

Ref. No. Priests/GR/14/2013

15 July 2013

My dear Fathers

Affectionate greetings from Bishop House! On 3 July and 7 July, we celebrated in our parishes and institutions the feast of *Dukhrana*, the day when we commemorate the martyrdom of Mar Thoma *Sleeha*. I thank all of you for taking great pains in imparting the Syro-Malabar traditions to our faithful. On 28 July we will be celebrating the feast of St Alphonsa, the first native woman saint of India who lived as an unknown simple Clarist nun within the four walls of the Convent at Bharananganam. Her extraordinary power of intercession before her beloved master Jesus Christ made her dear to everyone. Thousands of people from all walks of life irrespective of caste, creed, religion or country flow to the tomb of this Saint to pay homage, to thank for the innumerable favours they received through her intercession and to pray for their various needs.

St Alphonsa died at the age of 36 on 28 July 1946. At the funeral service, Rev. Fr Romulus CMI, her spiritual director, uttered these prophetic words: "...I affirm that we are attending the last rites of a saintly person. If the world had realized her intrinsic worth, unprecedented crowds from all over India would have assembled here. I assure you that as far as human judgment can be relied upon, this young nun was not much less saintly than the Little Flower of Lisieux...Bharananganam where her mortal remains will be interred is hallowed. If it is God's Holy Will, this place will become the Lisieux of India."

The above prophetic sermon was fully actualized on 12 October 2008 when His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI declared Blessed Alphonsa a **Saint** in the St Peter's Square, Rome in front of thousands of people from all over the world. St Peter's Square witnessed the presence of a large number of people from India including Cardinals, Bishops, Political Dignitaries, Priests, Religious men and women and laity including the Saint's family members.

ST ALPHONSA SHRINE, NAGARCOIL

To commemorate the canonisation of Blessed Alphonsa, the three Dioceses of Nagarcoil held a joint celebration with great devotion in 2008. During the celebrations, St Alphonsa Church, Nagarcoil was officially declared as the Shrine dedicated to St Alphonsa by the President of then Tamilnadu Catholic Bishops' Conference Archbishop Peter Fernando. As planned in our Priests Conference held on 9 July 2013, I invite everyone to give special attention to the celebration of the feast of St Alphonsa in our parishes by preparing our faithful spiritually and taking initiatives to organize pilgrimages to her Shrine at Nagarcoil on 28 July 2013. I also request all of you to render your valuable support to Rev. Fr Thomas Pawathuparambil, the Parish Priest of the Shrine. Let all of us be united together in the name of St Alphonsa and spread her name far and wide.

VISIT TO MAJOR SEMINARIES

I made a visit to the major seminaries of Aluva and Vadavadoor on 26 and 27 June 2013. My visit

was meant mainly to meet our Brothers pursuing their philosophical and theological studies. All the Brothers are doing well and very much involved in the affairs of the Diocese. They sent you their cordial greetings to all of you. I am planning to visit the Brothers at Poonamalee Seminary on 22 July 2013 and later this month I will also be visiting Kunnuth Seminary.

NEW PRIESTS' MEET

All our five new Priests met at Sangamam on 22 June 2013 in order to share their pastoral experiences and to deepen their understanding of pastoral ministry. I met all of them in group and we shared our experiences. Rev Fr Mathew, the Procurator briefed the Fathers regarding how to keep the mass register and the accounts of the Parish. Rev Fr Saji Elambasserril sdb took a session on leadership and finally Rev Fr Thomas Thuckalay took a practical session on how to administer the sacraments. The programme was well appreciated by the new Priests and I wish to thank all the above mentioned Fathers for helping our new Priests.

ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOLS CORRESPONDANCES" MEETING

All the Correspondences of English Medium Schools in the Diocese gathered at Sangamam on 1 July 2013. I chaired the meeting. The main purpose of the meeting was to coordinate all the activities of our schools and also to give support and guidance to those schools which require assistance. It was decided to make arrangements to get the minority certificates for all our schools and Rev. Fr Christudas and his team were requested to take the lead. Matters pertaining to Diocese run schools were also discussed. I am grateful to all the Fathers and Sisters who are involved in the ministry of education in the Diocese.

ST JOHN MARIA VIANNY DAY

On 4 August the Church will be celebrating the feast of St John Maria Vianny, the heavenly patron all the Parish Priests. We shall celebrate this day in a fitting manner at our Minor Seminary in Mookuttukal. I request all of you to attend this daylong programme without fail. The programme will be as follows:

09.45 am	-	Arrival
10.00 am	-	Concelebrated Holy Qurbana
11.30 am	-	Coffee break
12.00 noon	-	Family gathering
01.30 pm	-	Fellowship meal

15 AUGUST, OUR LADY'S ASSUMPTION AND INDEPENDENCE DAY

Padanthalumoodu parish is preparing 125 people for the sacrament of Confirmation on 15 August. On this great occasion, the Parish is going to host a unique programme for all the Fathers and Sisters working in the Diocese. It will be a great occasion for all of us to meet and share some moments together. In fact, it is going to be the first meeting of all the Priests and Religious since I was appointed the Bishop. Kindly spare your valuable time on that day after the celebrations in your Parishes. Rev Fr Robins Kuzhikodil will send you personal invitations regarding this gathering.

WELCOME TO ST JOSEPH SISTERS OF ST MARK

After 10 years of committed and dedicated work at Kanyakumari Social Service Society (KKSSS) Rev. Sr Cicil CMC retired from her selfless service. In the vacant place, we appointed Rev. Sr Ticy Joseph SJSM. She belongs to Congregation of St Joseph Sisters of St Mark (SJSM) with the Provincial House at Angamaly, Kerala. The SJSM Congregation has accepted our invitation to serve

in our Diocese and I am grateful to the Provincial and her Council for sending Sr Ticy to serve in our Diocese. They have already one house at Meckode in Marthandam Diocese. We welcome the Sisters to our Diocese!

UNITED CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY – CONFERENCE

The United Christian Community (UCC) of Kanyakumari District is organizing a daylong conference and cultural activities on 9 August 2013 at Scot Christian College, Nagarcoil. It is a coming together of all the Christian denominations in the name of Jesus in order to learn to live and work together as brothers and sisters. In the multi-religious context in which we live, it is important for us Christians to live in peace and fellowship. Hence, I request you to take part in this Conference in large numbers. The invitation letter will reach you soon. Since it is a daylong programme, you can choose any convenient time for you to be there. Kindly take along with you at least 10 people from your Parish. I have requested the Rev Fr Jose Muttathupadam and Rev Fr Christudas to co-ordinate this programme.

REST IN PEACE

Mrs Eliamma Abraham, the mother of Rev Sr Merlin SABS working in Soosaipuram passed away on 23 June 2013 at her home in pulikkekavala, Kerala. She was 84 years old.

Mrs Clarama Joseph, the mother Rev Sr Lima FCC working in Azhakiamandabam, passed away on 30 June 2013 in Kuruchi, Kerala. She was 74 years old.

We express our heartfelt condolences to them and pray for the departed souls and for their bereaved family.

INFORMATION

- The Junior Priests' Meeting scheduled for the 13 July is postponed to 24 August 2013 as it is in the pastoral calander. Rev. Fr Tom Kunnampuram will animate the Junior Priests. I request everyone to attend this programme.
- Br Jebanesh has completed his philosophical studies and has begun the Regency program at Sangamam. We welcome Br Jebanesh and wish him all the best.
- Br John who was serving at Sangamam is transferred to our Minor Seminary. He will be looking after all the correspondences relating to our benefactors. We thank Br John for all that he has accomplished at Sangamam.
- Br Jyothish has discontinued his philosophical studies for the time being as he needs some more time to reflect on his vocation to priesthood. He has gone home to be with his parents now. We gratefully remember Br Jyothish for all that he has done for us.
- Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, our VG, and other three Pastoral Council members attended the *Sabhadinam* programme at Kakanad on 3 July 2013.
- Shalom TV crew members were in our diocese on 1, 2 and 3 July 2013 to shoot Tamil Syro-Malabar Qurbana and talks. I am grateful to our Vicar General and Fr Robins Kuzhikodil for arranging the programme. Special thanks to all the Fathers, Brothers and Sisters for rendering wholehearted support to them.
- I attended the TBNC meeting which was held from 6 - 8 July 2013 at Madurai. On 7 July TNBC-TPPC (Tamilnadu-Pondicherry Pastoral Council) was held for which Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam along with six pastoral Council members from our Diocese took part.
- On 26 July 2013, 55 students along with staff members from Don Bosco School, Sashipur, Assam will be coming to our Diocese. Their night stay and dinner will be arranged at KKSSS.

They are on their way to Kanayakumari. You are most welcome to KKSSS on that day and share some lighter moments with the students from the north-east. Kindly inform Fr Saji regarding your participation.

HEALTH BULLETIN

- Regarding the health of Rev Fr Thomas Thekkeyil, the doctors at RCC, Trivandrum is yet to confirm whether the cancer has affected his liver because he looks very healthy and there is no symptom corresponding to the sickness. The doctors conducted a detailed test and send the sample for biopsy. We will receive the result on 15 July, Monday. Fr Thomas is just back after making a second retreat at Attapaddy, Kerala.
- As we know Rev Fr Mathew Thekkekutt is met with a minor accident and was admitted to the hospital. He was discharged on 14 and is now resting at Sangamam.
- Rev Fr Kurian Koipuram was taking treatment for his skin problem for many months. The doctors suggested that he should take continuous treatment for three months. Since the treatment is done at Medical College, Kottayam, I have allowed him to stay at home for three months.
- There are some others too who are not keeping well and are undergoing treatments.

I ask you to remember all these Fathers and pray for their good health. Kindly inform me or Rev Fr Muttathupadam regarding your health problems.

COMING PROGRAMMES IN THE DIOCESE

Kindly take note of the following programmes which will be organised in the Diocese in the coming days:

- July 20, 2013 - Catechism Annual day celebration at Kaluvilai from 9.30 am to 4.30pm. All the fathers are requested attend at least the concluding function from 2.00 pm on wards
- July 27, 2013 - Uraviam leaders seminar at Palukal from 9.30 am to 4.00pm for Manchalumoodu and Arukani Foranes
- August 4, 2013 - CML Executive members meeting at Padanthalumoodu from 2.00pm to 4.00 pm.
- August 10, 2013 - Susaipuram forane Alter boys meeting at Soosaipuram from 2.00 pm to 4.00 pm
- August 10, 2013 - Uraviam leaders seminar at Padanthalumoodu from 9.30 am to 4.00 pm for Padanthalumoodu and Nithravilai Foranes
- August 11, 2013 - CML organizers meeting of Pdanthalumoodu Forane at Padanthalumoodu from 2.00 pm to 4.00 pm
- August 25, 2013 - CML organizers meeting of Arukani forane at Arukani from 2.00 pm to 4.00 pm

CONCLUSION

As we are preparing ourselves to celebrate the feast of St Alphonsa, let me conclude this letter with St Alphonsa's experience of great suffering. In fact, reading through her biography we find that with the passing of the years, the heavenly Father gave her an ever fuller share in the Passion of his beloved Son. We recall how she experienced not only physical pain of great intensity, but also the spiritual suffering of being misunderstood and misjudged by others. But she constantly accepted all her sufferings with serenity and trust in God. She came to love suffering because she loved the suffering Christ. She learned to love the Cross through her love of the crucified Lord. May she

intercede for each one of us in accepting all the difficulties and challenges that visit us as we carry out our pastoral ministries!