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Dear and Reverend Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

The year 2016 has just faded away into oblivion and has become part of history. Time seems to pass so quickly. It was just the other day people all over the world celebrated New Year 2016. We have now entered into another New Year 2017. At the outset, let me wish you, dear Fathers, a prosperous and grace-filled New Year. May it bring into your lives abundance of blessings from the Almighty!

The arrival of a new year is a time of celebration. We celebrate the gift of another year that God has graciously given to each one of us. The New Year signifies that the time has arrived to bid farewell to the by-gone year and to welcome the New Year.

At this juncture, one can ask: what are the great things that happened in the last year that had tremendous influence upon the humanity in general? We can think of Pope Francis' momentous decision to declare the year as Jubilee Year of Mercy as the most important event of last year. Through this announcement and subsequent celebration of the Jubilee, the Pope has taught the world that God is merciful. For him, mercy is the identity card of our God. He is the God of mercy. He is the merciful God. No one can be excluded from the mercy of God. Hence, we as his children must not only receive the mercy of God but also become agents of mercy to one another. Through various acts of mercy, people throughout the world, including our Diocese, celebrated the Jubilee with great fervour and enthusiasm.

A second event that made a great impact in the world was the canonization of Blessed Mother Teresa of Kolkata. St Teresa of Kolkata stands as a great epitome of the mercy of God. Through her identification and insertion among the suffering poor of the streets of Kolkata, her initiatives in alleviating their pain and her desire to proffer them dignity that is the right of every human being, she has shown the world how one can truly live one's life for others. The yeoman service that her Sisters are rendering throughout the world has no rivals. People from every walk of life, irrespective of their religion, creed, caste or language, have come out in support of her humanitarian work. She was revered as a saint already during her lifetime. The recognitions that she received speak volumes for the way the people all over the world have admired her. Hence, the year 2016 will be remembered with fond memories for the recognition that the Church accorded her when Pope Francis canonized her.

Besides these conspicuous events, there are a number of events that have shaped our lives during the past year. Some of them we may remember while others we may have forgotten. Many of them we may have taken for granted without ever thinking of their source. Hence,

entering into a new year, we need to sit down and count the blessings that we have received during the past year and thank the Almighty for his bounty. We also need to be grateful to our near and dear ones who have made the past year eventful. There could many others, often unsung heroes, who have played crucial roles in our lives to make the year meaningful. Hence, the virtue gratitude should ring uppermost in our lips as we enter the New Year.

The year that just gone by has also left certain painful memories often due to our own faults or due to the insensitivities of others. Whatever be the case, it is important to seek pardon and forgiveness so that we are at peace as the New Year ushers in. This exercise will also help us to be humble and to accept our own frailties so that we can minimize the recurrence of such conduct.

Let us enter into the New Year with great courage and hope with a firm resolution to grab every opportunity that will come on our way to grow physically, intellectually, psychologically and spiritually. Let us pray that the good Lord who has graciously granted us another year for our development may bless us with his manifold gifts to make the coming year something beautiful for God.

NEWS AND EVENTS

BIBLE CONVENTION

The 16th Diocesan Bible Convention was held from 2-4 December 2016 at Padantahlumoodu. The Convention consisted of animation programmes for the adults and retreats for the children. On 2, 3 and 4 December, Rev. Fr Antony Raj from Madurai Archdiocese animated in Tamil while Rev. Br. Kurian from Retreat Centre, Muringoor animated in Malayalam. Under the leadership of Rev. Fr. Joemon Mangalamadam, Director of *Kuzhanthai Iso Iyakkam*, the retreat for the children was held in two groups. The retreat for the students of Classes 6-10 was held at Padanthalumoodu while the retreat for the students of classes 1-5 was held at Kamaraj Nagar School on 3-4 December 2016.

Rev. Fr Mijo Puthanpurayil, Director, Sinai Retreat Centre, was the chief organiser of the Convention. Rev. Fr Joseph Nedumpuram and the *Vanduparungal* team supported him fully. The participants appreciated the breaking of the Word, moments of prayer and time of adoration that the animators provided. There were a number of Priests and Religious Sisters attended the entire Convention. I thank and appreciate the Fathers who made all the arrangements for the faithful to come to Padanthalumoodu. I thank you for accompanying them and taking part in the programme. I am grateful to all the Fathers and Sisters, who supervised the venue, liturgy, singing, sound system, publicity, etc. All these made the Convention very effective. On the last day of the Convention we felicitated Very Rev. Fr. Jose Muttathupadam for completing 25 years of priestly ministries.

MISSION SUNDAY COLLECTION AND AWARDS

This year, the following Parishes and Mission Stations topped in the Mission Sunday collection.

- 01 - 25 families: St George Mission, Mekkarai : Rs 7000.00
- 26 - 50 families: St Joseph Mission, Kunnuvillai : Rs 5873.00
- 51 -100 families: St Mathew Church, Annikarai : Rs 5250.00
- Above 100 families: Little Flower Forane Church, Manchalumoodu : Rs 32000.00
- Over all: St Alphonsa Church, Nagarcoil : Rs 50465.00

These Parishes and Mission Stations were recognized and were given awards during the conclusion of the Bible Convention on 4 December 2016.

DEATH OF REV. FR THOMAS PAUL URUMBAIKAL

Rev. Fr. Thomas Paul Urumbaikal, who was professor at Mangalapuzha Seminary for a period of three decades, passed away in SUT Hospital in Thiruvanthapuram on 4 December 2016. He was 80 years old. He was the Spiritual Father in our Minor Seminary at Mukkottukkal when he breathed his last. He belonged to the Archdiocese of Changamassery. He served the Archdiocese of Changancherry as Assistant Vicar at St Mary's Metropolitan Church, Fatimapuram. Later he served as Vicar at Kumarakom, Parelpalli, Thottakad and Pangada Parishes. He was also Associate Vicar at Edathua Forane Church and taught many years at Cana Centre, Thuruthy. During his last years, he served our Diocese as Spiritual Father at Mukkoottukkal Minor Seminary.

On 3 December 2016, Fr. Thomas Paul complained that he was ill. He was immediately taken to Panachamood hospital at 4pm. Later, he was shifted to Holy Cross Hospital, Nagercoil. The CT Scan showed that he was suffering from Cerebral Haemorrhage and there was a blood clot in the brain. In order to give better treatment, he was shifted to Thiruvananthapuram SUT Hospital at 12.30am on 4 December. Though critical, a surgery was done in order to remove the clot but after the operation he was in comma till evening. At 4.30pm, he had a cardiac arrest and died immediately. His younger brother Rev. Fr. Alex Paul and relatives took the body and they kept it in the mortuary at Chetipuzha hospital.

The body of Rev. Fr. Thomas Paul was kept in Parel Shrine Church, Changanassery for 1 hour on Tuesday 6 December from 11.00am – 12.00pm noon for the faithful to pay homage. The funeral rite was held on 7 December at 1.00pm in his house. I was the main celebrant. Mar Mathew Arackal of Kanjirapally Diocese preached the homily. The holy Qurbana began at 2.00pm in the St. Pius Church, Anchalippa, Kanjirapally and Mar Joseph Perumthottam, Archbishop of Changanassery, was the main celebrant. Many Bishops and Priests concelebrated. The last funeral service was held at the cemetery. Our Cardinal George Alencherry presided over it. He was a student of Fr. Thomas Paul.

Fr Thomas Paul spent two years in our Minor Seminary helping the seminarians to grow spiritually. He also took classes for them. We miss his active presence in the Seminary and in the Diocese. Though he was old and sickly, he never missed any programme of the Diocese. He was happy to be present for every Priests' Conference and contributed qualitatively with his interventions. Even on the day he took ill, Fr. Thomas Paul was present at Padanthalumoodu attending the Bible Convention with the faithful. He was simple and obedient. His life was an open book for all of us to imitate.

I thank the Minor Seminary community for taking care of Fr. Thomas Paul during his last years. I thank all the Fathers, Sisters, Doctors and friends who came to our assistance in his last moments. I am grateful, in a special way, to Rev. Fr. Ritto, Rev. Fr. Shoji and Rev. Fr. Sathianesan who were at the SUT hospital taking care of Fr Thomas Paul. I am also grateful to all of you dear Fathers for taking part in his funeral rites.

INAUGURATION OF THE SILVER JUBILEE OF KARUNAI ILLAM

Karunai Illam, a unit of KKSSS was begun in 1992 with the aim of looking after the physically challenged children. It has now turned out to be a home and school for the mentally challenged children. The Institution has completed 24 years of its service and is entering into its 25th year. The solemn inauguration of the silver jubilee as well as the annual day celebrations was held on 10 December 2016 at Nithravilai Parish Auditorium. Mr. K.B. Piramanayagam, DDRO, Nagercoil, Rev. Fr. Saji Elambasseril, Secretary, KKSSS, Dr. R.S. Justin Paul MBBS, DPM and Mrs. Mary Bai, Panchayat President, Ezhudesam were the special guests on the occasion. During their talks, they expressed their happiness over the home for the special children that the Diocese runs. The Diocese is grateful to the ASMI Sisters for their hard work and dedication in running the home for the last 24 years. I wish them God's blessings. I thank in a special way Rev. Fr Christudas, Director of Karunai Illam, for arranging the programme in a meticulous manner.

CRI MEETING

The office bearers of CRI unit of the Diocese of Thuckalay gathered on 10 December 2016 at Sangamam to study the recommendations and decisions of Syro-Malabar Assembly, namely, Simplicity in Life, Witness in Family and Mission to the Migrants. The curia members too joined in the discussion. They studied the document very deeply and came out with some concrete proposals for the Religious working in the Diocese of Thuckalay.

REQUIEM MASS FOR MOTHER MARY LITTY LSDP

The Diocese remembered late Mother Litty, the founder of LSDP Congregation, on 13 December. A Requiem Holy Qurbana was at 3.00pm in LSDP Convent, Perumchilampu. Our Proto-Syncellus Rev. Fr. Jose Muttathupadam presided over it. Due to some prior engagements, I was unable to take part in the programme. I was happy that many of our

Priests and Sisters participated and prayed for the departed soul of Mother Mary Litty LSDP. I thank each one of you for your thoughtfulness.

PRE-CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

The Pre-Christmas celebrations were organized for various groups and organizations in the Diocese: for Priests of our Diocese, for the leaders of Diocesan Institutions, for Bishop's House staff and for animators of various Pious Associations. The Pre-Christmas celebration for Priests was held on 16 December 2016 and was organized by the junior Priests of 2015 batch. I appreciate the organizers for making us happy and giving us a foretaste of joyful Christmas through the various entertainment programmes.

During the Pre-Christmas celebration of Priests on 16 December 2016, the inauguration of Pulari Matrimony (a marriage enquiry website) was held. It was a long awaited need of the Diocese and was realized through the efforts of Rev. Fr. Alex Puthettu, who took initiative to make all the arrangements with support of Syro-Malabar Internet Mission (SMIM), Kakkannad. I congratulate Fr. Alex Puthettu for this great contribution to the Diocese.

UCC GATHERING

The annual pre-Christmas gathering of leaders of United Christian Council (UCC) was held on 22 December 2016 at Sangamam. This year our Diocese organized the event. The programme began at 10.30am. All the Bishops and heads of all Christian Denominations were present along with 16 zonal office bearers of Kannyakumari district. I welcomed the guests warmly to the Diocese and greeted them with *ponnadai*. All the Church leaders shared their respective Christmas messages. A cake was cut to celebrate the joy of togetherness and friendship. After the meeting, a sumptuous meal was served in the refectory. Thanks to Rev. Fr. Johnsilal, Rev. Fr. Christudas and their team for preparing the venue and looking after the guests graciously.

CATECHISM COMPETITIONS 26-31 DECEMBER

Forane level Bible Fest competitions for Catechism children were held from 26-31 December 2016 according to Forane-wise: Padanthalumoodu Forane had on 26 December, Soosaipuram Forane on 27 December, Manchalumoodu Forane on 28 December, Arukani Forane on 29 December, Thuckalay-Plankalai Forane on 30 December and Nithravilai Forane on 31 December. Under the leadership of Rev. Fr Alex Puthettu, Director Catechism Department, all the Forane Directors planned painstakingly to organize the competitions. Presence of many Fathers gave more enthusiasm and joy to the participants. Thank you dear Fathers.

BLESSING OF FOUNDATION STONE FOR THE CHURCH AT PALUKAL

The Palukal Parish community has begun its preparation for the construction of new Church. The foundation stone was blessed on 16 December at 5.00pm. The old Church, built by Rev.

Fr. Zacharias Kaithara, 55 years ago will be dismantled. The acting Parish Priest Fr. Jacob Aiyamathira along with two former Parish Priests and the parishioners were present for this historic event. Let us pray for the successful completion of the Church. Let us pray that many generous benefactors will come forward with financial assistance.

CHRISTMAS GATHERING AT SHENKOTTAI MISSION

On 19 December 2016 all the Priests and Sisters working in Shenkottai Mission gathered at Puliarai for the celebration of Christmas. The Celebration began 6.00pm with an adoration service. During this time, those who wanted to make their confessions, Priests were available. After spending an hour in the company of the Lord, a family gathering was held. Rev. Fr. Jipson Chully MCBS animated the pre-Christmas programme. The important part of the programme was to reveal the Christmas friends and to exchange gifts. The programme ended by 9.30pm. I thank Rev. Fr Peter Kizhakkeyil, Mission Coordinator, for arranging the programme. I sincerely thank all the Fathers and Sisters who made the day very joyful.

DEATH ANNIVERSARY MASS FOR REV. FR THOMAS THEKKEYIL

14 December was the 3rd death anniversary of Rev. Fr. Thomas Thekkeyil. A special Holy Mass was held on that day for the departed soul at Mankulam. Along with Rev. Fr. Printo and Rev. Fr. Shoji, I travelled to Mankulam and prayed for the departed soul. We conveyed our prayers and condolences to the family members of Rev. Fr. Thomas Thekkel. On the same day, KKSSS organised a special Holy Mass at Kalluvilai at 3.00pm and Rev. Fr. Jose Muttathupadam presided over the Mass.

CHRISTMAS GATHERING WITH MAJOR SEMINARIANS

Christmas gathering with Major Seminarians was organized on 22 December 2016. The Brothers arrived at Sangamam on 21 evening and the gathering began with Holy Mass on 22 at 6.30am. The programme ended by afternoon around 2.00pm with lunch. Rev. Fr. Justin Cheuvellil, Rector of Minor Seminary, who is in charge of the Seminarians, organized the event with help of Deacon Jebenesh and other brothers. The Brothers were assigned to various Parishes for Christmas ministry. They also acted as judges for Forane level Bible Fest competitions.

INFORMATION

- ❖ The residential address of Rev. Fr. Robin Koorumullil is: St Joseph's, Lifford Avenue, Ballinacurra, Limerick, Ireland. He can be contacted on 00353894333124. He is also active in our Diocese Whatsap group. He assists in two Parishes, namely, St Paul's Church, Dooradoyale and St Nessian's Church, Raheen. Both Churches are little far from his house and he is moving to those Churches by bus. Every first Friday, he has to do night vigil and he celebrates Holy Qurbana for the Syro-Malabar community three Saturdays. He conveys his loving greetings to all the Priests, Sisters

and Christian faithful of our Diocese. Let us keep Rev. Fr. Robin in our prayers for the success of his ministry.

- ❖ The mother of Rev. Fr. James Mangalaserry, Vicar General of Idukki Diocese, passed away on 11 December 2016 and her funeral was held on 12 December at 10.30am. Rev. Fr. James was the former Rector of our Minor Seminary. Some of the Fathers from the Diocese attended the funeral. They conveyed him our condolences.
- ❖ On 18 December 2016, Rev. Fr. Cyriac Madathil CMI, Provincial of St Joseph Province, Trivandrum visited Bishop's House. He came to the Diocese to make the Canonical Visitations of all the CMI Houses.
- ❖ All the Fathers and Brothers in Rome have gone to various Parishes for Christmas ministry and they will resume their classes in the first week of January.
- ❖ Rev. Fr. Mathew Mulangaserry made his Holy Land trip from 19-30 December 2016. He is back in the Diocese after an enriching experience in the land where Jesus lived.
- ❖ Rev. Fr. Printo Kurias has begun his studies in Law in the CSI Institute of Legal Studies at Cheruvarakonam. We wish Fr. Printo all the best and God's blessing. He will continue to be the Parish Priest of Palapallam.
- ❖ The Brothers from the Minor Seminary have gone home for holidays and they will return on 2 January 2017.
- ❖ Rev. Br. Toji Sebastian, who is doing his first year Theology in Satna, received the Karoya order on 20 December 2016. We congratulate him and pray for his studies.
- ❖ Rev. Fr. Justin Cheruvelil, the Rector of the Minor seminary, will be attending a month long (3-28 January) counselling course, at Anugraha, Dindigal. We wish him God's blessings.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

1 January 2017	- Blessing of Penu Church
6-8 January 2017	- Syro-Malabar Mission week
7 January 2017	- CRI Inauguration and Seminar on Home Mission
9-14 January 2017	- Synod at Kakkanadu
14 January 2017	- Diocese Level Catechism Bible Fest at Padanthalumoodu
16 January 2017	- Pastoral Council Meeting at Sangamam
17-19 January 2017	- TNBC at Hosur
21 January 2017	- Pongal Celebrations with Thuckalay Friends
24 January 2017	- Priests' Conference (Study of Syro-Malabar Assembly proposals)

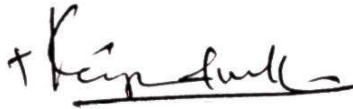
CONCLUSION

We shall celebrate the *Denha*, the Solemnity of Epiphany, on 6 January 2016. It is an important feast in our Syrian rite. We are entering into a new liturgical period. The word *Denha* in Syriac means sunrise. Jesus, the Sun, rises and reveals himself to the world. In fact, we meditate on the triple manifestations or revelations of Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Jesus manifested himself to the three Magi who came from the East to worship Him. During his baptism at River Jordan, we see the Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity declaring the Divinity of Jesus. Finally, we also remember how Jesus manifested himself while he changed water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana. Let us enter into this period with great devotion and prepare our people to accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ, who was born for us in the manger at Bethlehem!

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+George Rajendran SDB
Bishop of Thuckalay

