

Ref. No. Priests/GR/49/2015

28 October 2015

Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings in the Lord Jesus!

REFLECTIONS ON CATHOLIC FAMILIES

The months of September and October have witnessed the unfolding of two important events on the theme of family, namely, the *World Meeting of Families* and the *Synod of Bishops on the Family*. The *World Meeting of Families* is an occasion when families from around the world gather to pray, learn and celebrate the gift of the family. St John Paul II started this worldwide celebration in 1994 in order to promote the pastoral care of families, and to protect their rights and dignity in the Church and in civil society, so that they realize more fully their vocation. Held every three years, the *World Meeting of Families* is the world's largest gathering of Catholic families. The eighth such meeting - and the largest so far - was held from 22-27 September 2015 in Philadelphia, in which Pope Francis took part. The theme of the Philadelphia meeting was "Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive." The entire event emphasized the centrality of love in the family and the impact of the family in our society.

The *Fourteenth Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* began on 4 October 2015 and concluded on 25 October 2015. The Synod brought to a conclusion the study on the challenges and problems facing the family in today's world, a discussion that was started by the Synod last year. The theme of the Synod was "the Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World." While the Synod was in session, on 18 October 2015 Pope Francis canonized the parents of St Theresa of the Child Jesus, Louis Martin and Marie Zélie Guerin placing them as models for Catholic families.

The working document of the Synod had three parts, the *Challenges of the Family*, the *Vocation of the Family* and the *Mission of the Family Today*. This document proposed to *look* at the reality of the family today in all its complexities; to *listen* with renewed freshness and enthusiasm, what revelation tells us about the beauty, the role and the dignity of the family; and, to *confront and discern* the ways in which the Church and society can renew their commitment to the family founded upon the marriage between a man and a woman.

Despite the many signs of crisis in the institution of the family in various parts of the world, the desire to marry and form a family remains vibrant, especially among young people. The family is uniquely important to the Church and, in these times, the

family needs to be rediscovered as the essential agent in the work of evangelization.

The family, in addition to being called upon to respond to today's challenges, is also called by God to an ever-increasing awareness of its missionary identity as a domestic Church. In a world often marked by loneliness and sadness, the Gospel of the Family is indeed good news.

Anthropological and cultural changes in our times influence all aspects of life. On the positive side there is greater freedom of expression and a better recognition of the rights of women and children. On the other hand, equal consideration needs to be given to the growing dangers represented by individualism, which deforms family bonds. Added to this is the crisis of faith, witnessed among many Catholics, which oftentimes underlies the crisis in marriage and the family.

It is a fact that many people in the world do not support, encourage or live the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage and the family. In various cultures young people are displaying a fear to make definitive commitments, including a commitment concerning forming a family.

The Family: An Irreplaceable Resource of Society

The family is still, and will always remain, the fundamental and indispensable pillar of social life. The family represents a fundamental value and an irreplaceable resource for the harmonious development of every human society. Vatican II states: "The family is a school for human enrichment ... and the foundation of society" (GS 52). In the relations in a family - marital, filial and fraternal - all family members willingly establish strong ties, in harmony and mutual respect, which permit them to overcome the dangers of isolation and loneliness. Since the family is the leading agent in building society, adequate public policies on behalf of the family are necessary, which support and promote the family.

The Family and Faith

Pope Francis, in his Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, treating the connection between the family and faith, writes: "Encountering Christ, letting themselves be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of existence, gives it a firm hope which will not disappoint. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something, which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness" (LF 53). The primacy of grace, therefore, needs to be highlighted. It is a question of allowing people to experience that the Gospel of the Family is a joy that 'fills hearts and lives,' because in Christ we are 'set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness' (EG 1).

Catechesis and the Family

The Christian community is a place where families are born and where they meet and interact as they walk together in faith and share ways of growth and mutual exchange. In this regard, we need to impart catechesis to married couples together with their children. It demonstrates that the vocation of marriage is an important reality, which requires an adequate preparation for a reasonable period of time. For this purpose, the catechetical programme for the family needs to be strengthened and promoted in a much more vibrant manner.

We need to instil in families a sense of belonging to the Church, a sense of 'we'

in which no member is forgotten. Likewise, every family within the Church ought to rediscover the joy of communion with other families so as to serve the common good of society by promoting a public policy, an economy and a culture in service of the family, even through the use of the social network and the media.

This calls for the ability to create small communities of families as living witnesses of Gospel values. Some families need to be prepared, trained and empowered so they can accompany other families in living in a Christian manner. Families who are willing to assume the mission *ad gentes* are to be acknowledged and encouraged.

Indissolubility of marriage: a Gift and Task

Indissolubility represents a personal response to the profound desire for mutual and enduring love: a ‘never-ending’ love which becomes a choice and a gift of one’s self, a gift made by each spouse to the other, sealing the couple’s relation to God himself and all that God entrusts to them. Particularly important from this perspective is the celebration of wedding anniversaries in the Christian community so as to recall that, if a marriage is grounded in Christ, permanently living together as a couple is not only possible but also a beautiful experience.

“The Gospel of the Family offers an ideal in life which must take into account a sense of the times and the real difficulties in permanently maintaining commitments. In this regard, the Church needs to proclaim a message which might give hope and not be burdensome, so that every family may know that the Church never abandons the family” (Pope Francis).

Mutual self-giving in the Sacrament of Marriage is grounded in the grace of Baptism, which establishes the foundational covenant for every person with Christ in the Church. In accepting each other with Christ’s grace, the couple promises a total self-giving, faithfulness and openness to new life. The married couple recognizes these elements as constitutive of marriage. They recognise them as gifts offered to them by God and are expected to take seriously their mutual commitment made in the name of God in the presence of the Church. God consecrates the love of husband and wife and confirms its indissolubility, offering them assistance to live their faithfulness, mutual complementarity and openness to life. Therefore, the Church looks to married couples as the heart of the entire family, which, in turn, looks to Jesus.

Pastoral Care for the Wounded Families

While continuing to proclaim and foster Christian marriage, the Synod also encourages pastoral discernment of the situations of many who no longer live the reality of Christian marriage. Married couples with problems in their relationship should be able to count on the assistance and guidance of the Church. Experience shows that with proper assistance and acts of reconciliation, through grace, many troubled marriages find a solution in a satisfying manner.

Since the Sacrament of Matrimony is an indissoluble and exclusively faithful union between a man and a woman who are called to receive one another and welcome life, Christian marriage is a great grace for the human family. The Church has the duty and the mission to proclaim this grace to each person in every circumstance. The Church also ought to accompany those in a civil marriage or those living together, in a gradual discovery of the seeds of the Word, which lie hidden, until the fullness of union in the Sacrament might be achieved.

It must be borne in mind that the choice of civil marriage or, in some cases, simply living together is very often not a result of prejudice or an aversion to sacramental union but instead linked to cultural or contingent situations. To address these pastoral needs, the members of the Christian community too, especially at the local level, need to work together. In this regard, Christian families who bear witness with their lives to the truth of the Gospel have an important role to play.

Pope Francis, like his predecessors, is deeply concerned about the health and happiness of today's families. Some time ago he tweeted: "The family is where we are formed as people. Every family is a brick in the building of society." Another time he tweeted: "The family is the greatest treasure of any country. Let us all work to protect and strengthen this, the cornerstone of society." His intention in calling two meetings of the Synod within the period of one year to discuss the problems facing the Family is clear. He is convinced that families are so important in God's plan for the Church and he wants every member of the Church to understand the importance and the role of the Christian family. The future of every individual and of the world passes through the family.

NEWS AND EVENTS

1. Priests Retreat

The annual Priests Retreat was held at Sangamam from 5th to 9th October. Rev. Fr. I. Sathian OFM Cap. from the Anugraha Capuchin Institute for Counselling and Psychotherapy, Dindigul animated the Retreat days. It was a psycho-spiritual retreat well-animated focusing on integral approach to priestly living, starting with 'Healing the Inner Child.' I thank Rev. Fr. Sathian for leading the participants through an experience of prayer and power of the Spirit. Thirty six of our fathers participated in the Retreat. At the end of the Retreat we had the priests' conference.

Note: Those who were unable to make retreat must do it elsewhere before December this year.

2. Pastoral Council

The fourth pastoral council had its seventh sitting on 2nd October 2015. This time the main topic for discussion was the Year of Mercy. The members of the pastoral council discussed in four groups about the acts of mercy that can be carried out specifically in this year. They also discussed the how we can obtain the messages of mercy, personalize, and share them in this year of mercy; how to develop and sustain a corpus fund for charitable works; those acts which go against mercy and which need to be culled and curbed from the church and the society.

3. Consecration of Mezhacode Church

God has blessed us again through generous benefactors and now we have our new Church of St. Francis of Assisi at Mezhacode. The new church was blessed by me on 11th October 2015. I take this opportunity to personally congratulate and thank Rev. Fr. Augustine Thalodil for his unswerving grit, perseverance and commitment to completing the building of the Church. I also thank all those who cooperated in making this church a reality.

4. Junior Priests Orientation Programme

Nineteen of the Junior Priests of our Diocese gathered on 15th and 16th September 2015 at Sangamam for the Junior Priests Orientation Programme. Rev. Fr. Bosco SDB from Trivandrum animated the sessions. He dealt with topics like personal care, physical health, emotional health, intellectual health, spiritual health, Managing stress and strain, Goal setting and so on. The participants were more than happy to have listened to Fr. Bosco's personal sharing and some said it was awesome and the classes fruitful, better equipping them for pastoral ministry. The junior priests thanked our Bishop for arranging such useful Orientation Programme.

5. FCC First Profession and Vestition

We congratulate Rev. Sr. Asheena Rose Mystica FCC and Rev. Sr. Meju Emmanuel FCC, who made their First Vows on 10th October 2015 and had their Vestition during a well-organized and beautiful Holy Qurbana celebrated at Padanthalumoodu Parish. Both the sisters will work in the San Joe Province Thuckalay. We wish them blessing and guidance of their patrons. I thank the newly professed sisters for opting to work in our Diocese. I also thank Rev. Mother Celia FCC, Provincial, the Provincial team and other sisters for their continued support and their committed work in our diocese.

6. Altar Blessing at Kudukachivilai

The new mission at Kudukachivilai keeps growing. On 13th October at 5.15pm the Altar at the Fathima Matha Church, Kudukachivilai was blessed. I thank Rev. Fr. Antony Jose for his animation and initiatives in the growth of the Kudukachivilai mission.

7. Chain Rosary in families

Families in their Uraviams gathered on 18th October at 6.00pm to honour Our Lady of the Rosary by praying the Rosary. They prayed together all the mysteries of the Rosary meditating upon the mysteries of salvation. I was glad to get reports from our parishes that all of the Uraviams conducted the Chain Rosary well and there was maximum participation from our faithful. Let us continue to maintain and cherish such beautiful tradition that has now become part of our Diocese annual program.

8. Rosary Rally

About 900 of our faithful from various parishes participated in the Rosary Rally held on 25th October. The procession began from Kaisalavilai and ended at Plankalai. It was a very prayerful procession and we could witness people's devotion to our Lady and their love for praying the Rosary. I was happy to see many fathers and sisters being present and taking active part in the rally. I thank in a special way Mariayin Senai for organizing it and thank all those who were part of the organizing team.

9. Special collections during the year

Every year we take some special collections in order to support our Mother the Church and our Diocese. I have given below the dates and occasions for these special collections. May I remind you that this is not an option for us but the duty and responsibility of every parish/diocese to contribute to the common activities of the

Church. Also please instruct the faithful about the tradition of the Church and the Diocese. The collections to be made are on the following occasions:

1. World Mission Sunday (October 22nd)
2. Syro-Malabar Mission Week (Following Sunday after the feast of Dhenha)
3. Good Friday collection (upkeep of the Holy Land)
4. Lenten collection (Hundial, meant for a charitable institutions in the diocese)
5. Diocesan charity fund (taken during Lent on 3rd Sunday of Lent)
6. Sabha Dhinam collection on July 3 or Sunday after July 3 (for the upkeep of Archiepiscopal curia, Kakkanad)
7. Convention collection (a fixed amount for parishes)
8. Vincent de Paul (September 3rd Sunday)
9. Catechism department (after Pentecost Sunday)
10. Natural disaster (when needed)

I request you to take seriously and plan well in advance for these collections.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

1. CML Rally

As I have already mentioned in my previous circular, the Cherupushpam Mission League under the leadership of Rev. Fr. Shojo Erupathanchilchira the director is organizing the Annual Rally on Sunday 1 November 2015. The Rally begins from Annikarai at 2.00 pm and ends at Padanthalumoodu at 4.00 pm.

2. Priests Conference

Making use of this opportunity of all the fathers gathering on 1st November, I am convening an emergency Priests' Conference on the same day soon after the conclusion of the CML Rally at Padanthalumoodu around 4.30 pm.

3. 19th Diocesan Day Celebration cum Jubilee of Syro-Malabar Extension to South India

Our Diocese of Thuckalay was founded on 11 November 1996 by the bull *Apud Indorum* issued by St. John Paul II. Our Eparchy itself was the result of a mission venture constituted sixty years ago as the extension of Syro-Malabar Mission to South India. Today we are happy and proud that this mission has borne fruit and we shall celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of this event on the Diocesan Day to be held on 14th November at Kalluvilai. His Grace Mar Joseph Powathil will grace the occasion and preside over the function.

4. Diocesan Convention

Please be informed that our Annual Diocesan Convention will be held 4th, 5th, and 6th of December 2015 at Sacred Heart Church, Padanthalumoodu. We shall plan for these days during our Priests Conference on 1st November.

5. Inauguration of the new College building

Our St. Alphonsa College of Arts & Science will have its new building inaugurated on 16th December. I solicit the presence of all the fathers of our diocese and ask you all to encourage the team of our fathers and others who put their heart and soul

and their hard work into the development of our college. His Beatitude George Cardinal Alencherry will preside over the function.

6. Priestly Ordination of Rev. Deacon Ritto Thoompunkal

Rev. Deacon Ritto Thoompunkal will be ordained priest on 28th December 2015 in his home parish Fathimapuram, Changanassery. We wish him all the best and assure him of our prayers as he prepares himself to receive this unmerited grace of priesthood.

7. Thadikarankonam convent blessing

Sisters of the Franciscan Clarist Congregation had already begun their mission work at Thadikarankonam a few years back. Two of their sisters catered to evangelization and catechesis at Thadikarankonam while remaining at their Nagercoil community. Now they have built a new convent building. The blessing and inauguration of the new building will be held on 26 November 2015 at 1:30pm. I congratulate and thank Rev. Mother Celia FCC and her team for their initiative and contribution towards the growth of our diocese. I welcome you all to be present for the event and show your solidarity.

10. Year of mercy Inauguration

Our Holy Father Pope Francis has proclaimed the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy starting on 8th December 2015 (Fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception) to 20th November 2016 (Feast of Christ the King). He desires that celebration of “the Holy Year to be for all believers a true moment of encounter with the mercy of God” and that it is his “wish that the Jubilee be a living experience of the closeness of the Father, whose tenderness is almost tangible, so that the faith of every believer may be strengthened and thus testimony to it be ever more effective.”

We in our Diocese along with the Universal Church shall inaugurate this Year of Mercy on 8th December 2015. We will gather at Sacred Heart Church, Padanthalumoodu at 1.30pm. At 2.00pm we shall begin this Holy Year with the celebration of the Holy Qurbana leading us into the Year of Mercy. At the beginning of the celebrations there will be the “Opening of the Door of Mercy,” as the Psalm 136 will be prayed. This will be followed by a symbolic offertory procession and then Holy Qurbana will be celebrated.

Kindly encourage all our faithful to come and participate in this meaningful event. I ask the whole presbyterium to be present on this day to celebrate this event.

INFORMATION

- 1. Priest conference of November 10, 2015 stands cancelled.**
2. The FCC Province of Thuckalay will have their Provincial Election Synaxis from 27th November to 2nd December. I will be addressing their Chapter on 1st December. The CMC Vice-Province will have their Provincial Election Synaxis from 14th to 17th November. I will celebrate Holy Qurbana for them on 17th November, i.e., on the Election Day. Let us pray that the sisters may have successful and fruitful chapters conducted. At the end of the chapter they elect/re-elect their next provincial.

3. Christmas letters to our faithful: like last year this year too I will be sending the Christmas wishes to our faithful. The following information will be included in the envelope: 1. A Christmas letter 2. Saints feast day calendar 3. Year of Mercy book mark with Pope Francis's Prayer 4. Mass and prayer intention leaflet 5. A self-addressed envelope. Also Liturgical wall calendar of the Diocese will be distributed. We hope to reach to you these materials by the last week of November so that you can distribute to your faithful when you go for carol singing. You will have to pay only the cost of the wall calendar. Kindly encourage the faithful to contribute something to the diocese as their Christmas gift in the self-addressed envelope and give it to the parish priest. You can later hand over the envelope to me or to the financial officer.
4. The third floor of the St. Alphonsa Higher secondary school, Nagercoil has been completed. I appreciate and thank the hard work done by our fathers, Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil and Rev. Fr. Sanil Panthichirackal.
5. Two sisters from the Congregation of Holy Family (CHF) sisters, Rev. Sr. Jain Rose and Rev. Sr. Princy Raphael, have begun their new ministry called Radical Living at Vayalinkarai parish from October 1, 2015 onwards. We wish them the best for their ministry.
6. The Diocese Home mission Team has began their ministry in Soosaipuram Forane.
7. A five member team headed by Fr. Jose Muttathupadam will leave for Bombay on 12th November to take part in the National Eucharistic congress. We wish them the best and a happy journey.
8. The CRISMA HOLY ARTICLES centre at Padanthalumoodu is renovated and is now well-stocked with articles needed for Church and Liturgy, and books on liturgy and Christian living. I congratulate the initiative taken by Rev. Fr. Robins Kuzhikodil to bring the centre to this shape. You are most welcome to visit the centre and avail of its services.
9. Rev. Mother Mariamma FCC is still in the Chethipuzha hospital and she requires our special remembrance and prayers.

CONCLUSION

These days and especially this year we come to encounter several themes presented by Mother the Church and discussed by her. We are walking towards the inauguration of the Year of Mercy even as we are amidst the Year of Consecrated Life, and meanwhile the Church has just completed her Synod on the Family. Soon in India we will have the Eucharistic Congress. It does take time for us to ponder over, meditate, personalize, and act over the themes presented to us. Mother the Church cares for her children by attending to different dimensions of her children's life. It is also a sign that the Church is vibrant and ever alive with the Holy Spirit.

But all these efforts will go to waste if we especially priests behave as just bystanders with the least involvement. These are gifts of the Spirit bestowed on us in a special way

when the world outside lacks clarity of philosophy of life and living. It is for us to take up to read, reflect, share, and put into practice the truths the *Magisterium* is teaching us. I wish you all a continued Spirit-filled Journey.

Yours in Christ,

+ George Rajendran SDB
Bishop of Thuckalay

BISHOP'S ENGAGEMENTS
November 2015

1	Sun	2.00pm 4.30pm	CML Rally: Annikarai to Padanthalumoodu Priest conference Padanthalumoodu:
2	Mon	11.30am	Meeting with Dr. Thomas Neduvelichalil Bishops house
3	Tue	10.00am 5.00pm	Marappady: Golden Jubilee Mass of Sr. Jane Visit to Minor Seminary
4	Wed		Bishop's House
5	Thu		Bishop's House
6	Fri	10.30am 1.15pm	Kudamaloor: Holy Qurbana Kakkanad: Syro-Malabar Assembly Meeting
7	Sat		Bishop's House
8	Sun	8.00am	Mukkoottukal: Pastoral Visit
9	Mon		Bishop's House
10	Tue	10.00am 4.15pm	First Holy communion Qurbana: Kulasekaram Thuckalay: CMC new building blessing
11	Wed	9.30am	<i>Diocese Foundation Day</i> Curia Meeting
12	Thu	5.00 pm	College GB Meeting, Soosaipuram
13	Fri	5.30pm	Palapallam: Holy Qurbana and Kurusady Blessing
14	Sat	9.30am	Kalluvilai: Diocesan Day celebrations
15	Sun		Kanjirapally: Mission appeal
16	Mon	6.15am 9.00am	CMC chapter: Holy Qurbana Financial review by Mr Mittal
17	Tue	9.00am	Financial review by Mr Mittal
18	Wed		Visit to Shenkottai Mission
19	Thu	5.30pm	Marthandam: Bp. Vincent's Jubilee Celebration
20	Fri	4.15pm	Christurajapuram: Feast, Holy Qurbana
21	Sat	5.30pm	Marthandam: Bp. Vincent's Jubilee Holy Qurbana
22	Sun	8.00am 3.15pm	Muzhucode: Pastoral Visit Thuckalay: St. Elias Church Jubilee Mass
23	Mon		Retreat (Personal)
24	Tue		Retreat(Personal)
25	Wed		Retreat(Personal)
26	Thu	1:30pm	Retreat Thadikarankonam: FCC Convent Blessing
27	Fri		Bishop's House>>Thalassery
28	Sat		Vellarikundu, Thalassery
29	Sun		Vellarikundu, St. Jude Church Feast day Qurbana
30	Mon		Vellarikundu, Thalassery >>Thuckalay

Fr. K. J. Antony SDB
Diocese Secretary