



Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

Bishop George Rajendran sdb
Diocese of Thuckalay

Bishop's House, P B No: 12, Thuckalay PO,
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Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings and prayerful wishes Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

The announcement that many people have been anxious and longing to hear for several years finally came on 8 December as Pope Francis declared the beginning of a Year of St Joseph. The timing was perfect, coming on the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pius IX declaring St Joseph as the Patron of the Catholic Church and on the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Joseph's spouse.

Along with the Pope's announcement in his Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* - Heart of the Father - came a proclamation from the Apostolic Penitentiary about special plenary indulgences that are now available for this Year of St Joseph

In this Apostolic Letter, Pope Francis describes St Joseph as a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father; a father who is creatively courageous, a working father, a father in the shadows.

The Holy Father wrote *Patris Corde* against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, which, he says, has helped us to see more clearly the importance of ordinary people who, though far from the limelight, exercise patience and offer hope every day. In this, they resemble St Joseph, the man who goes unnoticed - a daily, discreet and hidden presence - who nonetheless played an incomparable role in the history of salvation.

St Joseph, in fact, concretely expressed his fatherhood by making an offering of himself in love - a love placed at the service of the Messiah who was growing to maturity in his home.

Because of his role at the crossroads between the Old and New Testament, St Joseph has always been venerated as a father by Christians. In him, Jesus saw the tender love of God, the one that helps us to accept our weakness, because it is through and despite our fears, our frailties, and our weakness that most divine designs are realized. Only tender love will save us from the snares of the accuser and it is by encountering God's mercy especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation that we experience His truth and tenderness, because we know that God's truth does not condemn us, but instead welcomes, embraces, sustains and forgives us.

Joseph is also a father in obedience to God. With his fiat, he protects Mary and Jesus and teaches his Son to do the will of the Father. Called by God to serve the mission of Jesus, he co-operated in the great mystery of Redemption and is truly a minister of salvation.

At the same time, Joseph is an accepting Father, because he accepted Mary unconditionally - an important gesture even today. The bridegroom of Mary is one who, trusting in the Lord, accepts in his life even the events that he

does not understand, setting aside his own ideas and reconciling himself with his own history.

Joseph's spiritual path is not one that explains, but accepts, which does not mean that he is resigned. Instead, he is courageously and firmly proactive, because with Holy Spirit's gift of fortitude, and full of hope, he is able to accept life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations and disappointments. In practice, through St Joseph, it is as if God were to repeat to us: "Do not be afraid!" Because faith gives meaning to every event, however happy or sad, and makes us aware that God can make flowers spring up from stony ground. Joseph did not look for shortcuts but confronted reality with open eyes and accepted personal responsibility for it. For this reason, he encourages us to accept and welcome others as they are, without exception, and to show special concern for the weak.

Patris Corde highlights the creative courage of St Joseph, which emerges especially in the way we deal with difficulties. The carpenter of Nazareth was able to turn a problem into a possibility by trusting in divine providence. He had to deal with the concrete problems his Family faced, problems faced by other families in the world, and especially those of migrants.

In this sense, St Joseph is the special patron of all those forced to leave their native lands because of war, hatred, persecution and poverty. As the guardian of Jesus and Mary, Joseph cannot be other than the guardian of the Church, of her motherhood, and of the Body of Christ. Consequently, every poor, needy, suffering or dying person, every stranger, every prisoner, every infirm person is the child whom Joseph continues to protect. From St Joseph, we must learn to love the Church and the poor.

A carpenter who earned an honest living to provide for his family, St Joseph also teaches us the value, the dignity and the joy of what it means to eat bread that is the fruit of one's own labour. This aspect of Joseph's character provides Pope Francis the opportunity to launch an appeal in favour of work, which has become a burning social issue even in countries with a certain level of well-being. There is a renewed need to appreciate the importance of dignified work, of which St Joseph is an exemplary patron.

Work is a means of participating in the work of salvation, an opportunity to hasten the coming of the Kingdom, to develop our talents and abilities, and to put them at the service of society and fraternal communion. Those who work are cooperating with God himself, and in some way become creators of the world around us. Pope Francis encourages everyone to rediscover the value, the importance and the necessity of work for bringing about a new normal from which no one is excluded. In light of rising unemployment due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Pope calls everyone to review our priorities and to express our firm conviction that no young person, no person at all, no family should be without work.

Taking a cue from *The Shadow of the Father*, a book by Polish writer Jan Dobraczyński, Pope Francis describes Joseph's fatherhood of Jesus as the earthly shadow of the heavenly Father. Fathers are not born, but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Unfortunately, in today's society, children often seem orphans, lacking fathers who are able to introduce them to life and reality. Children need fathers who will not try to dominate them, but instead raise them to be capable of deciding for themselves, enjoying freedom and exploring new possibilities.

This is the sense in which St Joseph is described as a most chaste father, which is the opposite of domineering possessiveness. Joseph knew how to love with extraordinary freedom. He never made himself the centre of things. He did not think of himself, but focused instead on the lives of Mary and Jesus.

Happiness for Joseph involved a true gift of self. In him, we never see frustration, but only trust. His patient silence was the prelude to concrete expressions of trust. Joseph stands out, therefore, as an exemplary figure for our time,

in a world that needs fathers, and not tyrants; a society that rejects those who confuse authority with authoritarianism, service with servility, discussion with oppression, charity with a welfare mentality, power with destruction.

True fathers, instead, refuse to live the lives of their children for them, and instead respect their freedom. In this sense, a father realizes that he is most a father and an educator at the point when he becomes useless, when he sees that his child has become independent and can walk the paths of life unaccompanied. Being a father has nothing to do with possession, but is rather a sign pointing to a greater fatherhood, that of the heavenly Father.

In summary, the Apostolic Letter teaches us five lessons about St Joseph for our Christian and priestly lives.

- St Joseph was **obedient**. Joseph was obedient to God's Will throughout his life. Joseph listened to the angel of the Lord explain the virgin birth in a dream and then took Mary as his wife (Matthew 1:20-24). He was obedient when he led his family to Egypt to escape Herod's infanticide in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13-15). Joseph obeyed the angel's later commands to return to Israel (Matthew 2:19-20) and settle in Nazareth with Mary and Jesus (Matthew 2:22-23). How often does our pride and wilfulness get in the way of our obedience to God?
- St Joseph was **selfless**. In the limited knowledge we have about Joseph, we see a man who only thought of serving Mary and Jesus, never himself. What many may see as sacrifices on his part, were actually acts of selfless love. His devotion to his family is a model for fathers today who may be allowing disordered attachments to the things of this world distort their focus and hinder their vocations.
- St Joseph led by **example**. None of his words are written in Scripture, but we can clearly see by his actions that he was a just, loving and faithful man. We often think that we primarily influence others by what we say, when so often we are watched for our actions. Every recorded decision and action made by this great saint is the standard for men to follow today.
- St Joseph was a **worker**. He was a simple craftsman who served his neighbours through his handiwork. He taught his foster son Jesus the value of hard work. It is likely that the humility Joseph exhibited in recorded Scripture spilled over into the simple approach he took to his work and providing for the Holy Family. We can all learn a great lesson from Saint Joseph, who is also the patron saint of workers, on the value of our daily work and how it should exist to glorify God, support our families and contribute to society.
- St Joseph was a **leader**. But, not in the way we may view leadership today. He led as a loving husband when he improvised to find a stable for Mary to give birth to Jesus, after being turned away from the Bethlehem inn. He led as a man of faith when he obeyed God in all things, took the pregnant Mary as his wife and later brought the Holy Family safely to Egypt. He led as the family provider by working long hours in his workshop to make sure they had enough to eat and a roof over their heads. He led as a teacher by teaching Jesus his trade and how to live and work as a man.

During this year of St Joseph, let us observe the month of March in a special way honouring St Joseph. Let us recite the prayer in honour St Joseph that the Eparchy prepared together with our people. I exhort you to undertake some pious practices in our respective parishes and institutions to honour St Joseph. I am sure you have read my Circular on St Joseph to all our people. May St Joseph watch over our Eparchy and each one of us!

NEWS AND EVENTS

Blessing of St Alphonsa Community Hall in Madurai: For the purpose of mission work at Madurai, we constructed a community hall and it was blessed on 5 February 2021. Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Fr Thomas Sathianesan, Fr Johnsilal Arackaparambil, Fr Babu Thattil CMI, Fr Sebastian CMI, Fr Anil Raj, Sisters of SABS and SJSJ and the family of Mr Jomichen participated in the blessing. The Centre will be known as St

Alphonsa Community Hall. The ground floor is used for the residence of the Sisters and the first floor will be used as St Alphonsa Tailoring Centre. We thank the Lord for the new arrangement that we were able to make at Madurai to further the missionary works.

Blessing of Altar at Chenamcode Convent: The FCC Sisters at St Assisi Convent, Chenamcode, renovated the altar of their convent chapel and it was blessed on 7 February 2021. I congratulate the Sisters for creating a better ambience for prayer in their chapel.

Priests' Orientation Programme: As in previous years, this year Priests' orientation programme was held on 12 & 13 February 2021 at Sangamam. On the first day, we had a study session on the Eparchial Statutes, Priests' Conference and a session by Dr Betty, Nagercoil, on maintaining good and holistic health. The representatives of Society of Vincent De Paul, namely, Mr Roby, Mr Soundar Raj and Mr Edwinson attended the Priests' Conference. Mr Soundar Raj spoke about the VAAN project to be executed at Assaripallam and its advantages. He requested the support and co-operation of Priests for the completion of this project.

On the second day Rev. Fr Xavier Arulraj, senior advocate and Secretary of legal cell of TNBC, took class. He spoke about issues such as safe environment and its procedure, sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults, and on new education policy. During the session on new education policy, the religious who are in-charge of schools also participated. I thank each one of you for your active participation.

New Charity Home of Vincent De Paul Society: The Central Council of the Society of Vincent De Paul Thuckalay gathered at Asaripallam to bless and to lay the foundation of the VAAN (Vidiyal Arul Avai Naduvam) project on 14 February 2021. It was a long cherished dream of the Vincent De Paul members. I blessed the foundation stone. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Fr Sanil Panthichirackal and some representative from the society and Alphonsa Church Nagercoil were present. The house is to be constructed will be called VAAN and it is located near the Medical College. The home will be used for the accommodation of those who look after the patients in the Medical College at Assaripallam. Dear Fathers, I ask you to give a helping hand to construct the building and fulfil this project.

Blessing of Shrine at Chenamcode: Lourdes Matha Mission at Chenamcode constructed a *Kurusady* within a short period and it was blessed on 25 February 2021. Since the Church is situated a little far from the main road, the shrine, it is hoped, will attract many people. This project was completed through the efforts of Fr Sajan Nettaponghu, Parish Priest with the help of benefactors and the parishioners. I congratulate all of them and wish them God's blessings.

Minor Seminary Home Day: St Mary's Minor Seminary at Mukkootukal celebrated Home Day on 27 February 2021. The programme began at 10.00 am with a prayer service. It was followed by some cultural events presented by the seminarians. Due to Covid-19, many parents of the seminarians from Kerala could not attend the programme. The event gave opportunity for interacting with the parents of the seminarians.

Annual Day of Family Apostolate: The Eparchial Department for Family Apostolate celebrated its annual day on 28 February 2021. It was a beautiful gathering of mothers, Mathiru Jyothis members. The celebration began with Holy Qurbana at 10.00 am. There was time for interaction with the members. I appreciate the honesty with which the mothers interacted with me sharing their concerns, doubts regarding Christian faith, issues in family life and the situation in the Eparchy. After lunch, there was a cultural programme. I appreciate and congratulate the Director of Family Apostolate, staff and all the members.

Birth Centenary of Cardinal Antony Padiyara observed: The Archdiocese of Changanaserry marked the Birth Centenary of Cardinal Antony Padiyara on 11 February 2021. From our Eparchy, I took part in the programme. The celebration began with a solemn concelebrated holy Qurbana by the bishops of the Province. The Archbishop was the main celebrant and Mar Mathew Moolakkatt gave an inspiring homily on the life and the mission of the Cardinal Padiyara. Soon after the Holy Qurbana, there was a Public meeting. Our Major Archbishop Cardinal George Allencherry was the Chief Guest. Representatives from Priests, Religious and Faithful were present for the function. I spoke about the growth of the Kanyakumari Mission under the leadership of Cardinal Antony Padiyara. The event was held at St Mary's Cathedral Church.

World Day of the Sick: 12 February is celebrated as the World Day of the Sick. We observed the day in our Eparchy. A special circular letter from the Chairman, TNBC Health Commission, was read in all our parishes and in some parishes special Holy Qurbana and prayers for the sick were organised. The members of the Eparchial Health Commission organised special awareness programmes for parishioners and school children. Health ministry is an important mission of the Church. I am happy and grateful to our Fathers and Sisters for reaching out to the poor and helping them to live healthy lives.

Jubilee Committee Meeting: A special meeting of the Jubilee Central monitoring committee and Central animation committee along with all the heads of departments and pious associations was held on 19 February at Sangamam. All the members were present. It was an opportunity to share and to make plans for the Jubilee activities in the Eparchy. It is the responsibility of the Central Monitoring Committee to help and to follow-up the programmes and report every month to the Bishop. Dear Fathers, kindly implement and follow up the Jubilee programmes in your respective parishes and institutions.

INFORMATION

- **Ash Monday:** The season of Lent began on 15 February 2021. I request you all of you to instruct the faithful to observe the spirit of the Lent. Help them to prepare for the celebration of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.
- **Rev. Sr Tomsy SH** received a special Teacher Award from the Tamil Nadu Government. Let us congratulate her selfless and dedicated work. We wish her fruitful ministry among the special children in the future.
- **Popular Mission Retreat:** The popular Mission retreat is going on well in all the parishes. The curia members and I visit the centres where retreats are going on in order to pray with them and to encourage them. I am happy and grateful to you, dear Fathers, for taking much initiative in this regard to give a better God-experience to our faithful.
- **Home for the Homeless:** As we are celebrating the Silver Jubilee of the Eparchy, we have decided to construct 25 houses for the homeless people in the Eparchy. We shall use the Lenten charity collection of 2020 and 2021 for this purpose. Therefore, I request all of you to give clear instructions to our people to be generous for the Lenten *Undial* collection.
- **Rameshwaram Mission:** Fr Mathew Kuzhijalil has gone back to the Rameshwaram Mission after a gap of 8 months due to COVID-19. Let us pray for him and for the mission.
- **Retreat for Families:** For the first time, our Sinai Retreat Centre organised a four-day residential retreat at Sangamam from 25 – 28 February 2021. Around 40 people from various parishes attended the retreat and I am happy to inform you that eight newly baptised Catholics from our Virudunagar Mission also attended the retreat. I am grateful the Fathers who encouraged the faithful to attend the retreat. I thank Fr Mijo and his team for organising the retreat.
- **Bishop's Visit to priest's family:** As planned before I will begin to visit the families of all our fathers in the diocese this year beginning from March 2021. First I shall visit to the families of fathers in Kanyakumari district then I shall move on to the families of fathers in Kerala.

- **Silver Jubilee Action Plan:** To have a meaningful celebration of Silver Jubilee of the diocese, we published a beautiful action plan, a document, which all our faithful should be made aware of and familiar with. Therefore, I am asking all the Parish Priests:
- After the Holy Qurbana present this Action plan book and tell them the only content of it and the purpose for which it is published. (there are many who are not aware of such Silver Jubilee action Plan document).
 - Make it a point to study the document in *uraviums* (give a specific portion to study)
 - Department directors should draw up plans to organise programs as mentioned in the documents
 - Every department and Pious Association should study their action plan, parish wise, mentioned in the document.



POPULAR MISSION RETREATS - (JANUARY TO MAY 2021)

S. No.	PMR NO	DATE OF PMR	PARISH	DIOCESE
1.	273	Jan 24-29	Paraicode	Thuckalay
2.	274	Jan 24-29	Anayadi	Thuckalay
3.	275	Jan 31-Feb 5	Athencode	Thuckalay
4.	276	Jan 31-Feb 5	Kazhuvanthittai	Thuckalay
5.	277	Feb 14-19	Karode	Thuckalay
6.	278	Feb 14-19	Killiyoor	Thuckalay
7.	279	Feb 21-26	Munchirai	Thuckalay
8.	280	Feb 21-26	Varuthattu	Thuckalay
9	281	Feb 21-26	Anumugam	Thuckalay
9.	282	Mar 07-12	Padanthalumoodu	Thuckalay
10.	283	Mar 07-12	Chenamcode	Thuckalay
11	284	Mar 07-12	Netta	Thuckalay
12	285	Mar 21-26	Thakkalivilai	Thuckalay
13	286	Mar 21-26	Kosavampatti	Salem
14	287	Mar 21-26	Arukani	Thuckalay
15	288	Apr 11-16	Penu	Thuckalay
16	289	Apr 18-23	Thuckalay	Thuckalay
17	290	Apr 18-23	Kalluvilai	Thuckalay
18	291	Apr 25-30	Mezhecode	Thuckalay
19	292	Apr 25-30	Nagercoil	Thuckalay
20	293	Apr 25-30	Thettiyode	Thuckalay
21	294	May 09-14	Malaicode	Thuckalay
22	295	May 09-14	Palugal	Thuckalay
23	296	May 16-21	Soosaipuram	Thuckalay

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

09 March 2021	- Priests' Half Day Prayer (Sinai Retreat Center)
19 March 2021	- Solemnity of St Joseph
25 March 2021	- Solemnity of Annunciation of Our Lord
28 March 2021	- Palm Sunday, Charity <i>Undiyal</i> Collection
31 March 2021	- One Day Recollection for Priests and Sisters

One Day Recollection on 31 March 2021 (Priesthood day)

Venue: **Sangamam**

09.30am	: Arrival
09.45am	: Breaking the Word Fr. Sebastian Chamathara CMI, Provincial of Trivandrum Province
11.00am	: Coffee Break
11.15am	: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Confessions
12.30pm	: Holy Qurbana (Day of Priesthood)
02.00pm	: Departure

CONCLUSION

As we conclude this month, we enter into the threshold of the Holy Week. The Holy Week is a week of God's blessings upon each one of us. Let us not miss the opportunities of receiving these graces. We need to celebrate this great week through our devout celebration of all the liturgies. On Psalm Sunday, I invite you to walk with Christ in his solemn entry into Jerusalem. On Holy Thursday, I encourage you become involved with the institution of the Holy Eucharist by celebrating the liturgy, which presents rich symbolisms like the washing of the feet. The entire ceremony will teach you lessons in love and service. I urge you to accompany Jesus, on Good Friday, in his journey of self-emptying from the Garden of Gethsemane to Mount Calvary in order to wash away our sins. Finally, I appeal to you to enter into the empty tomb like Mary Magdalene and experience the risen Christ on Easter Sunday.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,

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+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

