



# Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

**Bishop George Rajendran sdb**

**Diocese of Thuckalay**

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Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

Lent is a time for change. This season calls us to reflect on transformational change so that we can celebrate Easter meaningfully. Springtime is lush with rebirth, new beginnings, and new growth. Too often, however, we want to race to the Easter Resurrection without fully embracing the Lenten process that leads there. Lent reflects the days and the nights that Jesus wandered in the wilderness - tempted by Satan - in readiness for a ministry destined to end in tragedy. Few of us can relate to the level of sacrifice and commitment that Jesus displayed in his forty days, yet Lent provides us with an opportunity to deepen our spirituality by engaging in regular discipline from Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday. The wilderness - the desert days of Lent - is the true path toward spiritual transformation.

There is a compelling metaphor that helps us embrace the wilderness and prevents us from racing to Easter. It is the metaphor of the seed. Jesus began his teaching ministry with the parable of the sower (Mk 4: 1-20) and referred to seeds and trees, fruit and branches, throughout his ministry. To see the image of Christian growth and spiritual development contained in a seed is to learn valuable lessons about change and transformation. Let us examine them and make these lessons our own during this season of Lent so that we may grow spiritually and help our people to spend the season of Lent well.

**Seeds Need a Rich Environment:** A seed that lacks appropriate soil may sprout, but will quickly wither and die. Even in the best soil, without water and nutrients, growth will be limited. Without sun and cultivation, plants will decay and spoil. Seeds require a rich, healthy environment in which to grow. This applies to the environment in which we grow as his priests. There must be an ongoing flow of comfort and security, challenge and inspiration, learning and service. Without such an environment, discipleship growth is stunted, stagnant, or worse, dead. We create an environment for our spiritual formation through prayer, study, worship, fellowship, and service.

**Seeds Cannot Be Rushed:** When seeds do not sprout, take root, and grow, try yelling at them. Of course, that is a preposterous idea. No one would ever think that they could somehow rush the normal growing process. Seeds require the amount of time that they require. In God's plan, the time things take is the right time. People, however, get impatient. Our culture puts pressure on us to rush through everything. We live in an age of instant gratification. Seeds teach us that we need to learn to wait, to develop patience. Priestly formation is a process of seedlike growth. Patience is the key ingredient to transformational growth.

**All Seeds Grow at Different Paces:** Plant a package of seeds, and immediately you see diversity in the rate of growth. Some sprout almost immediately and begin a steady rate of growth. Late sprouters often become early bloomers. Some normal beginners end up stunted and sickly. Growth is rarely even, and it is often chaotic. Nothing we do will change this diversity. Where seeds are concerned, we are comfortable with different rates of development. This is not always true with our attitudes about Christian believers. We often adopt a ‘cookie-cutter’ approach to disciple making that makes some seem advanced, while others lag behind. The seed teaches us that to mature in different ways at different times is the only true normal.

**Change Happens in Stages:** Examine any plant as it grows from seed to maturity, and you will find that it is hard to believe you are looking at the same plant. While the growth follows a smooth process, it proceeds through distinct stages. These stages are marked by unique characteristics and are a measure for the relative health and well-being of the plant at any given time. Our spiritual development progresses through stages as well. Belief and inquiry deepen to devotion and discipleship. Learning and following evolve into teaching and leading. Growth within the community of faith matures to a life of service in the world. We move through ages and stages of faith development as we grow from seed to sapling to fruit-bearing tree.

**Seeds Contain the Past and the Future:** Each seed is the product of previous generations and contains within it all the genetic code for the future. Seeds are filled with the information that yields transformation. Each generation builds upon the last and lays the foundation for the next generation. The Word of God is the information we contain - passed down throughout the ages and preserved in us for the future - that holds the power to transform us. When we give ourselves time to grow, we unleash the God-given power to become mature priests after the heart of Christ.

**Seeds Have a Purpose Larger Than Themselves:** Growth is not the purpose of a seed, but a means to an end. Unless seeds give rise to new seeds, they fail to fulfil their purpose. Transformation never happens for its own sake. Change happens to lead us to a new place. Growth occurs that we might not only know more, but that we might do more. Seeds are judged, ultimately, on the fruit that they bear. We may never content ourselves with growing in their knowledge and love of God. Growth that fails to lead to a change in behaviour is cancerous, not healthy. We grow for a reason, and that reason is something much larger than any individual’s needs.

The lessons of the seed help us see Lent, not as a time of sacrifice and denial, but as a time of preparation and anticipation - preparation for the work to which God calls us and anticipation of the fullness of life that God promises. Let us spend these days of fasting, prayer and almsgiving to grow in our priestly identity and to minister to the faithful who are under our care with greater commitment and enthusiasm!

## **NEWS AND EVENTS**

**Diocese Health Commission Meeting:** The health-related activities in the Eparchy is organised through the department of Eparchial Health Commission. Seven nurse Sisters belonging to various congregations are its members and Rev. Fr Abin Poovathumootil is the Director. In order to expand the health ministry in the Eparchy, we decided to include all the charitable institutions like schools for the differently abled children, old age homes and homes for the mentally ill patients under its ambit. A meeting of heads all these institutions was convened on 1 February 2022 at the Bishop’s House. The nurse Sisters from Thenkasi and Tirunelveli joined the meeting online. Rev. Fr Jimmy Thekkekkadamath, Director of Family apostolate, too joined the meeting. Fr Abin welcomed the gathering and I shared the activities of TNBC Health Commission and encouraged the Sisters to carry forward the same programmes in the Eparchy especially

in the places where they are working. Time was also allotted to chalk out the forthcoming activities in the Eparchy.

**SABS St Shantal Province:** The Eparchy is immensely happy and thank God for raising the Thuckalay-based presences of the Sisters of Adoration of Blessed Sacrament (SABS) into a Province. The presence of SABS Sisters in the Eparchy dates back to 1980 when a group of Sisters from Changanaserry ventured into the Thuckalay Mission without knowing the language and culture of the people. However, they were filled with love for God and for the people. Their only focus was to plant the Word of God and to spread the devotion to the Holy Eucharist in the minds and hearts of people through educational, charitable and social activities. As the number of Sisters grew steadily and the presences began to be multiplied, it was felt that the Tamil Nadu Region of the SABS to be raised into a Province. The declaration of the same was held on 6 February 2022 at Soosaipuram. The function began with a thanksgiving Holy Eucharist. I presided over it. It was followed by a public meeting. Rev. Mother Rosily Jose Ozhukayil SABS, Mother General of the Congregation chaired it. Mother Mercy Nedumpuram, Vicar General, Mother Rose Therese Cheerakathil, Councillor for Missions, Mother Lilly Rose, Provincial of Changanaserry, Rev. Sr Rose Martin, newly elected Provincial of Thuckalay Province, Rev. Fr Thomas Pawathuparampil, Vicar General of the Eparchy and others. During the meeting, Mother General officially read out the Decree of the establishment of the Province of Thuckalay. All the speakers congratulated and felicitated the new Provincial and her team members.

**Archbishop Joseph Powathil Celebrates 50 years:** It was a Golden opportunity for priests, religious and faithful of the Eparchy to wish Mar Joseph Powathil on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee of Episcopal Ordination on 9 February 2022 at the Archbishop's House, Changanaserry. Born to Mr John Powathil and Marykutty on 14 August 1930, PJ Joseph (Pappachan) had his primary education in Holy Family LP School and St Peter's UP School, Kurumpanadom and High School Education in St Berchmans' High School, Changanassery. He did his seminary studies in St Thomas Petit Seminary, Parel and Papal Seminary, Pune. After Ordination on 3 October 1962 at Pune he was appointed lecturer in Economics and Warden of St Joseph's Hostel, St. Berchmans' College, Changanassery. He took keen interest also in the study of the ancient patrimony of the Syro-Malabar Church and for its restoration in accordance with the directives of Vatican II.

On 29 January 1972, Fr Joseph Powathil was nominated Auxiliary Bishop of Changanassery and was ordained bishop by Pope Paul VI on 13 February 1972 in Rome. While he was serving as the Auxiliary Bishop Changanaserry, Bishop Powathil was given the task of nurturing the newly established Eparchy of Kanjirapally. He was appointed its bishop on 26 February, 1977 and assumed charge on 12 May 1977. He was appointed Archbishop of Changanacherry on 5 November 1985 and he assumed charge on 17 January 1986. True to his motto, the ministry of Mar Joseph Powathil as bishop and Archbishop has been one of dedication and commitment to 'Truth and Charity.' It was during his time that the then Kanyakumari Mission saw the growth and development. He saw the further possibility of the growth of the mission and became instrumental in raising it into an Eparchy. We are very grateful to him for his foresight and love for the Tamil people. We felt happy and proud to be around him on this Golden Jubilee year. We presented him with a memento and honoured him with a shawl.

**World Day of the Sick 2022:** 30<sup>th</sup> World Day of the Sick was observed on 11 February 2022. It is kept in order to encourage people to offer prayers for those suffering from various illnesses. The day was declared by Pope John Paul II in 1992 and coincides with the commemoration of Our Lady of Lourdes. This year's theme is "Be merciful, as your Father is merciful." On this day, Pope Francis reminded us that "the supreme witness of the Father's merciful love for the sick is his only son."

Pope John Paul II was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease as early as 1991 and the illness was confirmed in 2001. It is believed that after one year of diagnosis of the disease, he decided to create the World Day of the Sick. He chose the memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes to mark the day. He chose it because various pilgrims and visitors to Lourdes, France, have been reported to have been healed at the Marian Sanctuary through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. The CBCI has taken this mandate and included it in its ministry. The TNBC Health Commission, involved in the health-related ministry in Tamil Nadu, encouraged all the dioceses in Tamil Nadu to organise this event meaningfully. In our Eparchy, we observed this day on 11 and 13 February 2022. I personally celebrated the holy Eucharist for the sick at Plankarai Parish. During the time of adoration, I anointed the hands of nurses and health workers with holy oil. A special prayer was offered to all and they were all anointed with the holy oil. In many of our parishes this day was observed giving special importance to the sick and the ailing persons.

A number of parishes in the Eparchy observed this event. The significance of the day was to bring sick and the bed ridden people to the church, to pray for the sick, to give holy communion to the sick, to visit the sick in their homes, to provide the sick with medicines, food, and spiritual guidance, etc. I appreciate and thank all the Fathers, Sisters and lay people for observing this day meaningfully.

**Holy Childhood Sunday:** Considering the current situation prevailing in the country and the restrictions placed in front of us, the Pontifical Mission Organization (PMO) exhorted us to celebrate the **Holy Childhood Sunday** on 13 February 2022 in all the dioceses. This celebration aims at promoting, encouraging and supporting our children to follow the motto of the Holy Childhood: "Children evangelizing children, children praying for children, and children helping children worldwide; and so being a missionary disciple by their witnessing life; thus, continuing the missionary works in and through the children in our pastoral care."

In our Eparchy, the Kuzhanthai Iso Iyakkam (KII) present in all the parishes celebrated the Holy childhood day solemnly on 13 and 20 February 2022. The celebrations began with Holy Qurbana giving special attention to the children by praying the specially prepared *karosusa* for children. After the Holy Qurbana children recited the *kuzhanthai Iso* prayer. In some parishes, cultural programmes were organised and prizes were distributed to the winners.

**Presbyterial Council meeting:** A special meeting of Presbyterial Council members and invited members from Pastoral Council was organised on 14 February 2022. It was meant to formulate the topics for the preparation of the Preparatory Document for the Major Archiepiscopal Assembly to be held in August 2024 with the theme: "Mission and Life of the Syro Malabar Church in Response to the Needs of the Time." The Synod also asked all the Eparchies to organise an Eparchial Assembly based on the same theme in 2023. The members of the Council spent considerable time to discuss the theme and formulated two topics, namely, promoting of national and regional level dialogues with other *sui iuris* Churches in carrying out the common mission of the Universal Church, and inter-Eparchial collaboration in the Syro Malabar Church for the *Ad Gentes* mission. The meeting also selected a core team for the Eparchial Assembly. It will be headed by Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal.

**Consecration of St Joseph Church, Kunnuvilai:** St Joseph Church, Valan Nagar, Kunnuvilai was consecrated on 20 February 2022. It was in 2005 that the Kunnuvilai mission was formed bifurcating it from the Sacred Heart Forane Church, Padanthalumoodu. For the past 17 years, the community practised their faith in a basement hall with minimum facilities and conveniences. It was a long-felt need of the community to have a full-fledged Church overground. The Lord made it possible with the help of the

benefactors and friends. Rev. Fr Augustin Thalodil, parish priest, worked very hard for the last seven months in building the Church with co-operation and support of the parishioners and well-wishers. In the given limited space, now there stands the beautiful church with a *Curusady, Kalkurusu and Kodimaram*. A special word of thanks to the parishioners of Manjalumoodu.

**SMYM Job Placement:** Syro-Malabar Youth Movement (SMYM) Thuckalay in collaboration with Don Bosco Vazhikatti, Trichy, started functioning on 22 October 2021. Since then, with the assistance of Don Bosco Vazhikatti, SMYM arranged five campus interviews and conducted several other life skills, life orientation and career guidance programmes at various schools in Kanyakumari District.

On 20 November 2021, Muthoot Finance Limited conducted campus interview for the male Arts and Science graduates. In the interview, more than 60 job seekers took part and 25 were short-listed for the second phase of interview. The same company again conducted another interview on 10 February 2022 for both male and female Arts and Science graduates and 15 were short-listed for the second phase of interview.

Sundaram Brake Linings Pvt Ltd, Chennai conducted direct recruitment campus interview on 29 January 2022 for Class 8, Class 10 and Class 12 pass outs. Seven were given offer letters on the same day. TYES arranged a campus interview for the engineering graduates on 25 February 2022. The HR of KIML (Kyungshin Industrial Motherson Pvt Ltd) Orgadam, Chennai conducted the interview and four job-seekers were given offer letters.

**On-going formation for Priests:** Life-long learning is now seen as essential for adequate performance in almost any occupation. Although priesthood is a calling which is unique and which cannot be simply classed with other careers or professions, nevertheless ongoing formation is equally essential for effective exercise of priestly ministry. The Presbyterium of our Eparchy gathered together for a two-day exercise at Sangamam on 23-24 February 2022. Rev. Fr Thomas Poovathanikunnel, a theology professor and Parish Priest of Kumali, belonging to the Eparchy of Kanjirapally, animated the priests on priestly responsibility and growing towards holiness. On the evening of the first day was spent in spiritual recollection and sacrament of confession. Rev. Fathers beautifully animated the adoration in preparation for confession.

The next day 24 February was spent in evaluation and presentation of report of activities of various departments and pious association of the Eparchy. It was for first time that the Eparchy spent a full-day for this exercise. The Directors of departments came well-prepared with PowerPoint presentation and beautifully presented one-year activities of their respective departments. The presbyterium discussed and gave valuable suggestions. Everyone felt happy and proud to have been informed of the enormous work that is being carried out in the various departments. I am grateful to all the Fathers for attending and benefitting from this two-day formative programme.

**Fr Justin Cheruvilil Defends his Doctoral Thesis:** Fr Justin Cheruvilil, who was doing his doctoral studies in Liturgy, at St Anselm University, Rome defended his thesis successfully on 25 February 2022. The thesis is entitled, *DUKHRANA D' QADDİŞĒ: THE CONCEPT OF THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS IN THE SYRO-MALABAR QURBĀNĀ*. It is a descriptive study on Communion of Saints as the decisive part of the profession of faith. The research work of Fr Justin included analysing the text of Holy Qurbana and the writings of different Church Fathers which affirm that the Holy Qurbānā helps to nourish holiness by strengthening our hope to attain the fullness of the life in the Holy Trinity and helping us to encounter the heavenly community. The commemoration of saints in the Holy Qurbānā is apt because the paschal mystery is the source, strength, food and hope for holiness.



The Commission for the thesis was presided over by the Rector of the Institute Padre R. P Piqué. Mons. Manuel Nin i Güell. Being the first relator of the thesis, he intervened immediately after the presentation of the thesis. R. Monteiro OSB, and S. Geiger OSB were the first and second censors of the thesis. Rev. Fathers, Sisters and Brothers from various colleges and universities including our diocesans priests were present for the public defence. The Rectors of the Pontifical colleges of Damasceno and Czech Republic, presented a bouquet to Fr Justin when he was declared a Doctor in Sacred Liturgy by the commission. We congratulate Fr Justin for his successful accomplishment of the doctoral research.

**Blessing of St Mother Teresa Church, Kalluvilai:** The community of St Mother Teresa was formed in 2005 with a few Syro-Malabar families. For the last seventeen years the community nourished their spiritual life in a chapel room of Catechetical Centre. The Eparchy allotted the community a plot of land belongs to the Kanyakumari Social Service Society (KKSSS). Rev. Fr Saji Ezhampaserril SDB, former Parish Priest, began the construction of the new church in 2018. Due to financial constraints, the construction work was rather slow. Rev. Fr Abin Poovathumootil, present Parish Priest, completed the work. I blessed the church on 27 February 2022 in the presence of Rev. Fr Thomas Pawathuparampil, Vicar General, Parish Priest and the parishioners. The consecration of the altar will be done at a later stage, after the completion of the pending works. I appreciate and congratulate the Parish Priest and parishioners for this great work.

**Great Lent: Ash Monday:** The word “Lent” comes from an old English word which means “springtime.” It reminds us of spring cleaning and the new life in nature during spring. This season of Lent is a time of special grace for us in which we want to do some cleaning in our lives and enjoy new life as a result. Hence, we enter this season acknowledging that we are sinners. We want to clean up our lives during Lent. We want to leave sin behind and grow closer to the Lord. The Syro-Malabar Church begins this great Lent with imposition of Ashes on the forehead on Monday. This year it was on 28 February. In our Eparchy, Priests, Religious and faithful entered into this season with great faith and spiritual preparation. Prior to this day, my pastoral letter was read in all our churches in preparation for the Lent. In order to make all the faithful to attend the Ash Monday liturgical services, the Holy Qurbana was held in most of the churches in the evening. There were special Holy Qurbana, the Way of the Cross and other spiritual activities planned for the Season.

### INFORMATION

- We congratulate Rev. Sr Rose Martin SABS who was elected as the new Provincial of newly formed SABS Shantal Thuckalay Province.
- Rev. Fr Justin Cheruvilil will returned to the diocese on 25 March, 2022. We welcome him wholeheartedly to the diocese.
- The Priests monthly Recollection for this month will be held on 15 March, 2022 at Sinai Retreat Centre.
- Rev. Fr Shoji Puthenpurakal, working in Ireland, has successfully completed the Hospital Chaplain course. The official convocation ceremony will be held on 12 March 2022. We congratulate Fr Shoji and wish him God’s blessings.
- The 9<sup>th</sup> Death anniversary of Rev. Fr Philip Kodianthara was observed in his home parish at Kayalpuram. I officiated the holy Eucharist. Some Priests, Sisters and faithful from our Eparchy were present on the occasion. We recalled with joy and gratitude, the ministry of Rev. Fr Kodianthara in the Eparchy and thanked God for this great personality.
- The department of Catechism conducted Bible quiz competition on 20 February 2022 at Sacred Heart Forane, Padanthalumoodu. The contestants were from classes 5 to class 12. More than 400 students from all the Parishes took part in the competition. A set of prepared questions was given to the students according to their classes. The prizes for the winners will be distributed class-wise. The winners will be announced later.

- The Syro- Malabar Mission Office in association with the Commission for Catechism organized a Quiz competition on the Mission of the Church in the context of the Synod on Synodality. The Mission Quiz was held on January 2022. In the Eparchial level, the Quiz competition was organized by the department of Catechism. In the Global level competitions organised by the Syro-Malabar Church, our Eparchy bagged two prizes. Geetha R. from Sacred Heart Forane, Padanthalumoodu, won the first prize in the adult category and Anna S Raj from St Francis Assisi Parish, Mezhacode, won the third prize in the student category. From our Eparchy, 195 students and 240 adults participated in the Mission Quiz 2022.

The list of the winners in the Eparchial Level

**In Students Category**

Anna S Raj: St Francis Assisi Parish, Mezhacode  
 Anu K.: Christ the King Parish, Christurajapuram  
 Steji J.: St Jacob Parish, Mangarai

**In Adult Category**

Geetha R.: Sacred Heart Forane, Padanthalumoodu  
 Vinu MR: Sacred Herat Forane, Padanthalumoodu  
 Anisha SR: Sacred Heart Forane, Padanthalumoodu

- The certificates and cash awards for the winner were distributed on 24 February 2022 during Priests' meeting at Sangamam. All the winners came in person to receive the awards.

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

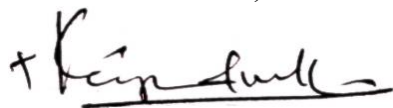
08 March	-	Women's Day Celebration
11 March	-	Minor Seminary Home Day
12 March	-	Thenkasi Mission meeting
15 March	-	Priests Monthly recollection at Sinai Retreat Centre
19 March	-	Feast of St Joseph

## **CONCLUSION**

We have entered the holy season of Lent with the reception of ashes on 28 February 2022. The season is marked by prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Echoing the importance of these Lenten disciplines, in his message for Lent, Pope Francis calls the Lenten season a favourable time for personal and communitarian renewal. He also invites us to pray for the suffering people of Ukraine. It is also a time set apart for deeper dialogue with God through prayer, for renewed gratitude for God's mercy and for increased compassion for people whose lives are under attack. We must not only show generosity through charitable giving, but they should also work for a real structural change to today's economic life. Let us become instruments of these changes in a world that is torn apart by violence, hatred and disunity. I wish all of you a happy and fruitful season of Lent.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



**+ George Rajendran SDB**  
 Bishop of Thuckalay

