



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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31 March 2022

Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

On 14 April 2022, we commemorate Holy Thursday. It is the memorial of the Last Supper of Jesus Christ, when he established the sacrament of Holy Communion prior to his arrest and crucifixion. It also commemorates his institution of the priesthood. Except for the resurrection on Easter, Holy Thursday is possibly one of the most important, complex, and profound days of celebration in the Catholic Church. Holy Thursday celebrates the institution of the Eucharist as the true body and blood of Jesus Christ and the institution of the sacrament of the priesthood.

On this occasion, as priests, it is a wonderful opportunity for us to reflect briefly on the theme of priesthood. According to the Letter to Hebrews, Christ offered the perfect obedience and made the perfect self-sacrifice. This makes him the high priest to end all high priests. Priesthood pertains first to Christ.

Yet elsewhere in the New Testament, like in the First Letter of St Peter and in the book of Revelation, the people of God are explicitly called priests, and priestly language is used of them in various other places. St Paul asks the Roman Christians to present their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is their spiritual worship (Romans 12:1). The writer of the First Letter of St Peter calls his hearers 'a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' (1 Peter 2:9), echoing very clearly a passage from Exodus: 'Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation' (Exodus 19:5-6a). Thus, priesthood pertains second to the people of God or the Church.

In one place in the New Testament, the work of a kind of 'minister' is referred to as specifically 'priestly.' In Romans, St Paul refers to 'the priestly service of the gospel of God' (Romans 15:16). He seems to be implying that the work of an evangelist is 'priestly' in a special way. The priesthood of the people of God is related directly to Christ's priesthood. The people of God are the body of Christ, and in a sense continue Christ's ministry in the world, through the Holy Spirit. In that way, they share in his priesthood. But what of the third type, the ordained priesthood?

It should be remembered that the Church has two basic types of sacramental ordination: diaconal and priestly. They both make people into sacraments, material means of encountering God, and they do so *for the building up of the Church*. In Ephesians 4:7-16, St Paul describes the specific ministries in the Church as 'ligaments' which knit the body together.

Those who are ordained *deacons* reveal Christ through service: they are sacraments of ‘Christ the servant,’ making Christ’s diaconal ministry present to the people of God so as to enable them to realize their status as servants, both of the Gospel (Ephesians 3:7) and of each other (John 13:13–15). Those who are ordained *priests* reveal Christ through priesthood: they are sacraments of ‘Christ the priest,’ making Christ’s priestly ministry present to the people of God so as to enable them to realize their status as priests.

The ordained priesthood is thus a link between the other two types of priesthood, the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of the people of God. It is derived from the one and helps to realize the other. At the consummation of the kingdom of God, when the royal priesthood will be fully realized, there will be no need for sacraments, including ordained priests.

The ordained priest, through being a sacrament of *Christ’s* priesthood, enables the people of God to realize *their* priesthood. The Eucharist is where these three types of priesthood come together. The Eucharist is a liturgical *anamnesis* of Christ’s great sacrifice, a liturgy that recalls it and makes its effects present. These effects are the establishment of a new covenant and the formation of a new people, a ‘kingdom of priests.’ In the Eucharist, the people symbolically sacrifice themselves in the ‘gifts’ they present at the offertory and they offer themselves as ‘a living sacrifice’ for the coming week. In this way, the Eucharist aims to unite their self-sacrifice with Christ’s, that is, to make them more fully the priests they are called to be, and in so doing to build up the Church.

As the function of the ordained priest is to enable and to encourage the people to realize their priesthood, it is appropriate that the ordained priest should preside at the liturgy where Christ’s self-sacrifice is recalled, and where the people unite themselves to this sacrifice, going out to live lives of self-sacrifice in the world. The Eucharist sums up the purpose of the ordained priest, namely, building up the Church.

Priesthood is not synonymous with leadership, and certainly not with being an incumbent. A priest may have particular responsibilities in one part of the Church, but whatever his job, his role is to reveal Christ’s priesthood and build up the royal priesthood of all Christian people.

Priesthood is not unique to the clergy, but they have a key role. They are to manifest Christ’s self-sacrifice and to elicit self-sacrifice in the people they serve, looking forward to the day ‘when sacraments shall cease,’ and they are no longer needed.

Let us remain with Jesus as he washed the feet of his disciples, instituted the Priesthood and Holy Eucharist on this day. Through the simple meal, consisting of bread and wine, he chooses to remain with us forever. Let us listen attentively to the reflections on Holy Thursday and help our people to grasp the importance of this day so that we enter into the Easter Triduum meaningfully!

Further, the season of transfers is approaching. Let me thank you for all the hard work and great initiatives that you have taken in your respective assignments during the last years. On April 11 and 12, I shall communicate individually to those who are due for transfers. All the transfers will come into effect on 24 May 2022. Hence, I request you to prepare all the documents and get your accounts ready for the official handing over to the persons who will take your places.

NEWS AND EVENTS

TNBC Meeting: The half-yearly Governing Body Meeting of TNBC was held at Pallotine House, Pillar, Madurai on 3 March 2022. The meeting began with the morning prayer at 7.00 am. It was followed by Holy Mass presided over by Archbishop Antony Pappusamy. The inaugural session started at 9.00 am with a short prayer conducted by Bishop Amalraj. Archbishop Antony Pappusamy, President of TNBC, gave the inaugural address. One-minute silence was observed to pray for the soul of Fr Joseph Justus, Regional Secretary of the Commission for Anpnam, who passed away untimely.

Later, the meeting went on to discuss on various topics such as Trusts/Societies/Companies of the Priests. Question of TET qualification, Michaelpatti Issue, Canonisation of Blessed Devasagayam, Letter from Bishop of Mannar, Sri Lanka, etc. The meeting concluded with words of gratitude delivered by Archbishop Antony Pappusamy. He appreciated the presence of the four Oriental Bishops and for their active participation and valuable suggestions.

Election of President and Vice President of TNBC/TNLBC: Since Archbishop Antony Pappusamy and Bishop Neethinathan have completed his two terms as President and Vice-President of TNBC in January 2022, election to the office of President and Vice-President of TNBC/TNLBC was held. Secret ballot system was followed. Archbishop George Antonysamy and Bishop Lawrence Pius were elected President and Vice-President respectively. Archbishop Pappusamy got their consent and on behalf of all the Bishops congratulated them and honoured them with *ponnadai*.

Women's Day Celebration: This day, called proudly as 'International Women's Day,' celebrates womanhood. In our Eparchy, this day was celebrated at St Alphonsa College and at Kanyakumari Social Service Society (KKSSS). In the College, the Commission for Family Apostolate in collaboration with Health Commission of the Eparchy gathered the mothers of Soosaipuram Forane as well as the teachers from the College for Women's Health programme and medical camp. Dr. Sudhakar, Oncologist from Neyyoor Hospital gave a health related class for the Mothers. Kanyakumari Social Service Society (KKSSS) organised a half-day Cancer awareness programme for the Self-Help Group members at Aseer Auditorium. The mothers put up a cultural programme highlighting the achievements of women in the society. Awards and gifts were given to women who won the recent Panchayath Elections. I was able attend both the programmes and was able to appreciate the important role the women play in building up family and the Church.

MMM Convent Chapel Blessed: The Missionaries of Mary Mediatrix (MMM) Congregation was founded in 1942 in Spain by Mother Rosario Fernandez Pereira. The mission of the congregation is spreading the Word of God all over the world through fraternal love. Indian Province has its Provincial House at Hyderabad. The MMM Sisters are present in our Eparchy since 2011 and their new convent was blessed last year. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, all could not take part in the celebration. The chapel was not ready during that time. On the occasion of the visit of the Mother General of the Congregation on 8 March 2022, the chapel was blessed during the Holy Qurbana that I presided over. After the Holy Qurbana, a brief public programme was organised in order officially welcome the Mother General and to inaugurate the Madonna Garment Unit.

Distribution of Scholarship: The Eparchy extends its support to the students within its jurisdiction who are financially weak in order to complete their higher studies in St Alphonsa College. We are able extend this support with the help of our benefactors and friends especially from CNEW. More than forty students from our Eparchy who study in our college benefitted from this scheme. A special meeting was organised

on 11 March 2022, in order to distribute the scholarships to the students. The programme was organised by Kanyakumari Social Service Society (KKSSS). Together with the Vicar General of the Eparchy, I attended the programme and encouraged the students to be ever grateful to persons who make sacrifices to donate the money and to make more efforts in their studies.

Vincent De Paul Turns Silver: The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) is an international Christian lay voluntary organization dedicated to tackle poverty and to help the disadvantaged by providing assistance irrespective of ideology, faith, ethnicity, age or gender. The vision of SSVP suggests that it is a global Catholic charity organization providing aid, development and hope to the poor and the marginalized. Till 1996, it functioned in the then Kanyakumari Mission as an Area Council under the Central Council of the Archdiocese of Changanassery. When the Kanyakumari Mission became an Eparchy in 1996, the Vincent de Paul Society Area Council was raised to a Central Council in 1997. The inauguration of the Silver Jubilee celebration was held on 13 March 2022 at Padanthalumoodu Parish. The celebration began with Holy Qurbana that I presided over. Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Spiritual Director of St Vincent De Paul, concelebrated. It was a time to thank the Lord for the blessings our people received through the instrumentality of this Society for last many years. There was a brief public meeting to place on record the activities and achievements of the Thuckalay Central Council of the Society. A clear action-plan was prepared by the Vincent de Paul members for the celebration of the silver Jubilee.

Priests' Recollection: A half-day spiritual recollection for all the Priests of the Eparchy was held on 15 March 2022 at Sinai Retreat Centre, Kalluvilai. The recollection began with the Way of the Cross. Rev. Fr Stephen, from the Eparchy of Marthandam, then, gave a talk. The preacher shared his own personal priestly experiences and invited all of us to look deeply into the special calling as the Priests of God. During the Holy Hour, time was given to everyone to make their confessions. It was a special time for every one of us to experience the powerful presence of God and to feel the brotherly communion of Priests in the Eparchy. A simple family meal was served after the prayer. I am grateful to the Director of Sinai Retreat Centre for organising the recollection. I also thank all the Fathers for taking part in it.

Minor Seminary Home Day: Due to Covid-19 restrictions, we were unable to gather all the parents of the Minor Seminary Brothers for the last two years. This year we decided to have the Home Day celebration online, since there were some Brothers hailing from Kerala. The Home Day celebration was held on 15 March 2022. All the family members of our Minor Seminary Brothers were present. The meeting began with a warm welcome by the Rector of the Seminary. It was followed by some entertainment programme staged by the seminarians. One of the parents spoke about the efforts of the Seminary to include the parents and families in the celebration. During the online celebration, we remembered all the benefactors, friends and sponsors of seminarians for supporting the seminary financially. We also thanked them for their effort to instil a spirit of mission work in the minds of the Brothers. I am grateful to the seminary community for the initiative that they took in order to organise this programme.

Most Rev. Thomas J. Netto Installed Archbishop of Thiruvananthapuram: The episcopal ordination and the installation of Most Rev. Thomas Netto took place on 19 March 2022 on the occasion of the Solemnity of St Joseph at St Sebastian Church Ground, Cheruvettukad, Thiruvananthapuram. Hundreds of Priests, religious and faithful took part in the ceremony which lasted over four hours. The chief celebrant was Most Rev. M. Soosai Pakiam, Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese. Twenty Archbishops and Bishops took part. Most Rev Leopoldo Girelli, Apostoli Nuncio, was present on the occasion and felicitated the newly ordained Archbishop in the name of the Holy Father. Cardinal Baselios Cleemis Catholicos, Major Archbishop of Syro-Malankara Church, delivered the homily. He called upon

the new Archbishop to lead the coastal population from the front to safeguard their rights and to bring about development in their areas. He also recounted the selfless deeds of the fisher folk in rescuing those stranded during the floods of 2018. On behalf of the Eparchy, I honoured the newly ordained Archbishop with a *Ponnadai* and wished him God's blessings.

Social Harmony Day Observed: The executive members of TNPCRI participated in the TNBC meeting held on 3 March to discuss the unfortunate incident in Michaelpatti. Rev. Sr. Paula, Superior General of the Congregation of Immaculate Heart of Mary, narrated the incidents that happened after the death of the school girl till the release of Sr Sahaya Mary on bail.

The Bishops discussed on how to react against rising intolerance and atrocities against the Christians in some parts of the country. Finally, they decided to observe a Samuga Nallinakka Naal (Social Harmony Day) at the diocesan level on 26 March 2022 in order to explain to the society that the Catholic institutions do not involve in any forced religious conversions. TNPCRI was requested to cooperate with the diocesan Bishops to organise the day effectively. The four Dioceses of Kanyakumari district came together on 26 March 2022 and held a public programme at Holy Cross Auditorium, Nagercoil. The representatives involving faithful, Priests, CRI members, people belong to other faiths and denominations participated in the programme. There were nearly 1500 people for the function. From our Eparchy, 100 lay persons, 20 religious Sisters and all the Fathers were present. The key persons who spoke about social harmony were Mr Mano Thankaraj, Minister of Communication, Mr R Mahesh, Mayor of Nagercoil, Ayya Balaprajapathi, Mr S Noormuhamad, former MLA and Mr Vanni Arasu from Viduthalai Chiruthai Kadchi. I am grateful to all the Fathers and Sisters for participating in the public function.

A seminar on Artemisia Anamed: *ANAMED* (Action for Natural Medicine) is a Christian organisation that enables people living in the Tropical region to become self-reliant especially with regard to their health. *Anamed* works with people of all faiths who are committed to improving the health care of their neighbours, region and country. These days, *Anamed* runs week – long seminars in natural medicine for health workers, doctors, traditional healers, religious leaders, community workers and other active members of the community in Africa and Asia. Artemisia is widely used in North India to fight Malaria, Cancer and the like. In order to make this plant available and to create more awareness among the people of Kannyakumari district, the Health commission of the Eparchy organized a day-long seminar. The resource persons were Rev. Sr Nirmala CIC, Director CHABUJAN and Rev. Sr Bhavya CHF, President, CHABUJAN. There were 60 participants. Religious Sisters, KKSSS animators and family members of cancer affected persons took part in it. The resource persons explained the positive effect and the healing properties of this herbal medicine. All the participants were given a packet of processed leaves of Artemisia. I am grateful to the Director and members of Diocesan Health Commission for organizing this seminar.

Fr. Shoji Obtained Catholic Healthcare Chaplaincy Certificate: Catholic healthcare chaplains are called to embody the Churches caring ministry to persons who are suffering because of illness, tragedy or trauma. Chaplains engage compassionately with individual human persons, family members and loved ones, and professional colleagues whose lives are shaken and human circumstances changed by painful and frightening health related conditions and experiences. Spiritually inspired, theologically educated, ethically informed and professionally competent, catholic healthcare chaplains serve as conduits and instruments of God's mercy to those whose lives are touched by any form of sickness or fragility. An authentic response to the vocation of catholic healthcare chaplain is rooted in a desire to continue the healing ministry of Christ as it finds expression in the faith and tradition of the Church.

Rev. Fr Shoji Puthenpurackal, serving in the diocese of Limerick, is the Healthcare Chaplin of MID-WEST Regional Hospital, Limerick, obtained the certified chaplaincy certificate. The requirements to obtain this certificate were changed during the pandemic. Fr Shoji did 5 courses on clinical pastoral education, wrote a thesis and five assignments on the subject to the chaplaincy board. After a careful evaluation Fr Shoji was declared successful and was made a certified chaplain. We congratulate Fr Shoji.

SMYM-YouthFest 2022: In view of promoting leadership and communion among the youth and to showcase their talents, every year, the SMYM of the diocese of Thuckalay conducts Youth Fest. This year the Forane Level Youth Fest competitions are conducted on March 27, April 3 and April 24. The diocesan level Finale will be on 30th of April at St. Alphonsa College Soosaipuram, Karinkal. The leadership for the competitions is taken up by the youth themselves. There are twelve central level youth leaders who work hard for the success of the program.

INFORMATION

- The family Apostolate department has resumed the 'Family Apostolate' through home visits and counselling, parish wise. Now they have completed Mezhacode and Mathapuram parishes. *Mathru Jothis* conducted the election of Forane office bearers for this year in all the Foranes except Thuck-Plankalai. They have conducted an exam for mothers from '*Neengal Jepikkumpothu*' at Padanthalumoodu on 27 March 2022.
- A meeting of Eparchial Consulters was held on 1 March 2022 in order to discuss some matters pertaining to the life and mission of the Eparchy.
- Rev. Sr Rose Martin SABS, Provincial and her new team members, visited the Bishop's House on 5 March 2022.
- Rev. Sr Mercedes Arbesu Suarez, Mother General of Missionaries of Mary Mediatrix (MMM), made a friendly visit to the Bishop's House along with Rev. Sr Valsamma Lukose Nampudakam, Provincial Superior, Hyderabad on 7 March 2022
- A meeting of all the Catholic Bishops of Kanyakumari district was held on 11 March 2022 at Kottar Bishop's House in order to discuss about the organisation of Social Harmony Day to be celebrated on 26 March 2022.
- Along with Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal, Rector of the Seminary, I visited the families of Deacon Mahesh and Deacon Josemon on 4 March and 12 March respectively.
- The first ever Legal Cell meeting was held on 13 March 2022 at Padanthalumoodu. It was a gathering of all the practicing advocates of the Eparchy in order to form a legal cell for the Eparchy. Eight advocates along with Vicar General participated in the meeting. Rev. Fr Printo Kurias, Legal Cell Director, was given the task of formulating the by-laws of the Thuckalay Legal Cell (TLC).
- The New Regional Superior Rev. Br. Panneer Selvam and his team of Counsellors of Franciscan Brothers of Trichy Province made a friendly visit to the Bishop's House on 19 March 2022. We congratulate and wish the new team God's Blessings.
- The Catholic Hospital Association of Tamil Nadu (CHAT) Executive team visited the Bishop's House on 23 March 2022 in order to discuss about the silver jubilee celebration of CHAT.
- On 20 March 2022, along with our Vicar General and Fr Jinoy Thottiyil, I visited Mr Robin Edathuva House in Tirunelveli and officially received from him the land documents. We gratefully acknowledge the generous donation of land at Vijayanarayanapuram to the Eparchy in order to begin a Home for the destitute women.
- March 19, 2022 was the feast of St Joseph. Nearly 22 Fathers of our Eparchy celebrated this feast but the Bishop's House community gathered around those who bear the name of St Joseph,

namely, Fr Ajin Jose, Fr Robin Jose, Fr Vinu Joseph and Br Ouseph on 20 March for a celebration.

- Blessing of St Joseph Mission Church at Virudhunagar will be on 3 April 2022. Mar Joseph Perumthottam, Archbishop of Changanassery, will bless the Church. Along with Vicar General and priests from the missions, I will also be present. I request your prayers for Fr Peter Kizhakeyil and the faithful of Virudhunagar Mission.
- Our Major Seminary Brothers will be coming to diocese on 2 April 2022 and will begin their holiday programs at Sangamam. We welcome them whole heartedly.
- This year we have 5 Major Seminarians who will receive the clerical habits and others will receive the minor orders on 11 April 2022 at Sangamam.
- This year we have four brothers who will be ordained deacons on 12 April 2022 at Varuthattu parish.
- The Priestly ordinations of Dn Josemon will be on 20 April 2022 at Annikarai and Dn Mahesh on 23 April 2022 at Padanthalumoodu. Dear fathers I am expecting your valuable presence and prayers for these brothers of ours.

On 12 April 2022, we will have one day recollection for priests and religious. Also Diocese level celebration of PRIESTHOOD DAY. There will be a concelebrated Holy Qurbana after the recollection and confession. Requesting everyone's presence on this great day.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

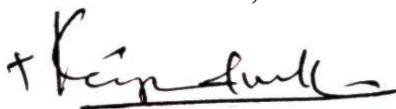
3 April 2022 - Blessing of Virudhanagar Church	4 April 2022 - Priests conference
10 April 2022 - Palm Sunday	11 April 2022 - Vestition and Minor Orders
12 April 2022 - Priests and Religious one day recollection	
13 April 2022 - Diaconate Ordinations	14 April 2022 - Holy Thursday
15 April 2022 - Good Friday	17 April 2022 - Easter Sunday
20 April 2022 - Priestly Ordination of Dn. Josemon	23 April 2022 - Priestly Ordination of Dn. Mahesh
25 April 2022 - Priests conference and farewell to Fr Mathew Mulangasseril	

CONCLUSION

As I conclude this circular, let me remind you that we are still in the holy season of Lent. We are called upon to spend these days spiritually undertaking the disciplines prayer, fasting and almsgiving in a meaningful way. Let us not lose the fervour of this season and not deprive ourselves of the graces that this holy season brings. During this period, even as we discipline our bodies through self-denial and fasting, let us give emphasis on embodying the values we preach. Let us emphasize on God's love, and how we need to embody this love in our own ministries. Love consists not in limiting God by our human equations of love, but by allowing God's infinite love to utterly redefine our own. Let us also prepare ourselves to enter into the holiest week in the Catholic Calendar with the celebration of the Palm Sunday on 10 April 2022. May the commemoration of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus enable us to become shepherds after the heart of the Good Shepherd who willingly laid down his life for his sheep!

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ George Rajendran SDB
Bishop of Thuckalay

