



Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

Bishop George Rajendran sdb
Diocese of Thuckalay

Bishop's House, P B No: 12, Thuckalay PO,
Kanya kumari Dt- 629 175, Tamil Nadu, India

Ref. No. Priests/GR/161/2024

31 August 2024

Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings and prayerful wishes from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

On 8 September, we celebrate the birthday of Mother Mary. The eight-day fast in preparation for the birthday of Mother Mary is an important practice in our Church tradition. Let us encourage our people to keep this tradition faithfully so that they are spiritually prepared to celebrate the nativity of our Blessed Mother!

In this circular, I want you to direct your attention to the challenges and stresses that we can experience in our priesthood while engaging in our ministries. We know that the Catholic priesthood holds a unique and sacred role within the Church, serving as a bridge between the divine and the earthly. Priests are called to be living representations of Christ, administering the sacraments and shepherding the faithful in their spiritual journey. Through their consecration, they are empowered to transform bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ during the Mass, offering the faithful a tangible connection to the divine mystery.

The importance of the priesthood lies in its essential function in the life of the Church and its members. Priests provide spiritual guidance, offer comfort in times of distress, and help interpret and teach the Word of God. They play a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of the Church's traditions and doctrines, ensuring that the faith is passed down through generations. Moreover, their commitment to a life of service and celibacy serves as a powerful witness to the primacy of spiritual values in a world often focused on material concerns.

The beauty of the priesthood is found in its selfless dedication to the service of God and humanity. Priests often forgo personal ambitions and familial ties to devote themselves entirely to their vocation. This sacrifice allows them to be fully present for their congregations, offering pastoral care and spiritual nourishment to all who seek it. The priesthood embodies the ideals of compassion, forgiveness, and unconditional love, striving to bring the healing and transformative power of Christ's message to a world in need of hope and redemption.

However, in performing our pastoral responsibilities, we often face significant stress and pressure due to several factors. Let me discuss some of these factors and offer the measures that different dioceses in the world have adopted to mitigate them. Following some of these measures, I feel, will be beneficial for us in finding fulfilment in serving the Lord in our Eparchy.

First, priests often serve as frontline emotional support for their parishioners. They are called upon to provide comfort during times of grief, guidance during personal crises, and support through life's challenges. This constant exposure to others' suffering can lead to a phenomenon known as compassion

fatigue or secondary traumatic stress. Over time, this emotional toll can affect a priest's own mental health and ability to empathize.

Second, the duties of a Catholic priest extend far beyond conducting Mass. They are often responsible for administering sacraments (baptisms, weddings, funerals, confessions), providing spiritual counselling, managing parish finances and administration, overseeing religious education programmes, participating in community outreach and social justice initiatives, attending diocesan meetings and events, etc. This diverse and demanding workload can lead to long hours, little downtime, and eventual burnout.

Third, priests are often viewed as moral exemplars in their communities. This places them under constant scrutiny, not just for their professional conduct, but also for their personal lives. Any perceived misstep can lead to criticism or loss of trust from parishioners. This pressure to maintain an impeccable image can be psychologically taxing.

Fourth, the vow of celibacy is a defining aspect of the Catholic priesthood. While many priests find spiritual fulfilment in this commitment, it can also be a source of struggle. It may lead to feelings of loneliness or isolation, especially as priests watch their peers form families. The celibacy requirement can also complicate friendships and pastoral relationships due to the need to maintain appropriate boundaries.

Fifth, the number of men entering the priesthood has been declining in many parts of the world. This trend leads to priests managing larger parishes or multiple parishes, increased workload for existing priests, concerns about the future of the Church and their role within it, pressure to attract new vocations, etc.

Sixth, priests must navigate an increasingly secular society where traditional Catholic teachings on issues like sexuality, gender roles, and bioethics often conflict with prevailing cultural norms. This can create tension within parishes and challenge priests to find ways to uphold Church doctrine while remaining pastoral and relevant.

Seventh, many parishes face financial difficulties due to declining attendance and donations. Priests often find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to fundraise or make difficult decisions about budget cuts. They may also feel pressure to maintain ageing church buildings with limited resources.

Eight, like anyone else, priests can experience doubt, spiritual dryness, or crises of faith. However, their position makes it particularly challenging to address these issues openly. They may feel they have nowhere to turn when facing their own spiritual questions or struggles.

Ninth, the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church has had far-reaching effects. Even priests who have no connection to these scandals may face suspicion or hostility from the public. This can lead to feelings of shame, defensiveness, or a sense of betrayal by the institution they serve.

Lastly, the demands of priestly life often leave little time for personal pursuits, hobbies, or maintaining close friendships. This lack of work-life balance can lead to stress, isolation, and a loss of personal identity outside of their clerical role.

To address these challenges, some dioceses and religious orders have implemented support systems to boost the physical, psychological and spiritual health of their priests. Some of these include:

- Organising regular retreats and spiritual direction:
 - Annual retreats and monthly recollections provide time away from regular duties for prayer, reflection, and spiritual renewal.

- Regular meetings with a trained spiritual director offer priests a safe space to discuss their own spiritual journey and challenges.
- Offering ongoing formation and education opportunities:
 - Organising regular seminars and conferences on topics like theology, pastoral care, and Church administration.
 - Addressing modern challenges in ministry, such as using technology in pastoral work or responding to societal changes through workshops
 - Training programmes to enhance management and communication skills.
- Encouraging peer support groups and mentoring programs:
 - Regular clergy gatherings can provide opportunities for priests to socialize and share experiences with peers.
 - Pairing younger priests with more experienced clergy for guidance and support.
 - Support systems to deal with specific challenges like addiction recovery or stress management.
- Helping to access to mental health professionals:
 - Providing counselling services with confidentiality.
 - Therapists familiar with clerical life can offer specialized support for the unique stressors of priesthood.
 - Encouraging proactive care through regular mental health check-ups rather than crisis management.
- Introducing physical health initiatives:
 - Ensuring priests have access to medical care with health insurance policies in place and arranging regular check-ups.
 - Some dioceses offer gym memberships or wellness programmes to their priests.
 - Recognizing the link between physical and mental health, some dioceses provide nutrition guidance to their priests
- Providing financial planning assistance:
 - Helping priests prepare for their future financial needs, especially during their post-retirement lives.
 - Assisting the priests with personal and parish finance management.
- Introducing transition support systems:
 - Organising programmes for newly ordained priests to help them adjust to full-time ministry.
 - Assisting the priests with the practical and emotional aspects during moments of transfers and relocation.
- Setting up of crisis intervention teams:
 - Rapid response support for priests facing acute personal or parish crises. These teams can provide immediate assistance and referrals to appropriate long-term support.
- Promoting technology and administrative support:
 - Training in modern communication tools and office technology.
 - Administrative assistance to reduce non-pastoral workload.

The implementation and effectiveness of these support systems vary widely between dioceses and religious orders. Some have comprehensive, well-funded programmes, while others may offer more limited support. Additionally, cultural factors within the Church and individual attitudes toward seeking help can influence how readily priests access these resources.

However, there is a growing recognition that support systems are needed and that they have to be proactive rather than reactive, aiming to maintain priests' well-being rather than just responding to crises. This shift represents an important step in addressing the long-term sustainability of priestly ministry and the health of the individuals who undertake it.

Dear Fathers, we need to recognise the fact that we face problems of stress and tension in our ministry. This acceptance can help us in finding ways and means to alleviate them. We may be able to adopt some of the courses suggested above and implement them in our Eparchy. Our monthly meetings can be the appropriate forum for engaging in frank discussions and arriving at acceptable and affordable support systems to maintain a healthy, sustainable approach in our vocation and priestly.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Inter-diocesan Badminton Tournament: The Priests from four Catholic Dioceses in Kanyakumari District participated in the inter diocesan badminton tournament organised as a part of St. John Mariya Vianney Day Annual celebration on 01 August 2024 at St. Xavier's College indoor stadium, Chunkankadai. In total nearly 60 priests reported in the indoor stadium. And from our eparchy 10 priests participated in the competition. The competition was flagged off by Rt. Rev Dr Albert Athanasus, the Bishop of Kuzhithurai. He also interacted with the players of four dioceses. Overall, it was great experience for all the priests and encouraging to seeing the priests participating in so much effort. I congratulate the participants from our eparchy.

Health Care Awareness Programme at Marappady: Health Care Commission organized a Breastfeeding Awareness Programme to mark World Breastfeeding Week on August 2, 2024. The event was held at Marappady Parish Community Hall. The programme was organized in collaboration with the Arumanai Health and Wellness Centre, Mid-Level Health Providers, and Village Health Nurses. These experts provided valuable insights into the importance of breastfeeding and discussed the critical role it plays in preventing malnutrition among children. They highlighted the rising concern of child malnutrition and shared the underlying causes, aiming to educate the community about effective practices for improving child health. The session was well-attended, with over 50 participants from the Arumanai Panchayat joining the event. I thank Fr. Subin Scaria for coordinating the event well.

Vianney Day Celebration: The feast of St. Maria John Vianney, the patron saint of all priests, especially Diocesan priests, was meaningfully observed in the Eparchy. This year August 04 was Sunday, therefore the traditional Vianney Day celebration, typically held on August 04 was conducted on August 03, 2024, at St. Mary's Minor Seminary, Mukkoottukal. All the priests of the Eparchy gathered at our Minor Seminary for the celebrations. The programme commenced at 9:30 am with the adoration of Blessed Sacrament animated by the minor seminarians. This was followed by the traditional volleyball match between the priests and the seminarians. Although both teams played exceptionally well, the Minor Seminary brothers with the help of Regency brothers ultimately triumphed over the challenging competition and secured the trophy. A brief cultural programme followed, showcasing the talents of the seminarians. The public meeting was presided over by me during which Fr. Mathew Kuzhinjalil was honoured by the TPWA for donating his land located at Kumarakovil for the welfare of the Priests. The new ID cards for priests were also distributed on the same day. The celebration culminated in a solemn lunch. Our gratitude goes to the Rector, Rev. Fr. Augustine Thalodil, and his team for their exceptional organization of the Vianney Day Programme. A special note of appreciation to the SH Sisters who diligently prepared the meal for everyone.

St. Alphonsa Academy Cultural Competitions at Nagercoil: St. Alphonsa Academy for Excellence Cultural Competitions conducted by St. Alphonsa Matri. Hr. Sec. School, Nagercoil was held on 03 August 2024 at Nagercoil school campus. Padma Shri Dr. Tessa Thomas, Former Director General of Aeronautical System DRDO, inaugurated the event and Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil, was the chief guest. A total of 80 schools and 15 colleges from Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli districts participated in the competitions, which drew over 1800 students. Students actively participate in different competitions such as elocution, quiz, essay writing, solo singing, drawing, dance etc. Academy Award Day was held on 17 August 2024

and I presided over the function and distributed prizes for the winners. I appreciate the correspondent Fr. Sanil John and entire team behind for conducting well the programme.

Training Programme at Poondi: The TNBC Health Commission successfully hosted a ‘Training of Trainers’ programme on August 06-07, 2024 at the Poondi Retreat Centre, Poondi, which brought together 180 dedicated participants from various regions, including 8 representatives from the Eparchy of Thuckalay. The Participants from our Eparchy were: Fr. Subin Puthenpurayil, Fr. Linto Thakidiyel, Sr. Libiya CMC, Mr. Edwinston, Mr. Shonic Reegan, Mis. Rasmitha and Mis. Jenisha. The programme centred around the vital theme of ‘Addiction-Free Life’, with esteemed resource persons Fr. Nelson, Fr. A J Rex, and Fr. Anbin Amalan leading insightful sessions and discussions. This comprehensive training aimed to equip participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to become effective trainers in their own communities, promoting a culture of wellness and resilience. I congratulate the participants from our Eparchy for their effective cooperation to the training of trainers programme.

Visit of the Major Archbishop to the Eparchy: His Beatitude Mar Raphael Thattil, the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, made his first visit to our Eparchy on 10-11 August 2024. It was a momentous occasion, allowing us to express our love, unity, and communion with the Father and Head of our Church. His visit was a blessing to our Eparchy, marked by several significant events:

- ❖ **Welcome at Bishop’s House:** The Major Archbishop arrived at the Bishop’s House at 1:00 PM on 10 August 2024, where he was warmly welcomed by priests from the Thuckalay Pilankalai Forane and sisters from the CMC convent in Thuckalay. After a moment of prayer in the Bishop’s House Chapel, he imparted his blessings. This was followed by a shared meal, attended by the three provincials of the FCC, CMC, and SABS, along with the priests from the Thuckalay Pilankalai Forane.
- ❖ **Priests and Religious Sangamam at Padanthalumoodu:** On 10 August 2024, the Major Archbishop addressed the priests and religious of our Eparchy at Sacred Heart Forane Church, Padanthalumoodu. The event began with the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, animated by Fr. Ajin Jose, Fr. Justin Suthesh, and their team, followed by a public meeting in the parish auditorium. The programme started with a video presentation on the Eparchy and the Major Archbishop, prepared by Pulari Communications. Rev. Fr. Thomas Sathianesan welcomed everyone, and Rev. Sr. Celia FCC, the Provincial Superior, along with myself, felicitated the Major Archbishop on behalf of the religious, priests, and the entire Eparchy. In his presidential address, the Major Archbishop expressed his special love and concern for our mission Eparchy. He honoured the Golden and Silver Jubilarians by presenting them with mementos and shawls. The Major Archbishop also released the Eparchial Directory 2024, handing over the first copy to me. The event featured felicitation songs by the Eparchial choir and sisters, as well as a dance performance by students from Padanthalumoodu Parish. Rev. Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal delivered the vote of thanks, and the gathering concluded with a fellowship meal.
- ❖ **Reception in Parishes and Institutions:** During his brief visit, the Major Archbishop visited the following parishes, mission centres, and institutions: On 10 August, he visited KKSSS, Kalluvilai, where he blessed the staff and parishioners. On Sunday, 11 August, he visited St. Thomas Church and LSDP Providence Home in Perumchilambu, St. Michael’s Church in Thettivilai, Little Flower Forane Church in Manjalumoodu, DNN Karode, Holy Family Church in Mukkoottukal, and St. Mary’s Minor Seminary in Mukkoottukal. At each location, he received a warm reception and imparted his apostolic blessing. With great care, the Major Archbishop engaged with the faithful, listening to their stories and gaining insight into their vibrant faith. He spoke of the mission dimension of the Church, urging the faithful to continue the rich traditions of our Church.
- ❖ **Solemn Holy Qurbana at Nithiravilai:** On Sunday, 11 August, the entire Eparchy gathered at Jayamatha Forane Church, Nithiravilai, for the Solemn Concelebrated Holy Qurbana. The Major Archbishop received a grand reception at Nithiravilai junction at 2:30 PM and was then escorted to

the church in an open jeep. I welcomed the Major Archbishop at the beginning of the Holy Qurbana, which he presided over, with a majority of the Eparchial priests concelebrating. Representatives from all parishes and religious congregations participated in the event. After the Holy Qurbana, Mrs. Juliet, the assistant secretary of the pastoral council, felicitated the Major Archbishop on behalf of the lay faithful during a short public meeting. Fr. Jose Muttathupadam thanked everyone. The event concluded with an agape meal for all present.

- ❖ **Dinner with neighbouring bishops and leaders of the society:** On Sunday, 11 August, a dinner was arranged at the Bishop's House to honour the Major Archbishop in the presence of neighbouring bishops and community leaders. Bishop Peter Remigius, Bishop Emeritus of Kottar, Vicar Generals from the Kottar, Marthandam, and Kuthithurai Dioceses, Bishop Rt. Anantha Raj Chelliah of the CSI, MLAs, and lay leaders of our Church were in attendance. At the end of the dinner, the Major Archbishop expressed his gratitude by presenting mementos to all for their love and cordial presence. The Major Archbishop returned to Kakkanad after the dinner.

My Sincere gratitude to the Curia members and all the Fathers and Sisters who took great efforts to make the visit of the Major Archbishop a success.

Priests and Religious Sangamam at Padanthalumoodu: This year, the Priests and religious sangamam took place along with the reception to the Major Archbishop on 10 August 2024 at Sacred Heart Forane Church, Padanthalumoodu. This event was organized with the primary objective of coming together with the Major Archbishop and fostering stronger interaction among the priests and religious who serve in the Eparchy. Additionally, it served as an occasion to extend warm wishes and congratulations to those priests and religious celebrating their Silver or Golden Jubilee of ordination or profession. This year, we had four golden jubilarians and three silver jubilarians. The Golden Jubilarians included Fr. Chacko Puthiyaparampil, Sr. Annie Deepa CMC, Sr. Vineeth Maria SH and Sr. Tessa Maria SH, while the Silver Jubilarians comprised Fr. Joshy Thevalakkara CMI, Sr. Emily Rose CMC, Sr. Vijaya SH. Special prayer service was conducted by thanking God for their ministry and imploring God's blessings upon them. During the meeting, on behalf of the Eparchy, the Major Archbishop honoured them by giving shall and a memento and expressed our gratitude to them for their dedicated and selfless service to the Church and to the Eparchy. I express my gratitude to Sr. Anitha SH and Sr. Sona SH for introducing the Jubilarians and all the Fathers, with a special mention of Rev. Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal, our chancellor, for their diligent efforts in organizing this programme. The success of the event was greatly attributed to the enthusiastic participation of all the Fathers and Sisters who added vibrancy to the occasion with their active involvement and contributions.

Inter-Eparchial Meet at Changanacherry: For the first time since the COVID pandemic, the inter-eparchial meeting was conducted on 12 August 2024 at St. Joseph College of Communication (Media Village), Changanacherry. Bishops from three eparchies—Palai, Kanjirappally, and Thuckalay—came together under the presidency of Mar Joseph Perumthottam, the Archbishop of Changanacherry. Priestly representatives from all four eparchies participated in the meeting. From our eparchy, Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal, Fr. Johnsilal Arackaparampil, Fr. Robin Koorumullil, Fr. Abilash Xavier, Fr. Linto Thakidiyel, and Fr. Liju Marattukalam took part. The meeting began at 10:00 AM, with the main discussions focusing on current social issues such as the Wayanad natural calamity, Mullaperiyar dam concerns, and the challenges faced by farmers. I presented the report on the collaborative mission activities in our extended territories, supported by the other three eparchies. On behalf of all four eparchies, Mar Jose Pulickal thanked Archbishop Mar Joseph Perumthottam for presiding over the inter-eparchial meetings over the past years. The meeting concluded with an agape meal at 1:30 PM.

Health Care Camp at Thettiyoode: On August 12, 2024, KKSSS, in collaboration with the Health Commission, hosted a significant awareness camp on alcohol and drug abuse at Thettiyoode. The event was presided over by Fr. Subin Scaria, the Assistant Director of KKSSS. The camp saw an impressive turnout of 35 women from the local community, who participated actively in discussions and sessions aimed at

raising awareness about the dangers of substance abuse. The programme provided valuable information on prevention, treatment options, and the importance of community support in addressing these issues. The event was a success in fostering a better understanding of substance abuse and encouraging collective efforts towards healthier communities.

SMYM Forane Animators' Meet: The forane animators' meeting was held in Nithiravilai and Padanthalumoodu on 04 August 2024 and in Kaliyal on 15th of August. Animators with the youth director and the forane director enthusiastically attended this meeting and shared the various activities they conduct for the youth in their parishes and the difficulties they face to gather the youth in the parish and also the challenges the youth face today. Fr. Santhosh, the Youth director, and Fr Antony, the Assit. Director, shared their thoughts about the youth, how to make them active and more productive in the parishes.

Blessing of a Pieta statue at Vanchi Nagar: An image of Our Lady of sorrow (Pieta) was installed on 16 August 2024 at St. Mary's Church, Vanchi Nagar. In order to emphasize religious harmony, the statue was jointly inaugurated by me along with Ilanchi Ashram Swamiji Krishnanantha Saraswati and Sengottai Jamaat President Mr. Ahmed Meeran. Then I blessed the statue. Along with that, the parish festival was started by hoisting the flag and with the Solemn celebration of Holy Qurbana. I thank Fr. Antony Mahesh for installing the statue for the public devotion organizing the event well.

National Meeting of CML: A meeting of CML national executive members along with the Thuckalay eparchial executive members was held at Bishop's House, Thuckalay on 17 August 2024 at 11 PM. In the meeting presided by me, Mr. Benny Puthuparampil, the national coordinator of CML and Mr. Suji Pullukattu, the CML President were present. The various activities to be carried out in the state level were discussed in the meeting. I thank Fr. Printo Kurias for organising the meeting.

Last Respects to Mr. Wilson Sir: With profound sadness, we received the shocking news of the demise of Mr. Wilson Sir, belonging to Holy Family Church, Mukkoottukal, in the early morning of 18 August 2024. Mr. Wilson Sir was a great lay missionary with ardent love for the Syro-Malabar Church and the Diocese. He possessed a special quality of understanding the mind of the Church. He lived a life of gospel witness and was a model layman for the present generation. Mr. Wilson was the diocesan coordinator of the Mission League (CML) from its inception and had been a pillar of strength in establishing CML in the Diocese. He made innumerable contributions to the Department of Catechesis by serving the Diocese as Promoter for 21 years (1997-2022;2006-2022) and as a catechism teacher for 43 years. He was an active member of the St. Vincent De Paul Society for 44 years and, at present, he was serving as a Central Council member and assistant project monitoring officer. He involved himself in translating many liturgical prayers of the Church from Malayalam to Tamil and recently dedicated himself to the translation of the Syro-Malabar Revised Holy Qurbana text from Malayalam to Tamil. He served the Diocese as a Pastoral Council member for many years. Mr. Wilson Sir was one of the main coordinators from the Diocese for the Edathuva Parish Feast, and all the announcements in Tamil were made by him in Edathuva Church for the last 24 years. He served as a Parish Council member and Kaikar of Mukkoottukal Parish for many terms and, at present, he was serving as Secretary of the Parish Council. From 1984 to 2019, he worked at Holy Family School, Mukkoottukal, as a Physical Training (PT) Teacher. The Eparchy of Thuckalay is always grateful to Mr. Wilson Sir for his selfless sacrifices for the glory of God and the good of the Eparchy. Let us pray that the merciful God grants him eternal joy.

A property for TPWA by Fr. Mathew Kuzhinjalil: Fr. Mathew Kuzhinjalil, a great pioneer missionary of our Eparchy, donated approximately 5.5 acres of land at Kumarakovil to the TPWA for the welfare of the priests of our eparchy on 21 August 2024. The donated land includes nearly 700 young rubber trees. The TPWA executive body has already taken charge of the land and its maintenance. On behalf of the entire eparchy, I extend our heartfelt gratitude to Fr. Mathew Kuzhinjalil for his extraordinary act of benevolence

for the welfare of our priests. I also thank the TPWA team for their dedicated work in completing the necessary documentation for the land registration.

The Major Archiepiscopal Assembly: The Fifth Major Archiepiscopal Assembly of the Syro-Malabar Church was held at Alphonsin Pastoral Centre, Palai, from 22 to 25 August 2024. A total of 348 members participated in the assembly, including 50 archbishops and bishops, 108 priests (comprising 34 Vicar Generals, 41 Eparchial Priests Delegates, 14 consecrated men, and 19 elected and nominated priests), 37 consecrated women (including Major Superiors), 7 brothers (2 religious superiors, 1 permanent deacon, and 4 deacons), and 146 lay delegates (99 males and 47 females) from 16 countries across 5 continents. From our eparchy, along with me, the following representatives participated in the assembly: Rev. Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal (substitute for the Vicar General), Rev. Fr. Joseph Santhosh (Presbyter delegate), Mr. Aju Thomas (substitute for the Pastoral Council Secretary), Mr. Shonic Regan (lay delegate), and Mrs. Juliet (lay delegate). The assembly served as an occasion for ecclesial self-reflection and renewal. As proposed, the assembly discussions focused on the theme, “Mission and Life of the Syro-Malabar Church: In Response to the Needs of the Time,” with three major sub-themes: (1) Renewal of Faith Formation, (2) Active Participation of the Lay Faithful in the Proclamation of the Gospel, and (3) Empowering the Syro-Malabar Community.

The assembly began and concluded with a Holy Hour of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, maintaining a spiritual atmosphere throughout. Each day included the solemn celebration of the Holy Qurbana, the Liturgy of the Hours, and the Rosary. On the first day, after the introductory session, the participants’ details were presented by the media committee. On 23 August, the assembly was officially inaugurated by Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, the Apostolic Nuncio to India, after which discussions commenced. Each theme was explored through four presentations by resource persons, followed by one-hour small group discussions of 20 members each. Additionally, five General Sessions were held where members were free to express their suggestions or doubts. In the evenings, cultural programmes were organized by Palai Communications. The Syro-Malabar Church expressed its gratitude and formally honoured Cardinal Mar George Alencherry, the Major Archbishop Emeritus, for his significant contributions to the growth and renewal of the Church. The concluding session featured Cardinal Baselios Mar Cleemis, the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malankara Church, along with political leaders from the Syro-Malabar Church as the chief guests. In summary, the assembly was a positive experience for all participants and marked a new beginning for the Syro-Malabar Church.

SMYM Forane Elections: Forane level youth representatives’ election was conducted in Manjalumoodu forane on 04 August, Thuckalay Pilankalai forane on 18th and Padanthalumoodu and Soosaipuum forane on 25th of August 2024. The leaders were elected in all the parishes and they were sent to the forane for the election. The leaders were elected in the parishes under the supervision of the parish priest and animator. The forane election was taken place by the forane director and the central youth representatives. I thank Fr. Santhosh for the effective coordination of the elections.

Students’ Retreat at Padanthalumoodu: The Catechetical department organised a 3 days retreat for students of Classes X, XI, XII on August 24, 25 and 26, 2024 at Sacred Heart Forane Church, Padanthalumoodu. The retreat was led by Fr. William John Bosco VC and Fr. Edward Raj VC. Bro. Rajan made the retreat joyful with songs. During the retreat various topics such as Love your God and neighbour, Faith, Holy Eucharist, Sin and its consequences, Word of God in the life of students, Use of social media and its impact on students’ lives were preached on the basis of Word of God. Above 250 students participated on first and last day. On the second day around 350 students participated. *Nartheithi Nilayam* staff, promoters and volunteers made the retreat so colourful and prayerful. My sincere gratitude to Fr. Abilash Xavier, the director and the entire team behind this spiritual renewal programme for our students.

Extended Territory Mission Meet at Tirunelveli: Extended Territory Mission gathering was conducted on 26 August 2024 in Tirunelveli Mission. There were 17 participants including 7 Fathers, 1 deacon and 9 Sisters. On behalf of all gathered, Fr. Tobin Alapurackal extended a warm welcome to the new missionaries to the mission koinonia, specially from Cumbum, Theni and Viruthunagar missions. All shared their experiences and Discussions took place about present situations and challenges in various missions. Everybody presented the urgent need of forming new society or an authentic structure to start the mission activities in extended territories. Absence of financial resources was also highlighted as a hindrance to the effective mission works. I appreciate Fr. Tobin for coordinating the mission gatherings in extended mission territory.

Social Work Students' Capacity Building at KKSSS: KKSSS hosted training programmes for social work students from various colleges in Kanyakumari district, focusing on practical knowledge and skills in social work. The programmes aimed to empower future social work professionals and align with KKSSS's mission. Training sessions were conducted for students from Nanjil Catholic College, Kaliyakkavilai (August 14), Malankara Catholic College, Kaliyakkavilai (August 23) and Holy Cross College, Nagercoil (August 27). Fr. Thomas Sebastian, Director of KKSSS, led the training sessions, which covered the principles of professional social work, KKSSS's activities, and ongoing projects. I thank Fr. Aby for the effective initiative and coordination.

Parish Empowerment by KKSSS: The KKSSS, Kalluvialai, as part of the Changing The Way We Care Project funded by CRS, conducted gatekeeping training programmes in various parishes. The primary objective of gatekeeping is to protect vulnerable children from abuse and strengthen their families through comprehensive support, including financial, psychological, educational, and other assistance. Each parish will assume the role of a gatekeeper, ensuring that children receive family care within their own communities, rather than being placed in child care institutions. The gatekeeping training programmes were conducted in the following parishes: Nithiravilai (August 4 & 22) and Vayalinkarai (August 18). By empowering parishes to take on this gatekeeping role, the project aims to create a supportive network that prioritizes family-based care and ensures the well-being and safety of vulnerable children.

Syro Malabar Bishop's Synod at Kakkanad: The Third Session of the XXXII Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church took place at the Major Archiepiscopal Curia at Mount St. Thomas Kakkanad from August 19 to 31, 2024. During the Synod, the Synod Fathers participated in the Fifth Major Archiepiscopal Assembly held at Alphonsin Pastoral Centre, Palai from 22 to 25 August 2024. Election of the New Archbishop to the Archeparchy of Changanacherry and a new Bishop to the Eparchy of Shamshabad were one of the agendas of this synodal session. Mar Thomas Tharayil was elected as the Archbishop of Changanacherry and Mar Prince Antony Panengadan was elected as the Bishop of Shamshabad. The Major Archbishop formally announced this appointment by 03.00 pm on 30 August 2024 at Kakkanad.

Mar Thomas Tharayil, our New Archbishop: Mar Raphael Thattil, the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, appointed Mar Thomas Tharayil as the Archbishop of Changanacherry. He succeeds Archbishop Mar Joseph Perumthottam, who retired upon reaching the age of 75. Bishop Mar Thomas Tharayil was born on 2 February 1972 and belongs to the Cathedral Parish of the Archeparchy of Changanacherry. He was ordained a priest on 1 January 2000 and completed a Ph.D. in Psychology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He was elected Auxiliary Bishop of the Archeparchy of Changanacherry and was ordained Bishop on 23 April 2017. We extend our best wishes and God's blessings to him as he takes on his new ministry as our Archbishop, and we express our deep gratitude to Mar Joseph Perumthottam for leading us as Archbishop for the past 17 years.

INFORMATION

- **The new ID cards for Priests** was provided on 04 August 2024 at St. Mary's Minor Seminary, Mukkoottukal during the Vianney day celebration. I thank Fr. Liju Marattukalam for the efforts taken to make it.
- **Rev. Fr. Stefano Martoglio SDB**, the Vicar of the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation visited the Bishop's House on 07 August 2024. A warm reception was given to him with the dinner in the presence of Curia members, three Provincial Superiors, Fathers from Thuckalay Pilankalai Forane and Salesian Sisters.
- **Mr. George Francis (76)**, the beloved father of Fr. Tinu Kottakkaparambil CMI, was called to the eternal abode on 08 August 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to Fr. Tinu and family members and pray for the departed soul.
- **Mr. Varghese Thattil (68)**, the brother of Fr. Babu Thattil CMI, was called to the eternal abode on 09 August 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to Fr. Babu and family members and pray for the departed soul.
- **The Eparchial Directory 2024** was released on 10 August 2024 by the Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil during Priests and Religious Sangamam. I extend sincere thanks to Fr. Lijo Thekkel who worked hard to collect the data and the entire team behind him.
- **Fr. Shoji** came from Ireland for his annual vacation on 11 August 2024. We wish him a blessed stay in the Eparchy.
- **Fr. Jose Vayalil** went to Australia for two weeks on 14 August 2024 to attend a family programme.
- **Pastoral Visit to St. Thomas Church, Pathukani** was conducted on 18 August 2024.
- **CML** conducted leaders meet for Manjalumoodu – Kaliyal Foranes, called 'the enlightened' at Kaliyal on 18 August 2024.
- **Rev. Sr. Carmaletha SD (65)**, the former Provincial of St. Joseph SD Province, was called to the eternal abode on 19 August 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to Rev. Sisters of SD Province and pray for the departed soul.
- **Mrs. Elikkuty (85)**, the elder sister of Sr. Tessy SDS was called to the eternal abode on 20 August 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to Sr. Tessy and family members and pray for the departed soul.
- **Fr. Prince Maliyil** reached back from Ireland for his annual vacation on 25 August 2024. We wish him a happy stay in the Eparchy.
- **Mr. K. V. Kurian (78)**, the brother of Sr. Tessy Kannambadam SABS, was called to the eternal abode on 29 August 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to Sr. Tessy and family members and pray for the departed soul.
- **Wayanad Collections:** I thank wholeheartedly for the generous support from your parishes for the rehabilitation of Wayanad. All the institutions of the Eparchy, including that of religious contributed very generously. After receiving from all, Fr. Procurator will publish it in the eparchial news later.
- This month I am **meeting the priests those who are transferred** on 24 May 2024. The secretary will inform you the date and time of the meeting.
- From 1 September we begin the **8-day fast**. I request you to observe this traditional practice as much as possible in order to celebrate the Nativity of our Blessed Mother on 08 September.
- **GRATITUDE:** As I complete my 12th year of Episcopal ministry in the eparchy on 16 September 2024, my heart is raised to God the Almighty for His benevolent blessing and guidance. I am grateful to all the priests, religious and faithful of the eparchy for the love, cooperation and prayers. It is through you dear fathers that I was able to realise God's plan in the eparchy. A big thank you to all.

FORTHCOMING MAJOR EVENTS

- 01 September - Eight days fast begins
- 03 September - Priests' Conference at Kalluvilai
- 08 September - The nativity of our Lady

Priests' Conference
03 September 2024 @ 09.30 AM
Kalluvilai
01.00 PM – Onam Sadhya

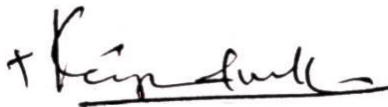
Priests' Annual Retreat 2024
Date: 06 - 11 October 2024
Place: Sangamam
Preacher: Rev. Fr. Jose Varikasseril SDB
Please prepare spiritually for the retreat and pray for the preacher
and its success

CONCLUSION

During the month of August, we had come together as fellow workers of the Eparchy to celebrate the feast of St John Maria Vianney. This celebration allowed us to recall our own priesthood and to resolve to live it like St John Maria Vianney by administering the sacraments especially the sacrament of reconciliation as he did. Let us make use of occasions such as feasts of patron Saints of our parishes to boost the faith of our people. In September, as we are already reminded, we shall celebrate one of the important feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, namely, the Nativity of Mother Mary. The celebration of this feast is a wonderful opportunity for us to grow in Marian piety. Let us prepare our people well and celebrate it meaningfully. Kindly keep the mission of the Church and the needs of our Eparchy in your daily prayers.

May our Blessed Mother intercede for each one of us!

Yours in Christ Jesus,



† **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

