



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

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30 June 2024

Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings and prayerful wishes from St. Mary of the Assumption Church, New York!

Saint Alphonsa, whose feast we celebrate on 28 July, was the first Indian woman to be canonised as a saint in the Catholic Church. Her life, though brief, was marked by profound faith, unwavering devotion, and heroic endurance of suffering. Born Anna Muttathupadathu in Kudamaloor, Kerala, India, she would become a shining example of holiness and inspiration for Catholics worldwide. In this circular, I want to highlight her spirituality, which can serve as a wonderful model in our journey towards holiness.

Anna was born on 19 August 1910 to Cherian Ousep and Mary Muttathupadathu. Tragedy struck early when her mother died just three months after her birth. Raised by her maternal aunt, Anna experienced a childhood marked by ill health and physical suffering. Despite these challenges, she developed a deep spirituality from a young age, drawing strength from her devotion to Christ.

As a young woman, Anna faced pressure to marry, as was customary in her culture. However, she felt a strong calling to religious life. In a bold act of faith and determination, she deliberately injured her foot by stepping into a pile of burning embers to make herself less attractive as a potential bride. This act, while extreme, demonstrated her unwavering commitment to her vocation.

In 1927, at the age of 17, Anna joined the Franciscan Clarist Congregation. Upon taking her vows in 1936, she received the name Sister Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception. Her life as a nun was characterised by simplicity, humility, and a deep love for Jesus Christ.

Saint Alphonsa's spirituality was characterised by a unique blend of mystical experiences, sacrificial love, and an unwavering commitment to her religious vocation despite numerous physical and mental challenges. Let me highlight some of the features of her spirituality, which we can emulate as we prepare to celebrate her feast.

Central to St Alphonsa's spirituality was her profound understanding and acceptance of **suffering** as a means of union with Christ. From a young age, she experienced various illnesses and accidents that caused her great pain. However, rather than viewing these trials as burdens, she embraced them as opportunities to participate in Christ's redemptive suffering.

St Alphonsa often referred to herself as a victim soul, willingly offering her pain for the salvation of others and the sanctification of priests. She wrote, "I have given myself up completely to Jesus. Let Him please

Himself in His dealings with me. My only desire in this world is to suffer for the love of God and to rejoice in doing it.”

This attitude towards suffering was not merely passive acceptance but an active choice to transform her pain into a spiritual offering. She saw her bed of illness as an altar where she could unite her sufferings with those of Christ on the cross.

St Alphonsa’s spirituality was deeply rooted in **prayer**. Despite her physical limitations, she maintained a rigorous prayer schedule, often spending hours in contemplation. Her prayer life was characterised by the following:

- Eucharistic devotion: She had a profound love for the Eucharist, considering it the source of her strength and consolation.
- Marian devotion: St Alphonsa had a special relationship with the Virgin Mary, whom she saw as a model of perfect discipleship and suffering.
- Contemplative prayer: She practised deep, silent prayer, often experiencing mystical union with God.
- Intercessory prayer: She prayed fervently for others, especially for the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of priests.

Despite her profound spiritual experiences, St Alphonsa maintained a childlike **simplicity and humility**. She never sought attention or special treatment, preferring to remain hidden and unknown. This aspect of her spirituality was reflected in her interactions with others, her writings, and her approach to religious life.

She often spoke of the ‘little way’ of spiritual childhood, similar to St Thérèse of Lisieux, emphasising trust in God’s love and the importance of small, everyday acts of love and sacrifice.

St Alphonsa’s spirituality was deeply intertwined with her vocation as a Franciscan Clarist nun. Despite facing numerous obstacles, including opposition from her family and her ill health, she persevered in her desire to consecrate herself to God.

She saw her religious life as a means of complete self-giving to Christ. She writes: “I have entrusted myself entirely to the Lord. Let Him do with me as He pleases. My only desire in this world is to suffer for God's love and rejoice in doing so.”

Intense mystical experiences marked St Alphonsa’s spiritual life. She often reported visions of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and various saints. These experiences, while profound, did not lead her to seek attention or consider herself special. Instead, they deepened her humility and desire to unite more closely with Christ in his suffering.

While St Alphonsa was largely confined to her convent due to illness, she understood her suffering as a powerful means of **evangelisation**. She offered her pain for the conversion of sinners, the sanctification of priests, and the growth of the Church. This understanding of suffering as a form of apostolate was a key aspect of her spirituality.

Despite her constant pain, St Alphonsa maintained a **joyful disposition**. This joy, rooted in her love for Christ and her acceptance of God’s will, was a testament to the depth of her spirituality. She often encouraged others to find joy in their sufferings, seeing them as opportunities for growth in holiness.

Thus, we can surmise that St Alphonsa's spirituality was characterised by a profound acceptance of suffering, a deep prayer life, childlike simplicity, love for her religious vocation, mystical experiences, and a joyful disposition despite constant pain. Her life and teachings inspire many, offering a powerful example of finding meaning and purpose in suffering through union with Christ.

Her canonisation in 2008 brought global attention to this hidden saint from Kerala, highlighting the universal call to holiness and the transformative power of embracing one's cross in union with Christ. St Alphonsa's spirituality offers a compelling model for those seeking to deepen their faith, especially in times of trial and suffering.

Saint Alphonsa's brief life left an indelible mark on the Catholic Church, particularly in India. Her canonisation in 2008 by Pope Benedict XVI brought her story of humble faith and heroic virtue to a global audience. Today, she inspires Catholics worldwide to embrace their sufferings, persevere in faith, and seek a deeper union with Christ.

As we face the challenges of the modern world, St Alphonsa's life reminds us that true holiness is found not in grand gestures or remarkable achievements but in the faithful and loving acceptance of God's will in our daily lives. Her example challenges us to find joy in simplicity, strength in suffering, and purpose in devotion to Christ.

Our Eparchy is fortunate to have a Shrine dedicated to St Alphonsa at Nagercoil. As in other years, we shall organise a solemn celebration this year. To prepare the faithful spiritually, I request that all parishes organise the novena in honour of St Alphonsa from 19-27 July.

We shall arrange the *nadaipayanam* (pilgrimage on foot) from the parishes to the Nagercoil shrine by the faithful on 20 July 2024. The SMYM department will take the initiative to organise the entire event. May I request all the priests to prepare the people to take part in this pilgrimage to the shrine!

On 26 July 2024, Most Rev. Albert George Alexander Anastas, bishop of Kuzhitharai, will celebrate the Holy Mass. After being appointed bishop, he is coming to our Eparchy for the first time, so let us welcome him wholeheartedly to our Shrine.

There is a possibility of organising Forane-level Qurbanas during the days of festivities. Kindly look at the schedule the organisers have prepared and urge the faithful of the respective Foranes to participate in these Qurbanas.

On 28 July 2024, the feast of St Alphonsa, Mar Paul Alappat, bishop of Ramanathapuram, will preside over the main Qurbana.

I encourage you, dear Fathers, to play an active role in making the celebration of the feast of St Alphonsa at our Shrine a meaningful experience for all our faithful. Your presence at the various events will be a witness to our people. I am sure the organisers will inform you of all the programmes for the celebration.

May the life and intercession of Saint Alphonsa continue to inspire and guide Catholics in their spiritual journey, reminding us of the profound depths of God's love and the transformative power of a life lived in complete surrender to Him!

NEWS AND EVENTS

Laity Council Meeting at Sangamam: The one-day seminar for the Diocesan Laity Council Members was held at Sangamam on June 2, 2024. The programme began with the solemn celebration of the Holy Qurbana, presided over by Fr. Vinu D. Joseph, the director of the Laity Council. The public meeting commenced at 11:30 AM, with Adv. Raja Eric Godwin, the Treasurer of the Laity Council, welcoming all present. This was followed by an insightful session on trade unions and the challenges faced by workers, led by Fr. Godwin Selva Justus. After the lunch break, Mr. Celestin, a teacher, delivered an excellent speech on why the faithful should engage in politics and explained the various welfare schemes provided to minorities by government departments. I presided over the concluding session of the seminar, offering many valuable and constructive insights. Adv. Dhanasign, the President of the Laity Council, delivered the vote of thanks, and the meeting concluded with my final blessing at 3:00 PM. Nearly 69 representatives from different parishes participated in the seminar. I extend my gratitude to Fr. Vinu D. Joseph for coordinating the seminar and providing effective leadership.

Last respects to Rev. Sr. Treasa Collet CMC (84): It is with profound sorrow that we received the sad news of the passing of Sr. Treasa Collet CMC on June 1, 2024. Her dedicated service spanned an impressive 40 years in our diocese. Sr. Collet was a pioneering missionary who devoted herself to the kingdom of God, particularly in the Kanyakumari mission and the diocese of Thuckalay. During her service, she contributed significantly to various ministries in the following places: Netta, Kaliyal, Muzhucode, Pallikonam, Penu, Puliyarai, and Courtallam. The first part of the funeral service began at 11:30 AM in the chapel of the Chavara Provincial House in Thuckalay on Sunday, June 2, 2024. From 1:00 PM onwards, the mortal remains were kept at Karunya Bhavan, Kalluvilai, and the funeral service began there at 4:00 PM. I presided over the funeral Holy Qurbana and other liturgical services. Almost all the Fathers and Sisters in the diocese, along with many of the faithful, visited, prayed for the departed soul, and participated in the final funeral rites. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the CMC Chavara family in Thuckalay, express our gratitude for her generous services, and fervently pray for her eternal reward.

Kuzhanthai Iso Iyakkam Annual Day: The annual day celebration of Kuzhanthai Iso Iyakkam took place on June 6, 2024, at KKSSS Auditorium, Kalluvilai, starting at 2:00 PM. The meeting was chaired by Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil, Vicar General, and Rev. Fr. Subin Puthenpurackal was the chief guest of the occasion. At the conclusion of the meeting, prizes were distributed to the deserving winners of various competitions. St. Jermain Cousin was announced as the icon of the year for the next year of KII. Including Fathers, Sisters, teachers, and students, almost 250 people participated in the annual day celebrations. I express my heartfelt gratitude to Fr. Toji Kozhuvakandathil, the director, for his exceptional organization of this event.

SMYM Three days Camp at Sangamam: The Diocesan Youth Camp was held at Sangamam from June 14 to 16, 2024. The programme started at 10:40 AM on June 14 with the inaugural address by Very Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil, the Vicar General. In the first session, Ms. Sherin Velicham from Chennai trained the youth to set goals in life and provided practical guidance on achieving them. In the afternoon session, Fr. Edwin from JDAX Academy of Excellence enlightened the youth on the constant training needed to secure desired jobs, especially government jobs, which provide social and economic security. At

7:00 PM, there was a Rosary procession and Adoration. On the morning of the next day, Fr. Felix Arulnadhan SDB oriented the youth on today's job market and the nature of available jobs. In the afternoon, Fr. Printo Kurias enlightened the youth about the Constitution of India, as well as their civil rights and duties. At 7:00 PM, there was an hour of Adoration, followed by a group talent exhibition in the evening. On the last day, June 16, 2024, Fr. Joseph Santhosh, the director, guided the youth through spiritual, life, and career discernments. The youth felt enthused after the three-day camp. I extend my gratitude to Fr. Joseph Santhosh for coordinating the camp so well and motivating our youth to be pilgrims of hope.

Priests' Conference: The Priests' Conference for the month took place at Sangamam on June 18, 2024, commencing at 9:30 AM. The conference began with a solemn adoration and confession, setting a prayerful atmosphere for the gathering. At 11:15 AM, the meeting officially began, with Fr. Vicar General coordinating the proceedings in my absence and presiding over the conference. During this significant conference, a warm welcome was extended to two new Fathers who joined the Presbytery: Rev. Fr. George Kalangara SDB, the new mission procure and project coordinator, and Rev. Fr. Joseph (Bibin) Kocheethra, Parish Priest of Mezhacode Parish. The main agenda of the meeting included the coordination of St. Alphonsa's feast and Nadaipayanam. Additionally, various departments and associations had the opportunity to present their respective programmes and initiatives, fostering a collaborative and informative atmosphere. I express my heartfelt gratitude to Fr. Vicar General for organizing the conference and to all the Fathers who actively participated, contributing to its success and fruitful discussions. Your presence and engagement are deeply appreciated as we strive together to strengthen our communal bonds and serve our eparchy with renewed enthusiasm and dedication.

SAFP Cluster-Level Meeting: The cluster-level meeting of the Save A Family Programme (SAFP) was held on three separate dates: June 3 in Mukkoottukal, June 13 in Marappady, and June 21 in Muzhucode. Mr. Vijayarajan, the SAFP coordinator, facilitated the meetings, focusing on the topic of health and hygiene. More than 50 families benefited from the programme.

Extended Territory Mission Meet: The mission meet for the Fathers and Sisters in the extended territory for the month of June took place at St. Joseph Mission, Rameswaram, on June 22, 2024. The event commenced at 10:00 AM with adoration and confession, followed by a meeting presided over by Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil, the Vicar General. During the meeting, Fathers and Sisters shared their mission experiences. Rev. Sr. Lisy Jose FCC and Rev. Sr. Cicy FCC, who are new to the mission, were warmly welcomed. Following the meeting, the concelebrated Holy Qurbana was celebrated and presided over by Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil. The programme concluded with an agape meal at Dhanushkodi. I extend my gratitude to Fr. Tobin Alapurackal, the mission coordinator of extended mission territories, for effectively organizing the mission meet.

Mission Meet at Tenkasi: The Tenkasi mission meeting was held at the Dorethian Sisters' Convent in Panpoli on June 29, 2024, at 4:00 PM. Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil presided over the meeting. Fr. Thomas Pottamparampil gave a class on the Vatican II document, Sacrosanctum Concilium. Twenty-eight members attended the meeting. Discussions on various topics pertaining to the mission were conducted. The meeting concluded with an agape meal, followed by Ramsa and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I thank Fr. Dency Mundunadackal, the mission coordinator, for organizing the meeting so well.

Academic Year Inauguration of St. Mary's Minor Seminary, Mukkoottukal: The inauguration of the academic year 2024-25 at St. Mary's Minor Seminary, Mukkoottukal, was held on June 29, 2024. The festivities commenced with the solemn celebration of Ramsa at 5:30 PM. The inaugural ceremony continued with a dedicated meeting, presided over by Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal, the chancellor, who officially

inaugurated the academic year. The Parish Priest and Sisters from Mukkoottukal Parish graced the gathering with their presence. In his inaugural address, Fr. Joshy extended heartfelt congratulations to the entire seminary team, with special commendation to Fr. Augustine Thalodil and Fr. George Kandathil for their meticulous organization of the ceremony. The meeting concluded at 8:00 PM, followed by a joyful agape meal, fostering a sense of fellowship.

Catechetical department Annual Day: The Sunday School Annual Day 2023-24 was held on June 30, 2024, at Aseer Auditorium, Kalluvilai. The programme was led by the central team of the Catechetical Department of the Diocese. Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil, the Vicar General, presided over the event. Various cultural programmes were performed by the Sunday School centers. During the programme, Bible quiz, scholarship, and Mission Quest winners were awarded by the dignitaries. Trophies were given to the best Sunday School centers in three categories: A, B, and C. Additionally, trophies for the best Sunday School teachers were awarded. Over 500 students and teachers participated in the annual day. The central catechetical team thanked everyone—Curia members, department coordinator, forane directors, unit directors, headmasters, and all teachers and students—for the success of the last academic year. I thank Fr. Abilash Xavier and his team for organizing the event so well.

Kaikars and Accountants Meeting at Sangamam: On Sunday, June 30, 2024, the Diocese conducted an annual meeting and orientation programme for all Kaikars and accountants at Sangamam. The day-long programme commenced at 9:30 AM and concluded at 4:00 PM, encompassing various informative sessions and activities. The programme began with a solemn Holy Qurbana, presided over by Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil. Fr. Justin Cheruvilil, Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal, and Fr. Johnsilal Arackaparampil served as resource persons, providing valuable insights and guidance throughout the day. They conducted classes on the role of the laity in the Church, the rights and duties of Kaikars, the functions of Pothumantram and Panku Peravai, and the accounting systems used within our parishes. In his presidential address, Fr. Vicar General extended a warm greeting to all the participants and expressed the diocese's heartfelt gratitude for their selfless and sacrificial service within our parishes. The programme saw the active participation of approximately 85 attendees. I express my sincere appreciation to all the Parish Priests for encouraging and facilitating the participation of their respective Kaikars and accountants. Additionally, my gratitude extends to the coordinators for their efficient organization and management of the event, ensuring its success.

INFORMATION

- **Rev. Fr. Cyriac Maliekal (79)** was called to eternal abode on June 3, 2024. He was a dedicated missionary of our diocese. During the years 1972-74, as assistant parish priest, he provided pastoral care in various mission places, including Soosaipuram, Palappallam, and Pilankarai. Recently, on May 9-10, 2024, he visited our diocese, and I personally took him to the parishes where he had rendered ministry. I could attend the Wake service which was held in US on 08 June 2024. The funeral service was held on 14 June 2024 at St. Sebastian Church, Cheruvandoor. From our diocese Fr. Johnsilal Arackaparampil and Fr. Subin Puthenpurackal attended the funeral rites. Let us thank God for his service in our diocese and pray that the Risen Lord may grant him eternal joy.
- **Mr. K. V. Kurian (88)**, the beloved father of Sr. Elsy Kurian S.H was called to the eternal abode on 06 June 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to her and the family members and pray for the departed soul.
- **Mrs. Njanavadiwu (102)**, the beloved mother of Fr. Christudas was called to the eternal abode on 15 June 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to him and the family members and pray for the departed soul.

- **Beloved father of Sr. Vineetha Manalady SABS** was called to the eternal abode on 16 June 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to her and the family members and pray for the departed soul.
- **Mrs. Kunjamma Xavier (68)**, the beloved mother of Sr. Jenny Therese CMC was called to the eternal abode on 17 June 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to her and the family members and pray for the departed soul.
- **Mrs. Thressia Rappai (82)**, the beloved mother of Sr. Ligi LSDP was called to the eternal abode on 20 June 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to her and the family members and pray for the departed soul.
- **Mrs. Mariamma Joseph (84)**, the beloved mother of Sr. Pavana CMC was called to the eternal on 23 June 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to her and the family members and pray for the departed soul.
- **Mr. Justin Jose (44)**, the younger brother of Fr. Albert Jose CMI was called to the eternal on 23 June 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to him and the family members and pray for the departed soul.
- **Mrs. Annakkutty Joseph (94)**, the beloved mother of Sr. Beena LSDP, was called to the eternal abode on 23 June 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to her and the family members and pray for the departed soul.
- **Mrs. Alykkutty Ouseph (85)**, the grandmother of Sr. Linza SABS was called to the eternal abode on 25 June 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to her and the family members and pray for the departed soul.
- **Mrs. Chellam (95)**, the beloved mother of Fr. Thomas Sathianesan was called to the eternal abode on 30 June 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to him and the family members and pray for the departed soul.
- **World Environmental Day** was observed at KKSSS, Kalluvilai on 05 June 2024 with various programmes in the self-help groups. Seminars were conducted, plants and saplings were distributed, and saplings were planted.
- **Fr. Ginoy Thottiyil** reached back from Italy after one month of stay on 15 June 2024.
- **Fr. Seby Manimalakandathil** went back to Saudi Mission on 17 June 2024.
- **Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal** came back from Saudi Arabia on 25 June 2024.
- **Fr. Alex Puthettu**, went back to Italy after two months' vacation. He will pursue his doctorate in pastoral theology from *Facolta Teologica dell'Italia Settentrionale*. We wish him God's blessings for the doctoral course.
- **Study of *Lumen Gentium* in Uraviyams:** We are preparing for Jubilee 2025 in different phases. Last month you got the leaflets in Tamil and Malayalam on Sacrosanctum Concilium prepared by Fr. Justin Cheruvilil, to be studied by the departments and uraviyams. The second leaflet on *Lumen Gentium* prepared by Fr. Thomas Sathianesan will be distributed soon and you will get the copy in this week itself. I request all Fathers to go through it and implement in your parishes.
- **Mission Appeal programme in USA:** Dear Fathers, As you know I left for USA on 03 June 2024 for mission preaching and to meet the benefactors in different states. I will return back to the diocese on 27th July. During my absence in the diocese Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, the Vicar General will take care of the ordinary governance of the diocese. For all the permission kindly approach him at the same time for any important matters I will be available on WhatsApp and email. I'm requesting your valuable prayers for me and to the mission.
- **TNPSC and SSC Coaching Centre at Kalluvilai:** SMYM Thuckalay is in the process of establishing a coaching centre in its office at Kalluvilai for TNPSC and SSC competitive exams in collaboration with JDAX Academy of excellence Chennai. The director of SMYM, Fr. Joseph Santhosh already

informed during the priests' conference about it on June 18, 2024 about this programme. I request dear Fathers to give necessary information and guidance in your parish.

- **Sinai Theological Institute:** Dear Fathers, I request you to promote the faithful to join in the theological classes conducted by the Sinai Theological Institute. It is a very good opportunity for our people to learn Bible and other ecclesiastical subjects and make them efficient lay leaders for the spiritual good of our diocese. Please inform the parishioners and encourage them to attend.
- **Visit of the Major Archbishop:** We have officially extended an invitation to Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil to warmly welcome him to our diocese for the first time in August. The Major Archbishop will be visiting on August 10-11, 2024, which falls on Saturday and Sunday. Our plan includes a meeting of Priests and Religious on Saturday evening, followed by a common solemn celebration of the Holy Qurbana on Sunday afternoon. I kindly request the Forane Fathers to discuss this matter during the Forane conferences and provide your valuable suggestions to ensure that this event becomes a memorable and meaningful occasion.
- **Internal Audit of the Parish Accounts:** The Diocesan Finance Office, in collaboration with the diocesan auditor, will conduct the internal audit of all parish accounts starting from the first week of July. Parish priests have already received letters from the finance office specifying the dates and times when accountants/kaikkars are required to be present before the auditing committee. I urge you to prepare everything in advance and collaborate closely with them to facilitate their work.

FORTHCOMING MAJOR EVENTS

03 July	-	Dhukrana of St. Thomas the Apostle
08 July	-	Forane Priests' Conference
09 July	-	Forane Priests' Conference
10 July	-	Forane Priests' Conference
20 July	-	Pilgrimage on foot – St Alphonsa <i>Nadaipayanam</i>
28 July	-	Diocese level St Alphonsa Feast Day celebration
29-30 July	-	Ongoing formation for junior priests
31 July	-	Presbyteral Council

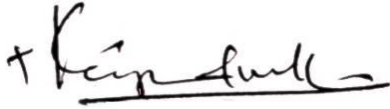
Ongoing formation Programme for Junior Priests
Place: Sangamam
Date: 29-30 July 2024

CONCLUSION

July is an important month for us in our Syro-Malabar Church. On 3 July, we mark the solemnity of St Thomas, and on 28 July, as already mentioned, we celebrate the feast of St Alphonsa. We have already reflected on St Alphonsa in the introductory part of the circular. The feast of St Thomas the Apostle holds profound significance for our Church. For us, this feast is not only a religious observance but also a celebration of their cultural identity and spiritual heritage. It reinforces their connection to the early Christian church and their unique place in global Christianity. Let us mark the day with special liturgies, processions, and cultural events, reminding us of the deep-rooted Christian tradition in Kerala and the enduring legacy of St Thomas's mission.

May St Thomas and St Alphonsa intercede for each one of us that we may live our Christian and Priestly lives after the model of the Crucified Saviour, whose heart was pierced for our sake!

Yours in Christ Jesus,



† **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

