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Dear and Reverend Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

On 28 July we will celebrate the feast of St Alphonsa. At the Eparchial level, we shall celebrate her feast at the shrine dedicated to St Alphonsa at Nagercoil. The new Bishop of Kottar will preside over the Holy Eucharist on 28 July 2017. Our young people will undertake a *Nadipayanam* to the Shrine in order to show their love towards the Saint and to spread devotion to her among the people. As we are preparing for the celebration of her feast, it is fitting that we reflect briefly on her heroic life and copy some of her virtues into our own lives so that we too can walk the path of holiness that she joyfully tread.

The life of St Alphonsa reveals that in the cross, the meaninglessness of suffering can give way to a profound experience of the love of God and neighbour in our daily lives. She is a sign of the deep roots and the maturation of the Christian faith in India. It is worthwhile to note that St Alphonsa belonged to the Syro-Malabar church, which, like its Catholic and non-Catholic counterparts, is known for its extraordinary socio-cultural proximity to Hinduism. Alphonsa herself had as her best class companion a Hindu girl named Laxmikutty. Unlike the Semitic and western churches, the Church in India, especially of the St Thomas Christian tradition, holds a unique place for its interreligious, multi-cultural and socio-political interactions and mutual relationships. For this reason, the Universal Church raised Alphonsa to the veneration at the altar by officially declaring her as a person who shares in the communion of saints. She was also presented before the world as a shining example of how the mutual interaction of the apostolic vitality of a Church, which is intermingled with the local cultures, can lead to the blossoming of Christian dignity and sanctity. This should be an assurance and consolation, not only for Christians living these days when rampant religious intolerance overwhelms the country, but also for the people of other faiths.

The life of St Alphonsa resembles closely the life of St Theresa of Child Jesus. Both of these saints draw our attention to the fundamental reality and truth of Jesus Christ as the only Son of God and the unique Saviour of the whole creation. St Alphonsa was a Franciscan Clarist nun. Her life though confined within the four walls of the FCC Convent at Bharananganam, was a tale of docility to God, to her fellow sisters, to her spiritual master, to her relatives and to the children around in the school. Although confined externally, it was her child like docility, which helped others feel and discover the mystery of the grace of sanctity at work in her.

The funeral sermon that Fr Romulus, her spiritual director, preached was nothing but wonderful exposition of the hidden sanctity of St Alphonsa. Among other things, Fr Romulus said: "With the most profound conviction in my heart and as one who has known this religious very intimately, I

affirm that we are now participating in the last rites of a saintly person. If the world had realized her intrinsic worth, unprecedented crowds including hundreds of Priests and Bishops from all over India would have assembled here. They would have rushed and clamoured for even a glimpse of this body and for some precious relic or token of this person. I assure you, that as far as human judgment can be relied on, this young nun was not much less saintly than the Little Flower of Lisieux.”

St Alphonsa had a unique relationship with Jesus Christ and she experienced his presence in her daily life. She is known to be a person who loved and invited sufferings in her life imitating her master. She would even ask for it. What does this apparently non-sensical yet theologically rich dimension of the spiritual life of St Alphonsa reveal to us? The answer to this riddle is found in the central role that Jesus played in her life. Her acceptance and love for suffering and her growth in the path of sanctity through such suffering and pain opens up the depth of her relationship with and in Jesus Christ and what became for her an experience of the redemptive value of suffering when joined to his suffering. This is what, in fact, makes her worthy of the honour of the altar universally.

Commenting on this aspect of her life, Fr C.C. Martindale SJ wrote: “The history of Sister Alphonsa will remain unintelligible unless we take into account the whole Catholic doctrine of the person and work of Our Lord. That this girl appreciated to the full the supreme importance of prayer should surprise no Christian; but there may be those who are disconcerted by her intense wish to suffer. We must insist that there was nothing morbid in this, and that no Catholic attaches any value to suffering as such, but only, as we said within the full doctrine of our Lord’s redemptive work.” According to Catholic theology, suffering gains a new sense and value only in the light of the passion of Christ and its spiritual acceptance would mean a positive inclusion of God and others with a constant self-emptying of the victim concerned. Suffering thus understood, accepted and offered is a rare spiritual height for the Christian soul than a passive fatalistic resignation to one’s problems or pain. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, the sufferings to be endured can mean that in one’s flesh one completes what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his Body, that is, the Church. Suffering becomes a participation in the saving work of Jesus.

A letter that St Alphonsa wrote reveals the redemptive dimension of the suffering of Christ as well as her own adherence to it. She wrote: “Since only grief and suffering have fallen to the lot of my Spouse, I too lovingly embrace them, and my soul is at peace, though my body continues to be tormented. For the last seven years I have ceased to be my own, being given over entirely to my Divine Spouse. You know all that; and now let the Lord do, as He will with me. It is not a cure I am anxious for, but only that His Holy Will be fulfilled in me.” Thus, behind the suffering, St Alphonsa cheerfully accepted the truth of a living and loving encounter with Jesus Christ. She denied herself. She died to herself. She forwent everything imaginable of a personal sense of ownership or belonging. In this self-emptying, she gained everything in Jesus Christ.

Thus, Christ became the centre of St Alphonsa’s life. She dethroned herself to enthrone Christ. She made him, with unerring vision, the focus of her life. This was very clearly expressed at the homily for the beatification of St Alphonsa, when St John Paul II said: “From early in her life, Sister Alphonsa experienced great suffering. With the passing of the years, the heavenly Father gave her an ever fuller share in the Passion of his beloved Son. We recall how she experienced not only physical pain of great intensity, but also the spiritual suffering of being misunderstood and misjudged by others.... She came to love suffering because she loved the suffering Christ. She learned to love the Cross through her love of the crucified Lord.”

As we are preparing to celebrate the feast of such an amazing saint, let us ask her to intercede for us so that we too may become worthy ministers of the Word and the Sacraments living a life fully in tune with the mind of Christ!

## NEWS AND EVENTS

**Kulanthai Iso Iyakkam:** Annual day celebration of *Kulanthai Iso Iyakkam* was held on 3 June 2017 at Kalluvilai. Very Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, Proto-Syncellus, was the Chief Guest and Rev. Fr Jose Vayalil and Mr John Kumarithozhan were the guests of honour for the celebration. It was a colourful event with the dances and action songs of the children who had won first prize in the Eparchial level competition. It showcased the talents and gifts that God showered on the little ones of our Eparchy. I express my sincere gratitude and thanks to Rev. Fr Jomon Mangalamadam, the animators and the helpers who worked hard to organize this event. Let us continue to pray for the growth of *Kulanthai Iso Iyakkam*.

**Cherupushpa Mission League:** The Eparchial level Mission League Annual Day celebration was held on 25 June 2017 at Padanthalumoodu. Very Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, Proto-Syncellus, presided over the celebration. On this occasion the Mission League published the *Mission League Kaiyedu*, which includes a brief history, motto, and activities of the Mission League. Very Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam released the publication by handing over the first copies to Rev. Sr Deeba SD and Mrs Daisy Munchirai. This year St Joseph Forane Church, Soosaipuram was awarded the best Mission League Unit in the Eparchy. During the celebration, *Chirumalar* editorial board members, namely, Rev. Sr Lins SABS, Mrs Bindhu Jose from Munchirai and Miss Shyni from Soosaipuram were honoured for their dedicated service in publishing *Chirumalar* on a regular basis. Many Fathers of our Eparchy were present. Their presence was an encouragement for the Mission League children, animators as well as the directors. I congratulate and appreciate Rev. Fr Shojo Erupathanchilchira, Director, Rev. Fr Jose Vayalil, Assistant Director, and other animators for their committed work and for the efforts that they put in for growth of the Mission League in our Eparchy.

**Feast of St Alphonsa at Nagercoil:** St Alphonsa is the first Saint from the Syro-Malabar Church. We are blessed to have a Shrine in her honour at Nagercoil. It is the pilgrim Centre in our Eparchy. After the canonization of St Alphonsa, the feast day celebration at the Shrine in Nagercoil is considered the Eparchial celebration. In the past years, there was enthusiastic participation from our faithful, Priests and religious. As in the previous years, I request all Fathers to participate in the celebrations and encourage our people to take part in the celebration. Kindly encourage the people to make a pilgrimage to the shrine at least once during the ten-day celebrations. The youth of our Eparchy normally play a very important role in the celebrations. Kindly encourage them to participate in the *Nadaipayanam* in large numbers. I am sure the Youth Director of our Eparchy in consultation with the Parish priest of the Shrine will get the necessary permissions for the event and plan systematically for its success. It is very important to prepare our faithful for this pilgrimage through special prayers, fasting and novena. This year the feast of St Alphonsa at the Shrine will begin on 21 July and will end on 30 July 2017. The important highlights of the event are the following:

- 21 July – Holy Qurbana, Very Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, Proto-Syncellus.
- 25 July – Holy Qurbana (Malankara Rite), Rt. Rev. Dr. Vincent Mar Paulus, Bishop of Marthandam.
- 28 July – Holy Qurbana (Latin Rite), Rt. Rev. Dr. Nazarene Soosai, New Bishop of Kottar.
- 29 July – *Nadaipayanam* Pilgrimage by Eparchial youth.

- 30 July – **Eparchial Pilgrimage Day**: Holy Qurbana, Bishop George Rajendran sdb, Eparchial Bishop.

I request all the parishes to participate in the Eparchial Pilgrimage Day celebration. Kindly arrange the necessary transport for your respective parishioners.

Please remember:

- ❖ The first nine consecutive days will be observed as days of novena in preparation for the feast. There will be the novena in honour of St Alphonsa and Holy Qurbana on all these days in the evening. Holy Qurbana on 30 July will be held in the morning at 9.30am.
- ❖ The different Foranes will animate the Holy Qurbana on 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 27 July 2017.
- ❖ To celebrate the feast of St Alphonsa, St Alphonsa Academy will conduct inter- school and inter-collegiate competitions on 5 August 2017.

The Parish Priest of St Alphonsa Shrine will send you the detailed programme of the celebrations with date, time and explanations, if need be.

**Europe Visit:** As I had informed you in my last circular, I am visiting Europe from 1 June to 2 July 2017. I had weekend mission appeal in three parishes at Brig, Switzerland and during the weekdays I visited all our Fathers who are doing pastoral ministry in Ireland, UK and Germany. I had the opportunity to meet some of the Bishops and benefactors of our Eparchy. I also visited Rome and met all the Fathers and Brothers who are studying. We had holy mass together in which we prayed for you and for the need of our Eparchy. I will return to Eparchy on 2 July morning. I am grateful to all the Fathers, Sisters and lay people in Europe who have assisted me in many ways during my tour of Europe. In a special way, I am grateful to Rev. Sr Vineeta and FCC community of Brig, Switzerland for arranging the mission appeal in the parishes.

**Episcopal Ordination of Rev. (Dr) Fr Nazarene Soosai, New Bishop of Kottar:** The Bishop-elect Rev. Fr Nazarene Soosai was ordained Bishop on 29 June 2017 at 5.00pm at the premises of the Bishop's House, Kottar. The Curia members along with many Priests and faithful took part in the solemn ceremony. We would like to congratulate and wish God's blessings upon the newly ordained Bishop.

## INFORMATION

**Pastoral Work in Germany:** Rev. Fr M. Christudas, who worked as Parish Priests in various Parishes, Directors of various Departments and Eparchial Chancellor for nine years, went to Germany on 29 July 2017 for pastoral work in the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart for a particular period. I sincerely thank him for accepting this new mission. We wish him good health and fruitful ministry in Europe. Let us remember him and his ministry in our prayers.

**Kazhuvanthittai Church Building:** As we aware, for the last 10 years the construction work of the church at Kazhuvanthittai was halted due to financial constraints. Now the parishioners under the leadership of their Parish Priest Rev. Fr Shojo have decided to continue the construction of the church. On 3 July 2017, we shall bless the doorstep and initiate the construction work. We give our continuous prayerful support to Fr Shojo and the parishioners.

**Priests' Annual Retreat:** This year, Rev. Fr Joseph Pamblani of Archeparchy of Thellicherry will animate our annual spiritual retreat. Since he is not available on our earlier planned dates, kindly take note of new dates of our retreat: 15 - 19 October 2017.

**Priests and Religious Sangamam:** Let me remind you in advance that the family gathering of all the Priests and Religious of our Eparchy will be held on 15 August 2017 at St Alphonsa Church Nagercoil. The Jubilee celebrations will also be held at the same time.

**Blessing of the Additional Constructions at Sangamam:** As we know, the additional construction work of second floor and chapel at Sangamam is almost completed. I sincerely congratulate and thank Rev. Fr Johnsilal Arackaparambil and Rev. Fr Dency Mundunadackal who worked hard to complete the work without disrupting the regular programmes that were held at Sangamam. We plan to bless the entire building and the renovated chapel on 18 July 2017 during the Priests' Conference. The programme will be as follows:

- 3.00 pm Priests' Conference
- 5.00 pm Tea Break
- 6.00 pm Blessing of the chapel and the entire building  
Adoration and Confessions
- 7.30 pm Supper and Departure

I request all the Fathers to participate in the Priests' Conference, blessing of Sangamam and the dinner thereafter.

**Mission Appeal to the USA:** Rev. Fr Saji Elambasseril SDB is in USA since 2 June 2017 for the Salesian Mission appeal. He will return in the first week of September. Let us remember him and his mission in our prayers.

**Prayers requested:**

- ❖ Rev. Fr Kochumon Madapurackal is resting at home after a medical intervention.
- ❖ Rev. Fr Sumesh was admitted in the Holy Cross Hospital some days ago with dengue fever. He is now resting at home.
- ❖ Rev. Fr Tobin Alapurackal and Rev. Fr Dency Mundunadackal are not keeping good health

Let us keep all these Fathers in our prayers.

**Deacon Subin Scaria** who was studying at *Matere Ecclesiae*, Rome returned to India on 29 June. He has completed his third year of theology and will join the Managlapuzha seminary, Aluva for Diaconate course from 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017. We welcome Deacon Subin back to our Eparchy and wish him all the best.

**Br Shijo** who completed his third year of theology at *Urbanianum*, Rome has come to India on 30 July. He will be available in the Eparchy from the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of July for pastoral ministry. He will return to Rome to pursue his Licentiate studies in Moral Theology on 18 September 2017. We welcome Br Shijo to the Eparchy.

**Rev Fr Joshy Kulathumkal** will come back to India in August to take up his responsibility on 5 September 2017.

**Rev. Fr Jinu Jacob** will come back to India on 16 August and he will take up the new responsibility on 1 September 2017.

Both these Fathers have successfully completed their studies and are now doing pastoral ministry in Rome. We welcome them.

## FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

- 03 July 2017 - Blessing of Doorstep of the Church at Kazhuvanthittai  
08-12 July 2017 - TNBC at Velankanni  
14-16 July 2017 - Marriage Preparation Course at Sangamam  
15 July 2017 - Pastoral Council Meeting at Sangamam  
18 July 2017 - Priests' Conference at 3pm  
29 July 2017 - Nadaipayanam Pilgrimage to St Alphonsa Shrine, Nagercoil by the Eparchial youth  
30 July 2017 - Eparchial Pilgrimage Day to St Alphonsa Shrine, Nagercoil

## CONCLUSION

As you receive my circular, you will be busy preparing to celebrate the feast of St Thomas, the Apostle of India. While we take pride in calling ourselves as St Thomas Christians, it is important that we know him well and make efforts to emulate some of the virtues that he excelled in. St Thomas refused to believe in the resurrection of Jesus without having a direct personal experience. When he had that experience, we find him to be a true believer: "My Lord and My God!". Like St Thomas, we too need a personal encounter with the Lord so that our lives will become more enriching and our ministry more effective. May St Thomas intercede for each one of us so that we too can experience the risen Lord as he did!

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



**+George Rajendran SDB**  
Bishop of Thuckalay

