



Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

Bishop George Rajendran sdb

Diocese of Thuckalay

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Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

In this circular, I want to present to you the final statement that the Bishops issued at the conclusion of the CBCI Plenary Assembly held at Bengaluru. The statement assumes great significance in the context of the present scenario of our country. Taking into consideration the political, social and economic and religious situation of our country, the Bishops emphasised the importance of dialogue a way forward in bringing peace and prosperity to our mother land. The final statement entitled *Dialogue: The Path to Truth and Charity* is re-produced below:

“We, the 192 member Bishops of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India, assembled for our XXXIV Plenary Assembly at St. John’s National Academy of Health Sciences, Bengaluru from 13-19 February 2020. Prompted by our fidelity to Jesus Christ and unflinching loyalty to our beloved motherland we reflected, meditated and deliberated on the ever relevant theme, “Dialogue: The Path to Truth and Charity.” We also sought to sincerely evaluate the quality of our apostolic ministry and be renewed in the Spirit to be servant leaders of our people after the heart of Christ who came “to serve and not to be served” (Mark 10, 48).

The Church, the community of faith in Jesus Christ, has integral and all-inclusive dialogue at her heart. Indeed, dialogue belongs to the very essence of the Christian faith. All through her history the Church has made earnest efforts to engage in dialogue at different levels. As a community of human beings the Church lives in civil society and body politic, continuously inspiring us to be loyal citizens of India. The noteworthy contribution of the Church in the field of education, health care and social transformation has been consistently acknowledged by the people of India.

India: Unity in Diversity

The hallmark of Indian society is its pluralism. From ancient times, India has been a mosaic of many religions, cultures and languages with a strong Indian identity. What unites us is stronger and deeper than what divides us. We are proud of our Constitution that envisions a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic which resolved to secure for all its citizens Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity as enshrined in the Preamble. Justice is spelt out as social, economic and political; Liberty is explained as liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; and Equality is understood as equality of status and opportunity. These Constitutional values form the ethos of Indian identity that promotes Fraternity which leads to the dignity of the individual and unity and integrity of the nation. Every citizen must be ever vigilant against any attempt to undermine the ennobling human vision of the Constitution so that our beloved country ever remains united.

Biblical Foundations

Various streams of thoughts running through the biblical texts enrich our understanding of the necessity of dialogue among peoples and cultures. Dialogue with other religions is integral to the Biblical Revelation. The different aspects of dialogue in the Bible are rooted in our faith in God as Trinity: God as the Creator of all, the universal presence of God's Spirit, and Jesus as the Saviour of all mankind.

In the Gospels, Jesus' encounters with people reveal that God is the Father of all. The Kingdom of God that Jesus preached embodies the love of God, irrespective of race, sex, colour, class, language and creed. The Good News of Jesus calls upon humanity to establish a society of justice, equality, love, forgiveness and peace. Dialogue begins and grows when we open ourselves to the Lord, and by committing ourselves to his words and deeds, live the mystery of his death and resurrection which paves the path to truth and charity. For example, in the dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Jesus unveils the true horizons of relating with God in truth and spirit. He starts with the dialogue of life and moves to the dialogue of action which is followed by the dialogue of sharing the religious experience, and eventually the dialogue leads to the witnessing of truth.

Church Teachings

The Church encourages believers to respect each other and one another's religious tradition, thus cooperating with one another to promote peace and harmony and work for the common good of all. Pope Francis has urged all people of good will to make every effort to establish peace in society by "inviting all persons who believe in God to unite and work together, so that it may serve as a guide for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters...called to express this human fraternity by safeguarding creation and the entire universe, and supporting all persons, especially the poorest and those most in need..." (*Document on Human Fraternity*, 4th February 2019, Abu Dhabi).

Dialogue is rooted in the very vocation of the Church. Being open to dialogue, calls for being absolutely consistent with one's own religious tradition. Believers enter into each other's depth of life through dialogue.

Dialogue with Cultures and Religions

Every community that lives in India possesses its own cultural identity with its richness, which must be respected at any cost. Attempts to homogenize and impose a mono-cultural pattern pose serious threats to the cultural patrimony of our country. As our Constitution envisions, there cannot be any meaningful dialogue of culture without acknowledging the primacy of human person. People of every culture and religion and those who profess no religion must be esteemed with mutual respect which eventually leads to human fraternity. No culture or religion shall dominate over other cultures and religions. Subduing certain cultures by the dominant culture will destroy the peace and harmony existing in the country. "The enemy of fraternity is an individualism which translates into the desire to affirm oneself and one's own group above others. Religious behaviour, therefore, needs continually to be purified from the recurrent temptation to judge others as enemies and adversaries." (*Document on Human Fraternity*, 4th February 2019, Abu Dhabi).

Dialogue with the Poor, the Dalits and Tribal People

Dialogue with the poor, the Dalits and Tribal people is an urgent priority in the context of India. The Dalits and Tribal people are continually denied their human rights socially. Every step taken in favour of their liberation by eradicating poverty, exploitation, discrimination, and every other form of sinful structures of society is an effective means of dialogue. However, dialogue with the poor shall not be limited only to the works of mercy. The term ‘the Church of the poor’ reflects the constant self-understanding of Christians that the poor stand in the place of Christ, and therefore charity and justice must be an essential and central dimension of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

In this context, we urge the State authorities to take adequate steps to ensure justice to the Dalit Christians and the Tribal people.

Dialogue with Nature

Dialogue with nature is another important aspect. The earth, our common home, which was created to support life and give praise to God, is crying out with pain because human activity is destroying it. All who believe in God and all people of good will have an obligation to protect the ecological equilibrium of the earth, intended by the Creator. Therefore, dialogue with nature includes serious steps to mitigate climate change, clean the land and the seas, and start treating all of creation with respect and concern.

Dialogue with the Unborn

Dialogue should not be limited to those who are born; rather the right to life of the unborn must also be taken seriously into account. We believe that the human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception, that *each and every human life has inherent dignity, and thus must be treated with the respect due to a human person from womb to tomb*. The steps to legalise abortion even to the extent of six months must be condemned as a gross injustice which undermines the right to life of the unborn. We appeal to the State authorities that it immediately withdraws the Bill in the Parliament.

Dialogue of Peace

Interreligious dialogue is one of the most pressing needs of our times. There will be no peace among nations without peace among religions. There will be no peace among religions without dialogue among religions. We are alarmed by continuous persecution on a global level endured by innocent people at the hands of fundamentalist and terrorist groups.

Dialogue in India should aim at collaboration in areas such as peace-building, protection of the environment, eradication of poverty and ensuring the human dignity of all, especially of women and children. Besides, it means that we condemn all wars, violence and terrorism that create insurmountable blocks to dialogue. We pledge ourselves to engage in a process of dialogue for a reconciled society.

A Fervent Appeal

We believe that *patriotism is different from narrow and divisive cultural nationalism, which is radically different from Constitutional nationalism*. No one has the right to question the patriotism of any Indian citizen on subjective grounds. Authentic patriotism **unites us amidst divergences**. *Patriotism is defined*

as directing the attention of the citizens to the good of the whole human family, united by the different ties which bind together races, people and nations. “All Christians must be aware of their sense of responsibility and their service of the common good. They must recognize the legitimacy of different opinions with regard to temporal solutions, and respect citizens, who, even as a group, defend their points of view by honest methods” (*Church in the Modern World*, no. 75).

False nationalistic ideologies that instigate contempt for cultures other than the majoritarian dominant culture are capable of perpetrating atrocities. It is necessary to clarify the essential difference between patriotism and pseudo nationalism. **Patriotism builds up the nation while pseudo nationalism destroys the integrity, unity and harmony of the nation. Nationalism, particularly in its most radical and extreme forms, is thus the antithesis of true patriotism.**

We appeal to the State authorities to ensure that pseudo nationalism does not continue to give rise to new forms of totalitarianism. Together with the framers of the Constitution, we, the Catholic Bishops of India, affirm that religion shall not be a criterion for determining Indian citizenship. The authorities should come forward with sincere and effective means to erase the sense of fear, anxiety and uncertainty spreading in the country, especially among the religious minorities.

Needless to say that dissent should not be misconstrued as un-patriotism. Democracy cannot be built on monologue. We call upon **the State authorities** that it is right time to sit around the common table, a place of conversation and of shared hopes. Against the attempts at creating cultural isolation in our beloved country, dialogue will make the elements that are seemingly a barrier or a wall, a bridge of relationship. “Identity and dialogue are not enemies. Our own cultural identity is strengthened and enriched as a result of dialogue with those unlike ourselves. Nor is our authentic identity preserved by an impoverished isolation.” (Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, n. 37).

Conclusion

Dialogue is indeed the path to truth and charity. Let us pray that dialogue grows in every family, at all levels of the Church, among the Christians, among religions and cultures, and among the nations so that God’s Kingdom of reconciliation, justice, peace and love may be established.

Though deeply concerned and anguished with what is happening in our country, we are filled with hope inspired by faith and the innate goodness of all our fellow citizens. We appreciate the majority who uphold the secular values of our nation. We are determined to continue to collaborate in the work of building our great nation, Mother India.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, who manifested the exemplary spirit of dialogue through her maternal intercession, guide each one of us on the path of truth and charity!”

I am sure you will find sufficient time to go through this statement and to help our people to understand its salient features during your interactions with them be it in homilies, meetings or seminars so that they are kept abreast of the latest teachings of the Church and better grasp the issues that affect the country adversely.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Mather Jyothis Anniversary: The anniversary celebration of Mather Jyothis was held on 2 February 2020 at Kalluvilai. It was one-day programme that consisted of seminar, Holy Qurbana and annual day celebration. During the annual day celebration, Rev. Fr Ajeesh Attiyil, Director of Family Apostolate, was thanked for his dedicative leadership and for organising innovative programmes for last four years. Rev. Fr Jimmy Thekkekadumathil was introduced as the new Director of Family Apostolate and was given charge from 10 February 2020. I sincerely thank Fr Ajeesh Attiyil for his wonderful services in guiding the mothers and young people to live fruitful and spiritual family lives. I congratulate Fr Jimmy Thekkekadumathil and wish him well in his ministry as Director of the Family Apostolate and Mather Jyothis. I also congratulate all the committee members, staff and the members of the Mather Jyothis for the well-organized programmes.

Installation of Mar Jose Pulickal: During the last Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church, Mar Jose Pulickal, Auxiliary Bishop of Kanjirapally, was elected Bishop of Kanjirapally and he was installed on 4 February 2020. Mar Mathew Arackal completed seventy-five years of age and hence retired from the service as Bishop of Kanjirapally. Mar Mathew Arackal was given farewell on the day of installation of Mar Jose Pulickal. I extend my sincere thanks for his missionary co-operation and concern towards our Eparchy.

Picnic of Priests: The priests from our Eparchy had a two-day picnic to Back Waters Ripples, Kumarakam, Kerala on 5 and 6 February 2020. Mr Alex Mathew (Babuji) extended his generosity in offering his Resort to all of us and bore all the expenses of the picnic for two days. Mr Joseph Thengaparambil, who is a friend and benefactor of the Eparchy, offered breakfast to all the Fathers on 6 February. I am grateful to them for their generosity. I sincerely thank Fr Printo Kurias and Fr Aby Poovathummoottil for taking all the troubles taken to organize the two-day programme.

Memorial Qurbana for Rev. Msgr Philip Kodiyanthara: The 7th year eternal birth of Msgr Philip Kodiyanthara was commemorated on 9 February 2020. I celebrated memorial Holy Qurbana in Kayalpuram parish church on 9 February 2020. The catechism children attended the Eucharist. I also visited the tomb of Msgr Philip Kodiyanthara and prayed the office of dead. The family arranged a Holy Qurbana on 10 February. Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam celebrated Holy Qurbana and Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil led the office for the dead. Some of our priests, sisters, teachers and lay people participated and prayed for him. Some priests from Changanassery also took part in these commemorations. I thank each and every one who prayed for the departed soul of Msgr Philip Kodiyanthara.

Orientation Programme for Priests: The Orientation Programme for the Priests was held on 11 and 12 February 2020 at Sangamam. The programme on the first day began at 10am on 11 February. Rev. Fr Berny Varghese OFM, a psychologist from Kollam animated the sessions during the day. In the evening, evening prayer, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Confessions were organised. The monthly priests' conference was also held. On 12 February, the Doctrinal Commission of Syro-Malabar Church animated the sessions. Mar Tony Neelankavil, Chairman, Mar Jose Pulickal, Mar Joseph Pamplani, and Fr Francis Pittapally took classes on Liturgy and eschatology. I thank all the resource persons and all the fathers who participated in these sessions.

CBCI Meeting at Bangalore: Catholic Bishops' Conference of India has held on 13-19 at St John's Complex Bangalore. 192 Bishops representing 174 dioceses of India attended the meeting. Speaking at

the opening session, the nuncio conveyed to the good wishes and blessings of Pope Francis to the participants. He also reminded the Bishops of their duty to offer effective and dynamic leadership for better service to the people. The nuncio presided over the inaugural Mass along with Cardinals Oswald Gracias, George Alencherry and Baselios Cleemis. The Theme of the meeting was *Dialogue: The Path to Truth and Charity*.

New Mission Centre in Muckthisthan, Ramanathapuram District: As you know the Eparchy of Palai has taken two districts from our extended mission area for the mission work and Fr Thomas Moolechalil is already residing at Sivagangai District. Rev. Fr Mathew Kuzhinjalil began a new mission at Muckthisthan in Rameshwaram. As part of the mission initiation the **Snehagiri Sisters** have begun a mission centre in Sethukarai, Ramnathapuram in a rented house. Rev. Fr Mathew Kuzhinjalil and Vicar General of Eparchy of Palai blessed the house on 21 February 2020 in the presence of Rev. Fr Johnsilal Arackaparambil, our procurator, Rev. Fr Thomas Moolechalil and others. I sincerely thank the Bishop of Palai and the fathers and sisters who have come forward for the mission work in our Eparchy.

Inauguration of *Ezhuvom Iyakkam*: All the four Catholic dioceses of Kanyakumari District together inaugurated on 22 February 2020 ***Ezhuvom Iyakkam*** which concentrates on the Cancer Awareness Programmes. It was launched as part of Caritas India Cancer awareness initiatives. I took part in the programme as Bishop of Thuckalay as well as the Secretary of Health Commission, TNBC. Others who took part in the programme include Most Rev. Nazarene Soosai, Bishop of Kottar, Most Rev. Vincent Mar Paulos, Bishop of Marthandam, Most Rev. Jerome Dhas Varuvel, Bishop of Kuzhithurai, District DSP, Mr Mano Thankaraj MLA, Mr Prince MLA and Director of TASSOS. All of them were felicitated during the programme. The whole programme was organized by the Directors of Social Service Societies of the four dioceses. I sincerely thank all the coordinators and all those who took part in the programme.

Blessing of Amboor CMC Convent: As I have informed you, the CMC Sisters of Thuckalay province has begun the St Chavara Mission Centre at Keezhamboor, Thenkasi District. This house was blessed and the chapel was concentrated on 29 February 2020. I officiated the ceremonies in the presence of Mother Vigi CMC, Provincial of CMC Congregation Thuckalay, Mother Prasenna CMC, Provincial of CMC Changanassery Province, fathers from the Thenkasi mission, sisters from the congregation and invited guests. On the same day an Old Age Home was also blessed and was dedicated to the people of the locality. I would like to acknowledge the prayers and hard work of Mother Vigi CMC and her team for starting the new convent along with an old age home in the mission area. I extend my prayers and wishes to the sisters, who work there.

INFORMATION

- ❖ **Blessing of Puliyarai Church:** Rev. Fr Seby, parish priest, with the help of benefactors and his parishioners began the renovation work of the church last year. The church is given a new face lift, made more space in front and back, has new *Mondolam* and new *Madubhaha* and altar. The work is completed now and is ready for blessing. It will be blessed on 1 March 2020. We wish Fr Seby and the parish community God's blessing and let us be present for the blessing to encourage the community.
- ❖ **Youth Festival:** Youth department organised the Youth Festival Competitions on 21 February 2020 at Sangamam. Participants from many parishes took part in the competitions. I congratulate Rev. Fr Joseph Santhosh, Forane Directors, coordinators and the participants.
- ❖ **Laity Council:** Laity Council organised a training programme for its members on 23 February 2020. Advocate Biju Sebastian, president of Catholic Congress of Syro-Malabar Church, took the class and

explained to the members the goal and mission of Laity Council in the diocese. Congratulations to Fr Vinu D. Joseph for having arranged training programme for the members.

- ❖ **KKSSS** arranged a one-day seminar on alternative medicine for health on 27 February 2020. Dr Hans Martin from Germany and Rev Sr Nirmala from Bihar animated the seminar. Nearly 70 persons from six dioceses took part in the programme.
- ❖ **Prayer Request:** Prayers requested for the speedy recovery and good health of Fr Thomas Powathuparampil and Fr Christudas.
- ❖ **Condolences:** **Father** of Sr. Ann Grace FCC passed away on 16 February, 2020 and **Mr. Thomas, the brother** of Sr. Seena SH passed away on 28 February, 2020. The diocese expresses its heartfelt condolences and offer prayers to the sisters and the grieving families.

Appointments

- ❖ **Fr Sebastian (Mijo) Puthenpurayil**, in addition to the office as the Director of Sinai Retreat Centre Kalluvilai, serving as the priest in charge of Loretto Matha Church, Pilankarai, is now appointed as the Parish Priest of the same church with effect from 10 February 2020. We wish him God's blessings and assure him of our prayers.
- ❖ **Fr Christudas**, Parish Priest of Maria Goretti Church, Athencode, is relieved from his office on 27 February 2020 due to ill health. Presently he is taking medication at Holy Cross Hospital and later will come to Sangamam for rest.
- ❖ **Fr Anil Raj**, besides his office at Thettiyode and Retreat Centre, he is appointed Priest in-charge of Maria Goretti Church, Athencode with effect from 27 February, 2020.

UPCOMING EVENTS

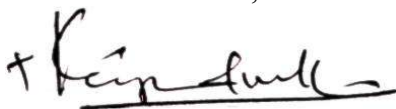
01 March 2020	-	Blessing of Puliয়ার Church
03 March 2020	-	Inter-Eparchial Meeting in Palai
10 March 2020	-	Priests' Conference at Sangamam

CONCLUSION

We have entered the holy season of Lent with the reception of ashes on 24 February 2020. The season is marked by prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Echoing the importance of these Lenten disciplines, in his message for Lent, Pope Francis said that this season is time set apart for deeper dialogue with God through prayer, for renewed gratitude for God's mercy and for increased compassion for people whose lives are under attack. He also enjoined that people must not only show generosity through charitable giving, but they should also work for a real structural change to today's economic life. Let us become instruments of these changes in a world that is torn apart by violence, hatred and disunity. I wish all of you a happy and fruitful season of Lent.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

