

Bishop George Rajendran sdb

Diocese of Thuckalay

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31 December 2024

Dear and Rev. Fathers,

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

The year 2024 is coming to an end. Throughout this year, our Eparchy witnessed remarkable growth and numerous blessings in its pastoral mission. Our parishes experienced a spiritual renewal through a good participation in liturgical celebrations and sacramental life. Youth ministry was vibrant with more young people engaging in church activities and faith formation programmes. The successful implementation of various social outreach initiatives by KKSSS, positively changed many lives in our communities. Diocese and Parish-level catechesis programmes saw greater involvement from both children and adults, strengthening the faith foundation of our faithful. The spirit of collaboration among priests fostered unity and effective pastoral care, while regular diocesan gatherings provided opportunities for spiritual enrichment and fraternal sharing. Our parishes undertook several infrastructure development projects, new churches, enhancing facilities for worship and community gatherings. The *Uraviams* became more active, fostering deeper faith relationships at the grassroots level. Our seminarians showed promising growth in their formation, while efforts are taken for new vocations from our parishes. Financial support from parishioners and benefactors remained steady, enabling continued mission activities and charitable works. The dedicated service of lay leaders and volunteers contributed significantly to the smooth functioning of parish and diocesan activities. At the same time, adopting of modern technology improved communication and administrative efficiency across the Eparchy. The various mission stations in the diocese were strengthened. We thank God for all these blessings we received throughout the year! I am also grateful to you, dear Fathers, for your unstinting support in making all our deliberations and decisions successful.

Jubilee Year 2025

The Christmas we just celebrated was a momentous occasion as it marked the beginning of the celebration of the 2025th year of the birth of Jesus Christ. Pope Francis wanted the Catholics to celebrate it more meaningfully when he declared 2025 an ordinary Jubilee Year. As we know, the Holy Father initiated two years of preparation before celebrating Jubilee 2025. The year 2023 was dedicated to an in-depth study of Catholic doctrine, focusing on the four constitutions of the Second Vatican Council, namely, *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) and *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World). We have tried to familiarise ourselves with these important documents through seminars and study sessions.

The year 2024 was devoted to prayer. This year, parishes, religious communities, and the faithful worldwide were called to deepen their prayer life and strengthen their relationship with God. We implemented various prayer initiatives, including extended hours of Eucharistic adoration, prayer vigils, and special devotional practices. We encouraged the faithful to rediscover traditional forms of prayers, the Rosary, and *lectio*

divina while exploring contemplative prayer and meditation on Sacred Scripture. This emphasis on prayer helped us to create a spiritual foundation for the upcoming Jubilee, fostering a deeper sense of communion with God and preparing hearts for the graces of the Holy Year. The year of prayer also emphasised the connection between personal prayer and communal worship, reinforcing the understanding that prayer is essential for spiritual renewal and the authentic living of Christian hope, which will be the central theme of the Jubilee Year 2025.

On 9 May 2024, the Holy Father issued the bull of Indiction of the ordinary Jubilee of the year 2025 titled *Spes Non-confundit* (Hope does not Disappoint), announcing the motto of the Jubilee: *Pilgrims of Hope* to ensure a fitting spiritual celebration. In our Eparchy, we constituted a Jubilee committee to plan and chalk out the various events to make the Jubilee a moment of spiritual renewal for our people. We solemnly inaugurated the Jubilee on 29 December 2024, and all the parishes are asked to do the same on 5 January 2025.

Hope does not Disappoint

The Bull of Indiction opens with the powerful theme "Hope does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5), which Pope Francis presents as the foundational message for the 2025 Jubilee Year. He contextualises this message within our contemporary world, particularly highlighting the aftermath of the global pandemic and the current challenges facing humanity. The Pope emphasises that Christian hope is not mere optimism but a theological virtue rooted in the certainty of God's love and faithfulness, which sustains us through difficulties and guides us toward the future.

The document elaborates on the spiritual significance of the Jubilee tradition, tracing its biblical roots from the Old Testament through its development in Church history. The Pope explains how the Jubilee symbolises God's mercy and the Church's mission of reconciliation. He emphasises that this Holy Year is meant to be a time of renewal, forgiveness, and spiritual awakening for all believers, with special attention to those who have drifted from their faith or feel marginalised from the Church.

The Bull outlines the four traditional pillars characterising the Jubilee celebration: a pilgrimage to Rome, reconciliation through the Sacrament of Penance, practising works of charity, and the special graces of indulgences. Pope Francis accentuates pilgrimage as a metaphor for the Christian life, describing how the physical journey to holy sites reflects our spiritual journey toward God. The symbolic act of crossing through the Holy Door is presented as a powerful gesture of conversion and commitment to Christian life.

The practical aspects of the Jubilee are detailed, beginning with the opening of the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica on Christmas Eve 2024 and continuing through the Epiphany in 2026. The Pope extends the possibility of gaining Jubilee indulgences beyond Rome, enabling local churches worldwide to participate fully in the celebration. Special provisions are made for the sick, elderly, and imprisoned, ensuring that all members of the faithful can participate in the Jubilee's graces regardless of their circumstances.

The social dimension of the Jubilee received significant attention, with Pope Francis calling for concrete actions of solidarity and care for the poor and marginalised. He connects the theme of hope with the urgent need for ecological conversion and social justice, challenging the Church to demonstrate hope through tangible works of mercy. The Pope emphasises that authentic spiritual renewal must be accompanied by a genuine commitment to addressing social inequalities and environmental challenges.

The Bull concludes with a profound meditation on Mary's role as the Mother of Hope, entrusting the Jubilee Year to her maternal intercession. Pope Francis invites all believers to embrace this time of grace as an opportunity for personal and communal transformation. He prays that the Jubilee will strengthen the

Church's witness of hope and lead to a renewed commitment to evangelisation and Christian unity. He desires this Holy Year to help heal divisions, restore hope to the discouraged, and bring about a civilisation of love and peace.

Inauguration of the Ordinary Jubilee 2025

As we were told, the Holy Father Pope Francis solemnly inaugurated the Ordinary Jubilee 2025 in the Universal Church on 24 December 2024 by opening the Holy Door of the Papal Basilica of St Peter. He opened the Holy Door of the Cathedral St John Lateran on the Sunday after Christmas, 29 December 2024, for the Archdiocese of Rome. Moreover, on 1 January 2025, the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God, Pope Francis, will open the Holy Door of the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major. On Sunday, 5 January 2025, He will open the Holy Door, the Papal Basilica of St Paul, Outside the Walls.

On the day when the Holy Father opened the Holy Door in his Cathedral on 29 December 2024, all the diocesan bishops were invited to inaugurate the Ordinary Jubilee 2025 in their respective dioceses by celebrating the Holy Qurbana in their respective Cathedrals. Thus, I celebrated the inauguration of the Jubilee year Holy Qurbana at 8.00 am in St George Shrine Church, Munchirai, and declared the Ordinary Jubilee year 2025 in our Eparchy of Thuckalay open. On that day for the Holy Qurbana, a specially crafted Jubilee cross was blessed and carried by the faithful in procession and solemnly enthroned in the Church. This will remain there throughout the ordinary Jubilee year, which will be concluded with the solemn Holy Qurbana on 28 December 2025.

Pilgrimage and Plenary Indulgences

During the Jubilee year, pilgrimage becomes a sacred journey of faith and renewal. Pope Francis emphasises that pilgrimage is essential to every Jubilee (SNC, no. 5), symbolising our human quest for meaning in life. Faithful are encouraged to make pilgrimages to the diocesan shrines designed by the bishop of the diocese to receive special graces and plenary indulgences.

In our Eparchy, the following shrines—St Alphonsa Shrine, Nagercoil, St George Shrine, Munchirai, and Holy Cross Shrine, Malaicode—are designated as places of pilgrimage for obtaining plenary indulgences. After spiritually preparing people to visit these centres, we could organise people to visit these shrines in groups. I urge you to follow the instructions of the Jubilee committee to conduct these pilgrimages in an orderly manner. I also encourage mission-league children and parish level Mission groups to visit the mission stations in the extended territories of our Eparchy.

A plenary indulgence is a grace the Catholic Church grants through the merits of Jesus Christ to remove temporal punishment due to sin. The indulgences apply to sins already forgiven. A plenary indulgence cleanses the soul as if the person has just been baptised. According to the Apostolic Penitentiary, plenary indulges obtained during the Jubilee year can also be applied to souls in purgatory with the possibility of obtaining two plenary indulgences for the deceased in one day. However, to obtain indulgence, the usual conditions of detachment from all sin, sacramental confession, holy communion, and prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father must be met.

In the jubilee year, Catholics are especially encouraged to practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The Apostolic Penitentiary lists visiting prisoners, spending time with lonely elderly people, aiding the sick or disabled, and helping those who are in need as instances to obtain an indulgence. Practising the works of mercy, it says, is "in a sense making a pilgrimage to Christ present in them." Indulgences for works of mercy can be received multiple times throughout the jubilee year, even daily. If the indulgence is applied to the deceased, two plenary indulgences can be obtained on the same day.

A Call to Renewal

Dear Fathers, as we embark on this Jubilee Year, I earnestly pray that this Jubilee Year will be a time of grace, deepening our relationship with God and fostering stronger bonds with our brothers and sisters in Christ. May this jubilee year be a time of profound spiritual renewal for the faithful of our Eparchy. Let it be marked not merely by external celebration but by deepening faith, hope, and love. As 'Pilgrims of Hope,' let us continue to build communion, promote participation, and deepen our commitment to the mission. The ordinary Jubilee 2025, an integral part of the synodal journey, invites us to be givers and agents of hope.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Priests' Conference at Sangamam: A special Priests' Conference was held at Sangamam on 5 December 2024 to discuss the suggestions provided by the last Presbyteral Council, which convened on 31 July 2024, and to conduct a self-evaluation of priests. The conference began with an hour of Adoration, animated by Rev. Fr. Toji Parambilparambil. After a short break, the conference commenced at 11:00 am. Rev. Fr. Vicar General warmly welcomed all, and I presided over the meeting. A special group discussion was organized, moderated by two priests: Fr. Mathew Kuzhinjalil and Fr. Justin Cheruvelil, the Presbyterium Secretary. Fr. Mathew Kuzhinjalil introduced the theme, while Fr. Justin Cheruvelil presented the points raised during the Presbyteral Council. The main topic of discussion was "Concerns, Challenges, and Preoccupations of Priests Regarding Their Life and Ministry in the Diocese of Thuckalay." After the introduction, the priests were divided into three groups, and questions were distributed for discussion. The group discussions lasted for approximately 45 minutes. In the second half of the meeting, Rev. Fr. Thomas Sathianesan presented a detailed diocesan action plan for the Christ Jubilee 2025. Subsequently, representatives from the three groups shared their findings in the common session. This was the first time we came together to discuss and identify ways to address the current issues collectively. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the Fathers who contributed valuable suggestions for the welfare of priests and the betterment of the eparchy. This effort helps us journey together as a synodal Church, listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit and discerning collectively what is best for our spiritual growth.

Legion of Mary Anniversary at Soosaipuram: The 23rd Anniversary of the Thuckalay Comitium, Legion of Mary, was celebrated at St. Alphonsa College of Arts and Science, Soosaipuram, on 7 December 2024, beginning at 9:30 am. The event commenced with the recitation of the Rosary, followed by the inaugural session. Rev. Fr. Mijo Puthenpurayil delivered an inspiring Marian message during this session. Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil was the main celebrant for the Thanksgiving Holy Qurbana. The anniversary celebrations resumed at 2:00 pm with a public meeting, which I presided over. Members of Mariayin Senai presented a variety of cultural programmes based on Marian themes, showcasing their devotion and creativity. I extend my sincere gratitude to Bro. R. Paneer Selvam, the President of the Thuckalay Comitium, for his excellent organization of the program and for ensuring its success.

Catholic Doctors' Meet at Chunkankadai: The TNBC Healthcare Commission, in collaboration with the Health Commission Directors of the four dioceses—Kottar, Kuzhithurai, Marthandam, and Thuckalay—organized a meeting of Catholic doctors from the Kanyakumari zone on 8 December 2024. The event was held at St. Xavier's Nursing College, Chunkankadai, from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm. As the Chairman of the TNBC Health Commission, I presided over the meeting, and Rt. Rev. Bishop Albert Anastas, Bishop of Kuzhithurai, graced the occasion as the chief guest. Fr. Vimal from the Diocese of Salem animated an insightful session on the theme "A Doctor Through the Eyes of Jesus." The meeting also included a

discussion on various challenges faced by Catholic doctors in the district. Seven doctors from our diocese actively participated in the event. The gathering concluded with an agape meal, fostering the fellowship. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Fr. Subin Puthenpurackal for serving as one of the coordinators of this well-organized programme.

Mission Quest Online Quiz Competition: The Mission Quest Online Quiz Competition offered a unique opportunity for the faithful to gain a deeper understanding of the apostolic mission entrusted by Christ, foster missionary zeal, and learn about various missionary activities. This online quiz was conducted on 14 December 2024 at 6:00 pm and was jointly organized by the Syro-Malabar Commission for Catechesis and the Syro-Malabar Mission Office. Faithful from all the parishes of our diocese actively participated in the competition. I commend the Catechesis Department for their commendable efforts in organizing this event in our diocese. I also extend my heartfelt congratulations to the winners from our diocese in both the student and adult categories for their excellent performance.

First Death Anniversary of Fr. John Thekkel: The first death anniversary of Fr. John Thekkel was commemorated on 21 December 2024 at St. Francis Assisi Church, Mezhacode. I celebrated the remembrance Holy Qurbana at 7:30 am, with Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil, Rev. Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal, Rev. Fr. Jose Muttathupadam, Rev. Fr. Jose Vayalil, and Rev. Fr. Vinod Kanakalil as concelebrants. Rev. Fr. Jose Muttathupadam delivered a heartfelt homily, recalling the life and contributions of Fr. John Thekkel. After the Holy Qurbana, the Office for the Dead was recited by Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil. This was followed by a prayer service for the deceased, led by Rev. Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal at the presbytery. An agape meal was arranged for all those present after the prayer service. I extend my sincere gratitude to Rev. Fr. Bibin Kocheethra for his excellent organization of the event.

Christmas Celebrations: The Diocese organized a series of Pre-Christmas celebrations as given below:

Organization	Place Date		
Catechesis	Kalluvilai	07 December 2024	
Kuzhanthai Isso Iyakkam	Kalluvilai	07 December 2024	
Institutions' Head	Sangamam	11 December 2024	
Sychar Resource Centre	Kozhipporvilai	11 December 2024	
CML Executive members	Bishop's House	12 December 2024	
Family Apostolate	Kalluvilai	14 December 2024	
UCC	Muttam	14 December 2024	
Educare Students, KKSSS	Kalluvilai	14 December 2024	
SMYM	Varuthattu	15 December 2024	
Vocation	Padanthalumoodu	15 December 2024	
Pulari Social Service Society	Border, Tenkasi	15 December 2024	
Madurai Mission	Ariyur	15 December 2024	
Cumbum Theni Mission	Theni	15 December 2024	
Tenkasi Mission	Pudur	16 December 2024	
Presbyterium	Sangamam	17 December 2024	
Charitable institutions' Head	Sangamam	18 December 2024	
Minor Seminary and Seeds	Mukkoottukal Seminary	18 December 2024	
CRI	Muzhucode	21 December 2024	
Irai Arul Staff	Padanthalumoodu	21 December 2024	
Karunai Illam	Nithiravilai	21 December 2024	
Major Seminarians	Sangamam	23 December 2024	
Neighborhoods	Bishop's House	23 December 2024	

I extend my sincere thanks to all the Fathers, Sisters, Brothers, and lay faithful who dedicated their efforts to the success of these joyous celebrations.

Inauguration of Christ Jubilee 2025: The diocesan-level inauguration of Christ Jubilee 2025 was held simultaneously at three pilgrim centres on 29 December 2024 at 8:00 am. I presided over the ceremony at St. George Shrine Church, Munchirai, while Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil, the Vicar General, was the main celebrant at Holy Cross Shrine Church, Malaicode, and Rev. Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal at St. Alphonsa Shrine Church, Nagercoil. The inaugural liturgical ceremony began in a designated location, where the newly prepared Jubilee Cross was blessed. Carrying the cross in a solemn procession, the faithful proceeded to the respective Shrine Churches. The Jubilee Candle was then lit, marking the beginning of the Jubilee Year followed by the Solemn Holy Qurbana. At the conclusion of the liturgy, the Jubilee Prayer was recited. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the parish priests of the pilgrim centres for their meticulous preparation and efforts in organizing this significant event. A special thanks to Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil for designing a beautiful Jubilee Cross and brining it personally to three pilgrim centres.

Bible Fest 2024: This year the Forane level Catechism Bible competitions were held on 27 - 30 December 2024. All the parishes took part in the various competitions. Narcheithi Nilayam organised the competitions. The themes for the various competitions were taken from the Bible itself. This helped the children to read the Bible and to engender love for the Word of God. All the children after much preparation and rigorous practice took part in the competitions. I am grateful to the Rev. Fr. Abilash Xavier, Director, and Rev. Fr. Jacob Ayyamathra, Assistant Director, of Catechism Department for organising the events in a professional manner. I thank all the Forane Vicars, Forane Catechism Directors and Secretaries for their valuable contributions in the smooth conduct of the competitions. A special word of thanks to all the Parish Priests, Sisters and teachers who have trained and prepared the children well. The events were held at APJM School, Soosaipuram; St Michael School, Kattathurai; Holy Family School, Mukkoottukkal; St Mary's School, Kaliyal; Sacred Heart School, Padanthalumoodu; Jaya Matha School, Christurajapuram and St. Francis Assisi School, Mezhacode. The Rank list of each Forane is listed below:

Foranes	Rank -1	Rank -2	Rank - 3
Kaliyal	Kaliyal	Pallikonam	Marappady
Manjalumoodu	Manjalumoodu	Muzhucode	Mukkoottukal
Nithiravilai	Varuthattu	Nithiravilai	Vayalinkarai
Padanthalumoodu	Padanthalumoodu	Annikkarai, Palugal	Kazhuvanthittai
Soosaipuram	Soosaipuram	Mankarai	Palappallam
Thuckalay -Pilankalai	Kattathurai	Pilankalai	Nagercoil
Arukani	Arukani	Netta	Pathukani

INFORMATION

- Mr. Kurian (93), the beloved father of Sr. Ancy SDS, was called to the eternal abode on 02 December 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to Sr. Ancy and her family members and pray for the departed soul.
- Mrs. Elikutty John (85), the grandmother(maternal) of Fr. Aby Poovathummoottil, was called to the eternal abode on 10 December 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to Fr. Aby and his family members and pray for the departed soul.
- Fr. Seby Manimalakkandathil went back to Saudi Arabia for ministry abroad on 11 December 2024.

- Mr. Mathew Mathai (99), the beloved father of Sr. Ann Mathew SH, was called to the eternal abode on 12 December 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to Sr. Ann and her family members and pray for the departed soul.
- Mrs. Rosamma Thomas (95), the grandmother(paternal) of Fr. Aby Poovathummoottil, was called to the eternal abode on 12 December 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to Fr. Aby and his family members and pray for the departed soul.
- Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal came back from Saudi Arabia on 14 December 2024.
- New Provincial Team was elected for the CMC Chavara Province, Thuckalay on 14 December 2024. Rev. Sr. Dr. Jessy Therese CMC (Provincial Superior), Sr. Anija CMC (Vicar Provincial) Sr. Alphonse Jose CMC, Sr. Soona Rose CMC and Sr. Reeja Paul CMC (councillors), Sr. Anie Lins CMC (Internal auditor), Sr. Krupa Rose CMC (Finance Secretary) and Sr. Germi Maria CMC (Provincial Secretary). Congratulations and prayerful wishes!
- New Provincial Team was elected for the SABS St. Chantal Province, Thuckalay on 16 December 2024. Rev. Sr. Rosemartin SABS (Provincial Superior), Sr. Elaise Kunnath SABS (Vicar Provincial) Sr. Leena Anpathilchira SABS, Sr. Amala Jose SABS and Sr. Roselin Kallarakavunkal SABS (councillors), Sr. Grace Vettethel SABS (Finance Officer) and Sr. Geo Maria SABS (Provincial Secretary). Congratulations and prayerful wishes!
- A new land (7.39 cents) with an existing building was registered for the Tirunelveli mission on 16 December 2024.
- Mrs. Annamma Joseph (75), the beloved mother of Sr. Anitha SH, was called to the eternal abode on 18 December 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to Sr. Anitha and her family members and pray for the departed soul.
- ➤ Mrs. Chinnathai (85), the beloved mother of Sr. Valan SDS, was called to the eternal abode on 19 December 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to Sr. Valan and her family members and pray for the departed soul.
- Mr. K. J. Baby (84), the beloved father of Sr. Elaise Kunnath SABS, was called to the eternal abode on 24 December 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to Sr. Elaise and her family members and pray for the departed soul.
- ➤ Holy Childhood Day was celebrated in our parishes on 29 December 2024, Sunday during Holy Qurbana by giving an introduction, lighting the lamp, offertory procession by the children, special blessing for children after the Holy Qurbana and at the end a group photo together. Thanks to the Director of Kuzhanthai Isso Iyakkam for providing necessary guidance to the parish priests.
- Fr. Peter Kizhakkeyil is relieved from the office of the Parish Priest of St. Benedict Church, Bengiri.
- Fr. George Kandathil is appointed as the Priest In Charge of St. Benedict Church, Bengiri.
- ➤ Silver Jubilee Inauguration of St. Mary's Church, Vanchinagar was held on 31 December 2024.
- Fr. Jinu Thekkethala will reach the diocese from Rome for his annual vacation on 25 January 2025.

FORTHCOMING MAJOR EVENTS

02 January - Priestly Ordination of Dn. Amanto
05 January - Parish level Jubilee 2025 Inauguration

06-11 January - Bishops' Synod

06-12 January - Syro Malabar Mission Week

28 January - Priests' Conference

Priests' Conference 28 January 2025

09.30 am @ Sangamam

CONCLUSION

Tomorrow, we are entering another year. This year, we are called to focus intensely on spiritual renewal and deepening the faith life of their congregations through several key approaches. We should prioritise offering regular spiritual direction sessions, contemplative prayer workshops, and guided spiritual experiences to help parishioners develop a more intimate relationship with God. We need to create meaningful retreat experiences, both in-person and virtual, that address contemporary challenges while grounding people in traditional spiritual practices and sacred scripture. We must revitalise the sacramental life of the parish, particularly through enhanced preparation for reconciliation and eucharistic devotion, helping parishioners rediscover these fountains of grace. Small faith-sharing groups/families led by trained lay leaders need to be supported. This spiritual rejuvenation will require us to become models of prayer ourselves. The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, that we celebrate on 1 January inspires us to re-commit ourselves to our mission like Mother Mary. As I conclude this circular, let me wish you a prosperous and grace-filled New Year, dear Fathers.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

† George Rajendran SDB

Bishop of Thuckalay