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LET FREEDOM BE CELEBRATED, BUT NEVER AT THE COST OF DUTY



Rev. Dr. Mathew Illathuparambil

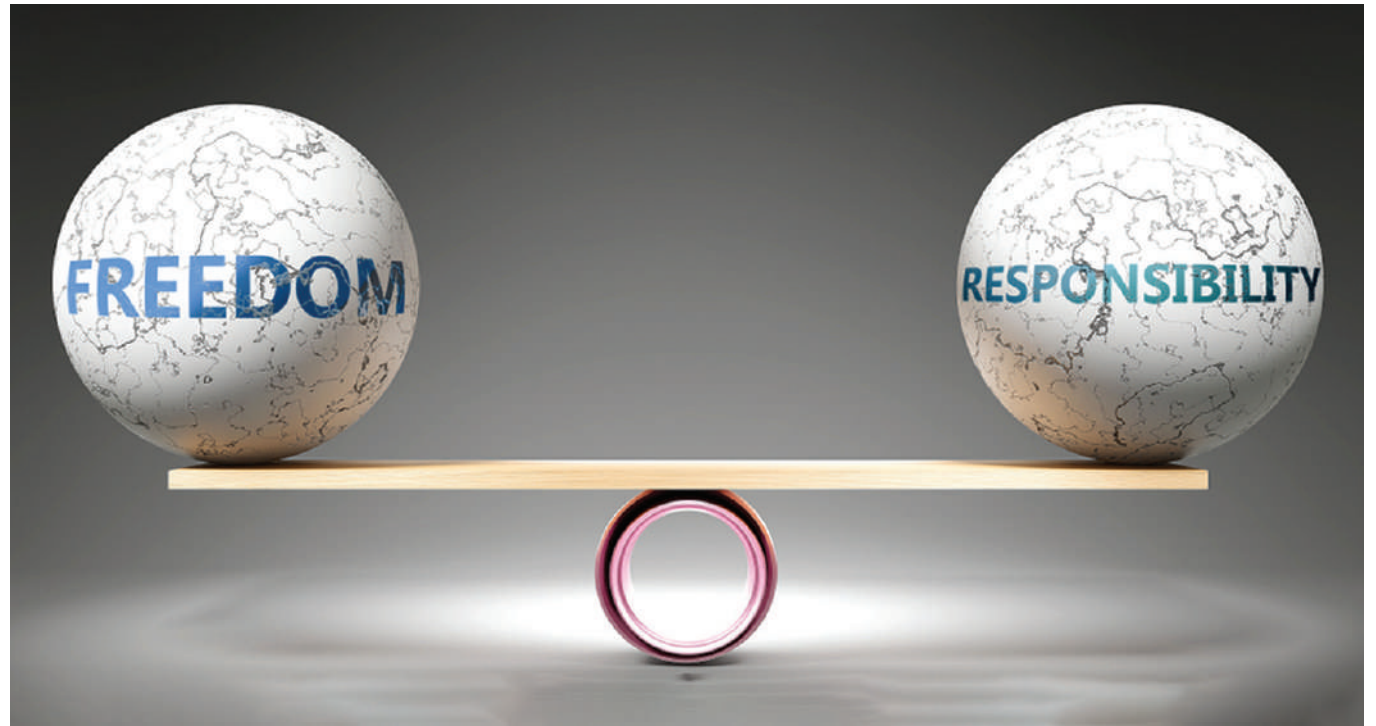
The history of human struggle has been a relentless pursuit of freedom—from national independence movements, including India's own, to the fight for individual liberties. Yet, history rarely records protests where people demand more duties to perform; nor does anyone expect them to. The contemporary tragedy lies in this: while we vociferously demand our rights and freedoms, we barely whisper about our duties and responsibilities. In this sense, our society is like a leaning tower, tilting dangerously toward the side of “rights” alone. A society that leans only in one direction is destined to fall. The signs of this collapse are already written in blood and tears across our social fabric; the only question is whether we are willing to read them.

Take, for instance, the fact that nearly four thousand people are killed in road accidents in Kerala every year. This is no small number. To a stranger, each accident is just a snippet of news, but the gravity of the statistics is felt only when tragedy arrives at one's own doorstep, shrouded in white. Our roads become paths of death when people fiercely demand their rights on the public way while completely abandoning their duties as responsible drivers or pedestrians. We must loudly proclaim, and listen to the fact, that balance between rights and duties is essential in every sphere of life.

Freedom that oversteps duties

There is no freedom without duty, just as there are no rights without responsibilities. The “bird of freedom” can only soar within the atmosphere bounded by duty; beyond those limits, the bird will tire and plummet. This is a universal principle. When India gained political independence, it inherited the duty of self-governance. The freedom to bring a child into the world carries the responsibility of fatherhood. One who receives a license to carry a gun must accept the duty to prevent harm. A person granted the freedom to treat the sick is bound by the responsibility not to kill.

A society that misuses freedom must pay the price. In a society with



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the freedom to eat whatever they like, people are dying not of starvation, but of complications from obesity. In a society that saves time to rest after office work, health problems stemming from physical inactivity are rising. In Kerala, where the freedom to protest is celebrated, many strikes have resulted in the closing of factories rather than the opening of new ones. The freedom granted by mobile phones has turned our privacy into an open book, not only can anyone read it, but anyone can deface it.

Some misunderstand “freedom of expression” as the right to say anything about anyone. The freedom granted by law to the media is, in horrifying instances, degrading into “media hunting.” There are those who interpret the freedom to propagate their religion as a right to eliminate other faiths through political power and terrorism. The examples are disheartening. We are witnessing a world where people become victims of their own rights and freedoms. This is a form of cultural suicide.

A Picture Painted by Many

Shouting for rights while remaining silent about duties is a culture rooted in human selfishness. Working half-heartedly during duty hours but stretching out one's hand greedily for wages is the ugly face of this culture. This is not just an issue of individual civic sense; it is about shaping a mature society. It is harder to rewrite the destiny of a culture stuck in a one-sided sense of freedom than it is for ten people with different interests to draw a single picture

of an elephant. To prepare individuals and societies for this shift, we must embrace a few fundamental realizations:

1. We must find the roots of this one-sided rights-consciousness.

It exists even in our culture and religious life. For example, our prayers often take the form of a beggar's bowl; the focus is on what we can get from God. Even our spirituality becomes a strategy for acquisition. We focus on the blessings we should receive while ignoring what we owe to the Divine-worship, praise, and thanksgiving. We must tell ourselves that there is a greater value in giving than in receiving. The comforts and culture we enjoy today were built by those who gave—their labor, contributions, money, lives, and very souls. Those who merely sat on their rights, eating and sleeping, have left nothing behind. Time, with its merciless hands, quickly erases their names from history. There are those who celebrate life by grabbing power and wealth, but they begin to decay even while they are alive. Those who gave must be remembered; the selfless must be praised. The history of the Church and the world bears witness to this. Even in the present, such individuals should be our heroes.

2. “Other-centeredness” (altruism) must be regarded as a paramount value.

Although we often say the world has become a global village, many people remain “cave dwellers” at heart. They haven't emerged from an ancient cave-culture; they live and die within the caves of their own families, friend

circles, online groups, and vested-interest cliques. To them, no world exists beyond that cave. We must realize what a massive “other-centered project” the Gospel proposes. St. Paul, who said we are called to freedom, clarified that this freedom is for serving one another (Galatians 5:13). Jesus' command was to go into all the world and preach the Gospel (Mark 16:15). This means for one who accepts the Gospel, the only boundaries are the ends of the earth—no barriers of caste, religion, language, or race. It is in proclaiming this “other-centeredness” that a society respecting everyone is formed. Only they can truly say, Fratelli Tutti (All are brothers).

3. The act of sharing.

Where individualism is strong, there is nothing to share and no platform to do so. A society that once lived by sharing food, belongings, facilities, and living spaces has shifted toward extreme individualism. We see people driving on the road as if they own the entire highway. This attitude exists in every field. We must think of ways to increase the spirit of sharing even within our homes.

It is in a “mature society” that duties are respected alongside rights. We need such social models. Local Christian churches should serve as examples of such mature societies, standing tall as a beacon. The Church fulfills its evangelical mission when the world can learn from it. We cannot argue for a transformation in the world if we cannot first achieve it within the Church

EDITORIAL



KERALA AT A MORAL CROSSROADS

The socio-cultural and political developments unfolding in God's Own Country, Kerala, have become a matter of serious concern. Once, politics dominated the public sphere. When every issue was viewed through a political prism, development suffered, and those without political affiliation were pushed to the margins. Generations that grew up under the shadow of party flags failed to see society beyond political equations. This unhealthy environment worsened when religion entered into an unholy alliance with politics. As political ideologies weakened and lost their capacity to hold cadres together, religious leadership and beliefs were mobilized, turning politics overtly communal. With this shift, the Kerala that once valued honesty and social cohesion began to fade. The shared core of society ceased to be a common objective. In effect, Kerala began to lose its moral and social integrity.

The disturbing trends visible today are the direct consequences of this erosion of a shared social consciousness. Violence is no longer confined to the fringes; even schoolchildren are increasingly involved. The question arises: where does a generation learn the brutality to assault a classmate pleading for mercy? The roots of this aggression may lie in distorted religious instruction, dysfunctional family environments, political indoctrination, or substance abuse. At the same time, suicide rates are rising. The reasons cited by young people for ending their lives are alarming and often difficult to comprehend. Equally troubling are the shifts occurring in marriage and family life and the ways in which conflicts are addressed, developments that threaten the foundational institutions of society. A growing counterculture, amplified by cinema and social media, normalizes the degradation of values. Victims of public shaming, voyeuristic entertainment, and mob justice, perpetrated by those indifferent to life, dignity, and privacy, often pay with their lives. Their silent cries stand as an indictment of society. The media, rather than acting as a corrective force, frequently reinforces this moral decline through narratives coloured by caste, religion, and political interest. The spreading dark clouds over Kerala's social landscape signal an imminent storm that cannot be ignored.

Change is imperative. Kerala must reassess its direction. A culture of mutual respect and civic responsibility must be restored. Politics and religion must operate with a clear and principled separation. Religious, political, or caste affiliations should never override the ability to acknowledge wrongdoing. Educational institutions must be safeguarded from substance abuse and cultural decay. The media must recommit itself to impartiality and public accountability. Respect for personal privacy must become a shared social norm. Politics, in turn, must recover its ethical purpose, to build society, not fracture it. This is not a pessimistic cry of despair but a cautionary note drawn from present realities. The future of Kerala depends on collective action today. It is time to join hands and unite hearts to ensure that God's Own Country does not descend into the "madhouse" once warned against by Swami Vivekananda.

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A DAY TO REMEMBER

February 2: Episcopal Ordination of Cardinal Mar George Alencherry (1997)

Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple

February 4: Episcopal Ordination of Mar Jose Pulickal (2020)
Saint John de Britto

February 6: Today, the Anaphora of Mar Nestorius is used in the Holy *Qurbana*

Death of Mar Mathew Pothanamuzhy (1982)

The Syriac Fathers of the Church

Feast of the Parish Patron

February 8: Episcopal Ordination of Mar Thomas Elavanal (1997)

February 9: Episcopal Ordination of Mar Mathew Arackal (2001)

Episcopal Ordination of Mar George Madathikandathil (2013)

February 11: Our Lady of Lourdes (World Day of the Sick)

February 13: Commemoration of the Dead
Episcopal Ordination of Mar Bosco Puthur (2010)

February 15: Today, the Season of Great Fast (*Sauma Ramba*) begins at midnight

February 16: Lent Begins. Day of Fasting

February 17: Death of Mar Joseph Pastor Neelankavil (2021)

February 20: Death of Cardinal Mar Joseph Parecattil (1987)

February 23: Saint Polycarp

February 25: Blessed Martyr Sr. Rani Maria



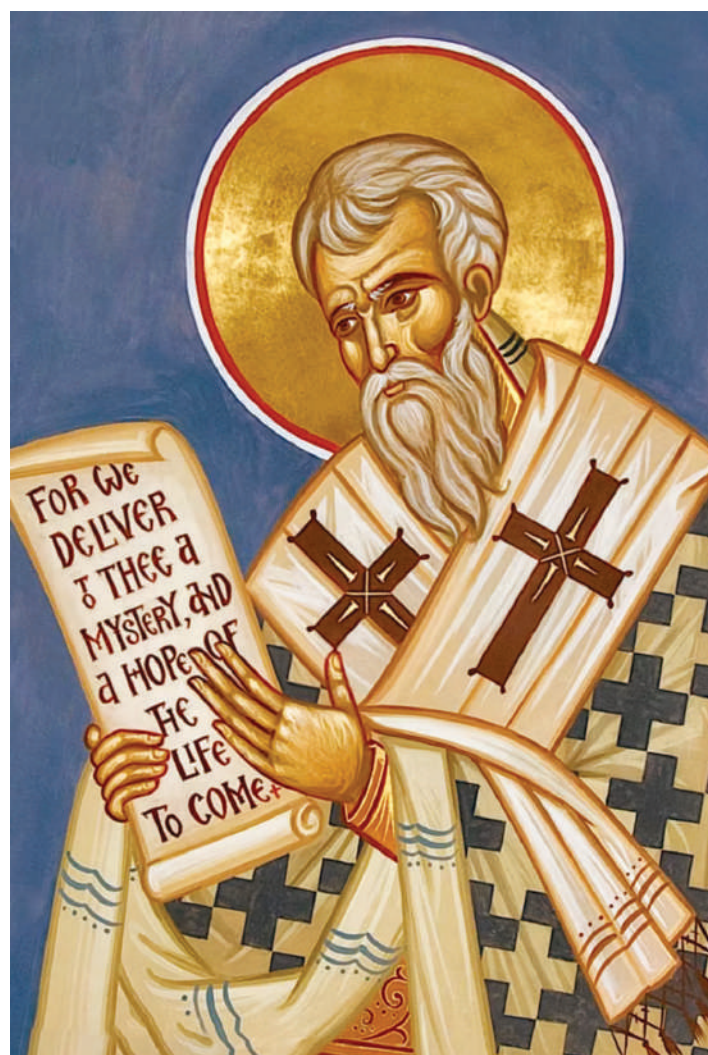
Rev. Dr. Alex Sebastian Kollamkalam

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, who was born around AD 330 in Arianus of Cappadocia in Asia Minor and died there around AD 390, is acclaimed as 'Great' among the Greek Fathers, together with Saint Basil, Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, and Saint John Chrysostom. Influenced by his mother, who lived a deeply rooted Christian life, Gregory's father embraced the Christian faith and was ordained Bishop of Nazianzus in AD 325. Born after this event, Gregory grew up receiving formation not only in secular disciplines but also in the Christian faith.

He completed his studies first at Caesarea, then at Alexandria, and finally at Athens. Saint Basil was his fellow student at Caesarea and Athens, and the friendship forged during their years of formation continued until the end of their lives. Julian, later known as "the Apostate" and future Roman Emperor, was also their classmate.

After completing his studies, Gregory returned to Cappadocia and joined the monastic community founded by Saint Basil at Annesi in Pontus, leading a monastic life. However, compelled by his father, the Bishop, he accepted priestly ordination in AD 362 after months of preparation. Later, at the insistence of his friend Basil, who was Bishop of Caesarea from AD 371 to 379, Gregory consented in AD 372 to be appointed Bishop of Sasima. Yet, due to his natural aversion

SAINT GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS



to positions of authority, he never formally assumed that office.

Following his father's death in AD 374, Gregory guided the Eparchy of Nazianzus for nearly two years, but once again refused to officially assume the episcopal office. Toward the end of 375, he returned to monastic life and spent the next three years in prayer and study. Saint Jerome testifies that Gregory was the one who instructed him in Sacred Scripture (*De Viris Illustribus*, 117).

After the death of Saint Basil in AD 379, Gregory became the principal spokesman of Nicene orthodoxy in Asia Minor. That same year, Emperor Theodosius,

who assumed leadership of the Eastern Roman Empire, decided to dethrone the Arian bishop of Constantinople and appoint Gregory in his place. The Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 ratified this appointment. Nevertheless, citing opposition from a group of Egyptian bishops, Gregory declined to accept the position.

Thus, during the final nine years of his life, he was able to live a peaceful life of prayer in the monastery. When we profess in the Creed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, we may remember Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, who reserved the term "procession" specifically for the Holy Spirit.



From the Heart of
the Father and Head

Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil



Freedom is one of the noblest expressions of human dignity. Yet, in the contemporary context of Kerala, we must reflect deeply on whether civic freedom is gradually being reduced to the protection of uncontrolled personal interests. In a society where people speak excessively about rights while maintaining a culpable silence about duties, "civic consciousness" risks shrinking into a mere academic term.

Sacred Scripture reminds us: "Live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of

CIVIC CULTURE: NOT THE PROCLAMATION OF RIGHTS, BUT THE REALIZATION OF DUTIES



Sacred Scripture reminds us: "Live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God" (1 Peter 2:16). Freedom is not liberation from responsibilities, but rather the strength to embrace them. The cornerstone of civic awareness is the realization of how one's personal attitudes and actions affect the common well-being of society.

God" (1 Peter 2:16). Freedom is not liberation from responsibilities, but rather the strength to embrace them. The cornerstone of civic awareness is the realization of how one's personal attitudes and actions affect the common well-being of society. A culture that mistakenly interprets the violation of laws as a sign of civic strength is a silent crisis.

Christ, who taught us to render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God, has given us a profound example in fulfilling civic duty. True civic culture is formed not out of fear of laws, but out of respect for one's fellow human being. The Golden Rule—"Therefore, whatever you wish that

others would do to you, do also to them" (Matthew 7:12)-must become an integral part of our social life.

Even within the inner life of the Church, civic consciousness and freedom must be properly understood and clearly expressed. Freedom in the Church is not self-centered individualism, but rather a complementary unity as members of the Body of Christ. It is when each of us faithfully and humbly fulfills the duties entrusted to us in the Church that we truly experience spiritual freedom. Authority and positions must not be viewed as claims of privilege, but as service to our brothers and sisters. The words of Saint Paul—"Through love, serve

one another" (Galatians 5:13)-must be the foundation of every action within the Church. Obedience to ecclesial laws and traditions does not diminish our freedom; rather, they are bonds of love that hold us securely within a great spiritual family.

What we need is not a competition of demands, but a sharing of responsibilities. Only by fulfilling one's duties does a person gain the moral legitimacy to speak for one's rights. Rooted in Gospel values of love and justice, and united with civic responsibility, let us together take steps toward a higher and more authentic civic culture. ■

POST SYNODAL CIRCULAR

XXXIV SYOND, SESSION I

Mar Raphael Thattil the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church to the Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Men and Women and Lay Faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church. May the Grace of our Lord be with you all!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Jubilee Year, which granted us a profound spiritual experience of the infinite mercy and abundant blessings of our Lord, has now come to a close. Together, let us lift our hearts in gratitude to God Almighty for the spiritual renewal and grace-filled experiences bestowed upon us during this Year of Grace, celebrated under the motto 'Pilgrims of Hope'. We have to continue to preserve and nurture the spiritual vitality gained during the Jubilee Year within our families and communities, and strive to live as authentic witnesses to the love of Christ.

The Christmas season, which echoes a message of peace and joy around the world, has sadly become a time of fear and unrest in parts of our motherland, India. Attacks on Christian churches and prayer groups - denying them even the rights guaranteed by our Constitution - cause deep pain and concern. The spread of a culture of hatred, which misrepresents our charitable work as forced conversions, undermines the secular fabric of our nation. The transformative power of Christ's love, who drew all people to himself through his sacrifice on the cross, is manifested in our educational and charitable ministries. The Church warmly encourages all its members who courageously live the joy of the Gospel amid opposition and persecution. May the words of the Apostle Paul strengthen

us: "Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, in the power of God" (2 Tim 1:8).

Moving forward through Empowerment

The Session of the Synod commenced on 6th January with the solemn inauguration of the Year of Community Empowerment 2026. The growth and vitality of the Church are rooted in the spiritual and social upliftment of each of her members. The Year of Community Empowerment observed by the Syro-Malabar Church is not merely a celebration, but a conscious effort to awaken our faithful to their mission, to strengthen them for this task, and thereby to permeate all spheres of public life with the teachings of Christ. Only when the members of the Church, especially families and parishes, remain deeply aware of their faith and identity, they will be able to fulfil our evangelical mission in society. The words of Pope Leo XIV: "Christians have no enemies, only brothers and sisters. Even when they do not understand each other, they remain brothers", underline the reality that universal fraternity is our true goal.

The primary objective of the observance of the Community Empowerment Year is to equip families, especially young people, to face the challenges of the modern world with courage and confidence.

The demographic decline that weakens our presence in public life must become a topic of serious discussion within our families. Active participation in public administration and politics is part of our civic responsibility. We shall not forget the dictum, 'democracy depends on the constant vigilance of citizens'. The reality of reckless migration from our community to foreign countries has driven many families into heavy financial burdens and a decline in faith. We need to explore the possibilities of becoming job creators and employers, rather than remaining merely job seekers. Although agriculture is often considered unprofitable, it is encouraging to note that exemplary initiatives in some eparchies have demonstrated that scientific farming can generate employment for many. I urge everyone to take up the action plans of the Community Empowerment Year to overcome the challenges of our times.

Apostolic Visitor for the Gulf Region

For a long time, we have been striving to establish pastoral structures proper to our Church for the Syro-Malabar faithful in the Gulf region. The appointment of an Apostolic Visitor by the Apostolic See for the Syro-Malabar faithful in the Arabian Peninsula marks a decisive step forward in the life and growth of our Church. The primary responsibility of the Apostolic Visitor is to prepare a comprehensive study report, in dialogue with

the local communities of our faithful and the existing pastoral structures, and to submit it to the Apostolic See in view of the erection of appropriate pastoral structures for the Syro-Malabar faithful in the Gulf region. I gratefully remember all Syro-Malabar faithful in the Gulf region who, despite limitations, make sacrifices to preserve the liturgical tradition of their mother Church. I request them to extend their wholehearted support to Rev. Fr. Jolly Vadakken, the Apostolic Visitor appointed by the Apostolic See.

Towards Unity through Reconciliation

The Synod resolved to implement the uniform mode of celebration in our Church, being convinced that a united community has the power to shape the course of history and that unity in the celebration of liturgy is an expression of deep-rooted fraternity among the faithful. However, it is painful that the unity envisioned has not yet been fully realized. The Synod views with empathy the efforts being made to implement step by step the decision of the Synod on the uniform mode of celebration of the Holy *Qurbana* in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly. The decision of the Synod on the uniform mode of celebration of the Holy *Qurbana*, approved by the Apostolic See, remains unchanged. The Church remembers with special gratitude those eparchies and individuals who willingly embraced, supported, and

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HOW CAN MALAYALIS BE MADE CIVICALLY CONSCIOUS?



Mr. Shinu Anatharakkal
(St. Augustine's Higher Secondary School, Ramapuram)

Do we Indians, especially *Malayalis*, have civic consciousness? Even hearing this question makes one angry, doesn't it? Such a question to a Keralite who takes pride in being part of the most educated, cultured, and tradition-rich people in India! As *Malayalis* blessed with numerous educational facilities and opportunities, there is no doubt that we are expected to uphold excellence. But what is the reality? Is it not true that *Malayalis* have no hesitation in throwing garbage on public roads, spitting in the middle of the street, overtaking long queues of vehicles through the wrong side while honking loudly, driving vehicles recklessly-whether intoxicated or not-at excessive speed, and saying or believing anything through social media and other modern platforms? All these clearly show that there are serious flaws in our collective civic awareness, even though we pride ourselves on being politically, socially, and culturally advanced. But this is not merely the fault of a few individuals; it is, in fact, a shortcoming of our educational system itself.

Even Indira Gandhi's Confession did not become a Lesson:

On Teachers' Day, September 5, 1984, in Delhi, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi lamented: "The greatest mistake that has happened in the field of education is that we could not teach our children about the freedom struggle." Having lived under colonial rule with countless restrictions and loss of freedom, when independence finally came, we were seized by an enthusiasm to cut off every bond. To stubbornly demand rights while closing our eyes to duties-that became our condition. Mahatma Gandhi repeatedly reminded us that for every privilege there is a corresponding responsibility, but no one listened. A river is not merely water; it also includes its banks. Without the banks that hold the water, there is no river. Here, we simply failed to emphasize enough the duty of the "banks." Could any ruler explain the importance of civic responsibility more clearly than this?



❖ **Everyone became aware of rights, but hardly anyone even thought about duties and responsibilities. In other words, if receiving is a right and giving is a duty, today's people have learned-and are being taught-only how to receive.**

Citizens Who Forgot Civic Duty:

The most painful reality is that those who were born and raised in independent India were able to grow up without understanding what civic duty truly means. Everyone became aware of rights, but hardly anyone even thought about duties and responsibilities. In other words, if receiving is a right and giving is a duty, today's people have learned-and are being taught-only how to receive. Europeans, however, are different. Passing civic consciousness on to the new generation is considered society's responsibility.

Therefore, they do not violate traffic rules, do not honk unnecessarily, do not spit in public places, and they respect the privacy of others. There are countries where military training and service are compulsory from a young age. This not only instills discipline and order in life, but also plants the awareness that however great a citizen may become, in times of need he must serve the nation. But what kind of training has India provided its sons so that it may rightfully demand service when necessary? As part of teaching social responsibility, even practices like the "Service Week," once implemented in schools, have been discontinued. Programs like NSS have been reduced merely to a means for obtaining grace marks.

What is Civic Duty?

Civic duty is a culture. It is not something received as a gift; it is something acquired. It is the awareness that one is part of society, and the conviction that

society grows through one's participation. Is it meaningful to insist on being a patriot without cultivating civic responsibility? In fact, duty is the other side of rights. One becomes an ideal citizen only by fulfilling duties. Article 51A speaks about the constitutional duties of citizens. And yet, even after decades of independence, have we succeeded in training our children in true civic consciousness?

There is Only One Solution: Civic Sense Must Become a Habit:

It is time to recognize the absence of proper civic consciousness in India, especially within Kerala society today. Considering that Christians were once a community that guided this society, it would be appropriate to study the fading of civic awareness among them. That is, the descendants of a community that took the lead in teaching *Malayalis* to read and write, imparted the meaning of social life, and crossed mountains and forests to discover new paths of life and mission, are now slow to recognize their own identity.

The reality is that civic consciousness has suffered injury. The energetic vitality of Christians, who were once the backbone of social transformation, is now diminishing-this is a serious truth. When one withdraws from public consciousness into personal safe circles, cracks begin to appear in one's responsibilities toward society as a citizen. Recovering the foresight and integrity shown by our predecessors is not merely the need of one community; rather, it is essential for the revival of Kerala's civic spirit. Only

by rediscovering its roots and historical mission can this community once again become a guiding light for the nation. Faith-formation classes must continually speak about citizenship and civic responsibility. Along with citizens' rights, the necessity of embracing duties and responsibilities must be clearly explained. Environmental protection, waste management, cleanliness initiatives-everything connected with civic sense must be passed on through catechetical instruction and family gatherings. Likewise, the relevance of patriotism must be discussed.

Most importantly, the Christian presence in Indian politics must become a subject of reflection. Compared to the 1970s, when Indian and Kerala society was filled with Christian names and influence, what is today's situation? Along with becoming leaders, it is equally important to become responsible followers. If all Christians begin to actively participate as members of political parties, the depth of anti-Christian sentiment will begin to decrease. Thus, Christians will be able to acquire and express a purified citizenship. This is an era when Christians face great difficulty in expressing their civic and identity consciousness. Yet, we are all children of this soil. How can a Christian, who established himself on this land two thousand years ago, be made to feel like an outsider? To prevent that from happening, we must carry within us the awareness that we are the children of this nation-civic consciousness must live within us. ■

IN UNITATE FIDEI (IN THE UNITY OF FAITH)

Rev. Dr. Varghese Kochuparambil

Introduction

On November 23, 2025, the Solemnity of Christ the King, coinciding with the 1700th anniversary of the Council, Pope Leo XIV issued the Apostolic Letter *In Unitate Fidei* (In the Unity of Faith) for the faithful. While embracing theological diversity, the Pope calls through this document for unity and reconciliation, encouraging the Churches to walk together toward deeper communion, cooperation, and witness.

Issued a few days prior to his Apostolic Visit to Turkey, the document offers profound reflections on the theological, social, and cultural relevance of the Council of Nicaea. Presented in twelve sections, the principal themes of the Apostolic Letter are outlined below.

1. Who is Jesus?

“Who do you say that I am?”-the question Jesus asked Peter at Caesarea Philippi remains relevant even today, the Pope reminds us. Arianism is not merely a historical error; its temptations persist even now. It manifests as the tendency to view Jesus as a mere intermediary, a being who is not fully divine. The denial of Christ’s divine nature in communion with the Father continues in various forms-seeing Jesus merely as a moral teacher, a spiritual leader, or a divine force. Therefore, the Pope reiterates without ambiguity the Council’s teaching on who Jesus is: the Firstborn of the Father, uncreated, and consubstantial with the Father.

2. The Divinity of the Son is Essential for Human Salvation

Only God can accomplish human salvation. If Jesus were not fully divine, salvation would not be possible. Citing the Fathers of the Church, the Pope explains the inner meaning of the Incar-



❖ **We must walk together toward unity and reconciliation among all Christians. Unity without diversity becomes authoritarianism, while diversity without unity leads to fragmentation, the Pope emphasizes. Christian unity does not impoverish us; rather, it enriches us.**

nation. The Incarnation is the fullest expression of God’s love for humanity, and through it, the human person-body and soul-is redeemed. If this truth is not professed, Christianity would be reduced to a mere moral-philosophical system.

3. Modern Forms of Arianism

For Arius, the Son was an intermediary being, incapable of fully knowing the Father and subject to change. According to the Pope, similar ideas persist today: Christianity is merely an inspiration, Jesus is an exceptional prophet, and God is only a spiritual energy. Through this Apostolic Letter, the Pope analyzes the salv-

ific value granted to humanity through God becoming man and reaffirms the reality of the Incarnation.

4. Unity of Faith: Communion in Truth

Complete unity in the truth that is Christ forms the foundation of relationships among the Churches. The Council of Nicaea guided the Church toward this truth. The Nicene Creed is not merely a historical event; it continually calls us to profess this faith anew. Only by remaining rooted in this faith can the Churches endure and move forward. The Pope stresses that the Church must never lose Christ. Only where Jesus is fully God and

fully man does Christianity remain the true Gospel.

Conclusion

We must walk together toward unity and reconciliation among all Christians. Unity without diversity becomes authoritarianism, while diversity without unity leads to fragmentation, the Pope emphasizes. Christian unity does not impoverish us; rather, it enriches us. As at Nicaea, this unity will be achieved through a long and demanding journey of mutual listening, acceptance, patience, repentance, and conversion-a profound spiritual challenge for all. ■

Continuation of page 3

implemented the uniform mode of celebration. In the particular situation of the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly, all are earnestly requested to cooperate with the Synod’s decision to implement the uniform mode of celebration step by step. I exhort all concerned to renounce the methods of protest that are unbecoming of Christians and to choose the path of reconciliation.

Timely Renewal of Seminary Formation

The Synod of Bishops discerned that, in changing circumstances, it is imperative to renew priestly formation in a timely manner in order to make the

Church’s mission more effective. Priestly formation that ignites zeal for evangelization is a necessity of the times. Along with spiritual depth and theological competence, candidates for the priesthood must develop mental maturity, social responsibility, and proficiency in modern technologies. Scientific research and in-depth studies on priestly formation have been conducted for several years under the guidance of the Synod. In the light of these studies, and following extensive discussion and consultation, the Synod has finalized a renewed formation programme. As the first phase of its implementation, the Synod has approved certain fundamental reforms in the minor seminary formation and en-

trusted the Commission for Clergy with the responsibility of implementing them with the participation and collaboration of all concerned.

Marching Forward in Pastoral Care and Evangelization

As the Syro-Malabar Church continues to expand its pastoral structures by erecting new Archeparchies outside the State of Kerala, our responsibility to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world continues to grow. While remaining firmly rooted in the heritage and spirituality of our Church, we are called to engage in meaningful dialogue with diverse cultures and to proclaim the love of Christ universally. To foster more lay

missionaries capable of undertaking this mission and to form Church members in such a way that they are proud of their faith and their Church, a lay missionary initiative titled ‘Jeevan Jyothi Syro-Malabar Lay Missionary Movement’ is being launched. As evangelization is our primary mission, families must show a special interest in promoting vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life.

Although the Jubilee Year of Incarnation is concluded, let us continue to nurture the seeds of hope and mercy sown in our hearts during this grace-filled time. May the words of Pope Leo XIV inspire us: “The pilgrimage of hope continues even as the Jubilee Year ends.” ■

160 YEARS OF DIVINE GRACE

CMC: The First Indigenous Women's Religious Congregation in the Kerala Church

This Religious Congregation was founded in Kerala, on 13th February 1866, under the name of Third Order of Carmelites Discalced (TOCD) in the Kerala Church, by Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the then Vicar General of the Syrian Church of Kerala. Rev. Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD, an Italian Carmelite missionary serving as the Provincial Delegate in Kerala at the time, is revered as the co-founder. The first members were Elishwa Vakayil (Blessed Mother Elishwa), Anna Vakayil, Thresia Vypissery and Elishwa Puthenangady (Clara).

A significant moment in the congregation's history occurred with the issuance of Pope Leo XIII's decree *Quod iam pridem* on 20 May 1887, which separated the Syrian Church from Latin jurisdiction. The decree that established the vicariates for the Syrians marked a significant turning point in the Congregation's history. On 18 April 1890, the Holy See transferred the Koonammavu Convent to the Vicariate of Thrissur. As a result, seven Latin-rite sisters from Koonammavu moved to Varappuzha on 17 September 1890, forming an independent community under Latin jurisdiction. Their successors are known today

as the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (CTC).

The congregations belonging to the Syrian Rite grew steadily under four Mother Generals across the dioceses of Thrissur, Ernakulam, Changanacherry, Pala, Kothamangalam, and Thalassery. On 16 November 1963, this congregation was united under one Mother General, and the diocesan units were reorganized as provinces. Later, on 2 March 1967, the congregation was elevated to pontifical status under the name "Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC)". The charism of the congregation is personal sanctity and the redemptive uplift of the people of God, especially women and children, through a harmonious integration of contemplation and action. Its essence is: "To become holy and to lead others to holiness."

Founded in Kerala to promote the spiritual, material, and vocational uplift of ordinary people, particularly women and children who were denied education in those times, the congregation now enters its 160th year of God's grace. Today, 6000 sisters, organized into 25 provinces and 4 regions, serve across Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, South Ameri-



ca, and Oceania, continuing to respond faithfully to Christ's command: "Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to all creation." With courageous dedication, they shine as bearers of the Gospel's light, meeting every challenge with resilience, while 343 new members, inspired by the congregation's enduring spiritual vitality, are presently undergoing formation for devoted service.

November 23, 2014, remains a day engraved in golden letters in the history of the CMC, marking the momentous canonization of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the congregation's founder and Saint Euphrasia, its cherished member, both raised to the honors of sainthood for their exemplary lives of holiness.

The life example of Mother Elishwa who was elevated to the rank of blessed and the servant of God Mother Mary Celine, ones as a realization of the desire of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara that the Kerala Church be enriched with saints, is worthy of imitation.

The principal apostolates include Christian Formation, Education, Healing Ministry, Social Uplift and Media Apostolate. Rooted in the ancient cultural heritage of India, inheriting the St. Thomas Christian tradition and flourishing as a Carmelite religious family, the CMC continues to glorify God through its life of service anchored in God's providence, faithfully preserving its original spirit and remaining true to its identity and mission.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT APPROACHES TO OVERCOME ALCOHOL DEPENDENCE



Rev. Dr. Sijon Kuzhikkattumyalil

Alcohol dependence (Alcoholism) refers to a condition in which drinking goes beyond a person's control. The primary feature of addiction is loss of control-drinking excessively and compulsively. There is a constant craving for alcohol. When alcohol is unavailable, withdrawal symptoms such as trembling of the hands and legs, excessive sweating, sleeplessness, and irritability may occur. Alcohol gradually takes priority over everything else in life. It is at this point that the relevance of psychological treatment approaches becomes increasingly important.

One must also accept the reality that alcohol consumption can lead to fatal illnesses such as alcoholic cirrhosis. This is not a sudden death; rather, it often results in years of prolonged illness and suffering. Alcohol can also destroy memory to such an extent that a person may fail to recognize loved ones and wander aimlessly. It is important to note that,



fearing the loss of mental peace, many tend to deny these realities or attempt to escape from them (denial).

Once these realities are accepted, a firm decision to stop drinking must be made. Thereafter, consulting a mental health professional is essential. Sudden cessation of alcohol may lead to tremors and other withdrawal symptoms, which require medication. Moreover, stopping alcohol abruptly can cause several physical and psychological disturbances. This is why many people relapse after attempting to quit once. However, these discomforts can be effectively managed

with appropriate medication, reducing the urge to resume drinking.

It takes about one week for the body to completely eliminate toxic substances caused by alcohol consumption. During this period, detoxifying medicines, vitamin B supplements, adequate rest, nutritious food, and plenty of water are required. Psychiatrists are specialists trained in managing this phase of treatment. This stage is known as detoxification. Once a patient successfully completes detoxification, preventive measures are necessary to avoid relapse. Today, medications that reduce alcohol craving (anti-craving drugs) are available. With regular use of these medicines, a significant percentage of individuals are able to lead an alcohol-free life.

A common question that troubles alcohol-dependent individuals is: *What will replace alcohol in my life if I quit?* At this stage, the support of family members and friends becomes extremely valuable. The individual may need help in developing new occupations, recreational activities, and healthy friendships. Counseling support is also essential. As far as possible, temptations from friends and alcohol-serving social functions should be avoided. Participation in such events is advisable only after a long period of abstinence and after gaining strong

self-confidence.

If a person drinks once after a long period of abstinence, it should be treated strictly as a single lapse. The argument, "I have already had a drink, so I might as well continue," is a dangerous rationalization. One instance of drinking does not necessitate continued drinking. Family members-especially spouses-can motivate individuals to quit alcohol by approaching them with gentleness, understanding, and compassion. Once alcohol consumption is stopped, it is important to reinforce the effort with greater love and care.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is a fellowship of individuals striving to overcome alcohol dependence. Many benefit from this group through mutual support, sharing experiences, and open dialogue.

Spirituality is a powerful remedy for those struggling with alcohol dependence. The renowned psychologist Carl Gustav Jung recounts that after exhausting all forms of treatment without success, guiding an alcoholic toward spirituality produced remarkable results. An alcohol-free life is a form of resurrection. Liberation from alcohol, which may have been a long-standing part of one's life, is a prolonged and challenging process. Yet, with firm determination and perseverance, it is achievable. Once people begin to experience life without alcohol, many come to relish it deeply. It offers a renewed place in society and gives life a new meaning.

CANONICAL ASPECTS OF BETROTHAL (MANASAMMATHAM)



CANON LAW

Rev. Dr. Joshy Kulathumkal

In the ancient traditions of the Eastern Churches, the promise of marriage (betrothal) prior to the wedding is based on the traditions and liturgical rites of each Church *Sui Iuris* (can. 782 §1, CCEO). Therefore, the particular law of each Church regulates this matter. Among St. Thomas Christians, this was known by names such as 'Paranjokkal', 'Manasammatham', 'Othukalyanam', and 'Koodikkazhcha'. The parents, relatives, and friends of the bride and bridegroom are the primary participants in this ceremony. The law does not mandate that a marriage must be conducted simply because a promise of marriage was made. However, the

other party must be compensated for any losses incurred as a result of the betrothal (can. 782 §2, CCEO).

The Code of Particular Law of the Syro-Malabar Church discusses betrothal in articles 154 to 162. The betrothal should be conducted before the marriage. It must be scheduled in a way that allows sufficient time for the publication of marriage banns. The betrothal can be conducted in the parish church in the presence of the Local Hierarchy or the Parish Priest of either the bride or the bridegroom, or before a priest or deacon delegated by them, and in the presence of two witnesses. Usually, this promise is made at the bride's parish church. However, according to the convenience of the bride and bridegroom and with the permission of the Parish Priest, it may be held at another church. Permission from the Local Hierarchy is required to conduct it in places other than a church.

The betrothal should only be conducted after receiving the betrothal certificate (Form A) or a similar document. The rite of betrothal must be performed according to the liturgical texts approved by the Synod of the Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church. Since the betrothal is only a sacramental, it is not celebrated along with the Holy Qurbana. If it is conducted on Sundays or other days of obligation, the Holy Qurbana may be celebrated either before or after this ceremony. The details of the betrothal must be recorded in the relevant register and signed by the bride, bridegroom, witnesses, and the celebrant. After the betrothal, the Parish Priest of the bridegroom or bride must be informed of the matter through the publication of banns notice (Form B). For mixed marriages, the Local Hierarchy can decide whether to allow a betrothal after understanding the nature of the application. Betrothal may be permitted for mixed marriages solemnized with dispensation from the Catholic form of marriage.

nized with dispensation from the Catholic form of marriage.

If there are just reasons, the Local Hierarchy of either party may grant an exemption from conducting the betrothal. It is sufficient to submit an application for this with the attestation of the respective Parish Priests of both parties. In urgent circumstances, the betrothal may also be conducted in writing. A written betrothal is when the bride and bridegroom, in the presence of two witnesses, express their consent for the proposed marriage in writing before their respective Parish Priests. The Parish Priests must then inform each other of the mutual consent. Only the Local Hierarchy has the authority to permit such a written betrothal in urgent situations based on a written request. If a party does not wish to proceed with the marriage after the betrothal, that party may marry another person after obtaining permission from the Local Hierarchy.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON FREEDOM



EXPLORING BIBLE QUESTIONS

Rev. Dr. Tom Olikkarott

The foundation of human dignity lies in the freedom of choice granted by God. The freedom envisioned by the Bible is not "the right to do anything," but rather "the ability to do what is true and good." The Bible clarifies the following fundamental concepts regarding freedom:

1. The Origin of Freedom: God did not create man as a machine, but as a free being. Freedom is essential to love and to be loved. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17). The Bible teaches that this human freedom is a gift from God. "In the beginning, the Lord created man; and He left him in the power of his own inclination [freedom]" (Sirach 15:14).

2. Responsible Choice Along with freedom: God has entrusted man with responsibility. God places life and death, good and evil, before us and desires that we choose life. "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity" (Deuteronomy 30:15). 3. Freedom Must Not Become Slavery: St. Paul the Apostle reminds us that freedom should not be used as a cover-up for fleshly desires. True freedom is liberation from sin. "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another" (Galatians 5:13). 4. Freedom Through Truth: Man becomes truly free only when he knows divine truth. Christian freedom finds its fulfillment in being liberated from selfishness and the bonds of sin to live according to God's will. "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). Human freedom is realized when it aligns with the will of

God. Freedom used for selfishness leads to destruction, while freedom used for the good of others leads to eternal life. While Biblical thoughts on freedom may seem simple, a deeper reflection reveals certain verses that appear paradoxical or filled with practical challenges. 1. The Paradox Between Slavery and Freedom: "Honor everyone... As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil" (1 Peter 2:16-17). It may seem contradictory to be told to "be free" while simultaneously being asked to live as "slaves (servants) of God." In the Biblical view, freedom is not about being devoid of all control, but rather about whose control you are under. True freedom is being liberated from the slavery of sin and coming under the loving care of God. Here, "servant" does not imply slavery out of fear, but a surrender out of love. 2. The Limits of Unrestricted Freedom: "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful for me, but I will

not be dominated by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12). The statement "all things are lawful" is often misinterpreted. It can potentially be seen as a license to do anything. However, St. Paul clarifies that Christian freedom is self-regulated. I may have the right to do something, but if that action does not lead me or others toward the good, it is not true freedom. A "permission" to do something that destroys us actually turns us into a slave of that very thing. 3. Relinquishing Freedom for the Sake of Love: "Take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak" (1 Corinthians 8:9). One might ask: why should how I use my freedom affect others? Practically, setting aside one's rights for the sake of another is difficult. Yet, this is the supreme model of Christian civic sense. If my actions cause the faith or thoughts of another to stumble, then "love for the brother" takes precedence over my "rights." In other words, the greatest freedom is the freedom to give up one's own freedom for the sake of love. The freedom envisioned by the Bible does not arise from self-centeredness, but from God-centered love. ■



FAMILY CORNER

When children fail to become what parents desire or drift away in disobedience, it deeply wounds the hearts of fathers and mothers. Most parents react by losing their temper and resorting to punishment when they discover their children's mistakes. However, Saint John Bosco teaches that this is not true parenting.

The saint, who guided countless young people along the right path, firmly

NOT PUNISHMENT, BUT LOVE

believed that transformation should be achieved through love, not punishment. Only when children understand that they are loved do even corrective measures become healing. For a child who feels unloved, punishment feels like violence.

Many parents physically punish children for their misbehavior, but Don Bosco strongly opposed this practice. He categorically rejected corporal punishment, observing that it destroys a child's self-confidence and self-esteem. He be-

lieved that the soul cannot be purified through punishments that wound the heart. Another key principle he taught was that dialogue is more beneficial than punishment. Speak with the child: Why did you do this? What led to this situation? Instead of conducting a post-mortem on the fault, seek the cause behind it. This helps correct the child.

Even if a child commits a mistake, correction should never be public; it must remain private. Rebuking a child in front of others is equivalent to hu-

miliation and can damage personality development. Children often repeat mistakes—they fall and rise again—but they should never be rejected. Parents should ask themselves: How many times have we fallen? Are our children really more guilty than we are?

Never lose hope in your children because of their mistakes. Lift them up with trust, relying on God's grace. Another path is to lead children to God by cultivating prayer. Encourage them to trust in prayer. Above all, what matters most is the exemplary life of parents themselves. Strive to live as role models before your children—Saint Don Bosco reminds us. ■

SYRO-MALABAR SYNOD CALLS FOR RADICAL RENEWAL IN PRIESTLY FORMATION



Kakkanad: To make the Church's mission more effective in the face of changing circumstances, the First session of the 34th Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church decided to introduce timely and radical renewal in priestly formation. The Synod was held at Mount Saint Thomas, the Major Archbishop's Curia, from January 6 to 10, and was inaugurated by Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil.

In his inaugural address, the Major Archbishop reminded that the Church's observance of

the "Year of Community Empowerment" is not a mere slogan but a commitment rooted in the Gospel. The vitality and credibility of the Church should be measured by the compassion shown to the poor and the marginalized. He called for 2026 to become a year in which pastoral priorities clearly reflect care for the poor, farmers, and the unjustly treated. The Synod also gratefully recalled the Church's growth, including the reorganization of the boundaries of twelve Eparchies and the establishment of new provinces.

The Synod observed that priestly formation which ignites zeal for evangelization is a necessity of the times. Along with spiritual and theological knowledge, seminarians must grow in psychological maturity, social responsibility, and competence in modern technologies. Based on academic research and studies conducted under the leadership of the Synod, a renewed formation programme was finalized. As the first phase, major reforms will be implemented during the minor seminary stage. The Synodal Commission

for Clergy, was entrusted with this responsibility.

The Synod expressed deep concern over the rising intolerance and acts of violence against the Christian community and missionaries engaged in social and healthcare services across various parts of India. It observed that the continuous violation of civil rights and minority security guaranteed by the Constitution is a threat to democracy. The Church declares its solidarity with everyone who continues to serve with the joy of the Gospel amidst persecutions and challenges.

The Synod called upon all members of the Church to cooperate with the efforts for liturgical unity. While standing firm on the decision to implement the uniform mode of celebrating the Holy Qurbana, the Synod clarified that it would sympathetically consider the emotional and practical situations that currently hinder its full implementation.

The Synod emphasized that

missionary work is the most important mission of the Church. To bring lay faithful into the mainstream of evangelization and to coordinate various existing lay missionary groups, it was decided to form a movement called Jeevan Jyothi 'Lay Missionary Movement' under the leadership of the Commission for the Church's Missionary Activities. This aims to ensure the active participation of the laity in missionary activities and to provide them with the necessary guidance and support.

The Synod congratulated Mar Sebastian Vadakel, Mar Kuriakose Bharanikulangara, Mar Sebastian Vaniyapurackal, and Mar Prince Antony Panengadan on assuming office as heads of new provinces, and welcomed newly appointed bishops Mar James Patteril CMF and Mar Joseph Thachaparambath CMI. The Synod, which began with a retreat led by Archbishop Mar Joseph Pampally, was attended by 53 bishops from India and abroad. The Synod ended on 10th January 2026

A RADIANT STAR OF THE NORTH INDIAN MISSION; FAREWELL TO MAR DOMINIC KOKKAT!



Gorakhpur: The faithful community bid a tearful farewell to Bishop Mar Dominic Kokkat (93), the first Bishop of the Eparchy of Gorakhpur, who authored new chapters of missionary service on the soil of North India. The funeral rites held at St. Joseph's Cathedral, Gorakhpur, were presided over by His Beatitude Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil, the Father and Head of the Syro-Malabar Church, as the principal celebrant. The Archbishop of Agra, Most Rev. Raphy Manjaly, delivered the homily. Bishop Mar Mathew Nellikkunnel CST of Gorakhpur, Archbishop Mar Kuriakose Bharanikulangara of Faridabad, Bishop Emir-

itus Mar Thomas Thuruthimatom were the concelebrants.

From Vaikom to Gorakhpur: The Story of a Calling

Born on 23 February 1922 at Vaikom in Kottayam district, Mar Dominic Kokkat was a personality who dedicated his entire century-long life to the glory of the Kingdom of God. He became a member of the Little Flower Congregation (CST) in 1953 and was ordained a priest in 1960. After serving in various responsibilities such as Vice Rector of the Aluva CST Seminary, Superior of the Punjab Mission, and Deputy Secretary of the CBCI, he was appointed in 1984 as the shepherd of the newly established Eparchy of Gorakhpur.

Twenty-Two Years of Pastoral Ministry

For a long span of 22 years (1984–2006), he led the Eparchy of Gorakhpur, not merely as an administrator, but as a true companion of the poor and the helpless. His love for the marginalized inspired him to initiate numerous service-oriented

works. He worked for the empowerment of women and provided leadership in establishing schools, colleges, hospitals, and social welfare centres in all the districts of the Gorakhpur region. Moreover, he founded the *Purvanchal Grameen Seva Samiti* in 1986 and guided the establishment of Fatima Hospital in 1995.

A Life that Spread the Light of Christ: The Major Archbishop's Tribute

Recalling Mar Dominic Kokkat as a radiant star who upheld throughout his life his chosen motto, "The Lord is my light and my salvation," Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil paid homage, saying: As a missionary, he carried the Gospel to new frontiers; as a bishop, he guided his people with wisdom and courage; as a religious, he bore joyful and faithful witness to evangelical counsels. His heart burned with love for the poor and the marginalized, and he offered his very life as a generous sacrifice for the building up of the Church. The Ma-



for Archbishop added that he showed the world how the simple spirituality of Saint Thérèse could be lived practically in missionary ministry. He further noted that the establishment of the congregation "Little Sisters of Saint Thérèse" stands as a sign of his far-sighted vision.

Hundreds Joined the Final Journey



Bishops, priests, religious and hundreds of faithful, gathered to offer their final respects to their beloved Bishop. As the life of a committed servant of God comes to its close, the seeds of love and service he sowed remain in the soil of Gorakhpur as a great inspiration for generations to come.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT YEAR INAUGURATED



Kakkanad: A community that is firmly rooted in faith and strengthened by unity has the power to change the course of history, said Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil. He was speaking while inaugurating the Church-level launch of the

Syro-Malabar Community Empowerment Year 2026 at Mount St. Thomas, the headquarters of the Syro-Malabar Church.

The Major Archbishop reminded that a community becomes a transformative force in history only when personal

faith experiences are translated into active engagement for the common good. He added that the true strength of the Church lies in a shared vision that nurtures eparchies, consecrated communities, families, youth, and educational and social in-

stitutions toward a common goal, enabling them to transform the present age in the light of Gospel values.

Representatives from various ecclesial levels participated in the inaugural ceremony held ahead of the first session of the

Thirty-Fourth Synod. Public Affairs Commission Chairman Archbishop Mar Andrews Thazhath delivered the introductory address, while Commission Convener Archbishop Mar Thomas Tharayil welcomed the gathering.

Synod Secretary Archbishop Mar Joseph Pamplany, Public Affairs Commission Secretary Fr. James Kokkavayalil, Vincentian Congregation Superior General Fr. Paul Puthuva, SABS Superior General Mother Rosily Jose Ozhukayil, Mathruvedi Global President Beena Joshi, Youth Organisation President Adv. Sam Sunny, and others attended. Catholic Congress Global President Rajeev Kochuparambil delivered the vote of thanks.

COMMUNITY CONSCIOUSNESS MUST BECOME A SENSE OF PRIDE: ARCHBISHOP MAR THOMAS THARAYIL



Changanacherry: The activities of the Syro-Malabar Church's Community Empowerment Year will serve as fuel for the reconstruction of both

the community and society, said Archbishop Mar Thomas Tharayil of Changanacherry. He was inaugurating the Archeparchy-level launch of the Com-

munity Empowerment Year at St. Antony's Forane Church, Kurumpanadom.

The Archbishop noted that the historic contributions of the Christian community were not limited to Christians alone but were made for the benefit of society at large. He pointed out that the advancement of Ker-

ala in many sectors was made possible by the significant participation of the Christian community.

Catholic Congress Global President Rajeev Kochuparambil, Syro-Malabar Public Affairs Commission Secretary Fr. James Kokkavayalil, Catholic Congress Archeparchy Presi-

dent Biju Sebastian, and Pastoral Council Secretary Prof. Rekha Mathews addressed the gathering. *Margamkali*, *Parichamuttu*, and *Ramban Pattu* were performed, and songs were presented by the Archeparchy youth band Ruhaband. The conference concluded with a fellowship meal featuring traditional Nasrani cuisine.

BEGINNING OF THE COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT YEAR IN THE EPARCHY OF THAMARASSERY

Koodaranji: The eparchy-level Community Empowerment Year observance of the Eparchy of Thamarassery, was held on January 2 at St. Sebastian's Church, Koodaranji and was inaugurated by the Global President of the Catholic Congress, Rajeev Kochuparambil. Dr. Kurias Kumbalakkuzhi delivering the keynote address. Mar Remigiose Inchananiyil

the Bishop of the Eparchy of Thamarassery called upon the faithful to awaken themselves to work actively for the empowerment of the community and to organize themselves and engage in an enlightened struggle. Dr. Chacko Kalamparampil, President of the Catholic Congress Thamarassery Eparchy, Pastoral Council Secretary Benny Lukose, and leaders representing

various organizations also addressed the gathering. Cultural programs including a *Margamkali* performed by 125 mothers, a *Chavittunatakam* presented by KCYM, and a *Parichamuttu-kali* were staged. Eparchy Vicar General Msgr. Abraham Vayalil, Chancellor Fr. Sebastian Kavalakkat, Eparchy-level Director of the Community Empowerment Year Fr. Sabin Thoomullil,



Vicar of St. Sebastian's Church, Koodaranji, Fr. Sebastian Puriyadathil, Dr. Treesa Liz Sebas-

tian, Swapna Girish, and others provided leadership for the event.

CHRISTIAN CHURCH COLLECTIVE AGAINST ATTEMPTS AT COMMUNAL POLARISATION



Thirssur: The collective of Christian Churches in the Thrissur, Palakkad, and Coimbatore regions expressed deep concern over recent incidents in Kerala that are creating communal rivalry and division, and emphasized that the Christian community must remain in constant vigilance in the pres-

ent situation. The continued non-publication of the Justice J. B. Koshy Commission report in the state, unjust discrimination in minority benefits, double standards in the education sector, and other unresolved issues continue to cause grave anxiety among the Christian community. The meeting expressed seri-

ous concern over the deliberate sidelining of the significant contributions made by the Christian community to the larger society. The erosion of religious freedom and minority rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India, along with the saffronisation of all sectors, cannot be justified, and the attacks on Christian missionaries in various parts of the country as well as the disruption of celebrations including Christmas were strongly condemned as highly objectionable. The gathering reiterated the need for various Christian Church communi-

ties and faith groups to stand united and to collectively resist these challenges. The meeting was held under the leadership of the Christian Church collective of the Thrissur, Palakkad, and Coimbatore regions in connection with the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, and was inaugurated by Thrissur Archeparchy Archbishop Mar Andrews Thazhath. Thozhiyoor Independent Syrian Church President Cyril Mar Baselios, Jacobite Church Thrissur Eparchy Metropolitan Kuriakose Mor Cleemis, Mar

Bosco Puthur, Chaldean Syrian Church Vicar General Fr. Jose Vengassery, Orthodox Church representative Fr. Stephen George, and CSI Church representative Fr. Johnson George addressed the gathering. Bishop Mar Peter Kochupurackal, head of the Eparchy of Palakkad, offered the welcome, Syro-Malabar Church Gulf Visitor Fr. Jolly Vadakken delivered the vote of thanks, and Thrissur Archeparchy Pastoral Council Secretary Joshi Vadakken presented the resolution.

NEW LEADERSHIP FOR THE INTER-CHURCH COUNCIL



Kollam: The General Body meeting of the Inter-Church Council, the official forum of the Episcopal Churches in Kerala, was held on January 13 at the CSI Bishop's House. Cardinal

Baselios Mar Cleemis, the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malankara Church, was elected as the new Chairman of the Council, Joseph Mar Divannasios Metropolitan as the General Secre-

tary, Fr. Cyril Thomas Thayyil as the Deputy Secretary, and Nibu Jacob Varghese and Adv. Ansel Komat as the Joint Secretaries. The meeting proceedings were held under the chairmanship of

Cardinal Mar George Alencherry, who had been serving as the Chairman of the Inter-Church Council. The session began with a prayer led by Catholicos Bava Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, the head of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, and Bishop Rt. Rev. Jose George extended the welcome address. In his presidential message, Cardinal Mar George Alencherry called upon the Inter-Church Council-com-

prising member Churches such as the Syro-Malabar Church, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church, Latin Catholic Church, CSI Church, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, Chaldean Syrian Church of the East, Malabar Independent Syrian Church, and the Knanaya Syrian Community-to provide leadership in facing and resolving together the crises affecting Christians and the nation. Metropolitan Augin Mar Kuriakose offered the vote of thanks.

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY CONCLUDES



Koothattukulam: The Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul the Apostle and the concluding conference of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity were held on January 25 at the Holy

Family Forane Church. The ecumenical gathering was inaugurated by Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil of the Syro-Malabar Church by lighting the Unity Lamp. In his inau-

gural address, the Major Archbishop urged that the Churches stand together and work in unity to find solutions to the challenges faced by Christians. The eight-day Unity Week was organized under the leadership of Fr. Daniel Bethel, Secretary of the KCBC Ecumenical Commission, Adv. Dr. Prakash P. Thomas, General Secretary of the KCC, and Fr. Cyril Thom-

as Thayyil, Deputy Secretary of the Inter-Church Council. For the second consecutive year, the Unity Octave was jointly conducted by the Inter-Church Council, the KCBC Ecumenical Commission, and the Kerala Council of Churches. At the global level, the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity of the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches

jointly guide this initiative. The Unity Octave began on January 18 at Chengannur under the leadership of the Mar Thoma Church and was held on different days under the auspices of the Orthodox Church, Latin Church, CSI Church, Jacobite Church, Syro-Malankara Church, and the Knanaya Syrian Community. The eighth day, led by the Syro-Malabar Church, concluded with Evening Prayer, marking the completion of the observance.

KANJIRAPPALLY EPARCHIAL PASTORAL COUNCIL INAUGURATED



Kanjirappally: The 13th Pastoral Council of the Eparchy was inaugurated by Archbishop Mar Sebastian Vaniyapurackal of the Kalyan Eparchy. In his inau-

gural address, he said that along with the four written Gospels, there is also an unwritten Gospel, which is the Gospel-centered life of the laity, and that

Pastoral Council members must put this into practice. Kanjirappally Eparchy Bishop Mar Jose Pulickal presided over the function. He reminded the members that each person builds up the Church by fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to them at home and in society. He also noted that, as in the Church, the laity are greater in number in the Pastoral Council as well, and that Council members have the mission of fostering the growth of the Church through

creative suggestions and practical approaches. In his blessing message, Bishop Emeritus Mar Mathew Arackal of the Kanjirappally Eparchy said that the Pastoral Council is a forum of open listening, and it is through such listening that the Church grows.

Dr. Bino P. Jose assumed office as the Secretary of the 13th Pastoral Council of the Kanjirappally Eparchy, and Adv. Shansi Philip took charge as Joint Secretary. Pastoral Council Secretary Dr. Bino P. Jose

led a discussion class on the topic "Church and Society." Fr. Bobby Alex Mannamplackal served as the moderator. Rev. Dr. Joseph Vellamattam, the Eparchial Protosyncellus, Rev. Dr. Sebastian Kollamkunnel, the Eparchial Syncellus, and Adv. Shansi Philip delivered speeches. Fr. Mathew Souryamkuzhi, Fr. Philip Thadathil, Sr. Treesa SH, and former Pastoral Council Secretary Dr. Juby Mathew provided leadership for the programme.

INFARM DISTRIBUTES 'VEER KISAN BHOOMIPUTRA' AWARDS



Podimattam: Stating that farmers are the true custodians of the environment and that

protecting them is essential, Jose K. Mani MP inaugurated the 'Veer Kisan Bhoomiputra'

award ceremony organized to honour farmers above the age of 75 as part of the silver jubilee celebrations of INFARM. The event was held at St. Mary's Auditorium, Podimattam. A total of 921 senior farmers from various districts of Kerala were honoured with mementos and

headgear. The organizers informed that 485 farmers who could not attend the function would be honoured at their homes under the leadership of local units. INFARM National Chairman Fr. Thomas Mattamundayil presided over the function. Mar Thomas Tharayil,

Archbishop of Changanacherry, Thomas Mar Koorilos, Archbishop of Thiruvalla, Mar Jose Pulickal, Bishop of Kanjirappally, Mar Mathew Arackal, Bishop Emeritus of Kanjirappally, Dean Kuriakose MP, and INFARM office-bearers Fr. George Pottackal and Jose Idappattu addressed the gathering.

SOCIAL SECURITY PENSION: CONFERENCE OF MAJOR SUPERIORS WELCOMES GOVERNMENT DECISION

Kottayam: The Kerala Conference of Major Superiors welcomed the government's corrective action in withdrawing an unjust order which had stipulated that missionaries, and religious men and women, priests, and nuns residing in institutions under religious administration are not eligible for social security pensions, and

that those receiving pensions should be removed from the beneficiary list. The statement was issued by the President of the Kerala Conference of Major Superiors, Sr. Ardra SIC.

She noted that excluding a section of citizens from benefits to which they are entitled, based on their religion or state of life, is unconstitutional and a viola-

tion of fundamental rights. Following such a declaration, it was observed that some individuals raised arguments claiming that Christian religious are receiving undue benefits and that the Church does not protect nuns. It must be examined whether opportunities for such false accusations were deliberately created.

This scheme, which is legit-

imately available to any unmarried woman without a stable income and who does not receive government salary or other benefits, is now being reorganized so that eligible religious persons of all faiths may also benefit. In such a context, propaganda and claims that attempt to spread the misconception that the government is granting undue benefits exclusively to nuns are

childish and capable of fostering social hostility.

Sr. Ardra further added that the eagerness shown by some to portray Christian religious merely as "religious workers" is contrary to reality, and that no one can ignore the immense contributions of religious men and women in the fields of social service, culture, healthcare, and education.

EPARCHY OF IDUKKI HONOURS MAR GEORGE PUNNAKOTTIL



Murickassery: As part of the *Navathi* (90th birthday) celebrations of Bishop Emeritus Mar George Punnakottil, former Bishop of the Kothamangalam Eparchy, the Idukki Eparchy family offered him a warm and affectionate felicitation at Murickassery. Idukki Eparchy Bishop Mar John Nellikunnel said that Mar Punnakottil was the architect of modern Idukki after

the post-migration period, and a visionary who worked tirelessly for the overall development of the High Range region. He provided courageous leadership in establishing educational institutions, hospitals, roads, and various government facilities in this area. While serving as the Bishop of the undivided Kothamangalam Eparchy from 1977 to 2003, Mar Punnakottil

showed special care and concern for the High Range region.

Speaking on the occasion, Mar George Punnakottil said that the people of Idukki are marked by deep faith, strong determination, and readiness for service. He recalled that Idukki's growth is the result of the people working sincerely in close cooperation with leadership, and that political leader-

ship has always supported the development of Idukki. Mar Punnakottil was ceremonially received in the fore church courtyard. At 10 a.m., a solemn Holy *Qurbana* was celebrated with Mar George Punnakottil as the main celebrant, with Idukki Eparchy Bishop Mar John Nellikunnel and all the priests of the Eparchy concelebrating.

At the felicitation meeting, Bishop Mar John Nellikunnel conveyed the official honours and greetings of the Eparchy. Vicar Generals Msgr. Jose Karivelikkal, Msgr. Abraham Purayatt, and Msgr. Jose Narit-hookkil spoke on the occasion. Representing the consecrated

community, Rev. Sr. Dr. Teslin SH, Provincial Superior of the Sacred Heart Sisters, Idukki Navjyothi Province, addressed the gathering. Eparchial Pastoral Council Secretary George Koyikkal spoke on behalf of the laity. Office-bearers of various pious associations offered felicitations. All the priests, religious, Pastoral Council members, trustees, and church workers from all parishes of the Eparchy participated. The programme was coordinated under the leadership of Eparchial Chancellor Rev. Dr. Martin Ponpanal, Fr. Joseph Thachukunnel, Fr. Sebastian Vadakel, Fr. Jins Karakkattu, Sam Sassi, and Shirley Judy.

FR. JACOB CHAKKATHRA APPOINTED SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR OF FIMCAP ASIA



Kakkanad: Fr. Jacob Chakkathra, Secretary of the Syro-Malabar Youth Movement Commission and Global Director of SMYM, has been appointed as the Spiritual Director of the Asian region of FIMCAP

(International Federation of Catholic Parochial Youth Movements), a global federation of various Catholic youth organizations functioning under the Vatican Dicastery for Family and Life. The selection was

made during an online meeting of representatives of various youth movements in Asia.

SMYM became a new member of FIMCAP during the General Assembly held in Georgia in August last year. FIMCAP is

an organization affiliated with the United Nations. Fr. Jacob Chakkathra, who has been actively involved in youth ministry for the past ten years, is a priest of the Archeparchy of Changanacherry. His appointment is regarded as a recognition received by the Syro-Malabar Church.

CATHOLIC TEACHERS' GUILD PROTESTS DELAY IN APPOINTMENT APPROVAL



Thrissur: Protesting the delay in granting approval for

teacher appointments in aided schools and the discrimination

shown by the government in matters related to reservation for persons with disabilities, the Catholic Teachers' Guild organized a four-day protest sit-in in front of the Thrissur Corporation Office. The concluding meeting was inaugurated by Auxiliary Bishop Mar Tony Neelankavil of the Thrissur Archeparchy. He stated that the

government's approach towards the teaching community is cruel and inhuman, and that such actions do not befit a democratic government. He called for urgent government intervention in the issues faced by teachers who have been working for years without salary, warning that democratic Kerala would respond strongly against in-

justice. He reminded that this protest is only the beginning of a new phase of struggle. Thrissur Corporation Mayor Dr. Niji Justin and Sanish Kumar Joseph MLA were the chief guests. DCC President Joseph Tajet and BJP State Vice President B. Gopalakrishnan addressed the gathering. State President of the Teachers' Guild, Tom Mathew, presided over the function.

MANAGERS' ASSOCIATION DEMANDS APPROVAL FOR AIDED SCHOOL APPOINTMENTS

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Aided School Managers' Association President Dr. Varkkey Attupurath and Secretary Fr. Sijo Elamkunnappuzha demanded that approval be granted to appointments made from 2021 onwards in additional posts in aided schools and to those appointed in leave vacancies exceeding one year. According to the 2016 amendment to the Kerala Rules, man-

agements were required to surrender certain categories of posts to the government for the appointment of protected teachers, including posts under the "one-east-one" pattern, leave vacancies exceeding one year, vacancies in schools with insufficient student strength, and one vacancy arising in newly established schools. Based on this, a government order issued on February 6, 2021 decided to

grant approval to those appointed in additional posts from 2016 up to the date of the order. However, the order did not clearly state provisions regarding approval for appointments made in additional posts arising after February 7, 2021. Only if the relaxation granted through the February 2021 order continues will those appointed from 2021 onwards receive approval. Teachers working for years

in additional posts sanctioned through staff fixation remain without approval and salary. The government argues that granting approval would cause additional financial burden, but over the past few years, due to a decline in student numbers, thousands of teaching posts in the aided sector have already been lost. The number of existing posts being abolished exceeds the creation of new posts.

Another crisis is the shortage of sufficient protected teachers to be appointed in posts reserved for them. As per the Supreme Court verdict dated September 1, 2025, thousands of teachers currently in service stand to lose their jobs. For these teachers to continue in service, strong intervention is required from the state government both before the Supreme Court and at the administrative level, the association office-bearers stated.



Most Rev. Dominik Schwaderlapp, Auxiliary Bishop of the Eparchy of Cologne, Germany, along with his delegation, visited the Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil.



His Grace Archbishop Carlo Maria Polvani, the Secretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education and Fr. Pierre Sulbert, Rector of the International College of Maria Mater Ecclesiae were received at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkannad.



Bishops Mar Mathew Arackal, Mar Jacob Angadiath who celebrate Episcopal Silver Jubilee and Mar John Vadakel who celebrates the Sacerdotal Golden Jubilee were honoured during the Syond of bishops.

YOUTH MUST ENGAGE IN ALL SECTORS OF SOCIAL LIFE: MAJOR ARCHBISHOP



Kakkanad: Syro-Malabar youth must actively participate and have representation in all spheres of society, including agriculture, business, politics, and government service, said Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil. He was inaugurating the meeting of SMYM Eparchy Di-

rectors and Presidents held on January 22 at the Central Office of the Syro-Malabar Church.

The Major Archbishop emphasized that youth are the strength of the Church and that empowering young people is an essential priority during the Community Empower-

ment Year. Presiding over the meeting, Syro-Malabar Youth Commission Chairman Mar Peter Kochupurackal remarked that what is needed today is not merely intense youth but youth with spiritual fervor and missionary zeal.

The meeting evaluated that

SMYM's membership in the international Catholic youth movement FIMCAP (International Federation of Catholic Parochial Youth Movements) is a significant asset for the Church. An Amendment Committee was elected to introduce timely revisions to the organiza-

tion's constitution.

Curia Chancellor, Fr. Abraham Kavilpurayidathil, Youth Commission Secretary, Fr. Jacob Chakkathra, Global President Adv. Sam Sunny Odakkal, State President Alex Thomas, former Global President Arun Davis, and Animator Sr. Diveena Rose addressed the gathering.

NEW APPOINTMENT AT MOUNT ST. THOMAS



Rev. Dr. Sanal Maliyekkal



Fr. Mathew Thuruthippallil

Kakkanad: Rev. Dr. Sanal Maliyekkal, a priest of the Thrissur Archeparchy, has been appointed as the new Secretary to the Syro-Malabar Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil. A member of the Puthanpally parish in Thrissur, he had been serving as the Dean of the Theological Institute under the Thrissur Archeparchy and also as the Assistant Director of the Catechetical Department. Fr. Sanal has obtained his doctorate in Dogmatic Theology from the Regina Apostolorum Institute in Rome.

This new appointment has been made to the vacancy created by the transfer of Fr. Mathew Thuruthippallil, who rendered commendable service as the Major Archbishop's Secretary for the past four years. Fr. Mathew Thuruthippallil, who had served with distinction at the central curia as Secretary to Cardinal Mar George Alencherry and subsequently to Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil, has now been appointed as Associate Director of Mar Sleeva Medicity under the Eparchy of Palai.

43RD PALA EPARCHIAL BIBLE CONVENTION



Pala: Marking the beginning of a renewed spiritual awakening, the 43rd Pala Eparchy Bible Convention, led by Fr. Dominic Valanmanal, Director of the Anakkara Marian Retreat Centre, concluded at St. Thomas College Ground. Organized as an evening convention from December 19 to 23, 2025, the

convention was inaugurated by former Syro-Malabar Major Archbishop Cardinal Mar George Alencherry. Bishop Mar Joseph Kallarangatt of Pala presided over the function. Former Bishop of Pala Mar Joseph Palikaparampil and Proto-Syncellus Msgr. Joseph Thadathil addressed the inaugural cere-

mony. Along with the proclamation of the Word, the convention included confession, special prayers, and Eucharistic adoration. Msgr. Sebastian Vethanath, Msgr. Joseph Kaniyodickal, Fr. Joseph Arimattathil, Fr. Mathew Alappattumedayil, Fr. Joseph Muthanatt, and Fr. Jose Kuttiankall provided leadership for the convention.



The Major Archbishop Inaugurates the Modern Cath Lab and The Neuro-Interventional Radiology Department at Angamaly Little Flower Hospital.

SUNDAY SCHOOL WELFARE FUND; K.C.B.C. CLEARS THE STAND

Kochi: The Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council (KCBC) has stated that there is no need to cooperate with the welfare fund scheme proposed by the government for Sunday School teachers. The scheme was recommended in the context of the Justice J. B. Koshy Commission report, appointed by the government to study the backwardness of Christians and submit guidelines. The Church's position is that religious instruction is its own private responsibility and that government bene-

fits should not be accepted in this matter. KCBC has also demanded that the government withdraw from its move to implement the scheme hastily through an ordinance.

Reasons Behind the Opposition: Religious instruction is not a profession but a service: the Church views catechetical teaching not as employment but as a service of dedication, for which teachers do not receive wages or remuneration. When secular benefits become part of the evangelising mission, the

mission risks becoming commodified and politicised, gradually affecting the mindset and outlook of those who enter it and undermining the spiritual depth and environment of faith formation. An ill-studied initiative: the Minority Department has not conducted a proper study of faith formation systems in Christian Churches in Kerala. The government's approach of seeking opinions only on benefits, without presenting a clear draft regarding the defini-

tion of catechists, membership criteria, or financial structures, is unacceptable. Justice J. B. Koshy Commission Report: the government should publish the Justice J. B. Koshy Commission report on Christian backwardness and implement its priorities through consultation. The structure of the welfare fund scheme presented as a recommendation of the report has not yet been disclosed. When the Church becomes dependent on government benefits even for

faith formation, it often loses the freedom to take independent positions on social and moral issues, thereby weakening its prophetic voice. While the government should be prepared to formulate other welfare schemes that include vulnerable sections of the Christian community, the KCBC statement emphasized that it must withdraw from initiatives that effectively turn Sunday School teachers into government-paid employees.



DIARY OF THE MAJOR ARCHBISHOP 2026 JANUARY 1-31

- **3 Saturday:** Conferred the *Holy Order of Priesthood* on Deacon Akhil Alappattukunnel, MCBS of Emmaus Province, hailing from St. John Maria Vianney Parish, Kalathukadavu, in the Eparchy of Palai.
- **5 Monday:** Participated in the *Ramsa* and other celebrations on the eve of the Feast of the *Denha* at the Major Archiepiscopal Curia.
- **6 Tuesday:** Presided over the Holy *Qurbana* at the **Major Archiepiscopal Curia** on the Feast of the *Denha*.
Inaugurated the *Year of Community Empowerment - 2026* in a meeting held at Mount St. Thomas in the presence of Synod Fathers.
The first Session of the XXXIV Synod began at the Major Archiepiscopal Curia, Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad.
- **8 Thursday:** Received Archbishop Carlo Maria Polvani, Secretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, along with Rev. Fr. Pierre Salebert, Rector of Maria Mater Ecclesiae Seminary, and Rev. Fr. Jorge Ortiz, Vice-Rector, at Mount St. Thomas.
- **12 Monday:** Received Most. Rev. Dominik Schwaderlapp, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Cologne, Germany and the delegation at Mount St. Thomas.
- **15 Thursday:** Inaugurated the International Theological Conference organized at *Dharmaram Vidyakshetram*, Bengaluru.
- **17 Saturday:** Blessed and inaugurated the renovated Cath Lab at Little Flower Hospital, Angamaly, in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly.
- **18 Sunday:** Celebrated the Holy *Qurbana* at St. Mary's Church, Kandashankadavu, in the Archeparchy of Trichur.
- **19 Monday:** Officiated the concluding rites of the funeral of Rev. Fr. Cyriac Kanichayi CMI, of the Devamatha Province, Trichur, at Carmel CMI Bhavan, Chalakudy.
- **20 Tuesday:** Inaugurated the SMYM Eparchial Directors' and Presidents' Conference at the Major Archiepiscopal Curia.
- **22 Wednesday:** Inaugurated the closing ceremony of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of *Jeeva Milk*, a social service initiative of the Eparchy of Kothamangalam, at Pareekanni.
- **24 Thursday:** Inaugurated the Pastoral Council of the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly.
Celebrated the Holy *Qurbana* at the mother house of the St. Martha's Sisters, Ponnukkara, in the Archeparchy of Trichur.
- **25 Friday:** Celebrated the Holy *Qurbana* at the Generalate of the Samaritan Sisters, Mannuthi, in the Archeparchy of Trichur.
Delivered the keynote address at the ecumenical prayer meeting organized by the Koothattukulam Forone, in the Eparchy of Palai on the occasion of the conclusion of Church Unity Octave.
- **26 Saturday:** Celebrated the Holy *Qurbana* at St. Benedictine Monastery, Kappad, in the Eparchy of Kanjirapally, and inaugurated the General Assembly of the Indo-Sri Lankan Benedictine Friars.
- **27 Sunday:** Officiated at the funeral services of the late Mar Dominic Kokkat, the first Bishop of the Eparchy of Gorakhpur, at the Cathedral Church of the eparchy.
- **29 Tuesday:** Conferred the *Holy Order of Priesthood* on Deacon Sonnet Madavana of the congregation of the Sacred Stigmata, at Kurumassery, in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly.
- **31 Thursday:** Inaugurated the public meeting held in connection with the Silver Jubilee celebrations of *INFARM at Podimattam* in the eparchy of Kanjirapally.

MSGR. JOSEPH PANJIKKARAN DECLARED VENERABLE: EPARCHY OF KOTHAMANAGALAM CELEBRATES IN GRATITUDE



Kothamangalam: The Eparchy of Kothamangalam and the MSJ Sisters Congregation expressed heartfelt gratitude on the Servant of God Fr. Joseph Panjikkaran being elevated to the dignity of Venerable. As part of the eparchial-level celebrations marking the declaration of the Servant of God Fr. Joseph Panjikkaran, the founder of the MSJ Sisters Congregation, as

Venerable, a Holy *Qurbana* of thanksgiving was celebrated at St. George Cathedral, Kothamangalam. Bishop Mar George Madathikandathil presided as the main celebrant.

Bishop Mar George Punnakottil, Bishop Mar John Nellikkunnel of the Eparchy of Idukki, the Syncelli of the eparchy Msgr. Pius Malekkandathil and Msgr. Vincent Nedungatt, along with nearly one hundred priests concelebrating from various eparchies and religious congregations, joined in the sacred celebration.

After the Holy *Qurbana*, a public meeting was held at the Mar Mathews Cathedral Auditorium. The gathering was inaugurated by Bishop Mar John Nellikkunnel, the head of the

Eparchy of Idukki. Bishop Mar George Madathikandathil presided over the session. The inauguration of the Community Empowerment Year was carried out by Bishop Mar George Punnakottil.

Dean Kuriakose MP, Antony John MLA, Rev. Dr. Mathew Manjakkunnel, Provincial of the CMI Muvattupuzha Carmel Province, Sr. Teresa Nadupadavil SABS, Vicar Provincial of the SABS Congregation, Kothamangalam Municipal Chairperson Bhanumathi Raju, Vice Chairperson Prince Varkey, and Joachim Jacob Panjikkaran, representing the family of Venerable Fr. Joseph Panjikkaran, delivered speeches on the occasion.

ARNOBIUS: DEFENDER OF THE FAITH



Rev. Dr. James Puliurumpil

Saint Jerome's *Chronicle* attests that before embracing Christianity, Arnobius was a renowned rhetorician in Sicca, Tunisia. After his conversion, during the persecution

under Emperor Diocletian, he emerged as a defender of the faith in Africa. At the request of the local bishop, he composed *Adversus Gentes* in seven volumes in AD 303. From the ninth century onward, the work came to be known as *Adversus Nationes*. The treatise highlights the greatness of Christianity. The historian Lactantius was a

disciple of Arnobius.

Arnobius records in his work the missionary activity of Saint Thomas the Apostle in India, stating that the Indians, witnessing his miracles, abandoned paganism and embraced Christianity. Though initially an opponent of Christianity, after his conversion Arnobius spoke forcefully against paganism.

He writes: "In India, Persia, Media, Arabia, Egypt, Asia, Syria, Galatia, Parthia, Achaia, Macedonia, Epirus, in all lands where the sun rises and sets, and finally in Rome itself, the Gospel has been preached... People everywhere abandoned their former religions and embraced Christianity" (*Arnobius of Sicca, Adversus Gentes*, PL 5, 828).

These words, written in the early fourth century, provide strong evidence of Christianity's presence in India. Arnobius mentions India first and Rome last, symbolizing the eastern and western limits of the known world. His intention was to affirm that the Gospel had spread throughout the entire world. ■

St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Chicago

“ The Faith Beyond Continents ”



**Mar Jacob Angadiath,
Bishop Emeritus**



**Bishop
Mar Joy Alappatt**



The St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Chicago is a historic milestone that marked the beginning of the Syro-Malabar Church's expansion beyond India. Founded on July 1, 2001, by Pope St. John Paul II, the Eparchy was established to address the spiritual needs of the faithful who migrated to America during the second half of the 20th century.

The Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Chicago celebrates its Silver Jubilee

As the first Syro-Malabar Eparchy outside India, it has played a crucial role in uniting scattered believers and preserving the East Syrian tradition and liturgy on Western soil. This spiritual journey, which commenced under the leadership of Mar Jacob Angadiath and now continues under Mar Joy Alappatt, has reached its Silver Jubilee, becoming a definitive symbol of the spiritual, cultural and Liturgical identity of the Malayali community in America. The Eparchy's contributions toward expanding the Church's missionary spirit globally and grounding the second-generation youth in their ancestral heritage remain unparalleled.

Eparchial Curia



Protosyncellus
Fr. Thomas Mulavanal



Syncellus
Fr. John Melepuram



Syncellus
Fr. Thomas Kadukapillil



Chancellor
Fr. Johnson
Kovoorputhenpurayil



Procurator
Fr. Kurian
Neduvichelalumkal

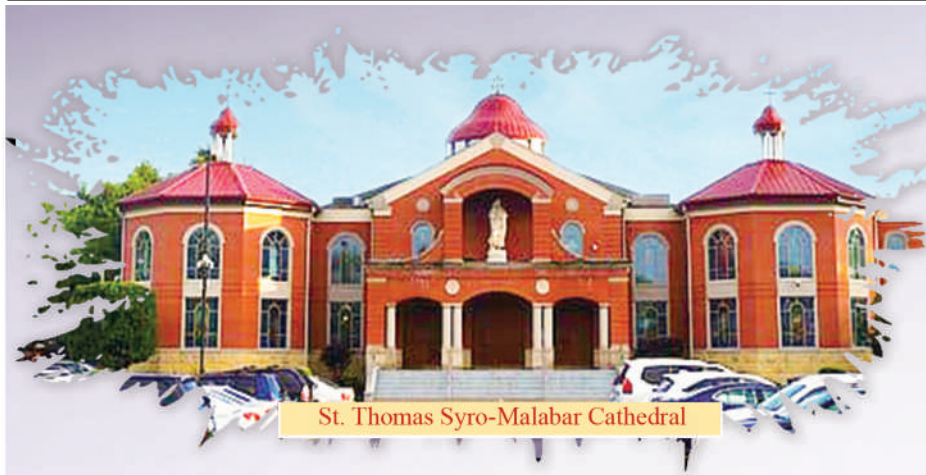
The history of the Eparchy of Chicago traces back to the late 1960s, when Syro-Malabar faithful from Kerala began migrating to the United States. Under the guidance of Syro-Malabar priests who were working or studying in America, they formed small communities to preserve their spiritual and cultural identity. Over time, these gatherings evolved into vibrant centers of prayer and worship. Under Mar Jacob Angadiath's visionary leadership, numerous parishes and missions were established, and the Eparchy witnessed unprecedented growth. On July 24, 2014, Mar Joy Alappatt was appointed as the auxiliary bishop. Following the retirement of Mar Angadiath in 2022, Mar Joy Alappatt assumed the leadership of the Eparchy on 1st October 2022.

Currently, under the leadership of Mar Joy Alappatt, the Eparchy comprises 94 parishes and missions, with 70 priests serving the community. Through various pastoral ministries, the Eparchy provides spiritual care to approximately 90,000 individuals across 30,000 Catholic families. This includes 15 parishes and 8 missions within the Knanaya Catholic Region of the USA, led by Monsignor Thomas Mulavanal. One of the most critical forms of support provided by the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Chicago is its commitment to the liturgical, social, cultural and linguistic traditions that immigrants left behind when they moved from India. The Eparchy provides platforms to nurture and celebrate these heritage values. This support system is essential for members of the Syro-Malabar Church to stay connected to their roots and to grow in their identity.



MINISTRIES FOR PASTORAL CARE

- Holy Childhood
- Altar Servers
- Cherupushpa Mission League (CML)
- Youth Apostolate (DYA)
- Vocation Bureau
- Faith Formation
- Family Apostolate
- 4 Life
- Eparchies Tribunal for marriage & Nurses' Ministry
- St. Vincent De Paul Society
- Syro-Malabar Catholic Congress (SMCC)
- Seniors Forum



St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Cathedral

Guided by the Catechetical Board the ministry continues to remain dynamic and relevant through effective communication and pastoral engagement. Under the supervision and strenuous efforts of this board, the Syro Malabar Catechism textbooks were revised and adapted to the needs of United States circumstance.

Youth in Grades 9 - 12 actively participate in the Diocesan Youth Apostolate (DYA) through retreats, adorations, and youth-led Holy Qurbana. Younger children are nurtured in missionary awareness through the Holy Childhood Association, while over 4,500 students in Grades 4 - 12 are formed through the Cherupushpa Mission League (CML).

Through mission rallies and service initiatives, including supporting the construction of a new church in the Eparchy of Shamshabad, faith formation continues to nurture vocations, strengthen families, and prepare the Church for the future.



Nurturing the Next Generation

Faith Formation is a central and vital ministry of the Eparchy. Since its establishment in 2001, the formation of the younger generation has remained at the heart of its mission. What began with 1,000 students has grown into a vibrant faith formation community of 10,610 children and adolescents by 2025, supported by the dedicated service of 2,652 catechists.

The ministry is strengthened through initiatives such as the annual Eparchial Bible Quiz, engaging nearly 5,000 students each year; comprehensive teacher formation programs, including virtual training, ongoing formation sessions, and the Didache two-year diploma in theology course; and regional gatherings that foster unity and shared vision.



Mar Joy Alapatt celebrating Syro-Malabar Holy Qurbana at National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis

Centered on the Eucharist: A Journey toward the Silver Jubilee

In communion with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Eparchy of Chicago observed a three-year Eucharistic Renewal program from 2023 to 2025. During this period, special Eucharistic adorations were conducted across parishes and ministries, accompanied by theological studies, Eucharistic retreats, and exhibitions.



The renewal culminated in an Eparchial Eucharistic Congress which was held in Somerset (NJ) Parish in May 23 - 25, 2025. This sustained spiritual journey fostered a deeper love, understanding, and devotion to the Holy Eucharist among the faithful. The Silver Jubilee celebrations was inaugurated on March 13, 2025 and will conclude with a four-day Syro-Malabar Convention in Chicago from July 9-12 2026.



A gathering of Malayali priests serving in America

Eparchial Assembly: Discerning the Future Together

Another significant milestone in the history of the Eparchy was the celebration of its second Eparchial Assembly, held in preparation for the Silver Jubilee. From October 28 - 31, 2024. Eparchial Bishops, members of the Curia, and representatives of priests religious sisters, lay leaders, and youth gathered for four days of prayerful reflection.

The assembly was marked by deep prayer, thoughtful study, and meaningful discussions and debates, culminating in the formulation of a shared vision and strategic plans for the future growth, vision and mission of the Eparchy. In conjunction with the Eparchial Assembly, a comprehensive survey was undertaken to assess the spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions of the faithful. The findings are currently being utilized to implement strategies of the eparchy.



Participation of Second Eparchial Assembly

2026 DECLARED FRANCISCAN YEAR. PLENARY INDULGENCE FOR THE FAITHFUL



Vatican City: On the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the death of Saint Francis of Assisi, the mediator of creation and the poor, the year 2026 has been declared the “Franciscan Year.” Pope Leo XIV announced the Franciscan Year as a continuation of the Jubilee Year of Hope celebrated in 2025. The most significant feature of this observance is the global commemoration of the 800th anniversary of the Transitus of Saint Francis of Assisi, who entered eternal life in 1226. The aim of

the celebration is to present the saint’s simple way of life and love for nature as a model for the modern world.

The Franciscan Year will be observed from January 10, 2026, to January 10, 2027. During this period, the faithful may obtain a plenary indulgence under the prescribed conditions, the Apostolic Penitentiary of the Vatican announced. The conditions include sacramental confession, reception of the Holy Eucharist, prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father, visiting churches

under the Franciscan Orders or churches dedicated to Saint Francis of Assisi and performing acts of devotion, praying for the growth of God’s mercy in the world by following the saint’s example, and participating in works of charity. The indulgence may be applied either for oneself or for the souls in purgatory. The 800th anniversaries of the reception of the stigmata by Saint Francis and of the Christmas crib are also being specially commemorated during this period.

‘JEEVAN JYOTHI’ LAY MISSIONARY APOSTOLATE WAS LAUNCHED



Kakkanad: Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil emphasized that the coordinated and collective functioning of the various ministries engaged in the field of evangelization has become an urgent necessity of the present times. He was

speaking at the official inauguration of the “Jeevan Jyothi” Lay Apostolate Movement, formed to lead the lay faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church to the forefront of Gospel proclamation. The inauguration was held on 26 January at Mount St. Thomas.

Archbishop Mar Prince Panengadan, Chairman of the Commission for Evangelization, delivered the keynote address. On the occasion, the official name, logo, and the programme framework of the movement were released. This is a compre-

hensive project proposed by the Major Archiepiscopal Assembly held in August 2024 and subsequently approved by the Synod in January 2025.

The primary objective of the initiative is to make the laity active participants in the Church’s missionary mission, firmly rooted in the apostolic heritage of St. Thomas the Apostle. The name “Jeevan Jyothi,” meaning “Light of Life,” has been taken from the Scriptural verse: “In him was life, and that life was the light of the human race” (John 1:4). “Jeevan Jyothi” is envisioned not merely as an organization, but as a spiritual way of life.

The movement will function through various groups in different fields. Spiritual ministries will include intercessory

prayer, catechists, kerygmatics, and music and media evangelization. Professional groups will bring together nurses, doctors, teachers, lawyers, and engineers. A “Legal Cell” will also be established to provide legal assistance. All existing lay movements such as Fiat Mission, Jesus Youth, and Christene have been welcomed into this common platform.

“Jeevan Jyothi” aims to ensure the participation of the laity in bringing the light of the Gospel to migrant communities and other continents, while also encouraging personal evangelization. The inaugural ceremony was coordinated under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Francis Eluvathingal, Secretary of the Syro-Malabar Church Commission for Evangelization.

DO NOT DELAY IN HANDING ON THE FAITH: POPE

Vatican City: Just as we do not hesitate to give clothing or food to newborn children, we should not delay in handing on the faith, Pope Leo XIV said. He was addressing parents after administering baptism to

around twenty infants in the Sistine Chapel on January 11, 2026. The Pope told parents and godparents that the children they now hold in their arms are being transformed into new creations. Just as they received

life from their parents, they are now receiving faith, which gives meaning to life. While food and clothing are necessary for life, faith is even more essential, he said, because it is divine life that helps one attain salvation.



DESECRATION AT SCARBOROUGH ST. THOMAS SHRINE: SACRED RELIC STOLEN



Mississauga: The relic of Saint Thomas the Apostle has been stolen from the Saint Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Forane Pilgrimage Church in Scarborough, Canada. The incident occurred in the early hours of January 14. The Eparchy of Mississauga stated that this was not a mere theft but part of a deliberate attempt to erase faith and spiritual symbols.

Although other valuable

items were present in the church, the perpetrators took only the relic of Saint Thomas as the Apostle and the key to the tabernacle. The attack occurred less than a month after the church was elevated to the status of a pilgrimage shrine, revealing a clear conspiracy behind the act. The Eparchy stated that this incident is part of a growing wave of hatred directed against Christian places of

worship in Canada and should be viewed as a planned “crime against faith.” Bishop Mar Jose Kalluvilil of Mississauga said that forces fearful of the growing vitality of the Catholic faith are likely behind the incident. He assured that the Eparchy would extend full support to all legal measures to bring the perpetrators and their hidden agenda to light.