



ECOLOGICALLY SENSITIVE AREA (ESA): CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS



Dr. Chacko Kaalamprambil

The Western Ghats are a mountain range extending for approximately 1,500 kilometres along the western coast of India, from the Tapti River in the north to Kanyakumari in the south, with an average elevation of more than 600 metres. Stretching across the six states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, they constitute a unique natural landscape and an invaluable repository of biodiversity. Protecting the Western Ghats, which bring the monsoon rains that begin every year in the first week of June to these regions, is the responsibility of successive generations.

Environmental protection and human livelihood need not come into conflict. It is wrong to place farmers or ordinary people in the dock in the name of protecting the Western Ghats; equally wrong is to implement environmental protection measures by ignoring the legitimate concerns of farmers. The Government's legislation should be guided by the UNESCO principle that human beings must remain at the centre of sustainable development while protecting the environment. However, attempting, through an ESA notification in the name of environmental protection, to convert lands containing residential areas, agricultural lands, and plantations into forest land, and to apply forest laws to revenue lands, including residential and agricultural areas, is entirely unscientific. Therefore, before the seventh draft ESA notification (Ecologically Sensitive Area) issued by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on 27 July 2026 is published as the final notification, comprehensive corrections, taking into account the realities of Kerala, are essential. In the new draft notification issued by the Union Ministry, an area of 56,825.7 square kilometres across six states has been proposed as ESA. Of this, 9,993.7 square kilometres covering 131 villages in twelve districts of Kerala have been included. The deadline for submitting comments and suggestions is 25 September 2026.

Incompleteness of Maps

One of the major problems concerning the ESA is that complete maps through which ordinary people can



▼ **The Western Ghats must be protected not by driving people out, but by standing together with the people. The seventh draft notification published at present is not a final decision. The Central Government itself has invited comments and suggestions. Therefore, this should be regarded as a crucial opportunity for Kerala to point out the errors and demand scientific corrections.**

clearly understand the exact boundaries of the ESA are not available in the cadastral maps referred to in the draft notification. Moreover, since the cadastral maps have been unscientifically compiled at different scales, they are not adequate for geo-referencing and converting them into local records. Many of these maps have not been properly scaled to the required map scale of 1:4000. Therefore, it is impossible to determine and digitise the extent of the ESA from the cadastral maps. If the map is not readable and understandable to the people, the process of obtaining public opinion itself will remain incomplete.

Therefore, the Kerala Directorate of Environment and Climate Change and the Kerala State Biodiversity Board must immediately publish the following: the precise ESA boundary in each village; cadastral maps based on survey numbers/block numbers; the extent of forest land and protected land included in the ESA; and land-use maps clearly distinguishing plantation land, agricultural land, and residential areas. All these must be made immediately available to the public. At the same time, only the existing forest areas and protected areas, excluding residential areas, agricultural lands, and plantations, should be included in the ESA, and such maps should be urgently submitted to the Central Government. The final notification must clearly state that revenue villages in Kerala have not been included within the ESA limits of the areas so submitted.

Contradictions in the State Government's ESA Reports

a) The Error in the Oommen V. Oommen Committee Report

One of the most serious issues requiring examination in the history of ESA determination in Kerala is the finding that 9,107 square kilometres of land in 123 villages is forest land. Following the Kasturirangan Report, which was prepared without public participation, the then Oommen Chandy Government appointed a three-member expert committee headed by Oommen V. Oommen to conduct physical verification in order to address the concerns of the people. Based on the report prepared by the Oommen Committee, an area of 9,993.7 square kilometres in 123 villages of Kerala was proposed as ESA. The report indicates that 9,107 square kilometres of this was forest land and 886.7 square kilometres was non-forest land. The recommendation submitted by the State Government following the Committee's report is the same recommendation that has been included in the previous six draft notifications as well as in the present seventh draft notification.

The 9,107 square kilometres of forest land recorded in the draft as ESA is, in reality, not the extent of forest area within the 123 villages; rather, according to the official records of the Forest Department at that time, it represents the total forest area of Kerala.

Therefore, the error in the said report of the Oommen V. Oommen Committee must be re-examined. Because of the ESA extent determined on the basis of this error, there remains a possibility

that, through the final notification, lakhs of acres of agricultural land and residential areas inhabited by more than three million people may be converted into forest land. The authorities and officials must be prepared to rectify this error.

However, according to the records of the State Government concerning the number of villages, eight of the 123 villages have subsequently undergone administrative division. Therefore, the last two draft notifications show 131 villages, including the eight newly formed villages. It is understood that the maps of these new villages are not available on the website of the Kerala State Biodiversity Board, where the draft notification claims they are available.

b) The Village Should Not Be the Basic Unit of ESA

In Kerala's distinctive geographical and social context, the most important correction required is to abandon the practice of declaring an entire village as an ESA. In the earlier proposals based on the Kasturirangan Report, the Oommen V. Oommen Committee itself pointed out that the approach of treating an entire village as ESA when a specified percentage of the village falls within the ESA boundary should be corrected. The same report states that in a densely populated state such as Kerala, where the availability of land per person is limited, a single village may contain forests, agricultural land, towns, hospitals, educational institutions, houses, plantations, commercial centres, and other establishments.

Therefore, a village is an administrative unit; it is not an ecological unit. Kerala has a history of even amending the law concerning the application of forest laws by excluding villages and limiting their application to wards. Moreover, the idea that the Western Ghats, spread across 546 panchayats, and the environment of Kerala, spread across nearly a thousand panchayats, can be protected by declaring all 131 villages as ESA under the present draft notification is nothing more than a pipe dream.

c) Residential Areas, Agricultural Lands and Plantations Must Be Excluded from the ESA

The Western Ghats region of Kerala is different from those in many other states. Here, human habitation, agriculture, and plantation cultivation have existed for centuries even on lands adjoining forest areas and possessing proper revenue records. Plantations of coffee, cardamom, pepper, rubber, tea, and other crops constitute the foundation of the local economy in many regions. The Oommen V. Oommen Committee Report has pointed out the need to clearly distinguish traditional plantations, agricultural land, residential areas, and natural areas.

Continued on page 5

EDITORIAL



STOP DECEIVING THE PEOPLE LIVING IN THE HILLY AREAS!

For twelve long years, the proposal to declare Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA) has been invoked to kindle anguish in the hearts of the farmers who till the soil of the Western Ghats, earn their livelihood through hard work, and live with dignity. The reactions and anguished cries that followed the one-sided report of environmental activist Madhav Gadgil and the Kasturirangan Report, prepared by selectively altering the former to accommodate pressure from politically powerful vested interests, cannot be forgotten, for these reports destabilised the lives of our farmers and shattered their dreams for the future. History has already inscribed, in tears, sweat and blood, upon the walls of the conscience of our times the unscientific and unethical character of an approach that fails to view environmental protection holistically, discards its essential principles, protects the interests of those who can rewrite anything behind closed doors and secure decisions in their favour, and confines environmental protection to only 123/131 villages in Kerala.

When the Central Government issued the first draft notification in 2014, the UPA was in power at the Centre and the UDF in Kerala. As the authorities and political parties ignored the grave threat facing the people of the hilly regions, the Church initiated a protest that soon grew into a people's movement. Despite temporary assurances and evasive measures, successive governments and political parties failed to pursue environmental protection without jeopardizing the interests of Kerala's people. They also failed to submit the required maps excluding settlements, agricultural lands and plantations and designating only forests, rocky terrain and grasslands as Ecologically Sensitive Areas. Consequently, even after the publication of the seventh draft notification in 2026, Kerala has made little meaningful progress in protecting its people living in the hilly regions. The present UDF Government must now correct the failure of 2014 by acting immediately on their longstanding demands, rather than waiting for the final notification and resorting to political rhetoric. Environmental protection is everyone's duty; therefore, political parties and elected representatives must take this issue seriously, at least as an act of atonement for isolating 123/131 villages while allowing quarries and industries to devastate nature elsewhere.

Whenever a landslip or landslide occurs, pseudo-environmentalists seek to deflect the issue by blaming the farmers and the Church, accusing the latter of organising the farmers' expressions of anguish in a manner that unsettles the administrative machinery. Such pseudo-environmentalists must no longer be allowed to dominate this discourse. No one should any longer be complicit in deceiving and reducing to destitution the highland farmers who, for decades, have cultivated the land in their possession and sustained generations through it. This is a time for vigilant action. To ensure that not a single settlement, agricultural holding or plantation in Kerala is branded with the unjust label of ESA, the residents of the hilly regions, farmers' organisations and eparchial structures must assist the Government and exert the necessary pressure upon it. The people living in the hilly areas must not be deceived again!

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A DAY TO REMEMBER

September 1: Beginning of the Eight-Day Fast

September 5: St. Teresa of Kolkata

September 6: Death of Bishop Mar Paul Chittilapilly (2020)

September 8: Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Consecration of Bishop Mar Sebastian Vadakel (1998)

September 10: Death of Archbishop Mar Joseph Kariattil (1786)

September 11: Consecration of Bishop Mar Jose Chittooparambil (2010)

September 12: St. John Chrysostom

September 14: Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

September 15: Consecration of Bishop Mar Joseph Kodakallil (2015)

Death of Bishop Mar Clement Thottungal (1991)

September 16: Consecration of Bishop Mar George Rajendran (2012)

September 17: Death of Archbishop Mar Jacob Thoomkuzhy (2025)

Consecration of Bishop Mar Joseph Kollamparampil, CMI (2013)

September 19: Consecration of Bishop Mar Jose Kalluvelil (2015)

September 21: St. Matthew the Apostle

Consecration of Bishop Mar Jose Puthenveetil (2013)

September 26: St. Vincent de Paul

September 27: Consecration of Bishop Mar Joy Alappat (2014)

September 29: Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael

September 30: St. Jerome

FESTAL GREETINGS

September 21



Archbishop Mar Mathew Moolakkatt OSB



Bishop Mar Mathew Arackal



Bishop Mar Mathew Vaniakizhake VC



Bishop Mar Mathew Nellikunnel CST

September 26



Bishop Mar Vincent Nellaiparambil

September 29



Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil

DIDYMUS THE BLIND



Rev. Dr. Alex Sebastian Kollamkalam

Historians testify that Didymus, who was born in Alexandria between AD 310 and 313, died at the age of 84. St. Jerome also testifies that Didymus was still alive and was 83 years old when he presented him in Chapter 109 of his work *De Viris Illustribus* (*On Illustrious Men*). Although he lost his eyesight at the age of four, Didymus succeeded in becoming one of the most learned men of his time. According to the historian Rufinus, he compensated for his loss of sight through his sense of hearing and committed everything he heard to the tablets of his heart. Within a short period, Didymus acquired profound knowledge of linguistics and Sacred Scripture. According to Rufinus, Didymus never prayed for the restoration of his sight during his youth. Rather, the inner vision of the heart was the subject of all his prayers.



St. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, appointed him head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, a position he held for about fifty years. Rufinus was his disciple for six years. The historian Palladius visited him four times over a period of ten years, from 388 to 398. St. Jerome, for his part, stayed with him for a month and sought clarification from him on difficult passages of Sacred Scripture.

A complete commentary on the Psalms, commentaries on the Gospels of Matthew and John, two works against Arianism, a work on the Holy Spirit that was later translated into

Latin by St. Jerome, eighteen volumes on the prophecies of Isaiah, three works commenting on the prophecies of Hosea, a commentary on the Book of Job, and a five-volume commentary on the prophecies of Zechariah are only some of his writings, according to Jerome (DVI 109).

The findings of later Councils, namely the Third Council of Constantinople (680-681) and the Second Council of Nicaea (787), that Didymus had repeated some of the theological errors of his revered Origen led to the destruction of many of his works. However, certain shortcomings in his theological studies do not diminish the value of his holy life. Though an unmarried layman, he demonstrated that even in the age of the Desert Fathers, it was possible to live an austere ascetical life while remaining in the city. His theological reflections on the Holy Trinity and Christology contributed to the development of the Church's doctrinal teaching. It was for this reason that St. Jerome preferred the expression "Didymus the Far-Sighted" to "Didymus the Blind."

POST SYNODAL CIRCULAR

XXXIV SYNOD, SESSION II

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 the Lord be with you all!

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

The II Session of the XXXIV Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church was held from 17 to 28 August 2026 at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad, the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church. The Synod deliberated in detail on various ways of renewing and strengthening the faith life and pastoral activities of the Church so as to respond more effectively to the challenges of our times. Marked by prayer, fraternity, and ecclesial communion, the Synod was a blessed occasion on which the Bishops, guided by the grace of the Holy Spirit, sought together to discern the will of God. I gratefully remember all those who prayed for the success of the Synod.

Strengthening the Church Community

In continuation of the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Assembly held at Pala in 2024, we are observing this year as the Year of Community Empowerment. The realization that the spiritual and social strengthening of the members of the Church is essential for meeting the various challenges of the contemporary world led us to observe this special year. What binds the members of our community, scattered across various countries, into one community of believers is their communion with the Church and their sense of pride in belonging to it.

Demographic decline, a weakening of ecclesial spirit, the lack of interest among the younger generation in the agricultural and commercial sectors, and our insufficient presence in the mainstream of society are the major challenges being faced by our community. These challenges should not frighten us but inspire us to discover new ways of responding to them. As the chosen people of our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, we must strive to become more powerful witnesses to the Gospel by deepening our spiritual convictions. At the same time, we must continue to make more diligent efforts to strengthen the younger generation in faith and in their sense of belonging to the community, while helping them develop their talents and resources. The Synod observed that the various initiatives undertaken in our eparchies during the Year of Community Empowerment would contribute greatly to strengthening both the Church and the community. I congratulate all those who are working selflessly toward this goal.

Deepening the Life of Faith

The faith formation and spiritual strengthening of families, young people, and children form an integral part of the Church's pastoral care. It is undeniable that the faith and zeal of our faithful in the diaspora have contributed significantly to the growth of the Syro-Malabar Church throughout the world. It is a matter of joy that the majority of parents

of the new generation strive to raise their children with the same fervour of faith that inspired their ancestors. However, in an age increasingly marked by cultural atheism and profoundly influenced by digital technologies, especially social media, which have become an integral part of daily life, the faith formation of our families assumes particular importance. Our convictions concerning Jesus Christ, the one and only Saviour, and the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, must be continually deepened and firmly rooted in our life of faith. I urge everyone to organize pastoral activities in ways suited to the changing times and conducive to the faith formation of families, young people, and children. At a time when our families face numerous challenges, including the erosion of values, individualism, economic pressures, the widening gap between generations, and the influence of digital culture, we must prepare young people to recognize and cherish God's call to family life and to receive worthily the graces of the Sacrament of Marriage. At the same time, we must intensify our efforts against social evils such as alcohol and drug abuse, which destroy families and society, while promoting greater awareness of their harmful consequences.

Revival of Missionary Work

Since being granted the right to exercise pastoral ministry and undertake evangelization throughout India, the Syro-Malabar Church has been carrying out its mission of evangelization amid many limitations. We must be convinced that to be a Christian also means to be an evangelizer (CCC 900). Since we have been commanded to "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15), evangelization is an integral part of our life of faith. The right to profess, practise, and propagate any religion is guaranteed by Article 25 of the Constitution of India. The Church's various fields of service arise from our faith but embrace everyone, irrespective of religious belief. However, we must also be aware of the efforts to hinder our life of faith and our charitable and educational ministries under the allegation of forced conversion are not in keeping with the secular character of India.

In accordance with the directives of the Major Archiepiscopal Assembly of 2024, a lay missionary movement called *Jeevan Jyoti* has been initiated in our Church. *Jeevan Jyoti* envisions a programme that will give fresh impetus to the missionary endeavours of the Church in view of the Great Jubilee of the Salvific Event in 2033. As part of this movement, we call for the initiation and strengthening of missionary activities in every

eparchy. The Church warmly greets all missionaries who bear witness to Jesus even in the most difficult life situations.

Challenges Requiring Resolution

The Synod Fathers had the opportunity to interact with several Members of Parliament and Members of the Legislative Assembly from Kerala, to bring to one another's attention the various problems faced by the Church and society, and to explore possible solutions. Following the necessary consultations, the people's representatives were requested to ensure that the report of the Justice J. B. Koshy Commission is implemented within a definite timeframe, that a permanent solution is found for the serious problems affecting the education sector, including the dispute concerning the appointment of teachers, and that the long-standing issues related to Ecologically Sensitive Areas are resolved. Along with these matters, the Synod Fathers also expressed their concern regarding the attempts of legislation that could adversely affect educational and social institutions operating in accordance with the law. It is deeply worrying that legal provisions are being introduced that adversely affect institutions functioning in accordance with the laws and constitutional rights of the country. At the same time, we must not forget that the Church has always remained the light of the world, even while journeying along difficult paths. Let us carry forward the Church's mission at the heart of society with renewed strength, overcoming crises and raising our voices in defence of truth, justice, and human dignity.

Unity is Our Responsibility

Despite the crises and challenges we face, our hope rests in our Lord, to whom "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given" (Mt 28:18). As the people of the Lord (Ex 33:14), we must move forward with greater determination. Unity at the altar was a significant step in our Church's journey together. Efforts toward this unity began in 1999 with the realization that the different modes of celebrating the Holy *Qurbana* had seriously affected the sense of unity within our Church. It is painful that this unity has not yet been fully realized. But we must understand that unity can never be achieved by hurting one another through our words. As Pope Leo XIV has exhorted us, "we must all, therefore, examine our conscience regarding the words we use, the prejudices we have and the explicit or implicit aggression that lies within them" (*Magnifica Humanitas*, 214).

Only constant prayer, personal repentance, and mutual reconciliation can lead us to lasting peace. While acknowledging the truth that there can be

no peace without justice, everyone must realize that peace in the Church cannot be achieved through court cases. Salvation is attained not through victories and defeats but through obedience to the Crucified Lord. Relying on the grace of God, let us strive to become messengers of unity by accepting the guidance of our Eparchial Bishops. "The grace does not magically eliminate conflict, but instead it inspires active resistance to evil and an astonishing creativity in doing good" (*Magnifica Humanitas*, 211). Let us strive to overcome our limitations by seeking new ways of engaging in acts of benevolence.

Priestly Formation in Tune with the Times

Let us give thanks to Almighty God, who enriches the Church with vocations to the priesthood. The Synod discussed the various challenges faced by priests in the modern world and entrusted the Commission for Clergy with the responsibility of making the necessary interventions in this regard. It is gratifying that the *curriculum* designed to renew the formation of seminarians in accordance with the needs of the times has already been introduced in the minor seminary. The Gospel will reach the ends of the earth only when priests, filled with the fervour of faith, are able to bear witness to Christ as men of the Church.

The Church also gives thanks to God for vocations to consecrated life. How abundant are the blessings that God bestows upon us through consecrated communities! Consecrated persons, who serve sacrificially in the fields of charity, education, and missionary work, spread the fragrance of the Gospel throughout the world. Therefore, we must encourage vocations to consecrated life and pray for their growth. The meeting with the Major Superiors of the consecrated communities held as part of the Synod was very fruitful.

Syro-Malabar Heritage and Research Centre

We have been able to open to the public the Heritage and Research Centre, which promotes the preservation, teaching, and scholarly study of the ancient and rich heritage of the Syro-Malabar Church. The St. Thomas Heritage Museum, established within this Centre, has come out as one of the important Christian museums in Kerala. Everyone is cordially invited to visit the Heritage and Research Centre and the Museum at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad.

Auxiliary Bishop for the Archeparchy of Kottayam

The appointment of Rev. Fr. Thomas Animoottil as Auxiliary Bishop of the Archeparchy of Kottayam is a matter

THE PROTECTION OF THE WESTERN GHATS MUST NOT BECOME ANTI-HUMAN



Rev. Dr. Tom Olikkarott

For twelve years, hundreds of thousands of people living in 131 revenue villages in Kerala have been trapped in a state of uncertainty on their own land. Their homes, agricultural lands, schools, places of worship, and commercial establishments, in other words, the entire fabric of life of a community, remain under the shadow of being classified as an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA).

The seventh draft notification issued by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on 27 July 2026 has not brought an end to this uncertainty. Instead, it has merely granted another sixty-day extension to the concerns and denial of rights that have persisted for the past twelve years. There is no dispute that the Western Ghats are among India's most valuable repositories of biodiversity. Their protection is the shared responsibility of both the government and society. However, what is being questioned today is an approach that, in the name of environmental protection, places the fundamental rights of people who have lived and cultivated their land for decades in a state of uncertainty.

The controversy began with the report submitted in 2010 by environmental scientist Madhav Gadgil and the subsequent report submitted in 2013 by the committee chaired by Dr. K. Kasturirangan. Although the two reports adopted different approaches to the protection of the Western Ghats, they were followed by the publication of the first draft notification in 2014. No final notification has been issued since then. Instead, whenever the validity of one notification expires, another draft notification is issued. Even after seven notifications, the concerns of the people have not been given a clear resolution. While the government continues to extend the process, it is ordinary people living in the hills who bear its consequences. The environment and human life are not mutually opposed. Yet, because of delays in policymaking and administrative inaction, an artificial conflict has been created between environmental protection and the people's right to live. Therefore, the focus of this discussion should not be merely on forests, but on people; not on maps, but on lives.

The Disturbing Reality Revealed by the Numbers

The area proposed to be classified as an Ecologically Sensitive Area in Kerala is 9,993.7 square kilometres. There has been no change in this extent in the seventh draft notification issued by the Central Government on 27 July 2026. However, following changes in the panchayat

and village divisions, the number of revenue villages falling within the proposed ESA has increased from 123 to 131. These figures are not merely lines drawn on a map. Behind every village are human lives, families, agricultural lands, institutions, places of worship, and schools. All of them remain under a shadow of uncertainty. According to figures provided by the Central Government, Kerala ranks third, after Maharashtra and Karnataka, among the Western Ghats states in terms of the proposed extent of ESA. However, a different picture emerges when these figures are considered in relation to the total geographical area of the respective states. Maharashtra has a total geographical area of 307,713 square kilometres, while Karnataka has 191,791 square kilometres. By comparison, Kerala has a total geographical area of only 38,863 square kilometres. Of this, 9,993.7 square kilometres, including inhabited areas and agricultural lands, have been proposed as an Ecologically Sensitive Area.

Another comparison is also noteworthy. Tamil Nadu, whose geographical area is more than three times that of Kerala, has only 6,914 square kilometres proposed as ESA. In Gujarat, whose geographical area is nearly five times larger, the proposed ESA extends to only 449 square kilometres. These figures raise questions not only about geographical differences between the states, but also about the approaches adopted in demarcating boundaries and defining areas. Kerala's principal demand was clear: the ESA should be redrawn from 9,993.7 square kilometres to 8,590.69 square kilometres by completely excluding inhabited areas, agricultural lands, and plantations. However, the Central Government did not accept this demand.

This is not merely a dispute over figures. When an area is declared ecologically sensitive, the lives, livelihoods, property rights, and future of the people who have lived there for generations must also be taken into consideration. This is precisely what the people living in the hill regions of Kerala have been saying repeatedly for the past twelve years. The central question, therefore, is this: Should the environment be protected by excluding people, or through policies that protect both people and nature? A credible answer to this question is still awaited.

Where Did Kerala Fall Behind?

As the ESA controversy enters its twelfth year, the most important question is this: Is the Central Government alone responsible for this uncertainty? Although the Central Government's notifications have repeatedly provoked protests, there is growing criticism that administrative delays on the part of Kerala have also aggravated the crisis. The failure to complete, within a reasonable timeframe, field surveys and scientific mapping that clearly distinguish inhabit-

ed areas, agricultural lands, plantations, and forest areas, and accurately demarcate the boundaries of revenue villages, is being identified as one of the major shortcomings in this matter.

The approach adopted by other states that faced similar concerns is noteworthy. States including Tamil Nadu and Goa submitted updated information to the Central Government based on satellite imagery, geospatial mapping, and field surveys, clearly distinguishing inhabited areas from forest areas. This enabled them to exclude, to the maximum extent possible, areas inhabited by people from the ESA. Kerala too had similar opportunities, but delays in procedures and a lack of coordination among various departments prevented these opportunities from being used effectively. Concerns repeatedly raised by people's representatives, farmers' organisations, Churches, and social organisations were slow to translate into administrative action.

The Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council (KCBC) recently pointed out the same concern. The KCBC observed that the failure to scientifically redemarcate the boundaries of revenue villages and complete the field survey within the stipulated timeframe was one of the major reasons for the present crisis.

The seventh draft notification has now been published. The Central Government has once again given the states an opportunity to submit their comments. Therefore, there is little value in merely repeating earlier objections. It is essential for the State Government to submit to the Centre a comprehensive report containing accurate scientific data, updated maps, evidence-based proposals, and clear documentation of inhabited areas.

There will be no solution if the Centre and the State continue to blame each other. What is needed now is a practical solution that accepts administrative responsibility and safeguards both environmental protection and people's right to live. Every new notification is not merely an official document; it is also a reminder that the future of thousands of families living in the hills is once again being pushed into uncertainty.

Environmental Protection Cannot Be Achieved at the Cost of People

The Western Ghats must be protected. They are an invaluable treasure of India's biodiversity. Protecting forests, water resources, and wildlife for future generations is the shared responsibility of the government and society. However, policies that push people into uncertainty in the name of environmental protection cannot claim the face of justice. The people living in the hill regions are not enemies of the forests. They are people who migrated decades ago as part of government policies, transformed forested land into agricultural land, and contributed significantly to Kerala's agricultur-

al economy. Thousands of families who have continued to cultivate their land despite floods, landslides, human-wildlife conflicts, and falling agricultural prices are today among those most affected by the uncertainty surrounding the ESA.

The uncertainty that has continued for twelve years affects not only the use of land but also the future of the people. Concerns regarding the renovation of houses, new construction, transfer of property, access to loans, and implementation of development projects adversely affect their economic and social lives. For an entire generation to be forced to live in a "temporary" state of uncertainty is not something a democratic society can take pride in.

The sixty-day period now granted by the Central Government should not become another mere procedural formality. The Kerala Government must submit scientifically sound and evidence-based revised proposals within the stipulated timeframe. The surveys and documentation required to clearly exclude inhabited areas, agricultural lands, and plantations from the ESA must be completed as a matter of urgency. At the same time, the Central Government has a responsibility to find a solution that protects the constitutional rights of the people without compromising the national objective of environmental protection.

Today, we speak extensively about environmental protection. The world is concerned about climate change, global warming, water scarcity, deforestation, and the loss of biodiversity. At the same time, however, mountains, hills, forests, and rivers are being ruthlessly exploited to provide greater comforts and luxuries for urban life. Mountains are being excavated for mining; the natural flow of rivers is being altered for dams and other projects; hill regions and forest lands are being encroached upon for large resorts and tourism projects. When the tranquillity of the hills and the balance of nature are destroyed for the entertainment and economic benefit of people from the cities, the price is paid by ordinary people, farmers, wildlife, and future generations. Protecting the Western Ghats and protecting the people who live there are not mutually exclusive objectives. The fundamental principle of sustainable development is to find a just balance between the two. When environmental protection becomes a project that excludes people, it becomes anti-human; when only human needs are considered and nature is ignored, it becomes an injustice to future generations.

After twelve years and seven notifications, the failure to find a lasting solution is a failure of policymaking. What is needed now is not another extension through a new notification, but a just and scientifically sound final decision that safeguards both the lives of the people and the survival of nature. That is what the people are waiting for. ■

ESA or Ecologically Sensitive Area

Continuation of page 1

d) Only Existing Forests and Protected Areas Should Be Clearly Included in the ESA

Protected areas such as national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, dams, and habitats of critically important wildlife species should be clearly included in the final ESA map. Therefore, a clear demarcation approach must be adopted whereby strong protection is provided to protected forest areas and areas of exceptional ecological importance, while the livelihood lands of ordinary farmers are not subjected to the same degree of restrictions.

e) Field Verification Must Be Conducted Again

Determining the ESA solely on the basis of satellite imagery increases the possibility of plantations appearing as forest land. Therefore, the final notification should be prepared by integrating satellite imagery, cadastral maps, field verification, and an opportunity for the people to examine the details. Greater credibility would be ensured if joint teams comprising representatives of the Revenue, Forest, and Agriculture Departments and the Gram Sabha conducted field verification in each ESA village. The recommendation of Gadgil was that the final decision should be taken by taking the Gram Sabhas into confidence.

Public Opinion Must Be Obtained by Making Accurate Records Available to the People

When public opinion is sought on including an area within the ESA, the precise map of the area, survey and location records, land-use pattern, and criteria for environmental protection must be made available to the people. The mere statement that a village is an ESA is incomplete and dangerous. What is the relevance of entering in the title deeds of land that the property falls within the ESA? A farmer must be able to ascertain whether his or her land is included in the ESA. If it is included, genuine public participation requires that the people be able to know why it was included and what criteria were applied. Based on the maps and proposals received by the panchayats concerning the proposed area, the respective panchayats had identified errors, conducted field surveys, and submitted corrections to the concerned departments. However, no further action was taken on these corrections, nor were the maps modified. The residential areas for which corrections had been made were not excluded. Moreover, it appears that eight villages that were not within the ESA limits have now been included in the Ecologically Sensitive Area. Under the seventh draft notification, the final notification may be issued at any time after 25 September.

Problems That May Be Faced by People if the ESA Final Notification Covers Revenue Villages, Residential Areas and Agricultural Lands

If the ESA boundary is incorrectly determined, the restrictions that may arise in future concerning land use and development activities, as well as uncertainties regarding permissions, are very serious.

1. Confusion Regarding Whether One's Own Land Falls Within the ESA

If an entire revenue village is recorded as an ESA, the actual status of each survey number within that village will not be clear. A landowner may not even be able to find an answer to the basic question, "Does my land fall within the ESA?" without an accurate map.

2. Uncertainty Concerning Agricultural Lands and Plantations

If plantations of rubber, cardamom, coffee, tea, pepper, and other crops, as well as traditional agricultural lands, are included within the ESA, future land-use decisions may be subject to additional restrictions or permission procedures. This may create uncertainty, particularly regarding the use, development, transfer, and investment in farmers' land.

3. Problems Concerning Houses and Construction

In areas where ESA restrictions apply, certain construction and development activities may be subject to specific restrictions and permission requirements. Therefore, even in an area that is currently a normal residential locality, future construction of a new house, expansion of an existing house, establishment of institutions, hospitals, schools, small commercial establishments, roads, or public works projects may require additional procedures for obtaining permissions.

4. Uncertainty Regarding the Economic Value of Land

Entering in the title deeds that a particular property falls within the ESA may create uncertainty concerning the sale and purchase of land, bank loans, investments, and other matters. In particular, if there is a dispute over whether a particular survey number is included in the ESA, prospective purchasers and financial institutions may exercise greater caution regarding the future use of the land.

5. Roads and Infrastructure

In ESA areas, environmental restrictions will become more relevant to infrastructure development such as roads, bridges, drinking-water projects, electricity, public institutions, and other basic facilities. If the ESA boundary is not accurately determined, even projects undertaken in the public interest may face unnecessary administrative obstacles.

6. Small-Scale and Micro Enterprises

Once an area is included within the ESA, restrictions may also affect existing and future small-scale and micro enterprises, and disputes may arise concerning development activities.

7. Problems Concerning the Land Rights of the Next Generation

There may be uncertainty regarding the extent to which land being cultivated today can be used by the next generation for constructing a house, expanding agriculture, starting a small enterprise, or for other lawful purposes. Therefore, the ESA issue is not merely a problem concerning today's farmer; it is also an issue concerning the land-use rights of the next generation.

As part of the ESA declaration, a rights-based economic benefit, namely a "conservation incentive and compensation mechanism," should be provided

to local residents for the development restrictions and loss of opportunities they undertake in the interests of environmental protection. Such benefits should be made available to those who may have to forgo their livelihoods, way of life, and development activities for the protection of the Western Ghats. Unless such a mechanism is implemented, as is done in other countries, this will become a major form of exploitation. There can be no doubt that it would amount to a blatant violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed to citizens by the Constitution.

Although the protection of the environment and the Western Ghats is the responsibility of all the people living in nearly a thousand panchayats and more than 1,600 villages in Kerala, imposing the entire responsibility unilaterally upon more than three million poor people living in 131 villages and making them scapegoats, while allowing activities that harm the environment to continue at will in the interests of certain vested groups, will place the State in danger. The ESA declaration could make such a situation possible.

The objective of the ESA is to protect the Western Ghats, not to place the lives of the people of Kerala in uncertainty. No ESA without accurate data; no final notification without accurate maps.

Matters Requiring Urgent Attention

Let us now consider the remedies or responsibilities that need to be undertaken at various levels regarding the ESA issue.

Even though this is the seventh ESA draft notification of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the Government is failing to address the concerns of the people.

The reason is that the draft notification has published maps, including maps with geo-coordinates, for the proposals of all the other states except Kerala. However, Kerala's map or proposal is not included. Why is it not included? The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has stated that Kerala has not yet submitted a proposal, but that Kerala's ESA has been calculated at 9,993.7 square kilometers through physical verification, and that the cadastral map (the map containing survey numbers) has been published on the website of the Kerala State Biodiversity Board. The Ministry has directed the people to examine the map and, if they have any objections, submit them within 60 days of the publication of the notification, that is, by 25 September, either to the email address of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change or by post. However, the map available on the website of the State Biodiversity Board is not accessible in a manner sufficient for ordinary people to submit their objections. Therefore, there remains a concern that the State Government has misled the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change as well as the people of Kerala in this regard. The draft notification states that objections are to be submitted after examining the map on the website of the Biodiversity Board. Such objections alone would have legal validity.

The Kerala Government and the Kerala State Biodiversity Board Must Take the Following Urgent Measures Before the Central Government Finalises the New Draft Notification:

One: Immediately rectify the discrepancy and error in the figure of 9,107 square kilometers of forest land in the 123/131 villages and submit a new report to the Centre. (The confusion appearing in the various reports submitted by Kerala must be resolved immediately: the 2014 proposal of 123 villages/9,993.7 sq. km.; the 2015 proposal of 119/9,993.7; the 2018 proposal of 92/8,656.46; the subsequent district-level verification proposal of 98/8,711.89; the 2024 proposal of 98/8,590.69; and the 2026 proposal of 131/9,993.70. The differences among these proposals must be resolved and an accurate map and report submitted.)

Two: Precisely determine the boundaries and prepare maps by completely excluding residential areas, agricultural lands, and traditional plantations from the ESA. Publish, as soon as possible, the corrected and criteria-based map on the website of the Biodiversity Board.

Three: Abandon the practice of treating the village as the basic unit of the ESA.

Four: Include only forest areas, protected areas, and areas having World Heritage status within the ESA.

Five: Make ESA maps available to the public in a form that enables ordinary people to examine them and submit objections, if any. The Gadgil and Kasturirangan Reports attach great importance to the Gram Sabhas. The sentiments and concerns of the people should be expressed through resolutions adopted by the Gram Sabhas and forwarded by the respective Panchayat governing bodies as official resolutions.

Six: Publish on the website the Oommen V. Oommen Committee Report, all ESA proposals submitted by the State Government, the letters sent to the Centre, and the details of the field verifications.

Seven: Establish help centres in every district where members of the public can examine the maps and submit complaints. Convene meetings of the affected panchayats and organise adalats to resolve the problems of the people.

Eight: Publish a simple ESA explanatory document in Malayalam.

Nine: After ensuring that the people are fully informed and convinced of the proposal, submit to and obtain approval from the Central Government for a zero-error proposal that completely excludes residential areas and agricultural lands, together with KML-format maps in which the geo-coordinates are clearly recorded. The final notification should be issued only after all complaints received have been examined.

The Western Ghats must be protected not by driving people out, but by standing together with the people. The seventh draft notification published at present is not a final decision. The Central Government itself has invited comments and suggestions. Therefore, this should be regarded as a crucial opportunity for Kerala to point out the errors and demand scientific corrections. ■

FOR CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

The Abhishekagni Sisters (ASJM) is a religious community founded in the Eparchy of Palaghat on 8th September 2014, with the approval of Bishop Mar Jacob Manantheodath, by Fr. Xavier Khan Vattayil, Fr. Binoy Karimruthinkal and Mother Amy Emmanuel, holding firmly to the motto, "For Christ and the Church"...



ASJM was established as the fruit of God bringing together in Sehion in 2007 Fr. Xavier Khan Vattayil, Fr. Binoy Karimruthinkal, and Mother Amy Emmanuel, the spiritual directors of ASJM, who had been formed and nurtured through different circumstances of life while carrying within them the same inner call. On 8 September 2014, Bishop Mar Jacob Manantheodath, the former Bishop of Palakkad, declared the first community of ASJM a Pious Union. On 14 December 2017, the feast of St John of the Cross, ASJM was raised to the status of a *sui iuris* religious institute. On 3 January 2019, the feast of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the first six members made their perpetual vows, while the first batch of seven novices made their first vows. The Abhishekagni Sisters are a community that spends all days in deep prayer and spiritual reflection, except for the fifteen days of each month set apart for ministry.

The Abhishekagni Sisters seek to strengthen and empower the whole world, especially priests and consecrated persons, through Gospel proclamation

filled with the ministry of deliverance, counselling through the use of charisms, and ministries of inner healing, and to build vibrant Christian communities throughout the world. Their goal is to strengthen the Holy Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, and to make the evangelization of the world possible before the Second Coming of Jesus. Like the Blessed Mother, they seek to attain a profound experience of the Trinity and, through prayer rooted in the ascetical life and a ministry of deliverance filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit, to enlighten the chosen and the whole world, build up the Holy Church, and make the evangelization of the world possible.

ASJM moves forward relying entirely on Divine Providence and integrating the ascetical life with apostolic ministries. Through six houses in Attappadi, Vazhakulam, Pathanamthitta, Mannuthy, Odisha, and Texas, the Abhishekagni Sisters serve the Church and extend their apostolate both within India and abroad. The motherhouse is located at Abhishekagni Mount, near the Sehion Retreat Centre in Attappadi.

ST THOMAS THE APOSTLE BEFORE KING MISDAEUS



LITURGICAL
RESEARCH
CENTRE STUDY
SERIES

Rev. Dr. James Puliurumpil

King Misdaeus, the ruler of Tamilakam, was enraged by the preaching of the Gospel by St Thomas the Apostle and decided to have him killed. The *Acts of Thomas* records the Apostle being brought before the king, questioned, and sentenced as follows:

When he entered the prison, he heard the guards quarrelling. "Why is this magician trying to open these doors with his magic and release the prisoners? What wrong have we done to him? Let us go and tell King Misdaeus about this." When the chief guard said this, Judas remained silent and simply listened attentively. They rose in the morning and went before the king and said: "Our lord and king, either release this magician or transfer him to another prison. We are unable to keep him under guard. Twice he has been fortunate in guarding

the prisoners. Otherwise, they would all have escaped. We had locked the doors. Your wife and son and others are always with him." Hearing this, King Misdaeus immediately went to examine the seal placed on the prison door and found it exactly as he had left it. He said to the prison guards: "Why did you lie to me? The seals on the doors are still intact. How then can you say that Tertius and Mygdonia came there?" The guards replied: "We have told you the truth."

King Misdaeus went and sat on his judgment seat. Then he sent for Judas. They seized him, stripped him of his clothes, wrapped a loincloth around him, and brought him before Misdaeus. Misdaeus asked him, "Are you a slave or a free man?" Judas replied, "I am a slave, but you have no authority over me." Misdaeus asked him, "How did you come

here and take refuge in this country?" Judas said to him, "I came here to give life to many through the Holy Scriptures. But now I shall have to leave this world at your hands." Misdaeus asked, "Who is your master? What is his name? Which country do you belong to?" Judas replied, "My King is also your Master. He is the Master of the whole world and the Lord of all its lands." Misdaeus asked again, "What is his name?" Judas answered, "At this moment, you are not able to comprehend his true name. Yet the name given to him is Jesus Christ." Misdaeus said to him, "I was in no hurry to destroy you. I showed you mercy. Yet you continue to increase your evil deeds. The whole country is talking about your magic. If I do anything to you, it will be in such a way that your deeds will follow you. Thus, our kingdom will be freed

from them." Judas replied, "None of these magical practices that you say will follow me will ever disappear from this world."

As he said all this, King Misdaeus bound him and was considering what order he should give for his execution. However, he was afraid of the crowd gathered there. Many, including the king's officials, had come to believe in the Lord. King Misdaeus took Judas outside the city, accompanied by a group of soldiers carrying weapons. The crowd thought that King Misdaeus was trying to learn something from Judas. Therefore, they remained there and watched them as they went. After travelling about half a mile, King Misdaeus handed Judas over to one of the nobles who was with him and to a group of soldiers, saying, "Go to the top of this mountain and kill him."

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD) IN CHILDREN: THE REALITIES



Rev. Dr. Sijon Kuzhikkattumyalil
Consultant Psychologist

Children are not immature adults. Biologically and psychologically, they are different from adults. Children have their own psychological world. Their emotional responses and behavioral characteristics are shaped through their interaction with different circumstances. Various types of psychological disorders manifest in children due to numerous genetic and biological factors.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is found in five percent of children below the age of fifteen. This condition is three times more common in boys than in girls. ADHD is a disorder associated with the cells of the brain. It usually begins to manifest before the age of seven.

Main Symptoms

The main symptom is lack of atten-



tion. While studying and while engaging in other activities, children may make mistakes, be forgetful, and frequently lose their belongings. They may experience difficulty in carrying out complex tasks. Excessive restlessness, an inability to remain seated in one place, excessive talking, and disturbing others are also among the symptoms. Impulsiveness, impatience, answering before a question has been completed, crossing the road in

a manner that invites danger, excessive anger, and an inability to maintain accuracy are also commonly observed.

Causes

Genetic factors play an important role in this condition. If the parents have the disorder, the likelihood of the condition occurring in their children is higher. The likelihood is also greater when the parents have a history of substance abuse

or criminal behaviour. A lack of coordination in the functioning of the left and right hemispheres of the brain, as well as differences in the functioning of the chemicals dopamine and norepinephrine in the frontal lobe, are associated with this condition. Learning disabilities and behavioural disorders are also more commonly found along with ADHD.

Remedial Measures

Diagnosis is made through detailed clinical examination, including discussions with the person experiencing the condition and the parents. It is also useful to collect information from teachers. Psychological tests such as the Conners Assessment Scale can be used to assess the severity of the condition. Psychological treatment and counselling may also be used in combination. Awareness of the things that need to be considered while raising children is highly beneficial. Likewise, as part of psychoeducation, importance should be given to maintaining a healthy family environment. Disciplinary measures are not a solution at all. Awareness classes for teachers are also highly beneficial. Along with behavioural therapies, medication may also be required in certain situations under the supervision of a psychiatrist.

“LET THE DEAD BURY THEIR OWN DEAD” (MATTHEW 8:22)



EXPLORING BIBLE QUESTIONS

Rev. Dr. Joju Kokkattu

Jesus gave this reply to a disciple who asked permission to go and bury his father: “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead” (Matthew 8:22). Burying the dead is a sacred duty. Therefore, at first sight, Jesus’ words may appear harsh and devoid of human consideration. However, when the context and deeper meaning of the saying are understood, it becomes clear that this is a profoundly powerful statement that reveals the greatness of discipleship and its urgency.

Honouring one’s parents is the fourth commandment. In Jewish life, burying one’s parents was an important expression of this commandment. The arrangements made by Joseph for the burial of Jacob (Genesis 47:27-30; 50:5), as well as Tobiah’s understanding of the importance of burying the dead in obedience to the counsel of his father Tobit (Tobit 4:3-4), provide evidence of this. Moreover, even priests and Nazirites, who were ordinarily required to refrain from contact with the dead because such contact rendered them ritually impure, had certain

responsibilities concerning burial rites in particular circumstances when close relatives died (Leviticus 21:11; Numbers 6:6-7). Therefore, when viewed against this background, Jesus’ words, “Let the dead bury their own dead,” appear even more profound.

However, the central theme of Matthew 8:18-22 is the cost of discipleship and its urgent character. Following Jesus is not a decision that can be postponed and taken up later according to convenience; it is a decision of faith that calls for an immediate response to the call of the Kingdom of God. Here, another fact concerning Jewish burial practices should also be noted. Among the Jews of the first century, there was a practice of collecting the bones approximately one year after a person had been buried in a tomb, placing them in an ossuary, and burying them again. Therefore, the disciple’s words, “First let me go and bury my father,” do not necessarily mean that his father had already died and was awaiting immediate burial. They could also indicate a long and indefinite delay such as waiting until his father’s death or until the completion of the funeral rites. This is why Jesus places such strong emphasis on the urgency of discipleship in his response.

Special attention must also be given to the expression “the dead” in this passage. The Greek word *nekros* generally re-

fers to a physically dead person or a dead body. However, in biblical language, the word is also used figuratively to refer to those who are separated from God and from divine life. For example, Scripture often presents the state of being spiritually separated from God through the symbolism of “death.”

Therefore, the deeper meaning of Jesus’ words, “Let the dead bury their own dead,” may be understood in this way: let those who are spiritually “dead” because they have not responded to the call of the Kingdom of God bury those who are physically dead; but you, who have heard the call of the Kingdom of God, follow me now. Here Jesus does not reject the sacredness of burying one’s father. Rather, he places before the disciple a higher priority: a complete and immediate response to the call of the Kingdom of God.

In the Gospel of Matthew itself, Jesus makes clear the priority that must be given to one’s relationship with Christ over family relationships: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37). Likewise, Jesus says, “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my name’s sake will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29). Jesus is not teaching that family relationships are unimportant; rather, he teaches

about the supreme priority that must be given to God above all relationships and responsibilities.

Therefore, this passage is not a rejection of family duties; rather, it is a powerful call not to postpone God’s call indefinitely for any reason. Burying one’s father is indeed a sacred duty. Yet, at the moment one receives Christ’s call, responding to that call becomes the highest responsibility. The call of the Kingdom of God is not something to be postponed by saying, “Later”; it is a call to be accepted now. A beautiful echo of this truth can be found in the thought of St Augustine: “The one who gave birth to us must be loved; but priority must be given to the Creator.” Even while loving human relationships and fulfilling our responsibilities, all these must be ordered in accordance with our relationship with God.

Therefore, Jesus’ words, “Let the dead bury their own dead,” are not the language of cruelty; rather, they are a wake-up call to the fullness of discipleship: to give Christ first place in life, not to delay when the call of the Kingdom of God is heard, and to order all relationships and responsibilities in the light of our relationship with God. This is the heart of the message of this passage. A life of following Christ is not a decision to be postponed until tomorrow; it is a life of faith that says “yes” in the very today in which God calls.

SECOND SESSION OF THE XXXIV SYNOD OF SYRO-MALABAR BISHOPS CONCLUDES

Kakkanad: The II Session of the XXXIV Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church was held from August 17 to 28, 2026, at the Major Archiepiscopal Curia, Mount St. Thomas. Fifty-two bishops engaged in pastoral ministry in India and abroad, as well as bishops who have retired from active ministry, participated in the session. The Synod discussed various matters related to the faith life of the Church, its pastoral mission, and contemporary social circumstances.

The Synod Session began at 10 am on August 17 with a spiritual reflection given by Bishop Mar Pauly Kannookadan of the Eparchy of Irinjalakuda. Following the *celebration of the Holy Qurbana* by the Synod Fathers, Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil the Father and Head of the Syro-Malabar Church, inaugurated the session.

The Synod expressed its congratulations to Bishop Mar Jose Pulickal, Bishop of the



Eparchy of Kanjirapally and Chairman of the Catechetical Commission of the Syro-Malabar Church, on his appointment as a member of the International Council for Catechesis for a five-year term. In the presence of the Synod Fathers, the Major Archbishop felicitated Mar George Punnakottil, who is celebrating the Golden Jubilee of his episcopal ordination; Mar Andrews Thazhath, who is celebrating the Golden Jubilee of his priestly ordination; and Mar Joseph Perumthottam and Mar

Sebastian Adayanthrath, who are celebrating the Silver Jubilee of their episcopal ordination.

The Synod elected Fr. Thomas Animoottil, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archeparchy of Kottayam. The official announcement regarding this was made on 27th August at 12 am Italian time at Vatican and at 3.30 p.m. Indian time at the public meeting held at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad, by the Major Archbishop.

Moran Mor Ignatius Joseph III Younan, Patriarch of the

Antiochene Syriac Catholic Church, addressed the Synod of Bishops. The Major Archbishop welcomed the Patriarch, and the Synod Secretary proposed the vote of thanks. The Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church decided to confer the title 'Sabhatharam' upon Shri. Santhosh Karumathra, a member of the Archeparchy of Trichur and Shri. Jacob Painadath, a member of the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly. The 'Sabhatharam' Award instituted for lay faithful who make

valuable contributions to the Church and society in various fields. Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil announced the awardees at the public meeting held in connection with the conclusion of the Synod.

During the Synod days, the Bishops interacted with various groups. In the meeting with 140 Major Superiors of the religious institutes of the Syro-Malabar Church, contemporary issues related to consecrated life were discussed. Meetings were also held with the Rectors of the four Synodal Major Seminaries, Aluva, Kunnoth, Vadavathoor, and Satna and with the Presidents of the Institutes at Vadavathoor and Aluva. The Synod also held discussions with MLAs and MPs who are members of the Syro-Malabar Church. A presentation of the internationally acclaimed web series 'The Chosen' was also held during the Synod session. The Session concluded on August 28.



Major Superiors of various religious institutes at the gathering held on 24 August in connection with the Second Session of the XXXIV Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church.



Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil presents the 'Paurastya Ratnam' Award to Mar Thomas Elavanal.



Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil extends Jubilee greetings to Mar George Punnakottil, Archbishop Mar Joseph Perumthottam and Archbishop Mar Andrews Thazhath



Jacob Painadath



Santhosh Karumathra

SYRO-MALABAR 'SABHATHARAM' AWARD ANNOUNCED

Kakkanad: The Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church has selected Mr. Santhosh Karumathra, a member of the Archeparchy of Thrissur, and Mr. Jacob Painadath, a member of the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly, for the 'Sabhatharam' Award instituted for lay faithful who make valuable contributions to the Church and society in various fields. Based on the nominations received from various eparchies of the Syro-Malabar Church for the presentation of such awards, the Synodal Committee studied the nominations and presented them to the Synod of Bishops. The second session of the 34th Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church, which began on August 17, 2026, at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad, selected both for the award. The awards will be presented during the *Dukrana - Sabhadhinam* celebrations to be held at the Major Archiepiscopal Curia on July 3, 2027.

BLESSING OF THE HERITAGE AND RESEARCH CENTRE (HRC) OF THE SYRO MALABAR CHURCH



Kakkanad: The Heritage and Research Centre of the Syro-Malabar Church was blessed by His Beatitude Mar Raphael Thattil the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, in the presence of the participants of the XXXIV synod of bishops. The Heritage and Research Centre was established with the objective of preserving, studying, and conducting research on the faith heritage, history, liturgical traditions, culture, and artistic heritage of the Syro-Malabar Church and handing them on to future generations. The foundation stone of the Centre was laid by the former Major Archbishop, Cardinal Mar George

Alencherry, together with the Synod Fathers. In addition to scientifically documenting and preserving the rich heritage and historical memories of the Church, facilities required for researchers, students, and the faithful are also provided here for study. A historical library and a digital library have been established for this purpose. The St. Thomas Heritage Museum also functions at the centre to preserve and display historical documents, heritage objects, liturgical articles, works of art, and other materials associated with the various stages of the growth and faith life of the Syro-Malabar Church, from the evangelising mission



of St. Thomas the Apostle in India onwards. Facilities have also been arranged to present the history and heritage of the Church through audio-visual media. The St. Thomas Heritage Museum has been con-

ceived under the leadership of renowned museologist Dr. John Philipose. The Heritage and Research Centre is emerging as an important centre for documenting and studying the history and heritage of the Sy-

ro-Malabar Church with the assistance of modern technology. Bishop Mar Tony Neelankavil, Chairman of the Heritage and Research Centre, and Fr. Dr. Jobin Kanjirathinkal led the ceremonies.

FR. THOMAS ANIMOOTIL NEW AUXILIARY BISHOP OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF KOTTAYAM

Kakkanad: Fr. Thomas Animoottil was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Kottayam by Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil of the Syro-Malabar Church. The Synod of Bishops, which began at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad, on August 17, 2026, elected him with the approval of the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV.

Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil made the announcement at the public meeting. The decree of the Major Archbishop appointing Rev. Fr. Thomas Animoottil as Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Kottayam was read by Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil and Archbishop Mar Mathew Moolakkatt of the Archdiocese of Kottayam vested Fr. Thomas Animoottil with the insignia of the epis-



copal office. Auxiliary Bishops Mar Joseph Pandarasseril and Geevarghese Mar Aprem presented him with bouquets and felicitated him. Archbishop Mar Sebastian Vaniyapurackal, Metropolitan Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Kalyan, extended the felicitation. Following the response of the Bishop-elect,

the prayer and blessing by the Major Archbishop, the Synod Fathers and members of the Major Archbishop Curia conveyed their greetings to the Bishop-elect.

Fr. Thomas was born on January 13, 1962, in the St. Anne's Knanaya Parish, Payyavoor, of the Archdiocese of Kottayam,

as the son of the late Joseph and Eli. After his school education, he began his priestly formation at the Minor Seminary of the Archdiocese of Kottayam. He completed his studies in philosophy and theology at St. Joseph's Seminary, Mangalore. He was ordained a priest on April 13, 1989, by Bishop Mar Kuria-kose Kunnacherry. After his ordination, he served as parish priest of Pulinyal Parish in the Archdiocese of Kottayam and later went to Rome for higher studies. He obtained a degree in Canon Law from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome and completed higher studies in Clinical Pastoral Education in Los Angeles, USA. He served as parish priest in Uzhavoor and Kaduthuruthy parishes. He also served as secretary to Bishop Mar Kuria-kose Kunnassery, Procurator of the Eparchy, Chancellor of

the Eparchy, Director of the Bar Maryam Pastoral Centre, Kannur, Notary of the Eparchial Tribunal, Director of Caritas Hospital, and Secretary of the Presbyteral Council of the Eparchy. He received the new appointment while serving as Protosyncellus of the Archdiocese.

"The responsibility entrusted to me as Auxiliary Bishop is from God. I firmly believe that He will grant me the strength and grace needed to fulfil it according to His will. I see this as a calling to serve God and His people with greater fidelity." The Bishop-elect said this while addressing the gathering at the ceremony held at Mount St. Thomas. "For I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil 4:13) is the episcopal motto he has chosen for his pastoral ministry. The episcopal ordination ceremony will be held on 2 October at Christ the King Cathedral, Kottayam.

MAR JOSE PULICKAL APPOINTED MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CATECHESIS



Mar Jose Pulickal, Bishop of the Eparchy of Kanjirapally and Chairman of the Commission

for Catechesis of the Syro-Malabar Church, has been appointed a member of the International Council for Catechesis. The appointment was made by the Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelization with the approval of Pope Leo XIV. He has been appointed for a term of five years.

The International Council for Catechesis, which functions under the Dicastery for Evangelization, is an international body that contributes to the develop-

ment of studies, guidelines, and policy recommendations required for the catechetical mission of the universal Church, and coordinates activities related to catechesis. Its members include bishops, priests, and experts in the field of catechesis from different continents.

Mar Jose Pulickal was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Kanjirapally in 2016 and became its Bishop in 2020. Since 2024, he has served as Chair-

man of the Catechetical Commission of the Syro-Malabar Church. In February 2026, he participated in the meeting of those engaged in the catechetical ministry of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, held in Manila, where he presented the catechetical activities of the Syro-Malabar Church, along with its achievements and challenges in the field of catechesis. He also serves as Chairman of the KCBC Bible Com-

mission, a member of the Media Commission of the Syro-Malabar Church, and a member of the Synodal Commission of Vadavathoor Seminary.

This appointment is a recognition of Mar Jose Pulickal's outstanding leadership and contribution to the field of catechesis. It also provides an opportunity for the Syro-Malabar Church to share its rich catechetical tradition more effectively in the catechetical mission of the universal Church.

“MUTUAL CONCORD” (*MUTUA CONCORDIA*): STRENGTHENING THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS IN PATRIARCHAL CHURCHES



CANON LAW

Rev. Dr. George Thekkekara

In the tradition of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the mutual communion and collaboration between the Patriarch and the Synod of Bishops are fundamental to ecclesial governance. While the Patriarch exercises his pastoral leadership as the Church's father and head, the Synod of Bishops embodies the Church's shared responsibility and communion. The harmonious cooperation of these two bodies is therefore essential to the Church's proper governance, the preservation of ecclesial communion, and the promotion of unity.

However, what is to be done when this relationship becomes seriously strained and reconciliation is no longer possible? More specifically, when it becomes evident that a change in leadership is necessary for the continued and orderly governance of the Church, but the Patriarch is unwilling to resign voluntarily, what canonical recourse is available to the Church? Until now, the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO) had not provided a clear canonical procedure for addressing such a situation.

It is precisely to address this legal lacuna that, on 29 August 2026, Pope Leo XIV promulgated the Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio* entitled “Mutual Concord” (*Mutua Concordia*). The document introduces significant amendments to canons 106 and 126 of the CCEO, establishing a specific canonical procedure for exceptional circumstances

in which the relationship between the Patriarch and the Synod of Bishops of his Church has become seriously and irreparably compromised, leadership change has become necessary, and the Patriarch is unwilling to resign voluntarily.

Therefore, *Mutua Concordia* should not be understood merely as a temporary measure to a crisis in a particular Church; rather, it should be understood as a structural legal reform that addresses the absence of a clear canonical procedure empowering the Synod of Bishops to safeguard the communion and orderly governance of the Church in extraordinary circumstances arising from a leadership crisis.

At the same time, *Mutua Concordia* does not diminish the Pope's supreme authority in any way. Rather, within the framework of papal authority, it gives the Synod of Bishops a more clearly defined canonical role and procedure for responding to extraordinary circumstances, grounded in shared responsibility and ecclesial communion.

Alternative Canonical Mechanism for Convening the Synod of Bishops

Canons 106 §§1–2 establish the authority and obligation of the Patriarch to convoke the Synod of Bishops in accordance with the norm of law. Recognizing, however, that the Patriarch may fail to fulfill this responsibility or may be unable to do so, the newly added §3 of canon 106 provides an alternative mechanism. In such circumstances, the authority to convoke the Synod is entrusted to the senior-most bishop in terms of episcopal ordination who possesses the right to vote. According to the current provision of canon 102 §3, bishops who have not yet attained the age of eighty retain the right to vote.

If this senior-most bishop likewise fails to convoke the Synod, the authority passes successively to the next senior bishop who has the right to vote and is “available for” fulfilling this responsibility. Thus, even in an extraordinary situation in which the Patriarch cannot convoke the Synod, a clear canonical mechanism is in place to ensure that the Synod of Bishops can be lawfully convened. Consequently, canon 106 §3 provides the necessary canonical mechanism for implementing the procedure prescribed in canon 126.

Major Changes to Canon 126

The patriarchal see becomes vacant when the incumbent Patriarch dies or resigns. The provisions governing this situation are set out in §§1 and 2 of canon 126. The present amendment adds three new paragraphs (§§3–5) to canon 126. Under Canon 108 §3, the consent of one-third of the members is sufficient to place a new matter on the agenda of a Synod convened in accordance with the provisions of canons 106 § 1, n. 3. On this basis, where serious reasons exist, the Synod may include the question of the Patriarch's resignation on its agenda and request that he resign (c. 126 §3).

However, if he is unwilling to do so, the senior-most bishop in episcopal ordination who has the right to vote may, as indicated above, undertake the procedure for electing a new president of the Synod. Under the presidency of the bishop so elected, a secret ballot shall be held on the removal of the Patriarch from office. If two-thirds of the members vote in favour, he shall communicate the matter to the Roman Pontiff.

Before the vote is taken, however, the Patriarch must be given a reasonable opportunity to explain his position and defend himself before the Synod.

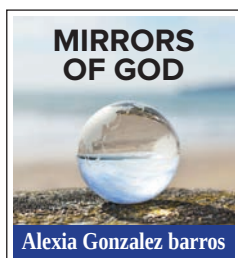
Canon 126 §4, however, does not specify in detail how this opportunity is to be provided. Once the Synod's decision receives the assent of the Roman Pontiff, the patriarchal office is considered vacant (c. 126 §4). Thereafter, the procedure for electing a new Patriarch may be initiated in accordance with the provisions of canon law.

Canon 126 §5 also empowers the Synod to make suitable provisions regarding the status of a Patriarch who has been removed from office. These may include retaining his title and honours, particularly during liturgical celebrations, assigning him, with his consent, a residence befitting his dignity, and providing him with the means necessary for his support in keeping with his title. Although the amendments have been introduced into the canons concerning patriarchal Churches, these procedures also apply to Major Archiepiscopal Churches (c. 152).

Conclusion

In an extraordinary situation in which communion between the Patriarch and the Synod is seriously and irreparably compromised, these reforms provide a clear, orderly, and canonical means of addressing the crisis within the Synodal structure of the Eastern Churches. The ultimate purpose of this reform is not to diminish the Patriarch's authority, but to protect ecclesial communion, uphold the proper synodal character of the Eastern Churches, and ensure the Church's unity, good order, and effective governance in communion with the Roman Pontiff. In this way, the reform seeks to provide a canonical remedy for situations in which the continuation of the existing relationship of governance itself becomes an obstacle to communion and the Church's common good. ■

ONE WHO RECEIVED DEATH WITH GRATITUDE FROM THE HANDS OF GOD



Vinayak Nirmal

It began with pain in the neck and arms. The persistent pain led to more detailed medical examinations. Finally, the result came. It was a malignant tumour. Alexia Gonzalez was only thirteen years old at the time. Everyone who knew her was filled with sorrow that such a serious illness had befallen a young girl at such a tender age. She too was distressed at first. Therefore, she prayed in this way: “I want and pray to be cured of this illness. But if it is not your will that I be cured, let your will be done.” It was unconditional surrender, complete submission to the will of God. That is what Alexia Gonzalez



did. How did a thirteen-year-old girl attain such spiritual maturity? Was it her faith in God?

Alexia was born on 7 March 1971 in Madrid, Spain, into a devout Catholic

family with a deep faith in God. Her parents, Francisco and Moncha, were closely associated with the Opus Dei movement. Alexia was the youngest of their seven children. She grew up with a devotion to her guardian angel. She named her guardian angel Hugo. Alexia received her First Holy Communion at the age of eight, and that same year she had the opportunity to witness an unforgettable moment. It was when she visited the Vatican with her parents and received a blessing from Pope John Paul II during the general audience. The joy and memory of seeing the Pope in person and receiving his blessing remained with her until her death. Her life as an adolescent was passing peacefully and calmly when illness entered her life in the form of pain. The tumour was in her spinal cord. She had to undergo four operations within a few months. As a result, she became paralysed. She lived for only ten months after the diagnosis. But those ten months were filled with severe pain and suffering. Yet throughout this period,

she lived with joy and faith. Even amid her pain, Alexia firmly believed that she was in the hands of God. That is why she prayed: “Jesus, I want to get well. But if you do not want it, neither do I.” She viewed everything that happened to her with faith. Therefore, many things that appeared to others as suffering did not seem to her to be suffering.

Alexia died in 1985 at the University of Navarra Clinic in Pamplona, Spain, at just fourteen years of age. Her life of suffering and spirituality inspired many people from that time onwards. The process for her canonisation began in the Archdiocese of Madrid in 1993. On 5 July 2018, Pope Francis declared Alexia Venerable. If we can receive even the ordinary events of daily life with gratitude from the hands of God, our lives will indeed be sanctified. How long we have lived is not the most important thing. Rather, if we are able to live according to the will of God throughout the time given to us, our lives will become blessed. ■

SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS OF THE EPARCHY OF CHICAGO CONCLUDES WITH SPIRITUAL RENEWAL



Chicago: The eparchial-level convention held from July 9 to 12 at the McCormick Place Convention Center in connection with the Silver Jubilee of the St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Chicago concluded. The convention was a great gathering of faith, fellowship, and spiritual renewal. Thousands of faithful from various states across the United States participated. The convention began with the celebration of the Holy Qurbana, presided over by the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, Mar Raphael Thattil.

Mar Joy Alappatt, Bishop of the Eparchy of Chicago; Mar Jacob Angadiyath, the first Bishop of the Eparchy; Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Chicago; Metropolitan Philipose Mar Stephanos; and Bishop Mar Jose Kalluvil were concelebrants. In his message, the Major Archbishop called upon every faithful to be prepared to go forth into the world as witnesses to the Gospel. He said that it is a great responsibility of the present time to faithfully hand on the faith heritage and spiritual traditions

of the Syro-Malabar Church to future generations, and that the growth of the Eparchy of Chicago over the past quarter century is the fruit of God's blessings and the dedication of the faith community.

The Major Archbishop inaugurated the public meeting. Bishop Mar Joy Alappatt said that the Silver Jubilee Convention is a historical testimony to the growth and faith journey of the Syro-Malabar Church in America. He recalled the bishops, priests, religious, and lay leaders who had rendered ded-

icated service for the growth of the Church from the time of the establishment of the Eparchy. Faithful who came from various parishes and missions across the United States participated enthusiastically in the Faith Rally, one of the major attractions of the convention. Parishes and missions that demonstrated notable participation in the rally, which bore witness to the spiritual awakening and fellowship of the Syro-Malabar diaspora community, were honoured and recognised. Spiritual formation classes, seminars, discussion fo-

ums, and special sessions were organised for various groups, including children, youth, couples, families, women, and senior citizens. Sessions dealing with family life, faith formation, active participation in the life of the Church, and Christian witness in contemporary society, as well as the presence and addresses of Cardinal Mar George Koovakad and Archbishops Mar Andrews Thazhath and Mar Thomas Tharayil, were noteworthy. Mar Raphael Thattil inaugurated at the diocesan level the new lay missionary movement 'Jeevan Jyothi', launched to strengthen the missionary participation of the laity in evangelisation. Artistic programmes, musical presentations, and cultural events were organised under the leadership of various parishes and missions.

CATHOLIC CONGRESS: FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE GIVES NEW IMPETUS



Mumbai: The contribution of the Christian community to India is unique, and society will always remember the Church's services in the fields of education and healthcare, said Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church Mar Raphael Thattil. He was inaugurating the national conference of the Catholic Congress in Mumbai. "The contribution of the Christian community to the growth of the country is a matter of pride for us. We are not a persecuted community. As migration increases, every Christian should strive to share the love of Christ in the places where they go, hold firmly to the traditions of the Church, and do good to others. The community should move forward as one across India, joining hands with the Catholic Congress," he said.

At the conference presided over by Global President Rajeev Kochuparambil, Archbishop Mar Sebastian Vaniyapurackal,

Archbishop Mar Raffi Manjaly, Bishop Legate Mar Remigiose Inchananiyil, Mar Joseph Arumachadath, General Secretary Dr. Josukkutty J. Ozhukayil, Director Fr. Philip Kaviyil, Msgr. Cyriac Kumbattu, Adv. Biju Parayanilam, Dr. Treasa Liz Sebastian, Adv. Tony Panchakunnel, Benny Antony, Rajeev Thomas, Saji Varkey and others spoke.

The conference programmes began on the morning of 1st August with Global President Rajeev Kochuparambil hoisting the flag at the conference venue. The national conference held at Panvel ARC in Mumbai was attended by 170 delegates from eparchies across different parts of the country. Panel discussions, interactive sessions, seminars on various topics, and policy formulation were held on the theme 'Community Empowerment for National Progress'. Archbishop Mar Raffi Manjaly, Bishop Mar Joseph Arumacha-

dath, Bishop Mar Thomas Padiyath, Glen E. D'Souza Tiklo, Member of the Central Minority Commission, Adv. Abraham Patiyan, Secretary of the CBCI Laity Commission, Anoop Antony, Fr. Varghese Vallikkattu, George Kallivayalil, Dolfy D'Souza, Chev. Dr. K. M. Francis and others presented papers.

The concluding session held on August 2 was inaugurated by Cardinal Oswald Gracias. Cardinal Oswald Gracias said that new laws in the country should not affect the survival of communities and that denying civil liberties by exploiting loopholes in the law is unbecoming of a civilised society. He expressed gratitude for the lay faithful who bear witness to the Gospel in various countries of the world. "There is no need to fear anyone in proclaiming the Gospel and doing good to others. This is our duty," the Cardinal reminded. The Archeparchy of Kalyan hosted the conference.

HESED 2K26 GOLDEN JUBILEE GRAND GATHERING OF MOTHERS



Podimattam: As part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Eparchy of Kanjirapally, the diocesan-level Grand Gathering of Mothers was held on Tuesday, August 11, hosted by the Velichiyani Forane. A public meeting followed the celebration of the Holy Qurbana at St. Mary's Church, presided over by the former Bishop of the Eparchy, Mar Mathew Arackal. The meeting, presided over by Bishop Mar Joseph Kallarangatt of the Eparchy of Pala, was inaugurated by Bishop Mar Joseph Pulickal of the Eparchy of Kanjirapally. In his presidential address, Mar Pulickal said that the self-sacrificing dedication shown by mothers towards God and human beings, and especially towards their families, is a challenging mission, and expressed the hope that they may fulfil this mission with care, strength, and a prayerful heart. Bishop Mar Joseph Kallarangatt reminded that mothers train their families to live with hope and overcome challenges in the light of faith, and that a mother who places her trust in God sows peace in the family.

Adv. Justin Pallivathukal presented a paper on the family. Fr. Mathew Olickal, Director of the Family Apostolate of the Eparchy, welcomed the participants at the Grand Gathering of Mothers.

Vicar General Rev. Dr. Sebastian Kollamkunnel, Forane Vicar Rev. Dr. Sebastian Palamoottil, Forane Director Fr. Manu Puthenveetil, Fr. Varghese Puthupparambil, Vicar of Podimattam Parish, Diocesan Animator Sr. Rosmy SABS, Forane Animator Sr. Maria Tom FCC, and members of the Forane and diocesan executive committees provided leadership.

Around 1,000 mothers from 148 parishes of the Eparchy participated. Seventy-three women representatives who were elected from the Eparchy in the recently held local self-government elections were honoured. Traditional art forms such as Margamkali, Ramban Pattu, Kolkali, and Christian Thiruvathira were presented. Gigi Jacob Puliyamkunnel and Jooby Antony Vezhambasheril spoke. Hesed 2K26 concluded with a fellowship meal.

BLACK DAY OBSERVED

Kottayam: A Black Day was observed on August 10, the anniversary of the promulgation of the Scheduled Caste Order of 1950, under the leadership of the Dalit Catholic Mahajana Sabha, protesting against the decades-long discrimination faced by Dalit Christians in the country on religious grounds,

contrary to constitutional principles. The gathering demanded the immediate restoration of the constitutional reservation rights that have been denied to the Dalit Christian community for decades on account of religious conversion. The Black Day observance held at the Thirunakara Bus Stand in Kottayam was

inaugurated by Bishop Geevarghese Mar Aprem, Chairman of the KCBC SC, ST and BC Commission. State President Shibu Joseph presided. State Director Fr. Josukkutty Edathinakath, Tommy Vijayapuram, U.V. Mathew, Rosamma Augustine, Bindu Antony and others spoke.

PILGRIMAGES HELP PEOPLE FACE SUFFERINGS WITH HOPE: ARCHBISHOP MAR THOMAS THARAYIL



Kudamaloor: Pilgrimages enable us to face the sufferings of life with hope, like St. Alphonsa, said Archbishop Mar Thomas Tharayil of the Archeparchy of Changanacherry. He was addressing the community of faithful who had gathered at Kudamaloor for the 38th Alphonso Pilgrimage. Thousands participated in the pilgrimage held on August 1 under the leadership of the Cherupushpa Mission League of the Archeparchy of Changanacherry, despite adverse weather conditions. Pilgrims from various regions of the Archeparchy of Changanacherry arrived at the birthplace of St. Alphonsa, St. Mary's Major Archiepiscopal Pilgrim-

age Centre, Kudamaloor, her mother parish, and the Mananam monastery church. The liturgical services at the birthplace of St. Alphonsa began at 7.15 a.m. with the arrival of the Kudamaloor Region pilgrimage led by Archpriest Rev. Dr. George Mangalath. Archbishop Emeritus Mar Joseph Perumthottam delivered the message during the Holy Qurbana.

The Holy Qurbana at 9.45 a.m. was presided over by Fr. Mathew Padinjarekutt, Vicar of Athirampuzha Forane. Rev. Dr. Mani Puthiyidom delivered the message. At 12 noon, Fr. Joseph Naduvilekkalam, Director of the Alappuzha Region, presided over the Holy Qurbana.

Fr. Antony Ethackad, Protosyncellus of the Archeparchy of Changanacherry, delivered the message. At 2 p.m., the main groups of pilgrims from the Changanacherry and Thuruthy regions, coming from the Parel Marian Pilgrimage Centre, arrived at the birthplace of St. Alphonsa. Nercha food was distributed at St. Mary's Major Archiepiscopal Pilgrimage Centre, Kudamaloor. The Holy Qurbana at 3 p.m. was presided over by Rev. Dr. Varghese Puthenpurakkal, Archeparchial Director of the Mission League. Rev. Dr. Scaria Kanniyakonil, Syncellus of the Archeparchy of Changanacherry, delivered the message.

KCYM STATE WOMEN'S GATHERING HELD AT THAMARASSERY



Thamarassery: The state-level camp 'Ini' of the KCYM State Committee was held on August 28, 29, and 30 at Liss College, Kaithappoyil, hosted by the KCYM-SMYM of the Eparchy of Thamarassery. Around 100 women from various eparchies of Kerala participated in the gathering. The function, presided over by KCYM State Vice President Aagi Maria Joseph, was inaugurated by Bishop Mar Remigiose Inchananiyil of the Eparchy of Thamarassery. He said that young women are the strength of the present time and called upon them to come

forward to leadership positions. Abin Palavayal, Mentalist Ayush, Linet Maria, Sr. Christy, Swathi, and the MVR Team led the sessions. KCYM State Secretaries Senju Jacob and Dhanya Mohanraj, Diocesan Vice President Bilha Mathew, Diocesan Animator Sr. Roseen SABS, Diocesan President Albin Jose, Diocesan Director Fr. Jyothis Cherusseril, Secretary Ansil Thomas, State Senate Member Alona Johnson, SMYM Counsellor Anjali Joy, Shubin Shaji, Joel John, Jenson and others provided leadership.



CONGRATULATIONS

Shri. Xavier Kariyavil, winner of the Kerala Government Kera Kesari Award 2025 for the best coconut farmer in the State. He is a member of Chempanoda Parish in the Eparchy of Thamarassery

NEW LEADERSHIP FOR THE CATHOLIC HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION



Mananthavady: The office-bearers of the Catholic Hospital Association of India (CHAI), Kerala Region, for the period 2026-2029 were elected. Fr. Dr. Philip Payyampilly is the President. He is the CEO and Secretary of Pushpagiri Institutions, Thiruvalla. Fr. Vimal Francis, Director of Lourdes Hospital, Ernakulam,

is the Vice President; Sr. Tejas FCC, Administrator of Dhanya Mission Hospital, Potta, is the Secretary; Fr. Anto Antony Perumpillythara, Executive Director of Sahardaya Hospital, Alappuzha, is the Joint Secretary; and Fr. Shibu Puthenpurayil CMI, Joint Director of Amala Medical College, Thrissur, is

the Treasurer. Fr. Binu Kunnath (Thiruvananthapuram), Fr. Ullas (Kottayam), Fr. Claudin Bivera (Ernakulam), Fr. Demin (Thrissur), and Sr. Josna (Malabar) were elected as Regional Coordinators. The election was held at the 64th Annual General Body Meeting at Dwaraka Pastoral Centre.

RESERVATION ISSUE OF DALIT CHRISTIANS TO BE SERIOUSLY EXAMINED: CHIEF MINISTER

Thiruvananthapuram: The government will seriously examine the issue of reservation for Dalit Christians in the state, said Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan. He said that the government would examine and study all the legal aspects of the matter. The issue of reservation for Dalit Christians was presented before the present government

by the Cherama Sambava Development Society. He said that the community currently receives neither the reservation benefits available to Dalits nor the privileges available to Christians. The Chief Minister was speaking after inaugurating the Ayyankali birth anniversary celebrations organised by the Cherama Sambava Development Society (CSDS).

INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS AT SYRO-MALABAR MAJOR ARCHIEPISCOPAL CURIA



Kakkanad: As part of the celebrations marking the 80th Independence Day of India, Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil hoisted the national flag and delivered the Independence Day message at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad, the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church.

Extending Independence Day greetings to all the people of the country, the Major Archbishop reminded that freedom is not merely the enjoyment of rights but also entails a great

responsibility. He pointed out that, along with safeguarding the unity and integrity of the nation, it is the duty of every citizen to embrace India's rich diversity and traditions. He added that every citizen of independent India should live with a constant remembrance of the sacrificial struggles of the great men and women who fought selflessly and made the supreme sacrifice for the freedom of India. Many Priests, religious, and faithful participated in the ceremony.

STATE FARMERS' AWARD FOR SANTHOM COMPANY OF THE EPARCHY PALA



Pala: The State Farmers' Award was presented to Santhom Company of the Eparchy of Pala. Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan presented the award at the state-level Farmers' Day celebration organised at Ashish Convention Centre, Kalamassery. The award was received by the team led by Msgr. Sebastian Vettanath, Vicar General of the Eparchy and Manager of the Pala Social Welfare Society, the promoting

agency of Pala Santhom Farmer Producer Company, along with Director Fr. Joseph Vattappilly, Assistant Directors Fr. Joseph Thazhathvarikayil, Fr. Francis Edathinal, Fr. Mathew Pulickaparambil, Public Relations Officer Dantes Koonanickal, FPC Chief Executive Officer Vimal Joni, and members of the Board of Directors Sibi Kaniyampady, P. V. George Purayidathil, Sheeba Benny, Claris Cherian, Tony Kaniparambil, Thomas Mathew,

Jose K. George, Thomas K. George, Shiljo Ettayakkunnel and others. Agriculture Minister T. Siddique presided over the function. Santhom Company operates at the Karoor Steel India campus. Santhom was selected for the state-level award in recognition of its sustainable and integrated entrepreneurial initiative, effectively utilising technical and financial assistance from various departments and agencies.



DIARY OF THE MAJOR ARCHBISHOP

FROM 28 JULY - 27 AUGUST

JULY

- **28 Tuesday:** Celebrated Holy *Qurbana* at St. Alphonsa Shrine, Bharananganam, in the Eparchy of Palai, on the feast day of St. Alphonsa.
- **31 Friday:** Celebrated Holy *Qurbana* at the CMI Generalate, Kakkanad for the participants of the General Synaxis.

AUGUST

- **1 Saturday:** Celebrated Holy *Qurbana* at the Minor Seminary of the Archeparchy of Kalyan.
- **2 Sunday:** Celebrated Holy *Qurbana* for the participants of the First National Conference of the Catholic Congress at Archeparchial Pastoral Centre, Panvel, and inaugurated the public meeting.
- **3 Monday:** Addressed the KCBC Bishops-Theologians Colloquium at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad and participated in it.

- **3-7:** Attended the KCBC Retreat at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad.
- **8 Saturday:** Presided over the public meeting held in connection with the at the *Navathi* celebration of Little Flower Hospital, Angamaly in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly. Presided over the public meeting, held as part of the centenary celebrations of *Sathyadeepam* at the Renewal Centre, Kaloor, in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly.
- **15 Saturday:** Inaugurated the Archeparchial Catechetical Day of the Archeparchy of Trichur at DBCLC.
- **17-28:** Inaugurated the II Session of the XXXIV Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church and participated in it.
- **22 Saturday:** Inaugurated the centenary celebrations of the Sisters of Destitute Congregation at the SD Generalate, Alwaye.

- **23 Sunday:** Celebrated Holy *Qurbana* as part of the conclusion of the centenary celebrations of the SD Congregation at the SD Generalate, Alwaye.
- **24 Monday:** Received at Mount St. Thomas His Beatitude Moran Mor Ignatius Joseph III Younan, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East of the Syrians and Father and Head of the Syriac Catholic Church. Visited St. Joseph Pontifical Seminary, Alwaye, together with the participants of the Synod of Bishops.
- **26 Wednesday:** Blessed the Heritage & Research Centre of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad.
- **27 Thursday:** Appointed Fr. Thomas Animoottil Auxiliary Bishop of Kottayam and announced the same in the public meeting held at Mount St. Thomas in the afternoon.

Post Synodal Circular

Continuation of page 3

of great joy for the entire Syro-Malabar Church. We pray that Fr. Thomas may receive the fullness of God's blessings, and we extend to him our prayerful best wishes for his episcopal ministry.

Dear brothers and sisters,

This Synod, held under divine prov-

idence, awakens within us a renewed sense of responsibility to form our Church in accordance with the will of God. Without being discouraged by crises or shaken by challenges, let us move forward in faith, communion, and missionary zeal, placing all our hope in the Lord.

The Synod expressed heartfelt solidarity with the families of all those who

are suffering because of the disasters caused by the monsoon rains in Kerala. It also shared in the sorrow of those who have lost their loved ones in the tragic natural disaster in Nepal, and continues to pray for all those who have lost their homes and livelihoods.

Let us seek the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Thomas the Apostle, and all the saints and blessed

of our Church, and entrust our Church and our families into the hands of the Lord. May the Holy Spirit guide us on our journey and bless us to bear witness to the Gospel with greater power as a Church united in Christ!

Given from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad, on 28 August 2026.

NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF THE ARCHEPARCHY OF FARIDABAD

A platform for in-depth reflection on the presence and synodal growth of the Syro-Malabar Church in North India

Ghaziabad: With the hope that the prophetic synodal vision of mission would become a reality, a national symposium was organised under the leadership of the Metropolitan Archeparchy of Faridabad and the Eparchies of Gorakhpur and Bijnor. At the inaugural ceremony of the national symposium jointly organised by the Archeparchy of Faridabad and Christ University at the Christ University campus on July 28, 2026, the Major Archbishop and Father and Head of the Syro-Malabar Church, Mar Raphael Thattil, delivered a video message. He said that the reorganisation of the ecclesiastical jurisdictions of the Church in North India was implemented to strengthen the formation of the faithful, pastoral ministry, and evangelisation, and called for the development of an evangelising style that journeys together with families, youth, and children, understanding the particular realities of North India as children of St. Thomas the Apostle.

Mar Sebastian Vadakel, Metropolitan Archbishop of Ujjain and a member of the Synodal Commission for Evangelisation of the Syro-Malabar



Church, inaugurated the symposium. Mar Sebastian Vadakel said that Christians should become builders of bridges of relationships in society and that, in the context of the reorganisation of the ecclesiastical jurisdictions of the Syro-Malabar Church in North India, the Church has a great responsibility to move forward together as a synodal community embracing everyone.

In his presidential address, Mar Kuriakose Bharanikulangara, Archbishop of the Archeparchy of Faridabad, said that, when the canonical jurisdiction of the Syro-Malabar Church was mainly limited to Kerala, the establishment of the Eparchy of Faridabad by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012 and

the entrustment of the evangelising mission in six states of North India to the Church was an important preparation for expanding the Church's evangelising mission and canonical jurisdiction throughout India through the establishment of the Eparchy of Shamshabad in 2017.

All the sessions on the first day of the symposium were centred on the theme 'Canonical and Legal Significance of the Reorganised Region of North India'. Bishop Mar Jose Porunnedom of the Eparchy of Mananthavady, Archbishop Mar Kuriakose Bharanikulangara of the Archeparchy of Faridabad, Major Archiepiscopal Chancellor Rev. Dr. Abraham Kavilpurayidathil, and

Chancellor of the Archeparchy of Faridabad Rev. Dr. Martin Palamattam presented research papers. In the panel discussion on 'The Inter-Church Context of the Reorganised Region', presided over by Bishop Mar Thomas Padiyath, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archeparchy of Shamshabad, Vicar General of Faridabad Msgr. John Chozhithara, Vicar General of Bijnor Msgr. Francis Kollamkudy, and Chancellor of Gorakhpur Rev. Fr. Sathesh Chathamkunnel presented papers. A new documentary on Mother Teresa, produced and directed by Anto Akkara, was screened.

On the second and third days, discussions focused on implementing at the practical level the theological, mission-

ary, and pastoral implications of the newly reorganised region of North India. Auxiliary Bishop of Faridabad Mar Jose Puthenveetil, Bishop Mar Mathew Nellikkunnel of the Eparchy of Gorakhpur, retired Bishop Mar John Vadakel of the Eparchy of Bijnor, retired Bishop Mar Thomas Thuruthimattam of the Eparchy of Gorakhpur, Msgr. Cyriac Kochalunkal CST, Syncellus of the Punjab Mission, Rev. Dr. Justin Vettukallel MST, Coordinator of the MST Missions and Guwahati, Sr. Adv. Asha Paul CHF, Advisory Member of the CBCI Legal Cell and Secretary of the CBCI Council for Women, Dr. Joseph Emmanuel, Chief Executive of CISCE and former Secretary of the CBSE Board, and Sr. Smitha S.D., Provincial Superior of the SD Sisters and social worker, presented research papers.

The concluding session was inaugurated by Archbishop Rev. Dr. Anil J. T. Kotto, Archbishop of the Latin Archdiocese of Delhi. He said that all missionary activities in North India should be marked by a spirit of ecclesial communion and mutual accompaniment. Around 200 delegates participated.

Epharchy of BIJNOR



Erected on 26 February 1977



Rt. Rev. Vincent Nellaiparambil
Bishop of Bijnor



Rt. Rev. John Vadakel CMI
Bishop Emeritus of Bijnor



Rt. Rev. Gratian Mundadan CMI
Bishop Emeritus of Bijnor



Diocese at a Glance

Patron	St. Joseph
Area	33919 sq. Km
Total Population	53813000
Language Spoken	Hindi, Garhwali, Urdu
Catholics	3664
Mission Stations	58
Diocesan Priests	62
Priests in Heaven	3
Religious Priests	33
Religious Nuns	205
Diocesan Seminarians	28
Diocesan Minor Seminary	1
Religious Minor Seminary	1
Formation Houses of Women Religious	4

Convents	52
Pastoral Centre	1
Publications	1
Mission House in Kerala	1
Hospital & Health Care Centres	1 + 6
Social Work Centres	2
Printing Press	1
Indian Christian Ashrams	4
Centres for Differently Abled	5
Research & Dialogue Centre	1

The Apostolic Exarchate of Bijnor was erected with the declaration by the papal bull "Beatorum Apostolorum" of Pope Paul VI on 23 March, 1972 and was entrusted to the Sacred Heart province of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate for the work of evangelization and Gratian Mundadan CMI was appointed the Apostolic Exarch. On 25 July 1972 Gratian Mundadan CMI took charge as the Apostolic Exarch of Bijnor. Erection of the Diocese of Bijnor was declared by the Papal Bull "Quae Cum Romano" of Pope Paul VI on 26 February 1977 and the Apostolic Exarch Gratian Mundadan CMI was nominated as the first Bishop of Bijnor.

The Eparchy of Bijnor was culled out from the Diocese of Meerut. It originally consisted of the civil districts of Bijnor, Pauri, Tehri, Uttarkashi and Chamoli of the then state of Uttar Pradesh. In 2000, when the new state of Uttarakhand was created, the districts of Pauri, Tehri, Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Rudraprayag and Haridwar became parts of the new state. With the extension of its territory since 2025, at present the Eparchy of Bijnor consists of 13 civil districts of Uttarakhand - Almora, Bageshwar, Chamoli, Champawat, Dehradun, Haridwar, Nainital, Pauri Garhwal, Pithoragarh, Rudraprayag, Tehri Garhwal, Udham Singh Nagar and Uttarkashi - and 14 civil districts of Uttar Pradesh - Amroha, Baghpat, Bareilly, Bijnor, Hapur, Meerut, Moradabad, Muzaffarnagar, Pilibhit, Rampur, Saharanpur, Sambhal, Shahjahanpur and Shamli.



Cathedral: Situated in Kotdwar, Uttarakhand, the Cathedral of Bijnor Diocese is a significant landmark of faith and heritage. Its foundation stone was laid on 5 December 2001, and it was consecrated on 31 October 2011.

Beyond being a centre of worship, the Cathedral enriches the spiritual and cultural identity of the region while preserving and upholding the cherished traditions and values of the Church.

Centers for Differently Abled

ASHADEEP CHARITABLE SOCIETY



Ashadeep, meaning "Light of Hope," is a centre for children with special needs and an initiative of the Catholic Diocese of Bijnor. It was established in 2002 and is situated in the remote village of Dodraipur, Bijnor District, Uttar Pradesh, India. Ashadeep provides a safe, inclusive and nurturing environment for children with special needs. It has become a home for children from different parts of North India. At present, 127 children with special needs from Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir are accommodated at the institution. One of the distinctive features of Ashadeep is its commitment to inclusive education. Children with special needs study alongside 1,130 day scholars from 21 nearby villages. This inclusive approach promotes mutual understanding, dignity, participation and social integration.

PREMDHAM

Responding to the call of the Lord and prompted by the Holy Spirit, two priests of the Diocese of Bijnor, envisioned and initiated the Premdham Ashram. It is a compassionate mission, inspired by the words of the Lord, “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40), reaching out to the Least, Last and Lost of the society. Premdham founded in 2009 has been actively engaged in the rehabilitation and care of the differently abled persons that includes the mentally retarded, physically challenged and terminally sick. Majority of the beneficiaries of the organization are neglected, abandoned and discarded young persons and adults who are destitute. Their parents or next of kin have disinclined to look after them owing to the social stigma attached to these illness and disabilities.



Premdham

Premdham Ashram is located at Najibabad Tehsil, in the District of Bijnor in Uttar Pradesh. The rehabilitation regimen of Premdham inter alia include: Medicare, supply of mobility aids, counseling, corrective surgeries and formal schooling for those children who are able to do so.

Ever since its very inception, Premdham has been in the spotlight and has the whole-hearted support and cooperation of the local people.

MARIA ASHRAM, GHATT

Maria Ashram is a centre for differently abled girls and women, situated at Nandanagar Ghat in Chamoli District, Uttarakhand, and is part of the Diocese of Bijnor in Garhwal. The mission station was established in 2002 by Rev. Fr. Benny Thekkekkara. He began his ministry in a rented house, reaching out to differently abled children and responding to their needs with compassion and dedication. In 2003, Rev. Fr. Shibu Thundathil joined this mission. Witnessing the difficult living conditions and limited opportunities available to children with disabilities, the Fathers decided to establish a dedicated centre named “Maria Ashram”, with the aim of empowering and rehabilitating these less privileged children. Since its establishment, Maria Ashram has remained committed to its objectives of providing care, education, skills training and opportunities for self-reliance. Over the years, more than 60 differently abled children and adults have benefited from its various programmes. Training in skills such as tailoring and muffler making has enabled several beneficiaries to become more self-reliant and economically independent.



More than 15 children have been successfully rehabilitated. Some have married and established stable family lives, while others are engaged in various jobs and productive activities. Two girls were also provided nursing training and are now well settled, serving in different hospitals.

At present, Maria Ashram accommodates 13 girls and women, continuing its mission of restoring dignity, building confidence and creating opportunities for differently abled persons through compassionate care, skill development and rehabilitation. Sisters of Destitute of Ghaziabad Province are actively engaged in this ministry.

Social Service Centre

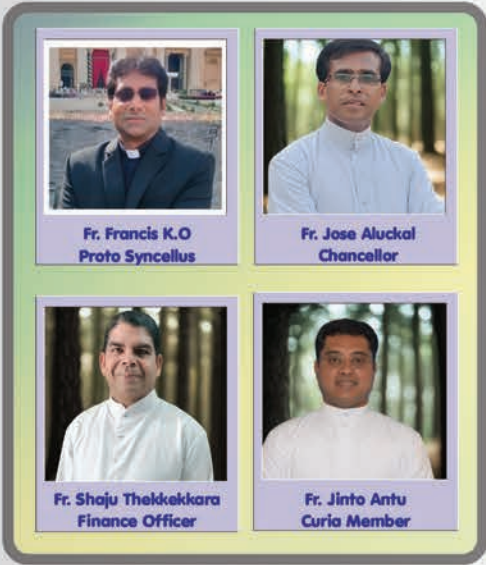
KARUNA SOCIAL SERVICE SOCIETY

Karuna Social Service Society (KSSS) is the Social Service Wing of Catholic Diocese Bijnor involved in social development activities for the marginalized and downtrodden. It is a voluntary non-profit organization registered under the Societies registration Act XXI 1860, on 29th April 1982 with a registration number 115/82/83. The registered office of the society is situated at Balasaur, Kotdwar, Pauri Garhwal in Uttarakhand India.



For over four decades, KSSS has been empowering marginalized and vulnerable communities across seven districts of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh through sustainable, participatory, and inclusive development. Operating through 28 Community Development Centres covering 634 villages, the organization implements integrated programmes in sustainable livelihoods, women and child development, youth empowerment, disability inclusion, health and nutrition, disaster risk reduction, environmental conservation, and local governance. KSSS combines grassroots experience with strong institutional systems in capacity building, project management, monitoring and evaluation, and stakeholder engagement. Working closely with government departments, community institutions, CSR partners, and development agencies, KSSS promotes community ownership, social justice, and resilience. Guided by the vision of a just and self-reliant society, KSSS continues to create lasting social impact through people-centered and sustainable development initiatives.

Curia Members



Our Vision & Mission

To build a vibrant, Christ-centred and inclusive Church that witnesses to the Gospel through faith, love, care and compassionate service, especially among the poor and marginalized. The Eparchy of Bijnor is committed to proclaiming the Gospel and nurturing communities of faith through pastoral care, evangelization, catechesis and formation. Inspired by Christ, it serves people irrespective of caste, creed or social status through education, healthcare, social development and empowerment of the marginalized. The Eparchy promotes human dignity, interreligious harmony and integral development while fostering the active participation of clergy, religious and laity. Rooted in prayer and missionary zeal, it seeks to be a humble and credible presence of Christ in the spiritually rich lands of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh

HOLY FATHER EXTENDS ASSISTANCE TO NEPAL IN THE WAKE OF DISASTER



Vatican City: Pope Leo XIV has extended assistance to the people of Nepal suffering from flash floods by providing necessary resources. Pope Leo sent financial assistance through the Dicastery for the Service of Charity. The assistance will be used for food, basic necessities, and shelter. Archbishop Luis Marín de San Martín, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Service of Charity, said that the assistance expresses the closeness and love of the Holy Father towards the most vulnerable among those

affected by the disaster and is a tangible sign that the Church accompanies and supports them. Caritas Nepal is providing food, drinking water, medical supplies, hygiene materials, emergency accommodation, clothing and blankets, and medicines. Caritas has also started operating a community kitchen. In addition to the financial assistance, Pope Leo also sent a telegram expressing his profound sorrow and prayers for the floods that occurred in Nepal.

THE SHARP DECLINE IN NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS ALARMING: CLAUDIO CARDINAL GUGEROTTI

Rome: The sharp decline in the number of Christians in the Middle East is a matter of concern, said Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches. The Head of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches pointed out the challenges faced by Christians in the Eastern lands at the 47th Meeting for Friendship among Peoples held in Rimini, Italy. He said that, at a time when wars and displace-

ment are causing great suffering in the Middle East, Christians belonging to the Eastern Churches are gradually disappearing altogether from those regions. "The Christian faith is a plural reality. This plurality is rich in diversity. As the Eastern world is increasingly caught in the grip of civil war, the crisis is intensifying. Internal problems create serious disturbances in maintaining the unity of the Church, the Body of Christ," he

said. He also pointed out that Christians fleeing their homelands and seeking safety elsewhere because of threats from extremist organisations such as the Islamic State are finding even survival increasingly difficult. Christian leaders, including Cardinal Béchara Boutros Raï, Patriarch of the Maronite Church in Lebanon, had also expressed sorrow over the decline in the Christian population in the Middle East.



PATRIARCH MORAN MOR IGNATIUS JOSEPH III YOUNAN ADDRESSED SYRO-MALABAR BISHOP SYNOD



Kakkanad: Moran Mor Ignatius Joseph III Younan, Patriarch of the Antiochene Syriac Catholic Church, visited Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad, the Major Archiepiscopal curia of the Syro-Malabar Church. The Patriarch's visit took place while the II Session of the XXXIV Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church was in progress. Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil The Father

and Head of the Syro-Malabar Church, together with the members of the Permanent Synod, received the Patriarch. Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Joseph III Younan addressed the Synod Fathers. He pointed out the need to strengthen communion and mutual cooperation among the Eastern Catholic Churches. He also highlighted the importance of presenting more effectively, in the contemporary

context, the traditions, spiritual riches, and witness of faith of the Eastern Churches. While welcoming the Patriarch Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil said that the visit is highly significant in further developing the historical and spiritual bonds between the Syro-Malabar Church and the Antiochene Syriac Catholic Church. Archbishop Mar Joseph Pamplany expressed gratitude to the Patriarch for his visit.



Prayerful greetings to His Beatitude Mar Raphael Thattil the Father and Head of the Syro-Malabar Church as he celebrates his feast on 29th September.



The Syro-Malabar Vision extends greeting to His Beatitude Baselios Cardinal Cleemis on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Episcopal Ordination.