

Prot. No. 969/2014

### **Pastoral Letter on *Sabhadinam***

GEORGE CARDINAL ALENCHERRY, the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, to the Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Men and Women Religious and Lay Faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church, May the Grace of the Lord be with you all!

My dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

On the third of July, we celebrate the memory of St. Thomas, the Apostle of India, which is popularly known as “Dukarana”. It is also on the third of July that the feast of St.Thomas is celebrated in the Universal Church. All those who have descended from the Christian communities belonging to the seven churches established by St.Thomas are known as Thomas Christians. They now belong to the Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara, Malankara Orthodox, Jacobite Orthodox and Mar Thoma Churches. All those who have embraced the Christian faith through the missionary efforts of these churches are also known as St.Thomas Christians. The present Christian community of India consists of these St.Thomas Christians, the Latin Catholics who received the faith through the missionary work of St.Francis Xavier and other missionaries, foreign and native and members of the Protestant denominations. It is in the midst of the diversity of these Christian denominations and also in the midst of the country’s own diversity based on religion, caste and culture that we have to witness as well as to proclaim Christ today.

Christ is the one who proclaimed that “I am the Way, the Truth and the life” and led humanity to that Way, the Truth and the Life. Those who believed in Christ called it “the Christian Way”. When St.Thomas brought this Way to India, our forefathers called it “The Thomas Way.” This way of Thomas has now become the life style of Christian communities.

St. Thomas Christians grew in strength through their families and family unions. Many of the histories of the families published recently attest to this fact. The importance of family life is seen in the fact that it has been selected for a deep reflection by the Church. What John Paul II did immediately after his election as the Pope was that he convoked a Synod on family life. Based on the recommendations of the Synod, he issued an Apostolic Exhortation called “*Familiaris Consortio*”. The ministry for family life in India is being carried out according to its directions. More than in any other state of India, the apostolate for family life, I am happy to say, is very active in Kerala. Later, a call for New Evangelization was made by Benedict XVI. Pope Francis has combined both the New Evangelization and the Family in the topics that he has assigned for the next Synods. More precisely, the topic for the Synod’s consideration is “The Challenges faced by families in the context of New Evangelization.” He is planning to use the decisions and deliberations that would be made at the next two Synods which will be taking place in Oct.2014 and Oct.2015 for the renewal of family life. We have to pray for the success of these two Synods. Moreover, special discussions and renewal programs have to be organized in

our dioceses and foreign missions and in the whole Church. In this effort, it would be very beneficial if those who are engaged in the apostolate of family evangelization and faith formation work together. All the apostolates in a diocese should act in unison for the renewal of family life. At a recently held conference of the office bearers of different lay organizations and their directors at Mt. St. Thomas, the need for working together in a unified manner was expressed very strongly. It would be very helpful if we can strengthen the activities of AKCC which was started with the intention of bringing together all the lay faithful of our Church. More activities will be organized by the Commission for the Laity and the Families with the approval of the Synod.

Faith formation that is being done in our Church is drawing a lot of favorable attention. The success of our Christian witness is dependent on the fruitfulness of our faith formation. It is through our Faith Formation programs in Mission League, CLC and among Altar Boys that vocations are being nurtured in our Church. It is with great joy that I extend my greetings to all the priests, sisters, faith formators and lay evangelists who are working hard in these areas of ministry.

It is incumbent on the part of the faithful not to indulge in destructive activities like alcoholism, murder, drug trafficking, extortion of the poor through excessive interest rates, broken agreements, inordinate and wasteful expenditures for luxurious ways of living etc. Parents and teachers have to pay special attention to the abuse of internet usage and internet addiction. Those who are engaged in family apostolates and faith formation have to work together to organize seminars and discussion groups not only to prevent abuse in the cyber world but also to show the potentialities of using it for evangelization. Parents should pay more attention when the children are sent on vacation trips as some of these trips have become death traps where through traffic accidents or drowning many have lost their lives.

There are more than forty lakhs of Syro-Malabar Catholics out of which seven lakhs are expatriates in different countries, apart from those who belong to the dioceses of Chicago and Melbourne. The Church has to organize suitable pastoral set-ups for their spiritual development. All the faithful are hereby requested to pray for the setting up of suitable structures for their pastoral care.

A new government is in charge at the Centre after the recent elections. All the faithful have, of course, to cooperate with the different governments that come at the Centre as well as at the State level at different times. The programmes that the Centre is envisaging for the development of the country should be beneficial to the poor also. The new Central Government will, we hope, pay more attention to the working class, farmers, traders, fisher folks and others who are engaged in similar professions. Along with the preservation of the environment, the interests of those farmers in the Western Ghats and of the fisher folks in the coastal areas of the State have to be given special attention. Along with these, secularism, democracy, equality, protection of the

minorities which are the basic pillars of our Constitution are to be protected. They are necessary for the preservation of the unity and progress of India which is very diverse on account of caste, religion and language.

The Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church has decided to celebrate the Dukarna Day as a Day of the Church. There will be a solemn celebration of this Day at Mount St.Thomas on July 3<sup>rd</sup> with participants coming from all dioceses and religious congregations. I urge all our dioceses, parishes and expatriate communities to celebrate this Day with Eucharistic celebrations, meetings and cultural programs. I also exhort you to make your contributions on this Day for the common needs of the Church.

It would be appropriate to remember the special blessings given to the Church in these days. The process of canonization of Bl.Chavara and Bl.Euphrasia is almost complete. We have a new diocese in Australia and got an Apostolic Visitor to guide the pastoral activities of our communities settled outside Kerala. We shall thank the Lord for all His blessings.

I wish all the faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church as well as those who are listening to this pastoral Letter all the blessings of the Lord.

Lovingly in Christ Jesus,

George Cardinal Alencherry  
Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

Given from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mount St Thomas, Kakkanad, on 4 June 2014.

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*N.B: This pastoral letter is to be read out during the Holy Mass on 29 June, the Sunday previous to July 3, or any other convenient day in the month of July, in all churches and chapels of the Syro-Malabar Church where there is Sunday Mass for the public.*