



Prot. No. 0029/2023

## **Post-Synodal Circular - January 2023**

**GEORGE CARDINAL ALENCHERRY,**  
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.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The First Session of the XXXI Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church took place at the Major Archiepiscopal Curia at Mount St. Thomas Kakkanad from January 9-14, after three days of prayer and retreat. The Fathers of the Synod tried to study the contemporary issues that affect the Church and to seek the will of God, in a prayerful atmosphere. I offer my gratitude to all of you who have prayed sincerely for the success of the Synod.

The Synodal Session began in the background of the passing away of Pope *Emeritus* Benedict XVI, who led the Church through his deep divine wisdom and exemplary holy life. The Church is deeply indebted to Pope Benedict XVI who led the Church courageously at a time of great challenges. The Syro-Malabar Church had a special place in his heart who took many important decisions concerning our Church. I was present at the funeral ceremonies of the late Pope at St. Peter's Square together with a few Bishops of our Church. Let us pray commending the soul of Pope Benedict XVI in the hands of God.

The Synod expressed its condolences at the demise of Bishop Simon Stock Palathara CMI, the former bishop of Jagdalpur. The Synod evaluated that the impetus and the orientation that he gave to missionary activities of the Syro-Malabar Church would remain forever.

### **The Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly and the Uniform Mode of Celebration of the Holy *Qurbana***

The Synod assessed realistically the pastoral difficulties faced by the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly in implementing the uniform mode of celebration of the Holy *Qurbana*. This uniform mode of celebration of the Holy *Qurbana* of the Syro-Malabar Church was decided unanimously by the Synod in November 1999, the implementation of which was repeatedly endorsed in the various subsequent Sessions of the Synod, and again directed to be legitimately implemented in the entire Church

from the First Sunday of Annunciation, November 28, 2021, as per the decision of the August Session of the Synod in 2021. In order to implement this uniform mode, Holy Father Pope Francis exhorted in his paternal solicitude through two letters dated July 3, 2021 and March 25, 2022, as an extraordinary step. This exhortation of the Holy Father, who is the supreme authority of the Church, is to be accepted in obedience by all the faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church. The competent authority to take final decision in matters of liturgy is the Synod and the Apostolic See. No one has the competence to take a different decision against the norm given by them. All have to realize that the celebration of the Holy *Qurbana*, deliberately disregarding the decision of the Synod which is approved by the Apostolic See, is illicit. Only those discussions that take place within the ambit of the above decision have any validity.

Since the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly is currently under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Administrator, the Synod cannot take any decision on the issues concerning the Archeparchy. As per the direction of Archbishop Andrews Thazhath, the Apostolic Administrator, a Committee of six Bishops including the Bishops hailing from the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly was constituted for dialogue. The Committee held several rounds of dialogue with those oppose the uniform mode of the celebration of the Holy *Qurbana* and who favour its implementation. Discussions were held also with the members of the Archeparchial Curia. The Committee also found time to discuss the issues with some prominent lay persons, who are members of the Archeparchy. All the Bishops who hail from the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly participated wholeheartedly in the various phases of the discussions. All the Synod Fathers were involved in this process through fasting and prayers.

The discussions were held to accelerate the pace of the unity of the Church with the intention of giving generous time limit to the parishes of the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly to implement the decision, without compromising the decision of the Synod on the uniform mode of celebration. The Fathers of the Synod were hopeful to begin the process of reconciliation by celebrating the uniform mode of the Holy *Qurbana* at least on Sundays in the Cathedral Basilica. If there were to be a decision like that, the proposal placed by some groups to arrange a concelebrated Holy *Qurbana* by the Synod Fathers in the Cathedral Basilica on the last day of the Synod, under the presidency of the Major Archbishop was acceptable to us. We feel sorry that that we could not arrive at a decision agreeable to all at the end of the Session of the Synod due to the disagreement of some who do not accept the uniform mode of celebration, not sticking to the above mentioned principles for some reasons not yet clarified. But we share the hope in the light of the above discussions that the day is not far off when all can accept the decision of the Synod, recognizing the mind of the Church for unity. Hence we have requested the help of a few prominent members of the laity to continue the discussions. The Committee of the Bishops will continue to lead the discussions.

We pray that the Holy Spirit may inspire all to move to a union of hearts, healing every wound. All have to realize the truth that the Synod cannot compromise to reach an agreement by sacrificing the authentic teachings, decisions and the common good of the Church.

The Synod is appealing with a single mind to all the priests, the religious and the laity to desist from joining all types of protest movements at this time that would disturb the discussions that are continuing to solve all the problems. All have to realize that it is a serious offense to disobey the appeal of the Holy Father and to work against the Apostolic Administrator appointed by him. The stand taken by a few priests and the laity of the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly to implement the decision taken by the Synod, with the approval of the Holy Father, is exemplary.

The formation given to the seminarians in the major seminaries was for celebrating the Holy *Qurbana* in the uniform mode from the year 2000 onwards. The catechetical texts of our Church were also giving lessons intended to familiarize the students with the uniform mode of celebration for the last two decades. Hence, it is not true to say that the uniform mode of celebration is not familiar. Until 1999, two types of celebrations were in existence in our Church: one facing totally the altar and the other facing totally the faithful. The Synod approved the present mode of celebration by combining both the modes of celebrations of the Holy *Qurbana* in order to preserve the unity of the Church. Hence no one should misinterpret the present uniform mode of celebration as a victory of one group or the defeat of the other.

The prevention and obstruction of the Apostolic Administrator when he came to celebrate the Holy *Qurbana* at St. Mary's Basilica on November 27, 2022 and the various protests and attacks at the Archbishop's House deserve the severest of condemnations. The Synod assessed that the efforts of Archbishop Andrews Thazhath was part of his sincere attempts to discharge the duty entrusted to him by the Apostolic See. All those acts of vandalism that took place in the Basilica on December 22 and 23 are incomparable acts of against faith. Every faithful of the Church has looked at those acts of desecrating the Holy *Qurbana* with heartbreaking pain. The wounds inflicted on the body of the Church by the priests who used the celebration of Holy *Qurbana* as a mode of protest and the individuals who got into the sanctuary to prevent the celebrations are very deep. The desecration of the Holy *Qurbana* is an act of blasphemy. The Apostolic Administrator has appointed a Committee to investigate the matter. The report will be sent to the relevant Office at the Apostolic See and further appropriate actions will be taken according to the direction given from there. The Synod is appealing to all Bishops, priests, the religious and the faithful to observe an hour of silent adoration before the Blessed Sacrament as reparation against the desecration of the Holy *Qurbana*.

Priesthood is a gift given by God to the Church. It becomes a grace-giving sacrament when it is in communion with the Holy Father, the Major Archbishop and the

Eparchial Bishop. Since priesthood becomes salt without flavor and useless when it disobeys the Pope, the Major Archbishop and the Eparchial Bishop, the candidates to priesthood at the time of their ordination promise their obedience and submission to the authorities of the Church. All the priests have to realize the fact that priesthood becomes incapable of giving grace to the people of God when the priests are not in communion with the Church.

All the priests, the religious and the laity have to see that the Holy *Qurbana* we offer for unity and reconciliation should not turn out to be occasions for disunity and thereby bringing derision to ourselves. It is very necessary for the unity of the Church that the online groups who brand themselves as lovers of the Church or traditionalists should desist from their provocative acts and maintain self-control.

### **Renewed Text of the Liturgy of the Hours (*Yama Prarthanakal*)**

It is a notable achievement that we could bring out a renewed text of the Liturgy of the Hours of the Church. The new text has been prepared with great faithfulness to the proper traditions of our Church and the original sources. The Liturgy of the Hours has a great role in fostering our spirituality. The priests, the religious and the laity should make the recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours a part of their daily spirituality. The new text will be implemented from the first Sunday of Lent, February 19, 2023.

### **Buffer Zone**

The Syro-Malabar Synod has assessed that the comment by the Supreme Court on January 11, 2023 in the case of the Buffer zone is very consoling to the farmers. Very speedy steps should be undertaken by the State and Central Governments to exclude farm lands, plantations and places of settlements from the buffer zone boundaries. The Synod has observed that the people living around the 23 wild life protection areas from Aralam in Kannur to Neyyar in Trivandrum district are in danger of eviction. Along with that, the newly proposed wild life protection area of Bavani near Attappady will definitely affect badly the lives of the people in Attappady. The Synod has noted that this action of the Government is a serious challenge to the farmers of the area.

The Synod is asking the Government to limit the buffer zone inside the forest area by excluding all farm lands and settlement areas. The newly proposed suggestion of Bavani wild life protection area should be withdrawn. The Government should ask the Court to allow it to change the report that has wrongly included the areas of human habitation along with wild life protected core areas and that the court should give the time to correct the errors included in the submitted documents. The State should argue convincingly with sufficient documents that human habitations and farms should not be considered the buffer zone of wild life protected areas. It should again request the Court to give time to prepare a new report with revised boundaries of the wild life protected areas with the approval of the Central Wild Life Board and of the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) and with the approval of the central Ministry of Environment and Forest. It is necessary to revise the boundaries of forests in order to

protect the farms lands and human settlements which were wrongly included in the boundaries of the forests due to technical errors. It is impractical to defend the environment by forgetting the farmers. Hence the Government should be able to create a new environmental culture by taking the farmers into confidence.

### **Reservation for Economically Weaker Section**

The Synod is appealing to the faithful to make use of the benefits available by the reservation granted to the economically weaker section in the non-reserved communities (EWS). The State Government has to make suitable amendments to the existing laws in conformity with the regulations of the Central Government in this regard. Only then will the people belonging economically weaker section of the people will get the rightful benefits. The Synod requested the Chief Minister of Kerala to take necessary steps to rectify the discrepancies existing between in the laws of the Central and State Governments.


### **A New Shepherd for the Eparchy of Melbourne**

The Holy Father Pope Francis has appointed Fr. John Panamthottathil CMI the new Bishop of the Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle of Melbourne in Australia. The Synod offers its congratulations, best wishes and prayers to the bishop-elect as well as to the Eparchy of Melbourne. The Syro-Malabar Church is deeply indebted to Bishop Bosco Puthur who guided the Eparchy gracefully on the path of development. His ministry as the first Curia Bishop of our Church and later as the first Bishop of the Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle of Melbourne was a great blessing to the Church.

Let us thank the Lord who, in His loving providence, is guiding us with new hopes in this New Year. May the intercession of our Mother and the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ and of St. Thomas the Apostle, our Father in faith, be with us all the time! May the infinite love of God our Father, the eternal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ and the merciful providence of the Holy Spirit be with us!

May the grace of the merciful Lord be with you all!

Given this from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mount St Thomas, Kakkanad on January 14, 2023.



Cardinal George Alencherry  
Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church



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*This circular shall be read in all the parish churches, institutions, religious houses, formation centres and the major seminaries of the Syro-Malabar Church during the Holy Qurbana on Sunday, January 22, 2023.*