

Pastoral Letter



BOSCO PUTHUR, Bishop of the Eparchy of St Thomas the Apostle of Melbourne of the Syro-Malabar, and Apostolic Visitor to New Zealand, to the Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church in Australia and New Zealand.

My dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

May the grace of our Lord be with you!

As you are well aware, it was on 25th of March 2014, that the new Eparchy for the Syro-Malabar Faithful of Australia was inaugurated and, as its first bishop, I was officially entrusted with your pastoral care. Many Bishops from India, Australia, and New Zealand participated in that beautiful ceremony. In the same manner, many lay faithful and priests from our communities of Australia and New Zealand participated, which I remember with gratitude. Let me thank once again, those who organised and cooperated with the Inauguration ceremony.

Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God is the heavenly patroness of our Eparchy. With the intercession of our Blessed Mother, let us labour in unity to enhance the Kingdom of God.

Let us bear witness to the risen Christ in this land, in the same way as *Mar Thoma Sleeha*, our Father of Faith bore witness to his faith by proclaiming "My Lord, My God". Pope Francis established our Eparchy to provide our faithful with leadership; strength and encouragement so that we will be able to, as individuals as well as a community, bear witness to Jesus Christ in this land. On this occasion, I remember with gratitude the Congregation for the Oriental

Churches, the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church and Major Archbishop Mar George Cardinal Alencherry who initiated the process for the establishment of the Eparchy, and the Bishops' Conferences of Australia and New Zealand who whole-heartedly supported it, which in turn helped the Holy Father to take the decision.

As you are well aware, our Eparchy is in its infancy, without any Churches, Parishes, or Institutions. Our first priority is to organise as many communities of faithful and form them as Eucharistic communities and parishes. It is important to make available for our faithful Holy *Qurbana* and other Sacraments on Sundays as well as on weekdays, in the Oriental tradition, which our forefathers have passed on to us. Regular Catechism classes for our children also need to be organised urgently. At least for a while, infrastructural facilities for these services can be found only with the help of local parishes. It is very encouraging to note the assistance promised to our infant Eparchy to this effect by the Australian Bishops during the recent meeting of the Bishops' Conference. It is a very important and urgent responsibility of ours to provide pastoral care according to the teaching and traditions of our Mother Church, not only for the communities in the urban areas, but also in the remote communities, however small they may be.

Let me share with joy the decision regarding the construction of our first Parish Church at the property in Mickleham, which our community has recently purchased. This Church will be called after Saint Alphonsa and will be the Cathedral of our Eparchy. I sincerely request your prayer and generous financial support (of communities as well as individuals) towards this project of building the mother Church of our Eparchy.

We need a ministry of many priests to provide pastoral and spiritual leadership for the future development of our communities. I am confident that our communities will be ready to welcome priests and provide appropriate facilities for them. The communities with adequate facilities, that are ready to receive a vicar (Parish Priest) and to organise regular Sunday *Qurbana* and Catechism, can be erected as Parishes. I request that as many communities to come forward for that.

We need to constitute necessary canonical structures for our Eparchy. The Presbyteral Council, College of Consulters, Pastoral Council, and Finance Council are those, which are

most important. I am glad to announce to you the recent formation of the Eparchial College of Consulters. The others will be constituted in the near future.

My dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

During our trials and temptations for survival, as migrant people, let us not forget the consoling words that the "Lord is my Shepherd". Even when you are in a foreign land, confronted with an alien Culture and many difficult situations, your keen interest to live in intimate communion with your Mother Church is highly praiseworthy. I really appreciate those lay faithful, men and women, especially Trustees, Parish Council members, Catechism teachers and others who laboured hard to nurture our communities (small or large) even before the arrival of priests.

Remember that our families and children are God's precious gift, and taking the Holy Family of Nazareth as the model, let us bring up our families abounding with God's Love and family prayer. Let us also acknowledge the benefit of Family Prayer Units (*Kudumba Kootayma*) and with enthusiasm participate in them, to foster among families mutual encouragement in faith formation and witnessing of faith. Twenty - Twenty five families per unit would be an ideal size for a Family Prayer Unit.

Youth is our future. Youth ministry will be one of the priorities in the Eparchy.

I would like to specially remember with gratitude all the priests who had worked hard to provide pastoral care to our communities before the formation of our Eparchy. There are religious and diocesan priests among them. Let me thank their Superiors and Bishops who allowed them to provide pastoral ministry to our communities and request from them their continued assistance in the future.

It is also our duty to form a *Presbyterium* of the priests, incardinated to our Eparchy. I would like to encourage you all, families, parents, and youth to promote vocations within our own communities. As you know, priestly formation will take many years. This year we have already selected 12 candidates for our Eparchy from the dioceses of Kerala, who are now undergoing formation in their respective minor seminaries. They need our prayers and financial help. I request you to come forward to sponsor these candidates for priesthood.

On July 3rd - *Dukrana* of Saint Thomas the Apostle, we celebrate *Sabhadinam*, the common Feast day of the Syro-Malabar Church. I would encourage you to celebrate this Feast day with due solemnity in our communities. Please pray for our Church especially on this Feast day.

Let us thank God for the recent announcement of the Holy Father regarding the canonisation of Chavara Kuriakose Elias and Euphrasia, the Blesseds from our Church. On 23rd November, the Feast of Christ the King, they will be declared saints during a solemn liturgical ceremony in Rome. I would like to request all the communities to celebrate this day in a special way.

Please remember our Eparchy and me in your prayers.

Wishing you all the greetings of *Dukrana Thirunal!*

Your Loving Father in Jesus,

+ Bosco Puthur

Bishop of the Eparchy of St Thomas the Apostle of Melbourne of the Syro-Malabar

Given from the Eparchial Curia, Mickleham, Melbourne, on 13 June 2014.

N.B: *This pastoral letter is to be read out during the Holy Qurbana on 6th July, the Sunday or any Sunday before that date.*