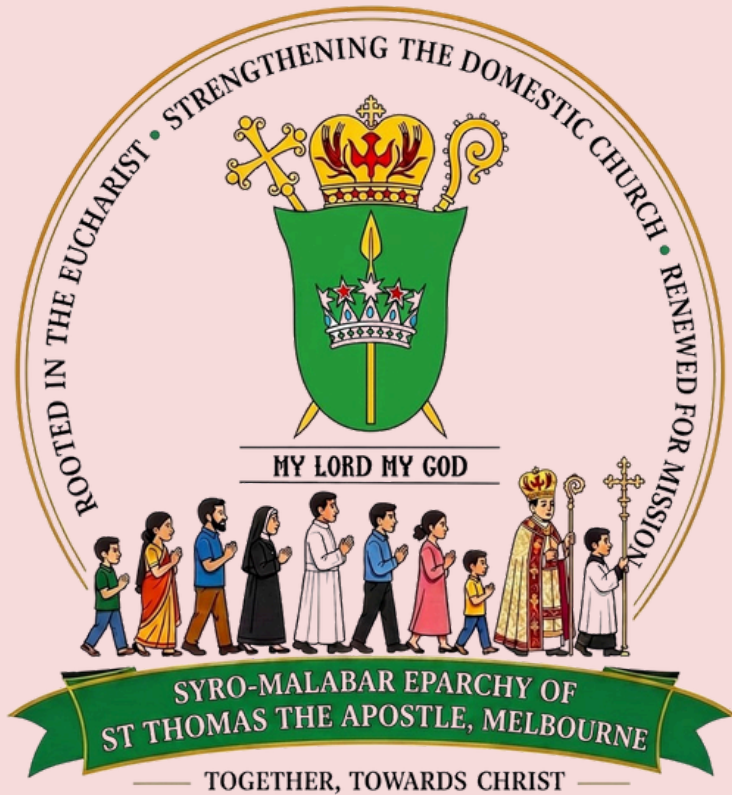


FIRST EPARCHIAL ASSEMBLY 2026



INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS

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Melbourne, Australia

19-21 November 2026

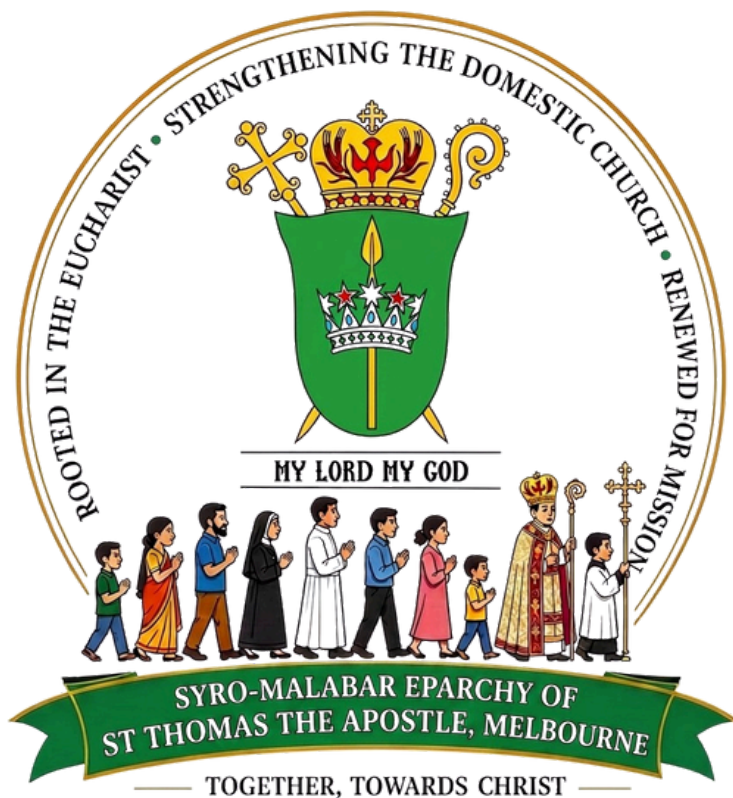
SYRO-MALABAR EPARCHY

OF ST THOMAS THE APOSTLE, MELBOURNE

INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS

**ROOTED IN THE EUCHARIST,
STRENGTHENING THE DOMESTIC CHURCH,
RENEWED FOR MISSION.**

Prepared by
the Secretariat of the First Eparchial Assembly



FIRST EPARCHIAL ASSEMBLY 2026

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BISHOP'S MESSAGE

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we approach our First Eparchial Assembly, I warmly invite everyone to prepare spiritually and thoughtfully for this historic moment in the life of our Eparchy. This Assembly is not simply a meeting; it is a moment of grace in which we are called to listen to one another, discern together and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the future of our Church.

I ask every delegate to come with a prayerful and open heart, free from personal agendas and ready to listen. Let our preparation begin with the Holy Eucharist, prayer and reflection. Our theme, "Rooted in the Eucharist, Strengthening the Domestic Church, Renewed for Mission," reminds us that the renewal of our Eparchy must always begin with Christ and lead us towards mission.

Please study the Instrumentum Laboris carefully and, where possible, discuss its themes in your parishes, missions and communities. Come prepared with concrete suggestions and a genuine desire to contribute to the growth of our Eparchy.

We must look beyond our immediate concerns and ask what kind of Church we wish to build for the coming years. We are called to strengthen our Holy Qurbana, families, catechesis and youth ministry, while preserving our Syro-Malabar heritage and responding creatively to the realities of Australia and New Zealand.

Let us come together in faith, communion and hope, trusting in the Holy Spirit. May St Thomas the Apostle guide and intercede for us as we discern the path ahead.

With my prayerful blessings,



Mar John Panamthottathil CMI



FOREWORD

The First Eparchial Assembly invites our community to give thanks for the faith received from St Thomas the Apostle and to discern how that faith can be lived and shared today. His confession, “My Lord and my God” (*Jn 20:28*), expresses the personal encounter with the risen Christ that must animate every pastoral undertaking. Our liturgical heritage, family life, ministries and service to society bear fruit when they lead people to this encounter.

On 14 January 2026, the Lineamenta (*Preparatory Document*), entitled “Rooted in the Eucharist, Strengthening the Domestic Church, Renewed for Mission,” was issued to every parish, mission and community of the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St Thomas the Apostle, Melbourne. It proposed five themes for reflection: liturgy, family, catechesis, youth and the empowerment of our community within the Australian and New Zealand context. Over the following months, parish priests, pastoral councils, family units, catechism teachers, youth ministries and individual members of the faithful across more than 75 parishes, missions and Mass centres studied the Lineamenta and submitted their reflections, concerns and proposals. Their responses, consolidated in the Report of the Parish Consultations, form the foundation of this Instrumentum Laboris.

Instrumentum Laboris means “working document.” While the Lineamenta introduced the themes and opened the consultation, this document gathers what has been heard and provides a common basis for the Assembly’s prayer, study and discussion. Each chapter presents the theological grounding of its theme in Scripture and Church teaching, summarises the principal findings of the consultation and offers two questions for discussion in the Assembly’s small groups. Its pastoral proposals are offered for discernment; they are not approved decisions.

Ours is a young and growing Eparchy, whose members come from many parts of India and now live across Australia and New Zealand. The consultation revealed a community that treasures its East Syriac heritage and seeks ways to live, teach and hand it on to children growing up in these societies.

Preserving this inheritance and responding to our present context belong to the same calling: fidelity to Christ, encountered in the Holy Qurbana and witnessed in daily life.

With gratitude to God for the faith and generosity expressed throughout the consultation, and invoking the intercession of St Thomas the Apostle, our father in faith, we place this Instrumentum Laboris before the delegates of the First Eparchial Assembly for their prayerful study and deliberation.

Secretariat
First Eparchial Assembly 2026

Liturgy at the Heart of Ecclesial Life

The liturgy is not simply one activity among many in the life of the Church; it is the source from which the Church's power flows and the summit toward which all her activity is directed (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). The vitality of a parish is measured, finally, not by its programmes or its structures but by the depth, reverence and participatory character of its liturgical life, above all, the celebration of the Holy Qurbana. For this reason all pastoral initiatives, devotional practices and administrative responsibilities must flow from and lead back to the Eucharist; catechism, youth ministry and parish planning should remain consciously Eucharistic in orientation.

Rooted in the East Syriac tradition, the Syro-Malabar liturgy is profoundly biblical, ecclesial and mystical, and forms believers not chiefly through instruction but through participation in the saving mysteries of Christ. Participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice is “the source and summit of the whole Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11); it is true worship offered, as the Lord himself asks, “in spirit and truth” (*Jn* 4:24). In a multicultural and increasingly secular Australia and New Zealand, the faithful and especially the young must be helped to rediscover the Holy Qurbana as a living encounter with the Risen Lord rather than a routine obligation inherited from their parents.

The Sunday celebration carries a particular weight. Gathering as a parish community around the altar expresses the visible unity of the Church, and habitual absence, or casual movement between parishes without pastoral reason, quietly weakens that unity. So too the sacraments more widely: each is a liturgical encounter with the living Lord, communicating grace and deepening communion with God and with one another. Where the social and cultural dimensions of a baptism, a wedding or a feast day begin to overshadow its sacred character, renewed catechesis is needed to reorient the faithful toward the primacy of the mystery being celebrated.

The Second Vatican Council calls for the full, conscious and active participation of the faithful in the liturgy (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14) an interior participation of attentive listening, meaningful response and reverent silence, and an exterior participation exercised through the liturgical ministries of reader, altar server and choir, properly trained and spiritually formed for service of the sacred liturgy. The Syro-Malabar liturgical tradition is itself a precious patrimony, its prayers, gestures and symbols expressing a theology of biblical imagery, eschatological hope and mystery; faithful observance of its approved texts and rubrics safeguards both the unity of the Church and the integrity of this inheritance (cf. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 6).

Because many today participate in the liturgy without fully grasping its language and theological depth, mystagogical catechesis i.e. guiding the faithful, through homilies, catechism and parish formation, into the meaning of the rites and symbols they celebrate, becomes an urgent pastoral priority. Properly understood in this way, the liturgy becomes a school of faith, shaping Christian life and discipleship, and the renewal of the whole of parish life begins, quite simply, at the altar.

Listening to the Eparchy

- A consistent, eparchy-wide call to retain the Holy Qurbana in Malayalam while expanding accessible English celebrations, so that children and young people formed in English can participate with understanding.
- A desire for regular, brief formation on the meaning, structure and symbols of the Holy Qurbana: mystagogical catechesis, especially for the young.
- Support for wider liturgical participation: readers, altar servers, choir and extraordinary ministers of holy communion be given proper training and spiritual formation for these ministries.
- A request that comparisons between the Syro-Malabar and Latin traditions be made with mutual respect rather than rivalry.
- Encouragement for families to prepare for Sunday Qurbana through prayer and Scripture reading, and to keep Sunday as the Lord's Day.

Questions for Discussion

1. How can our parishes discern a common approach across the Eparchy to celebrating the Sunday Holy Qurbana that deepens participation across generations?
2. What practical steps can parishes take to provide mystagogical catechesis—especially for children and young people—so that the Holy Qurbana is understood and loved as the source and summit of our Christian life? “Mystagogical catechesis” means helping people understand and enter more deeply into the mysteries celebrated in the liturgy.

Strengthening the Domestic Church

“The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 47). Marriage is not merely a social contract but a sacrament in which husband and wife share in the faithful love of Christ for his Church, and through it the family becomes the domestic church — the first place where faith is lived, prayer is learned and Christian love is practised, after the pattern of the apostolic community devoted to “the breaking of bread and the prayers” (*Acts* 2:42), and in the spirit of Joshua’s resolve: “as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (*Jos* 24:15). In the diaspora, families carry the added weight of migration, cultural transition, economic demand and rapid social change — pressures that create real opportunities alongside real strain, and that call the Church to accompany families with honesty and compassion rather than easy reassurance.

A major concern is losing sight of the meaning of Christian marriage. When Christ is given little place in daily family life, and Holy Qurbana, family prayer and regular confession are neglected, couples miss important sources of strength for facing difficulties together. Taking part in parish activities does not always help families feel that they belong. They also need friendship, care and opportunities to support one another. Families who feel alone tend to seek guidance from secular or online sources before approaching the Church. Long working hours, financial worries and the demands of raising children can make it difficult for couples to spend time together, say sorry or express appreciation. Without patience and forgiveness, small hurts can grow into resentment and damage the marriage. Children who witness these difficulties may become afraid of making a lifelong commitment. Christian marriage calls couples to follow Christ’s self-giving love through humility, mutual respect and daily acts of care.

The family is the first place where children learn and grow in faith. Yet work, study and differences between generations can make this difficult for parents. Many depend mainly on parish programmes, although children learn faith not only through lessons but also by seeing how their parents pray and live. Digital technology offers many benefits, but too much screen time, constant distractions and confusing messages about right and wrong can weaken Christian values at home. Families need a Church that listens, understands their struggles and supports them. When priests have many responsibilities and little time for personal conversations, families may miss this support. By making time for prayer, practising forgiveness and helping children grow in faith, families become living witnesses to the Gospel. The renewal of the Church begins with the renewal of family life.

Listening to the Eparchy

- Families across the Eparchy asked for practical, flexible resources for family prayer and Scripture reading that work around demanding work and school schedules.
- Widespread concern about the effect of digital distraction on family prayer, conversation and Sunday observance.
- Requests for marriage preparation and enrichment, parenting formation grounded in Catholic teaching, and confidential pastoral support for families in difficulty.
- A desire to divide large family units into smaller groups for closer fellowship, mutual support and pastoral accompaniment.
- Recognition that parents, not catechists alone, are the first teachers of faith, and need to be equipped and accompanied in that role.

Questions for Discussion

1. What practical steps can families, parishes and the eparchy take to help families make the Holy Qurbana, prayer and Scripture part of ordinary family life amid work, study and digital pressures?
2. How can we prepare young people for married life, accompany the married couples and help families going through challenges and difficulties?

Catechesis: Handing on the Faith

Catechesis is the Church's mission of handing on the faith from one generation to the next – not chiefly the transmission of information, but an encounter with the living person of Jesus Christ. As St John Paul II teaches, its goal is “to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ” (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 5), so that the faithful may “continue in what [they] have learned and firmly believed” (2 Tim 3:14). Sound doctrine remains essential, but the deeper purpose is to form disciples who know Christ, love him and follow him in every aspect of life, nourished by the sacraments, the Word of God, prayer, moral formation and service. Where catechesis is alive, its fruits are visible: children who grow in confidence in prayer, families who practise faith at home, young people who understand the sacraments, and adults able to “give a reason for the hope that is in them” (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).

As one of the twenty-three Eastern Catholic Churches in full communion with the Pope, the Syro-Malabar Church carries an ecclesial identity rooted in the apostolic tradition of St Thomas and expressed through the East Syriac liturgical tradition – a heritage the Council asks every Eastern Catholic to know, value and preserve (cf. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 6). The Holy Qurbana is not simply the Latin Mass celebrated in another language; it is a distinct liturgical expression of the one Eucharistic mystery, shaped by centuries of East Syriac spirituality, and catechesis must help young people understand and love its beauty rather than experience it as unfamiliar or foreign. This is not a matter of cultural preservation for its own sake: it is a gift that enriches the whole Catholic communion, and handing it on faithfully is part of handing on the faith itself.

In this Eparchy, catechesis supports families living in the multicultural and busy societies of Australia and New Zealand. Many children mainly speak English and have limited knowledge of Malayalam and the cultural background of the Syro-Malabar tradition. Parents want their children to grow in faith but some lack the confidence or resources to guide them at home. This can create a gap between what children learn in catechism classes and what they experience in family life. Parishes also face challenges, including finding and training catechists, encouraging regular attendance and keeping teenagers interested. Some classes take place in rented facilities important strengths: well-educated and committed catechists from different professions, access to many Catholic teaching resources and established practices for protecting children. Two matters need special attention throughout the Eparchy: ensuring that every child is safe and cared for, and choosing digital resources that help children understand and live their faith without unnecessary distractions.

Listening to the Eparchy

- Strong support for moving catechesis beyond memorisation toward interactive, Christ-centred learning - discussion, multimedia, projects and open-book assessment.
- Requests for catechesis to be explicitly connected to the Holy Qurbana, the sacraments and Syro-Malabar identity, rather than taught as a separate subject.
- A consistent call for better formation, resourcing and support for catechists, many of whom are generous volunteers without specialised training.
- Concern that catechists and families are negotiating two cultures at once, with a wish for resources developed specifically for Australian-born and New Zealand-born children.
- Encouragement for stronger partnership between catechists and parents, including parent sessions and reinforcement of learning at home.

Questions for Discussion

1. How can parents take a more active and responsible role in strengthening catechesis in our Eparchy by giving their time, contributing resources and supporting additional catechism activities?
2. How can we improve the way we manage student behaviour in catechism classes, especially at the high school level?

Young People at the Heart of Renewal

Young people are not only the future of the Church; they are an essential part of her present vitality, and the Church's mission requires serious attention to the spiritual, cultural and social realities that shape their lives. Growing up amid cultural hybridity, digital transformation, moral uncertainty and rising mental-health pressures, today's young people live three questions more urgently than any generation before them: Who am I? Where do I belong? What difference can I make? How these questions are answered shapes their faith, their relationships and their long-term commitments.

Many navigate several identities at once – Indian heritage and Western culture, an Eastern Catholic liturgical inheritance lived within a largely Latin-rite Church environment, traditional family expectation alongside an individualistic surrounding society – and these tensions can leave the Syro-Malabar tradition feeling like an ethnic inheritance rather than a living faith. When identity is not rooted in baptism and a personal encounter with Christ, it is easily reshaped instead by peer culture, social media and the ideologies of the moment. Many young people, too, attend the Holy Qurbana without fully grasping its theological depth; without accompaniment, the liturgy risks becoming routine rather than, as it is meant to be, a transformative meeting with the Lord. And many drift from parish life not because they reject the Church's teaching but because they do not experience genuine belonging within it – a belonging built only through relationship, responsibility and recognition, in parishes that remain, too often, largely adult-centred.

Young people need mentors and spiritual guides who will walk with them through questions of faith, vocation, relationships and personal struggle, as the Lord himself walked, unrecognised, beside the two disciples on the road to Emmaus until their hearts burned within them (cf. Lk 24:32). Where such accompaniment is absent, young people turn instead to social media, peers or online ideologies for direction on matters – including questions of sexuality, gender and relationships – on which the Church is asked to, offer both clarity and compassion. The family, the first environment of faith, can be weakened by the pressures of migration, demanding work schedules and generational gaps, leaving faith formation largely to parish programmes rather than nurturing it at home. Digital culture, for all its gifts, can encourage comparison, distraction and exposure to harmful content, allowing online influences to shape young people more deeply than the Gospel.

THEME IV

The future of the Church in this Eparchy depends on young people who are rooted in Christ, confident in their baptismal dignity, genuinely belonging to a Christian community, and inspired to live as missionary disciples. As Pope Francis writes directly to the young, Christ “is alive and he wants you to be alive” (*Christus Vivit*, 1); the same young people who today struggle with identity and belonging can, if the Church listens patiently and forms them intentionally, become tomorrow’s leaders, missionaries and builders of strong Christian families. Accompanying young people is not an optional programme among others - it is central to the Church’s mission and to the renewal of ecclesial life in this Eparchy.

Listening to the Eparchy

- Young people across parishes and missions asked to be listened to, trusted and given genuine responsibility - not only in youth programmes, but in the ordinary life and liturgy of the parish.
- A strong call for structured mentoring and faith-companion relationships linking young people with mature role models.
- Concern that many disengage after Year 12 catechism, with requests for clear pathways into youth ministry, leadership and, in time, parish governance.
- A wish for safe spaces to discuss identity, relationships, peer pressure and mental wellbeing alongside formal faith formation.
- Recognition that a Syro-Malabar identity and an Australian or New Zealand identity are complementary, not competing, and should be presented to young people as such.

Questions for Discussion

1. What steps can be taken by family, parish and eparchy to bring our youth back to the leadership of the church?
2. How do we accompany young people, with both clarity and compassion, through the questions of identity, relationships and purpose that most shape their generation?

Syro-Malabar Community Empowerment in the Australian/ New Zealand Context

The Syro-Malabar Catholic community is one of the fastest-growing Eastern Catholic communities in Australia and New Zealand. It carries an apostolic tradition that traces its origins to St Thomas the Apostle. Today, it lives in societies where fewer people identify as Christian and where faith has less influence on everyday life. This situation calls our community to deepen its faith and share the Gospel with others. Our mission has two closely connected goals: to strengthen our own community and to contribute to the life and mission of the wider Church in Australia and New Zealand. We need to preserve our spiritual and liturgical heritage while taking an active part in the society around us. Jesus calls us to be “the light of the world” (*Mt 5:14*) and to bear witness to him “to the ends of the earth” (*Acts 1:8*). Our strong family ties, rich liturgy and commitment to faith are gifts we can share. Growing numbers must also be supported by good planning, proper formation and responsible leadership.

Several practical steps can help us fulfil this mission. Exhibitions, seminars and cultural programmes can introduce young people and the wider community to the history, worship and faith of the St Thomas Christians. Training in faith, communication, media and public service can prepare young people to become confident Christian leaders. Teaching Malayalam alongside catechism can help children understand their heritage and participate more fully in the liturgy.

We can also support newly arrived families through welcome teams, employment guidance, referrals to legal services and practical assistance.

The Church is called to support Christian family life, uphold the dignity of every human life and use digital media to teach the faith, share the Gospel and correct misunderstandings. Sports, youth festivals, cultural gatherings and family events can build friendships and strengthen community life.

Working with the wider Catholic Church in caring for the elderly, supporting families and reaching out to others will also strengthen our unity. Our goal is to cherish our heritage and place its gifts at the service of the Church and society. Through faith, unity and good leadership, our community can help Christian life flourish in Australia and New Zealand.

Listening to the Eparchy

- A clear call to preserve Syro-Malabar liturgical, spiritual and cultural identity, including the Malayalam language, while actively engaging with the wider Australian and New Zealand Church.
- Strong interest in structured welcome, settlement support and a helpdesk for newly arrived migrants and international students.
- Requests for leadership formation preparing young Syro-Malabar Catholics for roles in the Church, in media and in public life.
- Support for the thoughtful use of digital media for evangelisation, parish communication and formation.
- From communities beyond Melbourne, a request for stronger coordination – including, where distance requires it, local pastoral structures – to remain genuinely connected to the Eparchy.

Questions for Discussion

1. How can our communities preserve our Syro-Malabar heritage and pass it on to future generations?
2. What steps can we take to encourage members of our communities to take on civic leadership roles and participate in political life?

CONCLUSION

Towards the Assembly

Across all five themes — liturgy, young people, the family, catechesis and the empowerment of our community — the consultation returned to a single, consistent pattern. Ours is a community rooted in the Holy Qurbana and genuinely proud of its East Syriac inheritance, and it is, at the same time, anxious and attentive about one task above all: handing that inheritance faithfully to children and grandchildren who are growing up in Australia and New Zealand. Every chapter of this *Instrumentum Laboris*, in its own way, is an answer to that single concern. The First Eparchial Assembly is, in the fullest sense, an exercise of synodality: the People of God walking together to evaluate present realities, discern future directions and strengthen communion in mission. It is not a forum for the Secretariat or the preparatory committees to present conclusions already reached. The presentations on each of the five themes are offered to open discussion, and the ten questions gathered in this document are given to the smaller groups of the Assembly so that delegates themselves may deliberate and propose the concrete conclusions and priorities to be carried forward.

Delegates are asked to come to the Assembly, to be held in Melbourne from 19 to 21 November 2026, having prayerfully read this *Instrumentum Laboris* and, where possible, having discussed it within their own parish, mission or family unit beforehand. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Mt 18:20). Trusting in this promise, and invoking the intercession of St Thomas the Apostle, we commend the work of the First Eparchial Assembly to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



SYRO-MALABAR EPARCHY OF ST THOMAS THE APOSTLE, MELBOURNE

Santhom Chancery
6 Greenock Court, Greenvale, VIC 3059
office.melbourne@syromalabar.org.au
03 8313 3678