



SYRO-MALABAR EPARCHY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Pastoral Letter -3

Relying on God's grace, Mar Joseph Srampickal, Bishop of the Syro Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain, writing to all Priests, Religious, and the Faithful.

WE ARE SHARERS OF THE DIVINE PLAN

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

"For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jer 29:11). How often have we received strength and hope from this word of God originally spoken to the people of Israel exiled in Babylon. Only when we are able to trust unconditionally in the Divine Providence and surrender ourselves to fulfill it in our lives will we have a clearer vision about the destiny of our life and receive the strength to pursue it.

I write this Pastoral Letter introducing the the Five-Year Pastoral Plan for our Eparchy named 'Living Stones' in the wake of the recent Eparchial Gathering conducted at Cefn Lea Park, Midwales, where the priests, religious and lay delegates from our Holy Qurbana Centers gathered together to discern the plan of God for our Eparchy. The eparchial gathering was enriched with talks on liturgy, theology, spirituality, history and discipline which mark the identity of a Particular Church, and with lively discussions on different dimensions of ecclesial life. Representatives from various parts of the Eparchy participated in the gathering with great zeal and team spirit. It was a wonderful experience to discuss and deliberate together very earnestly and prayerfully about our future. I thank all participants who contributed in many ways to the preparation of the Pastoral Plan.

In the Sacred Scriptures, God's plan for the salvation of humankind is unfolding gradually in the main events of history and in the lives of the people of God. In all these great events- the wondrous act of creation, the promise of redemption, the call of Abraham to be the father of many nations, the choice of Moses to be the leader of Israel, the liberating experience of Exodus, the powerful mission of prophets, the unconditional fiat of the Holy Virgin Mary of Nazareth- a generous invitation is extended to humans to share the Divine plan for human salvation. However, it is in the obedience of the Son, especially in His 'obedience unto death' that the salvific plan is fully and definitively realized. We are not only witnesses to the plan of salvation but also sharers of it. This truth inspires us to undertake the earthly life with a Divine perspective. We should also assent to God's plan like the Immaculate Virgin Mary who said 'Amen' to the Divine call. This perfect obedience is gloriously reflected in her Son, about whom the scripture said: 'Here I am; I have come to do thy will' (Heb 10:9). This union of the Divine and the human will is beautifully expressed in Jesus' life and His prayer: 'thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' When we surrender ourselves to God's plan we continue His life and mission on earth.

Our five-year pastoral plan has been designed after a model that is very dear to us all- the model of a family. Accordingly, the first year focuses on the faith formation of our children. In the following years, we concentrate our ministry to the youth, couples, family units, and parishes. A detailed pastoral plan along with the action plan for each year will be made available soon. Still, even in this historic moment, we should be humbly aware of the fact that the effectiveness and fruition of the pastoral plan do not depend on our professionalism and planning skills. As Scripture teaches, "The plans of the mind belong to mortals, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." (Prov 16:1) and "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain" (Ps 127:1). We should meditate on the words of the desert father and great monk Abba Evagrius: "you shall not look into what you have done so far in order to know who you are, but rather look into God's plan when He created you."

Our pastoral plan is spread out in five liturgical years starting from the Season of the Annunciation 2017 till the Season of the Dedication of the Church 2022. It is through the liturgical year that we commemorate, praise and enact the plan of God for the salvation of humanity. The Liturgical year provides us with a key to understand our plan in the light of the Divine plan and our time in God's time.

The future of our society and the Church lies in our children. I earnestly request prayers and sincere efforts from all the priests, religious and the faithful for the success of the Eparchial pastoral plan which begins with 'the Faith Formation of Children' and culminates in forming 'Parishes Ready for Mission' by the end of the five years.

The liturgical year starts with the period of Annunciation which invites us to receive the Good News like children. When the son of God, incarnate in the form of a child, Holy Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, St. Elizabeth, the shepherds, the Magi, Simeon and Anna all received Him with childlike humility and openness. Contemplating the radiant face of the Holy Child, let us begin new efforts for the 'Faith Formation' of our children, the promises of the future. I pray that these days of *irupathanchu nombu* (25 days of prayers and abstinence) lead us to an experience of great spiritual revival. Let us all keep the unfailing spirit of fasting and abstinence in line with the tradition of our Church and after the example of our families. Let us prepare our children for the great joy of Christmas by encouraging them to undertake little acts of sacrifice.

Benedict XVI, Pope Emeritus said in the introduction to YOUCAT, "You need to know what you believe. You need to know your faith with precision... you need to be more deeply rooted in the faith than the generation of your parents so that you can engage the challenges and temptations of this time with strength and determination." 'Faith Formation' is the responsibility of the whole parish community. It is the ultimate mission of the Holy Church.

The Syro-Malabar Catechetical Directory 'Call and Response' highlights three different ways of catechesis: Catechesis through celebration, Catechesis through instruction, and Catechesis through Apprenticeship. Through the proclamation of the Word and through the celebration of the sacraments, especially through the celebration of the Holy Qurbana (Eucharist), faith is proclaimed and transmitted from generation to generation. In addition to this, through systematic instruction children learn about faith and grow rooted in the experience of faith. Different

ministries and pious associations in the parish will provide opportunities for children where they can express their faith in concrete and practical ways.

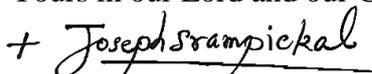
On the basis of the discussions and creative suggestions from the Eparchial gathering, we identify the following as the key priorities in this year dedicated to the faith formation of our children.

1. In three months' time, complete the second phase of the catechetical survey of collecting the current statistics of our Catechetical Programme.
2. Complete the first part of catechetical teachers' training at regional levels within six months.
3. Undertake the task of revising the catechetical textbooks to be finished in three years. Make a team of language experts and educationalists for this purpose.
4. Prepare supplementary textbooks fitting to the particular context of the Eparchy of Great Britain.
5. Complete the formation of regional catechetical councils and activate their functioning.

Let us begin these initiatives relying on Jesus Christ, 'the Living Stone' who is the pioneer and protector of the faith. We will inaugurate 'the Five Year Pastoral Plan' and 'the Year of Children' in our parishes and Qurbana centres on December 3rd, 2017, the first Sunday of the period of Annunciation (if not possible in the first Holy Qurbana of this liturgical year) by lighting lamps with a special prayer. Let us place our trust in the word of God "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). May the Blessed Mother "who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" guide us.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Yours in our Lord and our God,

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Mar Joseph Srampickal
Bishop, Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain

Preston, 25/11/2017

NB: This pastoral letter must be read in all your Qurbana Centres/Parish during the Celebration of the Holy Qurbana before 3rd December 2017 (if not possible in the first Holy Qurbana of this liturgical year).