



## **SYRO MALABAR EPARCHY OF GREAT BRITAIN**

**Pastoral Letter 12**

09/11/2020

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

### **Family Units Incorporate Families into the Holy Church**

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our Eparchy is focusing on an important area of its pastoral mission this year (29-11-2020 to 27-11-2021). We are dedicating the fourth year of the God-given pastoral plan in a special way for the renewal and strengthening of the Family Units. Through this our Eparchy aims at the sanctification of families, the training of children and the ecclesial experience of life. I am writing this to you with warmth, to make you aware of the relevance and importance of family units and the arrangements made by the Eparchy.

The Second Vatican Council teaches that the family is a Domestic Church (LG 11). This attribute is based on the family's in depth relation to the Church. Catholic families are not isolated houses but basic units of the Church.

The family's relationship with the Church makes it a family. St. Paul teaches us: This is a great mystery and I am applying it to Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:32). Our families are domestic churches because they are sacramentally connected to the Church and the Messiah.

The exhortation of Pope John Paul II, "Family, become what you are" (Familiaris Consortio 17), interprets the Catholic family as a fundamental and primary ecclesiastical reality. A family, that is established by sacrament of marriage doesn't have an existence separated from the Church. It is the very existence and foundation of the family that is shaken and gets deviated when it diverges from the Church.

'Whoever does not gather with me scatters' (Mathew 12:30); these words of Jesus are a fundamental teaching with regard to the family. It is impossible to unite family and family ties apart from the Messiah and the Church, His body. Thus the Family Unit becomes the most important link between the family and the Church.

The history of the Early Church reveals that the Family Units were part of the ecclesial life. The Holy Church is a home. The word of God describes Church as the household of God, which is the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). Therefore, the early Church was convinced that it was appropriate to have gatherings at home. The first meeting of the Church was in a room upstairs where the Apostles lived (Acts 1: 13). Similarly, in the letter of St. Paul to the Romans (Rom. 16:3-5), we see that the Church had been gathering in the house of Prisca and Aquila.

Bible references to the early church community meetings are like this: 'day by day they spent much time together in the temple and from house to house they assembled and broke bread' (Acts 2:46). They gathered in the houses in addition to their gatherings at Temple. We read: 'Every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as Messiah' (Acts 5:42, 20:20). St. Paul instructs that it is imperative for everyone to participate in the church community meetings. 'Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching' (Hebrews 10:25). It is due to this reason our Eparchy has decided to observe this year as the 'Year of Family Units'.

The Family Units of the Syro-Malabar Church is now an official body called the Syro-Malabar Kudumba Koottayma (SMKK). Family Units are organized under the leadership of the Eparchial Director, Regional Director and office bearers at the Eparchial level and the Parish Priest and the office bearers at the Parish level. At each level the governing body comprises of President, Vice President, Secretary, Joint Secretary and Treasurer. Hence, the Family Unit is an official body more significant in the Global Syro-Malabar Church.

Despite the fact that the Family Units have such a framework, we should realize that it is also a deep spiritual system. The divine mystery of 'Communion' is the foundation for this.

The spiritual reality of communion originates from God. The Sacred Will and the Sacred Face, revealed to us by God the Father through the Messiah, is of Communion. God is the communion of three divine persons. It is the divine image itself. When the Scripture teaches that God created man in His own image, it means that He created man in the image of His communion. Therefore, the one who denies the Communion, denies God and the mystery of His creation. This is a serious aberration. Hence, the Second Vatican Council teaches; 'As God did not create man for life in isolation, but for the formation of social unity, so also it has pleased God to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals, without bond or link between them, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in Truth and serves Him in Holiness' (GS 32).

God, who is in communion in Himself, required a divine and an earthly communion to reveal Himself. That is the holy Church. The Greek word that denotes Church is 'Ekklesia' (Ek + kaleo). The meaning of this is to gather together. Hence, we must never disregard or deny the community gatherings of the Holy Church which represents His Will and Image.

The most appropriate word that denotes the Holy Eucharist, the center and culmination of the Ecclesial life, is Communion. We must recognize with prudence that the body of Jesus, the Holy Eucharist, is the Holy Communion. There is no Holy Eucharist where this communion is violated. The Eucharist makes the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist.

We who receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ, are invited to the communion. Those who deny this communion, in reality sin against the body and blood of the Lord. Our family units should be places, where we share the spirit of the celebration of the Holy Qurbana in our parish. Therefore it is my desire that none of the members of our Eparchy avert from the family units.

Communion is strength. We are strong as and when we are in communion. Our children will be safe and develop good personality in these loving communities. Pope Francis teaches that true brotherhood becomes a reality only in the spirit of true communion that is free and open.

Our family units should be the study center and training ground of the traditions of the Syro-Malabar Church. It shall be a space for our children to develop their faith, talents and relationships. We need to change the notion that parents are the only mentors of the children. They belong to God, to the Church and to the society. Therefore, we should realise that God has also entrusted the family units their training and mentoring. The family units might be a shelter and a helping hand for the people

who are lonely and in despair. Seeing the love and joy of our unity, people should seek the Messiah as in the Early Church.

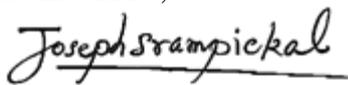
The Priests shall share the apostolic teachings of faith with the people of God in a distinct and subtle manner, as it happened in the early church. With great warmth I remind the Priests to be diligent in facing their eagerness and curious questions and to teach them the answers and the position of the Church.

Let us all have the aching heart of Jesus searching for the lost sheep. With compassion, love, patience and care the leaders shall attempt to unite those who are diverged. Thus the family units shall become the active link that connects each family to the Parish, and thus to the Holy Church.

You will be informed of the instructions regarding the arrangements of family units in due course. I too will try my maximum to attend family unit gatherings. I remember you all in my prayers. Also I take part and remember you in the prayer that Jesus recited and offered frequently: 'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one' (John 17:20-22).

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

Yours in Christ,

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Mar Joseph Srampickal

Bishop, Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain

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NB: This Pastoral letter must be read in all the Parishes/Missions/Proposed Missions during the celebration of the Holy Qurbana before 09<sup>th</sup> December 2020.