

**THE SYRO- MALANKARA CATHOLIC CHURCH
MAJOR ARCHIEPISCOPAL CURIA**

CATHOLICATE CENTRE, TRIVANDRUM - 695004, KERALA, INDIA

Sixteenth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod
(20- 22 September 2014)

REPORT

His Beatitude Baselios Cardinal Cleemis Catholicos convoked the Sixteenth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church at Dharmapitam, the Catholic Bishop's House, Bathery from 20 to 22 September 2014. The Holy Episcopal Synod (HES) began at 9.00 pm. on Saturday, 20 September 2014. It was after the conclusion of the 84th Reunion Day Celebrations and Sabha Sanghamam that the Bishops of our Church gathered together for the Holy Episcopal Synod.

The HES began with a prayer.

The members present at the Synod were: Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis Catholicos (President of the Synod), Most Rev. Thomas Mar Koorilos (Secretary of the Synod), Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Divannasios, Most Rev. Yoohanon Mar Chrysostom, Most Rev. Joshua Mar Ignathios, Most Rev. Joseph Mar Thomas, Most Rev. Abraham Mar Julios, Most Rev. Vincent Mar Paulos, Most Rev. Jacob Mar Barnabas OIC, Most Rev. Thomas Mar Anthonios OIC, Most Rev. Samuel Mar Irenios and Most Rev. Philipos Mar Stephanos.

Most Rev. Thomas Mar Eusebios was absent. Mar Eusebios had requested leave of absence from the HES, as he had to attend the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Canada. It was the first meeting of the Conference after Mar Eusebios had been granted its membership. The HES considered the request and accepted the legitimacy of the impediment.

Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Timotheos, the Bishop Emeritus of Tiruvalla is granted permanent leave of absence due to his old age health conditions.

Most Rev. Thomas Mar Anthonios OIC, the Curia Bishop and the Chancellor of the Major Archiepiscopal Curia, recorded the minutes.

His Beatitude Baselios Cardinal Cleemis, the Major Archbishop-Catholicos, gave the opening address. The backdrop of the message was the successful celebration of the 84th Reunion Day Celebrations and the Sabha Saghnam. His Beatitude congratulated Most Rev. Joseph Mar Thomas for the successful organisation and conduct of the programmes. Eparchy of Bathery inspired everyone in all respects of the celebration. The dedication and the cooperation of the priests and laity were very evident. The participation and commitment of the DM Sisters and the Bethany Sisters in the programmes were exemplary. It is undoubtful that the celebration has

empowered the Bishop and the Eparchy. The baton is now passed on to the Archieparchy of Tiruvalla. The celebration will take place in the context of the 125th year of the birth of Most Rev. Jacob Mar Theophilos, the first Metropolitan of Tiruvalla, the year of the birth centenary of Most Rev. Benedict Mar Gregorios, the second Metropolitan-Archbishop of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church and the fiftieth year of demise of Rt Rev Msgr Vadassery. It is also the Year of Consecrated Life in the Church. His Beatitude urged the Archieparchy of Tiruvalla to celebrate the Sabha Sanghamam and the 85th Reunion Day taking into consideration all these.

His Beatitude the Catholicos also delved on the wonderful experience of God's providence in the life of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. Ours is a Church that bears the imprint of the hands of the Lord. In all domains of ecclesial life, we experience that we are under the special protection of the Lord.

His Beatitude expressed the concern of our Church in the onslaught on the Christian Faithful and the Church in the Middle East. The Christian tradition, culture, heritage and the faithful are decimated. Of the 150 thousand Antiochian Syrian Catholics, 50 thousand are missing. The Maronite Catholics who share with us the same ecclesial and liturgical tradition urges us to salvage the Christian heritage of the region. The Catholicos urged the Synod Fathers to read the signs of the time prompted by the Spirit of God.

Invoking the special blessings of the Holy Spirit and confiding the HES to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary the Mother of God, His Beatitude the Catholicos declared the Sixteenth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod open.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE AGENDA

His Beatitude the Catholicos, the President of the HES, presented the following proposed agenda of the Synod:

1. Prayer
2. Inaugural Address by His Beatitude
3. Report of the Fifteenth Holy Episcopal Synod
4. Decisions of the Fifteenth Holy Episcopal Synod
5. The Evaluation of the Common Programmes – July 15, Sept. 20, 2014; Planning for the year 2015.
6. The Synodal Commissions – Bye-laws and Action Plan
7. Synodal Commission for Social Action and Caritas Malankara
8. Charter of Priestly Formation
9. Proposed Canonical Provision for the ETRI
10. Accounts of the Financial Year 2013-'14; Utilization of the Common Collections
11. Other Matters if any, with the consent of the President

The Synod Fathers proposed to add the following topics:

1. The observance of the Year of Consecrated Life
2. Suvisesha Sangham
3. Thukkasa and Prayers of Sleebakkalam

4. Some Liturgical Matters
5. Proposals for the Amendment of Certain Canons of the Particular Law
6. The Birth Centenary of Archbishop Mar Gregorios

The Synod Fathers approved the proposed agenda with the above additions.

Presentation of Reports

The Report and Decisions of the Fifteenth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod convoked from 10 to 14 March 2014 was read out. Observations of the members and corrections proposed by them were recorded. It was pointed out that, for publication the report should be edited and shortened. The report and decisions were proposed to be passed by Most Rev. Joseph Mar Thomas. The proposal was supported by Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Divannasios. They were passed with applause by all.

Points Arising out of the Report and Decisions

Decision no 2 : the study to reschedule the courses/credits in St Mary's Malankara Seminary, by the Academic Council – it was pointed out that it should be completed soon.

Decision no 4 : concerning the value of goods to be alienated, the clause, “This is applicable for a period of two years” should be deleted. It was suggested to add the clause, “The HES can revise this from time to time”.

Decision no. 6 : on Thukkasa, it was pointed out that the particularities or differences in the rubrics as practised in the Eparchy of Marthandom shall be redacted by the Eparchial Bishop and published.

Decision no. 7 : “The priestly ordinations shall not be conducted in the afternoon” – it was suggested to add, “As far as possible”.

Decision no. 14 : As per the earlier decision of the HES, trained deacons, brothers and religious sisters can be given the mandate, according to CCEO c 709 §2 and CPCSMCC c 490, for helping the distribution of the Holy Qurbano. The Eparchy of Marthandam and parishes in serious need in the Major Archieparchy of Trivandrum can try this” - change the usage “can try this”.

THE DELIBERATIONS

Evaluation of the Malankara Sabha Sanghamam and the 84th Reunion Day Celebrations

The members of the HES expressed great appreciation at the organisation and successful conduct of the Malankara Sabha Sanghamam and the 84th Reunion Day Celebrations held in the Eparchy of Bathery. The meeting of the Writers' Forum, arranged for the first time, was a success.

Next year, the Reunion Day, 20 September 2015, falls on a Sunday. Hence the main day, the concluding day of the Sabha Sanghamam, shall be on Monday, 21 September 2015 which is also a public holiday. The assemblies of the various associations and the MCYM Quiz programme shall be conducted on 20 September 2015. Since the year being the Year of Consecrated Life, a gathering of the Religious shall be conducted on one of the days of the Sabha Sanghamam.

Evaluation of the 61st Feast of Commemoration of the Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios

In this year's celebration of the Feast of Commemoration of the Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios, Most Rev. Archbishop Cyril Vasil SJ, Secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, Most Rev. Paul Hinder OFM Cap., Vicar Apostolic in the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia and Most Rev. Bishop Camillo Ballin MCCI, Vicar Apostolic of Northern Arabia participated. Such visits would open up our Church to the Universal Church and its voice heard in the world.

The HES is inspired by the growing fervour and devotion of the faithful who participate in the Padayatra to the tomb of Mar Ivanios. The increase in the number of faithful who participate in the Padayatras organised from various places is a sign of the spread of the fragrance of sanctity of the Servant God. It is this fervour and devotion that lead to the occurrence of miracles. It was suggested that the main Padayatra from Perunadu on the second day could be rerouted in order to avoid the extra distance covered that day.

The Synodal Commissions – Byelaws and Action Plan

His Beatitude the Catholicos asked Most Rev. Thomas Mar Anthonios, the Curia Bishop who is also the co-ordinator of the activities of the Synodal Commissions, to present the topic. Mar Anthonios brought to the attention of the HES the various meetings of the Secretaries of the Synodal Commissions to revive their functioning. In the last such meeting, the Secretaries had agreed to draft a working guideline for their respective commission and present it for consolidation by the co-ordinator and to present it to the HES for its approval. However, except two or three Synodal Commissions, no one took it seriously and did the work. In this circumstance, Most Rev. Vincent Mar Paulose, Most Rev. Samuel Mar Irenios, Most Rev. Philipos Mar Stephanos and Most Rev. Thomas Mar Anthonios were asked to draft the general guidelines and the specific guidelines for each of the Synodal Commissions and present it to the next HES.

Synodal Commission for Social Action and Caritas Malankara

The proposal and the byelaws of “Caritas Malankara”, an umbrella organisation to co-ordinate the activities of all the Social Services Societies of our Church was introduced by Most Rev. Joshua Mar Ignathios. The HES studied the byelaws and proposed the necessary amendments. The HES also asked the commission to find an alternative name for the umbrella organisation as the prefix “Caritas” can create relational confusion as there are many nationally and internationally interrelated social service organisations which bear the same name. The final approval to the draft of the byelaws is pending.

Charter of Priestly Formation

The proposal of the last Holy Episcopal Synod to prepare a Charter of Priestly Formation for the formation of our Seminarians was taken up for discussion. The sharing of the members of the

HES gave further orientation to Most Rev. Bishops Mar Julios, Mar Ignathios, Mar Stephanos, Mar Eusebios and Mar Koorilos who were named members of the board to draft the Charter and present it in the HES to be convoked in February 2015.

Proposed Canonical Provision for the ETRI

His Beatitude the Catholicos presented to the HES the iter of the proposal submitted to the Holy See for canonical provisions for the pastoral care of the Christian Faithful in India outside the territorium proprium of our Church. Since we could not obtain a response to the proposal through the dicasteries of the Holy See, it was proposed that the proposal should be submitted directly to the Holy Father. It was foreseen that it could be done in October 2014 when His Beatitude the Catholicos will meet the Holy Father during the Synod of Bishops at Rome.

Accounts of the Financial Year 2013-'14; Utilization of the Common Collections

Rev. Fr. Thomas Parakkal, the Finance Officer of the Major Archiepiscopal Curia, was called in to the HES for the presentation of the accounts of the Curia. He presented it and the HES accepted the accounts after necessary discussion and clarifications. Most Rev. Samuel Mar Irenios proposed that the accounts can be passed and it was supported by Most Rev. Philipos Mar Stephanos and it was passed with common acclamation.

Thereafter, the topic “utilization of the common collections” such as the offerings on Laity Day and Youth day was discussed. The following guidelines were agreed upon on the mode of handling the accounts and its utilization:

1. The offerings of the Youth Day and Laity Day are earmarked for the apostolate of the Youth and Laity respectively in our Church. It is not earmarked for any particular association / organisation though it could be allotted to them. No association has an exclusive claim on it.
2. The offerings are received into the account of the Major Archiepiscopal Curia with the specific purpose as said above. Hence the money can be transferred only to an account operated for the same.
3. The respective Synodal Commission is the recipient of the offerings transferred to an account operated jointly by the Chairman and the Secretary in the name of the Commission. The Chairman in consultation with the members of the Synodal Commission allots the money for the functioning of the Synodal Commission and the various associations that are coordinated by the same commission. The decision is to be executed by the Secretary of the Commission.
4. The bank account of the respective Synodal Commission is a subsidiary account of the Major Archiepiscopal Curia. The income and expenses of the Commission is also part of the income and expenses of the Major Archiepiscopal Curia. Hence, the respective commissions are to submit their accounts to the Finance Officer of the Major Archiepiscopal Curia for inclusion in the general account and to be submitted for audit according to the norms of civil law.

5. The Secretary of the Synodal Commission is to maintain the proper accounts of the Commission.
6. Money can be allotted to an association / organisation as per the above norms. However, the income and expenses of an association or organisation is not to be mixed up with the accounts of income and expenses of a Synodal Commission.

The observance of the Year of Consecrated Life

How do we observe the year 2015 proclaimed as an Year of Consecrated Life in the Church by the Holy Father Pope Francis on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the promulgation of Perfectae Caritatis, the Decree of the Second Vatican for the up-to-date renewal of religious life?" The HES welcomed the decision of the Holy Father in the context of the fall of vocations to religious life in the Universal Church and its corresponding influence in our local context. The HES called upon everyone to find Religious Life as the treasure of the Church as was understood from the early centuries of the Church. The following are suggestions of the HES to observe the "Year of Consecrated Life".

1. Issue a common pastoral letter by the Father and Head of our Church welcoming and introducing the Year of Consecrated Life in the Church
2. On 30 November 2014 the year shall be inaugurated in the SMCC. All Eparchial Bishops, the Exarch and the Apostolic Visitor are to inaugurate the Year of Consecrated Life in their respective Eparchy/Exarchate/ETRI celebrating a Holy Qurbano in the Cathedral Church to which the Religious and other Christian Faithful are invited.
3. An ecclesial-level gathering of the Religious with other Christian Faithful shall be called together along with the 85th Reunion Day Celebrations and Sabha Sanghamam to be hosted by the Archieparchy of Tiruvalla.
4. The Religious of each Eparchy/Exarchate/ETRI shall be gathered together by the Eparchial Bishop/Exarch/Apostolic Visitor in the respective level for interaction, coordination and dialogue to promote the apostolate of the Religious and vocation to religious life.
5. The parents of the Religious shall be honoured.
6. The apostolic activities of the Religious who are engaged in foreign countries shall be recognised and praised.

The Progress of the Suvishesha Sangham

Rev. Fr Antony Kakkanat was invited to the HES to report on the progress of the Suvishesha Sangham. In his report he highlighted that the SS tries to live in depth the spiritual patrimony of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. The present members experience deeply the presence of the Holy Spirit when they live the spirituality of the Church and gather together to break the Word of God. The members of the SS recite fervently the canonical Prayers of the Hours, observe fully the nombus (lents) that together count 114 days a year, read the Word of God in the morning and evening and avail themselves in front of the sacrament of reconciliation. Persons

experience conversion and growth in the Spirit. There is an increase in diligence to assume ministries in the Church. In the parishes where the SS is formed, the fragrance of the Gospel spreads and there are others who recognise this. In some parishes adoration and prayer meetings are held once in a week under the leadership of the parish priest. Rev. Fr. Antony expressed satisfaction at the overall spread and growth of the SS. However, he pointed out that at the parish-level the SS should be implanted and become active.

Most Rev. Jacob Mar Barnabas, the Chairman of the Synodal Commission for Evangelisation, complimented Rev. Fr Antony for his relentless commitment and leadership for the SS. His Beatitude the Catholicos expressed the same sentiments and urged the Synod Fathers to nurse the SS and take the lead in implanting the SS in their respective Eparchies.

Thukkasa and Prayers of Sleebakkalam

The recently published book of rubrics (Thukkasa) was presented in the Holy Episcopal Synod. The HES suggested that in order to introduce the text and conscientise the clergy of our Church of the need to follow the Thukkasa in the celebration of the sacraments and the sacramentals, a meeting of the clergy and the members of the religious communities be held in each Eparchy. The Chairman of the Synodal Commission, Rev. Fathers Thomas Panicker, Kuriakose Thadathil and Isaac Parappallil can give them an orientation on the same.

Most Rev. Thomas Mar Koorilos, the Chairman of the SC for Liturgy, brought to the attention of the HES that the translated text of the night prayer of the Sundays of the Sleebakkalam has to be finally approved. The text was posted for study and approval later.

Some Liturgical Matters

Some interpolations and deletions in the celebrations of the Divine Liturgy were brought to the attention of the HES. It was noted that the intercessory prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary was introduced in the Holy Qurbono in the place of Basmalkho. The HES directed that this should be stopped. Similarly it was pointed out that all six Thubdens should be recited in all celebrations of the Holy Qurbono.

Proposal to Amend Certain Canons of the Particular Law

It was pointed out that there is need to amend certain canons, for example c 146, of the CPCSMCC, as they do not correspond to the de-facto situations. However, the HES opined that a thorough study should be done and comprehensive proposals should be presented for amendment. Hence the topic was posted for consideration by the next Ordinary HES.

The Birth Centenary of Archbishop Mar Gregorios

We enter the birth centenary year of Most Rev. Benedict Mar Gregorios (1916-2016), the second Metropolitan Archbishop of the SMCC. It was suggested that the year should be observed with programmes and plans that would benefit the common good of the society.

In this context, it was pointed out the venerable memory of the other prelates like Mar Theophilos should also be given due importance in the life of the Church.

Other Matters with the Consent of the President of the HES

1. Request to relieve Rev. Fr Thomas Parakkal from the Office of the Finance Officer of the Major Archiepiscopal Curia.

Most Rev. Thomas Mar Koorilos, Archbishop of Tiruvalla, requested the HES that Rev. Fr Thomas Parakkal of the Archieparchy of Tiruvalla, who is presently serving the Major Archiepiscopal Curia as its Finance Officer be relieved from the office, as his service is indispensable for Pushpagiri Medical College as its Finance Officer. The HES granted the request.

Most Rev. Mar Koorilos proposed that Rev. Fr. Varghese Angadiyil, presently Parish Priest of Chakkupallam and Anakkara of the Archieparchy of Tiruvalla could be appointed as the new Finance Officer of the Curia. The HES accepted the proposal. It was told that Fr Thomas would be relieved of the office by the beginning of January 2015 after Fr Varghese gets acquainted with the office work.

2. Membership of the KCBC Bible Society

Most Rev. Samuel Mar Irenios, the Chairman of the Synodal Commission for Bible Apostolate brought to the attention of the HES that very few Malankara Catholics have taken membership of the Bible Society under the auspices of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council. It is often pointed out to us by the Society that the membership drive must be promoted among the Malankara Catholics. The HES urged all the Eparchial Bishops to do the needful.

As Rev. Fr Devdas Thenguvilayil, the Secretary of the Synodal Commission for Bible Apostolate is from the Eparchy of Marthandom in Tamil Nadu, he is not able to represent our Church in the KCBC Bible Commission. Hence Rev. Fr Kurian Valuparampil has to continue to represent our Church in the said Commission.

3. Directory of the SMCC

It was suggested that a new Directory of the SMCC should be published. The last directory was published in the year 2011. It was recommended that the new Directory could be published in June 2015. Most Rev. Thomas Mar Anthonios, the Curia Bishop and Chancellor, was entrusted with the responsibility.

4. Assessment of the Major Seminary

The life, functioning and the present disciplinary status of St Mary's Malankara Seminary after the appointment of the new Rector Rev. Fr Daniel Manikulam was reviewed by the HES. The Faculty of Philosophy comes to a closing stage this academic year. The pastoral experience programmes are streamlined. There are some 'populist approaches' which should be evaluated thoroughly. The role of the staff in the formation programme was also assessed.

5. Pastoral Course 2014 for Deacons and New Priests

The deacons of St Mary's Malankara Seminary and Bethany Ashram Pune, the Seminary of the OIC, complete their Theology with final exams by the end of November 2014. Taking into

consideration the convenience of the deacons and their proposed sacerdotal ordinations, the Chancellor who is in-charge of the pastoral course for the deacons and new priests of the Church suggested that the course could be arranged from 1 to 5 December 2015. The Synod Fathers also found the dates convenient.

In this context, the Synod Fathers opined that an organised on-going formation for the priests of our Church is essential. Hence, a team of Bishops, Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Divannasios, Most Rev. Yoohanon Mar Chrysostom and Most Rev. Joseph Mar Thomas, volunteered to arrange the course for our priests ordained during the last three years.

The Seventeenth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod

It was decided that the Seventeenth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod of the SMCC be convoked from 23 to 27 February 2015 at the Major Archiepiscopal Curia, Pattom, Trivandrum. The Synod will begin at 9.00 a.m. with a concelebrated Holy Qurbano on Monday 23 February and end at 4.00 p.m. on 27 February 2015.

CONCLUSION

His Beatitude gave the concluding message in the last session of the Holy Episcopal Synod that began at 4 p.m. on 22 September 2014. His Beatitude thanked the Synod Fathers for their participation in the Synod in spite of the heavy schedule of activities of the previous days. His Beatitude recalled the apostolic mission of the Holy Episcopal Synod as successors of the apostolic college. His Beatitude also recalled the dynamic and charismatic leadership given by his Holiness Pope Francis. "Caritas Christi urget nos" – These words of St Paul is the driving force behind Pope Francis' apostolate in the Church today.

His Beatitude continued: "The Synod of the SMCC too is a succession of the apostolic college for our Church. Hence it is qualified as holy. It is not the holiness of the members of the Synod that makes it holy but the living presence of the Holy Spirit in the Synod and the presence of the apostolic succession in the Synod that make the Synod holy". He added that, it is because of this that we could dynamically and enthusiastically move forward and could lead the Church. His Beatitude also pointed out that our people love us and it was often pointed out by the visiting prelates who were overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of our people. We also experience within our community, the loving care of the Holy Spirit. This is the only reason why we are happy and not worried in spite of the heavy load of responsibilities we shoulder."

Recalling the divine interventions in the life of the Church, His Beatitude requested the prayers of his Brother Bishops. "God never retracts from his promises that he made to our Church. Jesus Christ is the same for us yesterday, today and forever. This is the strength of the Synod Fathers. My dear venerable brothers, I acknowledge that your prayers strengthen me and I request your continuous prayers. "

His Beatitude thanked Most Rev. Joseph Mar Thomas, Bishop of Bathery, at whose residence the HES was in session after the successful celebration of the 84th Reunion Day and Sabha Sanghamam. His Beatitude praised profusely Mar Thomas for his magnificent leadership to the

Eparchy of Bathery. His Beatitude placed on record the whole hearted cooperation and commitment of the priests, religious and laity of the Eparchy of Bathery for making the celebrations a grand success. "The event has inspired and motivated the Eparchy of Bathery and the entire Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. I also remember with gratitude the personal care shown by Josphe Mar Thomas to each one of the Bishops, priests, religious and laity. I am happy to say that Mar Thomas inherited the unbroken lineage of successful leadership from Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Divannasios, the former Bishop of Bathery and now the Bishop of Puttur and from His Beatitude Cyril Mar Baselios, the first Catholicos of our Church who was the first Bishop of Bathery. On behalf of the HES, I convey gratitude and appreciation to each faithful of the Eparchy of Bathery."

His Beatitude the Catholicos thanked the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Malankara Catholic Church for her unfailing intercession for our Church to Jesus Christ, her Son and our Saviour and invoked the blessings of the Holy Trinity on our Church. His Beatitude declared the Sixteenth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod closed.

The Sixteenth Ordinary HES ended with prayers and the final blessing imparted by His Beatitude the Catholicos.

✠ Thomas Mar Koorilos

Secretary

✠ Thomas Mar Anthonios

Chancellor