

BISHOP'S CIRCULAR LETTER

BP/CL5/2021 July 1, 2021

Dear Priests/Brothers/Sisters & Lay Faithful in the Diocese:

Official

1. Ministerial Appointments

I have appointed the following Priests to these ministerial assignments:

- Fr. BhubanSarkar as the new Vicar Forane of Agartala Deanery with immediate effect.
- Fr. Sojan Augustine, CSC, as the new Vicar Forane of Depacherra Deanery with immediate effect. (After July 11th the new Parish of Pitra in Gomati District will be under Depacherra Deanery)
- Fr. S. George as Teacher in St. Joseph School Gokulnagar, with effect from July 1, 2021.
- After being proposed by their Provincial Superior Fr. Paul Olphindro, SDB, I have appointed:
 - Rev. Fr. Joseph Pallamthatel, SDB, as the first Parish Priest of the newly established St. Joseph Parish at Pitra in Gomati District, with effect from July 1, 2021.
 - Rev. Fr. Joseph Kavalakadan, SDB, as Assistant Priest of Sacred Heart Parish, Bishramganj, with immediate effect.
 - Rev. Fr. Merkush Ishwary, SDB, as Assistant Priest of St. John Paul II Parish, Baijalbari, with immediate effect.
 - Rev. Fr. James DOUNGEL, SDB, as Assistant Priest of Sacred Heart Parish, Bishramganj, with immediate effect.

2. Vatican asks all Catholic dioceses to take part in synod on synodality

The Vatican announced on May 21 that the Synod of Bishops on synodality has been postponed to 2023, with a two-year consultative preparatory phase involving Catholic dioceses worldwide. The Synod on synodality will officially open with a "diocesan phase" in October 2021 and conclude with the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in October 2023. Pope Francis will officially "inaugurate the synodal path" over the weekend of Oct. 9-10 with an opening session and a Mass. All Dioceses are invited to also offer an Opening Mass on Sunday, October 17, 2021.

During the diocesan phase, each Bishop is asked to undertake a consultation process with the local Church from October 17, 2021 until April 2022. The Vatican will send Dioceses a

preparatory document, accompanied by a questionnaire and a *vademecum* with proposals for consultation. Both, Bishops and Bishops' Conferences can appoint a contact person, and eventually a team, to be a point of reference during this local synodal process. The Vatican will then release an *instrumentum laboris* (working document) in September 2022 for a period of "pre-synodal discernment in continental assemblies," which will influence a second draft of the working document to be published before June 2023. The entire process will culminate in a meeting of Bishops from around the world at the Vatican in October 2023, held according to the established norms outlined in the 2018 Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio*.

Please be Informed that the Synod is a meeting of Bishops gathered to discuss a topic of theological or pastoral significance, to prepare a document of advice or counsel to the Pope.

3. Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis Antiquum Ministerium, 'The Ministry of Catechist' The Apostolic Letter in Gist

Earliest Reference: Role in the Ministry of the Word: The Apostolic Letter then points out their special role in the Ministry of the Word.

Catechists through History: The history of evangelization shows that in the past two thousand years catechetical instruction has been carried out not only by bishops, priests, deacons and many men and women in the consecrated life, but there has also been countless lay men and women who carried out catechetical instruction with dedication and competence (no. 3).

Second Vatican Council on Laity: The renewal introduced and insisted upon by the Second Vatican Council is seen in its appreciation for lay ministry by underlining lay involvement in the work of evangelisation.

Fidelity and Responsibility: While recognising the ministry of lay catechists, the document speaks about "fidelity to the past and responsibility for the present" as a necessary condition which the Church needs to follow.

Uniqueness of the Ministry of Catechists: The Apostolic Letter then goes on to describe what makes the apostolate of the laity unique.

A New Look into Ministries: The Pope then tries to root the establishment of this Ministry of Catechist to the intention of the Apostolic Letter, *Ministeria Quaedam*, of Pope Paul VI.

Qualifications of Catechists: While establishing the Ministry of Catechist, Pope Francis says, "It is

therefore essential that such candidates should "receive suitable biblical, theological, pastoral and pedagogical formation to be competent communicators of the truth of the faith," so that they will be faithful co-workers with priests and deacons and be prepared to exercise their ministry with true apostolic enthusiasm" (no.8).

Implementation: With regard to concrete and effective implementation of this document, the Holy Father has asked the Episcopal Conferences to determine the modalities.

4. The Need to reflect and act

The publication of this document is a key to look at the mission of the Church in the region with a special reference to the choice of personnel for the mission. The pre-Vatican II period sought to understand ministry as something granting an ecclesiastical status - a hierarchical privilege given to a person. On the contrary, the Second Vatican Council sought to instill the notion of ministry as service and it is now applied to the entire Church, the whole people of God. Therefore, both the 'ordained' ministers and 'admitted' (nos. 2, 9) ministers are meant for service in the Church. All share the threefold ministry of Jesus Christ as prophet, priest and king (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 30, 31).

The document's implications for the Church in the region would be many. However, some specific ones which seem to have preference over the others are: i) to take measures to avoid clericalisation of the Church in the northeast region where the young Church is still growing; ii) to promote and encourage lay men and women who have the vocation to be catechists; iii) to look for the possibilities of including women as catechists in our context which is predominantly patriarchal; and iv) to look for ways to qualify the capable, competent and prospective existing catechists in "suitable, biblical, theological and pedagogical formation." Whatever be the implications, the fruit of this document will depend on how these implications are put into practice.

5. Grandparents Day on 25th July 2021

In his message for the first-ever World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly Pope Francis reassures the elderly that God is always with them. He also reminds them of their vocation to preserve our roots and to pass on the faith to the younger ones. The First World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, is scheduled for 25 July 2021. The theme chosen by the Pope for the inaugural commemoration is "I am with you always" (Mt 28: 30).

Comfort amid the pandemic - The Pope's message comes amid the challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic that has affected everyone, especially elderly people.

The Lord sends angels, messengers through His words - Even at the darkest moments, the Lord continues to send angels to console our

loneliness and to remind us that He is with us always, the Pope assured.

Finally, Pope Francis spoke on prayer, recalling Pope Benedict XVI's words: "the prayer of the elderly can protect the world, helping it perhaps more effectively than the frenetic activity of many others." He closed by saying, "May each of us learn to repeat to all, and especially to the young, the words of consolation we have heard spoken to us today: "I am with you always."

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-06/pope-francis-world-day-grandparents-elderly-message.html>

6. Indian Christian Day

3rd of July will be observed as 'Indian Christian Day'. This is the death anniversary of St. Thomas, the Apostle who was martyred near Chennai in 72 AD. It will be observed for the first time this year together with the launch of the Decade of Indian Christian celebration 2021-2030, corresponding with the 2000th year of the earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ and the birth of Christianity.

One of the main objectives of this movement is to affirm the rootedness of Christianity in the cultures and the soul of our magnificent country India. We also acknowledge with gratitude the sacrificial contributions made by mission agencies from different Church traditions, and respectfully honour those missionaries who have sown the seed of the Gospel and established churches and institutions in different parts of our country.

A Coordinating Team has been formed. The intention is to show that Christianity has had roots in India since the 1st century and it is not a western import. Secondly, Christians need to be aware of our responsibility towards nation-building and duty towards society and the potential we have to do more good, to be the salt and light to society.

7. Green Sunday celebrated

Since three years we in the Diocese have undertaken a small initiative called Green Sunday to plant trees. This year the day was celebrated on 20th June wherein all Parishes and Institutions planted and distributed over 9,000 trees. Planting Trees-Restoring Hope was the theme. Since the beginning, trees have furnished us with two of life's essentials, food and oxygen. As we evolved, they provided additional necessities such as shelter, medicine, and tools. Trees contribute to the environment by providing oxygen, improving air quality, climate amelioration, conserving water, preserving soil, and supporting wildlife. A virtual Seminar was organized by JUST for the whole Diocese on 14th June. The Input Session was given by Dr. Wangdub Bhutia, IFS, on the theme Ecosystem Restoration.

Yours in the Good Shepherd,



Most Rev. Lumen Monteiro, CSC
Bishop of Agartala