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DIOCESE OF AGARTALA
Celebrating the silver Years



BISHOP'S CIRCULAR LETTER



Year of St. Joseph

BP/CL1/2021 January 1, 2021

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

Today is New Year's Day. With sentiments of joy and gratitude I wish you a very happy New Year and assure you of a special prayer for God's protection on you for the year ahead. 2020 was a year of unprecedented challenges; yet we faced these challenges with faith and the good Lord has kept us safe; for this we are grateful to God. I hope that the New Year 2021 will have us see better days. The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, has called the international community to make 2021 a year of healing. Noting that 2020 has been "a year of trials, tragedies and tears", Guterres said "Covid-19 upended our lives and plunged the world into suffering and grief. Together, let's make peace among ourselves and with nature, tackle the climate crisis, stop the spread of Covid-19, and make 2021 a year of healing." I join my voice to his and pray for faith, hope and good cheer as we go about building communities of fraternal love and charity. In this Year of St. Joseph let us "discover in him an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble." For us in this Diocese and especially for me, 2021 is a year of grace because we celebrate the Silver Jubilee of our Diocese and my Episcopal consecration with the theme, Rejoice with Gratitude; Renew with Hope.

Today is also World Day of Peace. In his Message for World Day of Peace Pope Francis appealed for a "culture of care". He wrote, "The culture of care ... calls for a common, supportive and inclusive commitment to protecting and promoting the dignity and good of all, a willingness to show care and compassion, to work for reconciliation and healing, and to advance mutual respect and acceptance. As such, it represents a privileged path to peace... May we never yield to the temptation to disregard others, especially those in greatest need, and to look the other way; instead, may we strive daily, in concrete and practical ways, to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another." Pope Francis went on to say that he envisioned this culture of care as a way to combat the "culture of indifference, waste, and confrontation so prevalent in our time."

(The full text of the Pope's Message is attached to this

Circular Letter.)

Today is also the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God. The image of Mary as Queen Mother is directly related to the first official Marian dogma defined by the Church: Mary's status as Mother of God. The Greek word for the title is Theotokos, which literally means "God-bearer." That title is one of the oldest and most commonly used titles for Mary in the very first centuries of the Church. Calling Mary the "Mother of God" states a truth in order to protect an essential truth about Christ. One of the three essential tasks of the Queen Mother was to be a sign of her son's legitimacy. She was the link between his father, the former rightful king, and her son, the present rightful king. Likewise, Mary as the virginal "Mother of God" is the link between her Son's humanity and divinity. She is the sign that He is both God and man. Christians rightly invoke Mary as Queen of Peace. In our Diocese the church at Mariamnagar is named Shantir Rani = Queen of Peace. Let us ask Mother Mary, the Mother of God and Queen of Peace to grant us the much needed gift of peace. I assure you of a special prayer and blessing at the New Year's Mass which I will offer for our families and our Diocese.

OFFICIAL

1. ['Year of St. Joseph' from 8 December 2020 to 8 December 2021](#)

The Apostolic Letter "Patris Corde" commemorates the 150th anniversary of the declaration of Saint Joseph as Patron of the universal Church. The year began on Dec. 8, 2020 and concludes on Dec. 8, 2021, according to a Decree authorized by the Pope. The Decree said that Pope Francis had established a Year of St. Joseph so that "every member of the faithful, following his example, may strengthen their life of faith daily in the complete fulfillment of God's will." The Pope explained in the letter, entitled Patris Corde ("With a father's heart"), that he wanted to share some "personal reflections" on the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. "My desire to do so increased during these months of pandemic," he said, noting that many people had made hidden sacrifices during the crisis in order to protect others. "Each of us can discover in Joseph -- the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence -- an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble," he wrote. "St. Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the

history of salvation.” The letter added that Pope Francis had granted special indulgences to mark the year. In addition to the Decree, Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Letter dedicated to the foster father of Jesus. Pope Pius IX proclaimed St. Joseph patron of the Universal Church on Dec. 8, 1870, in the decree *Quemadmodum Deus*.

(The full text of the Apostolic Letter is attached to this Circular Letter.)

2. [The Diocese of Agartala is now 25!](#)

The Silver Jubilee of the Diocese is here. I gratefully remember our beloved Pope John Paul II, who, on 11th January 1996 decreed the establishment of the Diocese of Agartala by the Papal Bull *VENERABILES FRATRES NOSTRI* putting the whole State of Tripura under its jurisdiction. On May 26, 1996, I assumed the responsibility of the new Diocese of Agartala beginning my ministry with the motto 'Lead Us Onward'. Today I want to acknowledge that the Diocese of Agartala is moving onward as it enters the SILVER JUBILEE year. The Jubilee Committee, under the leadership of its Convener Fr. Shaji, CSC, has many plans, even though most of them had to be cancelled due to the Corona virus pandemic. But the Committee is still hopeful to have the [Grand Finale on 23 May 2021](#). We will continue to pray for that day to dawn freed from the restrictions due to the pandemic.

3. [Third Sunday in Ordinary Time is Sunday of the Word of God](#)

The Sunday of the Word of God, instituted by Pope Francis and to be held every year on the third Sunday in Ordinary Time, reminds us, pastors and faithful alike, of the importance and value of Sacred Scripture for the Christian life, as well as the relationship between the word of God and the liturgy: “As Christians, we are one people, making our pilgrim way through history, sustained by the Lord, present in our midst, who speaks to us and nourishes us. A day devoted to the Bible should not be seen as a yearly event but rather a year-long event, for we urgently need to grow in our knowledge and love of the Scriptures and of the Risen Lord, who continues to speak his word and to break bread in the community of believers. For this reason, we need to develop a closer relationship with Sacred Scripture...” The purpose of this Note is to help reawaken, in the light of the Sunday of the Word of God, an awareness of the importance of Sacred Scripture for our lives as believers.

4. [Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines](#)

Pope Francis, at the Audience granted to the

undersigned Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on 17 December 2020, examined the present Note and ordered its publication. “The question of the use of vaccines, in general, is often at the center of controversy in the forum of public opinion. In recent months, this Congregation has received several requests for guidance regarding the use of vaccines against the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19, which, in the course of research and production, employed cell lines drawn from tissue obtained from two abortions that occurred in the last century. At the same time, diverse and sometimes conflicting pronouncements in the mass media by Bishops, Catholic associations, and experts have raised questions about the morality of the use of these vaccines.

Since the first vaccines against Covid-19 are already available for distribution and administration in various countries, this Congregation desires to offer some indications for clarification of this matter. We do not intend to judge the safety and efficacy of these vaccines, although ethically relevant and necessary, as this evaluation is the responsibility of biomedical researchers and drug agencies. Here, our objective is only to consider the moral aspects of the use of the vaccines against Covid-19 that have been developed from cell lines derived from tissues obtained from two fetuses that were not spontaneously aborted.”

5. [New Archbishop for Shillong](#)

We are overjoyed to know that His Holiness Pope Francis has appointed Most Rev. Victor Lyngdoh, currently Bishop of Jowai, as the Archbishop of Shillong. This provision was made public in Rome on Monday, 28th December, 2020, at noon, corresponding to 16:30 hours, Indian Standard Time. We congratulate our beloved Archbishop-elect Victor Lyngdoh and offer our prayerful support as he undertakes the governance of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Shillong.

[Conclusion](#)

As 2020 comes to a close the most immediate thought on our minds is the upsurge of Covid-19. We all agree that 2020 has indeed been a year of many unprecedented challenges. However, on hindsight, we cannot ignore the fact that it has also been a year of new learning and blessings--we are still alive; we have been able to sustain ourselves no matter how difficult it may have been, leading us to the conclusion that a moment of crisis is a moment of grace and an opportunity for spiritual growth. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought out the best in everyone and taught us the importance of faith, resilience and teamwork in the face of challenges. It gave us the opportunity to shed our illusion of personal invincibility and submit to God who alone has

ultimate control over our lives. It also taught us that, no amount of wealth, position or power can guarantee anything or add true value to our life; and that, to survive, we need one another. Fr. Anthony Chantry of Missio England says, “We are called to rekindle the mission through sparkles of true love, as a reflection of the love for Jesus”.

Dear Fathers, Brothers, Sisters and Laity, though there is improvement in terms of the Covid-19 pandemic, we may not be out of the woods and the road ahead may still be arduous. Yet, I am confident that we will rise to the occasion and exhibit utmost courage and determination in meeting the challenges that are in store for us in the New Year. Through the intercession of St. Joseph, to whom this year is dedicated, “Each of us can discover in Joseph -- the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence -- an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble,” as Pope Francis writes in *Patris Corde*.

Yours in the Good Shepherd,

The image shows a handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lumen". To the right of the signature is a circular official seal. The seal has a blue border with the text "LUMEN MONTEIRO CSCD" at the top and "BISHOP of Agartala" in the center. There is a small star at the bottom of the seal.

Most Rev. Lumen Monteiro, CSC
Bishop of Agartala