

**REPORT OF THE  
10<sup>TH</sup> PROVINCIAL SYNAXIS OF  
THE MARYMATHA PROVINCE OF THE  
VINCENTIAN CONGREGATION**

⌘ **Held from May 2 to 7, 2017** ⌘



**MARYMATHA PROVINCIAL HOUSE,  
ANGAMALY**

# REPORT OF THE 10<sup>TH</sup> PROVINCIAL SYNAXIS OF THE MARYMATHA PROVINCE OF THE VINCENTIAN CONGREGATION

*Held from May 2 to 7, 2017  
at the Provincial House, Angamaly*

## **The Inaugural Session**

The Inaugural Session of the 10<sup>th</sup> Provincial Synaxis of the Marymatha Province of the Vincentian Congregation commenced at 6 pm on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2017 in the conference hall of the Provincial House, Angamaly. The capitulars had already spent the day in prayer and reflection. Before noon, Rev. Fr. Mathai Kadavil OIC had given two thought provoking talks highlighting the importance of the Synaxis, the duties of the capitulars and the administrative team to be elected. Afternoon, from 3 pm to 4 pm the members had spent an hour in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

All the thirty elected delegates and four of the ex-officio members and the special invitees were present. One of the ex-officio members, Rev Fr. Alex Chalangady, Councilor for Education and Media, did not participate in the Synaxis, as he had been elected to the General Council. Rev. Fr. Antony Chakkungal, an elected delegate of the Synaxis, had also been elected a General Councilor and he was substituted by Rev. Fr. Thomas (Daison) Vettiyadan, who got the next most votes. Rev. Frs. Joseph (Geejo) Pattath, the Regional Superior of Sacred Heart Region, East Africa, and John Kizhakkumthala, the Mission Superior of St. Paul Mission, Ahmednagar took part in the discussions as special invitees.

The Provincial Superior Rev. Fr. Paul Puthuva welcomed all the capitulars. Rev. Fr. George Manalel, the senior most member of the Synaxis led the assembly in a short prayer.

Rev. Frs. Martin Chittadiyil and George Elengickalputhenthara, the two junior most of the delegates were designated tellers. Rev. Fr. James Kallumkal was elected the Moderator of the Synaxis. Rev. Frs. Francis Alackakunnel and John Mangalath were elected secretary and the assistant secretary respectively. Rev. Frs. Antony Plackal and Philip Nedumthuruthil were elected members of the Central Commission.

After the election of the functionaries the Provincial Superior officially inaugurated the Synaxis and thereafter the members of the outgoing administrative team presented detailed reports of their departments and there were clarifications and discussion on the reports.

### **Election of the Administrative Team**

After the opening and counting of the ballot papers for the election of the Provincial Superior a panel with the five members who got the highest number of votes was formed. Very Rev. Fr. Sebastian Thundathikunnel, the Superior General, presided over the election of the Provincial Superior. After a short exhortation of the Superior General, reminding the capitulars of the responsibilities entrusted to them, the delegates spent fifteen minutes in silent prayer and took the oath as per No 180b of the Statutes and Practical Norms.

In the ballot that followed Rev Fr. James Kallumkal was elected the Provincial Superior. The Superior General confirmed the election by reading out a decree to this effect. Having accepted the election, the newly elected Provincial Superior thanked the delegates for their trust in him and the outgoing administrative team for their hard work for the growth of the Province.

The Synaxis then proceeded to elect a new Moderator as Rev. Fr. James Kallumkal, the hitherto Moderator of the Synaxis was elected the Provincial and Rev. Fr. Paul Puthuva was elected the Moderator.

Then the ballots were held to elect the Councilors and the following is the new administrative team of the Marymatha Province of the Vincentian Congregation:

- Rev. Fr. James Kallumkal : Provincial Superior
- Rev. Fr. James Chelapurath : Asst. Provincial Superior,  
Councilor for Education and  
Media
- Rev. Fr. Paul Parekkattil : Councilor for Popular Mission,  
Retreats and Pastoral Work
- Rev. Fr. Francis Naduviledath : Councilor for Mission,  
Social and Charitable Works
- Rev. Fr. James Kokkandathil : Councilor for Finance and  
Construction

### **Discussions and Deliberations**

After the elections of the administrative team, the Synaxis straight away started discussions on the agenda prepared by the Preparatory Commission from the suggestions sent by the Houses and individuals. A brief report of the outcome of the deliberations is given below.

#### ***Vincentian Vocation: Purpose and Spirit***

The first theme in the agenda was the Purpose and Spirit of the Congregation. There were a few interventions regarding the concept of preaching the Gospel to the poor. Preaching the word of God to the poor should mean the spiritual as well as the material uplift of the poor. For St. Vincent de Paul serving the poor was serving God. Our identity as Vincentians lies in serving the poor as well as preaching the word of God.

There is a general impression that our Congregation is focusing more on the preaching ministry. We need to do more to serve the poor. Attached to all retreat centres it is good to have a centre for the

poor. We must explore the possibility to serve the underprivileged *Dalits* and *Adivasis* in a better way and thus try to deepen our commitment to the poor. We need to intensify our ministries to the poor especially in and around our Centres and Houses. We must make sure that nobody hungers around our Houses. Our preaching ministry should incorporate the charitable activities.

Starting a charitable institution close to every residential retreat centre which is more than ten years, making sure that the tithe is used for charity, undertaking a charitable activity in connection with the feast of St. Vincent de Paul, appointing a coordinator for the charitable activities, and giving the major seminarians more opportunities for social and charitable activities were some of the concrete suggestions that came up in this regard.

We need to understand the terms of the Statutes and Practical Norms fully for a better appreciation of our charism. St Vincent is to be understood in his totality. “To love what he loved and to practice what he taught”- so we pray. St. Vincent says that priests should preach in words and actions. We must read and reflect on the life and writings of St. Vincent. First we must let ourselves be influenced by them and give a Vincentian touch to everything we do.

During the discussions it was also acknowledged that in the last years crores of rupees were spent for charitable activities and that our kerygmic ministries are often indirectly complemented also by the dynamic ministries of the laity.

### ***Fraternal Communion and Life of Prayer***

How is our prayer life? Often the laity seems to be more inclined to prayer than the priests. We dedicate ourselves to God and to the Congregation through the vows. All must participate in the common activities of the Houses like common prayers, meals, spiritual reading and recreation. We need to foster the habit of prayer in our lives.

It was pointed out that a number of our confreres skip the community prayers. Our chapels are often not full during the time of community prayers; our community activities are decreasing. Lack of community prayers has adverse effects in our ministries. Of course, we cannot judge the prayer life of others merely because of one's absence from certain community prayers, yet the spiritual life needs to have certain regularities. There are certain basic principles of discipline; they are not optional. They cannot be changed. A certain amount of force is necessary also in prayer life.

Eucharistic adoration is encouraged by the Synodal Fathers. Syro-Malabar Church has the tradition of encouraging the perpetual adoration. It is a source of blessing; it is a great power. Wherever there is Eucharistic adoration, there the blessings of the Lord are showered upon. However, caution is required in the practice of our spirituality. Spirituality is not something parallel to our life, but a deepened aspect of it. Our prayer life and the quality of life need to go together.

Some concrete suggestions that came up in this regard were: to explore the possibility of starting a perpetual adoration centre in all our Houses, at least in our chapel in Angamaly, provide the facility for making confessions regularly for the public and open an adoration chapel in Angamaly town.

Fraternal communion is a basic condition for the community prayer. Monthly recollection can help fostering fraternal communion. Fixing the dates of monthly recollection already a year in advance, can help the members plan their programs accordingly.

Members of the community can help each other. We should have the courage to speak openly and personally. The Superiors do have a role to play. If anybody is regularly absent from community activities, the Superiors need to ask what the problem is. Mutual interaction in communities is to be fostered.

Earlier we had the practice of using a questionnaire for the

examination of conscience on monthly recollection day. These questions were really helpful and this practice can be resumed.

In Formation Houses the seminarians are to be encouraged to pray more than what is stipulated in the timetable, so as to develop spirit of prayer in them.

Law prescribes only the minimum. At least this much has to be done. On the one hand the Superiors have to make sure that the members live according to the Statutes and Practical Norms. On the other hand everyone is a professed member. After twelve years of formation why people fail to do the community exercises? Everyone needs to be aware of the commitments one has made. Individual corrections are to be made when necessary, yet one needs to be aware of the personal commitments one made to community life.

One point in the agenda was that Groupism and lobbying in the Province were to be avoided. There seems to be such tendencies, though minimal, in our Province. If true, they are to be addressed. If anybody comes to know of any such things, the persons concerned can be personally corrected or such things be reported to the Superiors.

### ***Evangelical Counsels***

Regarding the evangelical counsel of poverty, the pastoral activities of the members of the Province was discussed. Pastoral activities are to be undertaken through the House Superiors. The remuneration has to come to the House and the expenses are to be met by the House. Every confrere has to comply with this rule.

Regarding the evangelical counsel of chastity, it was mentioned that in the context of certain recent incidents of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church we should have certain guidelines. A code of conduct is to be made available for all the members.

There is perhaps the need for a personal undertaking regarding this matter to avoid future legal problems and also to make the members aware of the gravity of the problem. People do watch every movement of ours. We need to be extremely careful. The anonymous letters related to such matters are not to be neglected. The persons concerned are to be personally contacted and advised. Certain precautionary measures are to be taken. The administration may take a personal undertaking from every member.

The problem of the use of alcohol among our members, if existing, has to be addressed.

### ***Foreign Citizenship***

In the African scenario some members need to apply for citizenship for the sake of ownership of land and registration of trust or societies. According to the law of the land, citizenship was required to constitute trusts or societies. In this situation, if the Province finds it necessary, let the members be given permission to apply for citizenship.

### ***Andhra Region***

One observation of the priests working in Andhra Pradesh was that some seminarians who did their minor seminary in Andhra Pradesh were later sent to the African mission. It was because the option to opt for Africa for regency was kept open for all the seminarians. Another intervention was that the Bishops in Andhra were skeptic about welcoming priests from Kerala to work there as they already have surplus priests. However, it was pointed out that at least from two dioceses in Andhra Pradesh we had invitations to start our ministries in those dioceses.

### ***Charitable and Social Activities***

Counseling or de-addiction centres seem to be the need of the time. As we do not have enough qualified persons to start such centres, more young priests may be sent to attend counseling courses. The

priests who already do their studies abroad are to return soon and get involved in this ministry. We could also start a counseling centre exclusively for priests and religious in trouble.

Each House has a director for social work and they could do more in the field of charitable activities.

We may reconsider the present orphanage ministry in the light of JJ Act. This ministry is still relevant as there are many deserving children, who are not orphans in the strict sense, but who do not have a house to live in. In case of closure of orphanages the same facilities should be used for those who are very poor. We could extend our ministries to the immigrant workers.

Though we face new challenges in Kerala to manage orphanages, still there is great scope for this ministry in African countries especially in Tanzania.

The Synaxis has constituted a team to study the feasibility of doing our ministry among the Tribals, *Dalits* and *Adivasis*. Rev. Frs. Antony Plackal, Francis Naduviledath and Varghese Perinchery are the members of this team. The Synaxis has also passed a resolution to initiate a project to improve the living standards of the above mentioned groups of people.

### ***Media Ministry***

There was an item on the agenda on our media ministry. It was maintained that the Goodness Media should be promoted by all means to strengthen our ministry of evangelization. Through the media we can promote humanitarian and moral principles and popularize them among the common people.

### ***Educational Institutions***

We must ensure the quality of the staff of our institutions. There has to be a screening body for appointing the staff. However, qualification alone cannot be the criteria for appointing someone as

heads of our institutions but their loyalty and commitment should also be taken into account. To the query why DiST was put directly under the management of the Provincial House, it was clarified that DiST was an institution with rather huge financial liabilities. However, the transfer of management is possible at any time.

In order to promote the Vincentian spirit in our educational institutions, certain spiritual activities and certain works of mercy among the students and staff may be fostered.

### ***Retirement Home for the Senior Members***

The process of starting a retirement home with all the needed facilities for the bedridden and sick members of our Province adjacent to Divine Retreat Centre, Muringoor was already initiated, but due to some technical reasons regarding the land, we needed to wait more for the realization of the project.

### ***Provincial Ascription***

The possibility of ascription of the newly recruited seminarians to the Region was discussed in detail. It was opined that permission be granted to recruit seminarians with full ascription to a particular Region of the Province without the provision for any option when the Province would be divided in future. However, according to the Statutes of our Congregation ascription is possible only to a Province. A Province is self-sufficient in personnel and finance. Regions do not have self-sufficiency and independence.

### ***Social Media Policy***

The Extraordinary Provincial Synaxis held in December 2016 felt the need to have a Social Media Policy for the Province. A draft of such policy was presented to the Synaxis and after a detailed examination it was redrafted and the Provincial Council could make further studies and enact it.

## ***Formation***

Our formation should enable our seminarians to discover their identity as Vincentians. Our identity does not consist in what we do (role-identity) but in what we are (core-identity). It is important to foster the aptitude of the candidates and forming them for future ministry. However, the academic activities are not to be sacrificed. As some of our students are intellectually backward, an intensive formation must be given in the minor seminaries, especially to improve their mastery over the English language.

## ***Higher Studies***

As a response to the suggestion to send members for doing MSc in Psychology it was suggested that Counselling Psychology is more useful than MSc Psychology for our ministry. Other courses like CA & Printing technology would be highly useful in our institutions. Licentiate studies could be done in India.

## ***Vocation***

The members of the Synaxis expressed their concern that vocation was decreasing and the quality of the candidates was relatively low. Vocation promotion has to be more effective and more Vocation Promoters may be appointed region wise. The quality of the candidates to Priesthood is to be taken care of. Only those who have basic intellectual caliber shall be promoted to Priesthood, even if they are good in other areas like community life and prayer life. In fact vocation promotion is the duty of every member of the Congregation and everyone must try to promote vocations from their fields of activities.

## ***Use of Mobile Phones for the Seminarians***

Regarding the use of mobile phones for the seminarians during regency and theological studies, it was pointed out that in the seminaries they need not have personal mobile phones because the community provides the needed facilities. During the regency and

other situations like going for holidays or ministry the seminarians may use them with permission.

### ***Northeast Mission and Malabar Region***

We have already a number of retreat centres, three parishes and a school in the Northeast. So the Northeast states could be raised to a Mission.

It was also pointed out that the other two Provinces of our Congregation also have opened their ministries in these states and hence a clear demarcation of the territory for each Province would be necessary.

Another suggestion was to raise the Malabar area to a Region. As the number of Popular Missions in the Malabar region has gone down, erecting a Region in that area would help get more Popular Missions and also to promote vocations. However, it was clarified that in the Malabar area all the dioceses have their own retreat centres and retreat teams and they no more invite us.

### ***Provincial Administration***

Some of the suggestions give the impression that there was a growing dissatisfaction among some of the members and some members feel neglected. Such dissatisfaction and feeling of negligence would lead to passivity and indifference. It is clear that all members in the Province should be given equal consideration and if anyone felt the other way it might be because they did not get the offices they wanted due to certain reasons that could not be divulged.

There was a comment that nobody be appointed in a particular post permanently. We need to have a succession policy in our institutions for the continuance of the ministry. Yet we need to remember that certain ministries were developed based on the personal charisma of certain members and regular transfers in such situations might adversely affect the ministry.

Another suggestion in the agenda was to raise the Sacred Heart Region to a Vice Province. However, it was felt that the Region needs yet more preparation for that. Preparing enough priests for formation, education institutions etc., fostering diverse missions, starting at least a school each in each country of the Region and giving more financial independence for the Region - were the suggestions that came up as to how to prepare the Region for growth.

There was a suggestion not to make any more financial investments in Angamaly and Muringoor. This suggestion cannot be practiced in the case of institutions. As the institutions grow more investments are required, e.g. for playground, hostel, sewage treatment plant etc.

### ***Provincial Synaxis***

To the suggestion when the envelopes containing the names of the delegates for Synaxis are opened, at least one representative of General Administration should be present, the Synaxis felt that there needed to be basic trust on our administrative team. It is a team of five which counts the votes and another observer from outside for the counting of ballots is not required.

Another suggestion was that a delegate to the Synaxis must take up any office entrusted by the Synaxis and the House responded that nobody could be compelled to take up any office because according to our Statutes and Practical Norms every member has the freedom to accept or decline the office. Synaxes are convened not only for election but also for discussions on important matters pertaining to the Province.

Next suggestion was to make the Regional and Mission Superiors ex-officio members in the Synaxis. As per our Statutes it is not possible, otherwise amendments of the Statutes are required. Moreover, Regional Superiors are appointed and not elected.

Another suggestion was that the delegates to the Synaxes should be elected according to the age or profession, so that there is representation of all age groups. This suggestion was accepted by the Synaxis and a proposal to this effect was sent to the General Synaxis.

### ***Accountability***

Next suggestion was to control the financial dealings of the members. It is true that some members do not properly give accounts. All of us need to be mature in our financial dealings. If malpractices are noticed, the Major Superiors are to be informed and they should enquire about it.

### ***Panel for the Election of Provincial Superior***

To the suggestion to eliminate the practice of making the panel for the election of Provincial Superior it was responded that making a panel was the way to know of the mind of the members and it should not be eliminated.

### ***New Priests***

There were a couple of suggestions about the new priests of our Congregation. One suggestion was that new priests require mission experience and therefore they should be appointed in the mission areas to learn languages and cultures.

The suggestion that the new priests be appointed at first in retreat centres was not found to be that good. Actually only mature priests are to be appointed in retreat centres. There are occasions when the young priests skip community activities. In retreat centres a different time table is followed. When a new priest directly comes to such a centre a usual community life experience could be lacking. They should be in the regular communities at least for six months before being appointed in a retreat centre. However, all the retreat centres do not have the same situation and we may not generalize.

The suggestion that the new priests should begin the preaching of Popular Missions only after three years does not seem to be realistic and would be contra productive. Yet at least some priests should be sent to the missions immediately after ordination.

### ***Canonization***

One of the general points of discussion was the canonization of late Rev. Fr. Joseph Kuruppamparambil. In East Africa he is considered as a saintly person. Many miracles are seemingly attributed to his intercession. The House decided to make a proposal to the General Synaxis to this effect.

### **Conclusion**

The Synaxis congratulated the former Provincial administration on their efficient administration. The House fixed the number of delegates for the next Synaxis to be 40 including the ex-officios.

In his final address the Provincial Superior Very Rev. Fr. James Kallumkal congratulated the former administration for the good work done during their administrative period and thanked the functionaries of the Synaxis for their work and the entire Synaxis for the active participation in the discussions. He invited all the members to look upon the future with a positive attitude and he requested the cooperation and prayers of the members.

And then with the consent of the Synaxis, he declared the 10<sup>th</sup> Synaxis of the Marymatha Province of the Vincentian Congregation dissolved.

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