

Mar George Alencherry (Bishop of Thuckalay)

The new Syro-Malabar Major Archbishop

The Syro-Malabar Bishops' Synod that began on 23rd May 2011 at the Major Archiepiscopal Curia at Kakkanad elected Mar George Alencherry, the bishop of the Syro-Malabar Diocese of Thuckalay, the third Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church. The news of the election was announced in the Vatican as well as at Mount St Thomas, the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Curia at 3.30 pm on Thursday, 26th May 2011. Mar George Alencherry has been elected as the successor of the deceased Major Archbishop Cardinal Mar Varkey Vithayathil. As the Syro-Malabar Major Archbishop, Mar George Alencherry will also be the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly.

Mar George Alencherry is the first Major Archbishop, whom the synod elected on its own after the Syro-Malabar Church obtained Major Archiepiscopal status. His predecessors, Cardinal Mar Antony Padiyara and Cardinal Mar Varkey Vithayathil were appointed by the Pope.

On 23rd May, the first day of the synod, the members of the synod spent in prayer, led by Rev. Msgr. Mathew Vellanickal. Mar Bosco Puthur, the Curia Bishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, inaugurated the session at 9.00 am. Thereafter the synod elected Mar George Valiamattam, the Archbishop of Tellicherry, the president of the election synod. Then followed the procedures of election of the new Major Archbishop. The electoral process got completed before noon with the first two sittings.

Thereafter the president of the session asked Mar George Alencherry whether he accepted the election and in the following sitting the newly-elected expressed his acceptance by reading it out before the synod. Immediately the request was sent to the Pope, through the Apostolic Nunciature in New Delhi, for the approval of the election of Mar George Alencherry. The papal approval was given on Wednesday, 25th May evening and it was communicated to the Administrator, Mar Bosco Puthur, on Thursday, 26th May morning.

The papal approval of the election of Mar George Alencherry was announced in the synod by Mar George Valiamattam, the president of the session. Thereafter the newly elected Major Archbishop, according to the canon Law, made his oath of fidelity and communion to the college of bishops and the Church. Mar Bosco Puthur, then garlanded Mar George Alencherry and Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry, the archbishop of emeritus of Kottayam, presented him a floral bouquet. Thereafter all the bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church expressed their respect

and ecclesial communion with the new major archbishop. Mar George Alencherry, the new Major Archbishop, thanked all present and imparted his blessing.

Installation

The installation of Mar George Alencherry will take place at 2.45 pm on Sunday, 29th May 2011 at St Mary's Basilica, Ernakulam, the cathedral church of the Syro-Malabar Major Archbishop and the Archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly. Mar Bosco Puthur will preside over the installation ceremony. Archbishop Most Rev Salvatore Pennacchio, the Apostolic Nuncio to India, Moran Mor baselios Cleemis, the Syro-Malankara Major Archbishop, Cardinal Telesphore Toppo, the President of the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) and 44 bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church will be present for the ceremony. Likewise, representatives of priests, religious and laity of all the Syro-Malabar dioceses, and especially those of the archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly will participate in the installation ceremony. Holy Mass will be continued after the installation ceremony. The new Major Archbishop will preside over the rest of the Holy Mass.

Mar George Alencherry: A Short Biography

Mar George Alencherry was born on 19th April 1945 in the parish of Thuruthy in the archdiocese of Changanerry as the sixth child of the ten children of Mr. Philipose and Mary Alencherry of whom two others are priests (Fr. Jose Alencherry and Fr. Francis Alencherry, SDB) and one, a religious sister (Sr. Cherupushpam, S.A.B.S.). Geevarghese is his baptismal name. Mar George Alencherry had his primary schooling at St Mary's School, Thuruthy and secondary education at St Berchman's High School, Changanacherry. He began his priestly formation in 1961 at the archdiocesan minor seminary at Parel, Changanacherry. While he pursued his studies in the minor seminary, he obtained his BA in economics with second rank from St Berchman's College. After the minor seminary studies he was sent to St Joseph's Pontifical Seminary, Aluva where he completed his philosophical and theological studies. On 18 December 1972 Cardinal Antony Padiyara, the then archbishop of Changanacherry, ordained him priest at St Mary's Church, Thuruthy, for the archdiocese of Changanacherry. Later he continued his higher studies at the Pontifical Institute of Theology and Philosophy from where he obtained his master's degree in first rank.

While Mar George Alencherry was pursuing higher studies at Aluva he served also as vicar of the filial church at Periyarmugham in the archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly. After completion of studies at Aluva Mar George Alencherry was appointed as assistant vicar at the Cathedral church of Changanacherry and Director of the Archdiocesan Faith Formation department. Thereafter he served three years as secretary of the Commission for Catechism of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council (KCBC). After his tenure in KCBC he was sent to Paris for

higher studies. There he pursued his studies at Sorbonne University and the Catholic Institute from where he obtained his doctorate in biblical theology.

On returning to India in 1986 Mar George Alencherry was appointed director of the pastoral Oriental Centre (POC) at Palarivattom and deputy secretary of KCBC. He served the Church in Kerala in that capacity until 1993. Simultaneously he had served also as professor at St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor. He continued to teach at Vadavathoor until 1997. From 1994 to 1996 he was the protosyncellus of the metropolitan of Changanacherry.

When Pope John Paul II established the diocese of Thuckalay on 11th November 1996 Mar George Alencherry was appointed its first bishop. He was ordained bishop on 2nd February 1997 at Thuckalay by Mar Joseph Powathil, the then archbishop of Changanacherry.

As bishop Mar George Alencherry served the Syro-Malabar Church in his capacity of the secretary of the Synod of Bishops and chairman of the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Commission for Catechism. He has also served as chairman of the Commission for Laity of the catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI).

Mar George Alencherry has to his credit a Book with the title *Morality Today and Tomorrow* in Malayalam and a number of articles on various topics in English and Malayalam. The new major archbishop is proficient in Malayalam, Tamil, English and French.

Mar George Alencherry has been elected the spiritual leader of the more than 40 lakhs Syro-Malabar faithful living all over the world.

Mar BoscoPuthur
Administrator
Of the Syro-Malabar Church &
The Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly