

THE VOICE OF THE PASTOR

Dearly beloved Rev. Fathers, Brothers, Sisters
and my dear Lay Faithful,

Greetings of peace and joy in the name of the
Triune God!



I. THE PALLIUM AND A HEART OF GRATITUDE

With a heart filled with gratitude, I give thanks to Almighty God for the singular grace of receiving the sacred pallium from the hands of our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, on 29 June 2026, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul. This moment was not merely a personal honour. It was an ecclesial gift entrusted to me for the service of the People of God, especially for the communion and mission of our ecclesiastical province.

I thank the Lord who calls the weak, sustains those whom he calls and transforms every ministry into an instrument of grace. I also express my filial gratitude to Pope Leo XIV, the Successor of Saint Peter, whose ministry confirms the brethren in faith and serves the unity of the universal Church. At the tombs of the Apostles, I carried in prayer the clergy, religious and lay faithful of the metropolitan archdiocese and all the suffragan dioceses, particularly the sick, the poor and those who look to the Church for hope.

The pallium is a narrow band of white wool worn over the shoulders of the Pope and metropolitan archbishops. Its material and form are rich in biblical meaning. The wool recalls the lamb carried on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd. It reminds the bishop that pastoral ministry is not exercised from a distance. A shepherd must know the flock, walk with the people, seek those who are lost, bind the wounded and carry the weak. The crosses on the pallium point to Christ's redeeming Cross. They teach that episcopal service becomes fruitful not through power or prestige, but through self-giving love.

Placed upon the shoulders, the pallium also signifies a yoke. Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me” (Mt 11:29). Therefore, the pallium is not an ornament of status but a summons to humility, sacrifice and fidelity. It calls the metropolitan to bear, with Christ, the joys and sorrows of the Churches entrusted to his fraternal care. Authority in the Church must always take the form of service.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law (CIC) gives the pallium a precise ecclesial meaning. Canon 437 §1 states that it signifies the authority which the metropolitan possesses by law within his ecclesiastical province “in communion with the Roman Church.” These final words are decisive. The pallium binds the metropolitan not only to a territory but also to Peter’s ministry and to the universal communion of the Church. It expresses fidelity to the apostolic faith and responsibility for strengthening the bonds among the local Churches.

The date of its conferral deepens this meaning. Peter and Paul were different in temperament, vocation and apostolic path, yet they were united in Christ and sealed their witness in Rome. Peter represents the ministry of unity; Paul represents the missionary movement of the Gospel towards peoples and cultures. The pallium received on their solemnity joins these two dimensions: communion and mission. The Church is united so that she may be sent, and she is sent so that humanity may be gathered into unity in Christ.

II. THE ROLE OF THE METROPOLITAN ARCHBISHOP

To understand the pallium, we must understand the ecclesiastical province. A province is a grouping of neighbouring dioceses established to promote common pastoral action and foster closer relations among bishops (cf. CIC, can. 431 §1). The metropolitan is the archbishop who presides over this province while remaining the diocesan bishop of his own particular Church (cf. can. 435).

The metropolitan does not replace the diocesan bishops, nor does he govern their dioceses as extensions of his own. Every diocesan bishop possesses ordinary, proper and immediate authority in the diocese entrusted to him. Canon 436 carefully defines the limited responsibilities of the

metropolitan: he is to watch over the preservation of faith and ecclesiastical discipline, inform the Roman Pontiff of abuses, undertake a canonical visitation in particular circumstances with prior approval, and fulfil certain duties when a suffragan see is vacant. The same canon explicitly says that he has no other power of governance in the suffragan dioceses.

This canonical restraint is important. The metropolitan is not a “super-bishop.” His ministry is primarily one of vigilance, fraternity, coordination and communion. He serves the bishops without diminishing their responsibility, encourages collaboration without imposing uniformity, and promotes unity while respecting the history, gifts and pastoral needs of each local Church.

The Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops (2024), *Apostolorum Successores*, offers a pastoral interpretation of this office. It describes the metropolitan as bearing a special responsibility for unity within the province. His relationship with the suffragan bishops should be marked by discreet fraternal care, mutual support and the spirit of an elder brother, a first among equals. The Directory encourages the bishops to meet regularly, share pastoral experience, coordinate initiatives and assist one another in difficult situations (cf. *Apostolorum Successores*, nos. 22–23).

This teaching reflects the vision of the Second Vatican Council. *Christus Dominus* teaches that bishops should pool their abilities and wills for the common good of the Churches. Provincial and regional structures should strengthen relationships among bishops and make pastoral action more effective (cf. CD, nos. 36–40). A diocese is a portion of the People of God in which the one Church of Christ is truly present and active (cf. CD, no. 11). Because every local Church belongs to the one Body of Christ, each bishop cares not only for his own diocese but also shares concern for all the Churches.

This wider solicitude is particularly necessary today. Many pastoral realities cross diocesan boundaries: migration, education, healthcare, safeguarding, formation, digital evangelisation, youth and family ministry, social justice and care for the poor. No diocese can address all these challenges alone. The ecclesiastical province can become a practical space

for sharing personnel, institutions, expertise and resources. It can enable common formation, coordinated pastoral planning and a united Christian witness before society.

The 2023 Synthesis Report of the Synod for a Synodal Church gives renewed attention to this ancient structure. It asks that the ecclesiastical province and metropolitan see be “recovered and strengthened as a place of communion” for the local Churches. It also calls metropolitan sees to become concrete expressions of collegiality through fraternity, mutual support, transparency and wider consultation. This is an invitation to rediscover a spiritual relationship among bishops who pray, listen, discern and support one another in mission.

The 2024 Final Document continues this direction. It encourages the rediscovery and periodic celebration of provincial and plenary councils (no. 129). Such bodies can help the Churches discern common questions in the light of the Word of God, the living Tradition and the experiences of the faithful. Structures alone, however, cannot create communion. They become fruitful only when accompanied by conversion of heart, mutual trust and readiness to learn from one another.

I therefore understand the ministry of the metropolitan as a call to listen before speaking, to convene rather than control, to encourage rather than dominate, and to build bridges where distance or misunderstanding has arisen. It requires respect for the legitimate autonomy of each suffragan diocese and courage to invite all to shared discernment whenever the mission of the Gospel requires common action.

III. UNITY AND COMMUNION: FROM ROME TO HOME

The deepest meaning of the pallium is communion. The Final Document of the Synod explains that the communion of the faithful is also the communion of the Churches, and that this communion becomes visible in the communion of bishops (no. 18). These three realities belong together: the faithful, the local Churches and their bishops.

At the universal level, the Bishop of Rome is the visible principle and foundation of unity. The Final Document calls him the guarantor of synodality, entrusted with safeguarding the faith and ensuring that synodal processes

remain directed towards unity and witness (no. 131). The pallium makes visible the metropolitan's communion with this Petrine ministry. It signifies that the metropolitan archdiocese and its suffragan dioceses do not walk alone but belong to the universal Church and participate in the one mission entrusted by Christ.

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Leo XIV has placed unity at the heart of his teaching. At the inauguration of his Petrine ministry, he declared: "Love and unity: these are the two dimensions of the mission entrusted to Peter by Jesus." He also reminded the Church: "In the one Christ, we are one." On the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, he described communion as "unity within diversity" and invited the Church to transform differences into a workshop of unity and communion.

Christian unity, therefore, is not uniformity. The suffragan dioceses do not lose their identity by belonging to an ecclesiastical province. Their languages, devotions, pastoral experiences and charisms are gifts to be shared. Communion does not erase difference; it gathers differences into harmony. The Holy Spirit does not produce sameness but creates concord among diverse gifts for the common good.

For this reason, communion among bishops must be more than formal courtesy. It should include prayer, honest conversation, mutual correction, common discernment and practical solidarity. Bishops should be able to share not only successes but also burdens and uncertainties. When one diocese suffers, the others should not remain indifferent. When one discovers an effective pastoral practice, it should share it. When common challenges arise, the province should seek common responses while respecting the competence of each bishop.

The Synthesis Report observed that bishops united among themselves and with the Bishop of Rome make visible the Church as a communion of Churches. Such episcopal communion must shape every level of ecclesial life. What is lived among bishops should be reflected among priests; what is lived among priests should be visible among parishes; and what is lived in parishes should enter families, associations, institutions and neighbourhoods.

The parish is therefore not a small island. *Christus Dominus* teaches that parish communities should recognise themselves as members both of

the diocese and of the universal Church (no. 30). The Synod's Final Document describes the parish as a privileged place of relationships, welcome, discernment and mission, where people of different generations, occupations, origins and social conditions gather around the Eucharist (no. 117). The parish becomes truly Catholic when it welcomes difference, listens to every voice, cares for the vulnerable and collaborates with neighbouring communities. The family, which is the basic unit of society and church, is the place where communion is born, cherished, and developed.

Communion must become visible in pastoral practice: priests supporting rather than competing; parishes sharing resources rather than protecting territories; religious, clergy and laity planning together; pastoral councils becoming genuine places of listening; communities welcoming migrants; institutions collaborating for the poor; and disagreements being handled through prayerful dialogue rather than suspicion or hostility.

The Eucharist remains the source and summit of this communion. We receive one Bread and become one Body (cf. 1 Cor 10:16–17). At the altar, metropolitan and suffragan, bishop and priest, religious and lay faithful, rich and poor, young and old are gathered by the same Lord. Eucharistic communion judges every form of rivalry, clericalism, caste prejudice, exclusion and self-interest. What we celebrate sacramentally must become a culture of encounter and shared mission.

As I receive the pallium, I renew my commitment to serve unity: unity with the Holy Father and the universal Church; unity among the bishops of the province; unity among clergy, religious and laity; and unity among parishes and institutions. I ask the Holy Spirit to make our ecclesiastical province not merely a canonical arrangement but a living school of communion.

I conclude with heartfelt gratitude to the bishops, priests, deacons, religious, seminarians and lay faithful who have accompanied me with prayer and affection. I thank our families, parish communities, institutions, friends and well-wishers, including those who travelled, organised celebrations or quietly offered sacrifices for this intention. Your prayerful support is not external to this ministry; it sustains and strengthens it.

Please continue to pray for me, that I may carry the pallium with humility, fidelity and pastoral charity. Let us pray for Pope Leo XIV, for all the bishops

of our province and for the entire People of God. May Saints Peter and Paul obtain for us firmness in faith, courage in mission and joyful communion. May the Good Shepherd make us one flock, walking together in hope, so that the world may believe.

With my blessing and prayers,

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+ **Most Rev. Dr. Antonysamy Savarimuthu**

Metropolitan Archbishop of Madurai

Archbishop's Engagements

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| 02 | TNBC Family Commission Meeting, Chengalpattu |
| 03 | Meeting with St. Paul's Seminary Staff, Trichy |
| 04 – 10 | TNBC Annual Meeting, Pillar, Madurai |
| 10 | E Golden Jubilee Celebration of Bishop Thomas Paulsamy,
Dindigul |
| 13 – 18 | Bishops' Joint Reflection Programme, Yercaud |
| 20 – 26 | XII Plenary Assembly of the FABC, Jakarta |
| 28 – 29 | Priests Reunion, Pillar, Madurai |
| 30 | Meeting of the Rectors of Minor Basilicas in India, Pondicherry |

Appointments may be fixed by calling the Archbishop's Secretary at
+91 94433 86761 or by mailing to **abssecretarymdu@gmail.com**.

Appointments are subject to change.


St Thomas the Apostle
Feast Day
July 3

