



Shepherd's VOICE



Dear Fathers, Brothers, Sisters and all the Faithful,

In the context of increasing antagonism against the Christian faithful in general and the Catholic Church in particular, I express my deep gratitude to each of you for your unwavering support and encouragement in my episcopal ministry. Together, we have journeyed to be a beacon of light to the people of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh in the territories entrusted to us as a Diocese. If we look at the journey of the Diocese of Jalandhar, we have much to thank God and the leadership of the Church that envisioned and accomplished the development of the people without any discrimination.

As we journey further, we are invited to a Synodal Journey, a journey together: priests, Religious and the Lay Faithful together. Certain areas require change to accomplish our synodal journey. Let us begin with the most important aspect of that journey, which is shared responsibility in the administration. Traditionally, the Bishop and the Priests, respectively, took decisions pertaining to the good of the Diocese or parish, with consultation where required by canon law. The participation of the laity, especially women faithful, was very limited in decision-making and organisation. Very often the faithful would implore the priests to decide and tell them. Perhaps the understanding was that the priests are learned and the faithful were generally not qualified to give their opinion in several matters pertaining to the Church.

Over the years, the situation has changed. Many of our young people have received a good education from our own institutions, thanks to the vision of the bishops who guided the Diocese from time to time. From 15 stations and five educational institutions in 1972, the Diocese has grown in its service to the general public, with about a hundred educational institutions all over the Diocese, especially by reaching education to the border areas where education was only nominal. Now our children have the possibility of getting a good education and growing in maturity, with the possibility of understanding their rights and duties as citizens of this great Nation and members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Canon Law obliges the Diocese to be divided into parishes (Can. 374 §1) of certain territories with a priest appointed as its proper pastor. Parishes can be organised into Deaneries consisting of several parishes joined together for better administration (Can. 374 §2). Each parish is to have its own administrative set-up. "A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (parochus) as its proper pastor (pastor) under the authority of the diocesan bishop" (Can. 515 §1). By law, the Parish enjoys juridic status, separate from the Diocese, though it is part of the Diocese and is under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of the Diocese. The administrative responsibility lies with the Parish Priest, who represents the Parish, just as the Bishop represents the Diocese. However, the Bishop and the Parish Priests have to follow the lawful associations and councils that are meant to help in the administration of the Juridic person. Bishop has to hear the College of Consultors, the Finance Council and the Presbyteral Council before taking decisions in those matters which the law requires.

Similarly, the Parish Priest has to hear or consult the Finance Council before Parish.

In our Diocese, the functioning for a long time. Parish Finance Council was to the lack of qualified

the Parish Priest. Another reason was the centralised administration of the Diocese, in which the bishop took the decisions after hearing the Diocesan Curia or the College of Consultors or the Diocesan Finance Council. As a missionary Diocese, the parishes were not self-sufficient to administer themselves and depended on the generous contributions of faithful from other areas. The building up of infrastructure such as Churches for common worship, residences for the Priests and Religious, and travel expenses were all supported by generous faithful who supported the mission work. The maintenance of the clergy, catechists and religious, and salaries for servants at the station were partially contributed by the faithful in each parish by their offerings and pastoral funds. The institutions also helped in bearing the major share of the expenses so that the faithful were not burdened. The Parishioners' responsibilities were limited to organising the Celebrations or conventions that happened in the Parish.

Now it is time to take responsibility for ourselves rather than look for help from others. With the changing regulations on receiving funds from others, we have no other option than to make our own parishes self-reliant in their planning and execution of the programmes and celebrations. The Parish Finance Council has to be constituted and should take a major role in raising funds and executing the decisions taken by the Parish Priest in consultation with the Parish Council. "In each parish there is to be a finance council which is governed, in addition to universal law, by norms issued by the diocesan bishop and in which the Christian faithful, selected according to these same norms, are to assist the pastor in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to the prescript of can. 532" (Can. 537).

The Parish Priest is the leader who takes the decisions with regard to the administration of the Parish. "The pastor (parochus) is the proper pastor (pastor) of the parish entrusted to him, exercising the pastoral care of the community committed to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share, so that for that same community he carries out the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing, also with the cooperation of other presbyters or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful, according to the norm of law" (Can. 519). Can. 532 says that "In all juridic affairs the pastor represents the parish according to the norm of law. He is to take care that the goods of the parish are administered according to the norm of cann. 1281-1288." These canons give further guidance with regard to the administration of the Temporal Goods of the Church, be it a Parish or a Diocese or any other Juridic Person in the Church.

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the functioning of the parish and the various activities it has to do for the good of the faithful in the celebration of the liturgy, administration of sacraments, other parish activities, catechism classes for children, charitable activities needed in the parish, scholarships for deserving children, etc. The Finance Council has the responsibility of helping the Parish Priest in the budgeting, streamlining the sources of income from offerings, tithes, certificates, rent or any other income from the parish and deciding on the expenses related to maintenance of the Priests, Catechists, Religious who serve full time, other office staff and servants appointed to serve in the parish. The Statutes of the Parish Finance Council give an extensive and clear direction about the functioning of the Parish Finance Council.

The Parishes are requested to study the statutes and make preparations for the implementation of the Parish Finance Council. This will help us to walk the Synodal journey of collaboration among all the faithful. With the implementation of the Parish Finance Council and the Parish Pastoral Council in each of the parishes, the Parish priests will have to make preparations to educate the parishioners about co-responsibility in running the parish. The Basic Ecclesial Communities will have to discuss the matter in their meeting and resolve to be part of the transformation in our faith life. The role of the catechist will be one of coordinating the BECs in the parish. The BEC leader should take responsibility for his unit in collaborating with the Parish Council and the Parish Finance Council for the affairs of the Parish as a juridic person. Each Parish should open a joint account in a bank approved by the Diocesan Finance Office. Separate Juridic Persons within the Parish, such as School, College, Technical Institute, etc., will account for their functions separately. Accounts of the Parish as a Juridic Person and the Institutions as independent juridic persons or as part of the Diocesan Juridic Person are to be diligently maintained and audited separately, as required by law. Income Tax returns and tax liabilities must be borne by each juridic person. Our auditor and Accounts Department will work out the details.

With the implementation of these directives, the Diocese will move in the Principle of Synodality and Subsidiarity, which will bring about greater transparency in the functioning of the Catholic Church and its activities. The community of the faithful take active participation in all the activities of the Church under the leadership of the Parish Priests who work in communion and under the authority of the Diocesan Bishop who is in communion with the Pope, the successor of Peter, and with other Bishops who are successors of the Apostles.

I invite the Deans to arrange the Deanery Council meetings and explain the Statutes of the Parish Finance Council to the members. The Parish Priests, in turn, should hold meetings in their parishes and explain the required administrative changes to the Parish Council and the parishioners. With the help of the Parish Council members, the Parish Priest should choose trustworthy persons as Parish Finance Council members, and submit the list for approval from the Bishop, as explained in the Statutes.

I entrust these to the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Mother, Queen of Peace, the Principal Patroness of our Diocese, and St. Francis of Assisi, our second patron, and impart my apostolic

+ Jose Sebastian
Bishop of Jalandhar