

Verapoly Archdiocesan Gazette

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PASTORAL LETTER

Verapoly Archdiocese turns 140

Dear brothers in Christ,
Dear religious brothers and sisters,
Dear beloved children,

On September 1, 2026, the Archdiocese of Verapoly will complete 140 years since it was elevated to the status of an archdiocese. We are now embarking on a journey toward the 150th anniversary. As the Archdiocese of Verapoly begins its journey toward completing 150 years in 2036, I wish to briefly recall the historical background of its establishment.

The historic event known as the Synod of Diamper, which laid the foundation and marked the beginning of the renaissance of Kerala's Christians and Kerala society, took place in 1599. Pope Clement VIII had granted Archbishop Alexis de Menezes of Goa the authority to convene this synod.

In February 1599, Archbishop Menezes arrived in Kerala and visited almost all the churches then existing in the Malabar Church, completing the preparations for the synod. From June 20 to 26, the synod was held in the church compound at Udayamperoor, then an important Christian centre. It was attended by 133 priests, 20 deacons and 660 lay leaders from the Malabar Church. Representatives from Christian churches throughout Kerala also participated in the synod.

To remove the social and religious abuses prevailing in society at the time, more than 200 canons concerning the Catholic Church's traditions of faith, the seven sacraments and values in social life were adopted and implemented by the synod. Thus, the Synod of Diamper was a historic moment when the ancient Christians of Kerala embraced the Catholic faith. For Kerala's wider society, the canons of the Synod of Diamper also brought the golden light of renaissance values.

On April 1, 1600, through the apostolic letter *Multum in Indomino* sent to Archbishop Menezes, Pope Clement VIII praised the proceedings of the Synod of Diamper and expressed his gratitude to the archbishop for carrying out this mission. On May 19, 1601, through the apostolic letter *Divinam Dei*, the Pope granted the apostolic blessing to all the decrees and proceedings of the Synod of Diamper.

However, the division that took place at Mattancherry in 1653 and the schism that followed plunged the Church in Kerala into darkness once again. To study the problems that had arisen in the Malabar Church and to propose solutions, Pope Alexander VII sent two apostolic delegations to Malabar in 1657.

One delegation travelled by land under the leadership of Father Joseph Sebastiani OCD, while another travelled by sea through Portugal under the leadership of Father Hyacinth.

After completing the difficult journey at the risk of their lives, Father Joseph Sebastiani's delegation reached St. George Martyr's Church at Edappally in 1657. They subsequently held meetings in all

the churches of the Malabar Church, made efforts towards reconciliation, proposed solutions, and brought most of the churches back into communion with the Catholic faith.

Father Sebastiani returned to Rome in 1658 with his report. The Holy See then ordained him a bishop and reorganised the Malabar Christians as a whole under the Catholic administrative structure known as the “Malabar Vicariate.” Bishop Joseph Sebastiani returned to Kerala in 1659 as apostolic vicar and became the first leader of the Malabar Vicariate.

For the next three centuries, the Catholic Church in Kerala was nurtured and developed through the dedicated efforts of European missionaries. In accordance with the travel facilities of the time, the headquarters of the Malabar Vicariate was established at Varappuzha, and in 1709 it was renamed the “Vicariate of Varappuzha.” On September 1, 1886, the “Vicariate of Varappuzha” was elevated to the “Archdiocese of Verapoly.” The Kottayam and Thrissur Syrian vicariates were also established for the Syrians who had been under the Vicariate of Varappuzha.

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Verapoly, elevated to an archdiocese in 1886 within the uninterrupted Catholic tradition that began with the Synod of Diamper, will begin its journey toward its 150th anniversary on September 1, 2026. This will be a 10-year journey.

After 10 years, in 2036, the Archdiocese of Verapoly will be more radiant as it reaches the fullness of its 150th anniversary. At 7 a.m. on September 10, we will begin this jubilee journey by raising the jubilee flag in the compound of St. Francis of Assisi Cathedral in Ernakulam. I call upon all parishes and institutions of the archdiocese to raise the specially prepared jubilee flag on that day.

It is fitting to remember on this historic day the venerable fathers and priests who served in the Archdiocese of Verapoly and have departed to the presence of God. Therefore, I remind you that special prayers should be offered on that day at the graves where the bodies of the venerable fathers and priests have been buried.

Regarding the observance of the 150th anniversary of the archdiocese, and the projects we intend to implement with the aim of comprehensive renewal of the archdiocese during the 10-year journey, I will inform you later of the action plan being prepared after analysis at various levels.

We are not seeking external celebrations, but deep study and action. I pray that the historic journey of the Archdiocese of Verapoly from its 150th anniversary toward its 150th anniversary celebration in 2036 will help provide a new awakening in every sphere of the archdiocese through projects touching every level.

Praying that the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, the patron of the archdiocese, will guide us on this journey, I bless you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, as a sign of my paternal love for you.

From our Archbishop's House in Ernakulam,
August 15, 2026

✠ **Joseph Kalathiparambil**
Archbishop of Verapoly

N.B.: This pastoral letter is to be read during Holy Mass on Sunday, August 23, 2026.