PASTORAL LETTER
Bishop George Rajendran SDB
Diocese of Thuckalay
Pastoral Letter No/GR/55/2026

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Beloved Reverend Fathers, Consecrated Religious Sisters, and Dear Faithful in Christ,

May peace and grace from our Father God and our Lord Jesus the Messiah be with you!

Saint Alphonsa, the first saint of the Indian Church and a sacred bloom of the Syro-Malabar Church, lived without claiming any worldly achievements or titles for herself. Sitting upon the bed of arrows that her sufferings constituted, Saint Alphonsa chanted the hymn of love and imparted a profound new meaning to suffering. The holy fragrance of her life, lived within the stone walls of the Clarist Convent in Bharananganam, spread throughout the entire world. The Church celebrates the feast of Mother Alphonsa on the 28th of July. Death is not the conclusion of life; God, who exalts the humble, glorified her existence. Without making even the slightest rustling sound of a wing, that saint departed from this world. Her final rites were exceedingly ordinary and simple; however, every subsequent event following her death proved to be extraordinary.

On 19 August 1910, in the historically significant village of Kudamalloor, Annakkutty (Saint Alphonsa) was born as the fourth child of the couple Joseph and Mary of Mutthathupadathu. Endowed with captivating supreme beauty, a pure soul, and extraordinary intelligence, that beautiful blossom combined friendship and beauty like honey. Through cherishing the poor, engaging in prayer, receiving holy sacraments such as the Eucharist, observing fasting, and reading the biographies of saints, the very environment of that household sowed the seeds of divine love within the heart of Annakkutty, who later transformed into Alphonsa. For our children to become saints, our domestic environment must remain pure. To rebuild our families yet more firmly upon the love of God and love for neighbor constitutes the pressing necessity of the present era.

Having lost her mother at a tender age, life was by no means effortless for Annakkutty. Nevertheless, those griefs and tribulations did not allow her heart to falter; rather, they aided her in attaining a closer communion with God. Prayer and faith evolved into the foundational bedrock of her existence. She maintained the steadfast principle that the beauty bestowed upon her by God ought to be returned solely to God. The soul's calling—to seek the imperishable while forsaking transient things—endowed her with the courage to face the challenges arrayed against her life with fortitude. Notwithstanding numerous oppositions, she never once stepped back from her divine vocation. In accordance with the lifelong aspiration of "Poor Annakkutty," she joined the Congregation of the "Poor Clares". Saint Mother Alphonsa and her religious consecration stand as a historical testimony proclaiming that the ways of the Lord are inscrutable.

The torments of physical maladies and mental agonies transformed Alphonsa into an exalted bride of the crucified Christ. To express it in her own words, much like a grain of wheat that is crushed and afflicts itself to become the holy bread for the Eucharist, or like a cashew fruit

placed in the press to become the sacramental wine, her life was purified through suffering and converted into a flawless sapphire.

Desiring to transform herself in the manner of a dried leaf falling at the foot of a rose bush and serving as fertilizer for that rose plant, that religious sister is recognized across the entire world today. Through her love for the Crucified One, she learned to cherish crosses. Hers was a beautiful life that converted sleepless, agonizing nights into opportunities to love God.

All the agonies she experienced in her life—encompassing diseases and afflictions—were united with the cross of Christ and offered up to God. Through her life, she taught the world that "Suffering is the pathway to sanctity". She proved that every experience permitted by God possesses a meaning, and when accepted with faith, it transforms into an avenue of grace.

Through prayer, she remained unceasingly united with God. In humility, she shone as an exemplar to all. Through sacrifice, she walked in the footsteps of Christ, and through love, she touched the hearts of many. Hence, millions of people continue to remember her with affection and devotion to this day.

Like a lightweight bird flying without sound, her soul flew away peacefully and serenely to the feet of our Heavenly Father on 28 July 1946, following a severe affliction. Children were the first to recognize the fragrance of Saint Alphonsa's holy life. Through her intercession, numerous children succeeded in their examinations. Having learned of this information, multitudes arrived at her tomb in Bharananganam, seeking the intercession of Saint Mother Alphonsa. Miracles and liberations from illnesses transformed Bharananganam into the "Lisieux of India".

Forty years subsequent to the passing of Mother Alphonsa, Pope John Paul II beatified her in Kottayam on 8 February 1986. On 12 October 2008, so that the hymns of praise for this first holy daughter of India might resound within St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI elevated Mother Alphonsa to the dignity of sainthood. The renown of Saint Alphonsa began to spread across Tamil Nadu within our diocese from the year 2008 via the Saint Alphonsa Shrine in Nagercoil. Every year, the feast of Saint Alphonsa is celebrated with great splendor by our diocese.

This year, similar to all preceding years, the ten-day festival is being held at the Cathedral Shrine of Saint Alphonsa in Nagercoil from 24 July 2026 to 02 August 2026. Seeking the intercession of Saint Mother Alphonsa, vast numbers of people participate in the Holy Eucharistic Masses and Novenas during these days with a spirit of prayer and devotion. The novena prayer services serve as an excellent opportunity granted to us by God to renew our faith, strengthen our spiritual lives, and obtain divine grace.

As we journey through these blessed days filled with divine grace, a memory shines brightly in our hearts with prayer and gratitude, imbued with tears: Very Reverend Father Thomas Povvathuparambil. The void created by his passing has become an irreplaceable vacuum for this shrine in Nagercoil and for the pilgrims who visit here.

That noble priest lived among us and departed from us as a cherished child of Mother Alphonsa. The love and devotion he bore toward Saint Mother Alphonsa were known to all.

Yet, his life testifies that this was not merely devotion, but rather the manifestation of a way of life. He strove to reflect the "spirituality of Alphonsa" in his life and ministry.

Many were privileged to experience and know the intercessory power of Saint Mother Alphonsa through him, and thereby glorify God. His spiritual life was clearly manifested in his prayer, his ministry, and his approach toward the faithful. He played a major role in conveying the life message of Saint Mother Alphonsa to the people.

Not only did the Reverend Father teach the faithful the significance of prayer and the value of suffering through his own life, but the services he rendered for the growth of the church and the spiritual awakening of the people can never be forgotten.

Under the leadership and zeal of the Reverend Father, this shrine grew into a spiritual sanctuary for many believers. His love for prayer and his care for the people remain vibrant within everyone's hearts today. Although he is no longer with us today, his service and spiritual activities shall endure in our hearts forever. During these novena days, while imploring the intercession of Saint Mother Alphonsa, let us remember Very Reverend Father Thomas Povvathuparambil with gratitude. Let us pray that his soul attains eternal rest.

Beloved ones, the life of Saint Mother Alphonsa remains a profound challenge for us today. In a world that pursues solely pleasures and comforts, she calls us to live a life saturated with suffering, dedication, and prayer. Her life encourages us to accept the difficulties we encounter in family life, occupational fields, and social relationships with faith. Saint Alphonsa teaches us to cultivate love toward God and mercy toward our fellow human beings.

In conjunction with the feast of Saint Alphonsa, let us recite the customary nine-day Saint Alphonsa Novena that we routinely pray in our parishes. On Saturday, 25 July 2026, a pilgrimage toward the Saint Alphonsa Shrine shall take place under the leadership of the youth of the Diocese of Thuckalay. I affectionately request you to participate devoutly in this and receive divine blessings. We celebrate the final festival day on Sunday, 02 August 2026, as the Pilgrimage Day of the Diocese of Thuckalay. Therefore, I warmly invite all Reverend Fathers, Consecrated Religious Sisters, and the faithful to participate on that day and abundantly receive the grace of God through the intercession of Saint Mother Alphonsa.

Let us pray that the life of Saint Mother Alphonsa fosters us in a life of faith, the emotional maturity to accept sufferings, and love for our neighbor. Let us implore that her intercession secures abundant divine blessings for our families, our church, and our society. May God bless you abundantly.

Bishop’s House

15.07.2026

Always in Jesus the Messiah,

GEORGE RAJENDRAN
Bishop of Thuckalay
Diocese of Thuckalay