Pastoral Letter

Eparchy of Palai

From Bishop Joseph Kallarangatt

To all the priests, members of religious institutes, and faithful of our eparchy.

May grace and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We are delighted to share with you the joyous news that a museum, serving as a living repository of the spiritual, cultural, and social heritage of our eparchy, is being opened with comprehensive arrangements as part of the St. Alphonsa Shrine at Bharananganam. From a Christian perspective, a museum is a repository of the Church's memories, an aid to faith formation, and an open book for evangelisation.

Catholic museums possess immense pastoral significance and missions. We are not opening a museum merely as a space to display a collection of antiques; rather, we are establishing it as an ecclesial space that fulfills vital historical, spiritual, and catechetical missions. The objects within the museum stand as blazing witnesses to the journey of the Church's life of faith. As Pope Leo XIV instructs, “A museum is the wisdom of the past speaking to the present.” The Holy Father continues to teach: “It is impossible to understand Christian theology without understanding the places and objects that bear witness to the life of faith of past centuries.” Museums are supremely helpful instruments for the interpretation of theological truths. One of the primary missions of the Vatican Museum is the evangelisation of culture through the beauty of art. A beautiful expression used by the Holy Father when speaking of Christian art is *Via Pulchritudinis*—The Way of Beauty. On another occasion, the Holy Father states that every Christian art form reveals the glory of Christ’s resurrection. This Alphonsian Museum is a wondrous pathway of beauty.

The renowned Vatican Museum does not preserve elements of Christian culture alone; numerous celebrated artifacts of Egyptian culture are also to be found there. This is because a museum is a realm open to all; it is also a forum for dialogue between various cultures and religions.

Every Christian museum forms an intrinsic part of the Church’s life of faith. From ancient times, the Church has been deeply committed to preserving liturgical heritage, remnants of history, and sacred relics. In earlier times, antiquities were kept sacredly alongside the sacristies of our ancient churches, as well as in our cathedrals and monasteries. The famous Austrian composer Gustav Mahler stated: “Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire.” A museum is a place that preserves tradition—the fire.

The Objectives of Our Museum

Like all Catholic archival and heritage institutions, our museum has four paramount objectives: Pastoral, Cultural, Spiritual, and Historical.

1. Pastoral Purpose

The museum functions as a grand centre for faith formation and study. It is a place for studying the liturgy, religious customs, catechesis, and Christian lifestyles that have endured in our Church for centuries. The museum does not contain objects merely to be looked at and left behind; rather, they are living realities that speak to us, meant to be known and experienced. What is preserved in the museum is not lifeless matter, nor merely instruments that awaken cultural memory, but the cultural assets of the Church. In the view of the Pontifical Council for Culture of the Church, a Catholic museum comprises "objects displayed with active pedagogical objectives (A living Pedagogical Presentation)."

In our museum, antiquities are not simply put on display; they are accompanied by the necessary interpretations required to convey their message to viewers, alongside their connection to our heritage of faith, their era, and their historical context. Our museum features provisions designed to help visitors deepen their faith, engage with sacramental life, allow young people to witness the Church of yesteryears firsthand, impart knowledge on religious subjects to children, and foster admiration for our Church and family structures.

2. Cultural Purpose

The museum is a place where the artistic and cultural heritage of the Church is safeguarded. It offers a clear picture of the cultural contributions made by the Church to the world. Our museum houses a vast collection of ancient prayer books and substantive volumes belonging to our liturgical tradition. We possess thousands of palm-leaf manuscript collections that serve as hallmarks of Kerala's unique identity. From Egyptian papyrus works and ancient paintings pulsing with spiritual vitality, to meticulously crafted antique tabernacles, centuries-old liturgical vestments, monolithic wooden sacred statues, and icons, our museum holds numerous elements that signify holiness. All of these are arranged according to a distinct ecclesial vision and theological perspective. The sacred, beautiful, ancient, and modern items preserved in our museum constitute the patrimony of the entire ecclesial community. Our museum stands as a testimonial certificate of how our ancestors brilliantly synthesized faith with art and culture. The objects displayed here possess a sacramental character; they are signs of grace and testimonial certificates of God's passage through human history (*Transitus Domini*). Consequently, our museum serves as a temple of meditative prayer.

3. Spiritual Purpose

Our museum holds defined spiritual objectives. It stands to fulfill enriching goals such as restoring, preserving, protecting, catechesis, evangelising, glorifying God, recognising the creativity of the human intellect, and enjoying aesthetic beauty. None of these precious collections exist for our private pride; rather, they are dedicated to the grateful glorification of God. The museum also functions as a place of worship where one can praise God upon witnessing the wondrous universe that God has fashioned through human hands in stone, clay, wood, and metal.

4. Historical Objectives

The precious objects within the museum are historical documents entrusted to us by previous generations. We have a duty to safeguard them inviolably for future generations, and we must

honour their historical value. We must interpret the faith-based teachings they impart for generations to come. Let us accept the counsel of the Psalmist: “I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old—what we have heard and known, what our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their descendants” (Psalm 78:2–4). Bringing together history, imagination, faith, devotion, beauty, culture, memory, and hope, our museum is a valuable asset to our eparchy.

The Structure of Our Museum

Our collection is the most extensive assemblage of antiquities available in the surrounding regions. All of these have been acquired from the ancient churches, homes, and religious houses within our eparchy. It was the keen interest and meticulous intervention of our beloved Mar Joseph Pallikaparampil, our esteemed Bishop Emeritus, that enabled us to preserve such a vast number of antiquities down to the present day. Let us remember the Father’s visionary foresight with profound gratitude. Under the guidance of the Bishop Emeritus, the arduous task of collecting antiquities was led by the Reverend Father Kurian Madhavath and the late Reverend Father James Kaippanplackal. Rev. Fr. Madhavath is an individual who has profoundly safeguarded the history and faith-formation models of our Church.

Expanding the cultural horizons of the Eparchy of Palai to a great extent, this museum serves as our tribute to past generations who lived and celebrated their faith, a school of values that we must uphold for all time, and a historical marker of our devotion to St. Alphonsa.

The museum shall be named the **Alphonsian Museum, Eparchy of Palai**. Furthermore, as it coincides with the birth centenary of our dearly cherished Bishop Pallikaparampil, it will also serve as his **Birth Centenary Memorial Museum**.

In almost every household within our eparchy, one may find numerous objects that have been overlooked or discarded, yet are worthy of being housed in a museum. We kindly request that you contribute such items to our eparchial museum. Similarly, churches, convents, and institutions hold many art forms that protect our heritage. It is desired that institutions lacking a dedicated museum donate such artifacts to the eparchial museum. All arrangements for establishing this museum at Bharananganam have been undertaken by the St. Alphonsa Pilgrim Centre. The driving force behind this is the visionary foresight, love for the Church, and hard work of the Very Reverend Rector, Father Augustine Palackaparampil. The Alphonsian Museum stands as an enduring monument to the arduous labour carried out by the Father, uniting his fellow priests and the laity.

The official blessing and inauguration of the museum will take place at Bharananganam on **Tuesday, 15 December 2026, at 5:00 p.m.** This museum is a gift from our eparchy to all people. Everyone belonging to our eparchy should visit this museum.

Bishop’s House, *Palai, 03.11.2026*

Bishop Joseph Kallarangatt
Bishop of Palai

N.B.: This pastoral letter is to be read during the Holy Eucharist in all churches and all institutions where the Holy Eucharist is celebrated on **Sunday, 15 November 2026**.