CHAPTER – III

RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Religion is the divine force of Indian culture. Indian culture is fusion of the different spiritual systems. “Indian culture”, wrote Gandhiji is neither Hindu, nor Islamic nor Christian nor any other wholly. It is a fusion of all. India is a secular country. Secularism is not opposed to religion as such but respects all religions without adopting one or the other as the basis of its statehood. It does not allow religion to be exploited for political purposes, especially in multi – ethnic, multi - racial, multi – religious or multi –linguistic societies such as India, China, U.S.A, Canada, Russia and others.¹

In ancient Vedanta, internal nature has yielded its secrets to the spirituality and disciplined mind of man, enabling him to unravel the mystery of even that external nature which baffles all modern science. Human well being and progress depend on the two pillars namely the spirit of religion and the spirit of science. Neither can attain its largest effectiveness without the support from the other.²

Religious life is a life to love, understanding, serving to unite all people and beings in one whole. Each religion which has its own mission in the world is suited to the nations to whom it is given and to the culture it is to permeate bringing it into line with the general evolution of human family.³

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³ Anne Beasant, *Seven Great Religions*, p.12.
Gandhiji regarded religion as a matter of individual faith and he believed that the spiritual domain where one is face to face with God. He further emphasized that the religious education must be the sole concern of religious associations. He advocated that a curriculum of religious instructions should include a study of tenets of other religious so that the youth would have the habit of understanding and appreciating the doctrines of various great religions of the world in spirit of reverence and broad minded tolerance. He also opined that the religious education should form an integral part of basic education.⁴

Our country is well known as a land of varieties and described as ‘Epitome of the world.’ From the geographical point of view, there are endless varieties of flora and fauna. It has a variety of races and is known as an ethnological museum. It is also a museum of cults and customs, creeds and cultures, faiths and tongues and social systems. It was mostly governed by local provincial dynasties and did not enjoy supreme unity till 19th century.

V.A. Smith writes, “India encircled as she is surrounded by seas and mountains, indisputably a geographical unit and as such, is rightly called by one name. Her type of civilization, too, has many features which differentiate it from that of all other regions of the world. While they are common to the whole country or rather sub – continent to justify its treatment as a unit in the history of the social, religious and intellectual development of mankind.” The concept of unity has persisted from the ages.

Jawaharlal Nehru says, “That unity was not conceived as something imposed from outside. It was something deeper and within its fold the widest tolerance of belief and custom was practiced and every variety acknowledged and even encouraged.”\(^5\)

As a result of the British conquest of India, western education brought to the Hindus and Muslims alike western ideas and western ways of life and consequently the ancient and medieval culture of India was transformed into what we may call composite culture of India which reflects unity in diversity.\(^6\)

It is religion of dharma which supplies mankind the real basis of peace for life’s highest aspirations and for the knowledge of the great seers. It is also the ultimate goal and all devotees and mystics search no less than the aim of all literary endeavour. Religion is not only essential but inevitable for man as an individual and as a member of society. In India where men belonging to all faiths and religious denominations live in peace and goodwill towards one another. Without this feeling of tolerance and mutual accommodation life here would be too hard indeed.

The credit for this goes to our ancestors, saints and missionaries who from the very dawn of history have placed before us the ideals of faith and respect for all religions. The fundamental right of freedom of belief and propagating it for all the citizens we have incorporated in our constitution.

\(^6\) \textit{Ibid.}, p.116.
All are free to profess or preach the faith of their liking and that we wish well of all religions and want them develop in their own way without hindrance. True peace and happiness of the individual and the society is possible only through promoting religious harmony among the people of diversified socio-religious background.

It can never be denied that it was Christianity that first attacked caste and other evil customs of Indian society like child marriage, widow non-marriage and Mahatma Gandhi wrote the following. “My fierce hatred for child-marriage, I sadly say, is due to Christianity, I was an enemy of untouchability. My feelings gathered momentum owing to the fierce attack from Christian sources on this evil.”

Vinobabave, the founder-leader of Bhoodan movement says, “Christianity is a religion of India. Unfortunately it got associated with foreign powers. As a result, it could not occupy the high place it should have in India. The Christians began humanitarian works. This initiative by the Christians helped in the revival of the service-ideal in the Hinduism. Christianity has now become the religion of India. I declare on behalf of the whole of the country that we accept Christ and his message and are eager to live up to that. I can say on behalf of the whole of Indian culture that Christ is acceptable to India.”

Diversity of language, culture and religion is part of the life of a nation. The principles of pluralism demands that the identity of each group and community be respected. Conditions must be created for the preservation and promotion of their

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8 The Catholic Association of Madras, Who’s who And What’s What In Catholic India, p.160.
9 Ibid., p.163.
culture and religious heritage. Each group or community should be enabled to make
its own unique contribution to the welfare of the whole society. Former Pope John
Paul II calls attention to the danger of those who impose on others their own concept
of what is true and good.

Today, within the Roman Catholic Church, some of the pronouncements of
the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) have opened the way for a more positive
attitude towards other religions.\textsuperscript{10} In protestant circles also the council of Churches
has recently given increasing importance to dialogue with people of other regions.\textsuperscript{11}

Christianity started spreading from first century in different parts of the world.
The main cause for the rapid spread of Christianity was due to its philosophy of
humanism based on democratic social tradition and practices. Before the dawn of
Renaissance age this popular Christian thought was an outcome of popular support
that combated against feudal aristocracy and anarchy where in a new class of clergy
emerged which was considered more capable of coping up with nobles and more
acceptable with lower classes liberty.

Catholic religious philosophy dominated Indo-European thought. The Church
brought its philosophical beliefs closer to social and political circumstances, and
reshaped itself into an institution built on its creed, partly philosophic and partly
historic by subjugating the powerful Roman and Germanic traditions, as the
intelligentsia was convinced of the truth of Catholic faith.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} D.S.Lourdusamy, \textit{Vatican II Digest}, p.53
\textsuperscript{11} Harold G.Coward, \textit{Religious Pluralism And The World Religions}, p.4.
The Catholic philosophy is essentially the philosophy of an institution, namely the Catholic Church. The Christians’ views of moral law are still concerned with the relation of church state and God.\textsuperscript{13}

The regional history of Salem has undergone major transformation resulting from the impact of a variety of culture, social economic and political system during the past two thousand years. The culturescape of Salem is a conglomerate composed of hills streams and succession of cultures such as Brahminist, Buddhist, Dravidian, Jain, Islamic and Christian.\textsuperscript{14} Here cultures have grown into new forms and shapes. In the course of its long history, Salem has experienced continuous change of culture and transformation of traditions.

The present cultural landscape of Salem district is the result of a succession of people living in a conducive environment for centuries. Each group of people has left its distinctive imprints on the landscape in the form material and cultural remains. The current landscape is a complex mosaic of the effects of use, abandonment and reuse over periods of time. Local history evolves in a regional context. The context and the maintenance of the integrity of local character are possible only through an appreciation and preservation of historical heritage of its people.

The European missionaries who arrived in India started preaching the new faith and succeeded in consolidating it in Indian soil. Many missionaries toiled hard in their evangelical work in Salem. The Roman Catholic religious service began in Salem with the visit of Robert de Nobili, a relative of Pope Julius III in 1623 A.D. He

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p.228.
\textsuperscript{14} Busnagi Rajannan, Salem Cyclopedia, p.13.
lived some time in Agraharam. The other famous Catholic missionaries who came to Salem was Abbe Dubois, the famous author of Hindu Manners and Customs. Henry Crisp, a well known protestant missionary worker came to Salem in 1827 to take charge of some schools which were under the care of the then District Collector M.D. Cockburn.\(^\text{15}\)

J.M. Lechler, who succeeded George Watson, the successor of Henry Crisp was yet another protestant missionary strengthened the London Mission Church in Salem through his strenuous labour. In the first decade of 20\(^{th}\) century, there were about 15002 Christians of all divisions in Salem district. This was less than one present of the total district population. Of them 92 % were Roman Catholic and the remaining 8% were constituted by various divisions of protestants.\(^\text{16}\)

There is no doubt that Christianity in India, though numerically insignificant, yet exercises an influence that is out of proportion to its membership. Wherever Christian communities exist there its presence is known and felt.

The Religious Services of the Salem Diocese are the foremost among the various service-oriented activities rendered through the ages. The Bishop, the Clergy, the men and women Religious orders and the Lay faithful are involved actively in promoting the religious services of the diocese. Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, during his life on the earth, gathered around him a special band of followers called the “Apostles” and gave them a mission to carry on His divine work

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p.58.
to various parts of the world.\textsuperscript{17} Since the Bishop who is the head of the Diocese is unable to look after the entire religious functions of the Diocese, the responsibility is shared among the Diocesan Council, Diocesan Parish Priests- men and women belonging to various religious orders and the laity. The laity take an active part in all the religious activities of the Diocese.

**Religious Services of the Diocesan Priests**

In discharging pastoral duties, the first place is held by the diocesan priests for they have fully dedicated themselves to the services of parishes entrusted to them. They are not only co-operators with the Bishop for rendering pastoral work but also play the role of block development officers in their respective parishes in the diocese.\textsuperscript{18}

**Sacramental Services**

The discharging sacramental duty is the most important religious service of the priest serving in a particular parish. It is through the following sacraments that the priests bring about the encounter of the individual with God.

i) Baptism  
II) Eucharist  
III) Confirmation  
IV) Penance  
V) Matrimony  
VI) Anointing of the Sick, and  
VII) Holy Orders

\textsuperscript{17} Newton and Horan, *Church History*, p.8.  
\textsuperscript{18} Interview with Fr.Gregory Rajan, Parish Priest, Infant Jesus Cathedral, Arisipalayam, Salem dt. 25 June 2012.
It is through the priests that these spiritual tasks are taken place in the whole diocese.\textsuperscript{19}

**Baptism**

Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life. When a person is baptized, he is incorporated into the church and its mission. Baptism ordinarily takes place in the Parish Church. It is performed by the parish priest.\textsuperscript{20} After the baptism the priest records the details in a book. He enters the names of the sponsors [the god father and god mother] date, place of birth, time and place of baptism. At the end of the year he sends a copy of this record to the Bishop’s office where it is kept in a vault.\textsuperscript{21}

It is the gateway to life in spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. The Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word. The use of water as sign and symbol of the transition in a person’s personal life and spiritual journey could be connected to the journey of faith experienced by the Jewish community.

The priest performs this rite to the child to be baptized either by the triple immersion of the child in the water or pouring water three times over the head of the child while praying. Two symbols the priest uses are white garment and the candle. The white garment which may be brought or made for the occasion is a reminder of

\textsuperscript{19} Peter Meconville, *The Church of the Christ*, Vol-IV, p.146.
\textsuperscript{20} P.J.Sontag, *God’s ways with men*, p.369.
\textsuperscript{21} Vault means a cellar or special room used for preserving the important church records and other things at a cool temperature.
the white that the newly baptized received in early Christian community as a symbol that they now have put on Christ. The candle signifies that Christ has enlightened the newly baptized person and that they are to go forth as the light of the world. As the first sacrament and as the beginning of the initiation process, the sacrament of baptism marks the person who receives it being born into the new life of Christ. As baptism is operative at the parish level, it is vital for Catholics to identify and actively participate in the life of specific parish. Just as it is important that medical records be on file, so also it is vital that one identifies with a parish that keeps one’s sacramental records.

The baptismal record serves as a base of reference for the entire life of the person. A few years later when he is given confirmation, notation of the confirmation will be made on the baptismal record. If a person is later married, particulars of his marriage will be noted on the same record. If a person is ordained, that fact will also be noted on the baptismal record. It gives all the essential facts of the status of a person belonging to a particular church.\(^\text{22}\) These records are used to prepare the census of the diocese once in 10 years.

**Confirmation**

This is the sacrament by which the baptized attain adulthood in the church.\(^\text{23}\) The respective parish priests are in charge of preparing the youth for receiving the confirmation. The confirmation is normally administered by the Bishop. This serves to bring out the community idea for it marks the meeting of the baptized and the Bishop who is the head of the local church.

\(^{22}\) John Donald Conway, *Facts of Faith*, p.147.

\(^{23}\) Jose Gold Brunner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, p.72.
Confirmation is the time when each child receives the gift of the spirit of Jesus in a unique way. This gift, the Holy Spirit, is a person, God. If a child receives this person with the fullness of faith and love, the effects of spirit’s working in the child are many. The gift of spirit at confirmation reminds us of the gifts God has given us and makes us of the look forward in anticipation. So this sacramental moment is a unique and gifted moment for those who receive this grace at the parish Church.\textsuperscript{24} The Bishop is the usual minister of confirmation, In case of necessity a priest may be given the power to confirm by the Pope.\textsuperscript{25}

All Catholics should be confirmed in order to be strengthened against the dangers to salvation and to be prepared to defend the faith. In the words of Saint Ambrose Quoted in a reference in the catechism of the Catholic Church, confirmation, gifts the person who receives the sacrament with a spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence.

Confirmation traditionally has concluded one’s formal religious education. Just as baptism marks one’s entry into the church as an ardent member, so confirmation marks the beginning of one’s deeper involvement with one’s faith.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{24} Douglas L.S.Rowe, \textit{Catechism for Confirmation}, p.11.
\textsuperscript{25} Bennet Kelley, \textit{Baltimore Catechism}, p.122.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid.}, p.121.
Eucharist

This coming together of the faithful to celebrate Eucharist [Mass] goes right back to the beginning of Christianity. It is a community affair in which laity’s participation is must. It is especially in the Eucharist that the Bishop and his priests exercise their role of sanctifying. The ordained priest is the representative of the church in offering the mass on various occasions.27

After baptism and confirmation, the Eucharist is the third sacrament ignition of the Catholic Church. The Eucharist is the mysterious centre of all the sacraments, because the historical sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is made present. Jesus himself celebrated the last supper with his disciples and there in anticipated his death, he gave himself to his disciples under the signs of bread and wine and commanded them from them on, even after his death, to celebrate the Eucharist.28 In Greek the term enchqristia means thanksgiving. Eucharist was at first the name for the prayer of thanksgiving that preceded the transformation of the bread and wine into Christ’s body and Blood in the early church. Later the term was applied to the whole celebration of distributing communion.29 The fifty eight parish churches in Salem Diocese always stand as staunch symbols of the spiritual in the midst of the people. They stress simplicity, promote unity and encourage participation of a worshipping community. Indeed Eucharist celebration is the central act of worship and communal prayer for all baptized Catholics in the diocese. The main church of a particular diocese is called a Cathedral where the Bishop celebrates mass with his priests and

27 Peter Meconville, op.cit., p.144.
28 Michael J.Miller, Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church, p.107.
29 Alphonse Arockiasamy, The Joy of Serving At Eucharist, p.47.
people of the diocese on some special occasions.\textsuperscript{30} Music is a vital part of worship. The Choir with its music ministers has the responsibility of helping the people in singing and praying during the liturgy. It helps the people to enter into the mood of celebration. The Christian liturgy is not a mere cultic action, a combination of various rituals and ceremonies, but rather it calls for social action and social responsibility that are expected of every active member of Catholic Church. Liturgical celebration and the work of social justice are tightly woven threads of the same cloth.\textsuperscript{31}

**Penance**

By the sacrament of penance, the sinners are reconciled to God and His church. Human beings are earthen vessels, “Clay jars”, and such, they will experience in their lives moments where they will be in special need of healing power of God, made present through the working of Holy Spirit.

This healing is manifested in the sacrament of penance.\textsuperscript{32} God is the Divine Physician restoring health to believers’ souls and bodies. Penance is making restitution or satisfaction for a wrong that has been committed. One does penance also by praying, fasting and supporting the poor spiritually and materially. This sacrament is also known as sacrament of reconciliation, of forgiveness, of conversion, or of confession.

**Anointing of the Sick**

By the blessed oil the sick are given solace and especially by the celebration of mass, the priests offer the sacrifice of Christ.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, p.48.
\textsuperscript{31} S. Joseph Lionel, \textit{Speak O Lord}, p.155
\textsuperscript{32} A Redemptorist Pastoral Publication, \textit{The Essential Catholic Handbook of the Sacraments}, p.67.
One of the distinctive characteristic of Christianity has always been that the elderly, the sick and the needy are central to it. Jesus designated care of the sick as a central task for his disciples. He commands them, “Heal the Sick”\(^{33}\) and promises them to divine authority “In my name they will cast out demons; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.” Mother Teresa who cared for those who were dying in gutters of Calcutta is the one who discovered Christ precisely in those who were marginalized and avoided by others. Administering the anointing of the sick is reserved to bishop and priests of the diocese, for it is God who acts through them by virtue of their ordination.

**Marriage**

Christian marriage is considered both as a sacred contract and a sacrament. The priest in the church administers the marriage contract between bride and bridegroom. Two witnesses are required to sign the marriage contract. The particulars of the wedding are noted in the baptismal records.

Matrimony is the sacrament by which a baptized man and a baptized woman bind themselves for life in a lawful marriage and receive the grace to discharge their duties. Marriage has had the great sacramental value of keeping men and woman from loneliness and of involving them in the long human history of a growing love that encompasses this noble sacrament. Both the man and the woman administer it before the priest who is a qualified witness. Priest also blesses the marriage on the

33 Bible, Matthew 10:8, 16:17-18.
Church’s behalf and presides over the wedding mass. The wedded couples testify that the marriage is contracted before God and confirmed by the Church.\textsuperscript{34}

As a rule of Catholic wedding takes place publicly in the parish church, the bride and bride groom are questioned as to their intention to marry. The priest blesses their rings. The bride and bride groom exchange rings and mutually promise to be true in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health and vow to each other. The celebrant of the mass ratifies the wedding and administers the blessing. Thus Catholic Church raises the institution of marriage to the status of a sacrament as the well being of the individual and of human society as whole is intimately linked with the condition of marriage and the family.\textsuperscript{35}

In modern times conflict between men and women, which sometimes reaches the point of mutual hatred in marriage. Many marriages, however, are endangered by a lack of communication. There are economic and societal problems as well. The decisive role is played by the reality of sin envy, love of power, a tendency to quarrel, lust, infidelity and other destructive forces. That is why the Church lays emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation which is an essential part of every stable catholic marriage so as to prevent this social institution from facing disaster.

\textsuperscript{34} Bartholomew Okonkwo(ed), \textit{Crossing The Threshold of Marriage}, p.95.

\textsuperscript{35} D.S.Lourdusamy, \textit{op.cit.}, p.16.
Holy orders

The church needs priests to teach the gospel to the lay faithful and to do sacramental duties as agents of Christ. The parish priest usually selects the youth for priesthood formation. The Bishop through the sacrament of Holy order ordains them as priests. The ordination of priests is held at the cathedral church.

The newly ordained priests join the bishop and the rest of the priest in concelebrating first mass. It is an expression of the Church gathered around the altar with one who represents the God. This sacrament confers the necessary grace to the order received: for a bishop, the grace of strength and a governing spirit, which impels him to preach the gospel; for a priest, the grace to proclaim the ministry of the word and sacrifice and in the works of charity and social service.36 The Roman Catholic Church requires this way of life and to live in unmarried chastity for the sake of God of its bishops and priests, while the Eastern Catholic Churches demand it only from their bishops.37

Services Through Epiphany Centre

The Second Vatican Council says, “By divine favour especially in modern times human genius has produced from natural material astonishing inventions in the field of technology. The press, cinema, radio, television and similar media are classified as instruments of social communication.” The Catholic Church has been commissioned by Christ to bring salvation to every man and is consequently bound to

37 Michael J.Miller, op.cit., p.135.
proclaim the gospel. Hence the church judges it a part of her duty to preach the news of redemption with the aid of the instruments of social communication.  

Social communication, in fact, tends to make the world shrink to one big family where all big events are shared and where thoughts and feelings of different members are known to each other. It is therefore essential that Catholic news, thought and culture be brought to the form of world and communications so as to make Christ present to the world to put him within the reach of the masses.

To attain this goal, Bishop Michael Duraisamy (1974 – 1999) who was the Chairman of CBCI Commission for Dialogue and Social Communication started a separate commission for social communications in Salem Diocese. He established Epiphany centre in 1977 in the premises of Infant Jesus Cathedral, Salem to facilitate seminars, retreats, pastoral programmes, the activities of various diocesan commissions, programmes of the pious organisations and to promote fine arts and cultural activities.

The centre functions under the guidance of a diocesan priest. The Biblical playlets, folk songs, folk dances, street plays and Christian films are well prepared at this centre using latest equipments for carrying out evangelical work in and around Salem. The centre has prepared 500 programmes so far.

It is also a place for prayer and meditation, cultural activities and inter-religious dialogue. A reading room is available for the use of public. Further, eight

41 _Ibid._, p.6.
track sound recording studio and an auditorium with the capacity of 1500 seats are
available there. This center has accomplished nearly thirty eight years of noteworthy
service in the field of Christian communication and social uplift of the people of this
region.

The important activities of Epiphany Centre are:

1. Leadership training to the laity
2. Preparation of Audio Visual Aids
3. Seminars on spirituality and effective teaching techniques,
4. Fostering Inter Religious Dialogue
5. Dance school for boys and girls
6. Instrumental and percussion music school
7. Conducting Bible exhibition and competition at diocese level. The
   Surroundings of Epiphany centre are maintained with scenic beauty in order
to create a conducive atmosphere for practising deep meditation.  

St. Xavier’s Minor Seminary

The word of God to man is a vocation - a calling forth to go out of himself to
transcend beyond to God. Christian life is founded on this very possibility of being
able to be called by God to himself and man’s ability by God’s grace to be metania
(within God).  

The Church takes the major responsibility of training the young men to be
ordained them as Priests. St. Xavier’s Minor Seminary located at Arisipalayam was

42 Interview with Fr. Gopi, Director of Social Communication Commission and Epiphany Centre,
Salem, dt 18 September 2013.
43 Angelo Fernandes , Vatican II Revised, p.131.
founded in 1931 mainly to prepare the young men for priesthood. This formation centre develops the seed for the vocation. There are about 32 candidates undergoing priestly training at present at this centre.44

Vocation camp is organized every year at St. Xavier’s Minor Seminary for the young men of the Diocese who are ready to offer themselves for the service of God. Those who participate in this camp will get admission either in to +2 course or the initiation [Latin] course. Those students who show appreciable interest in spiritual activities seek admission in the apostolic school through their respective parish priests.45

Pilgrim Centres

The people of Salem diocese are encouraged to go on pilgrimage to a shrine anywhere and renew themselves spiritually.46 In the diocese of Salem the following places are officially designated as pilgrim centres in view of Jubilee 2000 [Christu Jayanthi].

1. Infant Jesus Cathedral, Arisipalayam, Salem
2. Our Lady of Assumption, Mettur Dam
3. Shrine of St. Mary, Mathiampatty
4. Our Lady’s Grotto, Agraharam, and
5. Sacred Heart Church, Yercaud

45 Interview with Fr.I.Mariasusai, Commission for Vocation Promotion, St. Xavier’s, Minor Seminary, dt.17 July 2013.
A plenary indulgence is granted on a visit to any one of these shrines mentioned above, if one prays for the intentions of the Holy Father [Pope].

Indulgence acts on one’s soul as a washing machine that acts on clothes. Indulgence does not forgive sin but helps to clean away the selfishness that in often still there even after the sin has been forgiven. A plenary indulgence is the remission of the part of temporal punishment (for a short time) due to one’s sins.

The Catholics and Syrians all over India have taken particular care to cultivate Church life. Their hierarchical organizations, rituals like the High Mass celebrated by more than one priest to the accompaniment of music and choir, the architecture and size of the Churches and their illuminations and decorations and processions on festivals, all add a grandeur to worship seldom found in other denominations.

A popular element in Catholic worship is the spirit of pilgrimage well fostered by the clergy. Some of the important shrines of the Catholics are visited by thousands of pilgrims from far and near during the feasts of saints. For instance the Church of Our Lady of Health, at Velankanni (Thanjavur District in Tamilnadu) is known as the Lourdes of South India because of the many miraculous cures attributed to the shrine. Not only Christians but Hindus and Muslims too frequent the shrine with alms for favours sought or received.

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47 Indulgence means granting of freedom by the Catholic Church from the punishment for sins. Plenary indulgences are granted for some important work, for a pilgrimage or on special occasions like a holy year or an anniversary.


49 Aruna Deshpande, *India A Divine Destination*, p.531.
Fairs and festivals are celebrated in every parish Church with pomp and show. Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, All Souls’ Day, Easter, and Church Feast Day are celebrated in meaningful and grand manner. Christmas is the most popular festival in the Christian Calendar celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, it is a day of joy, of sharing, of family visits, and wishes and of a special family meal. The customs of Crib building to recall the scene of the birth of Christ, of the Christmas tree and of Santa Claus are striking features of Christmas celebration in every parish in the Salem Diocese. On the Christmas Eve, services are held at mid-night in the Churches. In some north Indian villages, groups of Christians sing indigenous carols to the accompaniment of musical instruments.50

**Services of Ecumenical And Dialogue Commission**

Integration of India depends on inter-religious harmony because it is a land with multi religious faith and cultural groups. India has welcomed the streams of people of diverse religions, cultures and languages. The various kingdoms that came up in the north and the south of the country have enriched our country with their distinct religions and culture. The great personalities like Gandhiji, Tagore and Arbinodo Ghosh have stressed the need for inter-religious harmony, tolerance, mutual respect and common brotherhood under the common destiny of humanity.

Gandhiji said, “the different religions are like the different branches of a single tree each distinct from the other though having the same source”. In the long run the success or failure of India to keep its unity and integrity will greatly depend on its

ability to ensure wide spread participation in decision making genuine pluralism and minority protection.\textsuperscript{51}

Pope John Paul II remarked, “One should discuss without the fumes of pride, without obstinacy of arrogance, without a spirit of contradiction or envy, but with holy humility, with peace with Christian unity.\textsuperscript{52} In 1966, the Second Vatican Council’s Decree “Nostra Aetate transformed the Catholic Church’s attitude of people of other religions. A secretariat for non-Christians was established at Rome. It is now called the Pontifical Council for Inter – Religious Dialogue.

\textbf{Inter Religious Dialogue}

An Ecumenical Commission is functioning in Salem Diocese to foster inter religious understanding among the people of this region.

\textbf{OBJECTIVES}

1. To cultivate a profound attitudinal change among the Christians.
2. To facilitate issue-based services like functional literacy for upholding human dignity and transcending all religious barriers.
3. To direct special attention to areas prone to religious and cultural disharmony, riots etc., and try to solve them through dialogue and reconciliation.
4. To mobilize the youth power of all religions.
5. To organize prayer and para liturgical services open to all religions and people.

\textsuperscript{52}Thomas Pazhayampalli, \textit{op.cit.}, p.581.
6. To arrange the celebrations of national and religious festivals such as Diwali, Milad-ul-Nabi, Bakrid and

7. To organize a diocese care group to mobilize the people to strengthen the relations with the people of other religions.

Dialogue teams at Diocesan and parish level celebrate Diwali season every year by way of personal greeting and house visits to Hindu friends. The Pope’s Diwali message from Vatican is shared with the public. The Tamil version of the Pope’s message is prepared by dialogue team and is made available to the cross section of the society. In the Inter faith Dialogue meetings, which are organized frequently in a religious spirit and the special invitees belonging to various religions highlight the significance of their religious principles.\textsuperscript{53} As a result of arranging the inter-religious dialogue the unity, solidarity and the understanding among the various religious communities have been strengthened to a great extent in the areas, which come under the jurisdiction of the Salem Diocese.

**Services of Religious Men and Women Congregations**

The men and women in the church who take vows of chastity, poverty and obedience and vow to lead a community life are called the religious. In the first two centuries celibacy was not a condition of bishops, priests or deacons. It became law only in 305 A.D. when the Synod of Elvira in Spain made celibacy obligatory for bishops, priests and deacons.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{53} Interview with Fr. Gopi Emmanuel, Director, Ecumenism and Dialogue, Salem, dt. 15, September 2012.

\textsuperscript{54} P.C. Thomas, *A Concise History of Church*, p.25.
History witnesses the outstanding services rendered by the religious congregations in the spread of the faith and the formation of new churches from the ancient monastic institutions to the medieval orders up to the more recent congregations. The majority of the Bishops, pastors and assistants come from the ranks of the secular clergy who live in the world rather than monasteries. The secular clergy are assisted to perform multifarious ministries by many religious orders of both men and women. The Bishop of the diocese fosters various forms of apostolate [service] in his diocese and urges the religious to take up various ministries according to the needs of place and time.\(^5\)

A great majority of religious congregations in Salem Diocese engage in religious, social, medical, educational and cultural services. According to the statistics of the year 2005, the total number of the religious congregations of both men and women is 38 and the total number of religious houses is 90 in the Diocese of Salem. Following are some of the religious orders of priests, brothers and sisters rendering various services in the diocese of Salem.

**Religious Orders of Priests**

i) Carmelites

ii) Vincent Pallotine

iii) Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales [MSFS], and,

iv) Congregation of Holy Cross

2. Religious Orders of Brothers And Sisters

i) Missionaries of Charity Sisters and Brothers

ii) Congregation of Brothers of Holy Cross

iii) Monfort Brothers of St. Gabriel

iv) Franciscan Servants of Mary

v) Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate

vi) Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod

vii) Congregation of Immaculate Conception

viii) Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Bon Secours

ix) Congregation of the Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo

x) The Good Shepherd Congregation

xi) Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambery

xii) Missionaries of Charity Sisters

xiii) Congregation of Sisters of St. Aloysius

xiv) Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

 xv) Congregations of Sisters of Carmel

xvi) Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny

xvii) Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ

xviii) Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph, and 

xix) Congregation of Sisters of St. Teresa’s Carmel

56 The total number of religious priests in Salem diocese is 23, No. of diocesan priests 77, No. of brothers 54, No. of sisters 458, No. Seminarians [major-23, minor-9] = 32 and No. of Mission Stations 189, and No. of men and women Congregations 38; Catholic Directory of Salem 2005.
These religious strive with intensity and in a modality of freedom humility, self-denial and mercy, with constant practice of prayer, penance and renewal. It is worthwhile to see the multifarious services of a few religious congregations in Salem diocese.

Carmelites

Teresa was a Spanish saint of 16th century. She was a binding force in founding Carmelite convents, two of the foundations being laid specially for men. Carmelite priests run a spiritual development centre at Yercaud, Salem to share their spiritual experiences with the faithful and other visitors. Bishop Selvanather started a house for Carmelite Sisters at Yercaud on October 3, 1967. There are about 17 nuns rendering various religious services in Salem diocese.

Vincent Pallotine Congregation

Vincent Pallotine [1795-1850] founded the Society of the Catholic Apostolate in 1850 in Rome. The main aim of establishing this society is to involve clergy, religious and especially the faithful in the noble task of evangelization of the world. Having Italy as the head quarters, Palatine priests, brothers and sisters carry on their service in more than 30 countries in the world. Pallotines have their mission stations in 5 districts in Tamilnadu. In Salem Diocese the Steel Plant Parish is looked after by the Pallotines.

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58 Interview with Fr.Felix, Spritual Development Centre, Yercaud, dt. 17 September 2013.
Missionaries of St. Francis De Sales

This congregation came into existence in 1838 in France. The missionaries came to India and established mission centres in Andra Pradesh and other parts of Central India. The M.S.F.S. priests administer Udayapatty parish in Salem Diocese. This congregation has a minor seminary centre at Udyapatty, Salem. A good number of priests are missionaries in villages doing social services and proclaiming the message of Christ to the people.  

Congregation of Holy Cross

Fr. Basil Antony Moreau founded it in 1837. The Holycross Priests and brothers came to Salem diocese in 1960 to involve in pastoral social and educational ministries. At present there are more than 200 Holy Cross Priests and Brothers in different parts of India. They have a novitiate centre in Yercaud and a house for aspirants at Udayapatty.

Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate

The Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate made their entry into the diocese of Salem as early as 1931 during the period of the first Bishop Henry Prunier [1930-1949]. The sisters have an option for the poor specially the woman from socially and economically lower strata of the society. At present there are four communities working in Salem Diocese - one at Attur, another at Yercaud and two at Salem. The SMMI Sisters have been known as catechist missionaries. They continue

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59 Interview with Fr. Arul, Parish Priest, Udayapatti, dt. 07 February 2012.
60 Thomas Dziekan, Vision and Governance, p.9.
61 Directory, Congregation of Holy Cross in India, p.5.
62 Interview with Bro. John, Vocation Promoter, Holy Cross Congregation, Salem, dt.23 January 2012.
their tradition of going to the interior villages to meet the Christian children in order to teach them catechism and prepare them for the reception of sacraments during holidays.

**Congregation of Immaculate Conception**

The headquarters of this congregation is at Madurai. The main objective of these sisters is to change the life styles of the poor and the downtrodden through service, simplicity and love. The Sisters have 3 convents and one among them is a polio clinic centre at Mathiampatty.

**Congregation of The Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo**

These sisters have their convent at Yercaud. They are actively involved in Christian education of children and youth and evangelization through social services.

**Sisters of Cross of Chavanad**

These Sisters engage in pastoral work, empowering women, education and family apostolate. They have two houses in the diocese of Salem- one in Namakkal and the other in Yercaud. They also have a retreat centre at Yercaud.

Most pastors and parish priests belong to the diocesan or secular clergy. Priests of religious orders are more apt to devote themselves to work of education, preaching and social service to the mission or to specialized areas of the ministry. But often they too are called upon to take care of parishes and to assist diocesan priests in their pastoral work. Men and women religious for their personal religious life they

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63 Interview with Sr. Arul Rani, Director of Amala Anbu Karangal Orphanage Centre, Salem, dt.8 April 2012.
remain in their communities subject to their religious superiors but their pastoral work is performed under the authority of the Bishop, who is the chief shepherd of the flock in each diocese. Thus all the people of a diocese, the clergy, men and women religious groups and the lay faithful are laborers in the vineyard of the Lord. Every one of them is possessing charisms and ministries, diverse yet complimentary work in the same vineyard of the Lord.

**Participation of Laity in The Developmental Activities of the Diocese**

The Second Vatican Council defines the laity as “all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of the religious life specially approved by the church. The principal duty of laymen and lay women is to witness to Christ by their lives and their words, in family within their social circle and their working environment.” The word layman is derived from the term “laos” which means people i.e., the church community, body of Christ. A parish is essentially a religious grouping of Catholics in a locality. The lay apostolates participate in the mission of Christ and the church. The lay people fall in line with architects of Diocese namely Bishop, Clergy and Religious in contributing to the growth and development of the diocese.

**The Diocesan Laity Commission**

Seminars and Symposums are arranged by the laity commission to create awareness among the faithful about the role of lay people in taking active part in liturgical service and parish participatory structures. The Commission also helps

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64 Christifideles Laici, *Discourses of Pope Pius*, p.23.
youth movements and other associations to involve in the catholic action programmes [Social welfare activities] and for the growth of diocese. It offers not only laity formation course for several parishes but also helps parish priests to conduct the parish council election.

**Laity Sunday Celebration**

In the diocese of Salem, Laity Sunday is celebrated after the feast of St. Thomas Moore, the patron saint of laity in the month of June every year. Posters and leaflets are sent to all the parishes to highlight the duty of laity towards the development of church and the society.

**Catholic Action**

It means the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy. It implies in the laity leading of a true catholic life, the promotion of faith in all possible ways and the rendering of social service under the guidance of the clergy. All the catholics in the diocese have a definite responsibility to take part in catholic action. They have also a duty of charity and justice towards their neighbours. In order to perform the above said duties various youth movements, associations and pious organisations have come into existence in Salem Diocese.

They are

1. Society of St. Vincent De Paul
2. Legion of Mary
3. Sodalities of Our Lady

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68 Ibid., p.9.
4. Diocesan Health Association
5. Salem Catholic Union
6. Y.C.S/Y.S.M
7. Diocesan Catechetical Association, and
8. Christian Seva Sangam etc.

**Vincent de Paul Society**

Vincent de Paul started this society in 1660 in France. In India this society was setup on May 25, 1863.\(^{70}\) This society was started in 1968 in Salem Diocese by Bishop Selvanather. The society comprises of lay people as members. Several parishes in the Salem Diocese run this society. The Members of this society adopt poor families and do all kinds of charitable works with the help of funds raised from the parishners. The society has three particular councils in the diocese [Salem, Krishnagiri and Vellandivalasu].\(^{71}\)

**Legion of Mary**

This association aiming at rending social service was started in the diocese in 1954. This is one of the best movements in the parishes that encourages the committed lay people to realise their mission as Christians under the leadership of Mary.\(^{72}\)

\(^{70}\) Thomas Pothacamury, *The Church In Independent India*, p. 131.

\(^{71}\) News letter, Diocese of Salem, No.261, Sep. 1998.

\(^{72}\) Interview with Mr. Edward Joseph, President of Parish Council, Sanyasigundu, Salem, dt 25 April 2012.
The legionaries visit the families and assist them to solve their problems. They also create awareness among the lay people about illiteracy, poverty, female infanticide etc.

**Catholic Union of Salem**

This union was started in 14th August 1955 with the sole aim of social, economic and spiritual development of the lay faithful of the diocese. Several number of branches are found in different parishes of the diocese. The union strives for the betterment of the poor, marginalized, diseased and the victims of natural calamities. They render selfless service to the people irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

Other important lay apostolate associations such as Christian worker movements, Prison Ministry, Little way Association, P.M.V, Nurses Guild, Pontifical Mission Society, Sodalities Of Our Lady, Diocesan Health Associations and Small Christian Community operate in the diocese to help the people to realize their commitment towards the diocese and society.

**Role of Catechists**

Catechesis has been from apostolic times an essential ministry in the church. The images associated with catechism and catechists are products of catechetical fundamentalism, which equates faith formation with Christian belief. Catechesis deals greatly with Christ and his mystery of salvation. The Catechists present the word of God to the People especially through their catechetical instructions and assisting the parish priests, in his day to day church administration. They are lay apostles of God in

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73 Catechesis means Christian Faith Formation.
74 Bible, Acts 11:42
the world. Lay people are yet commissioned to teach and be witnesses to deal with 
sacred things beside priests.\textsuperscript{75} They render evangelical service in the parishes to 
extend God’s kingdom with their pastors. They deepen and widen the faith 
relationship between the people and God.\textsuperscript{76}

Hence the layman is consecrated to the ordinary task of human living. But this 
living must be done according to the way Christ has shown.\textsuperscript{77} The laity are called in a 
special way to make the church present, operative and develop through their 
involvement in the church mission and its participatory structures.

**Small Christian Community [ANPIAM]**

Now a days in Salem Diocese the parishes have more membership. In order to 
form everyone to be an active and participatory in the church mission and pastoral 
plans and programmes, in 1990 at Bandung, Indonesia, 400 Asian Bishops gave an 
integral pastoral approach by the vision of a new way of being church.\textsuperscript{78} They defined 
that the parish as communion of communities. They proposed that every parish has to 
be a communion of small communities to promote faith sharing and faith based 
activities in and through these communities called ANPIAM as acronym for 
Animating New Pastoral Integral Approach and Mission.\textsuperscript{79} There are 58 parishes in 
Salem Diocese. Each parish is divided into 10 to 50 small Christian Communities 
[ANPIAM] Based on its size and population, each having 10 to 30 families. Each

\textsuperscript{75} There are 16 professional catechists and 46 untrained catechists serving in different 
aparishes in the diocese of Salem; Interview Mr.Sabarinathan, Catechist, infant Jesus Cathedral, 
Arisipalayam, Salem, dt. 10 February 2013.
\textsuperscript{76} R.H.Lesser, *You Who Are Sent*, p.9.
\textsuperscript{78} S.Panneer Selvam, *New Evangelization In The Parishes*, p.69.
\textsuperscript{79} *Ibid.*, p.70.
ANPIAM is named after a patron saint. The Infant Jesus Cathedral Parish, Arisipalayam is the largest parish with the population of about 12,000 has around 50 ANPIAMS. In Tamilnadu the term ANPIAM was first used by Fr.Edwin. In China, they are called ‘house churches’ in Australia ‘home churches’.

These communities strengthen the faith of every individual and transmission of the faith at parish level in the diocese. Such a faith formation is done in the light of the gospel interpreted in reference with human experience. Along with lay pious organisations such as Vincent de Paul Society, Legion of Mary, Charismatic Renewal Groups, Youth Associations etc., these small Christian communities in each parish help one another to foster fellowship and to reach out to the poor and needy in their locality. As these communities meet regularly to do gospel sharing, they organize fund raising program to support the education of the poor children in the neighbourhood and to lend a helping hand to the downtrodden in their close vicinity.

One of the vital administrative organs is its pastoral council which is made up of elected representatives of ANPIAMs and other pious associations. Everyone is trained and encouraged to participate in various needs of the community. Service mindedness of ANPIAM members is also used for common good. Thus at parish level in Salem diocese. These communities are a true sign of vitality within the church, an instrument of formation of faith and a solid starting point for a new society based on a civilization of love.

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80 Thomas Vijay, *Developing Indian Integral Pastoral Approach*, p.45.
81 Joseph Prasad Pinto, *Inculturation Through Basic Communities An Indian Perspective*, p.152.
Thus the Bishop and clergy involve in all the religious activities of the diocese. The ordained pastors perform their routine religious services in different parts of the diocese such as saying masses, preaching sermons, baptizing and administering the other sacraments, giving instructions, visiting the sick, taking up a census and teaching in the parish school. Pastors give their people the intellectual good of sound doctrine, the spiritual nourishment of the sacraments and love and concern of a father. For this is the reason why the priest is called “Father”. Sometimes because of his position, age or achievements he is given an honorary title of Monsignor- a dignity conferred by the Pope.

The religious of both men and women assist the Bishop and Clergy by engaging various ministries to fulfil the mission of the church. The laity take an active part in sacramental and other religious and social welfare activities of the church through various organisations at parish and diocese level.
Epiphany center is the heart of Salem diocese where all pastoral animation and formation takes place. It has been structured as a big auditorium, where more than 1500 people can attend a programme. It was built in the year 1984.
ANPIAM’S MOTTO

PARTICIPANTS AT AN ANPIAM MEETING