CHAPTER – IV

PILGRIMAGE TOURISM OF VAILANKANNI

Tourism has become a major and an integral part of economic, social and physical development. It comprises complete system of nature, which include the man and his activities.

Tourism is an organized industry, its dimensions are very large, its location varies and its benefit scattered over large segments of the population. Those who live in tourism resorts or in tourism regions are all participating in the activities of tourism. The tourists – both foreign and domestic – all contribute to the development of economy of the area, provide employment to the people and offer opportunities to them to assimilate the best in many and diverse cultures. Each citizen has pride in the greatness of his city, its culture, traditions and history.

Tourist promotion is the key operation to any regional, state or community development programmes. Basically there are three ways to bring money and business into a new given area. These are agricultural development, industrial development and tourist development. Tourist development is probably the quickest least difficult method of the three. This new trend in the development of communities and therefore developed areas, gives rise to the interest and increase of business and payroll for the spectacular growth tourism allows.

Tourism is a multidimensional phenomenon. It is fragmented product, integrated with and directly affecting many other sectors of economy. These
sectors although separate and inter-dependent, which require cooperative efforts and common policies.

**Aspects of Pilgrimage Tourism**

The idea of pilgrimage has three aspects.

a. Under certain circumstances God responds to prayer in a special way.

b. This special activity of God or a divinity is particularly manifest in certain places which on that account become centers of pilgrimage.

c. In order to benefit by this special responsiveness of God, of the divinity or of certain heroes and holy persons, one must make a pilgrimage to this holy place of favor or deliverance, undertake a journey which forms a unity with the visit to or stay in the sacred place.¹

**Meaning of Pilgrimage**

The saving power of God or of the divinity, which is in Christianity, is regarded as operative and effective through the intercession of certain saints like Antony of Padua and others. In the Blessed Virgin Mary especially in Mother Mary who is gloriously seated in Vailankanni shrine pilgrims seek a tangible help in sickness and distress.² In order to gain blessing and assurance in important decisions and pray for this at a place of pilgrimage pilgrims travel to such destinations like Vailankanni.

Sometime man is tormented by the uncertainty of his lot after death and is impelled to seek out particular holy places in order to gain certainty about his after life. On the other hand, people may undertake a pilgrimage in gratitude

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for benefits already received or in order to preserve divine goodwill by regular visits to the holy place.

**Pilgrimage in Christianity**

At first pilgrimage did not enter into the perspective of Christians. They at first avoided this form of devotion because it had flourished among the pagans. Moreover unlike the Jew’s Christian worship was not centralized. Their imminent expectation of the *parusia* (the second coming of Jesus) made the idea of pilgrimages to the places of Jesus Christ’s earthly life seem superfluous. In addition, there is no sign at the beginning of veneration of saints and martyrs, which would have prompted pilgrimages to their graves. Very soon, however, the extreme reserve concerning paganism and its forms of expression like pilgrimage, diminished. The immediate second coming of Jesus Christ was not seen. Then veneration of martyrs and saints, and liturgical forms developed. Legal recognition of Christianity also represented an important condition for the development of pilgrimages, which now could be public.³

**Motives of Pilgrimage**

There are eight goals and motives of pilgrimages.⁴ They are burial places and memorials as places of pilgrimages; pilgrimage to living persons; pilgrimage as an ascetical mode of life; the pilgrimage site (the grave of martyr), as Christian burial place; pilgrimage of intercession (healing, help and advice as pilgrims’ intentions), pilgrimage of devotion, pilgrimage of penance, pilgrimage to relics. Particularly important among these was the pilgrimage to the holy places in Palestine. This also explains the considerable influence of

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³ Interview with Fr Roche SJ, St Joseph’s College, Tiruchirappalli, on 10th May 2006.
Jerusalem on liturgical practices and rites in other countries (procession of palms, veneration of the Cross on Good Friday). Also very important were pilgrimages to the graves of the saints, above all to the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul, Sergins in the Syrian Desert, Thecla at Seleucia, Mensas in the Maraestic desert, Demetrius in Thessalonica, Felix at Nola and Martin at tours.

No Marian pilgrimages in the first four centuries; they must however have developed soon after the places in Palestine more closely connected with her life. It is certain that numerous Marian pilgrimage churches were built in Constantinople (icons of Mary and articles of clothing; c.450). In the middle ages the penitential system played an important role in promoting pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Rome and Compostela. These long pilgrimages also served to remove the penitent from his usual surroundings for some time, which was important where he had committed a crime of violence. There were also the pilgrimage to famous pictures of Jesus, (Holy Face at Lucca), relics (shrines at Aachen, Cologne, Triar) places where ‘bleeding hosts’ were kept (Seefold near Innsburk, Heiligenblut) and to Marian shrines and those of other saints.

From the Counter Reformation down to the present day the centers of Marian pilgrimage have predominated. Austria in particular became well-known for its Marian pilgrimages (Mariazell). Among the most important pilgrimage centers now are; Lough Derg, Guadalupe, Einsiedeln, Lourdes, Fatima and Vailankanni which is known as Lourdes of East. In connection with present day pilgrimages, Popes and bishops have pointed out the deeper meaning of pilgrimages; “the pilgrim’s journey is long and begins with a

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5 Interview with Fr. Roche, SJ, St. Joseph’s College, Tiruchipalli, 2.10.2007.
6 Karl Rahner, op. cit. p.27.
parting. He leaves his home, his everyday life, and forgets all his unimportant, trivial cares… and then sets off courageously… and so prayer makes its way to God more easily. The company of other pilgrims increases the ardor of the soul and gives rise to prayer in common, singing, exchange of thoughts and feelings. The pilgrimage reawakens in the hearts of men the spirit of penance, the sense of providence and trust in God. It instructs man afresh about the meaning of life, to turn away from the present, from everyday joys and sorrows, and turn towards the goal whose radiance shines on you”.\(^7\)

**A new impulse to pilgrimage**

Some are inclined to assign pilgrimages to mere peripheral zone of piety. Nevertheless, pilgrimage occupies a central place in Christianity at the present day. A new impulse to pilgrimage might be given by the idea of pilgrim church, in the midst of distress, imperfection, uncertainty and perplexity, yet not wandering aimlessly, but as community, whose aim is perfect salvation and redemption in Jesus. That goal however is still distant, for the Church as a whole and for each of its members. If the Church’s great journey is given symbolic expression in the pilgrimage, the Church’s way faring is experienced on a small scale as a living process, and not merely as a sad distance from the goal, fulfillment in God. Pilgrims also feel in the way that the goal, Christ and Saints comes closer. The pilgrim congregation at the shrine of more intensely conscious of itself as the community united to God. Let us now examine the available facilities in Vailankanni for the sustainable growth of tourism.

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\(^7\) His Holiness Pope Pious XII, *Papel Encyclical*, 1952, p. 4.
**Pilgrimage Tourism of Vailankanni**

Vailankanni pilgrimage tourism gives the healthy atmosphere of the cultural society of the human nature. What does it mean the word the cultured society of the human nature? Even though it is a traditional Roman Catholic place of worship exclusively for the Catholics it gives a different dimension or a healthy beginning to implement the mood of the Vatican council.\(^8\) Vailankanni is the only Catholic institution wherein a healthy atmosphere of universal brotherhood prevails. How is it possible in Vailankanni? Because pilgrimage tourism of people irrespective of caste, creed, color and nationality based on the humble and genuine devotion to Our Lady of Good Health.

**General information about Vailankanni**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>5.5 squire kilometers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>15,156 (2006 census)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altitude</td>
<td>Sea level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>Maximum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>36.0’c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>29.0’c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainfall</td>
<td>350 mile meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season</td>
<td>Through out the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages spoken</td>
<td>Tamil and English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD code</td>
<td>04365</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Nearby Airports

- Tiruchirappalli 150 Kms
- Chennai 350 Kms
- Coimbatore 350 Kms

Railways

- Nearby Railway Station Nagapattinam 10 Kms

Arrangements by Railways for Vailankanni

Vailankanni is one of the major pilgrim centers in India. Considering its importance the railway administration is kind enough and approved a plan and estimates for lying of new Broad Gauge line in between Nagapattinam – Vailankanni. The work started by 2002. The major bridge and small culverts works and station buildings and staff quarters constructions are over, rest of the works (i.e.) about 75% of work (i.e.) laying of track, and earth work are yet to be commenced.

For the convenience of pilgrims, one train booking office with reservation facilities is functioning at Vailankanni on and from 1st April 1982. Nagapattinam station was remodeled with reservation facilities etc in 1994. To cater to the need of pilgrims to Vailankanni meter gauge section in between Thanjavur – Thiruvarur Junction was closed on 1st July 2004 and the Broad-gauge line work is in progress. The rest of line (i.e.) Thiruvarur Junction to Nagapattinam station will be taken up for Broad Gauge conversion as soon as the BG line conversion in between Thanjavur – Thiruvarur is come into use.
Every year, Railway is making elaborate arrangements during annual feast for the convenience of pilgrims.

1. Strengthening of regular trains by attaching extra coaches
2. Running of special trains during festival period
3. Erecting of temporary latrines & urinals for the use of pilgrims
4. Engaging of extra staff to look after sanitation and cleanliness work round the clock in and around Nagapattinam Railway Station for the convenience of pilgrims
5. One additional Health Inspector will be in charge throughout the festival period to look after sanitation.
6. Continuous water supply from Nagapattinam Municipality will be arranged in addition to regular working of water tanks with chlorinated water by train from Thiruvarur junction daily for the use of pilgrims
7. Catering arrangements (i.e.) supply of whole some food, snacks and beverages will be arranged
8. Adequate number of railway protection forces personnel will be posted at Nagapattinam to prevent unauthorized hawkers and beggars into station premises and give protection to pilgrims
9. First Aid Booth manned by St John Ambulance Brigade (SJAB) will function at Nagapattinam during festival period.
10. Additional Railway Police personnel will be camping at Nagapattinam to look after bandobust and to maintain law & order in and around Nagapattinam station.
11. Provision of public address system will be arranged for the convenience of passengers and staff to announce about the running of special trains,
train timings and other important information to public wherever necessary.

12. More than three lakhs of pilgrims are expected to visit Vailankanni every year during festival period by rail transport. This figure excluding 10% railway privilege pass holders and complementary pass holders & concession certificate pass holders, etc.

Though the Vailankanni Arockia Matha Basilica belongs to Christians, all sorts of people belong to all religions are thronging to Vailankanni not only for annual feast period but also through out the year. Vailankanni a town panchayat is growing up day by day. Not only the domestic travelers but also foreigners are visiting Vailanakanni throughout the year.

Trains and special trains run in between Tiruchirappalli junction Thanjavur Junction, Thiruvarur Junction, Nagapattinam and Nagore, before the closure of the section i.e. 1st July 2004. There were:

a. Tiruchirappalli Junction to Nagore & Back one pair of train
b. Thanjavur Junction to Nagore & Back 3 pairs of trains
c. Nagore – Madras & Back 1 pair of train
d. Thanjavur Junction to Thiruvarur & Back 1 pair of train
e. One pair of special train was run during the festival period

**Road Transport Buses Plying to Vailankanni**

1. MTC Metropolitan Transport Corporation – Chennai city
2. SETC State Express Transport Corporation – Chennai
3. TNSTC Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation / Villupuram
   (Vellore, Villupuram and Kanchipuram)
4. TNSTC Salem (Salem and Erode)
5. TNSTC Coimbatore (Coimbatore and Hills area)
6. TNSTC Kumbakonam (Tiruchirappalli, Kumbakonam, Karaikudi and Pudukottai)
7. TNSTC Madurai (Madurai, Nagercoil, Tirunelveli, Virudhunagar & Dindigul)

All the above corporations except MTC corporations are running the buses to Vailankanni from all over Tamil Nadu for the convenience of pilgrims. More number of regular and special buses are running during festival period (i.e.) from 28th August to 8th September.⁹

⁹ Interview with R. Kalian, Former Station Master, Nagapattinam Railway Station, on 12th September 2007.
Table No. VII

Types of Transport used by the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Air</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Train</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bus</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Own vehicle</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Hired vehicle</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>On foot (Paadhayaatra)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>400</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table describes the types of the transport used by the respondents. 2 percent of the respondents use airway. 132 percent of the respondents use trains, 43 percent of the respondents use bus, 6 percent of the respondents use their own vehicles, 3 percent use hired vehicles and 13 percent of the respondent come by foot (Paadhayaatra).

Chart No.2

Types of Transport used by the Respondents

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10 Field Survey.
Table No. VIII

Purpose of the Visit of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pilgrimage</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tour</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table reveals the purpose of the respondents. Of the total respondents 93 percent of visit Vailankanni for pilgrimage, 5 percent of them for tour and 2 percent of them for other (business, on duty etc.)

Chart No.3

Purpose of the Visit of the Respondents

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11 Field Survey.
Epidemic Control

In the year 1939, 1942 and 1945 three epidemics of cholera, have occurred at Vailankanni, during the annual festival of Vailankanni Arockia Matha. The Government of Tamil Nadu has notified this festival in the government order and steps have been taken year after year to prevent any outbreak of epidemic by organizing all sanitary arrangements like:

a. Protected water supply
b. Maintaining proper food sanitation
c. Maintaining proper conservancy system etc

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Inner view of the Church Canteen

Interview with Township Officer, Vailankanni
Anyhow this can be managed only by the dedicated services of public health staff and sincere cooperation from the pilgrims in adhering in strict civil in its true sense.\textsuperscript{14}

**Water supply**

Clean and protected drinking water supply to the vast congregation of devotees on the festival days is done by the Church Administration every year.

**For the Vailankanni Festival 2007**

a. 15 Tanker Lorries

b. 12 Mini tanker Lorries

c. 6 Tractors fixed with water tanks with extension pipelines and the church plumping department to distribute drinking water in the festival area using motors. Vailankanni being located at the sea shore it is very difficult to get drinking water. Therefore, by utilizing the above-mentioned number of vehicles the water is taken from the selected private and public wells at the close by villages (Poiyur, Keevalur, Ramar Madam, etc) and distributed to the pilgrims after making proper chlorination by the public health department officials.

**Hand Pumps**

In 2007 totally 160 hand pumps (tube wells) were erected during the festival period, at various spots, for the use of pilgrims.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Interview with Raj, Fitter, Church Plumping Section, Vailankanni on 23\textsuperscript{rd} September 2006.

\textsuperscript{15} Interview with Elango, Church plumping section, Vailankanni on 20\textsuperscript{th} September 2006.
Purified Water

In order to provide purified drinking water to the devotees throughout the year, a private Lottery Company called Best & Co from Coimbatore, has established a huge water purification plant at the church lodge, close by the church and has donated it to the church. Now the church has taken up the responsibility of providing the clear water, which is equal to the standard mineral water to the devotees.

Interview with the Parish Priest of Vailankanni Shrine

The devotees who come to Vailankanni never experience any water scarcity, though there may be water scarcity in some cities and in rural places, and due to the availability of generator facility the pilgrims never feel to suffer from power cut, and therefore they are happy to stay at Vailankanni for a longer period.¹⁶

¹⁶ Interview with Fr Arul Irudhayam, Former Parish Priest, Vailankanni on 29th October 2007.
Sanitation

It can be discussed under three heads.

1. Preliminary cleaning
2. Festival cleaning
3. Post cleaning

Preliminary cleaning is conducted from 14 August to 28 August every year. Festival cleaning starts from 29 August to 9 September every year and post cleaning starts from 10 September to 29 September. Besides system is arranged by the church sweepers section to attend night cleaning during the festival.

1. **Preliminary Cleaning**

   Period: 14\textsuperscript{th} August to 28\textsuperscript{th} August (15 days)

   Number of Men engaged:  
   a. Supervisors: 16  
   b. Permanent sweepers: 438

**Materials**

- a. No. of tractors to remove rubbish : 4
- b. Slacked lime : 17,000 kg
- c. Baskets : 800
- d. Tins : 170
- e. Drums (20 lts) : 130
- f. Scrapers and plates : 150
- g. Cups and Kuvalai : 500
- h. Cleaning malars : 330
- i. Brooms : 1100

are used for conservancy work.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17} Interview with Adaikalam, Supervisor, Church Sweeper Section, Vailankanni on 3\textsuperscript{rd} September 2006.
2. Festival Cleaning

Period: 12 days from 28th August to 9th September

Number of Men engaged:

- a. Supervisors: 16
- b. Permanent Sweepers: 438
- c. Festival, temporary sweepers: 500

Materials used:

- a. No. of tractors to remove the rubbish and night soil: 16
- b. Baskets: 800
- c. Tins: 170
- d. Drums (20 lts): 130
- e. Scrapers & Plates: 150
- f. Cups & Kuvalais: 600
- g. Slacked lime: 40,000- kg
- h. Cleaning malars: 330
- i. Brooms: 3000

3. Post Cleaning

Period: 15 days from 10th September to 24th September

Men engaged:

- a. Supervisor: 10
- b. Permanent Sweepers: 438
**Materials used**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Tractor</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Baskets</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Tins</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Drums (2 lts)</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Scrapers &amp; plates</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Cups and <em>Kuvalais</em></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Slaked lime</td>
<td>1500 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Cleaning <em>malars</em></td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Brooms</td>
<td>200(^{18})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Researcher with Health Inspectors*

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\(^{18}\) Interview with R. Raghubathi, Church stores, Vailankanni on 22\(^{nd}\) October 2006.
Mosquito and Fly control

I. On festival days before and after: 6 men with 6 power sprayers

II. On other days: one man with one power sprayer.\textsuperscript{19}

Public toilet facilities

There are sufficient number of public latrines, urinals, wash basins and bathing rooms, constructed by the church, located at three different places.

1. At the bus stand with the capacity of:
   - 30 Bathrooms
   - 70 Latrines
   - 20 Urinals

2. At the back of Christuraja Mahal
   - 50 Bathrooms
   - 51 Latrines

3. At the right side of the main church
   - 100 Bathrooms
   - 150 Latrines
   - 20 Washbasins\textsuperscript{20}

All the latrines, urinals, washbasins and bathing rooms are kept clean and maintained properly for the use of the festival pilgrims and the regular visiting devotees. Care is taken to maintain cleanliness in the church premises.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} Interview with Adaikalam, Supervisor, Church Sweeper Section, Vailankanni on 3\textsuperscript{rd} September 2006.

\textsuperscript{20} Interview with Aswath Narayanan, Church Engineer, Vailankanni on 30\textsuperscript{th} October 2007.

\textsuperscript{21} Interview with Fr R. Antony Joseph, In charge of Church Sweeper Section, Vailankanni on 28\textsuperscript{th} October 2007.
Lighting facilities

In addition to the lighting facilities provided by the special grade town panchayat the church authorities provide to all the public halls and thatched sheds where huge number of pilgrims takes free shelter during the festival days, and to all the festival area especially at the sea shore which accommodates a vast crowd of devotees. In case of power failure generator is used.22

Food facilities

Besides the private sector hotels, protected and tasty food is provided by the church canteen at a marginal rate to the festival devotees and to the pilgrims, throughout the year, who visit Vailankanni Church. Besides the care taken by the church administration, the Block Health Supervisors and Food Inspectors also inspect regularly, the Church canteen during the festival days.23

Accommodation

As per the Public Health Act, perfect standard is maintained in the church lodges.24 Besides the church lodges and halls the church authorities construct temporary sheds for the free stay of pilgrims. Added to that public health stall sheds, fire service sheds, hospital sheds, and exhibition sheds are also constructed by the church.25

The Church Authorities provide four rooms in St Joseph’s Lodge (Church Lodge) from 1st August to 24th September every year, for the stay of Block Health Supervisor, Special Health Officer, and Deputy Director of

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22 Interview with M. Rajasekar, Church Office, Vailankanni on 30th November 2007.
23 Interview with A. Singarayar, Church Canteen, Vailankanni on 3rd October 20027
25 Interview with P. Rajagopal, Pandal Contractor, Vailankanni on 13th September 2006.
Health Service. For the police department 15 rooms are allotted at St Joseph’s Lodge in which District Superintendent Police, Inspectors and Sub Inspectors stay during the annual feast. For other officials seven rooms are allotted at St Joseph’s Lodge and one room at Little Flower Lodge is allotted for the Fire Officer.  

Table No.IX

Church Lodges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Lodge</th>
<th>No. of Rooms</th>
<th>Total Beds</th>
<th>Opened on</th>
<th>Parish Priest at the time of opening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St Luke’s</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>28.4.1983</td>
<td>Fr Maria Susai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant Jesus</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>18.8.1994</td>
<td>Fr MM Sammanasu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Flower</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>2.7.1965 (Old)</td>
<td>Fr SL Gabriel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26.4.1989 (New)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christu Raja Mahal</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>29.8.2000</td>
<td>Fr G. Arul Irudayam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Antony’s</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>17.1.1983</td>
<td>Fr Gabriel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahilchi Matha</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>20.8.1991</td>
<td>Fr MM Sammanasu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St John’s</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>25.8.1983</td>
<td>Fr Mariasusai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don Bosco</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8.9.1957</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Xavier’s</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1.4.1982</td>
<td>Fr SL Gabriel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Joseph’s</td>
<td>132 New</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>18.8.1994</td>
<td>Fr MM Sammanasu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>82 Old</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>5.5.1976</td>
<td>Fr Mariasusai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29.8.1998</td>
<td>Fr G. Arul Irudayam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Assisi</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>25.8.1983</td>
<td>Fr Mariasusai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Thomas, I – II</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>11.12.1968</td>
<td>Fr Mariasusai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Thomas Extn.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>28.8.1986</td>
<td>Fr Gabriel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uthiriyamatha</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28.8.1986</td>
<td>Fr Gabriel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of Rooms and No. of Tourist Halls</td>
<td>853 New</td>
<td>1940 27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 Old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26 Church Room Counter Register on 5th August 2006.
27 Interview with Jude, Supervisor, Church Room Counter, Vailankanni on 19th October 2006.
Table No.X  
Accommodation Facility in Vailankanni\textsuperscript{28}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>400</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The available accommodation facility in Vailankanni is very good for the 32 percent of the respondents. It is good for 48 percent of the respondents, 15 percent of the respondent say that it is average and 5 percent of the respondent say that it is poor.

Chart No.4  
Accommodation Facility in Vailankanni

\textsuperscript{28} Field Survey.
Besides the Church lodges, there are good numbers of private lodges, which are at the service of devotees of Vailankanni. There two categories of private lodges:

1. The Lodges in the Lodge Owner’s Association Vailankanni (R.N. 5/87) with its President: L Pathiraj, Secretary: R. Felix, Treasurer: SI Selvaraj; and

2. The Lodges, which are not in the association

1. Private Lodges under Lodge Owner’s Association, Vailankanni
   1. Total Number of Lodges: 57
   2. Total Number of Rooms: 1227

2. Private Lodges that are not in the association
   1. Total Number of Lodges: 41
   2. Total Number of Rooms: 735

Snake Bite Precautions

There are poisonous sea snakes near the edges of the seashore and some have died due to the snakebite. A notice board is kept by the church, at the seashore to avoid the danger. Barricade is also provided by the church administration, near the seashore and police constables at the request of the parish priest are posted during the festival days, to prevent pilgrims bathing in the area. By the church necessary posters and pamphlets are displayed on this and announcement is made over mike every now and then and then to warn the danger to the pilgrims.

30 Interview with T. Ragavan, Welcome Lodge, Vailankanni on 20th October 2006.
31 Interview with Fr G. Arul Irudayam, Former Parish Priest, Vailankanni on 22nd October 2007.
Medical Facilities

The Government Hospital functions nearby the bus stand. The Church hospital is situated by the side of the main road, at the distance of ¼ km from the main church. Besides the hospital, there is a dispensary at the left side of the main church. They render medical aid round the clock, with tender love, care and concern, not only during the festival days, but also during the rest of the year. In addition two private doctors render their medical services at Vailankanni main road.

Fire Precaution

The traders dealing with fire, like teashops, hotels, etc (owners) are instructed by volunteers employed by the church, to be careful to prevent fire accidents. Handbills and pamphlets are printed and distributed by the church authorities. Church has provided a place at the main road, with a building and with other infrastructure, to station the permanent Fire Service Unit, added to
that the Church also provides place during the feast, to station the Fire service units at the festival area.\textsuperscript{32}

**Festival Sheds**

Every year during the festival the new school building is provided for the stay of public health staff, revenue department staff, public works department staff, transport corporation staff and policemen, with water and toilet facilities by the church administration for the period from 28\textsuperscript{th} August to 10\textsuperscript{th} September. During the feast, the primary school buildings are allotted for the stay of the women police constables.

Similarly, the Scout and Junior Red Cross Boys who render voluntary service to lead the devotees at the festival car procession and at the hoisting of festival flag every day are accommodated by the church authorities, in the school building for the above days. Necessary furniture like benches, cots, chairs and tables are provided by the church. Sheds for kitchen and for mess are also provided by the church in the school.\textsuperscript{33}

**Educational Services**

**The Primary School**

Abiding by the teachings of the Popes and the Church, Vailankanni Arockia Matha Church, realizing the urgent need of basic education to the local innocent children, and in adherence to the rules and regulations of the State

\textsuperscript{32} Interview with A. Joseph Vaz, Fire Officer, Tiruchirappalli on 3\textsuperscript{rd} November 2006.

\textsuperscript{33} Interview with M. Arockiasamy, District Convenor, Junior Red Cross, Govt. Hr Sec. School, Prathaparamapuram on 7\textsuperscript{th} October 2006.
Government, started a primary school at Vailankanni at the distance of 700 meters from the church in the year 1907.\footnote{Dhinamani, Madurai on 28\textsuperscript{th} June 1999, p. 2.}

**Punitha Arockia Annai Higher Secondary School, Vailankanni**

Vailankanni Arockia Matha Church fosters by giving a great importance to its educational institution, Punitha Arockia Matha Higher Secondary School, in all possible ways. This majestic school admits the students without any discrimination of caste, religion, color or creed, promotes religious unity and national integration.

In 1907: The School was started as primary school
In 1960: It was raised to Middle School
In 1977: It was upgraded to High School
In 1986: It gained the status of Higher Secondary School

This school enjoys the permanent recognition given by the Government of Tamil Nadu. The total number of students of this school, most of them hail from rural areas. With great care and love this school educates the students that they may be successful in life.

In 1988 the church administration constructed a Science laboratory, equipped with modern facilities, at the cost of Rs 30,00,000. The main building was opened by Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India in 1986. In the evening hours special coaching is provided to the students who are interested in upgrading their knowledge in computer science. General Knowledge Forum is functioning in the school in order to foster the talents of the students.
Arivial Kazhagam, National Service Scheme, National Cadet Corps, Scouts, Junior Red Cross, Young Christian Movement, Muthamil Mandram, Parents Teacher’s Association are functioning with the support and encouragement of the church administration, that the students may benefit a total and complete training in the field of education. And the church administration has generously given 5.3 acres of land to the school, that it may be utilized to foster the sportier spirit of the students.

Social Activities of the Shrine

In the Holy Bible, Jesus says, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then all will know that you are my disciples”.35 And again in the Gospel according to Mathew, Jesus says, “I tell you, indeed, when ever you did this for one of the poorest brothers of mine, you did it for me”.36

Ever since the dawn of Christianity, the Christian churches in all over the world have been involved in serving their fellowmen irrespective of caste, creed or culture. The only reason which promotes them to serve others is the command of Jesus who urges his followers to love others, to serve others and if, need be even to lay down their life for others.37 Vailankanni church having, the Catholic priests as its administration, is massively involved in the upliftment of the poor, needy and downtrodden.

Home for the Aged

With love and concern, the despised and deserted elderly persons are protected by the Church with tender love and care at the home for the aged. This home, which was started by Fr SL Gabriel, who was parish priest at Vailankanni (15th September 1982 to 30th December 1990), is run by the Vailankanni Church administration and it is situated at the southern side of the Main Church. Right now, at this home, there are 45 old men and 56 old ladies are looked after by the church. There are two sisters and two kitchen girls to serve the aged people.

Refugees’ Home

Mainly young girls in order to escape from the wrath of their parents and the villagers, flee to Vailankanni, and take refuge at the Refugees’ Home which is located near by the Home for the Aged at the southern side of the Main Church. It was started by Fr SL Gabriel. At present there are 15 girls at this home.38

Home for the Physically Challenged

Karunai Illam home for the physically challenged which was started by Fr G. Arul Irudayam, Parish Priest of Vailankanni in 1995 with 20 inmates children, is located at the northern side of the main church, at the distance of 1 km. Right now, 142 children who belong to different religion and caste are looked after at this home by five sisters.39

38 Interview with Sr Jude, Refugees Home, Vailankanni on 23rd November 2006.
39 Interview with Sr Victoria, Karunai Illam, Vailankanni on 25th November 2006.
Orphanages for Boys and Girls

Boys’ Orphanage Boarding was opened on 8th November 1993 in the Higher Secondary School Campus. Earlier it was functioning in Don Bosco Buildings at the northern side of the Main Church. Only limited number of students (142) irrespective of caste and creed have been admitted in the Boys orphanage boarding.40 Girl’s orphanage boarding is located at the northern side of the main church where in 260 students, irrespective of caste and creed, have been admitted.

Community Halls

There are six community halls, built by the Vailankanni church, for the benefit of the Paatha Yathra devotees who come to Vailankanni on foot, at the following places, Keelaiyur, Keevalur, Thirumanagudi, Puther and Vailankanni.41

Helping the Unemployed

Vailankanni Church shows keen interest in lifting up of the poor. An extension to the ‘Home for the Aged’ was put up where orphan girls are asked to undertake manufacture of coir products like foot rests. These doormats are used in the church lodges at Vailankanni. Under the Small Scale Industries Scheme of the Government of Tamil Nadu, training was given to 10th standard passed girls for 40 days at Vailankanni. Four trained girls from Vailankanni are producing cleaning powder, washing powder, scented phenyl and soap oil. These girls are paid for their work.42

40 Interview with Fr D. Ulaganathan, Boy’s Orphanage Boarding, Vailankanni on 27th November 2006.
42 Interview with Fr G. Arul Irudayam, Former Parish Priest, Vailankanni on 27th November 2006.
Helping the Poor and the Needy

Vailankanni Church has released an enormous sum of money in order to help the poor and needy persons like fire victims. The particulars of the charity expenses of the Vailankanni church are given in the following pages.

Educational Aid

People from Vailankanni as well as from other places, irrespective of caste and creed, approach the parish priest of Vailankanni and never return empty handed. Besides free distribution of books and note books for the poor students, the church is also helping them, by meeting their school and boarding expenses.\(^{43}\)

Marriage Aid

Marriage Aid is provided by the Church for the poor and deserving cases. The Church also freely distributes ‘Thali’ and saree for the marriage parties who come and meet the parish priest, with their marriage invitation.\(^{44}\)

Medical Aid

Medical aid is provided for the sick people who ask material help from the parish priest. The church workers especially the poor sweepers and others, with due permission from the parish priest are given free treatment in the church owned hospitals and dispensaries.\(^{45}\)

\(^{44}\) Interview with Vincent, Church Office, Vailankanni on 27\(^\text{th}\) November 2006.
\(^{45}\) Accounts Note Book, Church Office, Vailankanni, 2005.
Burial

The expenses to conduct funeral services of the poor are met by the church. Without giving heed to the repeated warnings given by the church administration and volunteers, for not to take bath in the sea since there are poisonous snakes one or two devotees go into the deep sea and kick their buckets. For those victims the church extends its helping hands and meets the expenses to conduct the burial services.46

Travel Allowance to the Poor and Needy

It is a common factor at Vailankanni that a few devotees, at times, loose their money and stand helpless. For such pilgrims the church comes forward to help them in getting the tickets to their respective places.47

Public Works

Bethsaida Pond is dug for the pilgrims to bathe and enjoy. A sum of Rs One Crore has been donated to the Railway for extending the railway line from Nagapattinam to Vailankanni and the work has been taken up by the Railway. About 100 shops are constructed for the welfare of the poor. And a scheme of providing houses for the 100 homeless employees is also taken up and protected drinking water is provided to the devotees of Vailankanni Arockia Matha by the church administration.48

Nirmal Home

Vailankanni Arockia Matha Church authorities, having in mind the noble and prime ministry of helping the poor and the needy, sent an invitation

46 Interview with Rajasekar, Church Office, Vailankanni on 23rd November 2006.
48 Interview with Fr IAF Selvaraj, Procurator, Vailankanni, on 2nd October 2006.
to Mother Teresa in Kolkata, kindly to come and start a branch of her institution in Vailankanni, where thousands of pilgrims gather from all over through out the year at the feet of Arockia Matha, for healing as well as thanksgiving with great faith in the deity. Accepting the invitation, Mother Teresa passed the order to start a branch in Vailankanni, with a group of four Missionaries of Charity Sisters, and it was inaugurated on 29th June 1988.

The number of the handicapped in Nirmal Home

a. Babies: 13  
b. Children: 42  
c. Youngsters: 18  
d. Old people: 20

The number of Mother Teresa Sisters to help them: 5

The main works of the sisters:

a. Visiting the sick, poor and needy in and around Vailankanni 
b. Free distribution of medicine to the poor 
c. Taking care of the deserted new born babies, and 
d. Nirmal Home has one Ambulance and a driver.  

Along with the flourishing pilgrimage tourism of Vailankanni, the church administration pays much attention on the social upliftment of the humankind. Most generously and willingly, the immense gathering of pilgrims contributes a lot to support the poor and needy. The pilgrim tourists by rendering the loving act of charity become one with the humanity. Thus, the renowned pilgrimage tourist center Valilankanni motivates the visitors towards unity, tolerance and goodwill. Since the motivation of the pilgrim tourists is predominantly to have God experience, they are prepare to face the inconveniences such as accommodation, food, general shopping and price

49 Interview with Sr Benita, Nirmal Home, Vailankanni on 25th November 2006.
raise. It is remarkable to note that sustainable flow of pilgrims in spite of challenges such as tsunami, unexpected climatical changes and hike in prices especially in oil price.

Table No. XI
Charity Expenses from 2000 to 2005

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Educational Aid</td>
<td>347010</td>
<td>900700</td>
<td>1100900</td>
<td>1512400</td>
<td>1710500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Aid</td>
<td>569282</td>
<td>732900</td>
<td>1098900</td>
<td>1297600</td>
<td>1500800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing aid</td>
<td>115500</td>
<td>277350</td>
<td>346700</td>
<td>678900</td>
<td>898900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Victims</td>
<td>59534</td>
<td>100600</td>
<td>45870</td>
<td>56000</td>
<td>77450</td>
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<tr>
<td>To the poor</td>
<td>1219618</td>
<td>857581</td>
<td>1578000</td>
<td>1478900</td>
<td>1890450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free meals</td>
<td>1365405</td>
<td>1957016</td>
<td>1789540</td>
<td>2367890</td>
<td>2867900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Places of pilgrimage tourist interest in Vailankanni

1. The majestic Arokia Matha Church
2. Our Lady’s Tank
3. Museum of offerings
4. Sea shore (beach)
5. The Adoration Chapel
6. The Nadu Thittu Church

Table No.XII
Tamil Nadu Tourism Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Details of the Project</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>To make the cement road on the way in which car procession takes place</td>
<td>Rs 15,00,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>To build concrete barriers along the both Sides of the road by which the car Procession takes place</td>
<td>Rs 3,00,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To make a cement road on the main road</td>
<td>Rs 10,00,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>To construct a recreational park at Vailankanni sea shore</td>
<td>Rs 15,00,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>To construct water falls in the beech</td>
<td>Rs 7,00,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In collaboration with the State government, the church administration is much interested in developing the seafront park to attract the millions of tourist pilgrims round the year from all over the globe. In addition, the state government has come forward to improve the road facility and the hospitality for the pilgrim tourists. The Tamil Nadu Tourism Department, Valaja road, Chennai has announced the development project which is approved by the Tamil Nadu Government. The following details would provide the proof for the immense interest of the State Tourism Department towards the growth the Vailankanni Pilgrimage Tourism.

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51 Interview with Julee, Chairman, Vailankanni, on 2nd September 2007.
52 Record number 18324/2005, Dated 3.10.2005, Tamil Nadu Tourism Department, Walajah Road, Chennai.