

KARNATAKA REGION CATHOLIC BISHOPS' COUNCIL

KRCBC SECRETARIATE:

Karnataka Regional Pastoral Centre

#58/6, 2nd Cross, Da Costa Layout, Wheeler Road Extension

St. Thomas Town Post, Bengaluru 560 084, Tel: 25496812

Mob: 98440-74883 E-mail – krcbc@hotmail.com

President: Most Rev. Dr. Bernard Moras Secretary: Msgr. S. Jayanathan

<p style="text-align: center;">A PASTORAL LETTER ISSUED BY THE KARNATAKA REGION CATHOLIC BISHOPS' COUNCIL (KRCBC) TO ALL THE PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS AND LAY FAITHFUL IN THE REGION</p>

Dear Rev. Fathers, Brothers, Sisters and the People of God,

First of all, I convey to all of you the greetings and good wishes of the Bishops of the Karnataka Region.

At the recently concluded Meeting of the Karnataka Region Catholic Bishops' Council (KRCBC), the Bishops deliberated on various matters that are essential for the growth of the church in our region, and now it is my joy to share with you some of the important concerns and reflections that marked our prayerful and fraternal deliberations.

1. The Encyclical: 'LAUDATO SI' of Pope Francis

As you are all aware our Holy Father Pope Francis has written an encyclical letter to the whole Church and to all people of goodwill calling for greater reverence for and sensitivity towards creation so that all of us together may care for the planet earth our common home. It is our responsibility to read this encyclical very carefully and see how best we can implement the proposals made by the Pope in our everyday life. In his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis notes the consequences of climate change including; the issue of water; loss of biodiversity; breakdown of society; global inequality and also expresses disappointment in the weak responses to these detrimental issues. His Holiness

summons all people, especially all Christians, to action. With simplicity and out of reverence for creation, Pope Francis affirms, “*Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interactions with it.*”

The Pope calls for integral ecology which shows that everything is connected and requires taking into account every aspect of the global crisis. There are intricate and delicate and almost invisible but real relationships taking place at the atomic and molecular level, between plants and animals, and among species in ecological networks and systems. Ecosystems interact in dispersing carbon dioxide, purifying water, controlling illnesses and epidemics, forming soil, and breaking down waste.

Therefore in analysing and finding remedies for environmental problems we must study “the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality.” We must “seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems.” This calls for an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature. The protection of the environment must become “an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.” Also “the health of a society’s institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life.” When the family, as well as wider local, national, and international communities are weakened, the result is injustice, violence, a loss of freedom, and a lack of respect for law – all of which have consequences for the environment. It is also required that the diversity of cultures is respected and preserved, because Globalization tends to destroy cultures and promote a monoculture. “There is a need to respect the rights of peoples and cultures, and to appreciate that the development of a social group presupposes an historical process which takes place within a cultural context and demands the constant and active involvement of local people from within their proper culture.”

Environmental exploitation and degradation not only exhaust the resources which provide local communities with their livelihood, but also undo the social structures which, for a long time, shaped cultural identity and their sense of the meaning of life and community. In various parts of the world indigenous communities are being pressured “to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture.”

Pope Francis also talks about the ecology of daily life “in our rooms, our homes, our workplaces and our neighbourhoods.” We attempt to shape our environment to express our identity, but “when it is disorderly, chaotic or saturated with noise and ugliness, such overstimulation makes it difficult to find ourselves integrated and happy.” He marvels at the ability of the poor to practice human ecology where “a wholesome social life can light up a seemingly undesirable environment” and “the limitations of the environment are compensated for in the interior of each person who feels held within a network of solidarity and belonging.” He recognizes that “The extreme poverty experienced in areas lacking harmony, open spaces or potential for integration, can lead to incidents of brutality and to exploitation by criminal organizations,” but “I wish to insist that love always proves more powerful” when people “weave bonds of belonging and togetherness which convert overcrowding into an experience of community in which the walls of the ego are torn down and the barriers of selfishness overcome.” The Pope acknowledges the importance of architectural design and urban planning, but these must serve the quality of people’s lives and take into consideration the views of those who live in the areas affected. Such planning must protect common areas and promote affordable housing and public transportation.

Quoting Pope Benedict who spoke of an “ecology of man,” which stresses the fact that human beings too have a nature that must be respected and should not be manipulate at will, the Pope notes that “thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation.”

Here he calls for “valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity” so that “we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment.” It is not a healthy attitude, he says, “to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it.”

Pope Francis stresses the need to work for the common good, which calls for respect for the human person as well as the overall welfare of society and the development of a variety of intermediate groups. It requires social peace, stability and security, “which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice.” He goes on to affirm that “where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.”

The Holy Father also speaks about justice to future generations. “The world is a gift we have freely received and must share with others.” This includes future generations. “The world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.” Quoting the Portuguese Bishops, he states that the environment “is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next.” Then he asks passionately: “What kind of a world do we want to leave to those who will come after us, to children who are now growing up?” and goes on to warn that

“the pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet’s capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world.”

Appealing to the consciences of all people of goodwill the Pope asks a fundamental and challenging question: “What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?”

The Holy Father calls for an integral ecology that sees the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, political, social, cultural, and ethical issues. Such an ecology requires the vision to think about comprehensive solutions to what is both an environmental and human crisis.

On behalf of the Bishops of Karnataka, I encourage all of you together and each of you individually to heed this passionate and urgent call of the Pope and work for collective and individual solutions to the problems of the environment so as to arrive at some concrete, feasible and effective practices that will make a definite difference in the way we live, relate, work and use the riches of creation that the Lord has gifted us so generously.

2. THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY

The Holy Father Pope Francis announced the extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy during the Lenten penitential service at St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, on Friday, 13th March 2015. This Jubilee will be celebrated from 8th December 2015, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception to 20th November 2016, the Feast of Christ the King. A special feature of this Holy Year is the fact that it will be celebrated not only in Rome, but also in all the other dioceses of the world. The Pope published the "*Misericordiae Vultus*" (MV), Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy to guide all of us to celebrate this special year more spiritually and meaningfully.

In his early discourses and, especially in this document, Pope Francis indicates the salient phases of the Jubilee. The opening coincides with the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council: "The Church feels a great need to keep this event alive. With the Council, the Church entered a new phase of her history. The Council Fathers strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk about God to men and women of their time in a more accessible way. The walls which too long had made the Church a kind of fortress

were torn down and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way” (MV No. 4).

Pope Francis resumes the teaching of St. John XXIII, who spoke of the “medicine of Mercy”, and of Paul VI who identified the spirituality of Vatican II with that of the Samaritan. The Bull of Indiction explains, furthermore, various salient aspects of the Jubilee: firstly, the motto, “*Merciful like the Father*”, then the meaning of pilgrimage and above all the need for forgiveness. The theme that is particularly close to the Pope’s heart is found in section

No. 15: the works of corporal and spiritual mercy are to be resumed in order to “reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God’s mercy”. A further indication is offered by Lent, with the sending out of the “Missionaries of Mercy” (No. 18),

The Pope wishes that this Jubilee of Mercy should be for all of us a true moment of encounter with the mercy of God and a living experience of the closeness of the Father, whose tenderness is almost tangible. The grace of the Jubilee will be a genuine experience of God’s mercy which comes to meet each person in the Face of the Father who welcomes and forgives, forgetting completely the sin committed, provided each one of us shows signs of the deep desire for true conversion. It is important that this moment be linked, first and foremost, to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist with a reflection on mercy, accompanying these celebrations with the profession of faith and with prayer for the Holy Father and for the intentions that he bears in his heart for the good of the Church and of the entire world.

Those who are sick and people who are elderly and alone, often confined to their homes are encouraged to live their sickness and suffering as an experience of closeness to the Lord who in the mystery of his Passion, death and Resurrection indicates the royal road which

gives meaning to pain and loneliness. Living with faith and joyful hope this moment of trial, receiving communion or attending Holy Mass and community prayer, even by the various means of communication, will be for them the means of obtaining the Jubilee grace of a personal encounter and experience with the God of tenderness, compassion, mercy, forgiveness and healing. In addition those who are in prison or in any kind of penal restrictions, on account of their weaknesses and crimes, it is the wish of the Pope that the Jubilee Year will be an opportunity for great amnesty, which is intended to include the many people who, despite deserving punishment, have become conscious of the injustice they worked and sincerely wish to re-enter society and make their honest contribution to it. The Holy Father prays: “May they all be touched in a tangible way by the mercy of the Father who wants to be close to those who have the greatest need of his forgiveness and may the gesture of directing their thought and prayer to the Father each time they cross the threshold of their cell signify for them their passage through the Holy Door, because the mercy of God is able to transform hearts, and is also able to transform bars into an experience of freedom”.

The Holy Father has asked the Church in this Jubilee Year to rediscover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. “The experience of mercy, indeed, becomes visible in the witness of concrete signs as Jesus himself taught us. The commitment to live by mercy is to obtain the grace of complete and exhaustive forgiveness by the power of the love of the Father who excludes no one”.

The Pope has specially made it possible for those who have indulged in the serious, cruel and inhuman crime of abortion to have access to absolution from any priest during the Jubilee Year by means of sincere repentance and promise of turning back from the path of destructive violence against the innocent and helpless unborn children. He points out that one of the serious problems of our time is clearly the changed relationship with respect to life. “A widespread and insensitive mentality has led to the loss of the proper personal and social sensitivity to welcome new life. The tragedy of abortion is experienced by some with

a superficial awareness, as if not realizing the extreme harm that such an act entails. Many others, on the other hand, although experiencing this moment as a defeat, believe that they have no other option. I think in particular of all the women who have resorted to abortion. I am well aware of the pressure that has led them to this decision. I know that it is an existential and moral ordeal. I have met so many women who bear in their heart the scar of this agonizing and painful decision. What has happened is profoundly unjust; yet only understanding the truth of it can enable one not to lose hope. The forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented, especially when that person approaches the Sacrament of Confession with a sincere heart in order to obtain reconciliation with the Father. For this reason too, I have decided, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, to concede to all priests for the Jubilee Year the discretion to absolve of the sin of abortion those who have procured it and who, with contrite heart, seek forgiveness for it. May priests fulfil this great task by expressing words of genuine welcome combined with a reflection that explains the gravity of the sin committed, besides indicating a path of authentic conversion by which to obtain the true and generous forgiveness of the Father who renews all with his presence.”

The Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization has published The Year of Mercy Calendar giving the Major Events that are going to take place during this year in Rome. It has also urged all the Bishops to organize similar programmes in their respective dioceses, if possible.

Together with all the Catholic Bishops of Karnataka, may I exhort all the priests, religious and lay faithful to celebrate the Jubilee Year of Mercy by renewing their faith in the God who is the fountain of unceasing love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness and healing. May the Jubilee Year be a time of special grace for all of us to renew our devotion to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to work for real reconciliation in our families, neighbourhoods, parishes, work places and dioceses.

3. PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

For many years now, a small group of priests and lay people has been inflicting deep wounds on the Body of Christ ostensibly in the name of liturgical language and local leadership. You are aware that consistent and sincere efforts have been made by the successive leaders of local churches to listen with empathy to the genuine concerns of these our brothers and sisters. Concrete and realistic steps have been taken to address their genuine grievances. Even the Holy See has intervened to give clear directives on this issue. But to our lasting regret nothing seems to really satisfy these brothers and sisters of ours so much so many have started wondering if there is some other hidden agenda beyond what is openly expressed as genuine and legitimate concerns. What is even more hurting is that they have repeatedly used sacred occasions and liturgical moments to disrupt, desecrate and dishonour the Church and her Pastors, apart from projecting a negative image of the Church and shaking the faith of the simple people. In addition, they have even co-opted individuals and agencies from outside the Catholic fold and even those from such groups have consistently opposed the Church's mission of evangelization, have been organizing public meetings, spreading false rumours, misguiding the innocent faithful and public. With the help of outsiders, they have been abusing, vilifying, defaming and condemning in intemperate language the Pastors of the Church and their pastoral administration. The apostle Paul wrote about the attitude a Christian should have: "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27). He is telling us that no matter what unexpected disruptions, frustrations, or difficulties come our way, we are to respond with a Christ-like attitude. Paul later writes, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 2:5). He also encourages us in Ephesians 5:1 to be "imitators of Christ as dearly beloved children." As children love to imitate what they see and repeat what they hear; we also are charged to imitate and model Christ's behaviour and to be clear reflections of the Lord (Mt. 5:16).

Jesus maintained a perfect attitude in every situation because He prayed about everything and worried about nothing. We, too, should

seek God's guidance about every aspect of our lives and allow Him to work out His perfect will without interference. Jesus' attitude was never to become defensive, discouraged, or depressed because His goal was to please the Father rather than to achieve His own agenda. In the midst of trials, He was patient; in the midst of suffering, He was hopeful; and in the midst of blessing, He was humble. Even in the midst of ridicule, abuse, and hostility, He "made no threats . . . and did not retaliate. Instead He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). With this attitude, we, the Bishops of the region, are doing our ministries for the welfare of all the faithful whose pastoral care has been entrusted to us.

However, this issues of defying the Church authorities and their directives, disrupting the liturgical services that cause desecration to the place of worship and involving the non-Christians in the church matters were discussed during the meeting of the Karnataka Bishops with the Regional Secretaries of the seventeen Regional Commissions and all of them, at the meeting, unanimously recommended that strong action should be taken to deal with those who wound the Body of Christ in the Local Church. Everyone is aware of the provisions of the Canon Law in this regard.

Since this small section of priests and lay people has personally been targeting me, the Archbishop, with such vilification and vituperation, I chose to remain silent, and neither did I intervene nor react during the discussion. However, as the Chairman of the KRCBC, I have to respect the unanimous recommendation of the Bishops and the Regional Secretaries who, without any exception, have affixed their signatures to the Resolution. By this letter I am informing all of you that steps are being taken to implement the unanimous Resolution of KRCBC by keeping before us the good of the Church as the sole aim. The resolution passed at this meeting has already been communicated to the Apostolic Nuncio and also to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples.

I want to assure you that heeding the call of the Holy Father Pope Francis, whatever measure may eventually be adopted will not only be in strict conformity with the Canon Law but even more in the spirit of the Gospel which demands that justice should be always tempered by mercy. This is particularly important as we are preparing ourselves for the Jubilee Year of Mercy. It is my hope and prayer that this Jubilee Year will be really a moment of radical conversion for all of us and in particular for our brothers and sisters who are inflicting such terrible wounds on the Body of Christ.

When Paul tells us that our “attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus,” he had summarized what such an attitude was: selflessness, humility, and service. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). In other words, the attitude a Christian should reflect is one that focuses on the needs and interests of others. Without question, that does not come naturally to us. When Christ came into the world, He established a whole new attitude to relationships with others. May we continue the mission of Jesus Christ with spiritual maturity and broad-mindedness, and work as one family for the spiritual and temporal welfare of everyone in the region by shunning our petty-mindedness, selfishness, animosity and resentment.

May the Holy Spirit guide us in our Christian living and witnessing, and help us become the instruments of peace, joy, love and unity. May Mary, our heavenly Mother, extend her maternal protection to us and intercede with God for all of us in Karnataka to make us the ambassadors of God’s mercy and compassion.

+Blessings

✠ **Bernard Moras**

Metropolitan Archbishop of Bangalore

and

President, KRCBC

21st November 2015

