

A STUDY ON ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE DIOCESE OF DHARMAPURI

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Abstract

In this paper we study, Pastoral Commissions have been established at the national, regional and diocesan levels in order to coordinate, inspire and implement various pastoral activities. Today, in the church the faith awakening activities are carried out through the various activities of the different commissions.

Introduction to the Origin of the Diocese:

In the biblical background the Church always regarded as the people of God. St. Paul calls the people of God as the Body of Christ in which diverse members are joined together and have their own functions for the common good. The most important designation is found in the Acts of Apostles in which the Church is described as the 'assembly of God' where each Christian lives in communion with one another [1]. For nurturing and constant growth of the people of God, the church has been given a special structure. It is called a hierarchical structure. The hierarchy of the Church is the orderly disposition of the ranks and orders of the clergy to provide for the spiritual care of all the faithful and for the administration of the Church which has spread all over the world. The Church is constituted basically as the people of God through baptism and only then it deals with the hierarchy and the laity. Its order can be presented in a pyramidal or a ladder structure in which the clergy and laity are layered, the Pope standing at the top, the bishops and the priests in the descending order and the laity (who are labeled as the people of God) at the bottom. In the circular model, the entire Church is circular where Christ is at the centre as the unique head of the people of God and the clergy who are constituted hierarchically among themselves by the power of orders and offices, are chosen from among the people of God in order to be their leaders and servants. The hierarchy of jurisdiction has for its purpose the governing of the faithful for spiritual ends. Its head is Supreme Pontiff (Pope) who exercises supreme jurisdiction over the Universal church. The diocese as a particular church is a portion of the universal church is entrusted with the bishop. With the collaboration of the parish priests to be governed, nourished by teaching and sanctified a sacred power over others and even in the distribution of this power, there are various orders. The parishes in the diocese and living cells within it and then individual members feel that they are members of the diocese and of the universal Church. The dioceses are therefore integral parts of the Universal Church which is rather a communion of different particular Church in which subsists its fullness[2].

According to the statistics of 2010, the population of the world is about 6.78 billion of whom 1.13 billion, that is about 16.7 percent are Catholics. Looking at the Indian scene, the country has a population of 1.2 billion of which only about 18 million, that is 1.55 percent are Catholics[3]. The Catholic Church in India alone has 164 dioceses, and 9750 parishes at present 2,795 dioceses[4].

It is used to distinguish it from other groups that also call themselves the Church. The Catechism of Pope Pius X, published in 1908, also used the term Roman to distinguish the Catholic Church from other communities who are not in free communion with the Church of Rome. Following the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, the Church continued to use the term Catholic to distinguish itself from the various denominations that split off. The Pope is the leader of the worldwide Catholic Church composed of the Latin Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches in full communion with the Universal Church of Rome. The current Pope is Francis, elected on 13, March 2013 by Papal Conclave. The Catholic Church is made up of 23 autonomous particular Churches each of which accepts the paramount of Pope on the matters of doctrine.

These Churches reflect different historical and cultural influences rather than differences in doctrine. It developed in southern Europe and North Africa. Then it spread throughout Europe before expanding to the rest of the world. The Latin Church is considered itself to be the oldest and largest branch of western Christianity. The membership of 22 self governing Eastern Catholic Churches is of 17.3 million as of 2010.5 They follow the tradition and spirituality of Eastern Christianity. The Roman Curia has a specific department called the Congregation for the Oriental Church to

maintain relations with them⁶. Although Christianity originated in Asia, its historic development and influence have been mostly in the west^[7]. The Catholics in India fall into two main categories; those who follow the Latin rite and the Syrian rite Catholics. They have in India prefectures, Dioceses and Arch dioceses all over the country, with a Cathedral in each. Individual countries, regions, or major cities are served by particular Churches known as dioceses or eparchies; each looked after by a Catholic bishop. Each diocese is united with one of the worldwide particular Churches such as the Latin Church or one of the Eastern Churches^[8].

According to Everyman's Encyclopedia the term 'Diocese' means a district under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction and care of a bishop. The word in its present ecclesiastical signification was not in common use till about the 9th century. Parish being the more usual term up to the time, for a longtime, the term was primarily used in the civil administration of the Roman Empire. Constantine [306 – 337 A.D], the great Roman Emperor divided his empire into 13 ecclesiastical and political divisions. The ecclesiastical district was brought under a patriarch, while the political district under a praetorian prefect. Later district dwindled to mean single province and finally merely the sphere of jurisdiction of any one bishop. In the Catholic Church, Dioceses are erected by the Pope in Consortium of Bishops⁹. During the later part of the 19th century the expansion of the church activities in India invited the attention of the Pope in Rome to organize the administration of the churches. Pope Leo XIII established the Indian Hierarchy in 1886. Since then the church in India has grown into a number of ecclesiastical provinces, each under an Archbishop who has one or more suffragan bishops within his jurisdiction [10].

In 1899, Pope Leo XIII created the diocese of Kumbakonam by the dismemberment from the Archdiocese of Pondicherry.¹¹ Thus the parishes in Salem region with about 45,000 Catholics were divided among the Diocese of Kumbakonam and Mysore for thirty years from 1899 to 1930^[12]. On 26th May 1930, the Diocese of Salem comprising the civil districts of Salem and Dharmapuri was erected by Pope Pius XI canonically [13]. It was created by merging 6 parishes from the jurisdiction of Pondicherry, three parishes from Kumbakonam and one parish from Mysore diocese in 1943. Two parishes in Mettur Taluk which were originally under the jurisdiction of Mysore Diocese were also added to the Diocese of Salem^[14].

Bishop. Rev. Dr. Joseph Antony Irudayaraj (Dharmapuri Diocese):

The history and the evangelization work of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Dharmapuri started almost in the year 1650. The first missionaries to spread the Word of God and to establish the Catholic Faith were the "Jesuits" from Mysore. Since in the year 1773 the Jesuits wended up their work, the same task was taken care by the congregation called "Paris Evangelists". Keeping Pondicherry as the center, till the year 1930, the Paris Evangelists carried their missionary work in Dharmapuri. In the year 1930, the Diocese of Salem was installed. For 67 years, the Diocese of Salem was brought up, groomed and guided under 3 Bishops. The Diocese of Dharmapuri, South India was erected on 24th January 1997. It is the 15th Catholic Diocese in Tamilnadu region, India, having been bifurcated from the Diocese of Salem.

The Most. Rev. Dr. Joseph Antony Irudayaraj, SDB, DD, was the first Bishop of the Diocese. He was ordained Bishop on the 24th April 1997 and was installed in the new Diocese on the 25th April 1997. After having served in the diocese for 15 years he has retired on 13th January 2013. The Second Bishop is the Most Rev. Dr. Lawrence Pius, transferred from the Archdiocese of Madras- Mylapore where he was the Auxiliary Bishop. He was installed as Bishop of the Diocese on 20th February 2012.

Structure and Administration of the Diocese of Dharmapuri

Canon law 369 states that a diocese is a portion of the people of God entrusted to a Bishop to be guided by him with the assistance of his clergy so that, loyal to its pastor and formed by him in to one community in the Holy spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, it constitutes one particular church [diocese] in which the one holy catholic and apostolic church of the Christ is truly present and active. Universal Church is a communion of different particular churches. The Pope who is the head of the college of Bishops maintains the unity of the Church Communion.

The Office of the Pope

For the nurturing and constant growth of the people of God, the Church has been given a special structure. It is called a hierarchical structure. First in the hierarchy of the Church comes the Pope. What most obviously distinguished the Catholic Church from other Christian bodies is the line between its members and the Pope. The catechism of the Catholic Church, quoting the second Vatican council's document 'Lumen Centrism', states: "The Pope is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful,

The Pope is the head of the Universal Catholic Church. He is the Bishop of Rome, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the successor of St. Peter, Prince of the apostles and the Supreme Pontiff who has the primacy of jurisdiction over the universal church and the particular church. The Catholic Church is the largest organization in the world. Its hierarchy is the orderly disposition of the ranks and orders of the clergy to provide spiritual care for all the members of the Universal Church. Lord Macaulay in his famous essay on the Popes, said 175 years ago that there was no instrument of human policy so worthy of study as the church of Rome. The churches are controlled throughout the entire world through the hierarchy. Its head is the Supreme Pontiff [Pope] who by divine law exercises supreme jurisdiction over the churches from the moment of his acceptance of the Papacy. The Bishops under him belong to this hierarchy by divine law whereas the various other officials belong to it by ecclesiastical institution [28].

He is the successor of St. Peter. The famous dictum "Where Peter is, there the church is" is not utopia, but the truth is inspired by divine light. He is often referred to as the Apostle to the Gentiles. No other man played so large a role in the propagation of Christianity as that of Peter [29]. The Pope resides in Vatican city and independent state within the city of Rome, setup by the 1929 Lateran Accord between the Holy See and Italy. Ambassadors are accredited to the Pope. According to Lateran Accord signed on Feb-11, 1929, the government of Italy agreed to the creation of a separate State to be called the Vatican city, which was to be under the complete ownership and sovereign jurisdiction of the Pope. The body of officials that assist the Pope in governance of the Church as a whole is known as the Roman Curia. The term Holy See is generally used only of Pope and Curia. The title of Pope derived from a word, known in Greek as far back as Homer's odyssey 6:57, for "Father is the most common title. The Pope is the sovereign head of Vatican city, which stretches over an area of 4,40,000 square metres. As an absolute sovereign, he holds in his hands the legislative, Judicial and administrative powers[30]. Apart from these powers, as a spiritual head, he controls the entire catholic churches in the world. Thus the Dharmapuri diocese and the churches under its jurisdiction are functioning as per his directions given through his representatives. For the practical governing of the church and the administration of its routine affairs, the Pope has a number of congregations, tribunals and offices in Vatican city and in Rome. Most of them have a Cardinal in charge. The highest ranking congregation is the Holy office. It is charged with matters of faith and morals. The Consistory prepares the appointment of Bishops and the establishment of diocese[31]. Cardinals are princes of the Church appointed by the Pope. He generally chooses bishops who head departments for the Roman Curia. Cardinals advise the Pope and those Cardinals under the age of 80 at the death of a Pope elect his successor. The Cardinals form a group of corporation which is called a college. This is the senate of the church. Various nations of the catholic world have representation in this senate[32].

Bishops and Archbishops

As the diocese forms a greater part of hierarchy of Catholic Church, it is worthwhile to study further about its administration with special reference to the Universal Church. Bishop is the term that in the early apostolic church was closely allied with the word elder.³³ In apostolic succession a diocese is presided over by a Bishop who is its visible principle and foundation of unity, having proper, ordinary and immediate power[34]. The Archbishops are metropolitan Prelates in charge of an ecclesiastical province consisting of several dioceses called suffragans. In his own arch-diocese he has the full powers of a Bishop, his jurisdiction over his suffragans is limited and defined by canon law[35]. Since 1886, the Church in India has grown into a number of ecclesiastical provinces, each under an Archbishop who has one or more suffragan Bishops within his Jurisdiction. At present there are three Archdioceses and sixteen dioceses in Tamilnadu. Dharmapuri is one among the dioceses of Tamilnadu. Qualification of Bishop Canon law 378 enumerates the qualifications necessary for a candidate to become a Bishop of the diocese. It is required that he must be outstanding for his solid faith, good morals, zeal for souls, wisdom, prudence and human virtues endowed with the other talents which make him fit to fulfill the office. He should possess a good deal of experience as the ordained priest for atleast five years. He should possess a doctorate in sacred scriptures[36]. A Bishop promoted to a diocese cannot exercise the office entrusted to him unless he has first taken canonical possession of the diocese.

Historical Archives

There are also historical archives in the diocese in which the documents having historical values are preserved. The records and the diaries of the missionaries preserved here are consulted for research purpose. The diocese of Dharmapuri has well maintained general and secret historical archives. A historical archive has not yet been setup in the diocese.

Presbyterian Council

The Presbyterian council plays a vital role in the administration of the diocese. The priests of 58 parishes of the diocese of Dharmapuri constitute one priesthood with their Bishop and strive to lend their consistent effort, support

and co-operation to the pastoral work of the whole diocese. They constitute the Bishop's senate or council such as cathedral chapter, the board of consulters or other committees established according to the circumstances or nature of various localities.

Diocesan Financial Council

The canon Laws 492 to 494 deal with the structure of the financial administration. In each diocese a financial council is established by the Bishop over which he himself or his delegates preside. Its members are appointed by the Bishop. Their term of office is five years. Each year the financial council prepares a budget of income and expenditure foreseen for the governance of the entire diocese. The financial council includes the vicar general, the chancellor, and expert in canon law, three lay people who are expert in accounts and civil law and the representatives of the diocesan pastoral council and priests senate[52].

The constitution of a finance council in every diocese is now obligatory. Apart from drafting the annual budget, the finance council undertakes internal audits. It includes evaluating the already audited annual statements of accounts of the diocese and all the diocesan institutions such as parishes, schools, home for children, health and social service centres etc., and submit the observation to the diocesan Bishop. This internal auditing done by the finance council promotes better economy efficiency and above all accountability. In order to look after financial administration of the diocese, a financial administrator can be appointed by the Bishop after consulting the college of consulters and the diocesan financial council. The diocesan financial council provides a model for parish financial council operating in different parishes in Dharmapuri Diocese.

Diocesan Pastoral Council

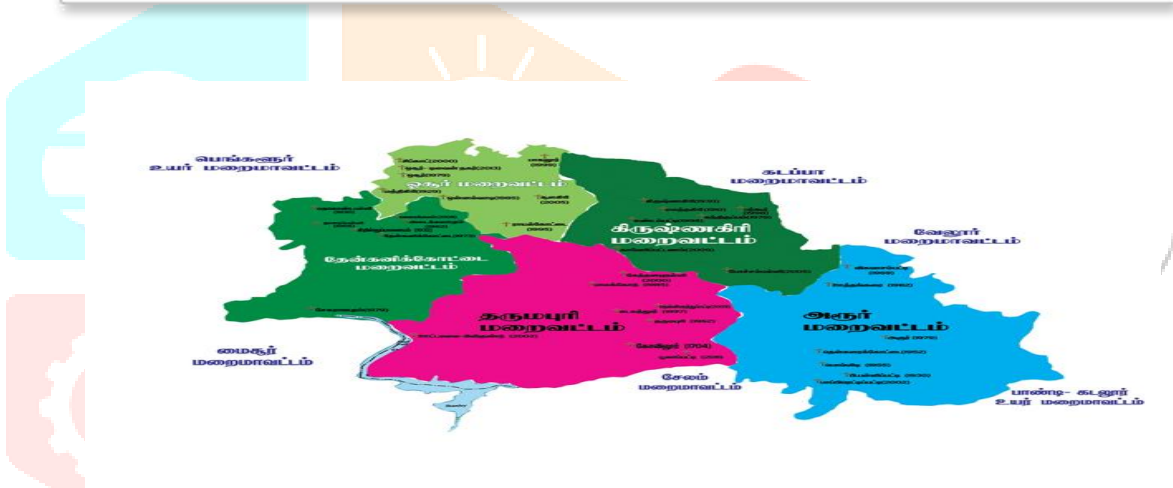
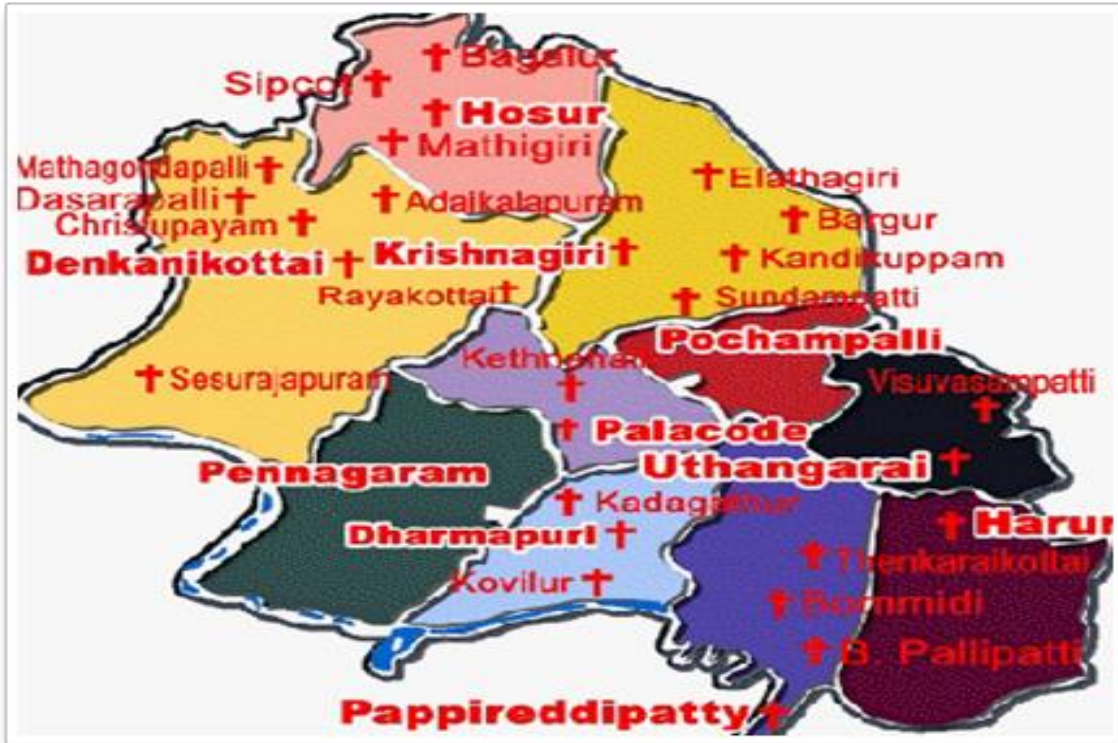
It consists of Christian faithful who are in full communion with the Catholic Church, clerics and the members of institutes of consecrated life. It is meant to be representative of the whole people of God of the particular Church [53]. The Pastoral Council is convened at least once a year. The members of the Parish Pastoral Council make representation to the Diocesan Pastoral Council [54]. The Pastoral Council is a body of consultation designed to enlighten the Bishop, so that his decisions on the diocesan Pastoral activity may always be made in the light of opinions and points of view given by the Pastoral Council enable the Bishop to make effective plans for his pastoral works in the Diocese. It is the great concern of the pastoral council to advise the bishop in the areas of his governance especially teaching, sanctifying and general administration[55].

Social Life in Parish and Its Civil Functions

Though church-going is essentially a religious obligation, it has social side too. Everyone takes care to attend church service in his or her best clothes. There is a certain amount of social prestige attached to membership in church councils, meant for general management of the affairs of the church. Among Syrians, membership in the Church Council was a coveted honour which generally was by heredity. Every parish church has a resident priest and a sexton, and the bigger parishes have clerks and assistant priests in addition. One of the most important duties of the church staff is the maintenance of the parish register in which dates of baptism, marriage and death or every parishioner are kept. The most important civic function has been in promoting the cause of education.⁵⁸ Children are taught the fundamentals of their religion and daily prayer in regular Sunday classes usually held after the service, for better attendance. For the efficient instruction of children it is necessary that they should know the art of reading and writing, and some parish churches run primary schools for this purpose.

Parishes and Vicariates

The Dharmapuri diocese is divided in to ecclesiastical parts known as parishes. Parish is the basic unit of the church administration. At present there are 58 parishes in diocese. In order to foster pastoral care, several neighboring parishes are joined together into special groups called vicariates. Vicariate forane is in charge of vicariate. There are five vicariates in Dharmapuri Diocese [57].



Commissions & Associations (Family):

Commission for Family is concerned about building up the Christian Families based on Gospel values. Concentrating on the formation of the whole family will lead towards the formation of better society.

In God’s plan, “Family has been established as an intimate communion of life and love” (FC 11). The essence and the role of the family are in the final analysis specified by love. It enables people to grow in personal and social maturity. Family values like filial respect, love and care for the aged and the sick, love of children and harmony are held in high esteem. The Christian family, like the church as a whole, should be a place where the truth of the Gospel is the rule of life.

Christian Family is hailed as the “Domestic Church and a Prayer Centre” (AA 11, LG 11) where ‘Faith’ germinates and settles at the deepest being of ever member from his/her birth. The fear of God taught by the parents gives the child the wisdom of love, faith, hope and all other Christian virtues. “While learning the first words, the children learn also the praise of God; while learning the first acts of love, the children learn also to open themselves to others” (CL 62). Christian Family, as “one of the Church’s most effective agents of evangelization” (EA 46), is called to witness to the Gospel values in difficult times and circumstances.

Conclusion

In this paper we studied, Pastoral Commissions have been established at the national, regional and diocesan levels in order to coordinate, inspire and implement various pastoral activities. Today, in the church the faith awakening activities are carried out through the various activities of the different commissions.

Reference:

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14. Ibid., p.760.
15. The newly created diocese had 17, 600 Christians, 26 schools, 26 priests and 45 sisters; Golden Jubilee Souvenir of Salem Diocese, 1980.
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17. News letter, Diocese of Salem. No.281, May, 1998.
18. When he took over the post of Bishop, there were 38,480 Christians, 50 Priests, 50 Churches, 28 Parishes, 110 sisters and 58 schools in Salem Diocese, Platinum Jubilee Souvenir of Salem Diocese; 2005.
19. News Letter, Diocese of Salem, No.294, June 1998.
20. Interview with Fr. Savari, Maravaneri, Salem.20 August, 2011.
21. Bishop Michael Duraisamy started a Dialogue and Ecumenism Ministry for promoting religious harmony in Salem District.
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37. The term Insignia means symbols of rank or authority
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40. The Diocesan Bishop rules the particular Church entrusted to him with Legislative, Executive and Judicial Powers in accord with norms of law. Vidyajyoti, Journal of Theological Reflection, Vol.58, No.4, p.44.
41. Ibid., Vol.58 No.2, p.98.
42. The Code of Canon law, p.381.

49. The Directory of the Bishops suggests that the decision to hold Synod may be arrived at the end of an extensive pastoral visit of the entire diocese. After his visit he can plan out pastoral programme with the policies of legislative nature. S.Sabastian op.cit., p.87.
50. The Diocesan Bishop is the sole Legislator at a Diocesan Synod while the remaining members of the synod possess only a consultative vote. Code of Canon Law, p. 390.
51. News Letter of Diocese of Salem, September, 2013, p.297.
52. Nullity means Legal Action that asks for a marriage to be declared null and void.
53. Interview with Fr.Alagu Selvan, Judicial Vicar, Maravaneri, Salem dt. 8th September, 2013.
54. M.Soundaraj, Manual of Archival Systems and The world of Archives, p.5.
55. S. Sebastian, op.cit., p.187.
56. Upon receiving the appointment, the members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council take the oath of honesty and confidentiality.
57. 54 Interview with K.V. Paulos, Secretary, Salem Diocese Pastoral Council, dt. 4 May 2011.
58. News Letter, Diocese of Salem, No.291, March 1999.
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