

Presbyteral Meeting of the Archdiocese was held on Monday & Tuesday, 19th and 20th March 2012. His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, the Archbishop of Colombo presided at the meeting with the Auxiliary Bishops, Bishop Marius Peiris, Bishop Emmanuel Fernando and Bishop Maxwell Silva.

ADDRESS BY HIS EMINENCE MALCOLM CARDINAL RANJITH -

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My Lord Bishops and my dear Fathers,

First of all I wish to make use of this opportunity to thank you very sincerely for your enthusiastic participation at this Presbyteral gathering. These moments of fraternal conviviality help us not only to dream together for the well being of our faithful but also to discern, plan and evaluate the work we do at regular intervals, meet as brothers of one presbyteral family and reach out to one another in fraternal communion and in a spirit of sharing.

Today's meeting becomes important for several reasons. First of all, at this meeting we will finalize a new programme of pastoral outreach which would be strongly anchored on a further decentralization of responsibilities allowing more room for local level planning and programming and sharing of resources be they the spiritual or material like personnel and finances.

DECENTRALISATION

The plans which were agreed upon at the last Presbyteral meeting, in October 2011, have now been sharpened, rendered more practical and certain first options of structural adjustments have been identified. These will be presented in detail to you by Rev. Fr. Leo Perera in his capacity as the Chairman of the Structural Adjustments Committee. These adjustments will come into effect with the new transfers to be announced on Saturday the 21st April after the next batch of priests for the Archdiocese are ordained.

In the meantime, the Archdiocese has been provided with the services of our new auxiliary Bishops ordained on the 11th February 2012, which is the feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes. Once again, I warmly welcome them into our midst. Your Lordships, we wish you God's abundant blessings for a joyful and fulfilling mission among us.

The decentralization plans which we will proceed to launch with the coming transfers will generally include the creation of the New Region of the East (the Missionary Region) which consists of all the existing parishes in the inner area plus the new mission parish of Kethhena, Kalutara. There will be three deaneries in this area named Gurubewila, Gampaha and Burullapitiya. His Lordship Bishop Maxwell Silva will oversee this area with Very Rev. Fr. Cyril Gamini Fernando assisting him as the EV. The EV will be provided with the services of a priest who will take closer care of the estate Tamil speaking Catholics especially in the Horana, Matugama, Avissawella and Waga area. The three Deans along with the EV and the two full timers who will handle important apostolates like Catechetics, education, formation to faith and Biblical and Liturgical as well as the formation of

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children and youth and vocations, will constitute along with the overseeing Bishop, the Regional Council of Colombo East. This Council will meet once a month under the chairmanship of the Bishop and plan their programmes and with the approval of the Archdiocesan College of Consultors work them out. As much space for autonomous planning as possible will be allowed to them.

The same will happen in the two regions of Negombo and Ja-Ela which will be overseen by His Lordship Bishop Emmanuel Fernando and the two Episcopal Vicars who will help him in Negombo and Ja-Ela. The Negombo region will consist of the following deaneries: Katana minus the Badalgama Parish, Negombo and Bolawalana [27 parishes] and the Ja-Ela region the deaneries of Tudella, Kandana, Wattala and Ragama [35 parishes]. Each of these regions will have a regional council which is composed of the Bishop in charge, the EV, the Deans and the full timers appointed for the apostolates. The balance area of the diocese which consists of the deaneries of Colombo North, Centre and South, Kotte, Moratuwa and Kalutara, minus Horana and Matugama [43 parishes] will be under the care of the Archbishop and an EV. It will have its own regional council which will consist of the Archbishop, the EV, the Deans and the two full timers. Fr. Leo will explain the detailed programme to you in his own presentation. I would expect the regional council to present new plans and projects for the better pastoral care of the people, for their further strengthening in the faith and for consolidation as well as expansion into new areas and to start new initiatives that would help realize the future vision and mission of the Archdiocese. I call upon all the fathers to cooperate in this common effort and to place themselves in the service of the Archdiocese in any task assigned to them. There are no A grade parishes in this programme. In fact the mission parishes will be considered A grade. The frequent consultations of the fathers at the regional level in order to discern new initiatives and to work out ambitious and forward looking programmes for a more intense pastoral presence at the grass roots will be a very important option that the regions will have to take. The work of the regional coordinators would also be very important in this effort.

WHY DECENTRALIZE

Dear Fathers, with this new thrust perhaps the work load may not decrease for us. Yet in the face of nagging pastoral problems like, a poor sense of awareness of the faith among many of our faithful, increasing indifference and the threats of secularist ideology in the world, fast changing value systems, onslaught of the fundamentalist sects and our own inadequacies and lack of fervour, there is an increasing sense of loss and drift among our people. And so we need to intensify our efforts and reach out to individual Catholics in the true spirit of Christ, the Good Shepherd who out of love for the flock laid down His life for them.

THE SHEPHERD'S ROLE OF THE PRIEST

Indeed, every single Catholic given to our care needs to meet in us the Good Shepherd, loving, caring and inspiring holiness. All of us, however inadequate and fragile we may be, are the means through which the Lord would seek to lead His flock to the greener pastures. We become signposts to indicate the way. After all He chose us, as Jer. 3:16 pointed out, to be shepherds after His own heart. Besides, God did assure the community that He will set shepherds over it and care for His people and that they would never need to fear nor be dismayed [cfr. Jer. 23:4]. That is an assurance

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that He continues to keep even to our own times. And we know how much He loved His flock deigning to become the Good Shepherd Himself – “I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me” [Jn. 10:14]. “I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep” [Jn.10: 11]. Pastores Dabo Vobis, the post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on priestly formation calls Jesus’ whole life as a “continual manifestation of His pastoral charity, or rather a daily enactment of it” [PDV 22]. Infact Jesus gives Himself to the community, the Church, in an act of spousal self donation. He is the eternal Spouse of the Church. Being Shepherd means to be so committed to the flock that one enters into a spousal relationship with the flock. The priest too in imitation of Christ ought to love the Church, the community to which he is sent. States Pastores Dabo Vobis “therefore the priests’ life ought to radiate this spousal character which demands that he be a witness to Christ’s spousal love and thus be capable of loving people with a heart which is new, generous and pure, with genuine self-detachment, with full, constant and faithful dedication and at the same time with a kind of “divine jealousy” [cf. 2 Cor. 11:2], and even with a kind of maternal tenderness, capable of bearing “the pangs of birth” until “Christ be formed” in the faithful [cf. Gal. 4:19]. Thus the priest, we could say, becomes a shepherd to the extent that he gives himself totally to the Church or the community to which he is sent.

LOVING OUR COMMUNITIES

Indeed a priest is a shepherd only in relation to a community to which he is espoused in the imitation of Christ the Good Shepherd. It is ontological so much so that without that relationship he ceases to be a shepherd. In an address to priests the late Pope, Blessed John Paul II stated “the priest who welcomes the call to ministry, is in a position to make this a loving choice, as a result of which the Church and souls become his first interest, and with this concrete spirituality he becomes capable of loving the Universal Church and that part of it entrusted to him with a deep love of a husband for his wife” [4th Nov. 1980 – to priests taking part in an assembly organized by the Italian Episcopal Conference]. And the beauty of that shepherdly love or pastoral charity lies in the fact that, in the image of Jesus, the priest gives his capacity to love, to all those to whom he is sent especially to the weak, the sinful, the stubborn, the poor and the unloved ones, those sick or distraught and those who have lost all hope. Jesus infact gave them not only His time and attention but also His capacity to love. He showed compassion to the sinners, cried with those who cried, fed the hungry, healed the sick, resurrected the dead, corrected and rebuked with love and finally died for them. The Gospel of Mark shows how much Jesus and the apostles were dedicated to the crowds and attentive to their needs that they couldn’t even have their meals [cfr. Mc 3:20]. Such was His pastoral charity or shall we say that His heart was so large that He loved them all – even those who nailed Him to that terrible cross on Calvary.

It is this same pastoral charity, my dear fathers, that is at the base of our commitment to celibacy, poverty and obedience and which accords us the fullest freedom to be completely dedicated to our flock. Our commitment to celibacy allows us to love all those to whom we are sent in the image of Christ. For, as Pastores Dabo Vobis states, the community to which we are sent “wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her head and spouse loved” [PDV 29], the Church. It further specifies – “priestly celibacy, then, is a gift of self in and with Christ to His Church and expresses the priest’s service to the Church in and with the Lord” [ibid]. The same holds true of poverty and obedience too – for these bring out the best, that sense of total

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dedication to the flock which becomes the most tangible expression of that self emptying in order to be totally committed to the Church and to the community to which one is sent.

KINDNESS AND GENTLENESS

Pastoral charity also demands from us qualities that emulate the Lord who is “meek and humble of heart” [Mt. 11: 29]. St. Paul outlines what is required of an elder when he states in his 1st letter to Timothy, that an elder should be “responsible, judicious, of good manners, hospitable and skillful in teaching. . . . not addicted to wine or quarrelsome, but gentle and peaceful and not a lover of money [1 Tim. 3:2-3]. He also admonishes Timothy to be a model to the believers in the way he speaks and acts, in his love, his faith and purity of life [cfr. 1 Tim. 12] All of this needs to be confirmed in the priests’ daily celebration of the Eucharist. States Pastores Dabo Vobis “ This pastoral charity flows mainly from the Eucharistic sacrifice which is thus the centre or root of the whole priestly life. The priestly soul strives thereby to apply to itself the action which takes place on the altar of sacrifice” [PDV 23]. The Eucharist is thus the Sacramental fountain or source as well as the fullest realization of pastoral charity. In it the priest, in imitation of Christ, the High Priest, offers his own life and its many sacrifices and joys as an act of salvific self donation for the people and draws inspiration and strength for his continued faithfulness to the mission – that of loving the community to which he is sent without counting the cost. Thus my dear fathers, the more devoutly you celebrate the Eucharist the more faithful and committed you would be towards your people. If you celebrate that Eucharist each day lovingly, you will understand how much and how intensely you should love the people you are sent to. If anyone of us consider the people a burden rather than a blessing and prefer to stay away from them, prefer their televisions or computers more than the flock, at times are at loggerheads with them or chase them away disdainfully. Such attitudes are not compatible with our priestly and shepherdly office. It is tragic if a priest has to invite the Police or law enforcement authorities to restore peace between him and the people in a given parish. Use of harsh and demeaning language would only reduce the very dignity of our priestly office. A true Shepherd, as it was in the case of Christ, is one who does not run away when the wolf comes but is even ready to lay down his life in order to protect the sheep.

All of this is relevant to us dear fathers as we seek to begin a new regionalization project in order to achieve a greater sense of shepherding of our people. Whatever those plans are, unless we do not effect a more determined imitation of Christ our supreme Shepherd, all of this will just be plans limited to paper and perhaps a lot of noise only. I therefore appeal to you to imitate Jesus, our true Shepherd and Lord, and to assume an attitude of loving care and concern for the salvation of your people, every single one of them, without exception, especially those who are wounded, sick or lost. They are your first concern.

PRAYER AND OUR MISSION

Let us also accompany this effort with prayer for we know that without the Lord’s participation in this project nothing would ever happen. The Psalmist said so: “Unless the Lord builds the house, in vain do its builders labour. Unless the Lord guards the city in vain does the guard stay awake”(Ps. 127:1). Let us organize from now on special prayers, holy hours, Novenas and benedictions of the Blessed Sacrament as well as Rosaries for this purpose. Let us also call upon the religious and the

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contemplative communities to do this. And above all, let us seek God's merciful blessings on our programmes, visions and dreams for the future by engaging ourselves in more intense personal and group prayers for we know that the success of our mission would not depend so much on what we do as much as what the Lord would achieve in and through us. For, when we pray at the altar or in our own rooms we unite ourselves more intimately to Him. How could we forget those words of St. John Mary Vianney the Cure of Ars which stated: "Prayer is nothing else than union with God. When our heart is pure and united to God, we feel within ourselves a joy, a sweetness that inebriates a light that dazzles us. In this intimate union God and the soul are like two pieces of wax melted together; they cannot be separated. This union of God with his little creature is a most beautiful thing. It is happiness that we cannot understand" (The little Catechism of the Cure of Ars, Tan Books & Publishers. Inc., Rockford, Illinois 1955 p 29). Yes, unless we are intimately linked to the Lord nothing would ever be possible, but linked to him nothing would ever remain unachievable. Prayer will help us to open ourselves to the powerful action of God like electricity which passes down the line when it is connected to the Grid. Prayer enlarges our hearts as St. John Mary Vianney stated: "My children, your heart is poor and narrow; but prayer enlarges it and renders it capable of loving God"(ibid p. 29). So dear Fathers, let us fervently pray so that God may bless our dreams and plans and achieve glory in us for himself.

In the implementation of the plans for the greater regionalization of pastoral care in the Archdiocese, I have had to face a severe shortage of priests. This is compounded by the fact that we are establishing 8 full time coordinators for the regions, new apostolates like the lay missionaries, a priest appointed for the pastoral care of the Tamil estate communities in the eastern region, new parishes and quasi parishes, and a consistent number of priests being ear-marked for overseas studies. And so I have been forced to reduce the numbers of priests allocated to some Institutions, assign additional tasks to others, and appoint some others to tasks that look difficult. I have also been forced to recall some others to whom special freedoms had been given. I appeal to you to accept with a spirit of generosity these appointments and to cooperate with me fully in this matter. I would also request you to give your fullest attention to the tasks entrusted to you and to perform well. As St. Paul stated: "God loves a cheerful giver" (2Cor. 9:7). In this matter it is good to remember the parable of the talents where those servants of the Lord who worked hard received more talents while those who were lazy even what was given to them was taken away (cf. Lc. 19). Life is what he gave us and then having responded to his call on our ordination day we solemnly promised to give it back to him - all of it – and unconditionally – and so my dear brothers in the priesthood let us keep that promise zealously – giving back every minute of our time, energy and labour to him. After all what better consolation would we have than to hear those beautiful words from him at the conclusion of our life's journey – "Well done, my good and faithful servant –"(Lk 19:17).

BISHOPS TASKS

Now let me share some practical decisions with you. The first is concerning the division of tasks among the bishops. His Lordship Bishop Marius Peiris is indisposed. And so he will spend a time of recuperation and partly help me when he can with some writing, including the publications of the Archdiocesan bulletin – Koinonia and attending to some of my correspondence. Their Lordships Bishops Emmanuel Fernando and Maxwell Silva will oversee the Negombo and Ja-ela regions as

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well as the Eastern Region, hold the regional Council meetings, plan and carry out different programmes for the betterment of their regions, attend to the confirmations in their regions (for the current year they will follow the plans arranged up to now) and guide the meetings of the Archdiocesan Commissions. They will attend the parish jubilees or shrine feasts sharing the ceremonies with the Archbishop and any other events for which they are invited. They will be based in Colombo and will also attend to receiving priests and lay people on Mondays and Fridays and marriage dispensations or requests for special permissions coming from the people and will assist the Archbishop on matters of general administration. They will also attend the meetings of the COC, COP, the Finance Committee and all Presbyteral and other meetings.

The Archbishop will oversee the Colombo West and South Region, conduct confirmation services in the region and elsewhere along with the Auxiliaries, especially where there is a large number of confirmandi, receive priests and people on Mondays and Fridays, organize and carry out parish visitations, attend jubilees and all diocesan functions, attend at least one meeting a year of the Archdiocesan Commissions, attend to all transfers of priests, attend and preside over the meetings of the Presbyterium, the COP, the COC and the Finance and Estate Administration Committee, attend to all matters of priestly formation and welfare as well as the formation of seminarians, care of the sick and elderly priests, organizing the spiritual care of priests, overseeing special programmes, financial and asset management, contacts with the public authorities, contacts with Rome and all fund raising here and abroad, all permissions for overseas travel by priests and any other responsibilities foreseen by Canon Law.

His Lordship Bishop Emmanuel Fernando will organize and carry out all visitations of the contemplative religious communities in the Archdiocese, and generally attend to the various matters brought to the notice of the diocese by the religious. He will also preside over the meetings of the Archdiocesan Commission for the Religious.

The Episcopal Vicars will continue to function in the same way they had been doing upto now working closely with the Bishops in implementing the different programmes of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Plan. Very Rev. Fr. J D Anthony and the Archdiocesan Commission for Formation will assist me in all matters concerning Seminaries and Seminarians, the formation of priests and their ongoing education.

LAY MISSION INSTITUTE

The Archdiocese, in order to enhance the participation of the laity in its mission has decided to establish the Lay Missionaries Institute. It will call for volunteers and after having trained those selected, give them the mission cross at a solemn ceremony to be held at the Cathedral and send them in groups to work in far flung outstations, especially in the missionary region. The training centre for this project will be manned by a competent priest director and will be situated at the premises of the former Holy Family Convent at Pamunugama. They will work in the above mentioned group of parishes Catechizing the people, bringing back the lost ones and helping the parish priests in reaching out to the Catholics cut off by distances. Periodic evaluations of their work will be carried out. They will be chosen from those who would apply and would consecrate themselves to live a life of chastity, poverty and obedience as well as an intense prayer life and

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service to the remotest communities and will take temporary promises or permanent promises. They will basically remain lay. Soon an advertisement over the Catholic papers would be published calling for applications. Kindly direct any persons of good standing and love for the Church who would be willing to take up this voluntary service, to the Director of the project who will be named with the new transfers.

Dear Rev. Fathers, as you know the Holy See has approved and decreed that the New Translation of the Roman Missal in English is to be used for the celebration of the Eucharist. Actually it became operative since the 1st Sunday in Advent last year. This Missal is being widely used by now. And so we too ought to use this Missal in all our parishes and institutions. The new Missals are now available in our book shops and the Archdiocesan Library. The small booklet that contains only the Order of the Mass has been printed and sold by the Catholic Press for Rs. 10/- a copy. This is to be used by the people. I therefore urge you, especially those celebrating the Mass in English, to shift to the use of the new Missal and the Ordo Missae as soon as possible. Kindly do so by the 1st Sunday of Easter the latest. Kindly train your faithful to answer the prayers correctly and devoutly. Do also inform the convents and religious houses in your parish that they too should now celebrate the Mass in English only as decreed in the new English Roman Missal. The old translation of the Mass is not to be used anymore.

HOLY COMMUNION

May I also remind you once again that in all Churches and Chapels in the Archdiocese Holy Communion is to be administered only on the tongue and kneeling. This should be implemented as normal use even at Holy Mass celebrated with the participation of a big crowd outdoors. On such occasions at least the youth and the children as well as the “youthful” should be called upon to kneel and receive the Lord. This is the most appropriate way of expressing our profoundest belief in the continuous and personal presence of the Lord in the most Sacred Host as we acclaim “down in adoration falling, lo! the Sacred Host we hail”. And in all our Churches, as an expression of that faith our people should be called upon to receive the Holy Communion, kneeling. And so kindly take steps to fix the altar rails and a cushion line fixed to the ground before the railing so that all could kneel and receive easily. It is also good for us to explain to our people about the teaching of the Church on the Most Holy Eucharist as found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church Nos. 1373-1381.

VESTMENTS AT MASS

With regard to the same matter, I would also like to insist with you on the culture of priestly vestments at Holy Mass. In a sermon Pope Benedict gave at the Chrism Mass held at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome on 5th April 2007, he explained this need in relation to what happens at Baptism where we put on Christ. St. Paul said so: “for as many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ” [Gal. 3:27]. The Pope continued: “This is what is fulfilled in Baptism; we put on Christ, He gives us His garments and these are not something external. It means that we enter into an existential communion with Him, that His being and our being merge, penetrate one another” [Priests of Jesus Christ, Family Publications, Oxford 2009 p.31]. The challenge to let Christ live in us is indicated by this putting on of Christ – “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” [Gal.

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2:20]. The Priest is one who is called upon to live that intimate spirit of communion with Christ even more intensely, especially when he celebrates the Eucharist. It is the highest point of our communion with Him, when we become totally identified with Him in His salvific sacrifice on Calvary. States the Pope “at the moment of priestly ordination, the Church has also made this reality of “new clothes” visible and comprehensive to us externally through being clothed in Liturgical vestments.the “putting on of Him” is demonstrated again and again at every Holy Mass by putting on the Liturgical vestments.the fact that we are standing at the altar clad in Liturgical vestments must make it clearly visible to those present that we are there ‘in the person of Christ’ ”[ibid p.32]. Indeed we ought to recall how Jesus explaining the parable of the wedding feast stressed on the need to be attired in a proper garment. He who was not thus dressed was ordered to be thrown with hand and feet tied into the dark where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. [cfr. Mt. 22:13]. The Vatican Instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum of 2004 states on the matter: “the vestments proper to the priest celebrant at Mass, and in other sacred actions directly connected with the Mass, unless otherwise indicated, is the Chasuble, worn over the alb and stole” [123] and then it states “the abuse is reprobated whereby the sacred ministers celebrate Holy Mass or other rites without sacred vestments or with only a stole over the monastic cowl or the common habit of religious or ordinary clothes” [126]. The same document states that the “ordinaries should take care that in all Churches and oratories subject to their jurisdiction there is present an adequate supply of Liturgical vestments made in accordance with the norms” [ibid]. And so dear fathers, kindly ensure that in each Church in your parishes there is an adequate supply of a sufficient number of amices, girdles, stoles and chasubles for daily use. When I come for my parish visits starting from January next year, I will check on this matter personally. Kindly begin celebrating your daily sacrifice of the Eucharist properly clad and that means dressed with the alb, with or without the amice, the girdle, stole and chasuble. This should start immediately. The Auxiliary Bishops and Episcopal Vicars should kindly ensure that this is strictly followed in your areas.

Dear fathers, I have now begun a programme of meetings with you all in batches and will be eventually catching up with most of the Ordinandi groups. These meetings are conducted in an informal manner and would help me to meet you all as groups or as individuals at a different level and to listen to you on your own experiences of day to day priestly living. Besides that, we will also continue with our pilgrimage programme with this year’s batch of 50 priests spending two weeks in Europe from the 14th to the 29th September. The list for registration will be made available tomorrow.

THE PLAGUE OF ABORTION

You would have noticed that of late some people in the Government have been making noises on a possible amendment to the country’s existing abortion laws which would allow free abortions in the case of rape and of babies known to be disabled or deformed in their fetal stages of infancy. The Catholic Bishops Conference has condemned this move and has come under attack in the media especially in the Raavaya newspaper. As we all know abortion is always a crime – it is murder and murder of a voiceless, defenseless human person even if that person is still in the fetal stage or appears deformed. I have spoken out against this in my Christmas midnight Mass sermon beamed islandwide by Rupavahini. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is categorical on this. It states that “human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From

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the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person – among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life....Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means is gravely contrary to the moral law....life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes” [CCC 2270-72]. The Catholic Bishops Conference will shortly come out in the open against any relaxation of the laws in Sri Lanka. When contacted the President did inform me that he will not allow any relaxation of the rules on this matter. But instigated and pushed by the United Nations Population Programme and other international agencies, some local women’s groups are agitating for this on the pretext of the enhancement of women’s rights. Western Nations in their greed to continue to possess over 75% of the world’s resources are telling us that there is not enough food to feed everyone – so we need to bring down our birth rates. Ironically they themselves are suffering the effects of their own folly with lower birth rates and higher death rates in their societies and a worrying influx of foreigners to fill in the blanks. Pope John Paul II called this mentality, “the culture of death”. As Catholics we cannot accept such a position and so I call upon all of you to preach against this to your flock. Doctrinal teaching on this subject is found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church – No. 2270-2274 and the Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II “Evangelium Vitae”.

And finally, I wish to inform you that parish pastoral visits by the Archbishop and the Auxiliaries will begin in January 2013 and will last over the whole year. These will be prepared by the EVs’ and the Deans and the different programmes of the visit will be agreed upon with the relevant Parish Priests. A committee headed by Bishops Emmanuel and Maxwell will draw up the agenda of the visits and it will be then presented to the relevant Parish Priests so that they may prepare the programmes in time. Please note that the spiritual preparation of the Parish for the visit will have to start early. We will keep you informed.

Kindly also note that every Diocesan Priest is obliged to follow the annual retreat and this year we have the special grace of a retreat to be preached by His Eminence Bernard Cardinal Law from Monday the 16th to Saturday the 21st July at the National Seminary, Kandy. Only 100 priests will be able to take part. Kindly book your place early as there is a request from other dioceses too. If the number is insufficient we will have to open it to them.

Let me then wind up these my comments thanking all of you once again and specially the Procurator General and his team for the arrangements made for this meeting and Fr. Daya Shelton for allowing us to use the Deva Dharma Nikethanaya hall for this meeting.

May God bless you all and thank you.

+ Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith
Archbishop of Colombo

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