



CARMELITES OF MARY IMMACULATE

CMI PRIOR GENERAL'S HOUSE

Chavara Hills, P.B. No. 3105, Kakkanad P.O.
Kochi 682 030, Kerala, India



ST. KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
1805-1871

Fr. Thomas Chathamparampil CMI
Prior General

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The CMI Year of Communitarian Witnessing

Dear and Loving *Koodappirappukale*,

Prayerful Greetings from CMI Prior General's House, Chavara Hills!

After having the celebration of the *Year of Call and Commitment*, we are entering into "*the Year of Communitarian Witnessing*" (11 May 2023- 10 May 2024) as part of the bicentennial celebrations of the foundation of our congregation. It's a matter of great joy and contentment that we make sincere efforts at the personal and communitarian levels to live up our commitment to the Vision- 2031, which we have envisioned for the celebration of the 200 years of our existence as a congregation. Let's revitalize ourselves to be a *Grace-filled Presence for a Transformed World*, especially through our sincere efforts for a communitarian witnessing.

1. Spirituality of Communion

Communion of hearts is an essential ingredient of sanctity and joyful living in a religious community and thus to bear witness to Christ. *Vita Consecrata* focuses on the value of the consecrated life as a sign and instrument of communion. In particular, community life is proposed as an "eloquent sign of ecclesial communion" and a "theological space" in which to experience the Risen Lord (VC, 42). For this reason, religious women and men should appear in the eyes of the world as "experts in communion," as sharing faith and daily life with others makes them "witnesses and architects" of unity (VC, 46). Pope Francis emphasizes this 'spirituality of communion' as "a way of being" for religious and to be lived in community life: "In these days when fragmentation justifies widespread sterile individualism and when the weakness of relationships breaks up and ruins the care of the human person, we are invited to humanize community relationships, to encourage communion of heart and spirit in the Gospel sense." (REJOICE! A letter to consecrated men and women, No.9). A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body and therefore as 'those who are part of me'..."

2. Communitarian Witnessing: Our CMI Heritage

In *Fratelli Tutti* also, Pope Francis reminds the religious that as members of the People of God, religious are therefore called upon to "contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration



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to fraternity" (FT, 8) with their commitment and in the distinctive mission that is theirs. As the renewed and empowered CMIs, we are called to be "the experts of communion," especially when we focuss on "the Communitarian Living" in this year. The GS 38 has exhorted us to give the "Communitarian Witnessing Beyond Borders" and this demands a reassessing and re-living of communitarian charisma.

Our call as *Carmelites of Mary Immaculate* is to a loving community of love in the Church. We are called to bear witness in the continuing presence of Christ in the Church through our radical commitment to his discipleship in the religious community. We, the CMIs are having a great legacy of communitarian living. *The Mannanam School of Communitarian Witnessing* has its roots in the three most exemplary communities - the Holy Trinity (*Threethvaika Kudumbam*), the Holy family (*Thirukudumbam*), and the early Christian community. Imbibing the spirit of these ideal communities, our forefathers made the congregation a house and school of communion and fellowship. They rightly understood that every community and communion on earth is the living reflection and loving extension of the Triune God. Father, Son and the Holy Spirit form the family filled with the fellowship of love and unity of heart and our call is to become the living paradigms of this love. The Spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of trinity dwelling in us and others. It is the ability to think of others as "those who are part of me" (Mystical body). It is the ability to see what is positive in others and to welcome it and to prize it as a gift from God.

3. Koodappirappu Sneham of St Chavara

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family, always kept the Holy family and its ideals very close to his heart. The communion he envisaged to be flourished in our communities was the *thirukkudumba koottayma* (the fellowship and mutuality of the Holy Family). The beautiful expression of St Kuriakose Elias, namely, "koodappirappu sneham," is a natural outcome of this vision. When he said, "...*Bhithikalude kanamalla hrudayangalude aduppamanu koventhayude balam*," he was giving a great vision for community life enriched by the communion of hearts. We also find that the expression, explanation and translation of the life of the Early Christian Community in the communitarian vision and living lived by the *Mannanam School of Communion*. This communion and fellowship was extended to the people of God and expressed through the various apostolates and ministries we have been doing from the very inception of our congregation. It is extended to the people of other denominations and faiths.

4. Challenges of Communitarian Witnessing Today

Today, the challenge before the CMIs is to enhance this communion through deep rooted connectedness in the community life, in the congregation and in the communities around us. We realize that the communitarian living today has been undergoing drastic changes faces a



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lot of challenges. There is a shift from community life to life in common- a group of people doing different things living together. Individualistic values are being given priority and as a result the agapeic love is being replaced by functional relationships. Individualism and pragmatism often become a threat to the communal aspect. Very often the virus of indifference, and the "I don't care" attitude kill the community spirit. Regionalism, Groupism, factionalism, ghetto-mindedness etc are at the increase in our communities. Because of all the factors the individual Happiness Index is increased but Community Happiness index is often decreased.

The advancement in the field of technology and communication has also affected our communitarian existence both positively and negatively. Today, we are the beneficiaries of virtualization, globalization, digitalization- and we find a technological Gap in the communities. The influence of social media has its say in our relationships, attitude and inter personal values. In this context, the quality of our community life is affected and the communitarian values are given less attention compared to the individualistic values.

5. Suggestions to Foster Communitarian Witnessing

We find three levels of communitarian existence in human life- life in common, community life and the life of communion. Only in the life of communion, we find the heart to heart sharing, love and communion. We need to foster the communion model of communitarian life for us in our religious communities. St Paul gives a beautiful depiction of the communion model through the imagery of the body and the organs in 1 Cor 12. He speaks about uniqueness, plurality, mutuality, unity and uniqueness of each organ in a body which holds the body together in a harmonious and healthy manner and generates synergy. Our challenge today is to enhance this communion through deep-rooted connectedness in the community life and in the congregation in different levels- local community, provincial community and congregational community. Our community should not be mere places of tolerance, but the abodes of the celebration of differences. We are not called to be agents of exclusiveness but to be the heralds of inclusiveness. More Team culture is to be fostered.

Community life calls for presence, prayer and participation. Presence not only physical but also mental, affective and fraternal. The active and regular presence in the community activities like, community prayer, meals, recreation, celebrations, felicitations, picnic, gathering will enhance the communion among us. Prayer should foster our unity and oneness. The community prayers, especially the Holy hour, our concelebrated Eucharistic celebrations etc. will definitely help us to strengthen our communion. The daily living in community requires a participation which allows for the exercise of dialogue and discernment. Each individual, then, and the whole community can work out their own life with the plan of God, together carrying out God's will. Participation in the joys and sorrows,



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needs and problems, fears and anxieties, success and failures of one another and willing and joyful sharing in the burdens and responsibilities within the community. A healthy and happy community requires the following qualities- availability, affability, accountability, being together, belonging together and building together, openness and other-orientedness. We should know how to make room for others, bearing "each other's burdens." Having "the mind of Christ" by considering others as better persons than ourselves and looking into the interest of others" (Phil 2:4) will make us people with the spirit of communion. In altruistic attitude should reflect in our communications, in the use of social and digital media and in our "virtual community" of existence.

For an enhanced communitarian living at the personal level, we need to foster certain values like accountability, belongingness, co-operation, openness to others, forgiveness, the sense of gratitude, accepting others as they are, refraining from making false judgements, improving the language of conversation, learning to differ with decency etc. At the community level, we must insist the concelebrating of the Holy Eucharist, participating in the community Prayers, community sharing - at least a day a week, felicitating the successes and achievements, sharing of events/happenings in ministry, visiting the families of the community members together, having the community day celebrations, spending time with the sick and elderly in order to strengthen our communitarian life. At the provincial and congregational level, the conduct of more inter-house and inter-provincial level programmes like seminars, workshops, inter- provincial level coming together at the initial levels of formation, strengthening the zonal gatherings, provinces in Kerala adopting a province outside etc are to be encouraged.

Conclusion

To make our community the home and school of communion: that is the great challenge before us, especially as we prepare ourselves for the bicentennial year of the foundation of our congregation. It's really a rediscovering and re-founding of the *Mannanam School of communion* for us. The spreading of the spirituality of communion, first of all in our inner life and then in the local communities and in the congregation and then in the Church and in the world and even beyond its boundaries shall be the mission of the times for us. Let there be more moments of listening, dialogue and discernment in our communities. May the *koodappirappu sneham* and *koodappirappu sukham* envisaged by St Chavara be realized in our communities. Let's share the joy of WE. Let's always keep in mind that holiness and mission come through the community because in and through the communitarian living Christ makes himself present (Mt 18:19).



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May the Triune God, the origin, fullness and the finality of the communitarian love bless us all; may the Immaculate Mother of Carmel, the model of communion and St Kuriakose Elias Chavara and the founding fathers who are the pioneers of CMI communitarian living, intercede for us to realize the "project of love" entrusted with us.

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