



**MOST REV. BENNY VARGHESE EDATHATTEL, D.D.**

**Bishop of Itanagar**  
**BISHOP'S HOUSE**

Post Box No.294, Naharlagun-791 110, Arunachal Pradesh



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**18<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

Dear Fathers/Sisters/Brothers and Lay faithful,

I am filled with joy as I pen these words following my Episcopal Ordination. First and foremost, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to God for choosing me to shepherd the diocese of Itanagar. The inscriptions on the steeple of my home parish, “For nothing is Impossible for God” (Lk 2:37) resonates deeply within me. Like our blessed Mother, I humbly submit to God’s will. Reflecting on my journey as a missionary and a priest, I recognize the immense responsibility and daunting challenges that lie ahead. However, I firmly believe that God’s grace will always protect and guide me. I entrust my Episcopal ministry and mission to the maternal care of Mother Mary and the paternal guidance of St. Joseph who is the patron saint of our diocese.

I would like to express my indebtedness to His Excellency Most Rev. Dr. John Moolachira the Archbishop of Guwahati, who was the principal consecrator of my Episcopal ordination. My sincere appreciation extends to Most Rev. John Thomas and Most Rev. James Thoppil for being the co-consecrators. I thankfully acknowledge the participation of Msgr. Juan Pablo Cerrillos Hernandez, Deputy Head at the Apostolic Nunciature to India and Nepal.

The presence of all the Archbishops, bishops from the region and some from outside the region, Provincials of both men and women religious, as well as the great number of priests, sisters and people from our diocese and outside was incredibly encouraging and reassuring.

I, also take this opportunity to thank former Chief Ministers of Arunachal Pradesh, Shri Nabam Tuki, Shri Gegong Apang and the former Member of the Parliament Shri Sanjay Takam and the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Naharlagun constituency Shri Techhi Kaso, of Doimukh constituency Shri Tana Hali Tara among others. Your governmental representation was significant, reiterating the fact that the Church and the Government share many common interests and can work hand in hand for the development and growth of Arunachal Pradesh.

I am deeply indebted to our Bishop Emeritus Most Rev. Dr. John Thomas Kattrukudiyil, who was my teacher and mentor and who provided his extensive service over 17 years as the first bishop of this diocese. His grand plan for the Episcopal Ordination was executed successfully by Rev. Fr. Jacob Mittathilany, the Chancellor and the chief coordinator of the various committees for the Episcopal Ordination. My eternal sincere goes to both of them.

I also wish to express my heartfelt thanks to various committees of Arunachal Pradesh Catholic Association (APCA), the Executive Members, the Organizing Chairman of the Episcopal Ordination committee Shri Taw Tebin, Shri Tara Miri Stephen (Vice Chairman), Shri Nabam Pekhi and Shri Tadar Dominic (Organizing Secretaries), Rev. Sr. Dorothy Hajoary SCC and Smti. Tok Maria (Cultural), Rev. Fr. Jacob Mittathilany, Shri Yumlam Kaha, Er. Takam Majeng and all the Parish Priests and Parish Council Secretaries of Capital Region (Finance), Rev. Fr. Kampan Chinnam and Shri Taku Stephen (Publicity), Shri Giah Thomas (Pandal Construction), Shri Bengia Taniang, Shri Likha Tado, Shri Likha Tara (Food), Shri Tok Dominic, Shri Taram Taya, Shri Tamchi Abrham (Social Service), Shri Tai Taning, Ms. Dohu Yadek (Youth), Shri Sorang Talo (Volunter), Rev. Fr. Marius Mushahary, Rev.Fr. Sijo Joseph, Shri Abraham Sorang, Shri Talling Yaying, Shri Sangyo

Choba, Shri Dayum Taha (Accommodation), Shri Lingdum Sanjoy, Shri Jarjo Jamoh, Shri Rido Peter (Transportation), Rev.Fr.Walter Rodrigues OP (Liturgy), Mrs. Bani Taku, Ms. Michi Chobin, Ms. Tage Mary (Reception) and Mr. Sangha Choba and Mr. Kago Rajens (Sound System).

I also express my sincere thanks to the fathers at Bishops house, Sisters at Naharlagun Parish, all the supporting staff and all those who made the Episcopal Ordination a prayerful and meaningful one. I thank all the fathers, sisters, and lay faithful from all the institutions, who came to help in very many ways to make the Episcopal Consecration a meaningful one.

## **TO ALL I SAY A BIG THANK YOU**

The presence of all those involved in the work for Episcopal Ordination and the thanksgiving service and dinner on 16<sup>th</sup> October was a reassurance for all the manifold blessings God had bestowed on us. We did it together to glorify God. May the Lord who called us together continue to lead us forward, onward and may we march ahead to Glorify God.

We are not capable of changing our destiny though the power of human will alone. However, when we let Him work through us, He will create magnificent works reflective of His impeccable character and blueprint. Let us constantly be reminded that “Everything is possible for one who believes” Mk 9.23. The word of God constantly encourages us to believe in God. We take the impossible situations in our lives and turn them into great opportunities for Christ.

### **1. The annual Pastoral Conference**

The annual Pastoral Conference this year was held at the NEDSF, Guwahati from 8<sup>th</sup> –to 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023 on the Theme, “*Fratelli Tutti* – Building Fraternity among ourselves and Other Faiths”. It is an important topic that had a great bearing on the Church in Northeast India. I am dispatching the joint pastoral letter the outcome of the Pastoral Conference. Kindly read and explain to the faithful in your parishes at the earliest.

### **2. Northeast Bishops’ Conference**

The Archbishops and Bishops of the North East Region had their annual meeting at Bishop’s House, Shillong from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> September. It is an annual feature that all the bishops come together to deliberate on all common matters pertaining to the Catholic Church in the region. I had the joy of attending such meeting for the first time. Many issues were discussed and reflected for the good of the Church.

### **3. Devotion to Holy Rosary**

As all of us know that the month of October is especially dedicated to the Holy Rosary. Many of the Catholic faithful all over the world would organize special rosary services and pray the rosary in groups, sector, fellowships, families and neighborhood. I recommend that all our priests and religious take special care to pray the Holy Rosary individually and in groups, thus spreading the devotion to Our Blessed Mother Mary. The devotion of the rosary has been part of our tradition for almost a thousand years, having developed in the second millennium of Christianity. The Dominican Religious Order was instrumental in kindling the popularity of this devotion.

Various Popes over the centuries have given their endorsement and have persistently advocated for the Holy Rosary to be recited with heightened devotion and utmost fervor. This is especially emphasized in our churches and homes during the month of October. Hence, I urge all to recite this revered prayer and comprehend dignity, power, and excellence. The Holy Rosary is not merely a

sequence of prayers; it is a testament to our faith and devotion. Embarking on this spiritual journey, let us appreciate the profound impact of the Holy Rosary on our lives.

#### **4. Mission Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> October**

Pope Francis has extended an invitation to us all this World Mission Sunday to reflect on the story of Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). He urges us to keep our hearts aflame with love and our feet with steadfast in our journey with Jesus. The narrative of Emmaus serves as a reminder of our own journey with Christ. When his Disciples recognized him they remembered, “Were our hearts not aflame within us, as he spoke to us on the road, as he explained the scriptures to us?” Immediately they rose to their feet (Lk 24:32-33).

We echo this sentiment through our call to deepen our faith and allegiance to Jesus, bearing witness to his Gospel and mercy in every aspect of our lives. Just as the Lord mandated his disciples to disseminate the Gospel far and wide, we too are endued with the same mission and zeal. We should strive to ignite our minds and hearts with the passion to spread his mission worldwide. The disciples of Emmaus embarked on their missionary work by sharing the news of our resurrected Lord with their community, friends, and acquaintances.

This is the day to remember and rekindle our baptismal call to propagate the Gospel. Let us also strive to embody and share God's love in our families, workplaces, and neighborhoods. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October, we are especially implored to pray for missionaries around the world. Let our prayers accompany them in their adversities, pains, and sufferings as they labor to disseminate the Gospel.

May our compassionate God bestow upon them his blessings, granting them strength, wisdom, and resilience to overcome challenges and bring salvation to humankind. Let us partake in the missionary activities of the Church through our spiritual and material support.

The collection received in all parishes on World Mission Sunday should serve as a symbol of unity and mutual concern amongst the churches. Let's demonstrate generosity in our contributions.

#### **5. Month of November**

As we draw closer to the month of November, we approach a time specifically dedicated to offering prayers for the souls in purgatory, and for those who have departed before us. During this month, we remember and pray for our deceased family members, our friends, and our benefactors. Yearly, we dedicate our prayers to them and their loved ones, it's therefore important to remember and pray for all our departed loved ones and benefactors.

Visiting the cemetery, blessing the graves, and praying there is a traditional Catholic practice. Let's continue with these worthwhile customs, which encourage devotion and form an integral part of our Catholic heritage and tradition. I will be at Banderdewa to offer the Holy Eucharist and bless the tomb of late Br. Prembhai, who was a great missionary to our land.

#### **6. Directory for Lay Catechists**

The Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) has published the Directory for Lay Catechists, which outlines directives and norms concerning the identity, formation, and role of lay catechists. This includes Sunday school catechists, teachers of catechesis in regular schools, and full-time

catechists in mission areas. The Directory for Lay Catechists was developed at the request of the Bishops, following Pope Francis's issuance of his Apostolic Letter, *Antiquum Ministerium*, on May 10, 2021.

This draft Directory was circulated among all Bishops as well as the Directors of Catechetics from each diocese, with over 40 Bishops providing their observations in response. The Directory's aim is to offer clear guidelines for bishops, directors of catechetical instruction, and lay catechists to better understand their identity and mission.

It serves as a helpful resource for parish priests, assisting with the appropriate selection of lay catechists, their adequate formation, and defining their specific roles within the parishes. Effectively, this Directory provides a roadmap for the lay catechist ministry within India. Copies of the Directory will be made available at Bishop's house.

## **7. Communio India 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of November**

Communio India" is an initiative introduced by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) to support all our Dioceses and Religious Congregations working in rural and mission areas, in their pastoral ministry. The objectives of Communio India are as follows:

- 1) To assist our dioceses and religious congregations that are working in mission areas.
- 2) To foster a culture of sharing among our people, to express solidarity with our needy brothers and sisters in the country.
- 3) To encourage our faithful to pray and assist the missions and missionaries, and to promote missionary vocations.
- 4) To inspire our lay faithful to serve in mission areas as lay missionaries.
- 5) To prepare all our faithful to become missionary disciples as envisioned by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*.

## **8. Blessing of Sacred Heart Church Naharlagun**

As we all know, the Sacred Heart Church at Naharlagun was a cherished dream of the parish community. It took them over a decade to reach this stage. We already had two major celebrations inside the not-yet-blessed church - the Silver Jubilee of the Bishop Emeritus John Thomas in 2019, and my Episcopal Consecration. Now, the construction of the church has been completed. On November 12, 2023, at 9:30 a.m., we will be blessing and dedicating the newly constructed church. I invite all who can participate in the dedication to join and bless the community with your presence.

## **9. Eucharistic Procession at St. Mary's Church Itanagar and Inauguration of the Jubilee 2025**

Preparations and celebrations for Jubilee 2025 are currently underway. These events are being integrated into the ongoing Synodal Journey and the Strategic Planning process so as to discern God's Plan for the Church in India at this moment in history. The theme of the Ordinary Jubilee 2025 celebrations is 'Pilgrims of Hope.' The purpose of the Jubilee has three aspects: to celebrate Jesus, celebrate the Church, and celebrate our Faith. There are two years of preparation for the Jubilee: 2023 is the Year of the Council (Year of Learning) and 2024 is the Year of Prayer. The Holy Father wishes for all members of the People of God to study the four Constitutions of the Second Vatican

Council to draw inspiration and guidance for daily life. The preparations for the Ordinary Jubilee 2025 should be inaugurated in all dioceses.

In our Diocese, on Sunday, November 26, 2023, the Solemnity of Christ the King, we will inaugurate this occasion with special prayers and a Eucharistic Procession. This year, the Eucharistic procession for the Capital Complex will be held at St. Mary's Church. Most Rev. Dennis Panipitchai, the Auxiliary Bishop of Miao, has consented to be the main celebrant on this occasion. I request all parishes in the Capital Complex to participate in the celebration and receive the Lord's Blessings. Please inform Rev. Fr. Awungshi Ngasammi Joseph, the Parish Priest, about your participation. His contact number is #7085959808.

I hope and pray that the Ordinary Jubilee 2025 strengthens the hope of all members of the Church. As 'Pilgrims of Hope,' let us continue to build communion, promote participation, and deepen our commitment to mission.

## 10. Christmas and Christmas Novena

Once again, we find ourselves preparing for another Christmas. It's a special time of the year when people come together to spend quality time with loved ones, exchange gifts, and enjoy delicious food. It is also a time to reflect on the past year and make resolutions for the future. The holiday season brings with it a sense of warmth and coziness, with decorations, lights, and festive music creating a cheerful atmosphere. Christmas reminds us of the importance of sharing, kindness, and spreading love to others. This Christmas celebration should positively impact our lives as it calls for reflection more than just celebration. In celebrating Christmas, we joyfully express our religious commitments.

Christmas is an event that reshapes our understanding of God. There's a beautiful practice observed in many churches known as the Christmas Novena. It is a sacred time of prayer and reflection that allows believers to prepare their hearts for the birth of Jesus Christ. The Christmas Novena holds deep spiritual significance for many Christians. It is a time of anticipation and hope, as believers reflect on the profound love and grace that God showed by sending His Son into the world. In this context, I urge all our parishes to develop a form of Novena, at least in the main churches, focusing on different themes or aspects of the Christmas story. Participating in a Christmas Novena can also foster a sense of unity and community; it deepens one's faith and fosters a sense of connectedness with others. Therefore, I exhort the development of these popular practices in our parishes and centers. May the spirit of Christmas bring us peace, the gladness of Christmas give us hope, and the warmth of Christmas grant us love.

## 11. Appointments

1) Rev. Fr. Jacob Mattathilany - Vicar General of the Diocese of Itanagar

My programme for the months of October to December		
October 2023		
15	Sun	Episcopal Ordination
16	Mon	Thanksgiving Service at Sacred Heart Church, Naharlagun
17	Tue	Itanagar
18	Wed	Mass at St. Patrick Seminary, Model Village
		Meeting with the Auditor Mrs. Dipsha
19	Thu	Meeting with Rev. Sr. Daniela Beatrice SCSC, the Mother General of Holy

		Cross
20	Fri	Itanagar
21	Sat	“Little way celebration of Mass” at Mary Queen of the Apostles Parish, Kimin
22	Sun	Mass at St. Joseph’s Cathedral, Itanagar
23	Mon	
24	Tue	Divine Youth Fest and Mass at St. Joseph’s Parish, Joram
25	Wed	
26 -30	Thu	Golden Jubilee Celebration of Kohima Diocese
31	Tue	Mass and Rosary Procession at Infant Jesus Parish, Doimukh

### November 2023

1	Wed	All Saints Day Mass at Divine Mercy Parish, Chimpu Cultural cum Food Fest at Don Bosco College, Jollang
2	Thu	Mass at Holy Trinity Parish, Banderdewa
3 - 6	Fri	Golden Jubilee Celebration of Tura Diocese
7	Tue	
8	Wed	Conclusion of Nyishi Retreat & Holy Mass at Divine Retreat Centre, Gumto
9	Thu	
10	Fri	
11	Sat	
12	Sun	Blessing of Sacred Heart Church, Naharlagun
13	Mon	
14	Tue	Meeting with Rev. Sr. Sophy Mathew <small>SJL</small> , Provincial
15	Wed	Diocesan Level “Small Christian Community Gathering” at Pastoral Centre, Itanagar
16 - 30	Thu	Leaves for Home for Reception and Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Priestly Ordination

### December 2023

1	Fri	
2	Sat	Blessing of FCC Convent, Ziro
3	Sun	Silver Jubilee of Yorkum Catholic Church Mass at St. Antony’s Parish, Raga
4	Mon	Mass at Infant Jesus Parish, Boasimla
5	Tue	Itanagar
6-8	Wed-Fri	Episcopal Consecration of Archbishop designate of Imphal Dr. Linus Nelli
9	Sat	Itanagar
10	Sun	Mass at Mary Help of Christians Parish, Itanagar

11	Mon	Itanagar
12	Tue	Christmas Recollection (St. Patrick Seminary: 5.30 pm)
13	Wed	Meeting with the Priests and religious of the diocese (Bishop's House: 8.30 am)
14	Thu	To Calcutta
15 - 23	Fri	To Philippines
24	Sun	Christmas midnight Mass, Sacred Heart parish, Naharlagun
25	Mon	Mass Mary Immaculate Parish, Ziro
26	Tue	
27	Wed	Mass at St. Francis De Sales Parish, Pasighat
28	Thu	Mass at St. Joseph's Parish, Kaying
29	Fri	Church Blessing at Taklingtak under Monigong Parish
30	Sat	
31	Sun	Mass at St. Thomas Parish, Mechuka

Wishing you all the best and praying for you. Rev.Fr. Jacob Mittahilany will look after the ordinary matters of the diocese in my absence.

Yours in Christ Jesus

  
18/12/2023

**+Benny Varghese Edathattel**  
**Bishop of Itanagar**

