

# THE INDIAN (MALANKARA) ORTHODOX CHURCH

Diocese of UK- Europe and Africa

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**GEN/22/096**

**08 .10. 2022**

**Blessings to the Vicars, Parish/Congregation office bearers and all the faithful members of the Diocese of UK-Europe and Africa:**

**Dearlly beloved in Lord,**

With all the Mercy from Almighty Lord, We have returned safely in India from Our recent visit to the UK. We would like to express our gratitude to all of you for your sincere love and care extended to me during my visit. It had been a blissful visit during which we witnessed your loyalty to the mother Church and the true faith on which the Church is laid upon. By the Grace of Lord, We could announce and solemnise five new worshipping congregations in the UK, which now counts a total of 50 Parishes/ Congregations in our diocese. We Praise our Merciful Lord for the abundant blessings for this tremendous growth from less than 20 congregations in 2009 to a remarkable number of today's 50 congregations.

At this juncture We would like to take this opportunity to remind you all about the brief history of our Holy Church in this part of the world especially in Europe and precisely in the UK. It is with pride and honor to state that since 19<sup>th</sup> century the mission of Malankara Orthodox Church has been actively present in the United Kingdom. Fr. Ignatius of Llanthony was the first European priest ordained in the orders of Malankara Orthodox Church. He was ordained by Bishop René Vilatte, the Bishop of America under the Holy Sea of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. He was laid to rest at Capel-y-ffin, Llanthony Abbey, near Wales, U.K.

His Holiness Baselios Geevarghese II of blessed memory is the first head of our Church visited the United Kingdom. Visit of His Holiness to represent our Church in the World Christian Conference held at Edinburgh in 1937 is always unique in the history of the ecumenical relations of our Church. Another important aspect in relation with our mission in the UK was the involvement of His Eminence Thoma Mar Dionisius of Pathanapuram of blessed memory in the ecumenical relations in the UK whilst His eminence was studying at Oxford University.

Another very important presence of Malankara Orthodox Church in the early years of 20<sup>th</sup> century in the UK was the service of Rev Dr. Sharupji Dadhabhai Bhabha. He was a medical doctor by profession, originally hailed from Gujarat and the first person of Indian origin ordained and

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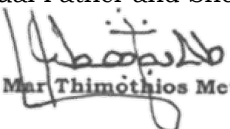
served in the UK as a Malankara Orthodox Syrian Priest. He served our Church as the ambassador of Malankara Orthodox Church in England during the days of British Raj. He was died on 3 January 1941 and was buried in London. In his last will, Rev. Bhabha authorised Monastery of Transfiguration in Travancore (Mount Tabore Dayara, Pathanapuram) to take care of his mortal remains. It is with great pleasure to inform you all that by going through extensive data gathering and research we managed to locate the probated will of Rev Bhabha and also become successful in locating his grave in London. The grave is found at Brockley Cemetery owned by the local city council. Incidentally the cemetery is close to our main Parish in the UK- St Gregorios Indian Orthodox Parish London. Now the custodianship of the tomb has been transferred from Mount Tabore Dayara Pathanapuram to Diocese of UK-Europe and Africa. The Catholicose of the East and Malankara Metropolitan entrusted me in my capacity as the Diocesan Metropolitan to care of the tomb of the first ordained priest of our Church in Europe. We would like to inform you all that by the permission of the relevant statutory authorities we managed the restoration of the tomb and a new headstone is installed at the grave of Revd Fr. (Dr.) Bhabah at Brockley Cemetery by the financial sponsorship of our honourable members Dr. Pothan Alexander and Mr Cherian Thomas (members of St Gregorios IOC, Brockley London).

According to our faith and teachings of our Church, it is our duty and responsibility to commemorate the feast of the departed spiritual fathers. As you know, H.H Baselious Geevarghese II of blessed memory departed from this world on 03 January 1964 and Our Church commemorate the annual feast in memory of His Holiness on that day. Incidentally the date of departure of Revd Fr (Dr) Bhabha is on 03 January 1941. On this context We would like to urge all the Parishes of our diocese that special memorial prayers for His Holiness Geevarghese II of blessed memory, the first Head of Church visited the UK and Europe, and Revd. Fr. (Dr) Late S.D. Bhabha should be conducted every year on 3rd January or the next first service day of the Holy Liturgical service of your Parish/ congregation.

We hereby entrust St Gregorios IOC London to conduct memorial Holy Liturgical service of His Holiness Baselious Geevarghese II and Revd Fr (Dr) Bhabha on 03 January of every year and conduct incense prayers at the tomb of Fr Bhabha at Brockley Cemetery. It would be an honour and privilege for that Parish to commemorate the memorial prayers on behalf of the Church especially of the Diocese of UK-Europe and Africa.

God Bless

Your Spiritual Father and Shepherd

  
+ Mathews Mar Thimothios Metropolitan