



**THE MALANKARA (INDIAN) ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH
DIOCESE OF UK-EUROPE & AFRICA**



***Minutes of
the Diocesan Annual General Body Meeting***

held on Monday 29th May 2023

at St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church, Liverpool

***Presented by Fr. Varghese T. Mathew
(Diocesan Secretary)***

on 17 September 2023

The General Body Meeting of the Diocesan Assembly of Diocese of UK-Europe and Africa was held on Monday, May 29, 2023, at St Thomas Indian Orthodox Church, Liverpool and commenced at 12. P.M.

The Chair

H.G. Abraham Mar Stephanos, the Diocesan Metropolitan, presided over the meeting.

Attendance:

Ninety nine representatives attended the meeting.

Commencing the Meeting

Meeting started at 12:00 p.m. with the prayers by Diocesan Metropolitan His Grace Abraham Mar Stephanos.

Diocesan Secretary Fr. Happy Jacob welcome all the participants and read the notice Kalpana Number E/114/2023/AMS from the Diocesan Metropolitan.

Fr. Joseph Cheruvathur, the Diocesan Secretary of Kunnamkulam Diocese led the meditation session based on the reflections from Psalms. In His speech he emphasised the necessity of peace and humility in life and also explained the importance of enlightening in Christ. He also mentioned the teachings by the Apostles referring to Acts of Apostles and exhorted everyone to invoke the Holy Spirit for guidance in life.

Diocesan Metropolitan His Grace Abraham Mar Stephanos gave the presidential address and emphasised that with the power of prayers and Blessings from God Almighty, we could overcome all the anxieties in our life.

Metropolitan exhorted that, hurting or humiliating anyone is not the Christian way and it is against the Christians ethos. If anyone of us ever had any hostility or negative feeling to someone, they should reconcile and without that the Christian values will not be fulfilled.

Minutes of the Meeting:

Diocesan Secretary Fr. Happy Jacob presented the minutes of the Diocesan General Body Meeting held on Saturday 25th March 2023 at St. Stephen's Indian orthodox Church Birmingham.

The chair of the meeting announced that matters arising from the minutes will be discussed later after the election processes for the new Diocesan Council are completed.

Diocesan Council Election:

The process for the new Diocesan Council Member's election is started by the declaration of the election by the Diocesan Metropolitan. Very Revd. Abraham George cor-episcopa read out the list of contestants for the new Diocesan Council. Since the total number of candidates are above the required numbers, Election for the new Diocesan Council for the period of 2023 through to 2028 were held by secret balloting by online evote system. Mr. Thomas George, the Returning Officer explained the election process and procedures to the members, by online.

On the completion of the voting, after the prescribed time, the returning officer with the permission of the Diocesan Metropolitan, generated the results.

Diocesan Metropolitan declared the following as the new Diocesan Council Members;

Diocesan Secretary:

Fr. Varghese T. Mathew

Priest representatives:

Fr. Stanley David James

Fr. Benoy C. Joshua

Lay Person representatives:

Mr. Libin Varghese, St. Thomas IOC, Germany

Mr. John Samuel, St. Thomas IOC, Newcastle

Mr. Vinod Kochuparambil, St. Thomas IOC, Poole

Mr. Johnson P. Yohannan, St. Mary's IOC, Coventry

It is noted that Mr. Vinod Kochupurambil, Mr. Johnson P. Yohannan and Mr. Binoy Phillip St. Mary's IOC Dublin scored same number of votes for the third and fourth positions. And by casting a secret lot from the names, the final names are declared.

Matters arise from the minutes of the meeting

Mr. Sunil George, Mar Baselious Gregorios IOC Southampton mentioned that his name and Mr. Matthew Varghese, St. Thomas IOC Hemel Hempstead are erratically mentioned as 'coordinators' for the family conference instead of 'organizing committee members'. The correction is accepted by the GB.

The minutes of the meeting is proposed to be passed by Dr. Sandeep Mathews and seconded by Dr. Ajay Mathews.

Annual Accounts 2022-23

Diocesan Secretary presented the Annual Accounts for the year 2022-23.

Following points were discussed;

Mr. Sunil George, Mar Baselios Gregorios IOC Southampton proposed that the existing mortgage for the Diocesan property should be paid off. Mr. Sibi Varghese from St. Dionisius IOC Northampton supported the point. GB decided that the aspect should be discussed with financial experts for further evaluation.

Mr. Anil George, St. Thomas IOC Liverpool enquired, what should be the status of the defaulters of the Diocesan contribution from parishes. His Grace the Diocesan Metropolitan confirmed that as discussed in the last meeting it would be considered as arrears from the parishes.

Mr. Rajan Philip, St. George IOC Sheffield raised his concern over the poor contribution towards Catholicate day collection from our diocese.

The Annual Accounts for the year 2022-23 is proposed to be passed by Mr. Sunil George, Mar Baselios Gregorios IOC Southampton and seconded by Mr. Varghese K. Cherian, St. Mary's IOC Oxford.

Annual budget for the year 2023 - 24

Diocesan Secretary Fr. Happy Jacob presented the annual budget for the financial year 2023-24.

The following points are discussed and concluded.

Every family in our Diocese should contribute GBP 10.00 or Euro 10.00 as the Catholicate Day contribution.

All our parishes should pay the Diocesan contribution on the basis GBP 30.00 or Euro 30.00 per family from the parishes. In addition to that, Diocesan Day envelopes will be distributed in the parishes for the members contribution.

It is decided to buy a leased car for the Diocese and appropriate amount shall be allocated in the budget.

Mr. Rajan Philip enquired, how does the contribution towards stipend and employee payment is reduced from the previous years. It is clarified that since there are no restrictions from UKBA or elsewhere, the present Diocesan Metropolitan's payment is set it as less than the previous years.

Fr. Anoop Abraham suggests to increase the contribution for Sunday school. GB agreed to increase the expense as GBP 18,000.00

Fr. Stanley David James suggested to add an amount for Clergy travelling to Europe from the UK for initializing the new congregations. GB agreed to the suggestion. Mr. Libin Varghese suggested that Diocese should contribute towards the initial expenses for organizing new congregations in Europe. The Diocesan Metropolitan

explained the difficulties at the current moment and assured that it would be discussed in detail in future.

The budget is proposed to be accepted by Mr. John Samuel, St. Thomas IOC New castle and seconded by Mr. Anil George, St. Thomas IOC Liverpool.

Annual report for the year 2022-23

Fr. Happy Jacob, Diocesan Secretary presented the Annual Report of the Diocese for the year 2022-23.

His Grace the Diocesan Metropolitan noticed and informed the Secretary that the Turkey - Syrian earthquake relief contribution and funding is not mentioned in the report and shall be added.

Mr. Varghese K. Cherian, St. Mary's IOC Oxford requested that the minutes of the meeting and the Annual Report should be sent to all Diocesan Assembly Members in advance to the meeting. Diocesan Metropolitan agreed to the suggestion and assured that from the next meeting onwards it should be done so.

Mr. Baiju Kuriakose, St. Stephen's IOC Birmingham proposed the Annual Reports to be passed and Mr. Roy Samuel, St. George IOC Manchester supported.

AOB:

Visit of the Catholicos His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III and Orthodox Sanghamam 2024

His Grace the Diocesan Metropolitan informed the GB that His Holiness the Catholicos and Malankara Metropolitan will visit UK and Republic of Ireland from 24 May through to 04 June 2024.

Thirumeni suggested that due to the high cost and the current financial situations in UK and Europe, we should hold the Orthodox Sanghamam for one day instead of three days as suggested. General Body agreed to Metropolitan's proposal.

Diocesan Metropolitan reminded the members that the concept of Family Conference is very effective and we should continue doing that in future. We may consider to conduct or hold the Family Conferences region wise due to the increase number of families in our community, for the future.

The Diocesan Metropolitan exhorted all the members that if any of the Parishes wishes to receive H.H. Bava Thirumeni in their respective Parishes they should request the same in writing to the Diocesan Metropolitan in advance and any discussion on this regard with His Holines' office shall be carried out through Diocesan Metropolitan.

- ❖ Fr. Happy Jacob, Diocesan Secretary urged all Parishes to use relevant Parish codes while making any online payment to Diocesan Accounts. The Parish codes are issued to the members and it is assured that it will be sent again to all Parish offices from the Diocesan office.
- ❖ Policy Documents and Statutory Requirements for the Diocese and Parishes: Fr. Tom Jacob narrated the initiative taken by the team led by him and informed that a report will be submitted for the approval of the GB soon.
- ❖ Diocesan Metropolitan informed that we could submit a request to Sabha Rules Committee to change the Diocesan Council Representation criteria to meet our requirements considering the geographical structure of our Diocese.
- ❖ Fr. Anoop Malayil Abraham requested to elect an internal auditor for the Diocesan Accounts and GB agreed to the suggestion.
- ❖ Mr Sibi Varghese, St. Dionasius IOC Northampton proposed Mr. Binoy Mathews, St. Gregorios IOC South and on Sea as the internal auditor of our Diocese. Mr. John Samuel, St. Thomas IOC Newcastle seconded the proposal and GB unanimously elected Mr. Binoy Mathew, St. Gregorios IOC South and on Sea as the internal auditor of the diocese.
- ❖ Fr. Tom Jacob suggested that Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) registration under the Data Protection Act 2018 should be done at the earliest possible and GB agreed to that suggestion.
- ❖ Diocesan Secretary, Fr. Happy Jacob updated on the progress on the administrative reformation initiatives lead by Fr. Eldo P. Varghese.
- ❖ Mr. Binoy Philp, St. Mary's IOC Dublin suggested that regional accounts should be managed by regional areas. The Diocesan Metropolitan explained the difficulties and assured that it will be discussed in detail before taking any decision. Thirumeni accepted the need of inclusiveness in our administrative structure.
- ❖ Mr Libin Varghese, St. Thomas IOC, Germany is nominated as the coordinator to discuss the feasibility of managing the diocesan accounts in Europe and Ireland separately and submit a report to the Diocesan General body. Mr Binoy Philip, St. Mary's IOC Dublin and Mr Praveen C. Ninan, St George IOC Limerick are nominated to support Mr. Libin Varghese for the above matter.
- ❖ Mr Baiju Kuriakose, St. Stephen's IOC Birmingham suggested to form a legal cell to support the newly migrated members of our Church to UK and Europe. GB agreed to that suggestion and noted that not only the legal experts, also the other expertise and resource personal should be involved in that forum to support the members of our Church. Further discussion to be held.

❖ Mr. Baiju Kuriakose suggested to form a WhatsApp group for the Vicars and Diocesan Representatives. GB agreed to that suggestion and decided that the group should be admin only with the admin rights laid upon Diocesan Metropolitan and Diocesan Secretary.

❖ Diocesan General Body decided to submit a change request to HSBC Bank to add the newly elected Diocesan Secretary Fr. VARGHESE T. MATHEW and newly appointed Accounts Officer Mr. ABRAHAM KURIAN as the signatories for banking transactions.

❖ Mr. Varghese P. Thomas, St. Gregorios IOC Peterborough sought clarification on the criteria for allowing or creating new congregations in our Diocese. His Grace clarified that such requests should be addressed by a case-by-case basis and appropriate decision will be taken for the benefit of the Church and our community in general.

❖ Fr. Saji C. John suggested that our Diocese must have a matrimonial internet site and Fr. Happy Jacob clarified that we had already got a live matrimonial site under our Diocesan website. The feedback and inquiries coming through were not very encouraging. The general response was that it could create unnecessary allegations and may not be suitable to promote.

❖ Mr. Binoy Mathews, St. Gregorios IOC Southend on Sea suggested that all our Parishes must follow similar accounting system and a pattern should be issued from the Diocese.

❖ Diocesan Secretary, Fr. Happy Jacob read the circular letter from Diocesan metropolitan - E 171/AMS/2023 and E172/AMS/2023 declaring the new Diocesan Council Members.

Obituary

On behalf of the Diocese Fr. Happy Jacob, the Diocesan Secretary paid homage to Mr. (late) P.M. Raju, our former Diocesan Council Member.

Felicitations to Mr. Tibu Thankachan

The general body expressed gratitude to Mr. Tibu Thankachan who had been serving as accounts officer for the Diocese for the last five years. His Grace, the Diocesan Metropolitan and the Diocesan Secretary expressed gratitude to Mr. Tibu and wish him all the best in his future endeavours. On behalf of the Diocese the Diocesan Metropolitan presented a memento as a token of love to Mr. Tibu.

Vote of thanks

Fr. Happy Jacob, Diocesan Secretary expressed gratitude and thanks to former Metropolitan and present Metropolitan of our Diocese for all the guidance and support for his office as the Diocesan Secretary.

He also thanked all the attendees who are attended in person and through online medium.

Sincere gratitude extended to Managing Committee and Members of St. Thomas IOC Liverpool for their warmth and hospitality by hosting the meeting.

Fr. Happy Jacob extended his gratitude to all the Vicars, outgoing Council Members, all the Diocesans of Representatives for all their support and cooperation during his tenure as the Diocesan Secretary. He also expressed his great thanks and appreciation to Mr. Saji Varghese the PRO, for his hard work and dedication. Also expressed thanks to Mr. Tibu Thankachan as the accounting officer of the Diocese.

Conclusion:

His Grace Abraham Mar Stephanos the Diocesan Metropolitan made the conclusive message to the meeting. Thirumeni insisted for unity among ourselves for the well-being of the Church. Also, His Grace exhorted that we should better utilize the capabilities and potential of our Priests. Thirumeni expressed appreciation and great thanks to St. Thomas IOC Liverpool, to their Vicar, Managing Committee, the Spiritual Organisation Leaders and the Parish Members for brilliantly hosting this meeting and for all the hospitality and care.

On behalf of the Diocesan General Body and on a personal note His Grace expressed gratitude to the former Diocesan Council.

In the conclusive message the remaining all the members to be united in Christ and work as one body in Christ for the blissful kingdom of God and requested everyone should pray for each other.

The meeting end with prayers and benediction by the Diocesan Metropolitan at 6 p.m.

Presented By : Fr. Varghese T. Mathew, Diocesan Secretary.

Approved by : + His Grace Abraham Mar Stephanos

Proposed :

Seconded :