



MALANKARA ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH (INDIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH)

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UK REGISTERED CHARITY : 1159302

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Blessings and greetings to all the Vicars and the Faithful of the Diocese in the name of the blessed Holy Trinity.

Dearly beloved in Christ,

As the season of Onam approaches, I wish to offer a brief pastoral direction regarding its observance within our parishes.

The Church has always recognised that the Gospel is proclaimed, received, and lived within the cultural contexts of people. Culture, with its language, art, music, customs, food, and forms of community life, provides a valuable matrix within which our experience of faith is expressed. We therefore value the rich cultural heritage that our people carry with them, particularly as we live and witness in the diaspora. Such cultural expressions can strengthen fellowship, preserve a healthy sense of belonging, and help our younger generations remain connected with their heritage.

At the same time, it is important that we maintain a clear distinction between cultural expressions and matters pertaining to faith, worship, and doctrine. While the Church can joyfully receive and appreciate what is good and wholesome within a culture, our parish life should not create ambiguity regarding the faith that we profess or the theological meaning of our celebrations.

In this regard, the sharing of an Onam Sadya within our parishes is certainly a beautiful expression of fellowship, hospitality, and our cultural heritage, and there is no difficulty in parishes organising such gatherings.

However, I request all our parishes to refrain completely from representations or enactments of Mahabali and other similar elements that may carry religious or mythological connotations within parish celebrations or on Church premises. This direction is not intended to diminish our appreciation of Kerala's cultural heritage. Rather, it is to ensure that the distinction between cultural celebration and the Church's confession of faith remains clear, especially for our children and younger generations growing up in diverse cultural and religious environments.

Our Orthodox Christian faith does not require us to withdraw from culture; rather, it calls us to engage with culture discerningly—receiving with gratitude what is good, beautiful, and conducive to fellowship, while ensuring that Christ remains unmistakably at the centre of our ecclesial life.

I therefore request our respected Vicars, Managing Committees, spiritual organisations, and all the faithful to observe this pastoral direction with understanding and sensitivity.

May our celebrations always become occasions for thanksgiving, fellowship, hospitality, and Christian witness. I wish all our faithful a joyful season of fellowship and pray that our homes and parish communities may continually abound in the peace and grace of our Lord.

With prayers and blessings,

+ Metropolitan Abraham Stephanos