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OF
GOA AND DAMAN**

PATRIARCHATE OF THE EAST INDIES

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Pastoral Letter

To the Priests, Religious, Lay Faithful and People of Good Will

in the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman

*(Approved English version of the Pastoral Letter No. CP-Past/164/2018
written originally in Konkani language)*

**"HE HAS ANOINTED ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS
TO THE POOR" (Lk. 4: 18)**

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus at the beginning of this God-given new Pastoral Year and I am pleased to address to you this Pastoral Letter.

INTRODUCTION

During the just concluded Pastoral Year, we have all, as the Local Church, reflected seriously on our social responsibilities; we reminded ourselves on various occasions that these responsibilities belong to each one and to all of us -- in our families, in our communities and in society -- and that we should work together throughout the year, in fulfilling them. Under the theme, *The Love of Christ urges us on*, we have been able to accomplish some of these responsibilities with commitment and dedication. This year too, moving on in the same direction, we would like to focus our attention on the poverty that exists among us and look out for various ways and means by which we can be of more relevant help to the poor and the needy around us.

“... He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed

free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Lk. 4:18-19). By reading these words from the Sacred Scriptures in the synagogue at Nazareth, the Lord Jesus revealed his mission.

Why does he say that his special mission is to set the poor, the prisoners and the captives free?

We believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and the Saviour of the whole human race. The Father sent him into this world to establish his Kingdom. Jesus does not preach a distant God. God is very close and he comes to encounter humanity with his kingdom: this is his proclamation and the greatest 'Good News.' For God is boundless in his Merciful Love and his kingdom brings liberation from sin and evil and signifies life in abundance, peace and joy.

Furthermore, the Abba-Father whom Jesus reveals is the God of life, of life in abundance. He deeply desires that every human person should live life to the fullest. St. Irenaeus says, "The glory of God is man fully alive." However, as long as we are surrounded by people who are poor, marginalized, oppressed and victims of injustice, we cannot speak about fullness of life. The kingdom of God is indeed primarily for such weak and socially oppressed people (*cf.* Is. 61: 1). Since their lives are endangered, God has compassion on them, shows them his preferential love and chooses them. The God of justice protects and dispenses justice to those who are poor and oppressed by human injustice. The God of liberation thus sets his people free and gives them life. Archbishop Oscar Romero, the martyr from El Salvador, says: "God receives glory in the measure the life of the poor is saved." Therefore, the God who is revealed by the Holy Scriptures and proclaimed by the Lord Jesus is in a special way a God who has a preferential love for the poor.

I. GOD'S PREFERENTIAL LOVE FOR THE POOR

1. Let us have a look at the History of Salvation. Pharaoh ruled over Egypt and his god was the god of the Egyptians, a god who permitted the oppression of people. The neighbouring kingdoms too had gods who endorsed injustice. In contrast to this, the Lord God speaks to Moses in the desert and, moved by compassion for the victims of slavery in Egypt, tells him: "I have seen the humiliation of my people in Egypt ... I heard their cry ... I have come down to free them ... I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt" (Ex. 3: 7-10). "I will be with you" (Ex. 3: 12). "This is what you will say to the sons of Israel: 'I AM sent me to you'" (Ex. 3: 14). According to experts, the meaning of the name YAHWEH is, *I am with you as a God who liberates.*

While making the Covenant and giving the Ten Commandments, God says yet again: “I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. Do not have other gods before me” (Ex. 20: 2-3). It is in this manner that the Lord God, from the beginning of the History of Salvation, shows a special concern for the poor and reveals himself as the Liberating God.

2. God’s Covenant with the people of Israel brings forth a new society based on justice and brotherhood (*cf.* Ex. 16: 19-21; 18: 11-26; Num. 33: 54; Josh. 13: 21). In one of the documents of the Second Vatican Council we read: “The situation of the poor is an unjust situation that goes against the Covenant of God. For this reason, the Law of the Covenant guides the people of God. Through these laws, the Israelites begin to realize the plan of God who had brought them out of Egypt from a life of slavery. To treat the poor and lowly with injustice is a grave sin and it breaks the relationship with God” (LG 46). “Thus there already exists the idea and the outline of a society centred upon the worship of the Lord and based upon justice and law inspired by love” (LC 45). Let us open the Bible and continue to read: Ex. 2: 20-24; Deut. 23: 16-17; 24: 14-15.19; Lev. 25: 23-34.

3. As they began their sojourn in the Promised Land, the people of Israel tried to live in justice and brotherhood, without a king to rule over them. When they demanded a *King* for themselves, he was to serve the people and take care of the poor without being allured by riches and power (*cf.* Ps.72). However, this did not happen. The kings and the princes often worshipped idols and ruled with injustice and corruption and they oppressed the poor. It is at this juncture that the *Prophets* begin to appear. They admonished kings and society alike and proclaimed that God desires that people treat the poor with justice, mercy and brotherhood (*cf.* Jer. 22: 1-5; Am. 6: 4-6; 8: 5-6; Mic. 3: 9-12; Is. 10: 1-4; 11: 1-9; Jer. 7: 1-5). According to the prophets, the injustice meted out to the poor is equivalent to denying the true God (*cf.* Jer. 22: 13-26; Hos. 4: 4-6) and to worshipping idols (*cf.* Hos. 6: 6; Am. 5: 21; Is. 1: 11-17; 43: 23-24; Jer. 6: 18-21; 7: 4-7).

4. People recited the Psalms in the temple of Jerusalem. These Psalms clearly portray Yahweh as the God of the weak, especially of the poor, of the strangers, of widows and of orphans. “He gives justice to the oppressed, gives food to the hungry. He sets prisoners free, gives sight to the blind and lifts up those who are bowed down. Yahweh protects the stranger, he sustains the orphan and the widow” (Ps 146: 7-9; *cf.* Ps 94: 3-7; 37: 14-17; 22: 23-27).

The Books of Wisdom speak about poverty as a great evil; on the other side, they also highlight that riches are not the greatest good. The rights of the poor are the rights of God and God's mission is to safeguard these rights (*cf.* Prov. 14: 31).

In short: in the Old Testament, God reveals himself as the liberator of the captives and the protector of the poor and as such commands people to believe in him and to treat one's neighbour with justice. It is only by observing the laws of justice that we come to know that God sets the captives free (JW 30).

Let us once again go in search of the self-revealing God in the History of Salvation. We need to convince ourselves that, if we do not practise justice and mercy and do not generously contribute to the complete liberation of our neighbour, we cannot be truly called children of God.

II. THE PREFERENTIAL LOVE OF JESUS FOR THE POOR

During the time of Jesus, Palestine experienced rampant injustice and discrimination. The majority of people were poor, oppressed by a few of the rich and the powerful. Agricultural and other taxes were high, many people lived under heavy debts, being eventually forced to abandon their properties, take to beggary and often to prostitution, in order to make their ends meet. The Roman authorities ruled with tyranny. The scribes and the pharisees would unnecessarily burden the people with an exaggerated interpretation of the Mosaic Law and would ostracize many, labelling them as 'sinners' and 'unclean.' Thus the society during the time of Jesus was marked by injustice and division.

Jesus of Nazareth did not turn a blind eye to this existing state of affairs, but faced it courageously. He took a fundamental option for the poor and the marginalized and he lived as one among them, tirelessly worked and fought for them and proclaimed to them the liberty of the kingdom of God (*cf.* SDS 7, 8, 39, 41, 172). Finally, he died as one of the marginalized and oppressed.

1. The Proclamation of Jesus. Jesus proclaims the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the poor; in other words, he proclaims their liberation (*cf.* Lk. 4: 18-19). Jesus says, 'you who are poor, hungry and mourning, are blessed' (*cf.* Lk. 6: 20-26), 'because the kingdom of God is coming, your liberation is at hand, your misery is coming to an end, a new society is dawning.'

Having performed deeds of liberation, he says to the messengers of John the Baptist, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard” (Lk. 7: 20-23; *cf.* Mt. 11: 4-6). Jesus also proclaims that God is present amongst the poor: “Whatever you do to the least of my brethren that you do unto me” (Mt. 25: 40). To enter the Kingdom of God, one needs to renew one’s life. “Be merciful, just as your heavenly Father is merciful” (Lk. 6: 36). “You cannot serve God and mammon at the same time” (Lk. 16: 13; *cf.* Mt. 6: 24). The god of money does not help the seed of the Kingdom of God to germinate but it chokes it (*cf.* Mt. 13: 22). “Therefore, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt.19: 24). Jesus counsels, “be on your guard and avoid every kind of greed” (Lk. 12.15); [*cf.* the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk.16, 19-31)]. We need to emulate the example of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10: 25-37).

2. The Protests of Jesus. Palestine was ruled in the name of God. The mighty and the powerful treated the common people with injustice and discrimination and they did this in God’s name. This perturbs Jesus and, quite vehemently, he protests against:

(a) *The Rich:* They are condemned for their injustice (*cf.* Lk. 6: 24-25; 16: 9-11.19-31).

(b) *The Scribes and the Pharisees:* They are hypocrites, they despised ‘sinners’ and overburdened people with unwarranted demands of law, they devoured widows’ properties, they were blind guides (*cf.* Lk. 11: 45-46; 18: 9-14; Mt. 21: 28-32; 23: 4.16-26).

(c) *The High Priests:* They have defiled the temple, they have turned the temple into an instrument of discrimination and a den of thieves (*cf.* Mt. 2: 23 -- 3: 6; Mk. 11: 15-18).

(d) *The Rulers of the Nation:* They rule over people like tyrants and the powerful oppress them (*cf.* Mt. 20: 25; Mk. 10: 42; Lk. 22: 25-26).

In this manner, Jesus not only criticized those who erred, but, at the same time, directly or indirectly, raised his voice against the existing evil structures. By doing so, Jesus taught us to safeguard justice, to put an end to discrimination and to use authority and power for the good of the poor and thus to usher the kingdom of God.

3. The Liberating Mission of Jesus. Jesus dedicated his whole life for the kingdom of God, which, in the first place, is Good News to the poor and, therefore, their complete liberation. Having become poor himself, Jesus defended the poor and the marginalized till his death. He welcomed sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, the blind, the deaf, the lame, the impure, those possessed by the devil, the strangers, the poor, the lowly and all those living in the periphery.

Jesus' mission of healing and deliverance signifies the victory of the kingdom of God over evil powers. His deeds of forgiveness and his dining with sinners proclaim the special love of God towards the lowly and puts an end to social ostracism. The attitude of Jesus towards *Lepers* (cf. Mk. 1: 40-45; Lk. 5: 12-16; 17: 11-19), *Samaritans* (cf. Lk. 10: 33-37; 17: 11-19; Jn. 4: 39-42) and *Women* (cf. Mt. 15: 28; 21: 31; Lk. 7: 37-47; 8: 1-3; 13: 16; 18: 1-7; Jn. 4: 7-27) is radically different and truly respectful (cf. MD 12-16).

Jesus never discriminated. Taking forward his mission of liberation for the sake of God's Kingdom, he laid the foundation for a New Society. This new society would be marked by liberty, equality, solidarity, option for the poor, inclusiveness and sacrifice for the love of service.

Jesus appeared not as a social or a political worker, but as an eminent prophet of the Kingdom of God, who confronted the unjust structures of the society, reason why he was crucified at the hands of the powerful. But God raised him up (cf. Phil. 2: 9-11). By raising Jesus from the dead, the Father confirmed all the words and deeds of his Son. God is truly the God of the poor, he is the God of life, of justice, of freedom. In the kingdom of God, all should live in harmony, love, solidarity and cater to the needs of the weak and the poor. To fight against injustice is to worship God; to tread the path of injustice or to turn a blind eye to it is to negate God. Jesus, the servant of the kingdom of God, calls us to shoulder the mission of bringing about the complete liberation of humanity and society. In this mission, the option for the poor is indispensable.

The Risen Christ is the hope of humanity. As the Lord of history and through the Holy Spirit, he guides the history of humanity towards the Kingdom of God and he will one day bring it to the fullness of life. Let our earnest and hope-filled prayer be: "Father, let thy Kingdom come."

Dear brothers and sisters, our beloved Pope Francis invites us to build a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (cf. EG 3) and to nurture it every day without fail. Let us discover daily this Master and Model of ours – Jesus – and, by strengthening our relationship with him, bear witness to him as his disciples in the society.

III. THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION OF THE CHURCH FOR THE POOR

The God who revealed himself in the History of Salvation is a God who showed his preferential love for the poor. Jesus is the universal Saviour; yet he became, in the first place, 'Good News' to the poor. The Church needs to be, without doubt, the Church of the poor, she has to make an option for the poor. Pope Francis states: "None of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice" (EG 201).

In the Jubilee Year 2000 the Catholic Bishops of India stated that they are “resolutely committed to change the life of our people living in poverty, inequality, injustice and oppression” and that “the preferential love of the poor ought to become the priority in all apostolic actions”. The General Assembly of the Church in India stated in the same year: “Following in the footsteps of our Master, we the Church in India make a definite option for the poor and the marginalised in the country ... we will never cease to empower the weak and the oppressed” (YKJ 2000 Final Statement, 32). Our own Diocesan Synod 2002 taught that “all diocesan pastoral activities must reflect the social dimension of our faith and our preferential option for the poor and for social justice” (SDS 176). “Our Biblical, Liturgical and Catechetical Apostolates must include a prophetic dimension that leads to social action, with a preferential option for the poor” (DPP 5.5).

1. Christ-Centred / God-Centred Option for the poor. Our option for the poor is the fruit of our Christian faith. Jesus calls us unceasingly for a revolution of tenderness and universal solidarity. We need to adopt “a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few” (EG 188). Solidarity means a strong and resolute willingness to service for the common good and more preferably for the good of the poor (*cf.* SRS 38, 46).

The Lord Jesus took his option for the poor to a new height when he declared, “whatever you do to the least of my brothers, you do it unto me” (Mt. 25: 40). Jesus, the living God who is with and in the poor, calls out to us. “In the poor, Jesus knocks on the doors of our heart, thirsting for our love. When we overcome our indifference and, in the name of Jesus, we give of ourselves for the least of his brethren, we are his good and faithful friends, with whom he loves to dwell” (Pope Francis, homily on 19-11-2017).

Without love for the poor there is no love of God, there is no salvation of God. “There is a saving power in their weakness... they are the ones who open to us the way to heaven; they are our passport to paradise (above-mentioned homily).

Therefore, our option for the poor is based on God’s, on Christ’s option for the poor: such an option enables us to experience God in our social action (contemplation in action). Let us earnestly ask our heavenly Father for this gift.

2. Option for the poor: a call for Conversion. We encounter God amidst the poor. God calls us earnestly for a change of attitude (conversion) towards the poor. “They have so much to teach us. They not only participate in the *sensus fidelium* but, through their struggles of life, they come to know the suffering Christ. We need to be open to the Gospel that they preach to us. Recognizing the salvific power that they possess, we must bring them to the

centre of the Church's pilgrimage" (EG 198). It is through our option for the poor that we begin to live as the new way of being Christian and of being the Church.

When Christian individuals or communities 'cross over' to the poor, involve themselves in their life and serve them in a spirit of solidarity, they begin to walk the path of the Beatitudes. To involve oneself in the life of the poor means to give up one's old thinking and life-style and adopt humility, poverty and a life of sacrifice (*cf.* LG 8); it means acquiring a new vision to recognize the humanity, the dignity of the poor and their power to transform society; it means treating with respect those who make present Christ crucified, being willing to learn from them and to live in deep union with them. Such a conversion must go on in our day-to-day life. We need to grow in union with Jesus the poor and with the poor themselves. Dear brothers and sisters, let us keep on praying that we may experience God in the poor and receive the grace of a genuine conversion towards them. By promoting the option for the poor may we learn to truly follow Jesus Christ.

3. Option for the poor: a call for Evangelical Poverty. Jesus lived not only in poverty of spirit, that is, in a total self-oblation to the Father and freedom from all worldly attachments, but in poverty of life-style, identifying himself with the poor and living and working in solidarity with them. Evangelical poverty signifies, on the one hand, complete trust in God, while on the other, it implies an austere and serene life that shuns away the temptation of greed, pride and selfishness (*cf.* 1 Tim. 6: 7-10). This type of poverty enhances solidarity with and social commitment to the less privileged.

Let us now reflect on how we can live this evangelical poverty in our personal as well as family life and take steps, accordingly. We need to be careful to avoid certain practices like excessive spending, buying things for the sake of buying and discarding valuables that are in good condition. Our weddings and other celebrations nowadays are becoming more and more ostentatious and extravagant. Let us strive to keep our feasts simple and sincerely endeavour to change social customs and traditions that go against justice. Christian life is a life of sharing, wherein we are led to generously offer our time, talents and even material resources to others. Let our offerings or services be not occasional but given on a regular basis.

4. Option for the poor: a call for Action for Social Justice. The most important aspect of the option for the poor is being seized of the goal of liberating the poor, consciously owning it and working tirelessly towards its realization. The main reason for poverty is social injustice. Option for the poor is option for social justice. Our social, economic and political structures are corroding with injustice and therefore action for social

justice becomes necessary. Pope Francis, quoting Pope Benedict XVI, says: “The Church cannot stay and must not stay out of the fight for justice” (EG 183). Our Diocesan Synod 2002 asserts: “The process of conscientization of the people and their mobilization for the defence of human rights and social change will be taken as the priority in our social mission” (SDS 184.2; *cf.* DPP 4.3.1.).

The liberating mission of the Church encapsulates the following principles: protecting human life and rights, raising a prophetic voice, solidarity with the poor in their trials and struggles, creating in them an attitude of the Beatitudes and strengthening their hope. Social Movements and Organizations play a vital role in making the option for the poor fruitful and in bringing about a just and a fraternal society. This is the reason why the Church gives her relentless support to these movements and enlightens them through the light of the Gospel.

Our Parishes and Small Christian Communities ought to be immersed in this mission of the Church. “They should be open to the problems of the world....this social concern should not only remain within the confines of the Parish Community but should reach out to the whole state and country at large” (SDS 184.1). It is advisable that the lay faithful play an active role in the political field; they should, however, follow the dictates of their conscience while doing so and shun sycophantic politics. They should thus strengthen democracy and, on the other hand, help to improve the functioning of the state administration. The ideals of social justice and the fight against corruption are of utmost importance.

Ever since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has been progressing significantly in living out her option for the poor and working for social justice. **In the year 2002**, our Diocesan Synod had put a significant emphasis on this. Let us read: “The promotion of social justice is yet to become an integral part of the expression of our faith and evangelization. Strong convictions of justice are yet to be developed among most of our faithful and high priority to the practice of social justice is still lacking in our communities and institutions. This requires a paradigm shift, viewing and addressing all issues, not from an elitist stance, but from the perspective of the poor” (SDS 177). “All of us, Clergy, Religious and Laity, should witness to this option for the poor, first and foremost, in our personal lifestyle, social dealings and in our institutions” (SDS 76).

Let us, therefore, sisters and brothers, commit ourselves, in this Pastoral Year, to make our Church in Goa a Church which is poor and for the poor.

IV. THE SOCIAL MISSION OF THE CHURCH

1. The Situation of Poverty in India

i) Extreme Poverty. In India, around 22% of the population live in extreme hunger: this has become the usual scene. Among the poor, the conditions in which children live are more precarious. According to the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, 30% of the global population of children living in poverty reside in India. While India is struck by extreme poverty, 73% of our country's resources are controlled by 10% of the population. The existing extreme poverty is therefore the result of the rampant social injustice prevailing in the country.

In this context, Caritas-India, through its various projects, is doing a commendable work in helping eradicate poverty in our country.

ii) Trampling of Human Rights. People are being uprooted from their land and homes in the name of development. Pope Francis says that “the first victim of development is the poor person.” It is easier to trample upon the rights of the poor, because those who will raise their voice for them are very few. In recent times we see a new trend emerging in our country, which demands uniformity in what and how we eat, dress, live and even worship: a kind of mono-culturalism. Human rights are under attack and democracy appears to be in peril. The various minorities fear for their safety. In short, respect for law is frankly on the decline in this country.

iii) Danger to our Constitution. At the time of elections, the candidates confuse the minds of many people by making false promises. And the people, on their part, often sell their precious vote for selfish, petty gain. Today, our Constitution is in danger, reason why most of the people live in insecurity. Having this concern in mind, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India has recently declared in its Plenary Assembly that the Church in India should diligently promote and stand by values like secularism, freedom of speech and freedom to practise one's religion enshrined in the Indian Constitution. In this context, particularly as the General Elections are fast approaching, we must strive to know our Constitution better and work harder to protect it (*cf.* CBCI XXXIII General Body Meeting Final Statement 2018).

2. The Situation of Poverty in Goa

Experts define a poor person as one who, in some way or the other, experiences a lack of something. This insufficiency could be related to money, emotions or social acceptance. A person who has plenty of money may not be necessarily a rich person, as the same may be isolated by the society, while a person with little money may be magnanimous

and rich in positive emotions. In this perspective, each one of us is poor in some way or the other. In Goa too we observe various types of poor people. In the reflection that follows we shall restrict ourselves to three types of poverty.

- i) Economic Poverty.* The general outlook of the socio-economic situation in Goa could easily lead one to think that there are few poor people in this state. We may indeed be better off than some other states in our country, as far as the index of hunger or poverty is concerned; nonetheless quite a few people in Goa do experience insufficiency of basic amenities and struggle to earn their daily bread. A good many children and youth cannot pursue their higher studies due to the financial constraints of their families. A lot of people cannot even avail themselves of various medical options, because of lack of finance. There are many who live under tremendous stress for they do not have a roof they can call their own. A good number of Goans have hit rock-bottom in their business, others are trapped in debts and some others have even committed suicide on account of their extreme personal circumstances.
- ii) Emotional Poverty.* Man is not an island; he lives and grows among others and, together with others, he confronts social problems. Unfortunately, quite a few have difficulty in adjusting or living with others; they live lonely lives, in isolation from the rest. There are those who are born in economically poor families and, being reluctant to interact freely with others, live their whole life with an inferiority complex. There are still others who, due to their emotional problems, feel unaccepted by society and have even fallen prey to mental illness. Children who have been raped or abused oftentimes have to live with that trauma for the rest of their life. Many victims of emotional humiliation become victims of domestic violence and ostracism. Sadly, this type of poverty is on the rise in our society.
- iii) Ostracism.* Those who do not have shelter, food or clothing often face social ostracism. This kind of poverty is not alien to our society and it has different faces. Society considers the illiterate as ignorant and the aged and the sick as discardable. Those suffering from terminal illness often carry their cross in loneliness. There is a growing thinking that the physically and the mentally handicapped bring down our economy. Migrants, people dwelling in huts and living on the streets are ostracized and treated with harsh words. Again, due to caste discrimination, some people live their entire life in humiliation.

Quite a number of children and widows suffer indignity. Those who are unemployed and those who have returned after quitting their jobs in other cities and countries and have no jobs at hand are undergoing a lot of stress. There are many domestic workers who silently bear injustices done to them for fear of losing their job. Those who are in prison and, sadly,

also their entire families are tagged with the label of being criminals, a stigma that they often have to carry for the rest of their lives. In the same way, the families of those who have become victims of alcohol and drug addiction are subjected to lasting social discrimination. There will be others who are victims of various types of poverty. To reach out to such ostracized people will be our big challenge, particularly during this Pastoral Year.

3. Eradication of Poverty: Our Measures and Programmes

Since poverty has different forms, we need to employ different ways and means to deal with it. By feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty and sheltering the homeless we cannot say we are fully done with our social responsibilities. Questions like --- ‘why are they poor?’ ‘who has led them to this situation?’ ‘why do they remain there?’ --- need to be asked. Else, our social work will be incomplete and the poor will continue to remain where they are for the rest of their life.

The various Diocesan Bodies of the Church in Goa should make provisions for the care of the needy and the poor in their annual budgets. It is my great desire that they should seriously apply their mind to this and, after due deliberation, take up concrete initiatives in this direction. I earnestly request that, during this Pastoral Year, all our diocesan bodies should identify people in need and find out ways and means to reach out to them.

Those of our diocesan bodies that work primarily for the transformation of the society, like Caritas-Goa, the Council for Social Justice and Peace as well as the Centre for Responsible Tourism, should in the first place see in what ways they can be of even more effective assistance to those who are in need. They would do well to organize regular programmes to conscientize people concerning their social responsibility. I call upon the Clergy, the Religious and the Laity to understand and live out more meaningfully the social dimension of our faith. The support that we as a Church have been extending to people in solving their problems and protecting their rights must continue with increased vigour.

An important sector of humanity in need that we must attend to is the youth. We ought to show our concern for them and accompany them as they look for employment or for setting up their own business endeavours. We shall in this way not only help eradicate poverty, but also help create new employment avenues.

We cannot fail to acknowledge the presence of various Congregations of Men and Women Religious who render yeoman service to the poor in our Archdiocese. We sincerely thank God for them, as our heart delights in watching them serve the least of our brethren with love, concern and selflessness. Among the Laity, the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul go out to personally visit the poor, taking part in their loneliness and pain and helping them materially too. Besides, many lay people, on their own or in groups, try to

help the poor and bring them out of their misery. All these are indeed living blessings from God!

4. Social Mission in our Parishes

Beginning this Pastoral Year, we need to create viable structures in favour of the poor and the underprivileged. Although we feel glad on account of the service that we have been rendering to the poor, we need to look for more ways of helping them effectively. In this regard, I make an earnest appeal to every Parish Pastoral Council and parish unit of our diocesan apostolates to reflect on this issue seriously and take concrete initiatives to alleviate human suffering around them.

It is also my fervent request that every parish should establish a Fund for the Poor and that, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, all should make efforts to reach out to the needs of the poor.

The leaders of our *Community Animation Teams (CATs)* should take it as their responsibility not only to draw the attention of the faithful to the life-situation and the needs of the poor members of our Small Christian Communities, but also to reach out to them. The transformation of the society should be a special concern of the Small Christian Communities. I strongly urge those concerned to revisit the guiding principles of the Parish Social Apostolate Fora and continue the work on social transformation with renewed vigour. Many of our lay faithful are engaged in fighting poverty, in different ways. Let us work enthusiastically to support and motivate them.

CONCLUSION

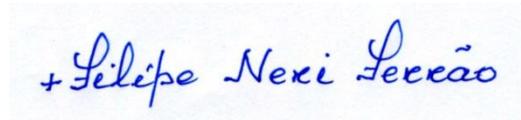
My beloved brothers and sisters, as we have reflected above, in order to bear a vibrant witness to our Christian faith, we need to relentlessly and wholeheartedly work for the poor, since service to the poor is not accidental, but essential to our faith. I have written this Letter with the genuine concern that all of us, aided by the power and the courage of the Holy Spirit, whose solemnity we celebrate today, may be able to face the challenge of serving the poor and the least of our brethren. Let us give a special place in our hearts to those who are ostracized and marginalized. Let our concern reach out to the poor and the needy through our various pastoral activities.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Heavenly Mother, accompany us as we carry forward our plan for this Pastoral Year. St. Francis Xavier, the Patron of Goa, although born in a castle, where he grew, came to us in humility and, walking barefoot, showed that

he carried the poor, the suffering and the abandoned in his heart. St. Joseph Vaz, the Patron of our Archdiocese, also walked barefoot and showed an extraordinary love and concern for the poor, the sick and the ostracized. Inspired by the example of these two Saints, let us be courageous instruments of the Church's solidarity and social concern in our times.

I pray that the blessing of our Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit may come upon you and I wish all of you a grace-filled new Pastoral Year.

Archbishop's House, Panjim, Solemnity of the Pentecost, May 20, 2018.



(+ Filipe Neri Ferrão)
Archbishop of Goa and Daman

Abbreviations:

LG – *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (1964)

LC – *Libertatis Conscientia*, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation (1986)

JW – Justice in the World (1971 Synod of Bishops)

SDS – Statement of the Diocesan Synod (Goa 2002)

MD – *Mulieris Dignitatem*, John Paul II, Apostolic Letter (1988)

EG - *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation (2013)

DPP - Diocesan Pastoral Plan (Archdiocese of Goa and Daman)

SRS – *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, John Paul II, Encyclical (1987)

YKJ 2000 – *Yesu Krist Jayanti*, National Assembly of the Church in India (Bangalore)

