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Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
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Pastor's Column

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**Welcome, Bishop Antonsamy Peter Abir!**

This weekend we are privileged to host Bishop Antonsamy Peter Abir, the Bishop of Sultanpet, India, for our annual Mission Appeal.

Here is a note from Bishop Antonsamy informing us about his Diocese:

*"My diocese was newly created in February 2014. It is a new Latin Catholic Diocese among the majority of the Syrian Catholics in the state of Kerala.*

*This new diocese is a border area touching two political States of India: Kerala and Tamil Nadu. This is the 167<sup>th</sup> Catholic diocese of India.*

*There are 55 priests (30 Diocesan and 25 Religious Priests) and 32,000 Latin Catholics out of the total population of 28 million people.*

*I was consecrated Bishop of this new diocese. So, I am also a new bishop of two years.*

**Area:** *The area of my diocese is in general composed of rocky land and hilly land and rough soil not much suitable for good cultivation. In general the whole area is very dry, having scanty rainfalls – not gaining either from the north east monsoon or from the south west monsoon. For four months (February – May) in the year people of this area suffer from lack of water both for drinking and irrigation. Unlike the main land of Kerala this area is full of rocks and so the heat adds the misery of the people.*

**The People:** *The people in this new diocese are migrants from inside another southern state of India (Tamilnadu). As Catholic Christians they migrated to this area on account of famine in their area and settled in this area. Hence they are minorities linguistically, ethnically and religiously. The situation of the Latin Catholics in this State are looked down by others as we are economically, culturally and educationally poor. The people of this area are looked down as downtrodden. They are considered as second class citizens in the State. The people of this new diocese, Sultanpet, are of casual laborers; they spend their daily wages in food, dress and alcohol and some are even driven to drugs. Immorality among the people is very common; this leads to growth of AIDS and other sex related patients. There is no saving mentality. Hence they do not spend much for the higher education of their children. Most of the children drop out or stop with high school. Hence they are unable to compete with others in securing Governmental or institutional jobs.*

**Status of Women:** *Women have lower status with reference to power and influence than men in all spheres of life – family, community, religion and politics. It is believed and practiced mostly that up to marriage, she is protected by her parents; during married life, she is looked after by her husband; and, after*

*the death of her husband, she was used to spend remaining years of her life under the roof of her children without any will or desire and rights in the family. A daughter began to be regarded as curse. As the girls will be married to another family, they, in general, are not sent for higher studies by their parents.*

**Children:** *Children in my diocese are in a very vulnerable situation. As the parents are not much educated they do not help their children to do their studies. There is only on diocesan school and the rest are Government owned schools where there is neither catechism nor moral studies. Hence the morality and personality building is very much lacking. Also the number of school drop outs is increasing year after year. Several parishes need to be bifurcated and so need to build chapels, presbyteries, and social service units. There are some companies where our Catholics are not given jobs since they do not come up to the educational or professional requirement of these companies.*

**Priorities:** *As a new diocese responsible for the welfare of the people, as Pope Francis has emphasized, we are to go to the periphery of the society, trying to give encouragement, uplift in the society and self-improvement. In particular, we give and wish to continue to give:*

- 1). Awareness programs against the social evils of alcohol, drugs for men... Awareness and self-empowerment and self-respect programs for women...*
- 2). For children: encourage them to pursue their education; start tuition centers, as far as possible, in all the parish communities.*
- 3). We have many poor and underprivileged girls and boys in order to educate them, keeping them in our own girls' home and boys' home.*
- 4). We also have to take care of many orphan boys and girls who are kept in three centers. We look after their board, lodging, and studies.*
- 5). Formation of seminarians, the future priests."*

I know that we will, as a Parish, encourage and support the ministry of Bishop Antonsamy with our prayers and our financial donations.

The Mission Appeal Envelope attached to the Bulletin this weekend can be returned any time during the month of August.

In anticipation, I am grateful for your generous response!

*Fr. Mike*