

# Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

*(Catholicate of the East)*

## *Diocese of South-West America*

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**Alexios Mar Eusebius**

**Metropolitan**



November 24, 2010

DSWA/C/18/2010

Blessings to all our Chor-Episcopoi, Priests, Deacons, Parish Managing Committee members, and all the faithful of the Diocese of South-West America.

Dearly Beloved,

We have come near to one of the five canonical Lents observed in our Church. The Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup> is one of the most important feasts of the Church that celebrates the incarnation of the second person of the Holy Trinity. Today, the world has commercialized this feast for self pleasure and gain. The feast is now understood merely in terms of store sales, gift exchanges, big meals, and the like. It is necessary to keep the spirit of this commemoration and refocus the attention to the central point of our celebration.

In the Church, lent is arranged for a period of twenty five days as a preparation for the celebration of the coming of our Lord. Christmas is in indeed a time to celebrate, but it is also a time for renewal and rededication to our Lord who became flesh and willingly died for the sake of our salvation. Our lives should imitate Christ and be set apart, for Christ lived in the world but did not consider Himself to be of the world. While the world commercializes and promotes delicious food items, we as Christians should be able to fast and abstain from meat, Fish and dairy products maintaining self-discipline and control over our personal diet.

My Beloved, we are aware that during many of our Indian Orthodox wedding receptions, family gatherings, and various holiday celebrations, alcohol has become a central part of the gathering or is provided in some form. Our gatherings should always reflect an environment where we can welcome Christ. Alcohol has ruined many of our families and continues to cause trouble in our community. We have witnessed many tragedies including issues of physical and verbal abuse, rape, and the like that have now become so common. Alcohol is destructive and continues to be

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the greatest source of problem in the Indian community. We hope and pray that all our faithful will practice abstinence from it and work together against this evil.

We also would like to bring to your attention the dress code of the Church. While there is no specific uniform for our Church, we urge everyone to come to Church in modest attire. Dress is a symbol of respect that we show not only to the place in which we stand but also to the people we commune with. Such items as shorts and other articles of clothing that cause distraction or can serve as a stumbling block for others during worship is not encouraged. We hope everyone will take this matter seriously and take the spirit of this advice to dress appropriately and present ourselves before God and others in a respectable way. The attraction and acceptance in the community should not be our dress but our behavior and dealings with one another. As St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians "...put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

The ornamental dot also known as 'bindi' that women often wear on their forehead has also become a point of concern. As you all know our forehead is already ornamented by the sign of the Cross with Holy Mooron. We should feel that no other ornament can supersede the sign and seal of the Trinity. Moreover, women who come forth for the absolution with the 'bindi' cause a disturbance to our priests, as it gets stuck on their fingers. We hope our faithful will understand this practical reason as to why women should not wear any decorative ornaments on their forehead when attending Church services. We just wanted to bring these matters to your attention and hope that it will be understood in the Spirit of love.

My dear children, we take this opportunity to extend our blessings for this Lent and the Feast of the Nativity and hope and pray that it will be a blessing for us all. Please continue to pray for our Church and its mission. May the grace and blessings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be showered upon us all.

Your Shepherd in Christ,



Alexios Mar Eusebius  
Metropolitan