COMMEMORATION SERVICE MESSAGE

MINISTERIAL FORMATION:
AN ALTERNATIVE CULTURE (OF SOULS)

The Most Rev. Dr. Govada Dyvasirvadam
Moderator, Church of South India and Bishop of Krishna-Godavari
Diocese of the Church of South India

With the ushering in of the new era, the doors were opened for a missionary movement in the beginning of 19th century in India. Serampore, a beautiful city on the river banks of Hooghly received the missionary intervention in the very East of India, in persons of William Carey the morning star and of his associates Marshman and Ward, the Serampore Trio. While we commemorate these spiritual and visionary luminaries we recall their unforgettable contribution that had impacted the larger culture of Indian community be it literacy, abolition of superstitions, introducing new mode of communication, translation and printing of the Bible. It only speaks volumes of a radical transformation of the then pluralistic Indian community. Their constant dialogue in the areas of interfaith and various aspects of the socio-cultural fabric has led to a spiritual Renaissance in India. It is in this context it is appropriate for all of us to pay our heartfelt tribute to the Serampore Trio while we stand firm on the foundations they laid for the theological learning.

We give thanks to God for the diversity of human cultures, for the integrity of knowledge and learning, for the enthusiasm and vibrancy of many young people, for communities being re-built by the constant efforts of establishing justice and peace. These are the signs of hope and the kingdom of God on earth. On the other hand, there are also attempts to dishonour God who is the source of our life, through the practices of exclusion and marginalization, reluctance to pursue justice and unwillingness to live in peace, our failure to cooperate for unity and preservation of the earth. In the light of this, we need to be more sensitive to the call of God to engage ourselves in preserving the dignity of human life and even learning values from other faiths and to work with them to discover the 'image of God'. The ministerial formation in the process of theological education is an invitation to respond in faith to various challenges we face in our land. It is imperative that the efforts in addressing the challenges need to be attested by the Word of God found in the Holy Scriptures and realized through our faith experiences.

Ministerial Formation: A Call to Hope

The proclamation of the Gospel, evangeleoum (paxromana) was primarily used in Roman context to give new hope and solace to the sub-servients by the Roman Rulers. The word acquired a new meaning by the coming of our Lord in the word evangellion - the 'good news' of our Lord Jesus Christ who promised the kingdom values but not from the worldly perspective. The word of God penetrated into the created world only to
renew and re-establish the kingdom values more so particular in the midst of human relations with creation, fellow humans and that of the creator God.

The assurance of the transformation of human values has crept in the teachings and work of Jesus in translating these virtues he did discover the malady of humanity. The individuals found in the Gospels only represent the broken and beleaguered world. More than a million Christians walking out of Syria from their native land as refugees portray a hopeless situation for the humanity to be ashamed off. In this context, we are also reminded of the victims of Kandamal persecution where the perpetrators have not allowed the Christians to come into their villages in spite of seven years intervention of the Government. A new spirit of hospitality at this tragic background is re-enacted in the lines of Jesus' model. The hope in Jesus is that he is both the sufferer and the saviour, refugee and the refuge, the vanquished and the victor. He himself was helpless on the cross yet he stands with open arms to extend hospitality. With this hope you are called to build an alternative community who discover the poverty and wealth, suffering and comfort under the same shade of the cross.

Ministerial Formation: A Call to Build
The Vatican council under the title "The Revealed Word of God" which was later changed to "Transmission of Divine Revelations" contain a subsection which reads "the Apostle and their successors of the Gospel" to indicate the continuity of the act of proclaiming (kerygma) and the tradition. The new reflection on the call of "the successors of the Apostle" is to act as "builders" (oikomane). As ministers in the making what kind of church do you perceive and what kind of community do you envisage to build in this 21st century. In the wake of Christianity assuming a re-imaging and re-emerging, building of an alternative community is a historic necessity. The institutional church with her historic and traditional shades do possess the strengths and challenges. On the other hand, there have been efforts for the formation of non-denominational and charismatic congregations. The growing para-church and mega-church attitude dramatically changes the ecclesiastical scenario in our country. It is also worth noting that the gap between "belonging" and "believing" is ever growing. The communities on the grassroots are looking for the church that is embedded with spiritual values and at the same time a church that is comfortable to their economic standards and cultural needs. These emerging trends demand the church in particular and community in general, to journey beyond institutional boundaries to transcend and transform the already existing traditional forms. In other words, there has been a shift from Ecclesio-centrism to Christo-centrism. Therefore, it is a caution and a call to rebuild our own faith communities with Christo-centric journey towards capturing the kingdom values where people of God and their aspirations for a new spirituality and wholeness becomes the agenda. In this process, not only humans but the whole creation becomes part of our accompaniment. Protecting and preserving God given 'Green Gift' becomes paramount objective in building up the Christo-centric community.

Ministerial Formation: A Call to Peace
The World Council of Churches (WCC) met in Harare had focused on overcoming violence. The council recorded: "we will strive together to overcome the spirit, logic and
practice of violence; and that we continue to be the agents of reconciliation and peace with justice" (World Council of Churches, Central Committee Minutes of 51st Meeting, Potsondon, Germany Jan- Fen 2001). We understand that overcoming violence directs us to promote compassion, tolerance and values of co-existence in the present context of intolerance to the “other”. Our openness for the inter-religious dialogue will enhance community building. As channels of peace we are called to preach and practice forgiveness and reconciliation. The essence of violence is the denial of justice. In other words, we are called to prioritize the forms of justice and mould the church as the locus of peace as it is ultimately the response to the promise and gift of God: "peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you" (John 14: 27).

At the closure of the year 2015, 147 young Christian women were beheaded in a university and 4 Palestinian Christians were killed recently. More strikingly, the fact that millions of Christians were driven away from Syria, from their native land, demands human intervention in a big way to bring justice and peace. Church is expected to play a constructive role in this situation towards building a community where there is no fear of violence and destruction of human life which is a gift of God, instead of being silent spectators and neutral communities in the Church. It is the gospel imperative on part of us to exhibit a re-invigorated commitment theologically, spiritually and morally to bring about healing and reconciliation to the broken humanity and creation. As called out and equipped agents of God, you represent the church that received the mandate to exercise her responsibility to heal and to build and to be a stewards of God's creation.

Ministerial Formation: A Call for a graceful Disposition
The Church that has sent you for theological training expect you to continue the great legacy of Jesus Christ, who was the Lord, yet assumed the servant hood; was a master yet washed the feet of his disciples. The thrust of Jesus’ ministry ‘not to be served but to serve’ must be the mantra and the life-giving inspiration to the ministry. When you begin to minister to the people of God, you would realize that you do not have a ministry of your own but to continue the ministry of Jesus the Christ who is the Lord of the Church. Jesus himself proclaimed the coming of the kingdom, basileia, which simply means the 'reign of God' or 'dominion of God'. We are called to have the mind of Christ as we serve communities in His name of Christ. We must put on Christ and cultivate Christ's graceful disposition until it becomes a habit and part of our personality. Cicero, the Roman orator said, cultura anima, which means 'cultivating the souls' towards a new culture of humanity.

Understanding God's grace is essential to enjoying the life that God has planned for you. God fills your heart with his grace that you become a 'Grace-giver" to the dejected and those living on the margins.

Conclusion:
I'm delighted to be part of the celebrations of both theological and ministerial formation in India. While I conclude this commemoration lecture, I invite these prospective leaders of the church to discover the 'image of God' on every human face irrespective of the
class, caste, colour and gender by living out the kingdom values on earth. I wish you all the best and God's choicest blessings as you move forward to realize what God has in store for each one of you.