

150 YEARS

Since the Publication of
Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul
by Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara
(Originally Issued on 13 February 1868)

In the loving Providence of God and with far-reaching foresight, our beloved founder Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara issued *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (*Testament of a Loving Father*) on 13 February 1868 to the people of Kainakary, his own kith and kin united in 'spirit and flesh'. This insightful and down-to-earth document, the first of its kind in the known history of the Church, aimed at giving practical direction to families in leading a God-fearing as well as socially commendable life, completes 150 years after it was handed over to the community in Kainakary.

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a yet to be recognized 'champion of families' even within the Catholic Church and a truly loving father (*oru nalla appan*) in heart, bequeathed to his beloved family members and relatives, and through them to the entire human family, this *Testament*, which, he believed, would keep him united with them by the regular reading of the text and following the instructions contained therein. As the Catholic Church makes earnest efforts to accompany her faithful who discern and adopt their vocation of responsible parenthood for which Pope Francis invites all pastors to go an extra mile to support "families face their present challenges with the light and strength that comes from the Gospel," the holistic and practical insights of Saint Chavara come handy, provided we are ready to translate them into contemporary idioms and make them respond to the challenges faced by modern day families. While the biblical insights and inspiring anecdotes contained in the *Testament* attest to the fact that Saint Chavara had a deep sense of Christian foundations for leading a genuine family life, his insightful practical directives indicate how thoroughly he understood the dynamics of a family, especially on grooming of children and discipline within the family.

Family is the heaven on earth. As Saint Chavara insightfully puts it, "a good Christian family is the image of heaven, where members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying the parents, walking peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one's proper state of life." It is with this intention that he, in a spirit of prayer and discernment

and yearning for “God’s light and peace,” invited family members to cultivate love, order, and peace, even if that would call for sacrificing personal convenience and comfort. Hence, Saint Chavara codified this practical guideline in forty paragraphs, addressing three vital perspectives to be maintained in every Catholic family, namely, (1) the place of a family in the redemptive plan of God, (2) the role of family in the mission of the Church, and (3) the mission of family in social networking.

Let us celebrate the message of the *Testament* by bringing it to the consciousness of every family by initiating more effective modes of love, unity, and sharing that are vital in establishing and effectively sustaining families at all times. Following the insights in the *Testament*, we shall personally and collectively strive to animate, support, and encourage all families that are close to us in our varied ministerial contexts. Let new insights emerge, inspired by the love and concern that Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara felt in his heart, for the integral wellbeing of families and to lead them on their way of becoming heaven on earth.