



Report on the Inauguration of the Lay Leaders Training Program



The Lay Leaders Training Programme 2026 of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India (JDCSI) was officially inaugurated on Saturday, 18 July 2026, at the Diocesan Conference Hall. The programme marked a significant milestone in the life and ministry of the Diocese as it revived a long-standing tradition of theological formation for lay members. A total of 28 participants representing the regions of Colombo, Batticaloa, Vanni, and Jaffna enrolled in the programme. The majority of the participants were women, reflecting the significant role that women continue to play in the life and ministry of the Church. Their enthusiastic participation demonstrated a growing commitment among lay members, particularly women, to deepen their theological understanding and strengthen their leadership in the Church and society.

The inauguration began with a devotional service led by the Bishop of the Jaffna Diocese, Rt. Rev. Dr. V. Pathmathayalan. Through Scripture reading, prayer, and meditation, the bishop dedicated the programme to God and encouraged participants to begin their journey of learning with humility and faith.

Following the devotion, the bishop delivered the inaugural address. He warmly welcomed the clergy, and lay participants and described the occasion

as not merely the beginning of a new course but the revival of a noble tradition that had once played an important role in the Diocese. He emphasized that the programme should be understood as the beginning of a spiritual journey that would contribute to shaping the future ministry of the Church.



Reflecting on the history of the Diocese, the Bishop recalled that the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India has faithfully continued its ministry for the past many years, despite numerous challenges including war, displacement, and social upheaval. He acknowledged the vision of the American missionaries who established the Church and noted how the Diocese has grown into a well-organized ecclesiastical body under the episcopal leadership of the bishop.



"The strength of the Church is measured not only by its bishops and clergy, but also by the faithful dedication of its lay people."
Bishop



"I lived the first 21 years of my life for myself. I lived the next 21 years for my family. Now I have decided to dedicate the rest of my life to God's ministry."

Mrs. Sumitha Victor

the life and witness of the Church. Therefore, providing theological education and ministry formation for lay members is an essential investment in the future of the Church.

He explained that this programme is not a new initiative but the continuation of an earlier tradition. The bishop



"I have a desire to engage in ministry, but I have not had the opportunity to do so. I hope this Lay Leadership Program will provide me with that opportunity."

Mr. Vinith

onwards. Teaching others while still learning himself, he said, became one of the most meaningful experiences of his life.

Although the programme was later discontinued due to retirements, changing responsibilities, and other circumstances, the bishop noted that the Diocese never abandoned its vision of lay theological education. Several attempts had been made to revive the programme, and through the cooperation and commitment of many individuals, it has now been successfully reintroduced. He encouraged everyone to thank God for this important achievement.

Addressing the purpose of the programme, the bishop stressed that the participants had not joined because they lacked faith or ministry experience. On the contrary, they were already actively serving in their



"I also have an Almanac, but I sometimes find it difficult to connect the Sunday theme with the appointed Bible passage. I hope this Lay Leadership Programme will help me understand and relate them more effectively"

Mr. Linton Thevarajah

Church. Whether bishop, clergy, professor, or lay member, everyone has more to learn. He illustrated this truth by sharing a personal story from his studies at Madurai Kamaraj University, where an atheist lecturer encouraged him to read deeply, think critically, and pursue research. Although the lecturer did not influence

The bishop paid special tribute to the faithful service of lay people throughout the history of the Diocese. He reminded the gathering that the growth of the Church had not depended solely on bishops and clergy but also on countless lay members who have served as Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, choir members, administrators, social workers, and dedicated volunteers. Their commitment, he said, has

been central to

recounted that structured lay theological education began in 1983 at Jaffna College, even before the establishment of the Christian Theological Seminary. After the Seminary was founded, lay theological education continued alongside the formation of clergy.

Sharing his own experience, Bishop Pathmathayalan recalled studying at the Christian Theological Seminary from 1991 to 1995. While still a student, he served as a resource person in the lay training programme from 1992

"Even though I am a professor, I desire to continue learning theology so that I may better support God's ministry."

Dr. M. Rubavathanan



"I am already engaged in ministry. I hope this programme will help me deepen my understanding of theology and Scripture."

Mrs. Janeera



congregations through worship, prayer, administration, and various ministries. However, Christian discipleship requires continual learning. Referring to Acts 18:24–28, he reflected on the example of Apollos, who, despite being eloquent and knowledgeable in Scripture, humbly accepted further teaching from Priscilla and Aquila. This, the Bishop said, illustrates that every Christian is called to remain a lifelong learner.

He reminded the participants that learning should never cease, regardless of one's position in the



his Christian faith, he broadened his intellectual outlook and demonstrated that God can use unexpected people to shape His servants.

The bishop emphasized that success should not be measured by the number of participants but by the transformation they experience. Referring to Jesus' words about sending His disciples "like sheep among wolves," he reminded the gathering that Christians are called not to conform to the

violence, hatred, and injustice of the world but to become agents of transformation. At the conclusion of the one-year programme, participants should leave not merely with certificates but as faithful servants carrying Christ's love into their churches and communities.

Concluding his address, the bishop reflected on the story of David and Goliath, reminding participants that true strength lies not in human ability but in trust in God. He prayed that at the completion of the programme each participant would possess greater knowledge, deeper humility, stronger commitment, increased responsibility, and the ability to become leaders who transform both the Church and society through faithful Christian witness.

Following the Bishop's address, Rev. M. Lukejohn introduced the Lay Leadership Formation Programme by presenting its vision, objectives, curriculum, and learning methods. He explained that the one-year programme consists of ten units organised into three sections: Biblical and Theological Foundations, Church in Context, and Ministry Skills. He highlighted that the programme aims to deepen participants' understanding of Scripture and Christian doctrine, strengthen their leadership in worship and pastoral ministry, promote justice, peace, and reconciliation, and equip them to serve their local congregations more effectively. He also outlined the teaching methods, including lectures, Bible studies, group discussions, case studies, practical exercises, assignments, and personal reflection, while encouraging participants to attend faithfully and actively engage throughout the programme.

During the afternoon session, the action plan for the implementation of the Lay Leaders Training Programme was discussed in detail. It was decided that, beginning August 2026, the training classes would be conducted once every month on a Saturday in four regional centres—Colombo, Batticaloa, Vanni, and Jaffna—to enable participants from different parts of the Diocese to attend more conveniently. The regional model of training is expected to strengthen participation, reduce travel burdens, and provide greater opportunities for contextual learning and fellowship among lay leaders in their respective regions. To support the learning process, reading materials for each unit will be distributed to participants in advance through WhatsApp in PDF format, allowing them to prepare for each session before attending the monthly classes. Participants were also briefed on the annual schedule, learning expectations, and coordination arrangements for the successful implementation of the one-year programme.



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The successful inauguration of the Lay Leaders Training Programme 2026-2027 represents a significant step in strengthening the ministry of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India. By reviving a historic tradition of lay theological education, the Diocese has reaffirmed its commitment to equipping lay members for faithful Christian witness, responsible leadership, and effective ministry in both the Church and society. The programme stands as an important investment in developing knowledgeable, spiritually mature, and mission-oriented lay leaders who will contribute to the continued growth and witness of the Diocese in the years ahead.

The inaugural programme continued throughout the day with opportunities for fellowship and interaction among participants from the four regions of the Diocese. The programme concluded at 4.00 p.m. with the Benediction pronounced by the bishop.