



MAR THOMA

MESSENGER

A PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE JANUARY 1997



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CONTENTS

Letter From The Diocesan Bishop	2
Role of the Laity—In and Through the Church	
Rev. Dr. K. V. Mathew	4
Karnataka Mission—	
Reaching the Remote Villages	5
Equipping the People of God in the Church	
Dr. George Samuel	6
The Role of the Laity in the Church	
George J. Poikail	7
Women and New Horizons of Witnessing	
Dr. Josephine George	9
Dr. M. M. Thomas—A Grateful Memory	
Rev. Dr. K. V. Mathew	12
Manushiavatharathinte Porul Thedi	
Rev. Raju Anchery	13
Message at the Inauguration of the	
Silver Jubilee Celebration—Joseph Mattackal	16
Journey to Jerusalem—Dr. T. M. Thomas	18
A Spirituality for Everyday Life	
Rev. Dr. K. C. Abraham	20
Parents & Teens Can Bridge the Generation Gap	
Dr. Annie Lincoln	21
From Death to Life: Bhopal Gas Tragedy Revisted	
P. C. Mathew	22
The Eternal Promise—Mary Varughese (Aswathi)	25
The Wisdom of the Body—Jainamma Cherian	26
Kids Corner	27
Dedication of the Mar Thoma Church of South Florida	29
Message at the Inauguration of the	
Silver Jubilee Celebration—Master Joseph Varghese	30
Bible Crossword Puzzle	31
Diocesan News	33
Parish News	38
Editorial	40



MAR THOMA MESSENGER UPCOMING ISSUES

APRIL, 1997 — LITURGY

Articles, News etc. due by March 1, 1997

JULY, 1997 — SILVER JUBILEE SPECIAL

Articles, News etc. due by June 1, 1997

Letter From The Diocesan Bishop



Dearly Beloved in Christ,

The world has set her face towards a new year. The past has gone by leaving its permanent marks on history. There is fear and hope at the same time. 1997 is declared as the "Year of the uprooted people." Uprooted are homeless and lifeless. In the modern world millions are homeless due to ethnic wars, natural calamities, urbanization, beautification of cities, unemployment and other causes. We need to identify with the pain of the uprooted and respond creatively to their dire needs.

The President of the United States has inaugurated his second term with the challenge to build a bridge to the 21st century. In his inaugural address he stated that even if we have all the wealth of this world, if we do not have human character we won't gain anything. That emphasize on values and human character has to be continued.

1997 is the Jubilee year for the Mar Thoma Church in the United States. We started as a small worshipping community in 1972 and now we have spread all over North America and Europe with 42 Parishes and nearly 20 Congregations. This is a tremendous growth to be celebrated with joy, gratitude, repentance and renewal. Jubilee celebrations were inaugurated on November 2nd at Long Island, New York. The whole year we are continuing the celebration with various programs and projects in different Regions and Centers. It is very pleasing and rewarding to see that people participate enthusiastically in these celebrations.

Every family is given a Memento with the logo and motto of our Church embedded on it. Mission fund boxes are distributed to raise funds for the mission work outside Kerala, mainly in Karnataka. A beautiful calendar with the Jubilee theme Repent, Rejoice, Renew, photographs of the Metropolitan and the Diocesan Bishop and an artist's rendering of the proposed Diocesan Center are also distributed. A Lectionary with Bible Reading and addresses of all our Bishops and Archbishops of the Diocese is also provided. The new directory with addresses of all our families will be published in March. Hope all these would help all of us to pray every day for diocese and its activities. Jubilee Coupons of various denominations are distributed to generate Diocesan Development Fund. It is expected that all our earning members would offer a thanksgiving of at least \$100 towards this fund. Those who are blessed in manifold ways during the last twenty-five years, I am sure, will contribute generously.

Last month some of our youngsters went to India for a mission tour visiting various Mission Centers in Kerala, Karnataka and other places. The Program was coordinated by the Rev. George Mathew, Director, Santhigiri Ashram, Alwaye and the Rev. K. G. Joseph (Epiphany, New York). The diocese is sharing fifty percent of their travel expenses to enlarge the missionary outlook of our young people. The Rev. Kurien George from Bombay is appointed as Chaplain from May 1st, to work independently among young people in the New York area to nurture them in Christian faith and practice.

The theme for the Jubilee is **"Repent Rejoice and Renew"** as stated earlier. Repentance was the theme of the Prophets and the leaders of the Bible with which they challenged the people to return to God. We read about the Jubilee year in the Book of Leviticus, It was a time of celebration, repentance and rejuvenation. We thank God for what he has given to us and re-dedicate ourselves for His services. In other words, we commit ourselves to the commands of God, "love your God and love your neighbor." That demands to do the will of God and to share all God's gifts with the fellow beings.

Repentance is a prerequisite for renewal. Unless we repent, we won't be renewed. It is true in the story of the prodigal son, the sinful woman wept at the feet of Jesus, St. Augustine who became the Bishop of Hippo and in the lives of numerous believers. It is said, "Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future."

Repentance makes the difference. So we need to repent in our personal and church life about our lack of oneness, love and forgiveness. Material wealth without humility is ruinous, but wealth with charity is a blessing. God has made us rich not to become proud of or selfish, but to be humble and caring, *"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?"* (Micah 6:8)

We have exploited the earth for our selfish purposes without caring for the future generations. We need to repent about the ecological exploitation and behave responsibly to the nature. We have exploited people for our pleasure through abuse of women, children and the weak. We need to repent for our squabbles and petty jealousies in the Parishes. This year should be an year of repentance. The proposed Regional Conventions, Seminars and Conferences in different parts of the Diocese should call all of us for repentance.

In November 1996 I had the privilege of visiting Beirut the capital of Lebanon to participate in a Consultation of the World Council Of Churches with the Orthodox Churches. The Catholicose of Silicia His Holiness Aram I was the host for nearly 30 Church leaders from all over the world. That was a very enriching and rewarding experience. We need to understand and to be proud of our Eastern tradition and the Western reformed outlook. As a bridge church between the East and the West we ought to give greater contribution. Similarly, in February I shall be in Cypress attending the Executive Committee of the WCC, where we are discussing and deciding upon a common understanding and vision (CUV) for the World Council of Churches. This would be a very important Consultation as we complete 50 years of ecumenical journey in search of unity and mission as the World Council of Churches. In 1998 at the Harare Jubilee General Assembly the churches will recommit themselves to the cause of Unity and Mission. So, we are looking at the WCC with a new understanding and vision.

I really appreciate that the Editorial Board has chosen **"Laity"** as the theme for this issue. This is a theme widely emphasized and studied all over the world at this juncture. World Council of Churches has given a lot of importance to the study of Laity and lay participation. This is the age of the Laity. Though the church has both ordained and nonordained persons, there should not be any difference or distance between them. Instead, the ordained and the non-ordained have to stand together and work together for the glory of God. Ordained people are specially trained and equipped for the Ministry of Sacraments within the church. The Lay ministry and the Ordained ministry are the two facets within the Church, both complimenting each other. Except for the fact of celebrating the Sacraments, Lay persons are in no way secondary to the Ordained.

In this Diocese there is a lot of Lay potential. We started this Diocese with the Lay initiative and action. The worship service we started twenty-five years ago was the result of lay initiatives. We did not have a Priest or a Bishop of our own in this land at that time. It was our young and enthusiastic lay persons who started it. The Mar Thoma Church gives a lot of emphasis to the lay ministry. That lay leadership, I fear, somehow or other is being lost in our journey. We have to regenerate in our Diocese a dynamic, positive, creative, spiritual leadership of lay persons. The great potential of lay women should be channalized for the building up of the church and its mission within and outside USA. At this Jubilee year we should think seriously how lay participation in the life and mission of the church could be more efficiently attained. The quality of the church depends upon the standard of the laity. I hope more emphasis will be given in the coming years for equipping the Laity for meaningful participation in the life and mission of the Church.

A Captain of a Flight announced, "I have a good news and a bad news for you. The good news is that, due to good *tail-wind*, we would be reaching earlier than expected. The bad news is that since the compass is not working, we do not know where we are heading to!" Do we know where we are heading to, if we go on like this? Wish you all a very happy and blessed New year!

Yours in Christ's Service,

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus

Role of the Laity — In and Through the Church

The Rev. Dr. K. V. Mathew

Let us consider first who are the laity. The word is derived from *laos*, a Greek word which means “the people” in the bible the term has a special significance. It stands for the called out community by God, from the world and for the world. They are different from the *laos* of the world because of their calling and response. Potentially the *laos* of the world are the “people of God.” However those called out for a specific purpose are different and they express that distinction through their obedience to God. They are in the world but not of the world, called not to be conformed to this world but to transform it in accordance with the will of God.

Laos in the Bible

According to the Old Testament the creation of the people of God begins with a historical event viz. the Exodus. The community that came out of Egyptian oppression and slavery becomes the nucleus of Laos — the laity in the Old Testament. They were a mixed race (Ex. 12:38) and were not a racial group. What commonly they experienced was oppression by the Egyptians and the Exodus under Moses. The promise given to Abraham included a vision of catholicity to the people of God (Gen. 12:1-3). The same vision was confirmed in the Exodus community and in the Shechem Covenant initiated by Joshua (Josh.24). New Testament is a continuation and confirmation of the catholic vision of the people of God (Mk. 16:15; Mt.28 :20). It is with Jesus of Nazareth that the movement of laity gained momentum. It reached even the shores of India through St. Thomas and the people who acknowledged the “Exodus” (Lk. 9:31) experience through faith in Jesus Christ were the *Nazaranis* of ancient Kerala. The Mar Thoma Christians share the vocation of the laity. We are grateful to God for the special heritage which we have received through the early Palestinian Aramaic/Syriac speaking community.

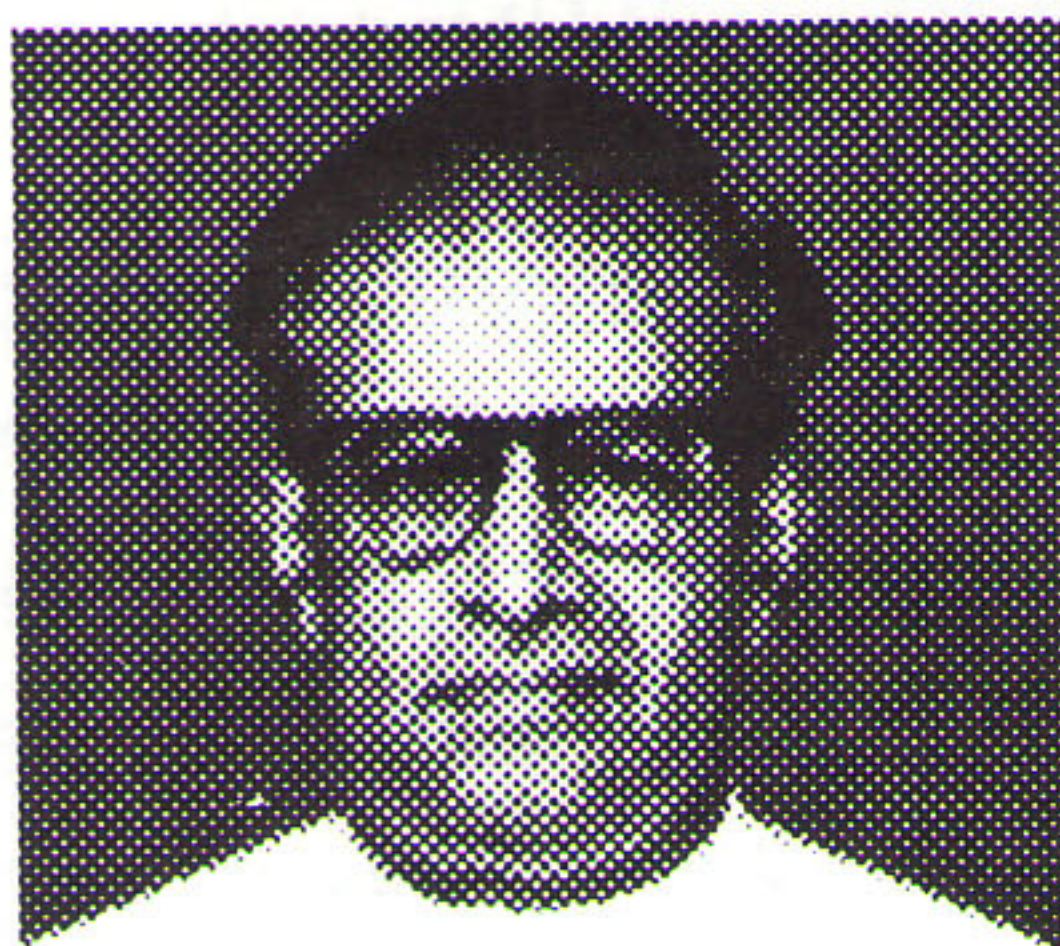
Almaya in the Church

For us, the word for laity comes not through the media of Greek but through Syriac. The word *Almaya* has a bifocal significance .

1. A people who move with God,
2. A people of this age/world.

These two implications together point to our vocation in the world as a people of God. As community/congregations in Parishes we are called to be a dynamic movement and not an established institution (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1-2; 2:11-12). The church is not an institution but an expedition, says Bishop Newbegin. It is not bricks and mortar, but the people of God, commented Bishop Bryan.

Later in course of history *Almaya* lost its original meaning and a new connotation has been attributed to signify the laity in contrast to the ordained. The laity is considered to be the unskilled and the clergy the skilled in matters of religious faith and practice.



This understanding is a caricature of truth and a state brought about by the negligent attitude of the clergy. The ordained became a dominant force in the church and the laity were pushed to the periphery. They were not equipped by the clergy for the effective witness through the church (Eph. 4:11-16). In fact, the church acknowledges the “priesthood of all believers” yet the division of the laity and the priests was maintained in the church.

The entry point of the laity into the ecclesial fold is baptism. The baptized are the people of God in the church. They are the body of Christ, the temple of God and the visible presence of the incarnation of Christ in the World. They are no mean people or secondary citizens in the hierarchical structure of the church, but they belong to the very core of the Christian faith. There is no church without this corpora. If they become the frozen ones, the function of the church cannot be performed.

Is There A Contrast Between the Laity and the Clergy?

The ordained are set apart from the laity by the church, for the ministry of the church in the world which is to be carried by the laity. It is the responsibility of the clergy to equip the laity for their task. There is only functional difference between the clergy and the laity. The function of the clergy becomes valid only in the context and in the presence of the laity, the people of God. The *Almaya* should realize their responsibilities and wake up to demand their right from the ordained in order that they may exercise their ministerial function in the world.

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Are they the frozen assets or the valuable assets of the church? It was Abraham Mar Thoma who discovered the worth of the *Almaya* in the Mar Thoma Church and confirmed their

right through the *Almaya Suvishesha Sanghom*. We had an array of *Almaya* leaders in the past — K. K. Kuruvilla, C. P. Mathew, M. C. Alexander, P. O. Philip, of late Dr. M. M. Thomas are only a few among the luminaries. Punchamannil Mammen, Sadhu Kochukunju and Mundakayam John were outstanding preachers of the gospel who made great impact in the church in reviving her from spiritual slumber.

Where are the *Almaya*?

As the number of clergy increased the leadership of the laity decreased. This is a sad situation. The people of God constitute the front line army and the clergy being the commanders stand at the rear. The situation is reversed, the clergy — the *Purohith* are placed in the front and the laity in the rear. The people of God are not properly trained to be the witnessing community in the world and therefore the collective witness of the church is not sufficiently effective.

Recently there is a flow of the laity into positions of leadership. It is good. We may ask whether they are inspired by the Spirit of God or they venture to be servants of God? In our situation the concept of the servanthood has been replaced by lordship and thus the ministry of the church is being ridiculed in the society (M. 10:42-45). People with selfish motives, love of money and power who may resort to any means conforming to the patterns of this world to achieve their ends, come to positions of power and authority in the church. They guide the destiny of the people of God and their mission in the world. Could we faithfully exercise our ministry in the church in such

situations? We have a democratic set up in the church. But that system will not be effective if the people do not uphold the values of the Kingdom of God. Democracy in the church is to be guided by theocracy. If it becomes "demonocracy" we can only imagine the consequences.

Task Ahead

Now is the time for the Faithful and God-fearing in the church to arise, unite and earnestly endeavor for a radical reform in the church so that the people of God both the clergy and the laity may bear witness to the gospel in the Spirit of Christ. We may attempt the following:-

1. A study of the word of God,
2. An earnest intelligent participation in worship,
3. Corelate the liturgical practice with the witness of the church,
4. Begin house-churches and establish fellowship in various realms of life,
5. To build bridges within the community and with people of other faiths and of no-faith.

In these latter days God calls us to prepare ourselves to be the light, the leaven and the salt of the earth to enter into the threshold of the 21st Century into the dawn of the third millennium with the Lord. ■

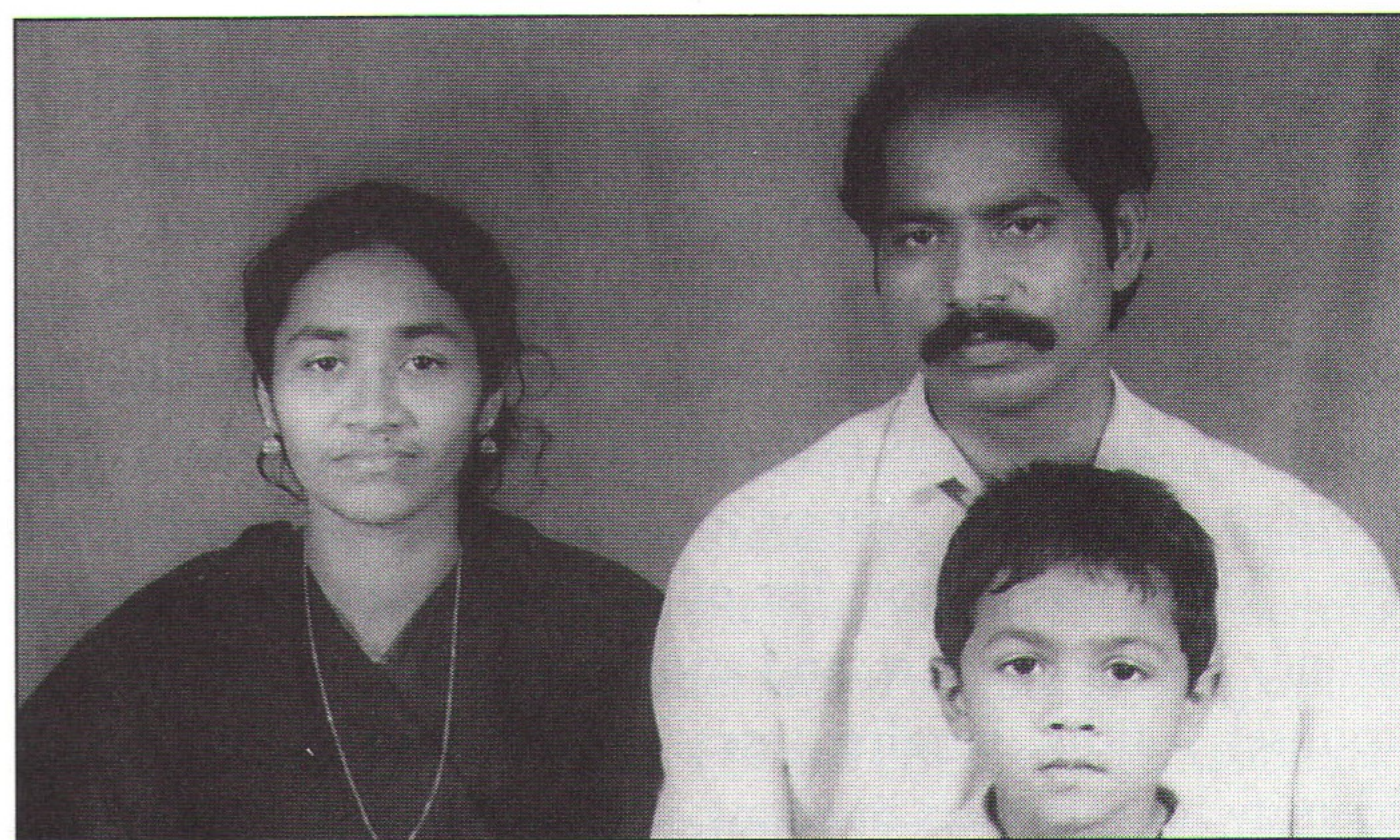
The Rev. Dr. K. V. Mathew is the former Sabha Secretary, Principal and Professor of Mar Thoma Theological Seminary and now on a Postdoctoral Program at the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Karnataka Mission — Reaching the Remote Villages

Kusugal is one of the 40 mission centers of the Kunnamkulam-Malabar Diocese which started its evangelistic work in this remote village in 1995. Two dedicated evangelists, Mr. N.V. Wilson and his wife Prasanna living with two young children in a rented farm house in this village are committed to the mission work of Kusugal and the surrounding villages. Their eldest son is staying at the diocesan hostel at Hanovar and attending the nearby school. Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, the diocesan bishop of Kunnamkulam-Malabar, extends his thanks to the members and organizations of this diocese for their support of various mission work in Karnataka. Continued support will help extend the mission work in Karnataka.

Kusugal is not very far from Hubli, a major city in North Karnataka; but remains far from the city life and has all the charm and beauty of a traditional Indian village. It remains one of the villages that is not touched by the Social and Economic growth of the country. Ancient customs and traditions including the cast system linger and most of them lead a joint family system. About 11,000 people estimated to be living in 3,000 homes, mostly with two rooms. Agriculture is the main source of income and about 70% of the work force are casual workers. Only about 40% of the population has primary education and only 1% has graduation. Education is mostly for name sake without organization and commitment. People are not aware of health and sanitation and children are neglected. Above all, drinking destroys families.

About 65% of the population is Hindus and 35% is



Evangelist Mr. N. V. Wilson and wife Prasanna with their son

Muslims and there are few lower cast people. Other than following the practice of various customs, they do not have proper understanding of their religion and faith.

Kusugal in fact is a true representation of the surrounding villages where people lack basic education, health and sanitation. This is where Christ's love lead the Wilson family to.

The Wilsons go to five different villages during the weekdays. In these villages, they tutor the boys in the morning and girls in the evening. During the daytime they visit houses and

(Cont'd on page 23)

Equipping the People of God in the Church

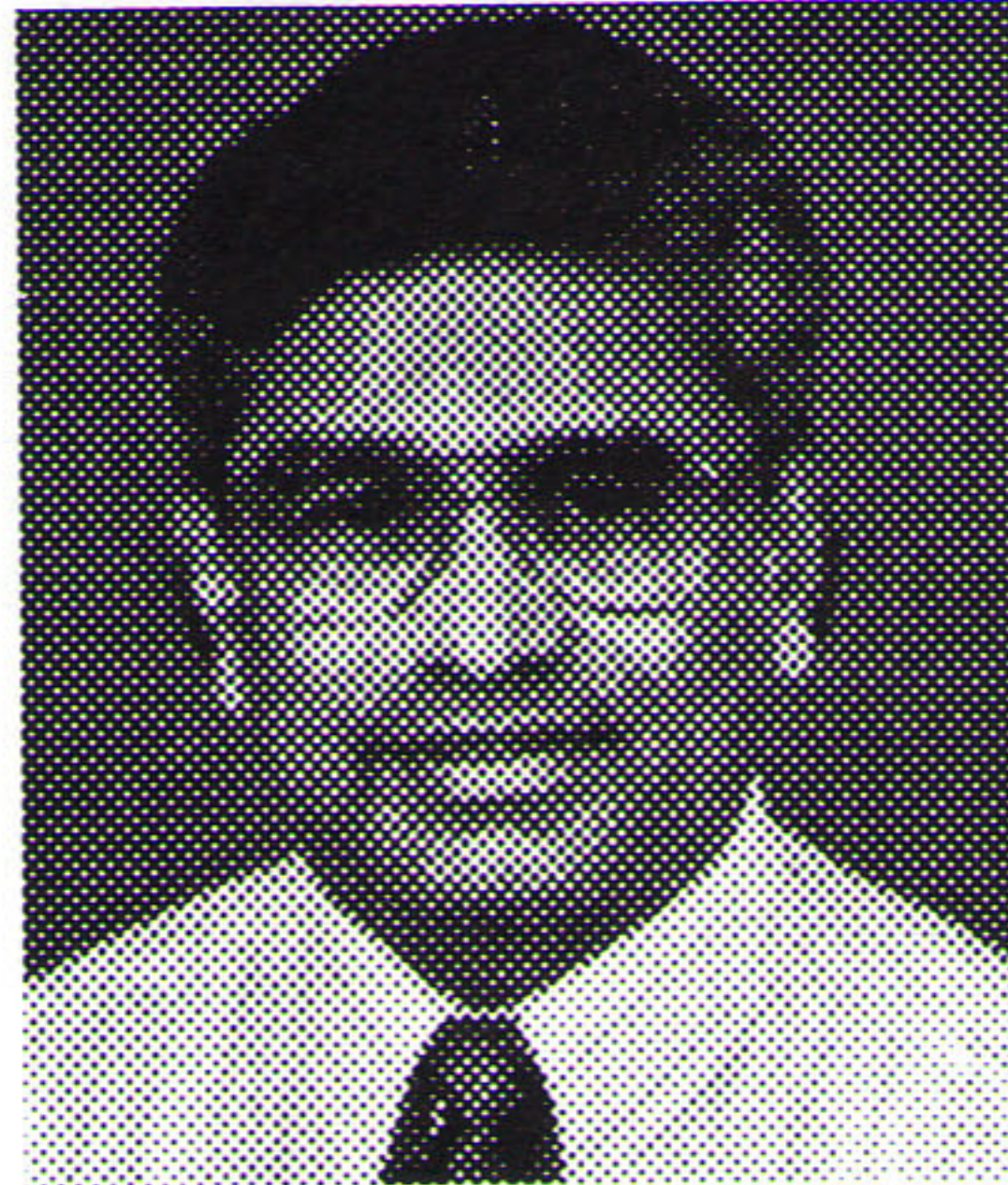
Dr. George Samuel, Tiruvalla

In Ephesians 4:11-13, we notice that God has given gifted people to the Church. These gifted people are God's gifts to the Church. Their responsibility is to prepare the people of God (the church members) for Christian service. Each church member is gifted with at least one of the spiritual gifts listed in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11-13. Because these gifts are from God, they are given with the purpose of utilizing them for the Kingdom of God.

Unfortunately, in some churches, the majority of the people (more than 90%) are watching what the others are doing. The majority are mere spectators, it seems. When a pastor was asked about the training program for lay people, his response was that he needed only two people for the ministry of the Church—one to read the Old Testament lesson, and the other to read the New Testament lesson, and that the one who reads the Old Testament could collect the offerings from the pews on the left hand side, and the other from the right hand side. His concept of ministry and the requirement of people for the ministry was so limited to just two of his members.

I remember meeting another pastor utilizing the resources of his church much more effectively. His list included about half a dozen of his members capable of preaching during worship services, about two dozen who could conduct cottage prayer meetings, a long list of Sunday School teachers, a similar list of members who are gifted to do personal evangelism, then a few who could work in slum areas, visit prisons, hospitals, old age homes, etc... There was a short list of members capable of raising money for the projects, and another list of those who could counsel youths, families, etc... In other words, he could identify his members in terms of their gifts and talents, and give them opportunities for exercising their gifts.

When the members exercise their gifts and work together, the Church — the Body of Christ, is built up. Building up of the people of God is an ongoing program in the Church. In certain places, people are satisfied with constructing a church building or a parsonage or parish hall, and give little time and thought for the building up of the people. In fact, the Church is people, and not merely buildings or structures. The building up is both in terms of quality and quantity. When each member grows in Christ-likeness, developing the qualities of Jesus Christ, the



Church grows in quality. They grow in Christian service when their spiritual gifts are exercised.

Developing the "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5: 22-23) in the lives of members makes them grow in spiritual maturity. The origin of this fruit, with the nine qualities, is supernatural — God did this in our personality at the time of new birth; but its growth is natural.

When we work together, it is not only that God gets His work of the Kingdom done through us,

but in addition He produces His character qualities in our lives. It is not merely seeing success in our various activities, but developing and improving the above qualities in our lives. What is the use of filling one's pocket at the expense of emptying his heart? If our activities lead to the condition of losing the quality of our life and acquiring bad character traits, we are losing in the long run. Our inner life thus becomes out of shape, and we run into various psychological and physical problems. We may have the freedom of choice to do anything as we please, but we are not free to choose the consequences of those choices which eventually lead to enslavement thus inhibiting any freedom altogether. It is better to take time to consider this matter of developing Christ-like qualities in our lives, while we are busy with the various activities of the Church.

Our involvements should result in the development of personal quality in us. Some may be satisfied with the greatness of popularity and show of talents, ignoring the matter of developing inner quality. In fact, the primary greatness of character is more important than the secondary greatness of popularity and the like. What a pathetic thing if we hear that there is no peace in the home of a person who has just received some award of peace! Such short-term popularity and human relationship end in failure and drainage of physical as well as psychological energy. They are not going to help the Church. When we work with people, we may run into various kinds of personality conflicts and the like. But remember, we are part of the Body of Christ, and we see the other person or the circumstances as tools to chip away the rough edges of our personality, and make us more like Christ (Romans 8:29). And we can still love a person although we disagree with what that person does, when we view the situation in terms of developing personal qualities in our own lives.

We read in the above text (Eph.4:11-13) that the people of God are equipped for the work of ministry. The

(Cont'd on page 17)

The Role of the Laity in the Church

George J. Poikail, Dallas

It is somewhat paradoxical to talk about the role of the Laity in the church because the Laity makes up what is much of the church. The clergy is chosen for particular ministry but the life and mission of the church center upon the spiritual health of the laity. In this brief essay we will make an attempt to look at the heritage of the Laity and its role for the continued growth of the church. This is of special importance as the Mar Thoma Church in North America celebrates twenty five years of its existence as a worshipping community.

I. Biblical Heritage

God's relationship to His people is expressed in at least three functional ways. That God calls forth communities is the gist of our understanding of human relationship with God. That relationship is expressed in:

The Calling of People—Abram who became Abraham (Gen. 12:1ff). So far as we know Abram was an ordinary religious person who had worshipped the Gods of his forefathers, when in God's plan he was called out of his land and people with the sole purpose of becoming a people, community and nation of God. It did take enormous courage and faith to leave one's settled land, people and the comforts of home to a future promised by hitherto unknown God. But that Abraham did follow his calling was counted on behalf of him and he became the father of an entirely new community and nation. It is of great interest that the three radically monotheistic religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam look to him as the father of their faith and their communities. Even now, generations later, the faith of Abraham is celebrated as exemplary under circumstances.

The Leading of People—Moses (Exodus 3:1-12) Calling of the people is limited unless God finds someone to lead those people to the promised future. From the beginning of human race, self-will run riot and given to opportunities for obedience to the will of God or self-will always took over, and people who were created free and called into freedom would enslave themselves. What happened to Israel is not only history but is also a parable of modern human societies. The proclivity to exchange one's freedom for slavery is a paradox of modern humanity as it was in the past. Paul writing to the Galatians reminded them of Abraham (Gal. 3:6) and then he pleads with them to stand in the freedom that Christ has brought for them and do not exchange that for slavery (Gal. 5:1). People who are in slavery need a leader to show them and lead them to the promised land. Moses, a shepherd became that leader.

He was a lay person but God called him to lead His people to a promised future.

The settling of communities —Joshua (Numbers 27:18-23; Deutonomy 3:28). Moses disobeyed God and therefore he was not to set foot in the promised land. He could only gaze upon it across the mountains (Numbers 27:12). Instead, Joshua the son of Nun, an ordinary layman, was chosen and commissioned to lead the people further and settle them. He had done so and Israel had settled into their promised land.

What happened after that is history and is again a parable for our times. Israel divided, fought amongst themselves, went after other Gods and eventually till the middle of this century wandered the world as sojourners without a land. But the truth remains that God calls ordinary people to create a nation, to lead, and settle it.

The New Testament tradition is replete with the role of lay people. So far as we know, Paul, although called an apostle, never saw Jesus Christ alive and he was never commissioned with the original twelve. He was a lay missionary. Ananias was instrumental in laying his hands on Saul who became Paul (Acts 9:17-19). There is no indication of his ordination before he started preaching in the synagogues (Acts 9:20) and all were amazed. What Paul has done for the spread of Christian faith is too phenomenal and well-recognized to need any rehash here.

Look at some of Paul's associates; Timothy was the son of a Jewish woman and Greek father (Acts 16:1; 1 Cor. 4:17; I Timothy 1:2, 18) and yet he became a dear associate of Paul and was instrumental in the spread of the gospel. Titus (II Cor. 8:23; Titus 1:4) is referred to as "my true child in common faith." It is also interesting that it is in writing to Titus that Paul describes the qualifications of a bishop (Titus 1:7ff). Mark had conflict with Paul but accompanied Paul (Acts 12:25; 15:39-40). He was engaged in missionary work (Acts 13:5) Barnabas is another interesting person. He introduced Paul to the apostles (Acts 9:26-27) bringing witness to the calling of Paul when the apostles were suspicious and afraid of Paul. He preached at Antioch and ministered with Paul (Acts 11:22-26) and helped make Paul the person he became. Barnabas accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-14:28) and he attended the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-31). Yet, so far as we know he was an ordinary lay person. Aquilla and Priscilla a God-fearing couple is referred to by Paul as my "fellow workers in Christ" (Romans 16:3). In (I Cor. 16:19) Paul talks about the church in the house of this couple, a congregation that met in the home of believers rather than

in dedicated areas for worship. The role of lay women is evident in the ministry of Priscilla.

II. Indian Heritage

Indian tradition represents the caste-system and the Syrian Christian Community in Kerala had reaped benefits from the caste system. It is still prevalent that some of the Dalit Christians have their separate centers of worship and although the Mar Thoma Church is integrated now, there are those who still insist on the Syrian in our corporate name. The Indian tradition has been one of Brahminism, a society organized on priestly class. This allowed that class (a) privilege, (b) rule, and (c) control. This is universal with the priestly class. They seek and gain privileges, they tend to rule rather than lead, and they want to maintain control. Society was organized with the priestly class as the source of divinity. But the modern Indian heritage look to the reformers not from the priestly class but from among the laity.

Examples:

Ghandi – Mohandas Ghandi was a lawyer from the middle class, guilt-ridden but committed. He was from the people which means the laity. He could and did understand the sufferings of his fellow-citizens and he championed people. His whole movement, though it took the form of a political struggle, was the movement of ordinary people. There is nothing in modern history till the Gandhian movement to illustrate that ordinary people forsaking violence could change society. He championed Harijans as people of God. His whole movement was a movement of the non-priestly class, the laity.

Ambedkar became instrumental in drafting the Indian constitution. This non-priestly person helped write the constitution that still sees smooth transitions of governments when similar developing nations have sunk into totalitarianism or dictatorship. The Indian constitution still guarantees individual rights, democratic form of government, freedom of religion and independent judiciary. Instrumental in creating such a constitution was a representative of laity rather than the priestly class.

III. Mar Thoma Heritage

There were times when the church as a reformed entity almost did not survive and there was a time when it was left without a Metropolitan. And it survived as a community of God through the commitment and leadership of laity. The following list of names does not preclude others who have served the Lord in the church. But a list must include at least:

1) **Karimpil Cherian**, one of the earlier leaders of the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association. At a time when the church was in an infant stage it was courageous to have a faith that envisioned reaching outside Malabar to the regions beyond.

2) **Punchamannil Mammen Upadeshi**—Thundering as a prophet of God, grounded in the eternal Word of God, Mammen Upadeshi was a revivalist.

3) **Moothampackal Kochukunju Upadeshi**—a mystic, evangelist, missionary par excellence. Upadeshi's heart-felt and heart-warming lyrics are still so devotional, popular and evocative. They had become part of our Christian heritage.

4) **Mundakayam John Upadeshi**—Another illustrious person in the revivalist tradition, the father of this writer. He was a lay-preacher with profound Biblical insights. His knowledge of the scriptures was well-recognized.

5) **K. K. Kuruvilla** was a theologically trained lay person who led the Mar Thoma Vaideeka Seminary for many years. He came to America for higher studies when America was not even a gleam in many eyes. He was highly educated but he maintained simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

6) **K. V. Cherian**—The history of All Kerala Christian Fellowship and several of its institutions owes itself to this devoted Christian. Institutions of his vision still flourish, grow and continue to minister to thousands in Kerala and the rest of India.

7) **Dr. M. M. Thomas** was an original thinker, ecumenist, visionary, a devoted Christian and was profoundly human. Until his recent death he worked hard to change our thinking so that Kingdom of God would be seen in global terms. He was a prolific author whose thought still remains seminal. From Amsterdam 1948 he attended all the general assemblies of the World Council of churches and was the only layperson who ever became the chairman of the Central Committee of the WCC. He was well recognized all over the world including the socialist countries. Fundamental to all his efforts to create cross-cultural, inter-religious and inter-faith communities, Dr. Thomas maintained a faith grounded in the Jesus of history. Yet throughout his life he remained a layman committed to the church.

What more can we say? Our church has too long a history of lay leadership that it will be a loss to revert to clergy-centrality.

IV. Some Suggestions

Now we thrive and cherish on the fact that we are the North American Diocese of the Mar Thoma Church of Malabar, can there be something done to increase lay leadership?

1) Lay preaching is right now limited to those parishes or occasions where there is no clergy available. Why not make this a shared task? The clergy must still conduct the Holy Communion but preaching may be shared with lay persons.

(Cont'd on page 24)

Women and New Horizons of Witnessing

Paper Submitted at the Sevika Sangham Regional Conference October 12, 1996

Dr. Josephine George, Baltimore

We are sure we have a clear conscience because we want to do the right things at all times. Hebrews 13:18.

“No, this is not you” is a common expression when a person does not outwardly behave true to the person inside him. All of us are witnesses of the person inside us. The words that we speak as well as the thoughts and intentions reflect what is truly in us. Witnessing is the result of the individual's different aspects of life put together. Any one aspect is not excluded when it comes to the expression of the Spirit inside the man. That which is inside of us will bring its character out in all walks of our life. What I mean by that in simple language is that an Evangelist is not a witness if his other aspects of life do not reflect Christ. Consciously we try to live a life of true witnesses of Christ in the eyes of people around us. And we Christians are truly proud of that achievement. If so what is it that causes us to be the bad examples that we often turn out to be? If the expression in the life of one man called Jesus left an impact on human race enough to bring about such a following, what makes the present day following so near impossible or impractical as some would call it? Could it be a flaw in the way we as well as our forefathers followed Jesus Christ in our lives? Isn't it time we analyzed our way of life?

Let us go back to the lives of some of the men of God who truly made a difference in the world. Abraham is an example of a man who obeyed God because his heart was set on God. He was not following a set example. Neither did he do it with the intention of setting an example to a group that was following him. He was, in fact, going against the norms of the society of his times to get to a truth that was deep inside him. Noah was another man who did what he did only because of his love and desire to obey God. He faced ridicule from the friends and that was not going to turn him away. Joseph took care of his brothers who tried to kill him not because Jesus taught him to love his enemies. His knowledge of God's love was so definite that he did not need an external expression to cling on to it. Abel brought a sacrifice that was pleasing to God not because that was God's command or because of a condition that if he gave to God He would bless him much more. No, he wanted to offer God out of his love for God. Moses felt the compassion for a group of people who were slaves of his own uncle, the Pharaoh, not because that was going to increase his prospects of becoming a king. He even took the courage to question the God who would let a people suffer like that because of a heart that had true compassion and

burden for the suffering. After all those things that went before them when God's own people reached the land of milk and honey, what happened to those people? It was their heart that went away from God. They worshipped God all right but with a tongue that did not connect their heart to God. God saw a point of no return for man and sent Jesus – God Himself – to show a living example of man according to God's own heart. Jesus the true witness of Holy Spirit that dwelt within Him. All aspects of his life, personal, spiritual, economic and social was a true expression of the spirit within him.

Many a times a true following of Jesus is considered by the so called Christians as a difficult or even impossible way of life. And we try to make compromises in following him to fit in with out conveniences. Do we forget the true aim and purpose of a Christ-like life? Are we blaming our circumstances for our failure to fix our eyes on the right target? The Paradise. If we look at some of the people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Solomon, Queen Esther, Peter, Paul, Mary(s) of the New Testament, Lydia, Mrs. Kandamma Varghese, Joanny Erickson Tata, they all lived under very unfavorable circumstances. But one fact remains constant in all of their lives. Their focus on the truth remained the same. Unfavorable circumstances only made them focus on the target a little better. And they became good witnesses as a result of their right focusing. Isn't it true that if our eyes were fixed on a target our steps would only take us there? Can we keep looking at something and walk towards something different? We cannot have our eyes fixed on hell and walk towards heaven, Jesus said in Luke 6:45. If you want to produce good fruits you have to plant good seeds. Only good seeds can produce and reproduce good plants further. This brings us to the reason why we are producing a generation of namesake Christians who cannot follow Christ. Where did we lose our vision?

Let us examine ourselves and make an effort to see if we need a refocussing.

What is your aim? Most often we talk about aim as the aim in this life. We hesitate to think of the eternal aim of our life. This hesitation, I believe is because we think it is too early to make that goal a real life goal. Whereas the true aim of human life is to fulfill God's will for us on this earth and reach the Paradise that is waiting for us, we tend to put that fact away, thinking that is something we can work on at a later stage when our material goals are achieved. So we teach our children to grow up, study, get a good job, make good money, have good family life and such. Yes goals are

set much different very early in life. If the child is fortunate enough to have a grandparent or mother to tell them that he should lead a life that is pleasing to God then that gets conveyed in a very secondary manner. So, very early in childhood there is a misfocussing of life's goal. If life is focused on what is to be achieved till death then priorities in life will be given to those things which will take one to that target.

Solomon in Proverbs says to bring up a child in the way he should live and he will cling on to it till his death. From the very tender age, we ought to teach our children by our lives and actions to love God with all our heart and strength. It is imperative to show by our way of life that he should have no other gods before Him. Our respect for Sabbath should teach him the sacredness of the same. By our respect for each other he should learn to respect himself and others. We do take time to tell them "don't do this or that, this is mine, that is yours, don't take mine." We give them the first lessons of selfishness right there. And we forget to give importance to the true things of life when it is easy to set their thinking. As time goes by, it becomes a big effort for the child to change his basic thinking to the true Christ like way of life. Naturally he either becomes confused or gets stuck in the old way of thinking. We think about him becoming unselfish only when his little sister or brother is suffering from the after effects of this. We end up justifying it as sibling rivalry. When that happens we try correcting him. It is painful for him and confusing. As the child grows up further this job is entrusted to the Pastor. In this context we need to remember what Jesus taught us in Luke 5:36-39. "You don't tear a piece off of a new coat to patch up an old coat. If you do, you will have torn the new coat and the piece of new cloth will not match the old. Nor do you pour new wine into old wineskins, because the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will pour out and the skin will be ruined. Instead, new wine must be poured into fresh wineskins. And you don't want new wine after drinking old wine. 'The old is better,' you say." When a child is brought up with materialistic priorities it is near to impossible to instill spiritual priorities into him. It will be like patching up an old coat with new piece of cloth or like pouring new wine into old wineskin. It will destroy him. Once you are used to old wine you wouldn't want the new wine! This tells us how careful we have to be in weaving our children's life with right priorities and fill them with truth and spirit at a very young age itself.

Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:22-24 says how a human being can become a new man. "So get rid of your old self which made you live as you used to, the old self that was being destroyed by its deceitful desires. Your hearts and minds must be made completely new. And you must put on a new self which is created in God's likeness and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy. It is impossible to repair the old with new and is impossible to fill new

spirit into the old sinful body. And we know the severe trials that some of us have to undergo so that God can make us get rid of the old self and put on the new. Here is the significance of bringing up children in the way of truth. A child who is baptized at the age of 3 to 6 months is already a new self. To fill that child with truth and spirit is just as easy as pouring wine into a wineskin. If we do not take heed, we are bound to produce a generation who has lost the right priorities.

When the focus of parents is elsewhere their priorities also become different. Children who grow up seeing this develop wrong priorities. Our actions speak so loudly that they cannot hear our words.

Whatever the situations or circumstances be we have the freedom of choice about our aims and priorities. And when we choose them right—the power, wisdom, grace, and strength to fulfill them is provided by God. He loves us and He wants us to be good. The only condition is that we should choose willingly. This is our witnessing to our next generation. When children with the right priorities come together in the society they understand each other. They have a common goal. There is a unity of spirit. This becomes the ultimate expression of witnessing at home.

There was a time when a woman's witnessing was bounded by the fences of a home. Being a good wife or mother, a mother-in-law and grandmother would cover her territory very well. Even now that is her primary field of action. But her venues of expression have widened to a great extent. The society gets a major chunk of her time and services, giving her the opportunity to be a witness of what is right and holy to the whole world. So then unless the lifestyle of the women becomes right and holy this witnessing becomes ineffective. In fact to be called a Christian and not to conform to the life style of Christ will act as a negative force that turns young minds away from God much more forcefully than anything else.

The willingness of our hearts is a tool in God's hands. Abel brought a sacrifice with a desire to bring the best. He had one desire in his heart. Cain did the act too. But his heart was not committed to the cause. We read that God was pleased with Abel. Certainly God was not considering the material value of what Abel or Cain brought. The heart that was behind it was what God saw. We also read that Cain was upset with God for not being pleased with his offering. It is important for us to understand what God said to Cain. Genesis 4:6 reads like this. "If you had done the right thing, you would be smiling. But because you have done evil, sin is crouching at your door. It wants to rule you, but you must overcome it." Greed, selfishness, lack of faith in God's beautiful mercies, dependence on self, selfishness, pride, and vain ambitions can all lie at the door of our heart and overpower us if we do not overcome it with our heart and put definite expression to the overcoming. Giving to God all that you have is an expression of this. God asked Abraham this very thing and it was considered

righteous of Abraham. Nicodemus was asked the same thing by Jesus and what turned him away was this very same thing. Nicodemus was a fine man according to Jesus. But without his heart in the right place he was not going to please God enough to go to Heaven. When we get opportunities to do something for God, will He find a heart that is full of desire and enthusiasm to do it for Him? In Hebrews 6:1 Paul talks about useless works. Here it says that one of the first lessons of Christian teaching is to turn away from useless works. God names Cain's sacrifice as evil. God pleases only with a right heart. For example on a Sunday morning is it an excitement and desire to go to church to worship God? Or is it a burden, a selfish move to attain status in the society. Our going to church becomes a pleasing act of adoration when our enthusiasm is the driving force behind it. The life and spirit imparted by the enthusiasm makes that a true witnessing for others too. Witnessing is not a conscious act, it is the unconscious result of a conscientious living. Witnessing is done by the Holy spirit that is living within us. We can only reflect it. We are unable to produce it by ourselves. If we make ourselves opaque by our worldliness, we cannot reflect the true spirit. Let our prayer be as in Psalms 51: vs. 6 onwards. "Sincerity and truth are what you require, fill my mind with your wisdom. Create in me a pure heart in me O God and put a new and loyal spirit in me. Give me again the joy that comes from your salvation and make willing to obey to you. Then I will teach sinners your commands and they will turn back towards you. You do not want sacrifices, or I would offer them. You are not pleased with burnt offerings. My sacrifice is a humble spirit. O God, you will not reject a humble and repentant heart."

Witnessing, as per customary standards is proclaiming with our mouth that Jesus died for us and we are saved by faith in the blood of Calvary. This is true. But when a person who has not known Christ hears it if he can also experience Christ through our lives and can glorify God, that is true witnessing. Witnessing is a language of truth, love and peace. This is why women's witnessing has an unlimited potential in today's society and Parish. Where there is difference of opinion, when men lose their focus in

the heated moments, it is women who can focus them. God has given woman a tremendous capacity for forbearance and an ability to keep the focus on the goal undisturbed. Man was made to be completed and complimented by woman this way. There is an interesting incident reported in the Bible, which rather clearly brings out this attribute in woman.

John 10:1-18. This was the day Jesus rose from the dead. As we all know disciples and the women who followed Jesus were under great fear and tension being unsure of how things were going to turn out for them. Even before it was daylight Mary Magdalene went to the tomb where they had kept the body of Jesus. She found the tomb empty and the stone rolled away. She ran to the people whom she thought would care to do the most, Peter and John. All of them came back to the tomb. Mary Magdalene did not go back to bed saying I have done what I could. She loved Jesus with all her heart. When disciples found that the body of Jesus was not in the tomb they went back home as per records. But Mary persistently stood there crying and looking into the tomb. Then she saw the two angels standing at the tomb. They asked her why she was crying. She was not afraid to share with them the reason for her sorrow. Then she turned and seeing Jesus and mistaking him for the gardener she again shows her willingness to take help. She was ready to even receive the body of Jesus by herself. I can imagine the love and affection that Jesus felt towards her. Jesus calls her in the very same tone that was so familiar to her 'Mary!' And she responded 'Rabboni!' At this point Jesus entrusts her with the message of peace to be given to the disciples. Now if Mary was not so persistent to find out the truth she could have spread panic among the disciples. And it was her unadulterated love that made her so persistent. God was so pleased by her heart that He willed another great miracle through woman. Wasn't she the first woman to see the risen Jesus Christ!

This is the time for women to look into themselves and become aware of their potential and desire to make use of it for mankind as well as for God's glory. ■

YOUTH WORKER WANTED

The Vicar and the selection committee of the Philadelphia Mar Thoma church invite applications from dedicated candidates for the positions of two youth workers (a male and a female) to work among the high school children. The selected candidates will serve as mentors, coaches and councilors for the youth to develop their Christian faith and fellowship in the church. We are looking for candidates with commitment, Christian faith, spiritual leadership and loyalty to the Mar Thoma Church. The candidates should have a college degree and should be below 35 years of age. Each youth worker shall be aid an allowance of \$100.00 a month and tuition reimbursement of \$200.00 each year for courses approved by the committee.

Please send your applications to: Rev. M. P. Yohannan, Vicar
Philadelphia Mar Thoma Church
2060 Orthodox Street
Philadelphia, PA 19124.

Dr. M. M. Thomas

A Grateful Memory

Rev. Dr. K. V. Mathew

“Thommachen”, affectionately known among friends passed away in the running train soon after he left Katpadi station on Tuesday the 3rd December on his way from Vellore to Tiruvella. He was a traveller and in transit he was translated. On Saturday he was in Bangalore to attend the funeral of his friend Dr. Abraham Ayrookuzhiyil. He met the old friends and none of us knew that was bidding farewell to that great man with a difference.

Do you know him? I asked a research student who was arduously delving deep into the thoughts of Dr. Thomas for a doctoral degree in theology. ‘Yes, I met him and talked to him’. ‘I read over 10,000 pages of his written work’ he answered. ‘What is your impression?’ I queried. ‘He seems to me an atheist’ he replied bluntly. What a mistaken notion that young man had, about Thomas whose life was founded on the rock of faith in Jesus Christ through whom he came to have the knowledge of God. It is not by casual conversation or by watching certain actions of one’s life that we know a person. Words and deeds are generally determined by context and the context determines the vocabulary and mode of response. A person is known by what essentially he is, and that is communicated only through constant intimate friendship with him. Those who knew M. M. from close quarters for years will never question his Christocentric faith and life-style. In him that simple maxim ‘simple life and high thinking’ genuinely co-mixed, something seldom we find among the so called ‘great ones’. He was a rare specimen and indeed unique among other Christian thinkers.

The University of Upsala honored outstanding scholars, from different parts of the world on the occasion of its jubilee celebrations. M. M. was one among them from the field of Theology. As customary, he had to deliver his speech prior to receiving D.D.Honoris Causa. The man was there on the rostrum in his traditional Indian costume to receive that great honor. Such was his simplicity in life.

While quite unassuming in posture, his thought will be roaming in a different world far above the ordinary. He is second to none intellectually to reflect, to articulate and to communicate ideas and concepts which he has absorbed through reading, study and observation.

Dr. Thomas was deeply committed to the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Right from his student days he began work among the street children of Trivandrum. His parents were very devoted Christians, instilled in him the love for the Word of God, the spirit of compassion and love towards the “negatively privileged” and that followed him

till the very end of his life. His innate love for service, passionate love for reading and reflection, unassuming life-style and serious view of life—was noted at least by some close friends. One among them was the late Metropolitan Yuhanan Mar Thoma who appointed him as the Secretary of the Mar Thoma Youth League. He did serve the Church with distinction. It was in those days that many young people were introduced to the Christian ideal of service among the down trodden to love them in humility, upholding their dignity and respect. There were Christians even among clergy, who practiced untouchability towards the Dalits in the Church. Young people who came under M. M.’s spell later became priests in the Church and they courageously undertook the responsibility for the emancipation of the poor and oppressed.

Dr. Thomas developed a sociological perspective which had its roots in his Christian convictions. In all his writings particularly in the Biblical commentaries in Malayalam the social perspective is obvious. It was an expanded theological articulation of the doctrine of incarnation. His concern was to understand society from that perspective and to seek for its transformation in which the people will discover for themselves ways and means to become what they ought to be.

Justice and peace, ipso facto, are not something that can be brought about by human ingenuity as wistfully thought of by socialists. According to Thomas, there are factors beyond human jurisdiction that will facilitate the social transformation. We must be conscious of our ungenerated state of life in which selfishness, greed for power, jealousy, fear and hatred do play their role as a constant reminder of human inability to bring the ‘Kingdom of God’ by force. Realization of such a state calls for introspection with humility and subsequent repentance in order that with a sense of forgiveness from others as well as from the Other, we may strive for social renewal.

Neither the Marxist party because of his faith in God, nor the Church because of his Marxist leaning, accepted Dr. Thomas whole-heartedly into their fold. He always acted as a catalytic agent challenging, questioning both the Party and the Church. His was a prophetic role, the role of a combatant, always willing to be challenged and corrected. Absolutism whether ideological or religious, he questioned. He wanted to be a corrective force, a man with a difference because of his allegiance to Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen.

(Cont'd on page 15)

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(Cont'd on page 15)

മനുഷ്യാവതാരത്തിന്റെ പൊരുൾ തേടി

റവ. രാജ്ജു അഞ്ചേരി, ഹ്യൂസ്റ്റൺ

ദൈവം മനുഷ്യനായി. "വചനം ജഡമെടുത്തു കൃപയും സത്യവും നിറഞ്ഞവനായി നമ്മുടെ ഇടയിൽ വസിച്ചു." തന്റെ ഏകജാതനായ പുത്രനിൽ വിശ്വസിക്കുന്ന ഏവനും നശിച്ചുപോകാതെ നിത്യജീവൻ പ്രാപിക്കേണ്ടതിനു ദൈവം അവനെ നൽകുവാൻ തക്കവണ്ണം ലോകത്തെ സ്നേഹിച്ചു. (യോഹ 3:16)

മനുഷ്യബുദ്ധിക്ക് ഗ്രഹണാതീതമായ ഒരു മർമ്മമാണ് ദൈവത്തിന്റെ മനുഷ്യാവതാരം. മറ്റുള്ളവരെ രക്ഷാകര ദൗത്യത്തിലേക്ക് നയിക്കുവാൻ, തന്റെ അസ്തിത്വം വെടിഞ്ഞു, മറ്റൊന്നിനോട് താദാത്മ്യപ്പെടുന്ന പ്രകൃിയയുടെ അനുസ്മരണയാണ് ക്രിസ്തുമസ്. കാലസമ്പൂർണ്ണതയിൽ ദൈവം തന്റെ പുത്രനെ നിയോഗിച്ചു. (ഗലാ. 4:4) കാലത്തിന്റെ, ചരിത്രത്തിന്റെ ആത്യന്തിക നിയന്ത്രണം ദൈവകരങ്ങളിലാണ്. ചരിത്രത്തിന്റെ ദിശാബോധത്തെ ആത്യന്തികമായി നിയന്ത്രിക്കുന്നത്, അതിന്റെ സമ്പൂർണ്ണതയെ വിവേചിക്കുന്നത് ദൈവം ആണെന്ന അറിവു് എത്ര ആശ്വാസദായകമാണ്. സമകാലീന ചരിത്രത്തിന്റെ ഇരുണ്ട ഗർത്തങ്ങളിലൂടെ നാം ഭയാശങ്കകളോടെ യാത്ര തുടരുമ്പോൾ, ചരിത്രം ദൈവകരങ്ങളിൽ ഭദ്രമാണെന്നും അതുകൊണ്ട് നിർഭയരായി നമ്മുടെ വിശ്വാസതീർത്ഥാടനത്തിൽ മുന്നേറണമെന്നും ക്രിസ്തുമസ് നമ്മെ അനുസ്മരിപ്പിക്കുന്നു.

സെഖരയാവു് ധൂപം കാട്ടുവാൻ ദേവാലയത്തിൽ ചെന്നപ്പോൾ ദർശനം കണ്ടു (ലൂക്കോ. 1:11). ദൈവസാന്നിദ്ധ്യവും ദർശനവും പ്രതീക്ഷിക്കുന്ന സ്ഥാനത്തു്, ദേവാലയത്തിലാണ് ദർശനം ലഭിക്കുന്നത്. എന്നാൽ കന്യമറിയത്തിനു ദർശനം ലഭിക്കുന്നത് പഴയനിയമത്തിൽ പ്രസക്തിയില്ലാത്ത നസ്രേത്ത് എന്ന കൊച്ചുഗ്രാമത്തിലാണ്. ആട്ടിടയർ വെളിപ്രദേശത്തു് കാവൽ കിടന്ന സ്ഥാനത്തു് ദർശനം ഉണ്ടായി. അപ്രതീക്ഷിത സ്ഥാനത്തു് ദൈവദർശനം ഉണ്ടാകുന്നു. ആലയത്തിനകത്തും, ഭവനത്തിലും, വെളിപ്രദേശങ്ങളിലും ദൈവദർശനം ഉണ്ടാകുന്നു. ലൗകികവും ആത്മികവുമെന്ന വേർതിരിവിന്റെ മതിൽ ഇവിടെ തകരുന്നു. ലോകം മുഴുവൻ ദൈവസാന്നിദ്ധ്യത്തിന്റെയും പ്രത്യക്ഷതയുടെയും കേന്ദ്രമാണ്. ദൈവം മനുഷ്യനായതിലൂടെ ലോകം പവിത്രീകരിക്കപ്പെട്ടു. അതുകൊണ്ട് ലോകവും ലോകജീവിതവും ഗൗരവമർഹിക്കുന്നു. പരസ്പരവിരുദ്ധമെന്നു കരുതിയിരുന്ന വചനവും ജഡവും ഒന്നായിത്തീർന്നു. ലോകത്തെയും മനുഷ്യ ജീവതത്തെയും നിഷേധിക്കുന്ന ആത്മീയതയ്ക്ക് മനുഷ്യാവതാരത്തിന്റെ വെളിച്ചത്തിൽ യാതൊരു പ്രസക്തിയും പ്രാധാന്യവും ഇല്ല.

ദൈവത്തിന്റെ രക്ഷാകര പദ്ധതിയിൽ പങ്കാളിയാകാൻ ദൈവം കന്യകയായ മറിയയെ ക്ഷണിച്ചു (ലൂക്കോ. 1:26-38). ദൈവം ഇതിനു മറിയയെ നിർബന്ധിച്ച്കൈയല്ല്, മറിച്ചു് ക്ഷണിക്കുകയാണ്. ആ ദൗത്യം ഏറ്റെടുക്കുന്നതിലുള്ള അനുഗ്രഹങ്ങളും അപകടസാധ്യതകളും വിലയിരുത്തി ഉവ്വു് എന്നോ ഇല്ലാ എന്നോ പറയാനുള്ള സ്വാതന്ത്ര്യം അവൾക്കുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. അവൾ ചോദ്യങ്ങൾ ഉന്നയിച്ചു. "ഞാൻ പുരുഷനെ അറിഞ്ഞിട്ടില്ല; പിന്നെ എങ്ങനെ സംഭവിക്കും? സംശയനിവാരണം വരുത്തി. അവസാനം ദൈവികപദ്ധതിയിൽ പങ്കാളിയാകാൻ സമ്മതിച്ചു. "ഞാൻ കർത്താവിന്റെ ദാസി. നിന്റെ ഹിതംപോലെ എനിക്കു ഭവിക്കട്ടെ." ഇന്നു ദൈവികരക്ഷാപദ്ധതിയിൽ ദൈവം നമ്മോടാവശ്യപ്പെടുന്ന അനുസരണവും പങ്കാളിത്വവും എന്താണ്?

"കൃപ ലഭിച്ചവളെ വന്ദനം." എന്താണ് ദൈവ കൃപ? ഭൗതികജീവിതസുഖസൗകര്യങ്ങളും സാമ്പത്തികനേട്ടവും ദൈവകൃപയായി വ്യാഖ്യാനിക്കുന്ന ഒരു ആത്മീയതയാണ് നമ്മുടെ സമൂഹത്തിൽ തഴച്ചു നിൽക്കുന്നത്. സുവിശേഷകൻ വരച്ചുകാട്ടുന്ന കന്യകമറിയത്തിന്റെ ചിത്രം നോക്കുക. ദർത്താവില്ലാതെ അമ്മയാകേണ്ടിവന്ന സ്ത്രീ, പ്രസവത്തിനു കീറ്റുശീലയും, പുൽക്കൂടും, കാണാൻ വന്നതു് ആട്ടിടയർ, ഹേരോദാവിനെ ഭയന്ന് കൈക്കൂഞ്ഞുമായി ഓടേണ്ടി വന്നു. മകൻ പരസ്യശുശ്രൂഷയ്ക്ക് ഇറങ്ങിയപ്പോൾ അവനു സുഖമില്ലെന്ന് അമ്മയ്ക്കു തോന്നി. ദൈവത്തിന്റെ ഇഷ്ടം ചെയ്യുന്നുവരാണ് എന്റെ അമ്മയും സഹോദരനും സഹോദരിയും എന്നു പറഞ്ഞു യേശു അമ്മയെ കാണാൻ വിസമ്മതിച്ചു. അവസാന ദൃശ്യത്തിൽ യുവാവായ തന്റെ മകൻ ഒരു കുറ്റവാളിയായി പാളയത്തിനു പുറത്തു്, നഗരവാതിലിനവെളിയിൽ ക്രൂരമായി ക്രൂശിക്കപ്പെടുന്നതു് ആ അമ്മ നോക്കി നിന്നു. ഇതെല്ലാം

അറിയാവുന്ന സുവിശേഷകൻ പറയുന്നു. “മറിയ ദൈവകൃപ ലഭിച്ചവളാണ്.” പ്രതികൂലങ്ങളുടെയും പ്രതിസന്ധികളുടെയും സാഹചര്യത്തിൽ പതറിപ്പോകാതെ ദൈവത്തിന്റെ രക്ഷാകരകണ്ണിയിൽ പങ്കാളിയാകാനുള്ള വിളിയിൽ വിശ്വസ്തരായി പിടിച്ചു നിൽക്കാൻ ദൈവം തരുന്ന ശക്തിയാണ് ദൈവകൃപ. ഇന്നു ലോകത്തിൽ സാക്ഷ്യം നിർവഹിക്കുവാൻ ദൈവകൃപയാണ് നമുക്ക് ആവശ്യം. ദൈവഹിതം നിവർത്തിപ്പാനുള്ള ശക്തിയാണ് ദൈവകൃപ.

ശീലകൾ ചുറ്റി, വഴിയമ്പലത്തിൽ അവർക്ക് സ്ഥലം ഇല്ലായ്കയാൽ പശുത്തൊട്ടിയിൽ കിടത്തി (ലൂക്കോ. 2:7). ഇലക്ട്രിക് ബൾബുകളുടെ കമനീയ പ്രകാശത്തിൽ അണിയിച്ചൊരുക്കിയ പുൽക്കൂട്ടിലല്ല, കാലികൾ പാർത്ത ഒരു പുൽക്കൂട്ടിൽ തന്നെയാണ് യേശു ജനിച്ചത്. ദൈവം മനുഷ്യനായപ്പോൾ, തലചായ്ക്കാനിടമില്ലാത്ത, വീടില്ലാത്ത, ഒന്നുമില്ലാത്തവരോട് താദാത്മ്യപ്പെട്ടു. നിരാലംബരോടുള്ള താദാത്മ്യത്തിലാണ് ക്രിസ്തമസ് അർത്ഥപൂർണ്ണമാകുന്നത്. പുൽക്കൂട്ട് തുറന്ന സ്ഥലമാണ്. അതിന് വാതിലുകളില്ല, പണ്ഡിതനു പാമരനും അവിടെ വരാം. ആട്ടിടയന്മാർക്കും വിദ്യാന്മാർക്കും അവിടെ വന്ന് യേശുവിനെ കാണാം. നമ്മുടെ ദേവാലയങ്ങൾ എല്ലാ മനുഷ്യരെയും ഉൾക്കൊള്ളുന്ന തുറന്ന സ്ഥലമാണോ? എല്ലാ മനുഷ്യരെയും ഉൾക്കൊള്ളാൻ പോരുന്ന തുറന്ന വാതിലുകൾ നമ്മുടെ ദേവനത്തിനുണ്ടോ? ആത്മീയതയുടെയും, സ്വയം നീതികരണത്തിന്റെയും, പ്രാർത്ഥനാവരത്തിന്റെയും മുറികൾക്കുള്ളിൽ നാം സ്വയം തളച്ചിടപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കയാണോ? മറ്റുള്ളവർക്കായി തുറന്നു കൊടുക്കാൻ ക്രിസ്തമസ് നമ്മെ നിർബന്ധിക്കുന്നു.

സർവ്വജനത്തിനും ഉണ്ടാകുവാനുള്ള മഹാസന്തോഷമാണ് ക്രിസ്തമസ് (ലൂക്കോസ് 2:10). സർവ്വജനത്തിന്റെയും വിമോചനത്തിന്റെ പുതിയ പുറപ്പാടാണ് ക്രിസ്തമസ്. ആർഭാടങ്ങളെയും, ആഡംബരങ്ങളെയും, സുഖലോലുപതെയും പ്രതിഷേധിക്കുന്നതാണ് ക്രിസ്തമസ്. നാഗരികതയിൽനിന്നും ആഡംബരത്തിൽനിന്നും അകന്നു നിൽക്കുന്ന പുൽക്കൂട്ടാണ് “ലോകരക്ഷകനെ” എതിരേറ്റത്. പുൽക്കൂട്ടിലെ ലാളിത്യത്തിലൂടെ അധികാര വർഗ്ഗാഭിമാനങ്ങളെയും, മതപ്രബുദ്ധത്തിന്റെ അഹംഭാവത്തെയും യേശു പിച്ഛിച്ചിട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. കാലിത്തൊഴുത്തും കീറുശീലയും വൈക്കോലുമാണ് തിരുജനനത്തിനു സാക്ഷ്യം വഹിച്ചത്.

ദരിദ്രരുടെ സുവാർത്തയാണ് ക്രിസ്തമസ്. പക്ഷെ സമ്പന്നർ അതു കൈയടക്കിവെച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു. ക്രിസ്തു മണിമാളികയിൽ ബന്ധിക്കപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. പുൽക്കൂട് വിജനമായിരിക്കുന്നു. മണിമാളികളുടെ ടെറസിൽ, കാർപ്പറ്റു വിരിച്ചൊരുക്കിയ, വൈദ്യുത ദീപാലംകൃതമായ കൂടുകളിൽ ഇന്ന് യേശുവിനെ ജനിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. പുൽക്കൂടിന്റെ മോചനമാണ് ഇന്നിന്റെ ആവശ്യം. മദ്യക്കുപ്പികളുമായി കൂടിച്ച് കൂത്താടി, വിരുന്നൊരുക്കി ആഘോഷിക്കുവാനുള്ളതല്ല ക്രിസ്തമസ്. ആർഭാടവും ആഡംഭരവും വെടിഞ്ഞു, “ഈ ഏറ്റവും ചെറിയവരിൽ” യേശുവിനെ കണ്ടു അവനോട് താദാത്മ്യപ്പെടുന്നതാണ് ക്രിസ്തമസ്.

നക്ഷത്രം കണ്ട് യേശുവിനെ അനുഗമിച്ച വിദ്യാന്മാർക്ക് വഴിതെറ്റി, കാലിടറി. കൊട്ടാരത്തിന്റെ വശ്യതയിൽ അവർ നക്ഷത്രത്തെ വിസ്മരിച്ചു. സമൂഹത്തെ നയിക്കാൻ കടപ്പെട്ട ബുദ്ധിജീവികൾക്ക് വഴിതെറ്റിയാൽ അതിന്റെ ഫലം എന്തായിരിക്കും? വിദ്യാന്മാർ കൊട്ടാരത്തിൽ കയറിയിറങ്ങിയതിന്റെ അനന്തരഫലം നിരപരാധികളായ കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങളുടെ മരണമായിരുന്നു. ക്രിസ്തുശിഷ്യരായ നാം കൊട്ടാരങ്ങളുടെ വശ്യതയിലും സമ്പത്തിന്റെയും സുഖഭോഗത്തിന്റെയും അധികാരത്തിന്റെയും തണലിലും കയറിയിറങ്ങി, ദർശനം നഷ്ടപ്പെടുത്തിയാൽ, നിരപരാധികൾ അതിന്റെ ശിക്ഷ എറ്റുവാങ്ങും എന്ന് നാം വിസ്മരിക്കരുത്.

ക്രിസ്തമസ് കബോളവൽക്കരിക്കപ്പെട്ട ഒരു കാലഘട്ടത്തിൽ നാം ജീവിക്കുന്നു. മദ്യപ്പാപ്പുകളിലെ നക്ഷത്രവിളക്കുകളും, അശ്ളീലം കലർന്ന കാർഡുകളും, വൈദ്യുത ദീപങ്ങളും, മദ്യക്കുപ്പികളും എല്ലാം ചുറ്റിലും കാണുന്നു. ദൈവം ആർക്കുവേണ്ടി മനുഷ്യനായോ, ആ മനുഷ്യൻ ഇപ്പോഴും കീറുശീലകളിൽ, പുൽക്കൂടുകളിൽ, കടലോരങ്ങളിൽ, കടത്തിണ്ണയിൽ അഭയം തേടും. **മനുഷ്യാവതാരത്തിന്റെ പൊരുൾകണ്ടെത്താൻ ക്രിസ്തു നമ്മുടെ ഉള്ളിൽ ജനിച്ചിരുന്നെങ്കിൽ?**



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Dr. M. M. Thomas (*Cont'd from page 12*)

He never wanted to be a solitary fighter, although he began as such, in the early days of his theological quest. When the established church and self-motivated political parties hesitated to acknowledge Thomas, unsuspecting youth without selfish interest began to join M.M.'s circle of friends. His writings spelled out his thought forms and attracted many towards him and the line of thinking he held dear to his heart. Now 'Thommism' from the Indian sub-continent 'blips' its thought waves across the continents. Young and old alike, all over the world in Universities do research in the thought of Dr. M. M. Thomas.

M. M. was a christian to the very core. He was not ashamed to share his understanding of the 'crucified' and the forgiveness of sins, one should experience in order to have the impetus to move forward with a clear conscience. While he was the Governor of Nagaland, he used to visit churches and preach. His willingness to associate with the humble and the lowly was exceptionally praiseworthy and something to be emulated. Anyone could be with him, and in discussion, could express their honest opinion. Dr. Thomas would patiently listen, appreciate even if it may not be important and relevant. He never snubbed others or spoke derogatorily. People had freedom in his presence. He was open and encouraging. He helped many to grow in their own freedom of thought and to discover their own identity.

It was his generosity, magnanimity, openness and willingness to appreciate points of view other than his own — that molded him great and enabled him to win many friends both in the International Christian circle and in the secular world at large.

"I am not a theologian" he used to say. It is true, in one sense. He was never a formal student of theology. What all he had gained, was through reading and reflection which was genuinely a part of his being. The titles of books and articles he has authored are more than 75 pages in print.

He was one of those who never exhibited his erudition even for a moment in his demeanor, but while auditing his lecture or reading his writings one is amazed at the vastness and profundity of his knowledge.

Now the Indian church, and the world at large lost a great man of outstanding caliber, a man of exemplary character with deep christian commitment and rooted in his commitment to Christ, the very key to his theological understanding. He was open to people of other faiths or no-faiths, engaged in dialogue with political ideologies, respected other views and thus won the respect of others. He was a movement, always on the move, moved others to move, in fact in that movement he entered eternal life. ■

Message Delivered at the Inauguration of the Silver Jubilee Celebration on November 2, 1996

Joseph Mattackal, Long Island Mar Thoma Church

God calls out individuals from time to time to be pioneers, to go by faith into the unknown and build His Kingdom on this earth. In the Old Testament, we can see Abraham and Moses obeying their call and accomplishing great things for God. When we read the history of this land, we see Christopher Columbus. It is recorded in his personal diary that it was his vision that God called him for a mission, which kept him going. He fought all the odds when his friends and authorities tried to discourage him, but he was determined to go forward, and landed on this part of the hemisphere.

God in His divine providence sent a few young people from India to North America in the early seventies. As in the case of all immigrants, these young men also landed in this country with a lot of dreams and hopes for a better life. But, they were not satisfied with the materialistic blessings alone. They wanted something more. They felt the need for fellowship to boost their spiritual lives, a Sunday service in their language where they felt at home. Memory takes me back to those early days, when 10-20 Malayalees, irrespective of their denominational barriers used to come together for Sunday worship at Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan. I gratefully acknowledge the leadership provided by the Late Very Rev. K. M. Simon Cor-Episcopa in uniting the Malayalees in those days.

As time passed, many members longed for a service according to the Mar Thoma rites. Being newcomers to this land and having no influence, they lacked the courage to go ahead with any plans. They looked up to God Almighty for guidance and help. *Aagrahikkunna Aalmakkale Tripthipeduthunna Daivam*, heard their prayers. The guidance was given to them by the Holy Spirit who strengthened them. It helped them to fight all the odds and criticism and to go ahead with their plans. Their dreams came true and the first lay service using the *Parasyarathanakramam* was started in Queens on April 9, 1972 with the full support of our Orthodox and CSI friends. No one thought that it was the beginning of something big. When you talk of humble beginnings, here we have a fine example. Even though there was serious opposition from our Church leadership and some senior Mar Thoma members of this land, it did not stop God from doing what he wanted to do. God always uses imperfect people in imperfect situations to accomplish His perfect will. As we now inaugurate the 25th anniversary of this great event, may I take this opportunity to gratefully acknowledge the help and support of the following non-

Mar Thomites in starting this service: Very Rev. Fr. Yohannan Sankarathil, Cor-Episcopa, Very Rev. Fr. N. K. Cherian, Cor-Episcopa, Late Very Rev. K. K. Chandy, Late Rev. John Mathew, Mr. P. I. John and Mr. K. T. Kurian. I do want to mention several other names, but time does not permit me to do so. We are greatly indebted to all our other Mar Thoma and CSI members who served on the first committee and regularly attended the service in Jamaica, Queens. My heartfelt gratitude to our first Secretary Mr. George Kurian, Joint Secretary Mr. Thomas Mathew and the only lady committee member, Mrs. Mariamma Mathew, wife of Rev. K. O. Mathew. Their support, encouragement and fellowship in the initial teething trouble was a comfort and source of courage.

I remember with gratitude to God Almighty the wonderful ways He used us as instruments for the building up of His Kingdom. He used us, who do not have any theological background or experience, just like he used the fisher men to become the fishers of men. In the absence of athen, officiating at wedding engagements, conducting prayer meetings in various areas, meeting members and encouraging them at times of need, praying at the Brides and Grooms houses were common routine. I greatly acknowledge the leadership, help and support provided by Dr. Mammen C. Jacob during this period.

As time passed, we organized ourselves as the Mar Thoma CSI Congregation of Greater New York. Since we encountered some difficulties in this marriage, we had to separate and organize ourselves as the Mar Thoma Church of Greater New York. Our struggles for recognition was not yet over. All our requests for approval as a parish were not received favorably by the church authorities. I gratefully acknowledge the guidance and encouragement of then Rev. Oommen Koruthu (now our Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa), who was a student at Princeton Theological Seminary at that time. Achen understood the plight of our members, and saw our condition like sheep without a shepherd and came to our rescue. He was scolded and put down on various occasions for his actions and I still remember the tears he shed for us on a number of occasions. I am sure the sleepless nights bestowed upon him by the zealous members in those days helped him to become a better Christian. I hope this experience has definitely molded him to give tireless leadership as our first resident bishop. Achen went back to India during the second half of 1975 and used his influence in getting us approved as a recognized parish of the Mar

Thoma Church. Thirumeni, many thanks for your understanding, help, and support.

Now, we are sitting at the threshold of victory and accomplishments. We have just finished the ground breaking ceremony for our new diocesan center. Now, it is a dream. We had a dream in 1972 which became a reality because it was God's plan. Let us be optimistic that our present dream of the beautiful picture of the diocesan center you all saw will be a reality in the near future. Even though I walk through the shadow of the valley of death, I fear no evil, for thou art with me. He is with us.

We have several programs and projects planned in connection with the Jubilee celebrations. I would emphasize the need for some concrete steps to make the church attractive to our next generation. If we lose our next generation, there will not be a Mar Thoma Church in this land after a generation or two. Likewise, the Mar Thoma Church in its present form was established about 170 years ago to meet the needs of the mainstream farmer membership of Kerala. We have come a long way during this 170 years. It is no longer a Kerala Church, but it is a global one. But we did not make any changes in the form or structure or even the liturgy as we expanded. It is a serious handicap, and I hope the church leadership will rise to the occasion and take appropriate action, before it is too late. Our attempt should not be to transplant a Kerala Church in the Western Hemisphere; but to build a Western Hemisphere Mar Thoma Church by grafting our traditional values to the Western religious values.

The good Lord has guided and sustained us for the last 25 years. We have accomplished a lot during this period. He used some ordinary people, in extraordinary ways in the process of building His Kingdom. Let this be a time of self examination for all of us. Are we faithful to His call? How is our walk with God today? Is our eternity insured? What are our priorities? This is not the time to dwell on our past accomplishments, but to go forward and do greater things for the glory of His Kingdom. We have to see our church as a body and not as a business. We have to see it as an organism and not as an organization. We need to rearrange our priorities from institutional development to a people building process. We have all the material blessings, but do we have what we really need? Are we really living or existing in the sight of God? Since 1972, we are 25 years closer to His second coming. Are we ready, if He comes today? If we are not ready, all these celebrations are in vain my friends. All our programs and celebrations are worthless, without God's anointing. Psalms 127:1 says "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain." A church cannot be built by human effort alone. Let us work together with God to build a beautiful community for Christ. Let this Jubilee celebration be a turning point in our lives and the life of our church from what we are to what we should be. In Psalm 1:3 we read "He shall be like a tree planted by rivers of water that brings forth fruit in season; his leaf shall not wither; whatsoever he does shall prosper." We are planted at the right place, it is time for us to produce fruits and the Lord will help us to prosper. Let us make a new commitment and leap forward. May God bless us all. ■

Joseph Mattackal was instrumental in starting the regular Mar Thoma Service in the United States.

Equipping the...Church (Cont'd from page 6)

ministries for fulfilling the social responsibility of meeting various human needs as well as obeying the evangelistic mandate of our Lord given in the Great Commission (Mt. 28: 18-20), result in the extension of the God's Kingdom. Our aim is to see that the fellowship (*koinonia*) we enjoy in the Church become the fellowship we cultivate in human society. As a result of our quantitative growth, the Kingdom of God is thus extended. It needs to happen both at the local level, and also at the places where the name of Christ is not yet heard. Those outside the Church may see us as "dead bones" (Ezk.37) of rituals and inactivity, because we can be active in the church, and at the same time inactive in the gospel. Surely, we need a fresh breath of God to breath to the bones. Also we need to see everything we do

in light of the Kingdom goal. We have to check whether we are giving our best to the Kingdom of God, or doing many things merely for our ego satisfaction.

Equipping the people of God for the work of the Kingdom must become an ongoing program of the Church. The clergy may serve as spiritual coaches to the laity. In many cases, the clergy and the laity together explore effective ways of making the Church a blessing to those people around. Our intention is not to become achievers or performers by our training and preparation for the ministries—but to become channels of blessings.

May the Lord make us and keep us as dean and usable channels for His glory. ■

Dr. George Samuel, Director of Navajeevodayam Centre, Tiruvalla. and Dean of the Haggai Institute, Singapore, is a lay-leader of the Mar Thoma Church.

Journey to Jerusalem

Dr. T. M. Thomas, University of Bridgeport

A group of 51 Malayalees visited the Holy Land, Egypt, and Rome for about two weeks in August, 1996. The north American Diocese of the Knanaya Syrian Orthodox Church organized the tour and my wife Annamma and I joined the group and traveled with several others known to us from the mid 1960's when there was only an Orthodox worship for the general New York area Kerala residents.

Our stay in Israel was arranged at two hotels, one in Tibrias and the other at Jerusalem. Israel is such a small country that we traveled to "distant" places and returned to our hotel on the same day. However, we were surprised by the variety of terrain with mountains and valleys, desert and oasis as well as the fertile land of "milk and honey" in the Galilee area. Our guide explained the historic significance of the places we visited, especially as they relate to the life of Jesus, and our patriarchs, (Abraham, Issac, Jacob) and prophets (Elijah and others). Though the Christian population is small in Israel, we saw many churches (like Kerala) and visited about twenty of them. We were happy to see prayers or worship taking place in most of these churches where we too found time for short prayers. Thus, instead of limiting ourselves to the outlook of tourism, we tried to develop the mentality and practice of pilgrimage.

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Tiberias

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Tiberias is very close to the famous lake, Sea of Galilee, also known as Tiberias Sea or Kinneret which comes from the Hebrew word for harp, as the sea is shaped like a harp. We had a one hour ride in the lake when we covered most of the lake (14 miles long and 7 miles wide). Since the boat was arranged just for us, we had the time to stop it in the middle of the lake for devotion and prayers, a memorable time for all of us. On the shore at a museum we saw a 2000 year old boat, recently excavated and nicely preserved, reminding the actual boat used by Jesus and his disciples.



Entrance to the Tomb of Lazarus — Dr. T. M. Thomas standing by the side of the entrance of Lazarus Tomb. Walk down several steps to reach the Tomb.

By bus we traveled around the Sea of Galilee stopping at several sites that are significant in the public ministry of Jesus. At the location where Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount there is a beautiful Roman Catholic Church with verses of the sermon inscribed on the walls. There is another church at the site where Jesus fed 5000 people with five loaves and two fish. It is built over the ruins of Byzantine church preserving its artistic mosaic work of the basket of loaves and two fish. Also, on the banks there are convenience for travels to come and camp for few days, a facility we have not used.

Capernaum, a town nearby, was an important place at the time of Jesus, being situated on a major route. Here, Jesus spent a lot of his time preaching and teaching in and outside of the synagogue as well as performing many miracles. He spent time at the home of St. Peter where a memorial was built recently. The ruins of the synagogue are worth seeing because we get an idea of an early place of Jewish worship. The marble floors and remains of the wall as well as pillars are found.

Nazareth, the next place we visited, is a busy small city with plenty of business activities and traffic jams. It is this place, enshrined among hills, that God has chosen for the annunciation of the birth of Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth grew up in this town, playing with children around, living as part of a family and probably working as a carpenter till he was 30 years old.

We visited the church of Annunciation, one of the largest churches in the Middle East, built by the Franciscans during the 1960's. Churches were built in the early centuries starting with the 5th century structure over the grotto of the Annunciation and later by the Crusaders. Ruins of early buildings form an integral part of the present church. The models of Mary's kitchen and Joseph's carpenter workshop maintain original look by keeping early utensils, stones and woodwork. The place attracts many visitors; but in this busy atmosphere Roman Catholic worship goes with all its formalities and solemnity.

Mount Tabor, where the transfiguration happened, is a tall (1600 feet above the surrounding plain) and large mountain. We reached the top by special vehicle suited for climbing hills. There is a splendid view of the entire region from summit. The church of Transfiguration was built in the 1920's by the Franciscans, a big structure near a monastery. Also, we found the remains of the

Journey to Jerusalem

Dr. T. M. Thomas, University of Bridgeport

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fortress built during the 13th century by the Moslems at the top of this mountain. The historical significance of Mount Tabor is the important victory of Barak, foretold by the prophets Deborah, over the strong Canaanite army (Judge 4:6).

Mount Carmel and Haifa

The longest journey from Tiberias hotel to Haifa taking about three hours and reaching the principal port at the Mediterranean Sea. Haifa is the third largest city in Israel, after Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. It is situated on the slopes of the most charming mountain, Mount Carmel. Haifa is the world center for Bahai faith, a religion with two hundred thousand members with origins in Persia by the middle of the 19th century. At the top of the mountain in Haifa, there is the Carmelite monastery of Stella Maris built over a cave where Elijah found refuge when he fled from the wrath of King Ahab (1 Kings 19:8-13).

Jerusalem

From Tiberias we traveled several hours by bus passing through a different terrain with all its hills and deserts in Samaria to reach Jerusalem. We stayed four days in hotel in Jerusalem and visited several significant sites in and around Jerusalem traveling by bus even covering distant places such as Jaffa-Tel-Aviv and Jericho-Masada region.

Jerusalem is a holy place for Jews, Christians and Muslims, a phenomenon noticed in various structures and practices. Today it is the capital and the biggest city of Israel. There are several mountains, made habitable by buildings and roads. Visitors are attracted to one of the mountains, the Old City with a wall around covering one quarter of a square mile in area. Next to it is Mount Olives with Gethsemane on its slopes. Both these mountains are fairly steep with Kidron Valley in between, a narrow area only. During the last part of his ministry, Jesus spent much time in this area as well as Bethany, a town next to Jerusalem.

The Old City surrounded by walls and gates consists of the Temple Mount (about one sixth of the total area) with its two impressive buildings—Dome of the Rock and El-Aqse Mosque and much open space which itself can be used for prayers being holy. It is on raised level—there is a big wall on one side which is the Wailing Wall, a wall with big pieces of stones, built by Herod the Great as part of the Second Temple (first Temple built by Solomon). At his lower level facing the wall (a few acres of open space) Jews gather for their worship. The Dome of the Rock is a massive beautiful structure which may be compared to the Taj Mahal for its impressive architecture with charming mosaic work. The big rock over which this huge structure is built, is associated with Abraham's sacrifice of his son as well as Mohamed who rose to heavens for obtaining God's word.

Also, the Old City consists of: 1) the Armenian Quarter (with the residence for the Armenian Patriarch, head of six million people, churches, seminary and other residence buildings), 2) Christian Quarter (with holy Sculpture and other buildings), 3) Muslim Quarter (76 acres of land where we find via Dolorosa, Sisters of Zion Convent, some famous chapels related to Jesus' trial and other buildings), and 4) the Jewish Quarter (Western Wall built by Herod, Synagogues, memorials and residence for Jews). We can walk through these quarters by the narrow streets without noticing any difference of one quarter from the other. We walked through Dolorosa (through Christian and Muslim Quarters) from

the place of trials to the place of the Crucifixion of Jesus, singing Malayalam songs, people around us did not notice anything uncommon. There are several significant sites with churches and the most important among them seems to be the church of the Holy Sepulchre standing over Golgotha, the place of crucifixion and the tomb where the body of Jesus was laid. Instead of one church we see several chapels and churches shared by six Christian communities or denominations.

From Jerusalem, we traveled to Jericho about 12 miles, and near by Dead Sea when we reached from a place 2723 feet above sea level to several feet below, the lowest land area with mountains. In a cave at one of these mountains two Bedouin shepherds discovered the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. We reached Masada, a fortress built by Herod the Great, in this Judean desert near Dead Sea. Masada is steep huge mountain where Jews found refuge in A. D. 73, but finally committed suicide when Romans built a ramp (which is another mountain built by Romans for access). Today Israeli soldiers take their oath on Masada. In order to reach the top there is electric cars today, but still we have to climb 90 steps by the side of this steep mountain. We remember that the temperature was 125 F when we were walking through the top of the Masada for about half an hour, a place without any shade.

Bethlehem, the next place we visited, lies 5 or 6 miles south of Jerusalem on a hill. On the way we stopped to see the Tomb of Rachel which is away from the burial sites of Abraham, Sarah, Issac, Jacob and others, all in Hebron, 15 miles south of Bethelhem. The church of the nativity is one of the oldest structures seen in the Holy Land. The original mosaic work done by Emperor Constantine's mother Helena is found in the church. (Helena is known for her efforts in identifying holy sites and building churches including Jesus' crucifixion and burial site). Under the central altar of this ancient church there is a grotto which marks the "Nativity", the birth of Jesus by a silver star. We walked down a few steps to see this grotto (cave made in the limestone), the place where Jesus was born and kept in a manger which is at the other side of the same cave.

At all these holy sites we saw churches; we visited about twenty of them. The orthodox Qurbana was celebrated in our language at two places by both aches in the group, one in Bethelhem and other in Jerusalem at St. Mark's church built over the upper room, the place of the Last Supper. Some of these events, the Last supper, burial and others, are remembered at two places with churches of different denominations. The first efforts to identify holy sites to build churches were initiated by Emperor Constantines' mother Helena after their conversion. Most of these structures built in the 4th century were destroyed by invading Muslim conquerors and then rebuilt in the 11th century by Crusaders, but later destroyed by some Turkish rulers. During recent centuries the Roman Catholic Church and some other took interest in building modern structures.

Many things happened in this area over centuries, both good and bad. Jerusalem and its surrounding area form a small part of the world, where Jesus spent his earthly life. So long as we see the life of Jesus above everything else, the visit has special meaning and significance. In that case the journey to Jerusalem is not just another visit or travel, but it is a pilgrimage, which transformed life and brings us closer to God. ■

A Spirituality for Everyday Life

Rev. Dr. K. C. Abraham

A few months ago I was invited to speak to a group of police officers under training at the police academy in Mysore, India. Seated before me in their trim uniforms and in rapt attention were three hundred police officers. It was not usual for me to face such a formidable audience. They wanted me to speak on the religious basis of human rights and the police vocation. I began my comments by saying that the vocation of the police officers to maintain the law and order was as sacred as the vocation of a priest or a Poojari who was called upon to offer prayers in the church or the temple. I added that the police officers were performing God's service. Some of them were surprised at this comment. They thought they were always doing the "dirty work" and it was not easy to think that their service had a spiritual quality to it. Justice Krishana Iyer, the great fighter for human rights who spoke after my talk in his inimitable style remarked that he would call them, "priests" and not officers.

God has called the church to be God's agent or instrument in bringing peace and justice in this world. It is through our vocation, whether it be as a doctor, a nurse, a teacher or an engineer that God works for the renewal of society and the creation. This is the basis for Christian spirituality that is vibrant and relevant.

Unfortunately, our understanding of spirituality is distorted. We have a view of spirituality that is almost exclusively oriented to our own individual salvation offered to us in Christ. Salvation is only for me and my soul that seems to be the attitude of some people. Berdyaev, the Russian Orthodox theologian calls this "heavenly utilitarianism." He writes, "We must not think of our own salvation. This is a wrong state of mind, and is heavenly utilitarianism. We must think of the highest values and of the kingdom of God for all creatures- not for men only, but for the whole world." We need a spirituality that reflects God's concern for the whole world and the entire creation. We need a spirituality that provides a basis for meaningful involvement in society and the struggles of people. It should guide us and sustain us.

Our view of spirituality becomes distorted when we maintain spiritual as opposed to material. According to this, spiritual life is best expressed when we create a separate sphere of activity — a spiritual world that is isolated from the daily struggles of life. This distortion is based on the wrong understanding of "spiritual." Paul uses the word 'spirit' not opposed to material. For him "walking

according to the spirit" (Rom. 8:4) is to live a life that is oriented to God's purpose for our life. And this purpose is revealed to us in the life and ministry of Jesus. It was a life of love and peace, a life that is open to others. All the qualities of spirit are important for our day-to-day relationships. But Paul has another phrase "walking according to the flesh." This too is a life lived in the context of our daily life, but it is oriented to selfishness and self aggrandizement. You may be very religious but if you are only preoccupied with your own position, power and other selfish gain, then you are not spiritual. Again, Berdayev has captured this perspective well and articulated it clearly when he said that if you are concerned about food for yourself it is a material concern, but if you are concerned about the food for your hungry brother or sister it becomes a spiritual concern. In other words, the distinction is not between spiritual and material, but in our orientations. We live our spiritual life in a material context. We may agree with the following. We need a spirituality that is inclusive rather than exclusive, active as well as receptive, oriented to the coming of God's kingdom of righteousness and freedom throughout the world. We need a spirituality of liberation that will open us increasingly to a life of solidarity with others, especially with the poor.

There is yet another form of distortion of spirituality that is very common among us. That is to reduce spirituality to spiritual exercises and disciplines. They are important, but they are only tools for a healthy spirituality. Here again a very special attention has to be given to our orientation. The practices like the Bible reading, prayer, meditation and fellowship around the Word and Sacrament are to be linked with the practice of the kingdom and its righteousness. Biblical symbols, stories and narratives are peculiarly relevant for our struggles in concrete situations. They describe the joys and agonies of the people, they articulate people's questions and answers. Today this "people character" of the Bible is obscure. There should be a process by which the Bible should be re-appropriated by the people.

The prayer life should also receive a new orientation. The prayer has become a way of asking favors from God. But prayer should be a recalling to ourselves God's concern and love and justice. Is this not the real meaning of the

(Cont'd on page 24)

Parents & Teens Can Bridge the Generation Gap

Mrs. Annie Lincoln, M.D.



Adolescence is a very difficult time for teenagers and their parents. Teens are often in a hurry to grow up and their parents struggle with the fact that their child really isn't a child anymore. Often times parental help is resented and guidance rejected. At this point in their lives, teenagers can be

swimming in some very scary waters. They deal with issues such as identity, conformity, inferiority, and love. Hormones are exploding and sometimes a teenager's concept of right and wrong can get warped.

Worrying that your teenager will succumb to negative peer pressure and get off the track morally and educationally after you have done your best for them is a concern. Parents would like to see their effort and sacrifice pay off in a positive way. This applies not only to our Indian parents but to all parents, regardless of cast, creed, or place.

Another difficult issue for parents is the realization that their baby is growing up and needs some space. These years are a time of gradually letting go, yet knowing where to draw the line. Appropriate, timely communication is the answer to this situation. Indian parents, especially, should spend time with their teenagers early enough to teach our culture and moral values in a Christian way. Show them the good and bad of both cultures. Take the decision together in a most acceptable way for both. Root the realization and confidence in the teen's mind that parents trust them and if they cheat they are cheating themselves and need to face the consequences and their guilt. "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6 It is often difficult to be fair to the teenagers and still keep their best interest at heart. Teenagers often have problems making their parents understand that they truly are ready to grow up and make important decisions on their own.

One teenager says, "my parents have influenced my life, taught me values and given me a great preparation for

adulthood. Still it's hard for them to accept certain parts of my growth. I am still a baby. Sometimes lack of communication makes it impossible to let them know that I am ready to take up responsibilities and make important decisions." We Indian parents are experts in making decisions for our children and force them to implement it.

Another problem teenagers face is that they are living in a completely different age than when we parents were teens. Adolescence is a trying time for both parent and child. The keys to making it flow easier are to keep an open line of communication and finding some common ground. Parents love watching their child grow into a responsible adult and they value greatly the relationship established along the way. One way to help resolve some of the conflicts that inevitably will come along is to walk around in each other's shoes for a while.

Parents, try to reach back and remember what it was like for you when you were growing up and some of the challenges that you faced. Children, try to put yourselves in your parents shoes. They have an immense responsibility as parents. If parents and teens can find proper common ground this way, it may help alleviate years of frustration for both parties. Always listen to the word of God when you are in trouble. "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Exodus 20:12 "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old." Proverb 23:22 "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6:4 "Parents love your children unconditionally." Listen to their problems and solve them together. Strengthen the link of love and trust between parents and children through the love of Jesus.

*Increase your knowledge of God's word
for in it you will find the wisdom
that you need for life, which comes from
God's own mind*

— Sper

MATRIMONIAL

Proposals invited for Mar Thoma Syrian Christian Computer Engineer girl, completing MS from USA in May 1997, widow, having a son (6 yrs.), 30 years, 163 cm., fair. Professionals from USA preferred. Forward enquiries to: Box No. JAN97 c/o The Editor, Mar Thoma Messenger.

From Death To Life: Bhopal Gas Tragedy Revisited!

P. C. Mathew, Philadelphia

December 3, 1996 celebrated the 12th anniversary of the worst ever poisonous gas tragedy which shocked the whole world. It has taken away more than 3,000 innocent lives in their sound sleep and thousands more were succumbed to injuries due to its after-effect. We were staying in Old Bhopal City very close to this ill-fated Union Carbide factory and have experienced "death" at close range — in just another 15 minutes, if the toxic gas continued, we would have been included in that list ... No words can fully express God's providence and care for us. Following is an episode of fear of death and darkness, but also a personal experience of the living and saving grace of our Lord.

December 2nd 1984 was a normal night for us who went to bed and for all residents of Bhopal City. But that night turned out to be a dreadful night, the poisonous gas called "Methyl Iso-cyanate" (Chemical preparation) which was used for manufacturing pesticides, leaked out from Union Carbide Plant located in the heart of old Bhopal City, 3 Kilometers from Railway Station and 3 Kilometers from Bhopal Medical College. When this plant was established it was a blessing to the local people. The leakage of gas may be due to improper maintenance or deficiencies in storing the toxic chemicals in tanks or lack of proper emergency system. One of the maintenance engineers on night shift tried his best to prevent this leakage manually, it didn't work, but this hero laid his own life for others.

The leakage started around 11:30 pm and most of the inhabitants had gone to sleep. Since there was no alarm, nobody knew what was really happening. The poisonous gas being lighter it had gone up in the sky at the beginning. After about two hours, early morning, the gas got mixed with fog and got condensed and started coming down all over the area within 3 to 4 Kilometers radius, more in the Railway Station area. We were staying near the Medical College, at the lower valley of a hill called *Idgah*. It was around 2:30 a.m. that we got up with suffocation. As the winter was on us we closed most of our ventilation before sleeping and that therefore we couldn't feel it earlier. Those people who happened to know about it earlier fled away and ran for safety to the other side of the hill or the opposite direction of the wind. When we woke up, we could hear people running fast for safety and coughing hard. The roads were completely packed with cars, scooters and people on foot. With the anxiety to find out what's happening outside, I tried to open our window and saw layers of white clouds falling down from the top of the hill and it smelled like chemical poison (as if we burn red chillies in the fire). When I breathed a little, my throat started to irritate as if I



Mr. P. C. Mathew and Family

ate chilly. I was forced to drink water. Immediately we closed all other small ventilation by cloths and children were covered with more blankets. We took all humanly possible precautionary measures — viz. pouring water, washing face with wet clothes and one more table fan was put into service. We spent about an hour in anxiety like rats that consumed poison and caught up in a cage. We had enough water to drink for this much time. We also called our cousin — Joy (he is also now in the US) from his room to our room where we were together. When the drinking water available at home was completely exhausted and the situation was worsening minute by minute, we had no other alternative but to say *our last prayers*. We concluded that there is no hope left. We knew that there is no one left to rescue us and we cannot leave the place, especially with our three children of ages 9, 7 and 5. Almighty God gave us great courage to face the situation and we started to pray. Anticipating death at any moment we decided to pray and I opened the Bible to Psalms 91 for our last prayer and started reading. Each verse meant so much to us at that time as we were facing death. After reading the Psalm we had our prayers. While praying I repeated verses 9-11 "*If you make the Most High your dwelling- even the LORD, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.*" In this valley of the shadow of death, for a few moments we doubted God's faithfulness and wondered how these verses are going to work at that juncture. Again my doubts got stronger when I noticed that my wife started to shiver and nearing death. We could feel that the intensity of poisonous gas is increasing in the room and there was no water left to drink, unable to open the windows or doors. Even now, after these twelve years, it is difficult to explain the plight we were in on that dreadful night! Our last wish was that "Great God be kind enough to call all of us together — not part by

part." We were afraid, if the children are left at this young age who will look after them? Many other thoughts of this nature created confusion and anxiety in our minds. Even while thinking all these evil thoughts which are not fitting for a true Christian family, we again remembered 14th verse of Psalms 91 "Because *he loves me,*" Says Lord, "*I will rescue him; I will protect him; for he acknowledges my name.*" 15th verse, *I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him.* After prayer these great promises gave us considerable strength and courage to face another 15 horrifying minutes.

All of a sudden, to our great surprise we felt a sort of relief. We heard people talking outside. We opened our door facing the road and saw that the cloud of smoke has lifted and cool breeze entered the house. Oh! What a great relief! We praised God in loud voice. It was a great miracle! God sent his team of angels and rescued us and many other people. We got our life back. On our way to Medical College Hospital we could see many dead bodies and dying people. By 6:00 a.m. many trucks arrived at the Hospital with seriously injured and dying people. Within an hour the whole campus of Medical College and the adjacent roads were filled with dead bodies. There is hardly anyone to attend these poor victims as most of the Doctors and other responsible people left the hospital in order to save their life. It was really a mess and nobody know what to do and how to deal with the situation. By 7:00 am few Doctors reached and started diagnosing and in order to diagnose, they wanted the details of the chemical combination that had leaked out. In the absence of all these, Doctors and Social Workers started their social work and had to begin with first-aid treatment. Children are dying in front of their parents and parents are dying in front of their young children who are also sailing on the same boat and facing death within few minutes. Some people even started vomiting and those who happen to be nearby will be affected by the poison. In order to avoid further spreading

the authorities have started piling up dead bodies in store rooms and emergency rooms. Even half-dead people were also stored in the same way! Proper treatment could be started only in the afternoon by which time most of the seriously injured were dead. During day time many other confusing news were spread and the whole population of Bhopal had to flee once again from the city. Later in the evening everything came back to normalcy, but many of them who left the city couldn't be back as they went far away places and later transportation by rail or road was impossible.

In these dark moments there were some "heroes" who literally have made a difference. Bhopal Railway Station Master. He stayed at his desk when all other workers fled the tragedy and ensured that a few prominent mail/express trains destined for Bhopal, including Kerala-Karnataka Express were stopped at previous stations. This man was dead at his desk, he was honored and has erected a statue at the Bhopal station. There was another Colonel in EME Center whose timely action has saved our lives. 6-7 oxygen tanks were released which neutralized the toxic gas in and around two Kilometers including our area and Medical College. Bhopal Mar Thoma Parish had two prayer groups in Bhopal City area and our loving Father *covered all our families with His feathers and under His wings, and His graciousness was our shield during this deadly affliction.* A few of our members had eye sore and infection which was cured after treatment.

Words cannot fully express the graciousness of our God towards our family. This incident helped us and our children to trust in God more than anything. We owe our life to Him "a second time" who gives us eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Mr. P.C. Mathew and family have migrated to USA in 1995 and they are members of the Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia.

Karnataka Mission...(Cont'd from page 5)

counsel them. They also teach the children Bible stories and Christian Songs. A Balavady was started on November 4, 1996 at the house of Mr. Sunlingappa. Mrs. Sushilavva, wife Sunlingappa and Prasanna teach about 30 children at this Balavady.



Kusugal Mission — Sulla Village, work among children.

They conduct regular prayer meetings and pray with families in distress. People are touched by the love and care extended by the Wilsons and many people enjoy the Christian fellowship. Villagers who attended the Christmas program, were eager to hear more about Jesus.

The Wilsons also formed a youth group called "Jeevan Jyothi." They gather in the evening for recreation. At times they practice music with instruments.

The diocese of Kunnamkulam-Malabar is planning for (1) A community Health Center at Kusugal, (2) Better educational facility at Kusugal, (3) A training center for Ladies in tailoring and crafts at Sulla and (4) A Nūrsury School at Sulla Village. If you are interested in supporting any of these projects, please contact the Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodisius, Mar Thoma Diocesan Center, Makkada P. O., Kokkadi, Calicut 673 617, Phone 04942-60773 or please contact the Diocese of North America & Europe at (2150 579-9359). ■

A Spirituality for Everyday Life *(Cont'd from page 20)*

model prayer our Lord taught us? We pray for His Kingdom, His will be done and His name to be hallowed. Of course within that framework we place our needs and the needs of others. But primarily it is a way of entering in the liberative act of God. It could also be a form of protest against all forces that thwart God's purposes. That becomes the primary focus and not something that is tagged on to our prayer by way of vague intercessions for the needs of the world.

So far we have talked about the distortions in our understanding of spirituality. But what about a meaningful and relevant spirituality? Already some elements of it have been mentioned in our discussion. We can only reiterate them.

First, it is a spirituality that is oriented to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom. To follow Jesus in everyday life is the

basis of our spirituality. It was to be involved in the struggles of people—a life open to God and all God's children. Love is the essential mode of this life. To be in solidarity with the people, especially those who are needy. The test of Christian spirituality is openness and humility.

Second, it is a spirituality of protest. Evil born out to selfish interest disrupts God's design for the world. In the modern world this selfish interest is expressed in organized structures of politics and economics. How else could one interpret the culture of consumerism and profitability? Media projects this culture and we are being enslaved by it. Does our spirituality enable us to raise a critical voice?

Third, a community that nurtures this spirituality. In its origin the church was meant to be a community that is based on spiritual values like sharing and love. It is a community that provides an alternative vision. Alas, the life in our churches is far from this vision. How to recover it? ■

The Role of the Laity in the Church *(Cont'd from page 8)*

2) Parishwide organizations are all presided by the clergy and it is not rare to find that meetings of two organizations are scheduled at the same time. An achen finds himself in the unenviable task of running to and fro without knowing what to do. Yet all organizations have vice-presidents. Why not make the office of vice-presidency more than name sake and have lay persons lead the parish-wide organizations?

3) Why not develop leadership within U.S.A. from our sons and daughters?

4) Sacerdotal functions of the church are in the domain of the clergy. But every other facet of the ministry of the church can be shared. A new resource in our community is the retired people. These include those who have migrated from India after retirement and those who after more than three decades of work have retired in North America. Why not the ministers create partnership with them in the ministry of the church and delegate them to some of the non-sacerdotal functions?

5) A commission of the Laity should be established to seek ways in which shared ministry becomes not only a goal of our church in North America but also a church life-style. As we grow, the role of the laity becomes more crucial than ever.

In closing, the health of a church depends much on the way in which it uses the resources of its lay leadership. The style of leadership that Jesus practiced was one of a shared one. He sent people and commissioned them. They were ordinary people called from ordinary pursuits. Our church will be richer if ordinary people from ordinary pursuits could be called and commissioned for a shared ministry with the clergy. One does not replace the other but both work in tandem. ■

George J. Poikail, STM, ADC, LCDC is a licensed psychotherapist, currently practising in Dallas with MCC Behavioral Care, a subsidiary of CIGNA Corporation.

MARAMON CONVENTION SONGS TAPE 1997

Tapes will be made available to parishes to be released on the same day it is released at maramon. It is a privilege that we enjoy in this Diocese for the last two years. The proceeds from this project is added to the DSM Recording Equipment fund as it was exhorted by our beloved Metropolitan.

The Eternal Promise

Mary Varughese (Aswathi)

July 15, 1996 12:20 A. M.—The harsh ringing of the phone shattered the silence of the night, striking instantly the unexplainable fear into our minds. Upon answering the call, our worst fears were realized, Daddy in broken tones said that my only sister was diagnosed with CANCER.

Anita, beautiful and witty, so full of Life, how could this be true? Could the doctors have made an error in their diagnosis? Unfortunately, the answer still was Cancer—Anaplastic Carcinoma with unknown primary. At the time of the diagnosis Anita was six months pregnant with her first baby girl. At 28 years, having just embarked on the journey of life, hopes and star spangled dreams danced on the horizon. To her the diagnosis was just another challenge to courage that surprised everyone including the doctors who cared for her. Her faith and smiling countenance in the midst of unbearable pain gave us all strength and an unforgettable lesson in endurance.

The first setback was the most heart-wrenching. A cesarean was performed and a tiny, beautiful baby girl named Kristin was born. Weighing less than two pounds, her survival hung on a fine thread that we desperately tried to strengthen by prayer. Four days later at 7:20 P. M. Kristin gave up her unfair struggle to live. Her departure was synonymous with Anita's desire to overcome disease. But in the face of our pleas and tears, she agreed for treatment and started radiation simultaneously with the first course of aggressive chemotherapy.

Returning to the USA after spending two weeks with my beloved sister, I was confident of her recovery, even to the extent of making plans for her to spend time with me after the completion of the six courses of chemotherapy. Twice a week I would call home, reaching across all those miles that separated us, to give her my strength, willing for her to get better.

Two weeks later, Anita was back in the hospital, with lung infection and bronchitis. Again she overcome and returned home. The second chemotherapy was more grueling than the first, bringing with it excessive nausea, loss of hair and appetite. But we prayed for strength and our lives revolved around the Bible and prayer. After ten days, doctors decided to reanalyze her medical condition.

*To Anita,
An aching void
A silent cry
An unheard prayer...
Poignant memories in the still of the night.
I try to reach across the chasm of death—
Dry-eyed I search for answers,
But my pain filled cry echoes back at me.
Speckled shadows and shattered illusions blend together...
The broken pieces of my life I try to mend...
Somewhere on a moonbeam
A Whisper of hope...
"We'll meet on that beautiful shore."*

*Love always,
Your sister (Mary Varughese) Aswathi*

Monday morning, confident of her progress, I dialed home. The moment Daddy answered I knew something was drastically wrong. Like in a nightmare, I heard the words "Doctors have stopped treatment.... there is no more they can do....."

The words hung ominously in the air!

I desperately reached out in prayer to our Lord. With tears streaming down my cheeks I implored and prayed. Back home, prayers were being said around the clock. The Bible offered us immeasurable strength, hope and comfort. Like Martha and Mary begged Jesus for their brother Lazarus, I went on bent knees and an ocean of tears to Jesus for my sister's healing.

Hopes soared when a new doctor, famous for his treatment of cancer appeared on the horizon. Just as suddenly as his appearance, so was his verdict, "Sorry!". But we did not give up.. there is the greatest healer of all and we entrusted dearest Anita in His Care.

Friday, September 27, 1996—today is the day of fasting for Anita. Every hour a prayer winged heavenward. "O Lord, please...please...heal my Anita." Driving home, I decided to call her that evening. Pulling into the garage, I realized something was terribly wrong. My husband came running... "She has gone..."

"No...No..." my screams rang through the house, echoing and reechoing futilely...My beloved Anita had left me forever...

"Daddy..?" broken sobs was all that was left, until I heard my Daddy "Daughter, don't cry...I'll tell you of a promise...Do you want to hear how your Anita went?"

At 11:15 P. M. Daddy was reading the Bible out loud and Anita called..."Daddy!". Daddy rushed to her side and Anita said "Daddy it's time for me to go, pray for me" As Daddy started praying, Anita said "No daddy, get down on your knees and pray." By this time Mummy, Anita's husband and his mother all entered the room and started praying. Daddy cradled her head in his arms ...Looking at his loving face Anita said "Daddy, mummy, I am going..."

...And on the golden staircase built by prayers, my sister traveled heavenward.

"...In the sweet By and By we'll meet on that beautiful shore..."

Not Goodbye...but Adieu...until then...my beloved Anita.

*Anita,
If the world were an easel, I'd be the best artist
Your picture would be painted to perfection...
If the world were a book, every story would echo your name...
Cruel death snatched you from our midst...
Memories haunt every waking thought...
I miss you so...
The phone rings...shattering the silence...
...but it will never be you.
Your picture smiles back at me...
Assuring me?*

*Love Always,
Your sister,
Aswathi (Mary Varughese)*

The Wisdom of the Body

Jainamma Cherian, Bethel MTC, Philadelphia

Anyone interested in nutrition needs not only to study nutrients and foods, but also to acquire an understanding of the human body as well. Every consumer needs to know about the interactions among foods, nutrients, and the body. The human body is a collection of molecules that move. The arrangement is constant, but its parts are continually being replaced by using the energy derived from nutrients. The skin, and the fat beneath your skin which covered you when you were born, is not the same skin that covered you after ten years; it is made entirely of new cells. Your oldest red blood cell is only 120 days old, and the entire lining of your digestive tract is renewed every three days. To maintain your "self" you must continually replenish the energy. You are made entirely of what you have eaten. A healthy 150 pound person's body contains about 90 pounds of water and about 30 pounds of fat. The other 30 pounds are mostly protein, carbohydrate, minerals, calcium, phosphorus, vitamins etc... Thus the human body is composed largely of nutrients.



The following are the reasons why you choose the foods to eat:

1. Personal preferences (you like them)
2. Habit or tradition (familiar and always eat)
3. Social pressure (offered, can't refuse)
4. Availability (no choice)
5. Convenience (too rushed to prepare anything else)
6. Economy (within your budget)
7. Nutritional value (you think they are good for you)

Of these seven possible reasons, only one has to do with nutrition directly. According to Ronald M Deutsch, "Food does not become nutrition until it passes the lips." No matter how nutritious a meal is, it cannot benefit a person's health until it is eaten. The body operates according to its own regulatory systems, and handles nutrients according to its own laws. When you select your food, it is very important to have a wise nutrition judgement according to your body and your health status. Many false claims in advertising are based on misunderstandings of how the body works. A few examples will illustrate misguided nutrition behavior, based on incorrect assumptions about the way the body works.

1. A man whose father has heart disease learns that his father's arteries buildup with cholesterol. So the man decided to stop eating all high-cholesterol foods, including eggs, shell fish and others that he likes and enjoys. However, the cholesterol buildup of his own arteries was unchecked. He did not realize his body makes cholesterol not only from the food but also according to his body's rule and his life style. for example, exercise habits.
2. A person with a low blood sugar decided to eat a sugary snack. The blood sugar rises briefly in response, but soon falls back to below the level it started from. Sugar is a poor choice, because it evokes an insulin surge. The person should follow an appropriate way to correct the problem by eating protein foods along with a starchy food to stimulate glycogen secretion and avoid simple sugars to prevent over secretion of insulin.
3. An ulcer patient fears that his foods are irritating his stomach. He followed a strict diet and eliminates most of the foods he likes, as well as foods, containing nutrients that he needs. But his pain gets worse. Foods can irritate, it is true, almost every one can identify particular foods that "disagree" with them. His mistake, he didn't realize that his stomach was irritating itself by secreting too much acid due to stress, not primarily caused by diet.
4. A young man wants big muscles and he knows that muscle and meat are both high in protein. He eats large quantities of meat and also supplements his diet with protein. But his body doesn't deposit this extra protein in his muscles, but stores it as fat. The body will build muscle only through the muscle building activities. not through the diet. He needs an adequate protein diet (not a high protein diet), then he needs to work out in order to build muscle.

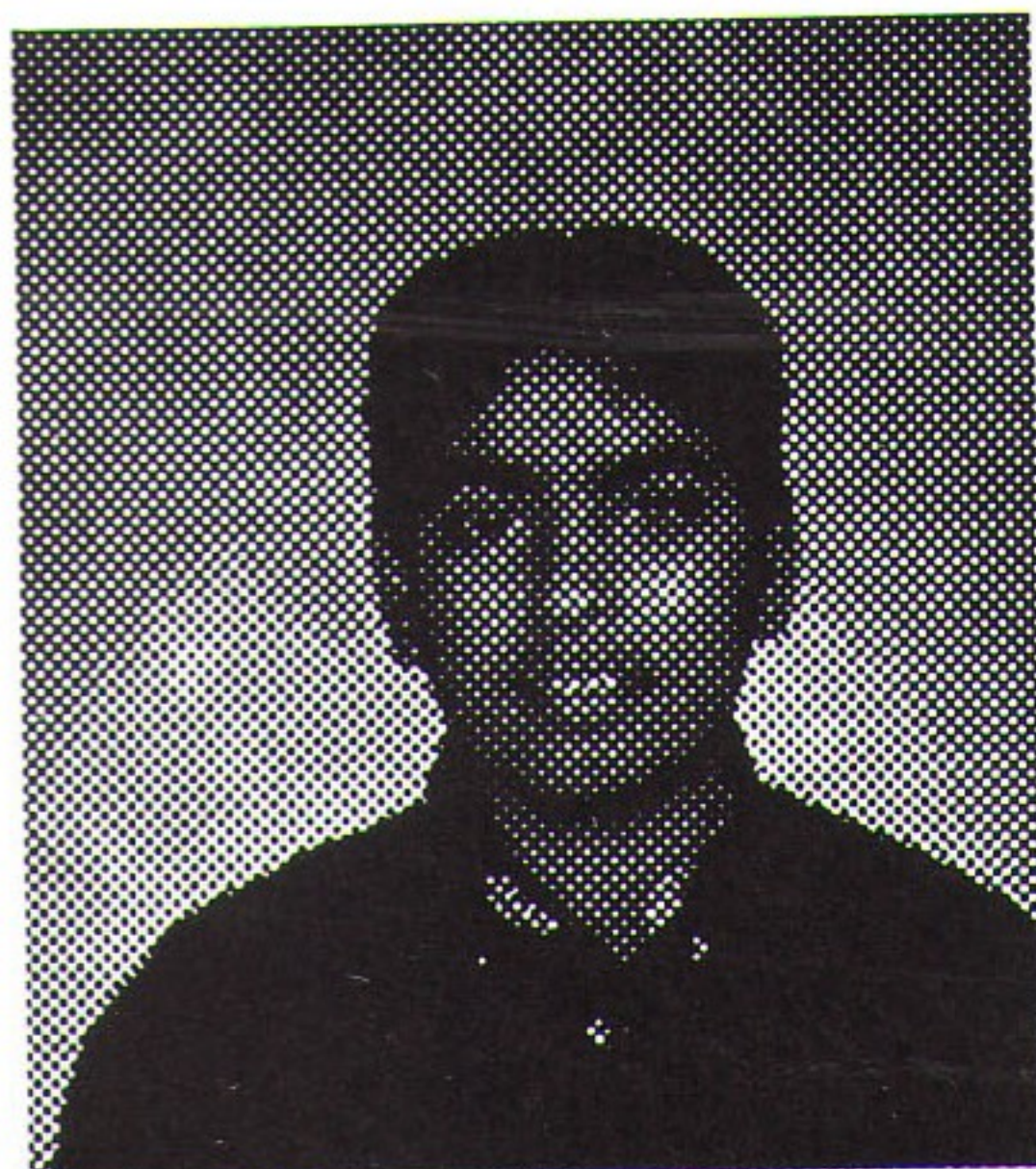
All of these examples show mistaken uses of diets. Choosing to eat a certain food or follow a certain kind of diet in the hope of having a special effect on the body is a hit- or- miss process. In all these cases, the people mistakenly thought of nutrients as medicine. Nutrients delivered from foods work with one another under the body's directions. As I mentioned here, the human body is regulated by a complex set of controls. ■

"The clear sign of your faith is not what you say but what you do."

My Experiences at the Diocesan Center

Leni John

My name is Leni John, I am sixteen years of age and I live in a suburban town called Langhorne which is 25 miles away from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I am the son of Mr. and Mrs. John V. Mathai. I have only one sister, Linu, who is doing her Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering at the University of Virginia. My parents were the members of the Mar Thoma Church of Thoniamala in Kerala until they moved to the United States. My family has been members of the Philadelphia Mar Thoma Church for the past twenty years, ever since the first Mar Thoma Church was established in Philadelphia. Our home is ten minutes away from the current Mar Thoma Diocesan Center of North America and Europe which is located in Richboro, Pennsylvania. In this article I would like to explain my experiences working in the Diocesan Center for the past two years.



During this time, I have learned a great deal about the Mar Thoma Church and this Diocese. I have had the great honor and privilege to meet and get to know the Diocesan Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa, and the Diocesan Secretary/Bishop's Secretary, The Rev. Dr. P. G. George. I have come to understand the great role that they have in this diocese and their great love for the Mar Thoma Church and the Diocese of North America and Europe.

In 1995, Thirumeni had asked me if I could come to the Diocesan Center during my summer vacation and assist him with his secretarial work. He had asked me because I lived nearby the Diocesan Center and had some knowledge of computer applications that were helpful in doing secretarial work. It was a great opportunity for me to get out of my house and to get some experience doing secretarial work. This also enabled me to have a summer job which would keep me busy instead of being bored at home. But that was all I really thought I would experience by working at the Diocesan Center.

Before starting to work at the Diocesan Center, I did not really know a thing about the Mar Thoma Church or how it runs. I did not really understand what the Thirumeni's role was. I did not understand why he needed my help. I always thought of the Thirumeni as some kind of king when I was little, only because of the way he dressed and the respect that he got from many people. Since I thought he was like a king, I also thought he lived as kings live. I did not think he had much work to do. However, I was totally wrong. I was surprised to learn how difficult and stressful his job really is.

As I worked at the Diocesan Center, I learned about all kinds of different organizations and associations within and outside of our Church. I began to understand the amount of time and effort people spent for these organizations and associations. I learned about the different functions and conferences being held in this diocese and how determined the organizers were to have the functions be successful. I got to hear about different activities happening in our Church in Kerala. I also learned a great deal

about Thirumeni's project, Santhi Giri Ashram. I have really gotten to have an understanding about how the Mar Thoma Church and this Diocese functions and all the different processes it goes through to have things accomplished. I have also learned a great deal about what Thirumeni's job really is about and what he is in charge of. He has an overwhelming responsibility for the Mar Thoma Church and the Diocese of North America and Europe. I have had the opportunity to meet many different people within our diocese from a variety of places. I had the honor to meet our Valiya

Thirumeni, The Most Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan, and the Thirumenis from other dioceses. I have met many Achen's of the various parishes in our diocese as well. I met many other people from other parts of the world who have different missions and goals to accomplish in order to help our Church.

I have done all sorts of different things at the Diocesan Center for Thirumeni and George Achen. I have done filing work and computer related jobs. I have helped Thirumeni to better understand the computer and showed him how to use his laptop. I have also done all sorts of computer work for George Achen and have typed up different things for him. I have sorted out many of Thirumeni's paperwork as well.

Working with Thirumeni was a great learning experience for me. Thirumeni is a very strong and able bishop. He has been a wonderful Diocesan Bishop for the Diocese of North America and Europe. His devotion and love for the Mar Thoma Church and this Diocese is something I will always remember about him. We are all blessed with his great leadership for this Diocese. He never has time to really sit and relax. He is either working very hard or traveling to different places around the world. I think he is the first person I have ever met who has to travel as much as he does. As the Vice President, Al Gore, had said about the Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, I think it safe to say the same thing about Thirumeni. He has traveled so much that he could probably have gone to the moon and back. I hope and pray that God will give Thirumeni the strength and guidance to continue to be an outstanding Diocesan Bishop for this Diocese.

Working with George Achen was also a great learning experience for me. I learned how tough his job is, having two enormous responsibilities, as the Bishop's Secretary and the Diocesan Secretary. I have seen him work as hard as humanly possible in order not to fall behind in his work. I admire his determination to do whatever he can think of to help our Diocese. Another thing that I have learned about Achen is that he is a great cook which had surprised me. He has cooked all sorts of delicious foods whether it is Indian food or even American. I am sad to hear that he is going back to Kerala in May. I will miss him and the good advice

(Cont'd on page 29)

Truths and Promises I'm Learning Through My Walk with Jesus

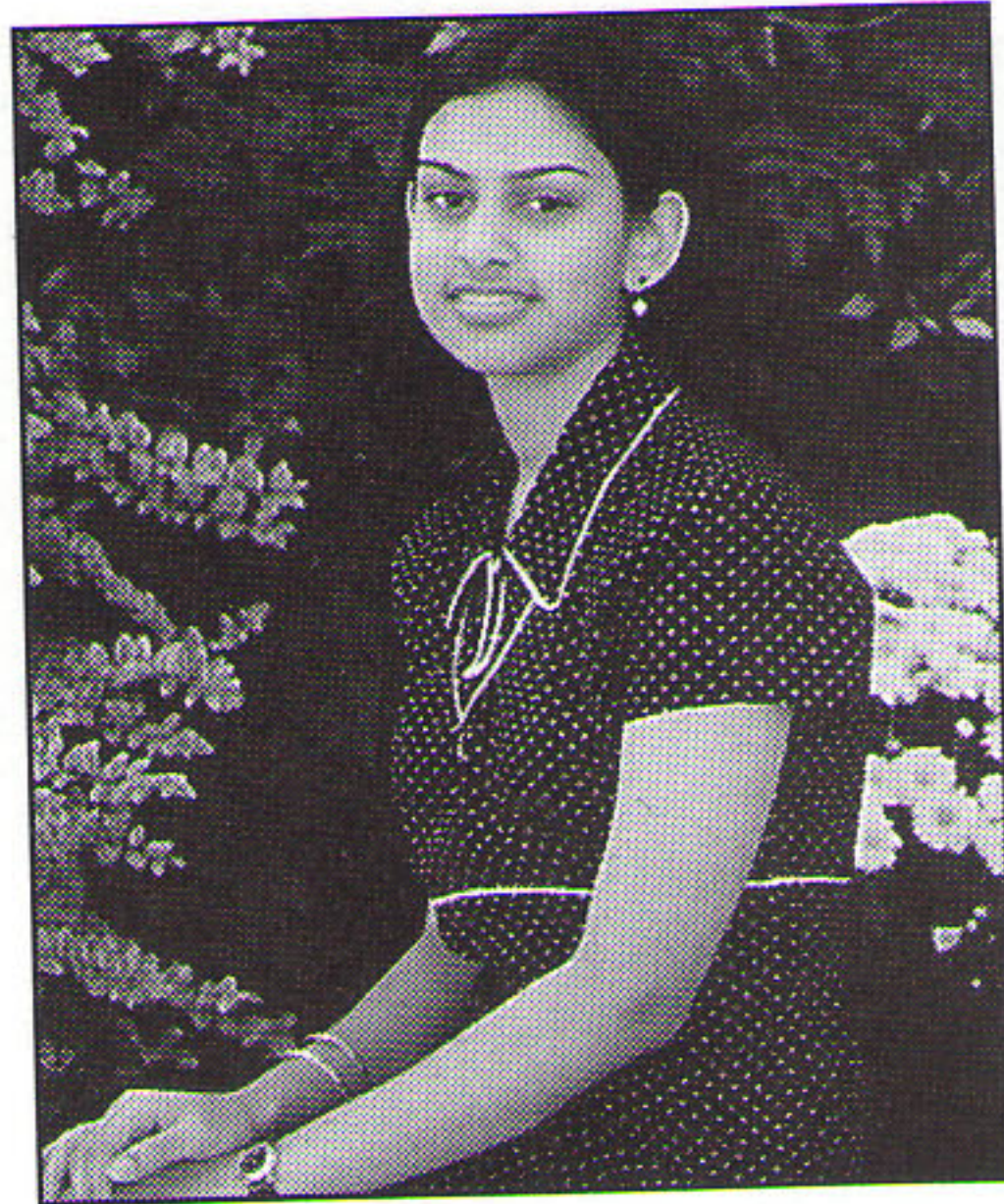
Shane Ninan, Trinity Mar Thoma Church Houston

When I was young, I always learned about the same bible stories. Stories like David and Goliath, the story of Moses, the story of how the Israelites defeated Jericho, and the death and resurrection of Jesus. All these stories have promises and truths when you really take time to think about them.

The story of David and Goliath reveals that God is a deliverer. The story of Moses and his life revealed that God is a living God and one who tests the heart and mind. He proved this mostly through the burning bush. The story of how the Israelites defeated the city Jericho revealed that God is a great and powerful God. The death and resurrection of Jesus revealed that God is love and that he has the power to raise the dead. When I first heard these stories I never discovered these truths. As I grew in my walk with Jesus, I began to study the stories more closely, and looked to see where God had worked in these situations. These stories are just a few examples of how God is real and can be personal.

The year I accepted Jesus into my heart, I never took time to discover the promises or even get to know Him that well as a friend or a savior about a year ago I was intrigued to get to know God more personally. Through my bible class at school and the bible study I attended, I learned a lot of how God had been real and personal to characters in the bible and of how He still can be real to those who earnestly seek Him. These classes only taught me that God is real, the factor that really encouraged me to get to know God were my teachers. They were so sold out for Jesus that it made me eager to experience the same love and joy they were experiencing. So, for my first step I decided to have a devotion every night.

As months passed by, I began to get into the bible and have the desire to find out promises. This devotion finally started paying off, because I finally started hearing the Holy Spirit. At first I only heard the Holy Spirit convincing me when I sinned. But as time passed, I felt that Jesus had started to let me face situations that would teach me to trust him. Proverbs 3:5-6 states, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your



ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths." This verse was one of the first verses I learned as a child, but became significant to me during these past months. To me it says that if you trust in Christ to help you in any problem, then he will honor you through His help. This is a big time truth always helps me when I am in trouble or have a problem that I cannot take care of myself.

Ever since I started this devotion in January, I have found a lot of verses that have spoken to me. Verses that I like to look back on are as follows: Proverbs 16:3, Isaiah 53:5, Matt. 5:16, John 8:47, John 14:21, John 15:5, Eph. 4:32, Phil. 4:13, Heb. 4:16, Heb. 11:6. This may seem like a lot of verses for some people, but to me each verse reminds me of the correct way to live. I will share with you what some of them mean.

Proverbs 16:3 states, "Commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed." To me this says that if you surrender your problems, tests, or anything to Christ, He will help you get through.

Matt. 5:16 says, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven." To me this verse says to make sure that your actions are glorifying to God, so that you can be a witness to others.

In Phil. 4:13 it states, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." To me it means what it says. It says that Jesus will help you to do all things if you ask him to.

In Eph. 4:32 it states, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." To me this says to treat others just as God treats us.

In conclusion, the bible has many verses that have powerful truths. I've shown you just a few that God has used to change my life. God loves us all, and He wants more than anything for us to get to know Him through the bible so we can experience for ourselves His love, Joy, and peace! ■

*"Our hearts are restless
till they find their rest in God"*

*"You can get knowledge in college
but wisdom comes from God"*

DEDICATION OF THE MAR THOMA CHURCH OF SOUTH FLORIDA

The south Florida Mar Thoma parish dedicated its new church building on December 24, 1996 by our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa. The new church building located at 4740 S. W. 82nd Ave., Davie, Florida consists of nearly 10,150 Sft. The dedication services and the public meeting were attended by Vicars of sister parishes and a large number of people from various church denominations. Rev. Bryan Hobbs, Rector of the

Holy Sacrament Episcopal church, Hollywood was also present in the dedication service.

Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa presided over the meeting that followed and Rev. Fr. George John, Rev. Fr. Joy Pyngolil and pastor K. C. John are among the many people spoke in the meeting. The Holy communion service on the following day (Christmas day) was celebrated by our Thirumeni.

Rev. P.G. Mathew, vicar



Procession lead by Choir before the dedication.



Zacharias Thirumeni leading the dedication service with other priests.



His Grace Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus placing the Cross on the Altar.



A view of the audience of the public meeting.

My Experiences... (Cont'd from page 27)

that he always gave me. He has been a very devoted and loving secretary to the Thirumeni and this Diocese. I hope and pray that God will keep leading him throughout his life in India.

I am happy to see how far the Mar Thoma Church has come. Especially to see how much it has spread throughout the world outside of Kerala, furthermore, this diocese celebrating its Silver Jubilee Anniversary. To see all the great things that this Diocese has accomplished in the past 25 years makes me proud to be a member of the Mar Thoma Church. hope and pray that we keep growing and achieve our goals as a diocese.

It was a great honor and pleasure to have helped Thirumeni and George Achen in their work. I am happy

that I was able to contribute my time and effort for our diocese. I would like to thank Thirumeni and George Achen for asking me to help them. I probably would still be unaware right now of some things about the Mar Thoma Church if I did not have this opportunity to work with them. Although the Diocesan Center will be moving to New York, I would still be more than happy to offer any help they need from me even though I will be about 100 miles away from the new Diocesan Center. I thank God for blessing this Diocese with the strong and powerful leadership of Thirumeni and George Achen as a team working together to improve the Diocese of North America and Europe. I hope and pray that this diocese keeps growing and improving together with everyone's help and effort. ■

Message Delivered at the Inauguration of the Silver Jubilee Celebration on November 2, 1996

Master Joseph Varghese, St. John's Mar Thoma Church, New York

"What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord"

Respected Thirumenis, Achens, Distinguished Guests, Parents, and Friends:

Greetings to you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are all gathered here today for a special event. Today is our Jubilee day. It is an important day in the history of the Mar Thoma church in North America. It is an important day in the history of the Mar Thoma parishes and parishioners. It is an important day and it will become a memorable day because we are celebrating the completion of 25 years of our achievements as a God-loving and God-fearing people in North America.

Today is a day of Thanks Giving for us. We are celebrating this day not only as the completion of 25 years of pleasant memories as a church and community, but we are also giving our thanks to Almighty God for his countless blessings on us over the years.

Like the splendid growth of the Mar Thoma Church and Marthomites in Kerala, we see a spectacular growth in the physical and spiritual life of the Mar Thoma Church in North America. Within the short span of 25 years, we have come a long way on the American soil. Like the early European immigrants, we had no church, no vicars, and no significant possessions. Now we have our own Diocese, over 30 parishes spread all over America and Europe, our own vicars, Sunday Schools, youth organizations, and so on.

We are all proud and happy about our growth over the years. God has blessed us immensely in this land. His unchanging love has been with us wherever we go. He has led us wherever we go. We have inherited houses that we have not constructed and cities that we have not built. God has restored us in this land from another land with material and spiritual blessings. Yet today, we add another important milestone to our history in this land. That is our resolve to build an 'Aramana' and a Headquarters for the Diocese. I take this opportunity to thank and congratulate our Thirumeni, Achens, lay leaders, and parents who have

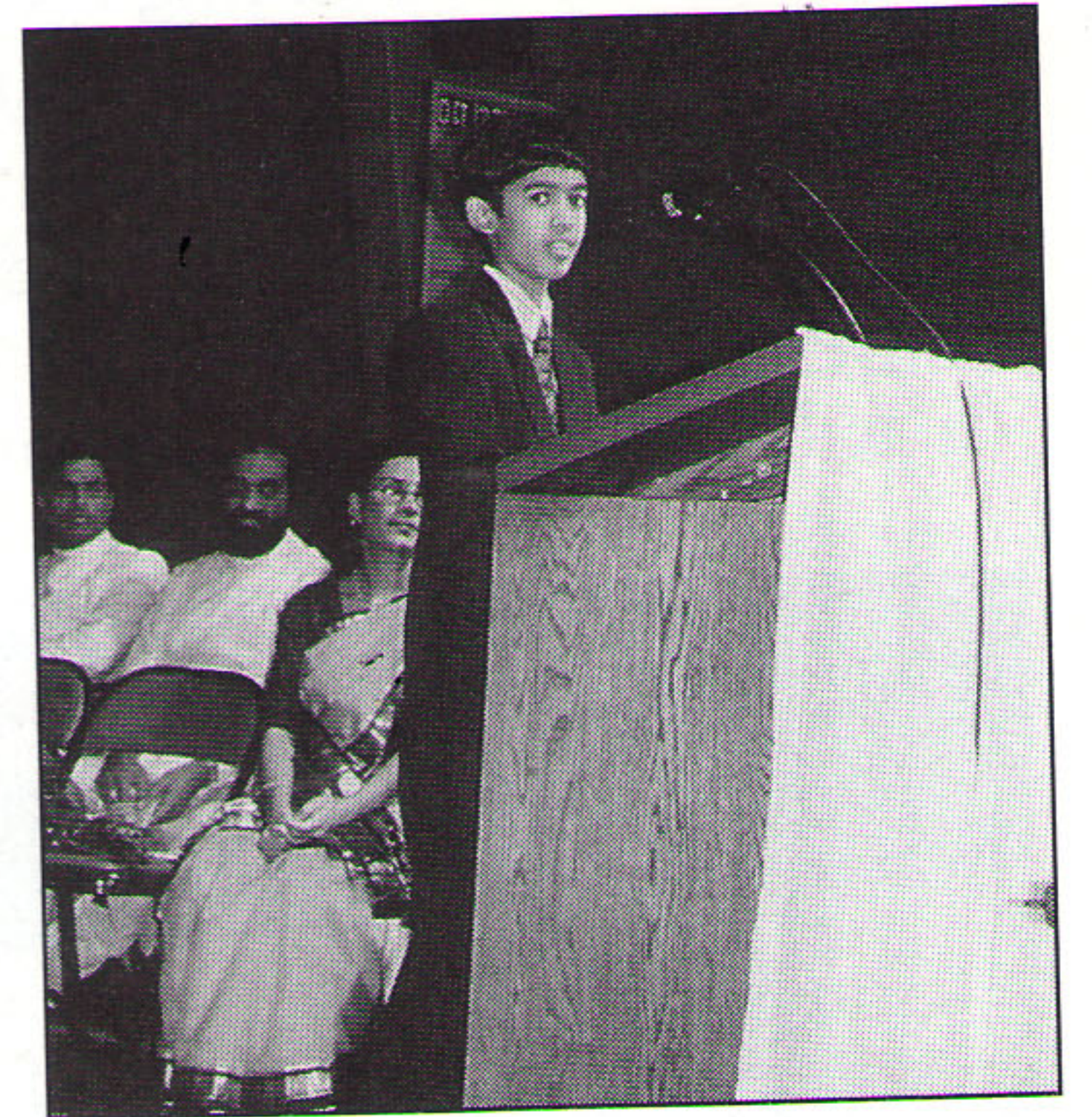
helped the growth of the church and made this important occasion possible. I also thank God for His blessings for this occasion.

As a Sunday School student, I am happy and proud to see what is happening here today. I take this opportunity to

appreciate the efforts of the Diocese on behalf of the Sunday School children. I appreciate the efforts of the Diocese in organizing the Junior/Senior conferences, national and regional examinations, and the World Sunday School Day.

I look forward to the Diocese to do much more to help the Sunday Schools and the Sunday school children. Children are the future of the Mar Thoma parishes and the Mar Thoma Diocese in this land. Our parents and our community often talk about our heritage, identity, and values. They want us to keep these attributes and we want to inherit and keep those attributes. It is not an easy task in an alien environment. But we can try and keep at least our identity and values as Marthomite children.

That should happen when children are given gradual and responsible progression in the affairs and activities of the church as they grow up in their life from children to youths and youths to adults. For that we need the necessary support at home, at church, and at the Diocesan levels. Our success as children, youths, and adults some day will determine the growth and well-being of the parishes, our community and our Diocese. Now I would like to wind up my speech: I hope the next 25 years and beyond will help us to grow further and flourish in this land. Our progress has begun with God and our progress should continue with God. He will crown our plans and efforts with success if we carry on with Him and live according to His will. As it says in Psalms chapter 37, verse 3: Trust in the Lord and do good. Live in the land and be safe. Seek your happiness in the Lord and He will give you your heart's desire. Thank you all and May God Bless you. ■



"A small light can dispel great darkness"

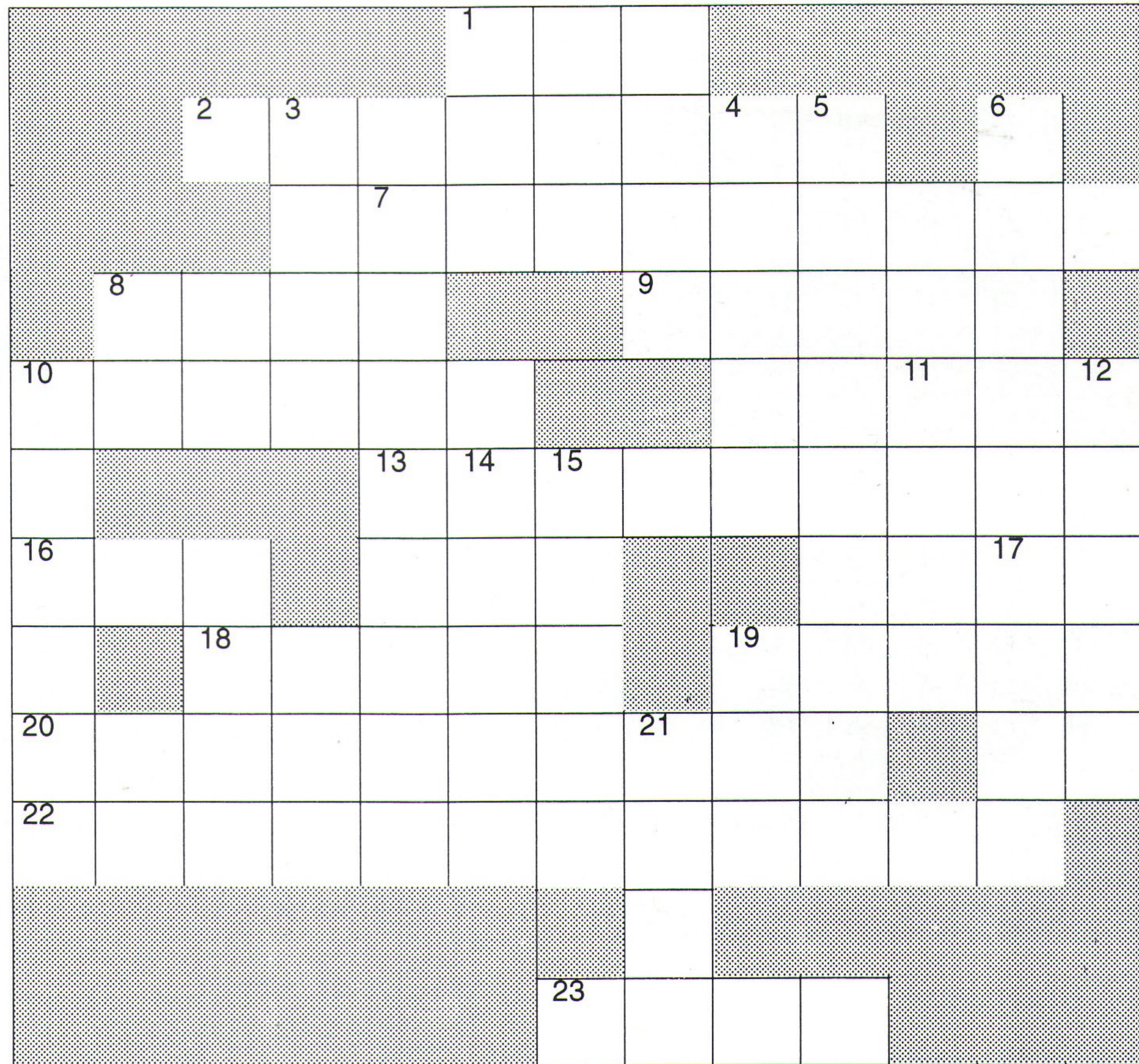
"Present choices determine future rewards"

BIBLE CROSSWORD PUZZLE

AS IN TODAY'S ENGLISH VERSION

(based on the book of Nehemiah)

Mrs. Mini Joys Thomas (New York)



Across

1. Who fought for Nehemiah and his people?
2. The enemies were planned to harm Nehemiah at _____.
3. A Prophetess.
7. The city where Joshua's ancestors were buried.
8. The people of Israel gathered to fast in order to show sorrow for their _____.
9. He was one of them who explained the law to the people.
10. When Nehemiah went on to Jerusalem _____ was with him.
13. Son of Jeshua.
16. Nehemiah's feeling about the destruction of his city.
18. King of Bashan.
20. Gates were destroyed by this.
22. Nehemiah was his wine steward.
23. Everyone said _____, and praised the Lord.

Down

3. Father of Joshua.
4. A musician.
5. A perfumer.
6. He laughed at Nehemiah and his people.
11. Leader of Benjaminites.
12. The man of God.
13. The priest and scholar of the law.
14. He was a supervisor of temple workers.
15. The month of _____ entire wall was finished.
17. The people of _____ paid money to Balaam to curse Israel.
19. According to Tobiah _____ could break down the wall.
21. An object used by the priest to determine God's will.

BIBLE WORD SEARCH

AS IN TODAY'S ENGLISH VERSION

(based on the book of Joshua)

Mrs. Mini Joys Thomas (New York)

M	A	R	T	H	O	M	A	M	E	S	S	E	N	G	E	R	J	A	N	U	A	R	Y
I	P	S	K	T	U	V	P	B	C	L	O	R	D	R	D	G	I	L	Q	Z	P	E	B
N	B	D	H	K	P	S	O	T	L	K	G	H	I	J	A	E	I	O	N	U	X	O	H
I	R	O	B	S	L	Z	W	T	S	M	N	J	K	H	K	U	Z	A	X	V	U	R	O
T	S	J	D	A	O	E	N	U	W	Y	K	T	C	H	I	V	H	B	C	D	E	F	M
O	M	S	F	D	L	P	Q	S	A	U	L	Q	Z	T	O	C	U	S	L	A	I	H	R
X	A	B	C	V	F	A	G	K	P	E	A	M	O	E	A	Y	P	L	O	L	T	A	S
S	K	V	E	P	Q	Z	A	U	Y	L	K	I	H	L	G	K	L	U	A	J	H	I	E
E	K	U	P	L	P	I	S	M	A	E	D	S	E	A	P	E	N	M	T	S	P	L	A
H	E	I	U	M	O	U	W	H	U	A	L	B	A	B	U	J	O	Y	O	R	A	S	N
O	D	P	M	Z	Y	X	A	N	D	Z	O	N	A	P	H	I	L	A	D	W	E	T	O
M	A	F	G	E	L	S	O	N	G	A	B	W	P	H	O	T	A	W	I	T	K	O	W
N	H	J	R	N	H	W	E	Y	O	R	A	Q	M	N	A	R	S	T	U	A	J	N	X
Q	P	U	S	C	A	C	R	U	S	I	N	S	N	D	A	R	N	V	I	M	O	E	F
G	O	P	A	L	A	N	E	L	I	M	K	H	A	N	D	E	I	D	P	A	H	S	O
N	L	R	E	P	U	B	L	H	I	J	I	M	N	D	S	V	O	A	E	A	S	O	W
J	I	M	E	T	H	O	M	A	S	Q	F	N	A	S	L	A	Y	A	Z	M	L	H	B
O	T	H	I	R	U	M	E	N	I	L	E	V	I	A	L	S	A	N	U	W	C	X	I
M	A	R	T	H	O	M	A	M	E	S	S	E	N	G	E	R	J	A	N	U	A	R	Y

- _____ said Moses dead.
- More people killed by this.
- A priest.
- A fortune teller.
- All the people stoned him to death.
- One day Lord obeyed him.
- Here the body of Joseph buried.
- This altar is a witness to all of us that the Lord is God.
- When Othniel captured the city, then Caleb gave him_____.
- He was sent by the Moses to spy out the land.
- _____ stones set up at Gilgal.
- Joshua burned _____.
- Moses did not assign any land to them.
- The five Amorite Kings hid here.
- Joshua spared the life of her because she had hidden the two spies.

Bible Word Search Finders (October 1996)

Davis Thomas	St. Peter's MTC, New Jersey
Tricia Paul	Bethel MTC, Philadelphia
Sheena Cherian	Bethel MTC, Philadelphia
Manju Mathew	Bethel MTC, Philadelphia
Sheba Susan Philip	Carmel MTC, Boston
Asha Deena Alex	Carmel MTC, Boston
Kunjumol Thomas	MTC, Ottawa
Susy John	MTC, Ottawa
Manoj John, Vinod John,	
Asha John	St. Luke's MTC, Florida
Jerin E. Philip	Trinity MTC, Edmonton
Aleyamma Thomas	MTC, San Francisco

Bible Cross-Word Puzzle Winners (October 1996)

Davis Thomas	St. Peter's MTC, New Jersey
Tricia Paul	Bethel MTC, Philadelphia
Sheena Cherian	Bethel MTC, Philadelphia
Manju Mathew	Bethel MTC, Philadelphia
Prathik Manuel Philip	Carmel MTC, Boston
Sheba Susan Philip	Carmel MTC, Boston
Asha Deena Alex	Carmel MTC, Boston
Kunjumol Thomas	MTC, Ottawa
Susy John	MTC, Ottawa
Manoj John, Vinod John,	
Asha John	St. Luke's MTC, Florida
Ajay Thomas	The MTC, Staten Island

Congratulations to all winners!

DEADLINE FOR ANSWERS MARCH 15, 1997

DIOCESAN NEWS

SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATION



Groundbreaking ceremony for the new Diocesan Center in Long Island, New York by the Diocesan Bishop.

The Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the beginning of regular Mar Thoma worship in North America was inaugurated in New York on November 2, 1996. The day began with the ground breaking ceremony for the building of the New Diocesan Center at Merrick, Long Island, New York. The Diocese has purchased a property in Long Island adjacent to the Long Island Mar Thoma Church. The new Diocesan Headquarters will be

built there with office space, bishop's residence, secretary's quarters and guest suites.

It was a day of celebration with a Service of Thanksgiving and a Public Meeting. Church leaders, civic leaders, representatives from sister churches and members from all regions of our diocese attended the meeting. A special liturgy was used on the occasion. The inaugural address was given by The Rev. Dr. Winston W. Ching, Asiamerica Ministry, of the Episcopal Church. Felicitations from sister churches were given by The Most Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios, Senior Metropolitan of American Diocese, Malankara Orthodox Church; The Most Rev. Mathews Mar Barnabas, Diocesan Metropolitan of the American Diocese, Malankara Orthodox Church and The Rev. Thomas K. Oommen, Church of South India. Hon. Thomas Gulotta, Nassau County Executive attended the ground breaking ceremony and presented the Diocese with "Proclamation" and the Diocesan Bishop gave the Jubilee Memento as a gift of the Diocese. The Assistant County Executive and Representative of Hon. Norman Leevy, State Senator; Mr. B. P. Thomas, Secretary, Indian Embassy spoke at the public meeting. The Rev. Tom Philip representing all clergy in the Merrick Clergy Fellowship in Merrick offered greetings. There were short speeches from representatives of different age and gender groups: Mr. Joseph Mattackal (Lay Representative); Mr. Varghese Joseph (Sunday School Representative); Mr. Binu Chacko (Youth Representative) and Mrs. Mariamma Abraham (Women's Representative).

"HISTORY IN THE MAKING"



Witnessing a historic event.



Hon. Thomas Gulotta, Nassau County Executive is presenting "THE MAR THOMA CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA DAY" Proclamation.



Rev. Dr. P. G. George, Diocesan Secretary welcoming the gathering.



View of the Audience.



The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus unveiling the foundation stone of the new Diocesan Center.

JUBILEE MEMENTO

Dr. Anna Panackal, Diocesan Council Member introduced the Jubilee Memento and the Diocesan Bishop inaugurated by presenting it to Dr. & Mrs. T. M. Thomas. Mementos will be presented to all families in the Diocese as a gift.

SUVISHESHA NIDHI BOX

Dr. P. John Lincoln, Diocesan Council Member introduced the Suvishesha Nidhi Box (Mission Box) and the Diocesan Bishop presented it to Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Mattappallil. Mission Fund boxes will be distributed to all families. The collection from the Mission Boxes will be used for Mission work in Karnataka, Mission frontier of the Mar Thoma Church.

JUBILEE COUPON

The Jubilee Coupon was inaugurated by accepting the first \$1,000.00 Coupon by the Diocesan Bishop. This was followed by an opportunity to receive Coupons. Parish representatives collected over \$33,000 and received their

coupons for the respective parishes. The proceeds from the Diocesan Jubilee Fund Coupon will help various programs and projects. It is expected that a working person donate a minimum of \$100.00 towards this jubilee project. Jubilee Coupons are available in \$100.00, \$200.00, \$500.00 and \$1,000.00 denominations. All members are expected to participate in this special celebration with their presence and active participation.



Diocesan Secretary, George Achen receiving the Jubilee Coupon from Zacharias Thirumeni.

DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY

The Diocesan Council met on January 24-25, 1997 at Long Island Mar Thoma Church, New York decided to hold the next Diocesan Assembly meeting from March 20-22, 1997. The Council reviewed the jubilee programs and projects. The plan

of the new Diocesan Center is being approved by the City and the construction will begin soon. The Council solicits full cooperation from all members in this historic event of our community.

JUBILEE CELEBRATION & REGIONAL CONVENTIONS

NORTH EAST REGION: New York

Dr. Samuel Kamalesan will be the main speaker at the Jubilee Regional Convention in New York from May 30 to June 1, 1997. The place and other details will be announced soon. There will be special sessions for youths, women and children. Please contact the Vicar/Diocesan Assembly members/Jubilee Celebration Committee members for more details.

SOUTH EAST REGION: Philadelphia

The Rt. Rev. Geevarghese Mar Athanasius, Diocesan Bishop of the Kottayam-Kochi Diocese will be the main speaker at the Jubilee Celebration and Convention from April 4 to 6, at the Cardinal Dougherty High School

Auditorium, Philadelphia. There will be a public meeting on Saturday. On Sunday there will be a joint Holy Communion Service. Please contact the Vicar/Diocesan Assembly members/Jubilee Celebration Committee members for more details.

DALLAS

The Jubilee Celebration and Convention is scheduled for March 14-16, in Dallas, Texas. The Rt. Rev. Geevarghese Mar Athanasius, Diocesan Bishop of the Kottayam-Kochi Diocese will be the main speaker. Vicar/Diocesan Assembly members/Jubilee Celebration Committee members for more details.

MARAMON CONVENTION

The 1997 Maramon Convention will be held from February 16 to 23, 1997. The leaders include Dr. Samuel Kamalesan and Dr. William P. Barker from USA. Our Diocesan booth is set up at Maramon and Diocesan Jubilee Memento, Calendar, copies

of Messenger and other articles will be exhibited. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, our Diocesan Bishop, will attend the convention.

LECTIONARY 1997

Lectionary with readings for Sundays and Feast days are printed and available. Please contact the Diocesan Center.

GERMAN CHURCH IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE THE MAR THOMA CHURCH

The Synod of the Center Essen (Diocesan Assembly) met on November 15-16, 1996 in the City of Essen in Germany. The Diocesan Secretary, the Rev. Dr. P. G. George represented the Mar Thoma Church at this meeting. The Ecumenical Committee of the Synod presented their proposals and after a lively discussion in small groups and a plenary session, they voted to enter into partnership with the Mar Thoma Church.

The Rev. Abraham Skaria of the Mar Thoma Church will come to Germany at their invitation and will be working with the Diocese for a period of two years. The German Church will support Achen and he will be able to take some courses at Bohm University where the Rev. Dr. R. C. Thomas got his Doctoral degree. Achen is getting trained in the German language in order to work there meaningfully.

There is a small community of Marthomites in Germany. They do not have a formal Congregation. There is an Ecumenical Forum where Mar Thoma members give leadership. A few local Mar Thoma members were also invited to the Synod meetings and their views were implored by the Ecumenical Committee and members of the Assembly.

The Assembly started with Holy Communion Service in the Liturgy of the Protestant Church, which is largely Lutheran. This was followed by Dinner and then the formal session. Rev. Dr. P. G. George was then introduced and had a few minutes to convey the greetings of the Diocesan Bishop. They very fondly call our Thirumeni 'Bishop Mar Theophilus.'

This meeting is an outcome of long and careful preparation. The Rev. Glade, the Superintendent of the Synod (Diocese) whose role is equivalent to that of our Diocesan Bishop. Rev. Glade has developed good relationship with the Mar Thoma Church. He has visited Kerala and has seen first hand the work of the Church. This Diocese supports/sponsors students of the Girideepthi Hostel. The Rt. Rev. Geevarghese Mar Athanasius and the Rev. K. G. Joseph went to Germany in 1995. Another trip was taken in 1996 by the Rev. Zacharia John and family and Mr. Abraham from the London parish. Zacharias Thirumeni visited Germany at the invitation of Rev. Glade a few times and laid enough ground work for a closer relationship.



Rev. Dr. P. G. George, presenting the Jubilee Memento to Rev. Glade.



The "Synod" (Diocesan Assembly) of Center Essen of the Protestant Evangelical Church in session.



Rev. Dr. P. G. George and Rev. Glade with Marthomites in Germany.

ENDOWMENT FUND

Mr. & Mrs. T. A. Mathew has donated \$1,000 to the endowment fund in memory of Mr. C. J. John of Kolacot, Cherukara. His whole life was dedicated to the Lord and the Mar Thoma Church. He has served the Church in several capacities including the Voluntary Evangelists' Association as its Travelling Secretary and the Kombadi Bible Institute as a teacher.

Dr. K. E. Mathew & Dr. Leya Mathew of Gramercy, Louisiana

established an endowment "In memory of Rev. P. C. Cherian for Theological Education." Dr. Leya's father, P. C. Cherian Achen was a Headmaster of the St. Thomas Mar Thoma High School, Keezhillam. Achen was a pioneer and instrumental in establishing several parishes in the area.

Other endowment fund donors will be acknowledged in the following issues.

VOLUNTARY EVANGELISTS' ASSOCIATION—MIDWEST REGION

A retreat was held on October 12, 1996 at the Chicago Mar Thoma Church. About 60 members from the Chicago Mar Thoma Church, Bethel Mar Thoma church, Detroit Mar Thoma Church and Minneapolis Mar Thoma congregation

attended the retreat. Rev. George Samuel was the main speaker. Rev. K. Y. Jacob, Rev. James Thomas and Rev. P. P. Thomas also were also present.

Dr. Mathew Sadhu, Secretary.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE USA

The Membership and Ecclesial Relations Standing Committee on October 1, 1996 in Chicago voted unanimously to recommend the certification of the Mar Thoma Church to the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. The Assembly is expected to vote on it favourably and the Mar Thoma Church is expected to have a delegation in the 1997 Assembly. Rev. K. Y. Jacob, (Vicar) and Dr. M. V. Mathew of Chicago Mar Thoma parish have participated in this process.



WORLD SUNDAY SCHOOL DAY RALLY—NORTHEAST REGION

The Children and teachers of all Sunday Schools of the North East Region celebrated the World Sunday School Day on Sunday November 3, 1996. The meeting was held at St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Yonkers, New York. This day was marked by a special rally with banners, flags and chorus singing. This was the first time our community has embarked on such a public demonstration of our Christian presence. With the escort of the Yonkers Police, the children went around a few blocks and reassembled at the Church for the World Sunday School Day meeting. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus was the chief guest. Dr. A. M. Chacko, former Principal of Union Christian College, Always, spoke at the meeting. Teachers and the children made this day an historic and memorable one to all.



World Sunday School Day Rally held on November 3 at St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Yonkers, New York.

THE MAR THOMA SUNDAY SCHOOL—WESTERN REGION

The Western Region Junior/Senior Conference will be held on March 14, 15 and 16 at the Mar Thoma Church Dallas, 11550 Luna Dr., Farmers Branch, Dallas. The theme of the conference is **"GROWING IN CHRIST—GROW OUT AND GROW UP—GO OUT AND**

REACH OUT." Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Rt. Rev. Geevarghese Mar Athanasius, Mr. Todd Todd Wagner and Dr. George Samuel are the main leaders.

P. T. Mathew, Secretary (Western Region)

CALENDAR 1997

Special 1997 Diocesan Calendar is available with the pictures of the Metropolitan and the Diocesan Bishop. At the center it

has the artist's rendition of the new Diocesan Center in New York. The cost is \$2.00. Please contact the Diocesan Center.

ECUMENICAL ENCOUNTER

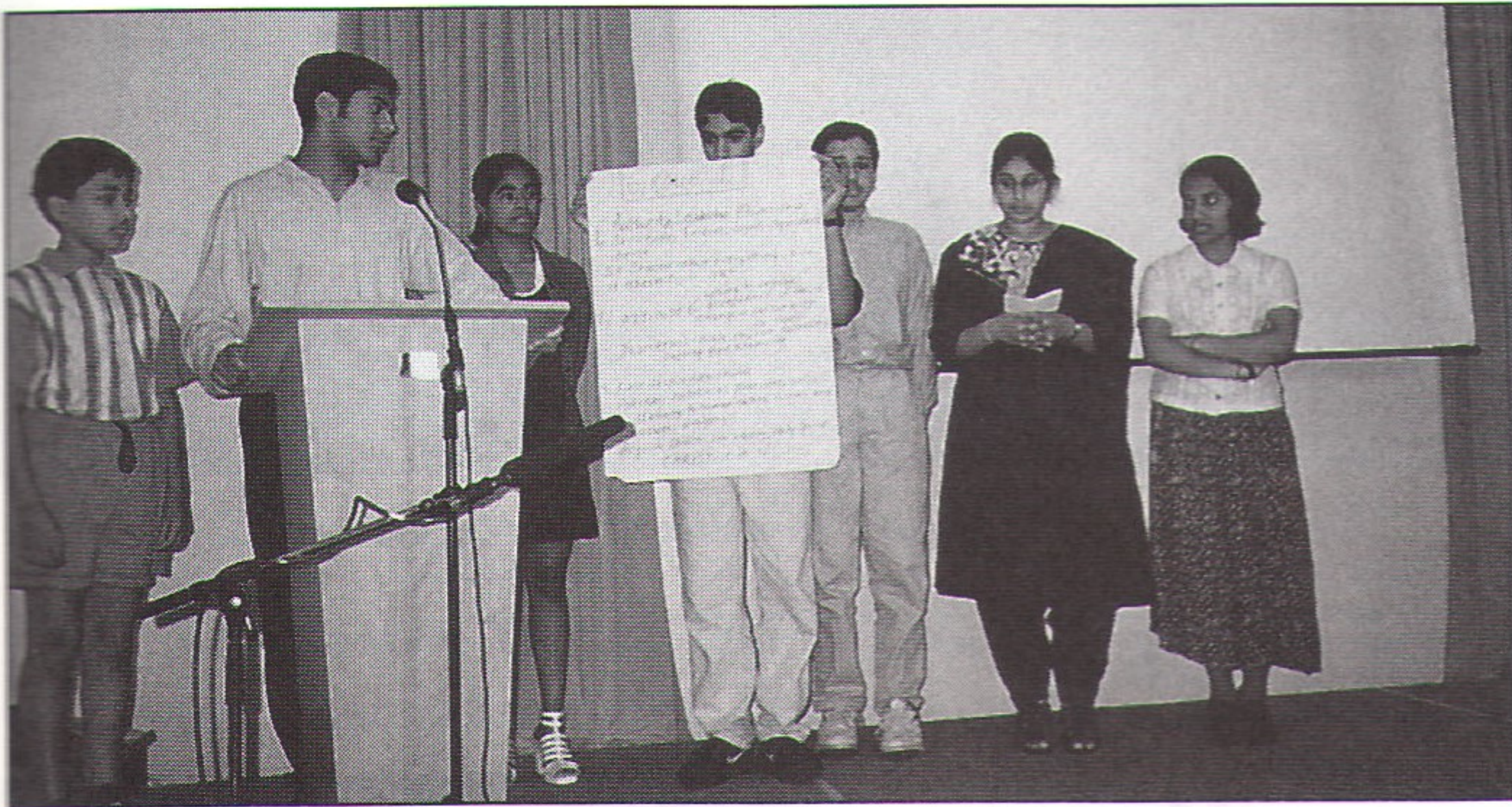


Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa at Hong Kong in a meeting with the General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) Feliciano Carino and Dr. Mathews Chunakkara, Executive Secretary for Indo-China Concerns.

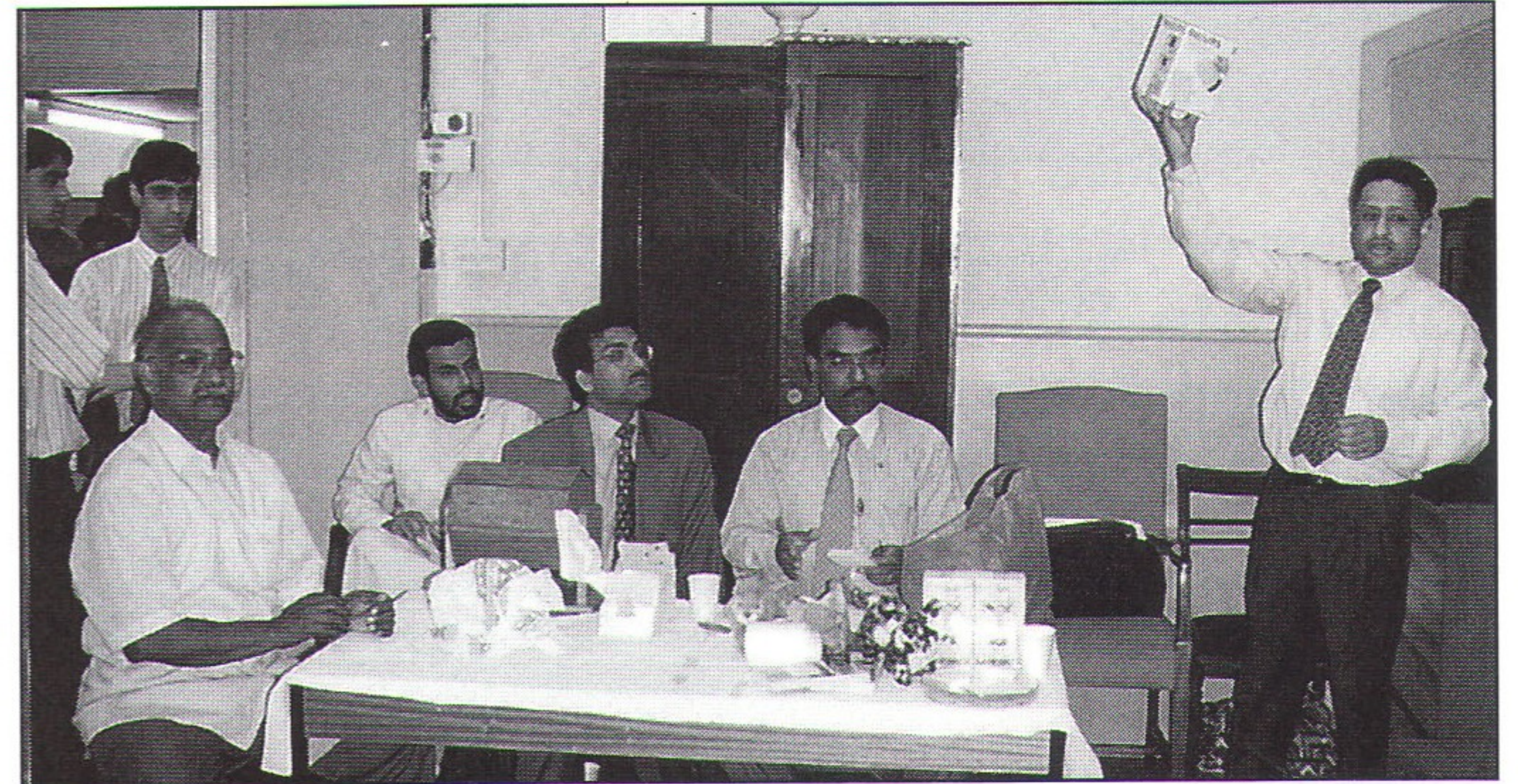
FAMILY CONFERENCE U.K.

The fourteenth Mar Thoma Family Conference U.K. was held from August 2-4, at High Leigh conference centre, Hoddesdon. The theme was Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:11). The main leaders were Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa, Dr. George Samuel, Rev. Fr. M. S. Skaria, Rev. Arul Das, and Mr. T. Thomas. It was really a

time of spiritual and social fellowship and it challenged many to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Many new participants attended from all over U.K. and 21 participants from Germany. Mr. Noble J. Mathew served as the conference committee convenor and Mr. Thomas George as the Treasurer.



Youth session at the conference.

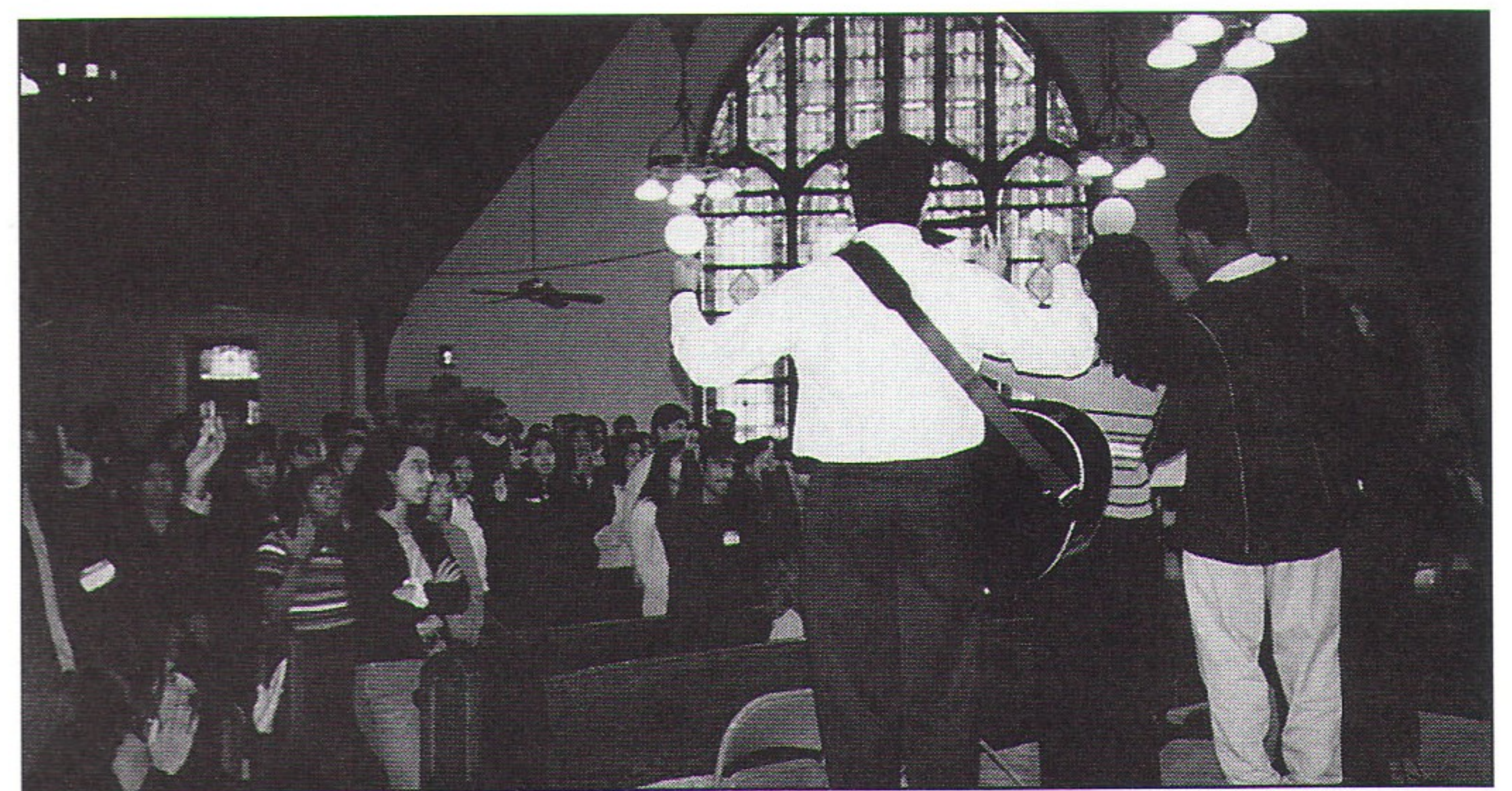
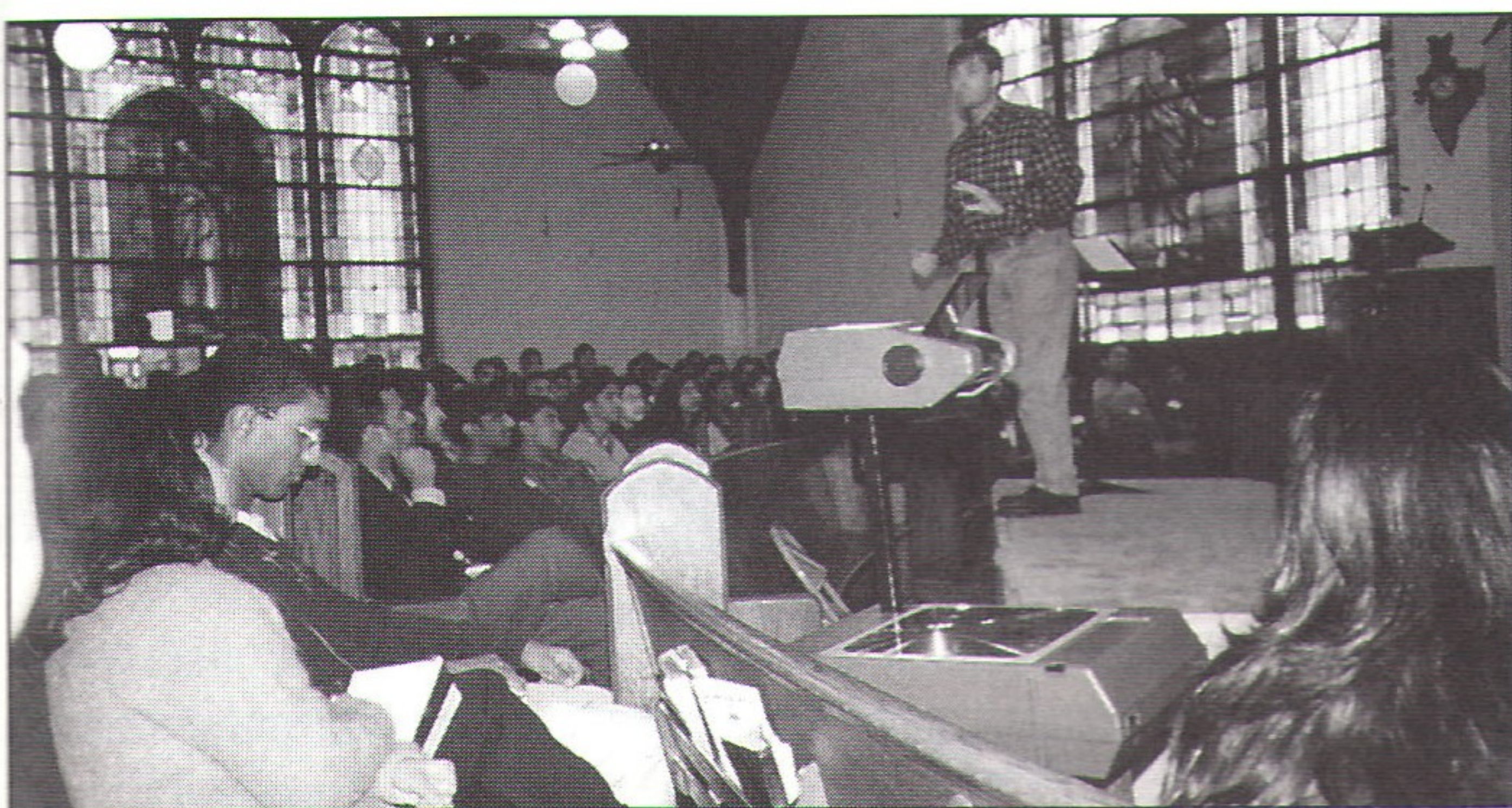


Harvest Festival of St. James Mar Thoma Church, UK held on August 18, 1996.

MID-WEST REGION YOUTH CONFERENCE — DETROIT

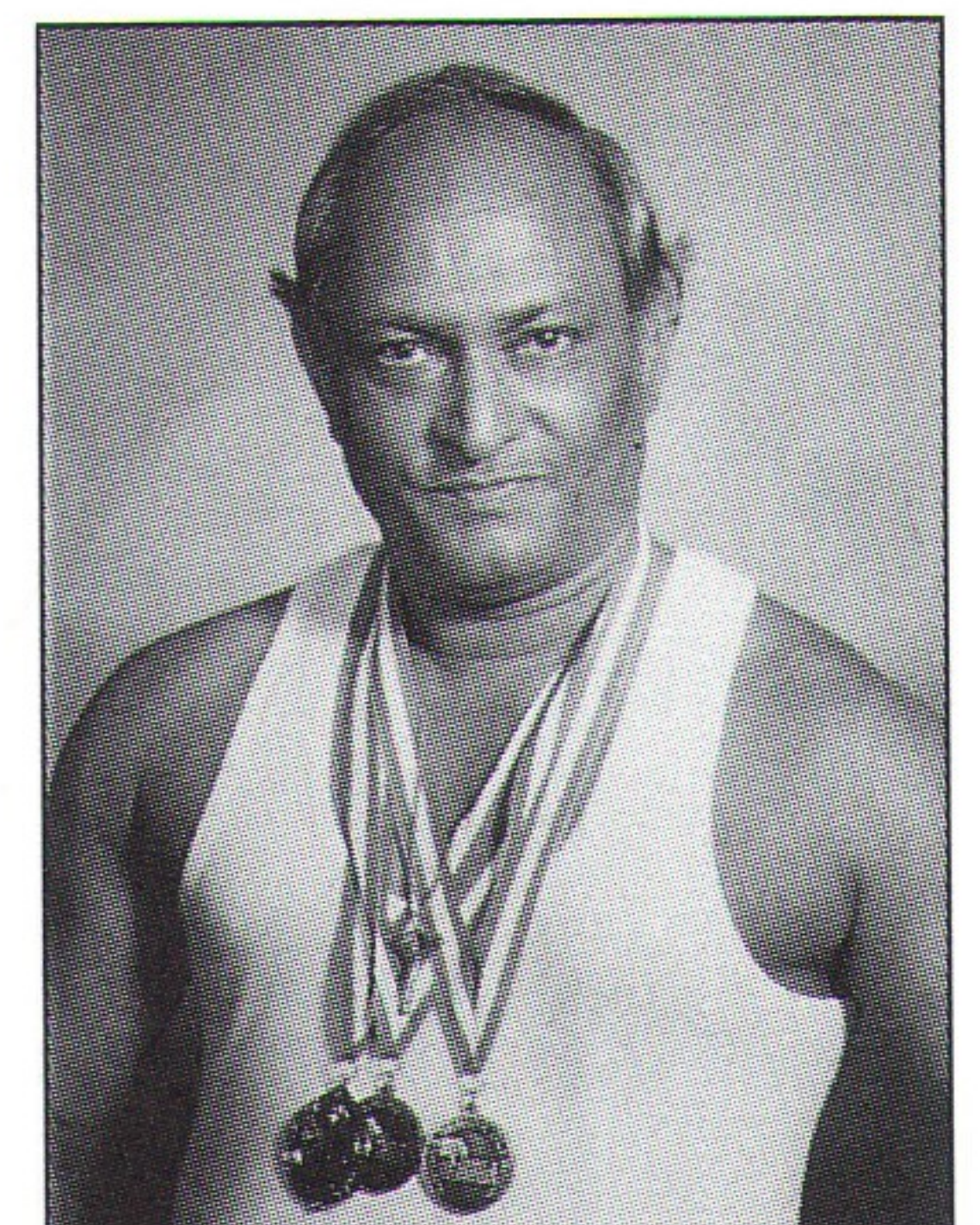
Regional Youth Conference of the Chicago-Detroit-Bethel, Frankfort, Il. was held at the Echo Grove, Leonard, Michigan. About 110 young people participated. It was hosted by the Detroit Mar Thoma Parish. The Rev. Dr. P. G. George, Rev. K. Y. Jacob, Rev. James Thomas, Mr. Saji George and Mr. Saji Varghese were the leaders. The

Conference celebrated its 10th Anniversary and a special Video was shown reminiscing the previous conferences. An Anniversary Cake was part of the celebration. There were talks, tracks and the sharing sessions. The Conference concluded with the Holy Communion service.



MARTHOMITE WON GOLD MEDAL IN THE U.S. OPEN SENIOR OLYMPICS

Mr. K. M. Thomas of the Philadelphia Mar Thoma Church has won a gold medal in the hundred meter dash and a bronze medal in the two hundred meter dash in the US Open Senior Olympics held on October 3-6, 1996 at Tapeka City, Kansas. He also has received the award for the fastest athlete of the Mar Thoma Family Conference held in Chicago. Mr. Thomas of Mezhuveli, Kerala has represented the athletic team of the Heavy Engineering Corporation, Ranchi, India from 1964 to 1974. He is planning to attend National Senior Olympics Meet in May at Tuscon, Arizona.



PARISH NEWS

BETHEL MAR THOMA CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA

On November 1, 1996, the day of "Kerala Piravi", the Parish started Malayalam Classes for the youngsters. Separate classes for different age groups are held on Saturdays. The program is intended to foster children's participation in the church services. Over 125 children have already enrolled in this program. Mr. Binu Philip, Mr. George Jacob, Mr. Jacob Oommen, Mrs. Jainamma Cherian, Mrs. Shali Jacob, Mrs Saramma George, Mrs Jaya George and Mrs Lija George volunteer their time for this program.



Students at the Inaugural function of the Malayalam Class.

CHICAGO MAR THOMA CHURCH

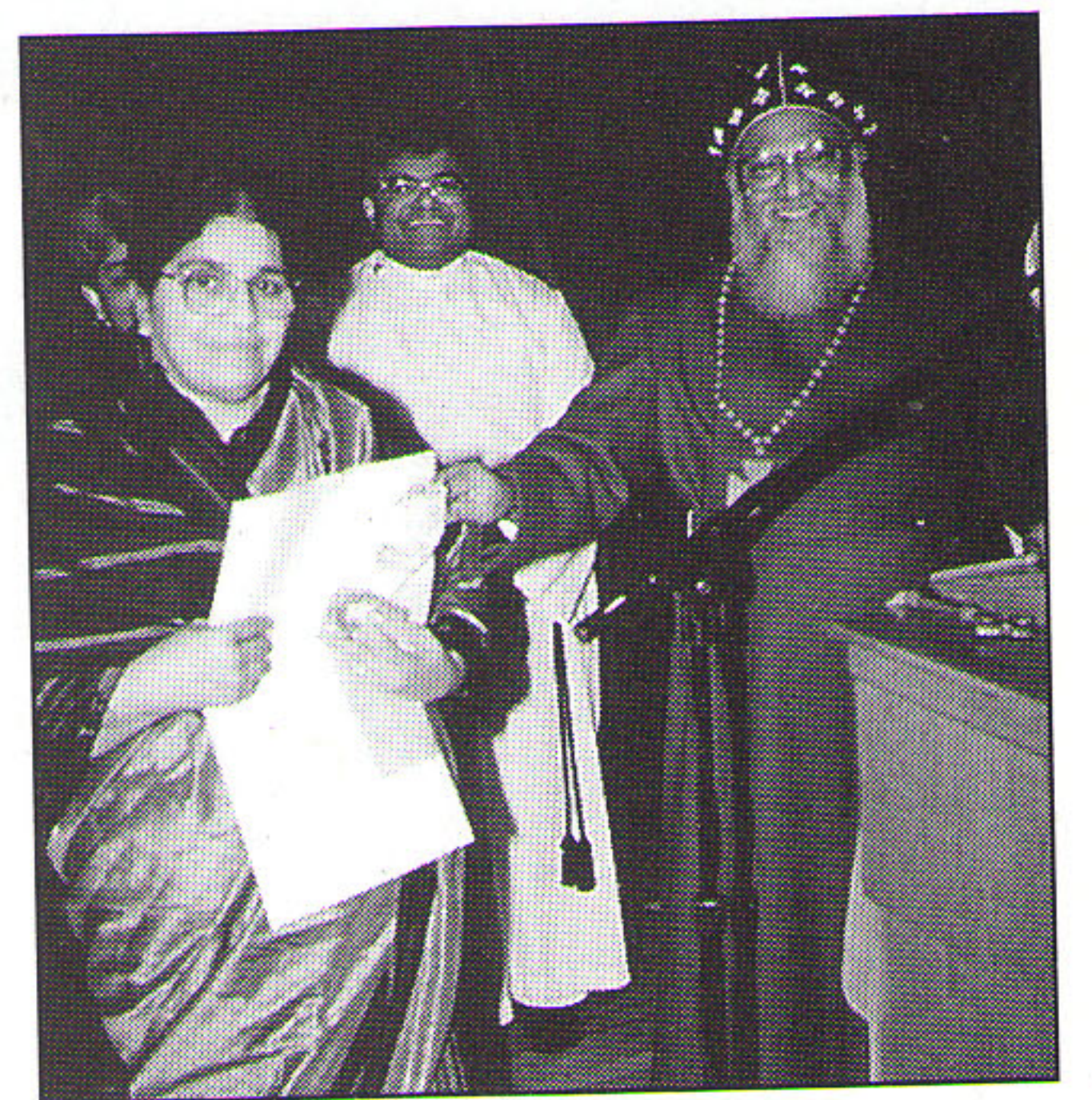
The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa visited the parish from January 10-12, and celebrated Holy Communion Service on Sunday, January 12th. Twenty nine (29) young people received first Communion. Thirumeni inaugurated Jubilee celebrations and the Jubilee Fund Coupon. Under the "Homes for Homeless" project the Yuvajana Sakhyam has given financial aid to 101 families in Kerala during the period of 1992-1996. The construction is managed by the Yuvajana Sakhyam and the vicars of the respective parishes. The Homes are completed with the financial aid of \$700 (Rs. 25,000) per home and the money raised by the local parishes. About Rs 35,000 is required to build a home with basic needs.

Besides the Homes for the Homeless project, the Yuvajana Sakhyam provides assistance in various other mission activities. In cooperation with the central Yuvajana Sakhyam, the Chicago Yuvajana Sakhyam is planning to adopt a village in the Vyanad District and to provide aid for the development of the village.

The Chicago Yuvajana Sakhyam has so far donated over Rs. 20,00,000 to various mission works.

p38

Mrs. Lilly Kurian receiving Diocesan Jubilee Fund Coupon from Zacharias Thirumeni.



First Communicants during the service.

PHILADELPHIA MAR THOMA CHURCH

The parish is in the process of appointing two Youth Leaders with initiatives and commitment to serve the Church to assist the Vicar and to work among the youth. They will be given stipends and tuition benefits for approved courses. One of the objectives is to develop them as leaders in our church.

The Edavaka Mission had served Turkeys to eighty poor families in the neighborhood during the Thanksgiving.

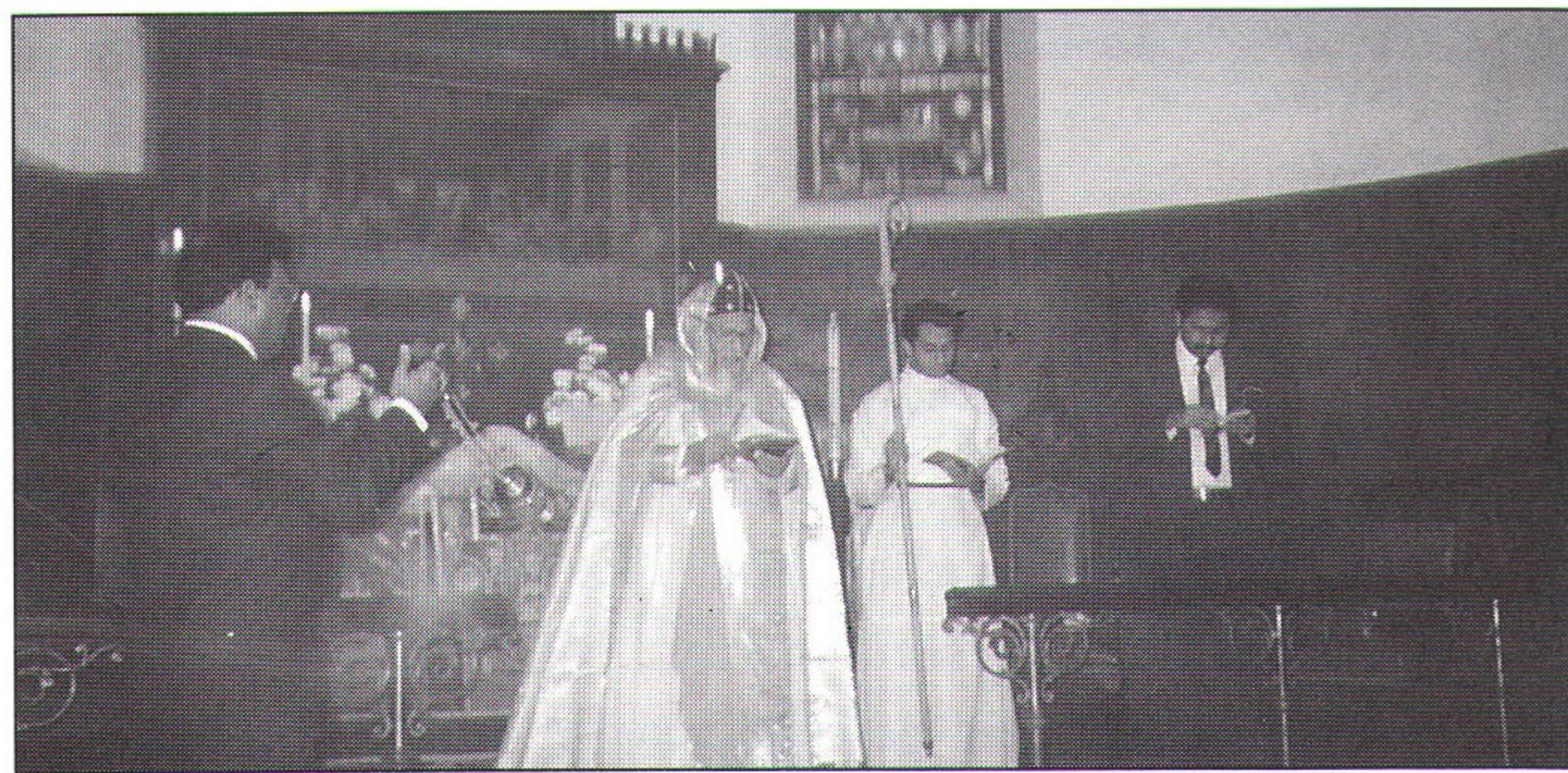
The Sunday School children won the Overall Championship and four first places in the South Eastern Regional competitions held in Washington.



Mar Thoma Church Philadelphia Sunday School—South East Regional Competition.

EBENEZER MAR THOMA CHURCH, 30 LOCKWOOD AVE., NEW ROCHELLE, NEW YORK

Annual convention of the Ebenezer Mar Thoma Church was held on August 16-18 at The Trinity Episcopal Church, New Rochelle, New York. Prof. Koshy Thalakel was the main speaker. Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa visited the Parish on January 4-5, 1997. There was a fellowship meeting on 4th evening and on 5th Thirumeni celebrated the Holy Communion Service. Ebenezer Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam got the first prize in the Bible Quiz competition and the choir competition in the Regional Mar Thoma Yuvajanasakhyam.



ST. JOHN'S MAR THOMA CHURCH, QUEENS VILLAGE, NEW YORK

Annual convention was held on September 6-8, at the Church. Prof. Koshy Thalakel was the main speaker. Family night was arranged by the Church on November 4. Diocesan Bishop and Mr. Binoy Chacko were the main leaders. Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa visited the Parish on November 3. The Parish day was celebrated on that day. Thirumeni celebrated Holy Communion and 26 children participated in the first Holy Communion service. There was a retreat conducted by the Sevika Sanghom and the Edavaka Mission on November 29-30. Prof. Koshy Thalakel was the leader. Christmas Carol Service was conducted on 24th December, Rev. Kuruvilla P. K. of the CSI Church Bronx gave the message. Watch Night Service was conducted on December 31st.



TRINITY MAR THOMA CHURCH, HOUSTON

The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus visited the parish from November 9-15, 1996. On November 10th Thirumeni celebrated Holy Communion Service and 19 youngsters received their first communion. During the meeting that followed, Thirumeni discussed about community relationship and various Jubilee Projects. He inaugurated the Jubilee Memento, Fund Raising Coupons and Suvisesha Nidhi Box. Thirumeni laid the foundation stone of the Sunday School building expansion.

During the Jubilee celebration held on November 13, proposals were made for a Youth Center, appointment of a Youth Chaplain and a Retirement Home for our community.

The youth choir won the first place in the 1996 Ecumenical program of the Houston area.



Diocesan Episcopa laid the foundation stone for the new Sunday School building.

CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

The Mar Thoma service started at Chattanooga, Tennessee. First Holy Communion Service conducted at Resurrection Lutheran Church, Chattanooga, on November 2, 1996 by Rev. P. G. Mathew of the Mar Thoma Church of Atlanta. Thirty-two people attended the service. Mr. George Kurien and Mr. Philipose Varghese were the organizers.

Rev. P. G. Mathew.



From the Editor

In this issue, we had plans to carry an article on Laity from the great lay theologian of our time, our beloved Dr. M. M. Thomas. Instead of carrying an article from him, we are carrying an article about him, for he was called to his eternal home on December 2, 1996 on his way from Bangalore to Tiruvalla. An attempt to write about him is more of a theological challenge; but on a clear lay perspective, he was a visionary and a missionary who believed in the universal brotherhood. His words and deeds have more fitting him to the ecclesiastical order; but he always remained a lay person. His life has thinned the distinction between ordained and the laity. It is only a couple of months earlier that he was bestowed with the highest order of respect by the Mar Thoma church. The messenger pays it's homage to this great messenger.

Reference books connate laity to "of or from the people" and "the chosen people of God" especially in relation to early Christian times. A distinction is made between the people and their priests or between the laity and the clergy. Both are engaged in the same process of pursuing spiritual fulfillment, but a distinction can be drawn between the two styles of their religious life. Laity fulfill their religious quest in conjunction with full participation with the ordinary life and the clergy involves in total absorption in the religious quest away from full participation of ordinary life. The clergy is ordained to a sacred vocation and the laity who receive the sacrament pursue their work in the world. The Clergy predominantly are engaged in the divine side as the teaching and sacramental authority, the intermediary to make God's grace available to the laity; but they also carry the administrative responsibilities of the church. The laity receive the grace by participation in the worship and share some of the responsibilities of fulfilling the church's mission.

During the Protestant reformation, there were significant changes in the approach to the status and role of laity. Martin Luther professed against the prevailed hierarchical structure of the church as well as the differentiation between clergy and laity. Even though the universal priesthood was the central theme of the theological principle, in practice, the teaching, preaching and liturgical responsibility remained with the ordained that needed special training. Thus the distinction continued to remain throughout history.

The structural expansion of the churches requires the clergies to engage into more administrative duties of the church, very often at the cost of sacramental duties. This is true of all churches with sufficient structural complexity. The political and financial status of the Vatican, for example, make the Pope also one of the most occupied administrators and managers of a different order. The Mar Thoma Church also has sufficient complexity that requires our bishops and clergies spend exhaustive amount of time and effort on administrative matters.

The laity share many of the administrative responsibilities of our church; but not to its full extent and in most cases it is limited to a small group of people. The school of thought that "people by nature enjoy working and want to work" has been contemplated outside the classroom discussions in the business world with immense success. If we say the same concept is true in the church situation, then there are a number of people who enjoy working for the church but have 'not enough' to do. It is true only because our activities are confined within the 'perimeter' of the church. We need to redraw that perimeter. The highly productive lay resources in this diocese is yet to be orchestrated symphonically. Nonconstructive thoughts that spruce up in the quest of action needs to be re-directed for constructive and harmonious results. Supplementing personal involvement and sacrifice with monetary contribution may yield instant gratification but not lasting satisfaction. Monetary contribution should only be a compliment to personal involvement.

We are celebrating the Silver Jubilee, and it truly is a tribute to the lay initiative and determination. We came a long way during the last twenty-five years. It also was a clear demonstration of our admiration of our church and the lay potential of this diocese. We cherish and treasure the Mar Thoma Church and we are all very proud of her. But do we treasure her treasures as much as we treasure her?

Abraham Thomas

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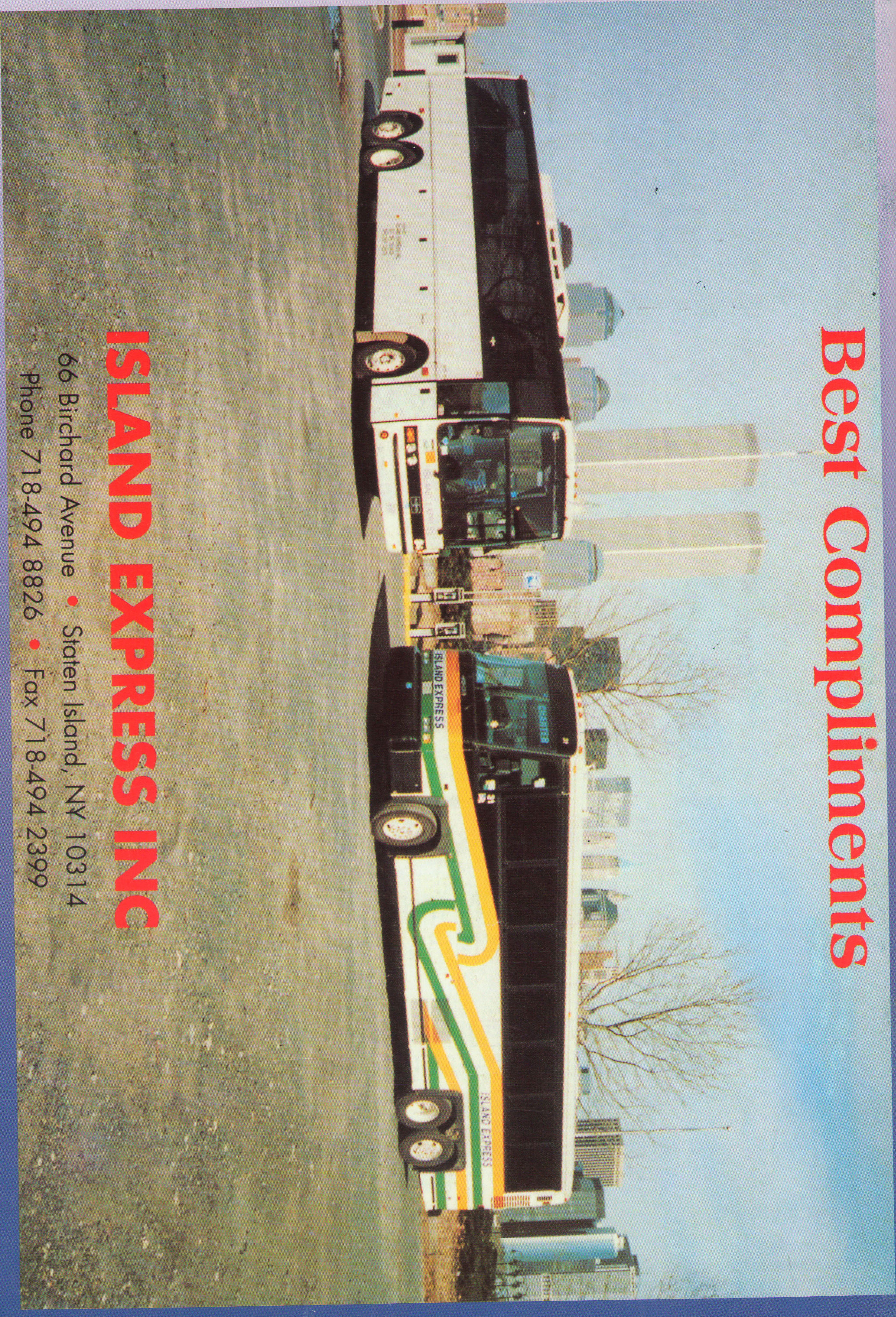
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