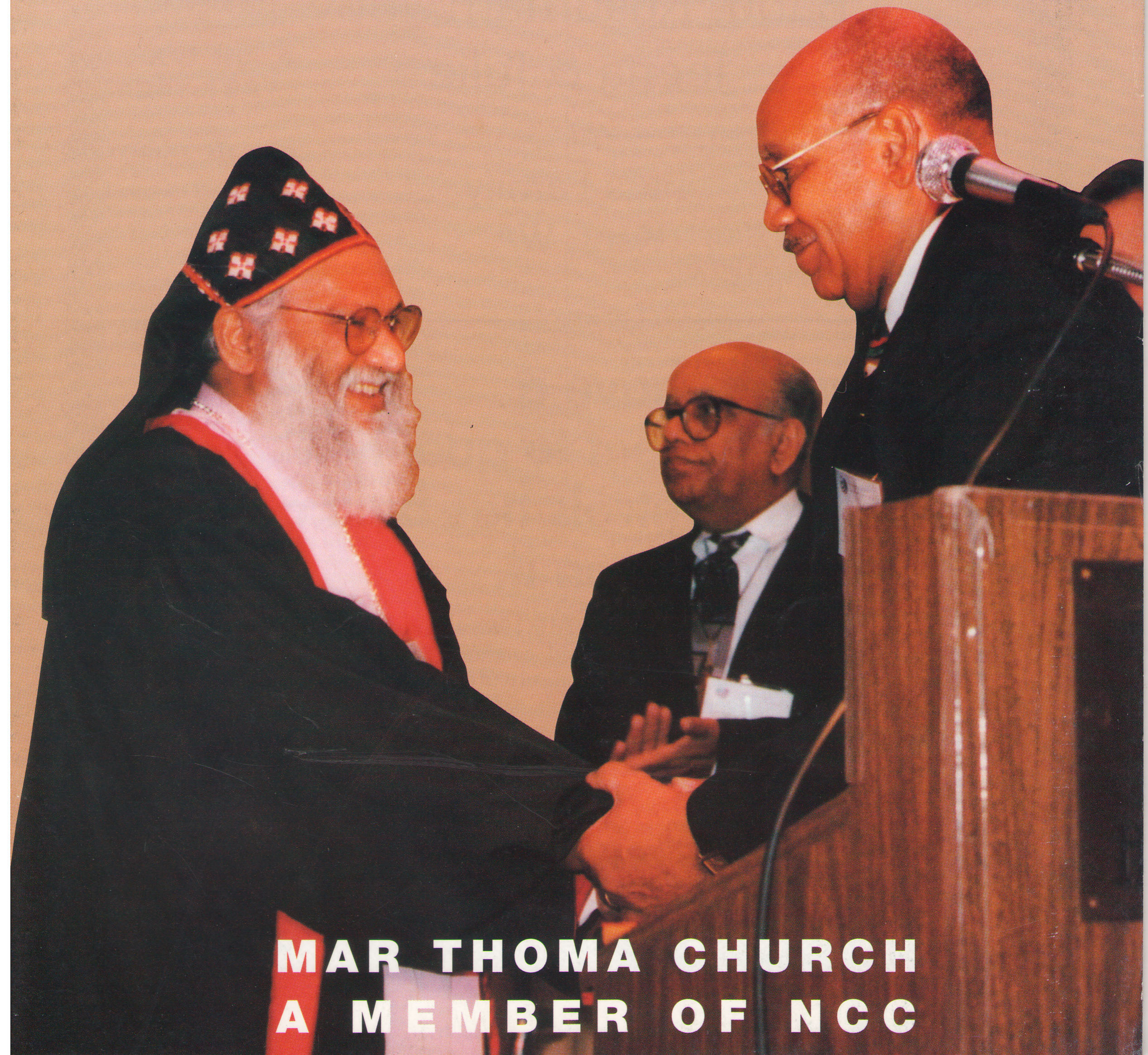


MAR THOMA

MESSENGER

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



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MAR THOMA MESSENGER

The official publication of the
Diocese of North America & Europe

**VOL. XVI No. 4
October 1997**

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Subscription Rates:	U.S.	CAN.
Four Issues	\$10.00	\$15.00
Eight Issues	\$18.00	\$25.00

Advertisement Rates:	Four Issues	One Issue
Back Cover Page	\$1,500.00	\$500.00
Front/Back Cover Inside	\$1,000.00	\$300.00
Inside Full Page	\$ 500.00	\$150.00

Cover: Zacharias Thirumeni and Rev. Dr. Melvin Talbert greeting each other after the acceptance of Mar Thoma Church membership to NCC.
Cover picture and pictures on pages 2 and 21 are courtesy of Rick Reinhard

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MAR THOMA MESSENGER UPCOMING ISSUES

JANUARY, 1998
Articles, News etc. due by December 1, 1997

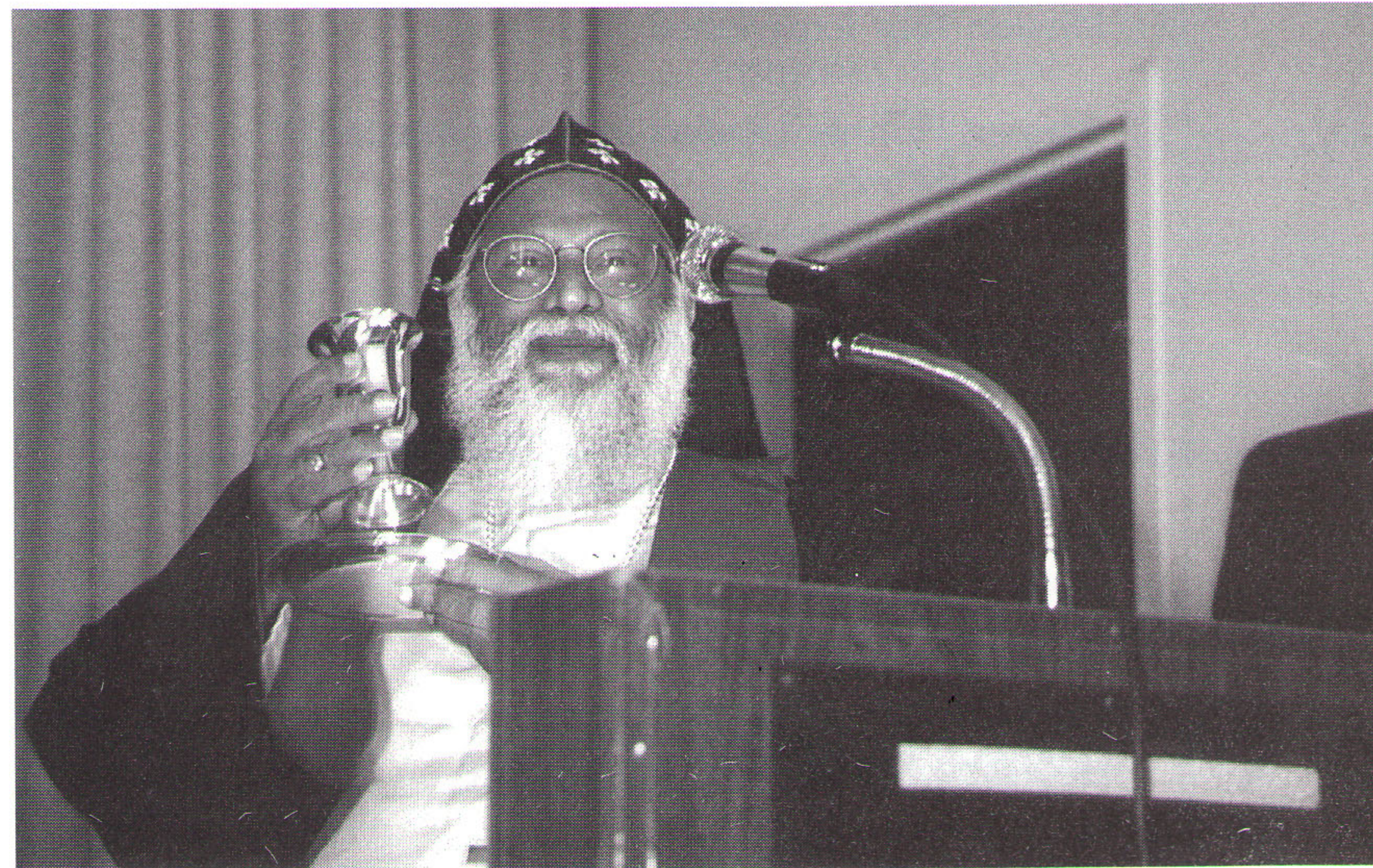
A SILVER JUBILEE GIFT FROM THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

As we celebrate our silver Jubilee, it indeed is a timely gift; the annual general assembly of the National Council of Churches unanimously accepted the Mar Thoma Church a member communion on November 12, 1997.

In her report the General Secretary Rev. Dr. Joan B. Campbell said, "This morning we received into membership the 34th member communion. The Mar Thoma Church, with its roots in the ancient Christian community of Kerala in India, deepens our diversity.... Dare we allow them, in the words of Paul to Timothy, to stir into flame the faith that is already in us? Is this moment not like the moment of baptism when we rejoice with the newly baptized and in the process reaffirm our own baptism? The promise vows remind us of our special status as children of a God who loves us. The promise to lead



Rev. Dr. Joan B. Campbell presenting a gift to Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus.



"The most important gift since it is for the taking of communion." Zacharias Thirumeni.

half century to become members of the NCC." "I was thrilled when the communion said 'yes'. ..., but with faith and hope, you accepted us into this fellowship."

The five member Mar Thoma Church delegation (Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Rev. Oommen Philip, Diocesan Secretary, Rev. John Mathew, Dr. Anna Panackal and Dr. George Zachariah) was greeted with sustained applause as Mar Thoma Church was formally seated in the assembly.

Vice President Al Gore addressing general assembly said "You stand for unity, not instead of, or in spite of, diversity, but unity inspired by appreciation for and celebration of our diversity and absolute mutual respect." "It is not enough for churches and other houses of worship to be united if the people are not." The Vice President, later welcomed the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of India.

a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called newly claims us! So I say to those who have been with the Council for these 48 years, dare to see again the vision of unity through the untarnished eye of these newly 'baptized,' Let our vision be large, whole and embracing...."

In his acceptance speech, Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Diocesan Bishop said: "We were a founding member of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches of India and have full communion with the Anglican and Episcopal Church, but it took us a

Rev. Dr. Joan B. Campbell, General Secretary of the NCC accepting the gift, Peacock Brass bowl from Zacharias Thirumeni.

Messenger expresses its thanks to Carol Fouke of NCC for providing the information about the General Assembly at Washington, D.C.



Message From The Diocesan Bishop



Dearly Beloved in Christ,

We will be celebrating Thanksgiving Day at the end of this month. Turkey will be at the center of every gathering. It is a symbol of blessing, strength and hope. We thank God for His providence, provisions and protection. We commit to bind ourselves to God in love and service. This is also a time we rejoice and thank God with others. The earth and its fullness belong to God. (Ps. 24:1). The products of the earth and the labor of humankind jointly bring joy to God and blessing to man. The blessings become multiplied when it is offered to God and shared with fellow beings, so as we sumptuously celebrate Thanksgiving let us remember the poor and helpless around us. Thanksgiving is for such an act of commitment. Hope all our families and parishes will understand its meaning and fulfill the purpose.

'Repent, Renew and Rejoice' is our jubilee theme. Articles in the Messenger have been based on the same. Though the Church has many occasions of celebrations, we are very poor in rejoicing. Any liberation is an occasion of rejoicing. Repentance leads to liberation which culminates in rejoicing. Sunday worship, Holy Communion and all such sacraments and festivals lead us to rejoice in Christ. St. Paul speaks of rejoicing on many occasions when ordinary people would have turned to cursing. The presence, power and work of Christ brings repentance that leads humanity to rejoicing. When we share this experiences of rejoicing with believers and non-believers, the world becomes a different place. "Rejoice in the Lord, always and again I say rejoice." As a Church we always have to practice that great advice of Paul.

We have to be grateful to the members of the National Council of Churches in USA for receiving us into that fellowship. A five member delegation of our Diocese has attended the General Assembly of the NCC held at Washington, D.C. from November 12 to 14. We are the 34th communion including the Orthodox and Protestant Churches in the National Council of Churches in USA. In place of the present President Bishop Melvin Talbert, Bishop Craig Anderson was installed as the new President for 1998-99. The Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell is giving a dynamic leadership as General Secretary. Heads of the communion had the special privilege of meeting Vice President Mr. Albert Gore who addressed the General Assembly. Issues of common interest and mutual concern are in the agenda of NCC. We have to learn more from the established Churches of the land and we might be able to contribute to the stability and growth of the Churches here. This privilege opens up a great responsibility for our Church to be more ecumenical and mission oriented in this land.

It is very encouraging that some of our members have formed Charitable Trusts to donate their wealth for the benefit of the Church and the needs of humanity. Some have kept separate certain percentage of their wealth to be used for the Church activities annually. Some others have ear-marked a portion of their possessions to be transferred to the Church after their life. These are commendable acts of wise and proper stewardship of wealth. I hope all our people will understand this stewardship and take a fresh look at the use of their wealth. Wealth is a gift from God, therefore, let us offer it for divine use and purpose and be blessed by it.

The Mar Thoma Center at Long Island is nearing completion. Many have participated in this endeavor through receiving the Jubilee coupons and giving loans. Glad that quite a few have come forward with donations of \$10,000, and more, whose names would kept inscribed on a slab at the Center. However, my sincere and humble wish is that all, how big or small their contribution may be, participate in the building of the Center and benefit the joy of giving.

May God's blessing be upon you all.

Yours in Christ's Service,

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus

Shalom: A Jubilee Vision

Rev. Kurian Thomas, San Francisco

(This is the second of a three part series from the previous issue.)

In the New Testament

The word 'eirene' (ai-re-nay) in classical Greek meant peace. The Septuagint, the earliest Greek translation of the Old Testament uses the word 'eirene' as the translation for 'shalom'. In New Testament Greek, eirene thus came to take on the range of meanings earlier associated with shalom. In the New Testament eirene has more consistently been rendered by translators into English as "peace" than Old Testament translators have done with the myriad meanings of shalom.

Probably the first association of 'eirene' in the range of scriptures is related to the birth of Jesus, especially in Luke. In the Magnificat, Mary's words recall the sense of justice and equity associated with the prophetic sense of shalom:

"He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away." (Luke 1:51-53)

Zechariah speaks of his infant son, John the Baptist, as one who will prepare the way for the dawn that shall "give light to those who sit in darkness" and "guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:79) The angel's announcement of Jesus' birth is the familiar "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace." (Luke 2:14) The Old Testament passages most associated with Jesus' birth are "shalom" passages — Isa. 2:4; 9:7, 11; Micah 5:2-4. They convey the future-oriented, eschatological vision of a world of unity, community, justice, wholeness and peace.

The New Testament speaks of the eschatological character of shalom. It is a vision of what can be. It represents the best of human hope. Shalom is the spirit of the Messianic age. Uniquely Jesus is the fulfillment of that hope. The writer of Ephesians (Paul) says, "For he is our 'shalom', who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility." (2:14) In this passage Jesus heals the separation of humans.

Jesus often uses the word 'eirene' as a form of greeting or command. "Go in peace" is Jesus word of release to the ill. (Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50) "Peace be with you" was Jesus' greeting to his followers. (John 20:19 and 21) C.L. Mitton in "Peace in the New Testament" says:

"With the word of peace went the actual bestowal of peace, and if this proffered gift was spurned, the peace returned to him who had offered it (Matthew 10:13; Luke 10:5-6). Paul also incorporates this greeting into the opening sentences of his letters, and other letter writers follow his example." (1 Peter 1:2; 2 John 3; Jude 2; Rev. 1:4)

Yet it is in the suffering and death of Christ that the New Testament equivalents of shalom take on their full meaning. This theme builds upon the Second Isaiah passages dealing with the suffering servant, particularly Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Although there are various interpretations of the identity of the suffering servant, the New Testament church interprets Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the expectation:

He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that made us
whole (shalom) (Isaiah 53:5)

In Romans 5 and Colossians 1:20, Paul declares that God's shalom comes to us through Jesus. Ephesians 2:14-22 is a vigorous statement of this theme and experience. In a frequently used benediction, Hebrews relates Christ as shalom to the covenant: "Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, ... by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will." (Hebrews 13:20-21) In the giving of Jesus' life which his followers celebrate in the Lord's Supper, we see the cost of shalom. The new covenant renews the old in the person of Jesus.

Jesus presses the claim of shalom upon his followers in a compelling way. He weeps over Jerusalem: "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace." (Luke 19:44) He reminds those unwilling to give Him their all, that judgement awaits: "Do not think I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matthew 10:34f) Yet his final gift is shalom: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you... Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27)

The New Testament understanding of peace stems from Old Testament usage, but now the basis of shalom is understood to be the love of God as revealed in the crucifixion of Jesus... In Jesus, God takes upon himself the punishment of the unrighteous, and in so doing ushers in a new age of peace in which all men will recognize their guilt and find in the forgiveness of God a new basis of human community.

The Fabric of a Shalom Vision

The Bible's use of the shalom concept includes several dimensions: Shalom is wholeness (as in "together", "complete", "united", "not fragmented"). The root word is the same as that of 'well' (as in "not ill" or "no longer ill"), whole, and salvation. The Bible is dealing with a 'whole' person, a 'whole' people, a 'whole' world; a 'whole' earth.

People are interdependent, and, with the increasing awareness of ecological issues, we are learning of the interdependence of persons and the earth.

The Bible has a bias toward those who are denied shalom—the poor, oppressed, hurt, or captive. Shalom blessing is intended for all. When that blessing is denied anyone, God's will is thwarted. The concern for justice is part and parcel of this sense of the universality of shalom. Wherever structures or acts of injustice deny opportunity or equity to persons or groups or nations, the biblical vision is denied. In such circumstances the religious person is called to be an advocate for justice or, in Martin Luther King Jr.'s phrase, a "drum major for justice."

The Bible has a strong corporate, communal sense. To be sure, shalom is a concern for the well-being of individuals. Yet individuality in the Bible is seen in the context of being a people. "Once you were no people but now you are God's people" is the way 1 Peter 2 describes God's redeeming action in Jesus Christ. It is not an overstatement to say that in the biblical view persons have their being in the context of community. We humans are created for relationship—with others and with God. "Shalom is a social happening, an event in interpersonal relations." (The Church for others: A Quest for Structures for Missionary Congregations. WCC)

Shalom transcends our differences and our differentness without denying them. We are not dealing here with an oblong blur or with a bland uniformity. We are dealing with a unity that comprehends diversity. Ephesians 2:14-15 stresses this unity in speaking of Jesus as shalom, "For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility...so making peace." This reconciliation is finally accomplished in Jesus and it bears the mark of cost and pain. Bernard Haring describes it in these words:

"The fact that our Lord punctuated his proclamation of peace with a display of his wounded hands and side is significant. It indicates that while the Easter mystery is always the mystery of the resurrection, that resurrection inexorably refers to his suffering and death." (Shalom: Peace, the Sacrament of Reconciliation)

This unity, this reconciliation, relates to the human community, to the relationship between humans and the natural world, and to human relationship with God.

Shalom is a positive concept both as present reality and as future vision. Yet the positive image implies the negative. Because we know shalom as a relationship of unity, community, wholeness, well being, peace and justice, we can recognize that which is not-shalom or anti-shalom. A tension exists seeking to be reconciled. "The creation groans and travails", is Paul's language for it. "I am waiting for a rebirth of wonder", is Lawrence Ferlinghetti's sense of the dynamic yearning for that which is to come.

Shalom as Future Vision

A vision is not ethereal or unreal. It may be the motivating force driving persons toward self-realization. The vision of a project finished, of a world at peace, of a good meal, of the return of a loved one, has energizing power. We can await the time because of the hope that the vision feeds. We can take concrete steps toward the vision's fulfillment. "I have a dream", was Martin Luther King Jr.'s way of conveying the hope toward which patience and activity must be directed.

Throughout the Bible is the vision of that which is to be vital to the life of the faithful. We partly know what is to be because of what has been. God has met us in creation, in the life of a community, in the natural world, in the experience of love, in the person of Jesus. But the biblical direction is forward toward that which is to be, toward the now as the hope of what will come. Such a vision as that of the peaceable kingdom, of the new Israel, of the final judgement performs several functions. It empowers: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." (Prov. 29:18) Life is made tolerable and action is judged valuable because the goals toward which activity is directed seem worthwhile.

A vision is a resource to judge particulars. Some acts are good. Some are evil. When the line is clear, choice is generally not difficult. But judging between shades of evil or shades of good is complex. "What will contribute to the vision?" is a question the answer to which generally helps us decide. The right kind of vision, too, helps establish priorities.

Gabriel Fackre describes a shalom vision:

"The "glory of the Lord" that visionaries have seen coming into history is the breakthrough of shalom. Yes, still harassed by powers that do not know that the game is up; but for all that, genuine signs, portents, first fruits. Christians discern, celebrate and participate in shalom wherever swords are beaten into ploughshares, wherever the oppressed receive justice, the hungry are fed, wounds are bound up, pain and death are contested, the prisoner is released and creation travail is eased. (Rainbow Sign)

Shalom is both gift and goal. In God's way and time, shalom is to come. Yet it is present now when life corresponds to, even anticipates the dream. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," is Jesus' promise in Luke 12:32. At the same time, and because of the promise, Jesus claims Isaiah's mandate:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives...to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19)

Shalom is both gift and goal. ■

(To be continued in the next issue)

The Future of the Mar Thoma Church in North America & Europe

Rev. Dr. P. G. George

The Diocese of North America and Europe is celebrating the Silver Jubilee of the beginning of regular Mar Thoma Service in North America. The growth of Mar Thoma Church in North America is a historical phenomenon unparalleled in history. This is a short reflection on the motivating and guiding force of the Mar Thoma Church in a global and church historical perspective.

Global Perspective

The world is becoming smaller through the recent advances in transportation industry and telecommunication systems. It is truly a "Global Village"! Economic benefits in one part of the world are now known to the whole world and they are accessible to the rest of the world directly and indirectly. With the migration of Mar Thoma Community to North America, our community is privileged to live in close proximity to the economic benefits. This movement of people from one part of the world to another creates waves which has both positive and negative significance in history.

With the migration of Mar Thoma Community to North America, our community is privileged to live in close proximity to the economic benefits. This movement of people from one part of the world to another creates waves which has both positive and negative significance in history.

The Mar Thoma Community in Kerala through education and other exposures was made aware of a bigger world of opportunities. Recent migration to North America is only a logical continuum of the flow of our people to Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and other North Indian Cities, Colombo (Sri Lanka), Singapore-Malaysia and African Countries. The recent flow to Gulf countries has already made a lasting impact on the economic fabric of Keralian Society. The Mar Thoma Community in North

America and Europe where the impact has been felt in the last two decades has the advantage that it can settle down there and participate fully in the natural life of the respective countries. This has the effect of a changed view which makes the Mar Thoma Church an international church where they share their resources for the benefit of all people.

The Mar Thoma Church is a reformed and reforming church with an evangelical vision and ecumenical outlook. The eastern liturgical tradition still speaks clearly the whole experience of salvation and grace to a bible centered church

Church Historical Perspective

Mar Thoma Church is a "diaspora community" in North America. She has a deep sense of commitment to the historical roots and loyalty to the parent church. This is a "fuzzle" in church historical thinking. How can we, an Eastern Church, take such deep roots in the western world. Church historians will have to assess the impact of such a phenomenon. We should continue to meaningfully participate in the struggles of the people and community standing firm in the tradition of the Church and values of the Kingdom of God.

The Mar Thoma Church is a reformed and reforming church with an evangelical vision and ecumenical outlook. The eastern liturgical tradition still speaks clearly the whole experience of salvation and grace to a bible centered church. The barriers of culture and language are transcended by introducing translated versions to accommodate the changing needs of the faith community without compromising the basic faith.

From this perspective we may look at three areas of strength which propels the church to the future.

1. Word of God is Primary

Teaching and preaching is the "life breath" of a church. The mission and ministry of the church derives from a

due understanding of the Bible. Men and women who are caught by the life changing power of the gospel come to a personal understanding of the redeeming work of Christ.

The church in North America and Europe continues this work in the Sunday School, VBS, Youth Fellowship, Yuvajana Sakhyam, Young-Adult Fellowship, Sevika Sangham, Edavaka Mission and the respective conferences. These communicate Jesus Christ "the word became flesh". As Isaiah speaks (Is. 55:10-11) the word will not return empty. He (the word) continues to accomplish His purpose. As the church becomes firmly rooted she will open her doors to share and minister to the community around by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

2. Lay Leadership With a Vision

Marthomites, wherever they went, started small prayer groups and then developed them into congregations/parishes; Colombo (Sri Lanka) may be an exemption. This happened because of lay initiatives. The dynamics of church hierarchy-laity relationship is that. Despite initial thoughts based on ecumenism, the need for the Mar Thoma identity was recognized out of filial love in Christ (i.e. for our people to dissolve their identity in the melting pot—which though ideal for the world in yet utopian). The hierarchy responded to the laity and reached out even in this distant land.

Lay leadership of those mentioned above was groomed in parishes where they grew up, especially in the Yuvajana Sakhyam. The same grooming is needed for the second generation. So that the church is able to effectively carry out its mission.

3. Discipline of the Clergy and Laity

Mar Thoma Church has a well established administration set up with episcopal oversight. Clergy

and members of the church express this together in word and deed. Parishes in complete obedience to the Lord of the church submit themselves to the faith, practice and constitution of the Mar Thoma Church. The personal contact of the leadership and the loyalty handed over through generations brings "unity" and "oneness". The parishes individually and Diocese as the larger umbrella is a "family."

This is the work of the Holy Spirit. The growth of the Diocese of North America and Europe is a clear demonstration of the guiding and renewing work of the spirit. When the whole "Body" is bound and controlled by His spirit we'll reach new heights of christian maturity and become witnesses of the power of the gospel.

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Conclusion

The Mar Thoma Church is a "Global Church" and we should develop infrastructures to minister to her people around the world. The progressive outlook of the leadership and creative contribution of the members are assets to our church. Biblical understanding and deeply anchored historical roots have enabled her to transcend all boundaries of culture, language and historical tradition to meet the needs of the "People of God". As the Mar Thoma Church is getting ready to welcome the 21st century my prayer is that the Diocese of North America and Europe will rise up to forfeit the unique role on the Global Stage to which she is called. ■

"THE CAUGHT WIND"

Jewel Varghese (Grade 9), St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church

*A chasing after the wind,
A simple, thoughtless act,
An act of pain, patience, and perspiration,
A goal not yet achieved
A goal worth chasing after,
For I will run till I have caught the wind,
In the palm of my hand.*

Conflict, Growth and Community

Dr. Zac Varghese, London, U.K.

Conflict, growth and community are three words that sum up the reality of the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Diocese of the Mar Thoma Church of North America and Europe. The community of Mar Thoma Christians has grown steadily in Europe and North America over the past 25 years, both in depth of consciousness and in organization. Our parishes and congregations in these countries have been going through some difficult times because of unresolved conflicts and internal tension. "Wounded by friendly fire" is a phrase which became very familiar to me during the Gulf war of 1991. This phrase brought home the shock of the terrible tragedy of how several American service men were accidentally killed by friends and comrades in arms. The damage is more outrageous and pain is more intolerable when it comes from some one supposedly on your side. When we calmly look at sad experiences in some of our parishes, we begin to see the damages caused by "friendly fire". We also recognize two aspects of damaging human relationships namely slander and gossip. Gossip is talking about, instead of talking to one another, but unlike the gossip, the slanderer spreads untruths or he becomes "economical with truth". There is an urgent need to stamp out such tendencies from our social and cultural attitudes. We should learn to live in a "gentle way" in this world, honoring and respecting others in our community before trying to make a claim for a castle and a crown on the other side of life. Why do Christians sometimes project ego and status rather than respond in love to correct their mistakes? What is really going on when our relationships within our parishes suffer and we are pulled apart or "bifurcated"?

We should learn to live in a "gentle way" in this world, honoring and respecting others in our community before trying to make a claim for a castle and a crown on the other side of life.

We also must believe, as Christians, that we can help bring good out of painful conflicts and situations. There are those who passionately believe that only through conflicts can there be growth and advance. Therefore, we can see how simple laws of human development and growth (being enacted as they are) are necessary for vibrant societies. Conflict is an integral part of community and is necessary for personal growth. Even the cosmic community of stars

and planets, far into the night sky, interact, disagree, and pull in differing directions before achieving a higher synthesis of identity, form, and apparent stability. What matters is not avoiding conflict but resolving it with courage born of human decency, understanding, charity, and love.

One of the great surprises in life is to realize that all of us are in the same boat. We all think that we are the only ones who suffer from the divisions within our parishes or enjoy ordinary things in life. It comes as a revelation to find other people in other parts of North America or Europe share the same sorrows and troubles, and get excited and enlivened over aspects of life which some times depress us. In sharing all these things as a community, we will comfort and encourage each other. It will help us all to turn from being only concerned with ourselves, and enable us to give greater respect to each other. It will help all our imaginations to find new ways of doing things in our Christian community built around the love of Jesus. Community is a place of trust—we know we are all in it together. As the old saying goes, "together we stand, divided we fall". In general body meetings we assume a crowd mentality, we compete, we threaten and trust no one. These attitudes breed misery. **Our search for a socially cohesive community is in direct proportion to our nightmare experience of isolation and social fragmentation.** Our culture, education and society should help us create the conditions that allow to us to reject the crowd mentality and build communities. Despite the glib ways with which we use the term community today, our Christian lifestyle should direct us to its basic meaning. To be in community means to be with oneness. If we cannot hear the clarion call to be a part of the community how can we respond to it? Religion and society are meant to sharpen our hearing, heighten our expectations, rather than drown out the unique call of God which He addresses to each of us with our individual ideologies and dogmas. It is such a personal call which opened the eyes of Mary Magdalene to recognize the risen Lord. For us today, enmeshed in the addictive culture of consumerism and blinded by economic and academic goals, **Christian meditation allows us the space to grow and the silence to hear God who is calling.** Once this call is heard, we become a new creation and as Paul says, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

If the "call" leads us into an organized form of community, a parish, its organized structures should not act like a crowd. In other words, the institutional structure of

the Church should not suffocate the communal nature of its membership which is its true identity. **In order to be a very effective member of a community, we need to be humble enough to listen to a voice other than our own ego.** To learn this we must learn the spiritual meaning of obedience and discipline. Communities can quickly degenerate to crowds especially when the membership ceases to be imaginative and accommodating.

Another problem unfolds, as we persevere in this new way acquiring membership of a community, which is an awareness of relationship and interdependence in all areas of life. This is where the sparks start flying. The closer we come to losing our self-centredness the stronger are the forces of egocentric gravity pulling us back to a self-centered orbit controlled by polarities of fear and desire. Here we face the paradox of resisting what we most desire. This is the point when we begin to rationalize our fears and project our fault on to others. **As we become familiar with the struggle between egocentredness and other-centredness through our experience in the life of the community we stumble across isolation. This isolation can be used creatively for building our spirituality.** We should try to transform isolation into solitude, it is necessary to realize that those who can be solitary are capable of true friendship and it is in friendship that Christian spirituality finds its true meaning. Some one once said "To be friends with one another is only seeing that we are in God together." So to make friend with one another, and friends with our opponents, to treasure tolerance and respect our differences must be the goal of our silver Jubilee celebration.

We must also refrain from judging other people's motives and understand that, may be what they do is good...as they see it.

In our urban societies, although we have many superficial relations with so many people, it appears that physical proximity has brought with it emotional distance. We need more intimate and deep relationships with our neighbor as well as shallow ones in order to remind us of

our humanity, to give us a sense of the community, to help us to be less afraid of one another, to permit us to laugh and cry with one another. True community cannot be established without dropping more of the barriers with which we surround ourselves so that we and our neighbor can communicate fully with each other and enter into each other's lives. We cannot be concerned for our neighbor unless we first get to know him. To succeed, such a relationship must be based on "sharing" oneself with another, letting him see what we are really like, rather than "presenting" to another what we consider to be favorable—though perhaps false impressions of ourselves. There are two main causes which motivate people in general to take action other than for their own benefit—to avert or deal with a disaster, or in pursuit of an ideal. Such an ideal has to be capable of fulfillment and enthusiasm for it must become infectious. It could be the establishment of a society in which men and women could live the good life, free from want and oppression and free to develop their personalities to the full with divine help. We must also refrain from judging other people's motives and understand that, may be what they do is good...as they see it.

Our parishes and congregations need to be developed to encourage people to realize their full potential as autonomous beings with a care for others. For the first time, mankind's future and the quality of life in a limited sense are within our control, but there is a real barrier in our own resistance to change and unwillingness to "share" ourselves. We need to develop the idea of a relationship between God and man based on the work they can do together. Our responsibility for the well-being of the community and the people in it was spelled out for us very clearly in the Gospels. How we respond to this is a matter for each individual conscience. We need to do some hard thinking and praying together to clarify in our own minds the message of Christ in the modern context and act on it. Let us also pray that people may honor one another, and seek the common good. It is also a time to express our appreciation, and thanks to those who contributed to the growth of this diocese. The Silver Jubilee is an ideal occasion for Thanksgiving to our Lord and to express our unity that we have in Christ. May God help us in this path during our silver jubilee celebrations to forget our differences, to resolve our conflicts and grow together as a community of "people of God" for building His Kingdom here and now. ■

*"life's challenges are designed not to break us,
but to bend us toward God."*

*"Freedom does not give us the right to do what we
please, but to do what pleases God."*

Mission Tour Experience

Manoj M. Zachariah

On August 8, 1997, four members from the North American Diocese embarked on a journey which transformed their hearts and minds. From the outset, these members, Christina Varughese (Philadelphia), Jaisen Thomas (Washington, DC), Anitha Abraham (Bethel, Philadelphia), and Manoj M. Zachariah (St. Thomas, New York) represented the youth of the Diocese of North America and Europe in the visitation of various mission sites in Kerala and Karnataka. The ensuing briefly recounts some of the experiences of the trip.

Annually, the Diocese of North America and Europe sponsors youth, falling under its purview, to partake in a mission tour of evangelistic activities of the Mar Thoma Church in Karnataka. For the past two years, the program has been under the guidance and supervision of our Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Barnabas (Diocesan Bishop: Malabar-Kunnamkulam Diocese), Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius (former bishop, Malabar-Kunnamkulam Diocese), Rev. P. C. James (Missionary Coordinator, Malabar-Kunnamkulam Diocese), and Rev. K. G. Joseph (Diocesan Council Member and Vicar of the Epiphany Mar Thoma Church.) While the purpose of the aforementioned is to educate members of the North American and European diaspora as to the missionary activities of the Mar Thoma Church, perhaps a secondary purpose is to gauge the interest of those who would like to take an active role in the ministry of the church.

The objective of this article is three-fold. Firstly, it is imperative to elucidate the context of the mission field, India. Secondly, I will attempt to provide a working definition of the notions of "evangelism" and "missions" in the Indian Context. Finally, I will, in utmost brevity, highlight the activities of some of the stations we visited.

Relities of 1997 India

According to the U.N. Secretary General's Annual Report on the Nations, the population of India, as of 1995, is estimated to be nearly nine hundred and five million (904,800,000) people. Various world N.G.Os (Non



Members of the team with Rev. P. C. James (L to R) Anitha Abraham, Christina Varughese, Jaisen Thomas and Manoj M. Zachariah.

Govoernmental Organizations) have predicted that population of India will reach 1.3 billion people, there by

becoming the most populous country in the world by the year 2020. The Indian mission context encompasses a vast variety of ethnicities¹ and languages². Regarding religion, eighty-two percent (82%) identify themselves with Hinduism, while twelve percent (12%) identify with Islam. Within India, two and a half percent (2.5%) label themselves as Christians.

The political context of India, though quite difficult to gauge because of the constant turn-overs in the leadership of the legislative assembly, has interestingly turned "religiously conservative/

fundamentalist." In 1991, the B.J.P. (Bharatiya Janata Party) became the opposition group with the most seats in the lok sabha. Partially due to the corruption within the Congress Party, in 1996 the B.J.P. amassed the most number of seats in the lok sabha. Though Vajpayee, the leader of the B.J.P., was elected Prime Minister, his brief reign came to a close with the thrust of the "no-confidence vote" which led to the

"It is our duty to proceed from what is near to what is distant; from what is known to that which is less known; to gather the traditions from those who have reported them as much as possible, and leave the rest as it is in order to make our work help anyone who seeks the truth and loves wisdom."

Abul Rayhan Al Biruni

elevation of Deve Gowda and subsequently, the current prime minister I. K. Gujral. In various states, such as Maharashtra, the B.J.P., or various components (Shiva Sena, V.H.P., R.S.S., etc.), have effective governmental control. Religiously fundamentalist groups, such as the B.J.P., present political threat to the propagation of Christianity.³

Though India's economy is agriculturally based, economic reforms of Former Finance Minister M. Singh, in conjunction with the economic liberalization policies since 1991, have actuated the rapid urbanization of India. Even with the influx of capital generated by various Multi/Trans-National Corporations (M.N.C., T.N.C.) and the emerging private sector of India, there seems to be a deep economic chasm between the poor and the affluent. Nearly seven hundred million (700,000,000) people live in villages. The infrastructural, educational, and health facilities in these villages are virtually nil. Currently, it is estimated six hundred million (600,000,000) live in abject poverty.



Children of the village: God's gift to us

Karnataka, encompassing nearly forty-five (45) million people, is highly indicative of the Indian situation. While the literacy rate is high, in comparison with the norm in India, educational and employment opportunities in the state are very dismal. It is in this context that our church attempts to provide a sense of social and economic hope in light of the evangelistic commissions of Christ.

Evangelism

In our understanding of missions, it is crucial that we use a working definition for the term, "evangelism." Please note that missions work can be defined as the manifestation of evangelism. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that a lucid and precise definition of evangelism is presented in order to heighten our understanding of missionary work. Among the missionaries and evangelists in Karnataka, the general consensus, as for a definition of evangelism, seems to be the effectuation of the Christian message through direct communication and social work. Conventional direct communication methods include the proliferation of the Christian message through the distribution of tracts, oral recitation of the Christian message, Biblical

examination/studies, etc. Economic development projects, health care clinics, and educational programs are included under our definition of social work. The predominant method of evangelism throughout Karnataka is village work. Each team of evangelists concentrates on five villages. Within these villages, the gospel is taught and applied through various methods. In the Indian context, it is essential that traditional gospel work is conjoined with social work. Social work, or concern for humanity, is certainly regarded as a branch within the Biblical understanding of God's work. For instance, we read of God's admonition through the prophet Micah in the book of Micah 6:8.

He has shown you, oh people, what is good and what the Lord requires of you. But to do justice, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God⁴.

During our visits with evangelists we met many "converts" to Christianity. There are two categories of individuals who are receptive to the gospel message. The first label, "seeker", applies to individuals who are interested in the gospel and have expressed some form of devotion to the personal salvation of Christ. Yet, these individuals are not fully committed to "Christianity." As seekers, they may understand Christ as a part of their religious conceptual paradigm. For example, many Hindu "seekers" consider Christ to be a dominant god-head in their religious paradigm. The second category, "believer", applies to individuals who have professed their full devotion to the salvation message of Christ. These individuals, under careful observation by evangelists, are baptized as members of the church.



Glorifying God in innocence

Visitation

Always Station: We⁵ arrived in Trivandrum, Kerala on August 8, 1997. Rev. Sashi George⁶, Rev. Samuel P. Varghese, and Mr. Jacob Geevarghese⁷ received us at the airport. After a brief rest at the Aramana, we were opportune to proceed via train to our destination, Always. At Always, we were greeted by Rev. George Mathew⁸. In addition to parish duties, Achen currently serves as the

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Director of the Santhigiri⁹ project. Below, please find a synopsis of the places we visited and a brief description of the work in those respective places.

Blind School: The Blind School is a joint project undertaken by the Mar Thoma, C.S.I., and the Orthodox, churches. Enrollment at the school is approximately 65.

Balikhya Mandiram: The balikhya mandiram is a school for girls and young women. The mandiram nurtures these young women in Christian love, community, and education.

Giri Deepti: The Giri Deepti project is quite fascinating. The school extrapolates students from "tribal" backgrounds and places them in an environment conducive to educational, social, and spiritual development.



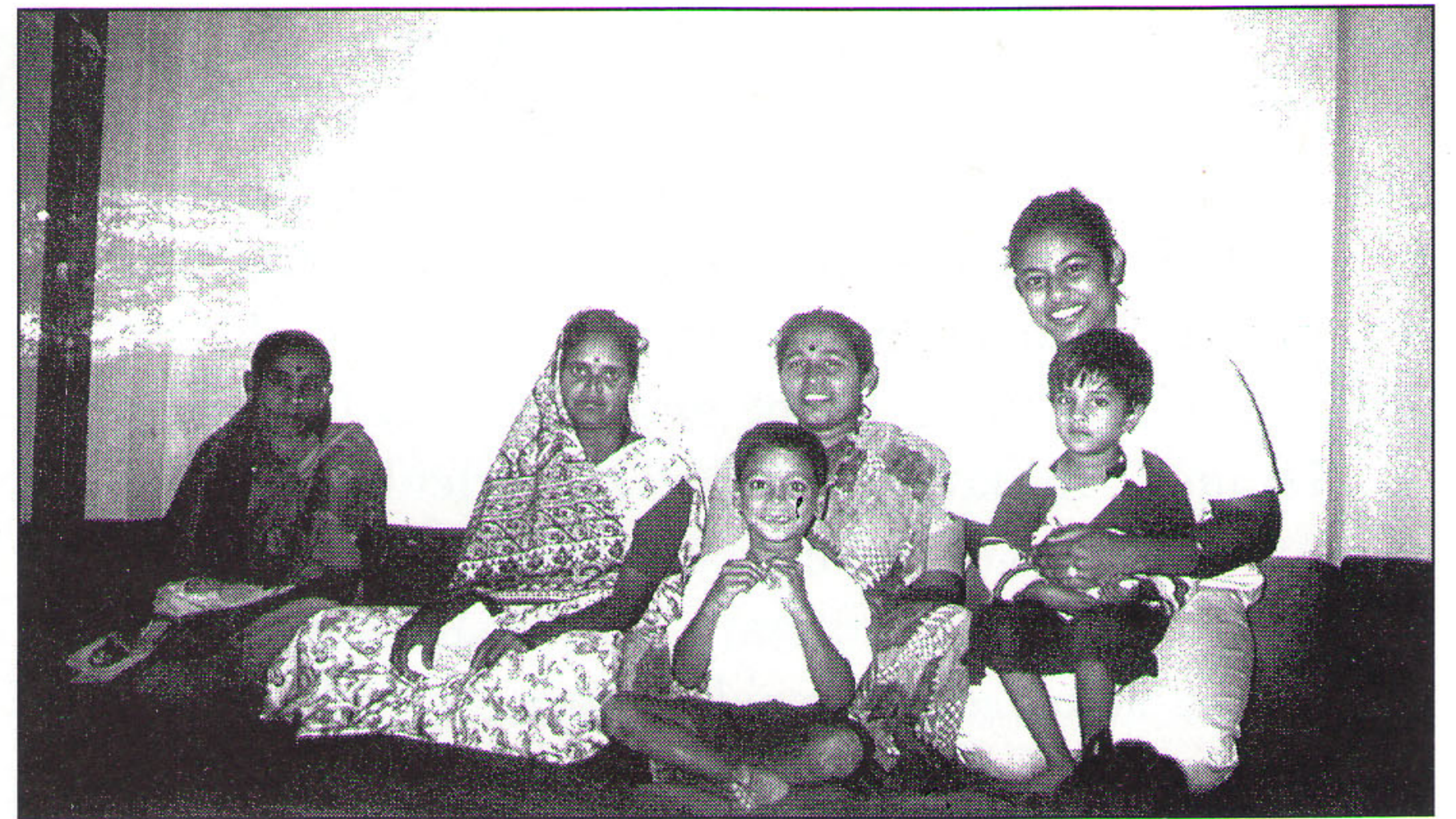
Finding joy with the innocence, Giri Deepti students with Anitha Abraham

Kassargod Station: On August 10, from Alwaye, we trekked over to Kassargod via train. Interestingly, the train ride, an exact representation of the theory "social-darwinism", was quite indicative of our culture. Traveling through the train modality provided an orientation to life in India.¹⁰ After the initial moments of awkwardness dissipated, we felt right "at home". At Kassargod, we were greeted by Rev. Eapen Cherian.¹¹

Deaf and Dumb School: The Deaf and Dumb school is managed by Rev. Eapen Cherian. The school provides educational as well as dormitory facilities for students with hearing impediments. Generally, the enrollment of the school encompasses economically impoverished within the K.G. through Grade 10 age bracket. The school is staffed with teachers and an "administrator". In addition to providing standard education, the school is also providing a tailoring class.

Old Age Home: While we were at Kasargod, we were able to see the structures of an old-age home. This home will provide a communal residential environment, rooted in Christian teaching, to an economically "down-trodden" elderly population.

Electrical School: The church is in the process of developing an electrical educational facility.



Spending time in solidarity, Christina with village women

Mangalore, Karnataka State: We left Kassargod on August 12, 1997 and arrived at Mangalore. Mangalore, a border town of Karnataka State, is a center of education. At Mangalore, we visited Rev. Issac P. Johnson. Achen is the Youth Chaplain, as well as Vicar of the Mar Thoma Church, in the Mangalore area. From Achen's parsonage, we proceeded to Manipal, as many of you are aware, is also a center of education in Karnataka. We were greeted by the missionary coordinator, Rev. P. C. James. James Achen would be our "guide", friend, and parent for the remainder of our time in Karnataka State.

Jog Falls Area: Jog-Falls is considered to be a tourist center in India. Within this missionary area, a radius of approximately seventy (70) kilometers, we visited various evangelists. These dedicated and fervent workers of the church, full of vigor and passion for the gospel, detailed the missionary activities in the area. Predominantly, the mission work centers on personal contact and education.

Sirsi Area: The Sirsi missionary area covers a radius of eighty (80) kilometers. Rev. Santosh Samuel, a native of Karnataka State, is the missionary in charge of this area. We were opportune to visit and converse with evangelists regarding the projects in the area. Among the projects are Nursery Schools, educational and tutorial centers. Moreover, there is a hostel for the female children of evangelists and believers. This hostel is managed by residential evangelists and Rev. Santosh Samuel¹².

Mundagod Area: In comparison with the other missionary areas, Mundagod covers a smaller radius. However, the activities and the population within the Mundagod area are comparable to the aforementioned areas. Rev. P. E. Mathew provides the missionary leadership in this area. We were opportune to partake in the Indian Independence Day celebration at the Mar Thoma Nursery School in Mundagod. The nursery has an enrollment of seventy two students. Most of the students in this school are non-Christian. However, these students are provided with rudimentary education in a Christian atmosphere. Interestingly, the Mundagod missionary area, as reported by

three female evangelists, suffers from the pernicious threat of the B.J.P. and other ancillary fundamentalist groups. Though the residence of the female evangelists suffered minor danger (those opposed to the Christian message are suspected in a minor act of vandalism), the evangelists proceed with their work with the faith that God will protect them. Analogous to the missionary areas mentioned above, the Mundagod area provides facilities and resources for balawadis, tuition centers, etc.



Christa Mitra Ashram Sevamandir, Ankola

Dandelli Area: The Dandelli Missionary Center was formerly an annexure of The Ankola Mission. Currently, Dandelli Mission—in its “new”¹³ found autonomy, is managed by Rev. C. V. Mathew. Within Achen’s purview is the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Dandelli. We had the opportunity to participate in the Holy Qurbana service. Included in the missionary activities of Dandelli are tuition centers, ladies ministry, loan/economic incentive programs, Sunday Schools, educational sponsorship, and hostels. While we were at Dandelli, a new initiative in the form of alcoholic rehabilitation was being formulated.

Ankola Area: The Ankola Center is a major center of missionary activity. Rev. Dr. K. M. Samuel¹⁴ and Rev. P. S. Samuel provide the missionary leadership in this area. The activities of the area are well known. Included in these activities are the Mission Hospital, Type Writing School, Health Clinics, Old Age home for men, schools, fishermen outreach, and conventional village work.

Honovar Mission Area: The Honovar Mission is directed by Rev. P. C. James, Rev. Alexander Thomas, the former director and initiator of the mission project, currently serves as the principal of the extremely successful St. Thomas High School, Honovar. The mission includes a high school, an “elementary” school which is adjoined to the parsonage, hostel for the children of believers and evangelists, and village work.

Kottayam and Tiruvalla: We were opportune to meet our Metropolitan, Most. Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma. Valiya Thirumeni, as we affectionately call our church father, graciously took us on a tour of the Poolatheen

facility. Amidst a busy schedule, Thirumeni cordially hosted us, while taking time to converse with us. We visited the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam. We met many students and members of the faculty.

Conclusion: Sojourning through the picturesque beauty of the states of Karnataka and Kerala, we were perpetually in a state of ineffable awe. Bedazzled by the aesthetic handicraft of God’s creation, the mission trip, which we embarked upon, provided us with the opportunity to rejoice, grasp, and reflect upon certain aspects of God’s purpose in creation. However, throughout the trip we were constantly pondering about the direction of our North American Diocese. Our members are situated in an amazingly vast, rich, and diverse mission field. The problems of drug abuse, alcoholism, discrimination (in all forms), violence, physical and emotional abuse, and illiteracy run rabidly rampant in this Diocese. As the prophet Micah attempted to understand, we must constantly ask ourselves what the Lord requires of us. ■

¹ Predominantly consisting of the Indo-Aryan ethnic group (73%), India encompasses the Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan, as well as a plethora of other ethnic/racial groups.

² Officially, there are 18 recognized languages. Yet, there are 1,652 spoken communicational modalities which include official and unofficial languages and dialects.

³ Though a variety of sources crafted this section, the two main sources of information are: The C.I.A. World Book and Operation World. Upon request, bibliographic sources of this article will be shared.

⁴ Micah 6:8

⁵ N.B. Anita Abraham met us at Santhigiri later that night as she had been in India from July 26, 1997.

⁶ Rev. Sashi George is the bishop’s secretary to Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius.

⁷ Mr. Geevarghese is the uncle of Jaisen Thomas.

⁸ Rev. George Mathew was the vicar of the Chicago Mar Thoma Church from 1992-1996. He was the President of the Family Conference hosted by the Chicago Mar Thoma Church. Achen serves as the director of the Santhigiri Project.

⁹ The Santhigiri project is an initiative of our Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus. Resting on beautiful and serene acreage, Santhigiri is a “retreat” and meditation center. Plans, and to that extent work, is under way for the erection of a hostel, chapel, and conference hall. The center is located around Alwaye.

¹⁰ Since the subject of the article is quite restrictive in nature, I will not seek to explicate this notion.

¹¹ Rev. Eapen Cherian is the Manager of the Mar Thoma School for the Deaf and the Dumb. Achen served in various capacities of our Diocese. He was the Youth Chaplain for the Mid-West Region, as well as the Vicar of parishes in Dallas (St. Paul’s M.T.C.) and Trinity MTC, Houston.

¹² Achen’s parsonage is next to the hostel.

¹³ The Dandelli mission became autonomous nearly five years ago.

¹⁴ Former vicar of the Mar Thoma Church, Dallas.

Women Pioneer Leaders in World Mission

Sakhi Athyal

From the time God selected the family of Abraham to be a blessing to the nations; women were part of God's covenant and they were involved in worshiping and obeying him. Women such as Deborah were God's elected judges and leaders; Ruth was an obedient and loving daughter-in-law from whom Jesus descended; Esther was ready to die for her people; and Hannah was a prayer warrior. These and many other women in the Old Testament are examples of how God used women for his mission.

In the New Testament we see God choosing the church as his people. A large part were women. When Christ gave his great commission to his followers to go into all the world to preach, teach, baptize and disciple the nations, he included men and women equally in this great responsibility. It was to Mary that Jesus first said, "Go to my brothers...and tell them..." John 20:17. Then he also empowered women with all the spiritual gifts as he did men. God poured out his Spirit on "all people". "Your sons and daughters will prophesy" (Acts 2:17). This meant that the women were expected to use these gifts for the extension of his kingdom.

Women were part of God's plan for his mission in the world from the time of creation of humanity. God created men and women in his own image and gave them the responsibility of taking care of the world. We see both the Old Testament and the New Testament, how women were used by God.

Ruth Tucker in her article, "A Historical Overview of Women in Ministry" in the Fuller Theological Seminary Theology, News and Notes, divides the history of women in mission into different models. First, the Medieval Model: Celibacy, Self-denial and Seclusion. Many monasteries for women sprung up all over the world as a result of this emphasis. Their focus was celibacy and it became the key to women's spirituality. Second, the Reformation Model: A

Focus on Family. Martin Luther scorned the concept of virginity as superior to married life. He married a nun, Katie who became an active partner with him in his ministry. But the primary responsibility of a wife was to her children. She supported her husband in prayer and did ministry with women and children. This was the main understanding of involvement of women in mission. Third, the Evangelical Outreach Model: Serving Others. Here the main ministry was by single women. The missionaries realized that only women could reach women in certain countries like India and China. Many female agencies started sending single women as missionaries to serve the world. The ministries included educational, medical and social work. Fourth, Self-fulfillment Model: Focus on the Nuclear Family.

Women were involved in the pioneer work from the beginning of modern mission. To begin with they were only allowed primarily to be fund raisers and prayer warriors. Then women went with their husbands to the mission fields, to help them in prayer and work with women and children. This was the only way they participated in mission. Narcissa Prentiss is one of those wives who wanted to work with American Indians, but could only be a wife and hostess. She was in utter frustration because she knew God had called her to preach the gospel to the Indians but could not.

Later single women started going to the mission field for fulltime ministry. By 1820, three young women, Clerk, Lucc, and Johnson went to work with American Indians. Cynthia Farrer was the first unmarried woman who was sent overseas with the title "Assistant Missionary". She was sent to Calicut, India in 1827 to educate girls. Sarah Cumming went to Karens in Burma in 1832, and was one of the first single women who dared to go alone. Eleanor Macomber followed her and was considered to be a great evangelist and church organizer. Education, medical and social work, such as orphanages, were the type of ministries these single women missionaries accomplished. Vellore Medical College and Hospital is a very famous Christian institution in India known around the world. Dr. Ida Scadder, one of the pioneer medical missionaries started that institution to train Indian women as doctors.

Gradually women's mission agencies emerged. The Women's Union Missionary Society started in 1861 and later the women's missionary movement had about forty organizations by the turn of the 20th Century. Zenana Mission was one of those agencies working in India.

(Continued on page 16)

A Season of Celebrations

Abraham Mattackal, Los Angeles, California

The long awaited Holiday Season in the United States begins with the celebration of Thanksgiving Day on the last Thursday in November every year. This is followed by the greatest of all holiday celebrations—Christmas on the 25th of December and New Year on the 1st of January. This is a season of joyous festivities all across this great continent. Stores everywhere are filled with merchandise of all kinds, manufactured in various countries of the world, to satisfy the tastes and needs of holiday shoppers. Streets and malls are beautifully decorated and are often crowded with people everywhere. Christmas carols are continuously played on radios in offices, restaurants and shopping malls.

Although late, autumn's falling leaves and the days of winter with its chilly nights and sub zero temperatures, are ahead. They often carry with them a sense of melancholy and depression. The season of Thanksgiving through Christmas and New Year despite the climate brings out the best in every human being. It is the season for exchanging gifts, personal visits, wishing each other the season's best and above all helping the poor and needy. Nevertheless, there is reason to wonder if the true meaning of these celebrations is lost in the hyper-commercialization of these holidays. What do these celebrations mean to us from a biblical point of view?

THANKSGIVING: Every year Americans celebrate this most typical national holiday with no real understanding of its significance. To them and to us, mostly it means a time to feast—a bountiful meal with turkey and stuffing, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, corn and pumpkin pie. 375 years ago, in the fall of 1621, the early pilgrims celebrated the first Thanksgiving in Plymouth, Massachusetts. What did these English settlers have to be thankful for?

The pilgrims landed at Plymouth at the worst time of the year—in December of 1620—after a nine week voyage of unending horror, huddled between the decks of a merchant ship called “Mayflower.” When they finally landed at the unknown land, they were horrified with what was in store for them. They had reason to be. Nearly half of them died within the next few months. The harsh voyage and the fierce winter of New England was taking its toll. Yet the pilgrims did not lose hope or faith in God. With the onset of Spring, they planted corn and other vegetables. In summer they had a rich harvest. The native Indians in the area turned out to be friendly and helpful. The settlement was going to survive. And in the fall, in a spirit of victory over awesome odds, they held a harvest festival with their

new found friends, the native Indians. It's their triumph and gratitude to the Almighty we celebrate as Thanksgiving.

“...Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord always giving thanks to God the Father for everything...” (Eph. 5:19-20)

“Enter into His gates with Thanksgiving and into His courts with praise; Be thankful to Him and bless His name” (Psalm 100:4)

Give thanks for everything? Everything, the Bible says.

“How can I be thankful for everything? I have just lost my job. My spouse and I, are not getting along. My children are not doing well in school. I have just buried my closest friend. My bills are piling up! The doctors tell me that in the not-too-distant future I need to have surgery to correct my heart problem. ...” The world seems to be crashing down all around us, yet God wants us to give thanks for everything.

If only, in the middle of our darkest periods, we would take a minute or a few moments to reflect on the good things in our lives and how we have come through difficult situations in the past, we would be so much happier. We would have more peace. Thanksgiving does not have to be a fancy affair or a day-long event. It can occur several times a year, several times a month or even several times a day, if need be.

CHRISTMAS: Of all the solemn beauty of Christmas, nothing can surpass the innocence and simplicity of the manger scene, that arouses a sense of wonderment and peace in each of us. A remembrance of a humble birth 2000 years ago in the rocky hills of Palestine and a message that comes with it “Peace on earth, goodwill toward men.” It's beautiful when sung in hymns, but its lyrics and its meaning is lost not only in the violence filled snow-clad valleys of Bosnia and Kashmir, in the desert regions of the Middle East and in the jungles of Cambodia and Africa, but also in our individual homes, villages and towns. This is so because we forget the innocence and simplicity of the manger. If the celebration of Christmas is to be meaningful in our hearts, the love and compassion Jesus showed to the poor, the down-trodden, the prostitutes, the unsophisticated and the uncultured, should transform our hearts and minds.

How can we expect God to give peace to a world that will not walk in His way; that will not limit its greed, its pride, its prejudice, its passion and follow the things that make for peace? We cannot expect God to save a world from war or a family from disintegration when it rejects the

love of the Prince of Peace. The peace that Christ offers comes not with detachment from the world, but involvement in it. Peace is the fruit of active participation with God. This is only possible if there is reconciliation with God (which Jesus enables), responsible living and righteousness in our relationships.

We must give to the world, beginning where we are: in our family, our workplace, our community, our parish. Our giving should be in the spirit of the words of Jesus—"Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and all these things (including peace) shall be added unto you" (Mathew 6:33)

NEW YEAR: Finally what does the New Year mean to us? At the stroke of the midnight hour on December 31st, a new year will dawn on us. It's a year full of possibilities and hope, but there is also fear and uncertainties. We make resolutions and set goals for the New Year. Are these goals set on God's plan and help or are we depending on our own merits? St. Augustine says "Without God, Man cannot, Without Man, God will not."

As we cross over from 1997 to the new year, there is probably much that we would prefer to forget. We would like to start 1998 as clean and fresh as if just washed in the

waters of Jordan. Joshua ordered the twelve representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel to go back to the middle of Jordan to collect a stone each. One stone for each of the twelve tribes was collected and set up at the camp. (Joshua 4:4-9) Joshua then instructed the people: In the future when your children ask you what the stones mean, tell them about the miracle God performed at the Jordan. These stones were to be the stones of remembrance, a memorial to ensure that this time the people would not be so quick to forget.

Do not bring in the New Year without remembering the blessings of the old. The waters of 1997 have closed in and the new tide will take us through another 12 months. Though much of the old year will be swept away, it is important to hold on to good memories. These are the stones of remembrance—perhaps one for each month of the year—that we would like to hold on to as a memorial. These may include weddings, births and deaths, graduations and anniversaries; a new home, new business, new friends and visions; talent discovered, a conflict resolved, health restored and hope renewed. It's these stones of remembrances that make each year special and build the foundations of a fulfilling life.

May these seasons of celebrations be seasons of peace ■

Women Pioneer Leaders...*Cont'd from pg. 14*

Two-thirds world churches also had deaconesses and sisters who were celibates and involved in full time ministries. Ellen Gorch was ordained as a deaconess in 1867. She started as a Zenana missionary, became a deaconess, and served the church in Kotgah and Simla.

Even in two-thirds world countries, women's missionary movements started decades ago. The "Sevikasangham", the women's organization of the Mar Thoma Church, has many women missionaries from the very beginning. Our church has the tradition that it was the Apostle Thomas who brought the gospel to South India and established the church there. The Mar Thoma Church's Women's Organization started its mission work in 1919. Annama and Allayamma were the first two women who worked as missionaries. By 1943 they had 32 women missionaries on the field. They were helping the poor and needy, training people in proper hygiene and preaching the gospel. They even established new churches.

To some extent the "Self Fulfillment Model" has affected the two-thirds world women as well. Now there is concern about justice for women, therefore it is also an important phase in the women's journey in mission. There are still a lot of injustices against women in the world, especially in two-thirds world countries. Justice oriented missions have been in existence from the beginning of history. But it is now more about educating and enabling women to fight their own battles.

From this we can move into another model which is very Biblical. The "Community Model" focuses on equal partnership of men and women in mission. My study of different conferences consisting of Asian, African and Latin American women shows that a common theme has been the community of women and men and the idea of partnership. Two-thirds world women rarely see men as rivals. Women and men need to work together in different ministries using the gifts God has given them individually.

Women and men are becoming equal partners in God's mission, and I believe that this was God's original plan from the beginning. This relationship should include global partnership of men and women, and women with women everywhere. God's mission is holistic and needs various gifts and different types of people to accomplish His task. It should come to the level of equal partnership that is above all social, sexual and cultural barriers. Women should fully participate at the decision making level as well. Only then can the partnership become fully equal. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28). This was the final stage of Paul's understanding of mission, and that is what we should all aim to reach. ■

Dr. Sakhi Athyal, Ph.D., D. Miss. Popular lecturer and speaker on the role of women in ministry.

Vulnerability: The Christian Definition of Strength

A Message Given at the Spring Northeast Regional One Day Youth Conference

John John Thatamanil

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Oh really? What does the word "strength" really mean? Is the Christian a special type of creature endowed with strengths or powers other people don't have? Some TV preachers tell us, "With Christ in your life, you can do anything." With Jesus in your life and a little positive thinking, you can be prosperous and influential. You can be successful and happy. You can have everything you've ever wanted. It's just a question of having the right "Behappytudes." Is that what St. Paul means by saying, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"?

I have my doubts about such definitions of strength. Christians don't seem more successful or wealthier than non-Christians. In fact, I wonder if Christians should even try. Is Christian strength the ability to achieve social or economic success or political power? Are such goals even appropriate for a Christian life?

Consider the life of Jesus. Was Jesus successful by worldly standards? Was He powerful or strong by conventional definitions? Jesus was executed in his early thirties. Every one of his closest disciples abandoned him in his greatest hour of need. Even at the very end of his life, his closest disciples did not understand what he was trying to teach. And what about his death? Jesus died on the ancient equivalent of the electric chair. A condemned and despised man hanging between two common criminals. This is certainly not the kind of life Malayalee parents want for their sons and daughters!

Despite all this, Christians are supposed to see his life as the most powerful, strongest life any human being has ever lived. We are supposed to model our lives after his. But was His life truly a life of power and strength? Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great and Napoleon were powerful. Or in our time, perhaps many politicians, businessmen or bureaucrats are powerful people. But how does Jesus resemble any of them?

What would you say if someone asked you the following questions? You are Christian, aren't you? Why do you consider Jesus' life so supremely powerful, so strong? Why should we imitate the life of Jesus? We are all followers of Jesus. That means that our goal is to live a life like His. So, we better have some idea as to why we ought to consider this life the most beautiful and most powerful life ever lived, the life that has won our hearts and minds.

As we think about these questions, let us keep in mind two passages from the letters of St. Paul, namely Philippians 2: 5-9 and I Corinthians 1: 25.

The Quest for Worldly Strength or Power as the Quest to be Invulnerable

Before we think about how Jesus' life was a life of power and strength, let us think about our everyday definitions of strength. According to conventional or worldly definitions, to be powerful and strong is to be invulnerable. People are considered strong or powerful if they don't need others, if they don't need to rely on other people to have their needs or wants met. The people whom we consider powerful are people who have access to unlimited resources.

They are the rich and the powerful of the world. We are sure that having access to wealth means freedom from need. The appeal of wealth and possessions is something we already know from our own experience. We also consider people strong or powerful if they have political or social power. If you can influence, even control the lives of people, you can make sure your future is comfortable. Closer to home, there is the strength or power of violence. To have a gun, to be part of a gang that can terrorize and intimidate others, many think that this is strength. I can be safe if I know that you are afraid of me.

When we look closely at the desire for economic, political or social power and the power of violence, we see that people seek such power in order to be invulnerable. But notice something strange here; the more deeply someone wants or needs these things, the more you see a paradox, a contradiction. They do not want to acknowledge that the fear of being vulnerable is what drives them in their search for invulnerability. The tragedy is that these feelings don't disappear when they are ignored. To try to escape your needs by ignoring them is like hoping that a broken bone will heal itself if you pretend it's not broken.

Jesus as our Model for Vulnerability

If the attempt to be invulnerable is bound to fail, if it is in the end a lie because it is an attempt by human beings to pretend that they are not human, then true strength, Christian strength, is the courage and honesty to be truly and deeply vulnerable. The world defines strength as invulnerability. Christians define strength as vulnerability. The strength to be vulnerable: that is what we see in Jesus' life. In Jesus, we see the most vulnerable person the world has ever seen. From this life we can learn the true meaning of Christian strength.

The first kind of vulnerability we see in Jesus' life was his honest recognition of his personal needs and his

willingness to share those needs with those closest to him. Jesus was willing to share his trials and temptations with his disciples. We see this most clearly in the Garden of Gethsemane.

"I am deeply grieved. Stay awake with me!" Matthew 26:36-39. What Jesus is really saying here is, "I need you." What courage! What honesty! Has there ever lived a soul who was more deeply human than this!! And yet, what a strange teacher this is! Our idea of a great spiritual master demands that such a person be free of all conflict and pain. Yet, we have in Jesus a teacher who needs his disciples and isn't afraid to ask for their help and support.

I suppose many in the world would see this display of emotion as shameful weakness. But that is precisely the problem. We have our definitions of strength and weakness reversed. We have come to think of invulnerability as strength and vulnerability as weakness. Jesus' message to us is that we don't need to try to be invulnerable. His message to us is "Be human!"

If our Lord was grieved unto death and agitated by his struggles, we should not find it surprising that we are also overwhelmed by our own weaknesses and difficulties. Every one of us has problems and needs and weaknesses. We ought to have the courage and the vulnerability to acknowledge these needs openly, to ourselves and also to those who are closest to us. Without such courage and openness, there is no possibility of healing.

Keeping in mind Jesus' deep honesty and vulnerability, we see why he preferred the company of the sinful to that of the Pharisees. In these people, Jesus felt an honesty he could not find among the righteous. Among the weak, the oppressed and those struggling with their own personal demons and nightmares, Jesus saw people who were deeply human, who were willing to acknowledge their need for His loving and compassionate presence. This is, of course, the meaning of Jesus' saying about only the sick needing a physician.

Unless you have the honesty and humility to say that you need help, you cannot be healed. Unless you have the strength to know that you are weak and are not ashamed to admit it, you will not be open to the love of Christ.

To be followers of Jesus then, we must be honest with ourselves and with those whom we love about our fears, our weaknesses and our needs. Such vulnerability takes courage. It means rejecting the attempt to be superhuman. It means being open to the possibility of being hurt.

What are your struggles and pains? What are the things that discourage you? Do you try to cover up your own difficulties for fear that others will think you weak? Or because others will think that you are not a good Christian? Do you have at least one friend with whom you can practice vulnerability? A follower of Jesus must never be ashamed to need the support of others. And no follower of Jesus should think it a sign of weakness to be vulnerable.

Vulnerability As the Capacity to Be Open to the Sufferings of Others

A second kind of vulnerability that we see in Jesus was his deep openness to the sufferings of others. We all know from experience how hard it is to be with someone who is suffering. We find it difficult even to look into the eyes of a homeless person as we happen to pass by. There is something in us that recoils from the pain of others. We find it difficult to bear.

Have you ever wondered why it is so difficult to be in the presence of people who are suffering? Why is it so difficult to be vulnerable to the sufferings of others? I have two possibilities to suggest. I think one reason it is so difficult to be vulnerable to the pain of others is that it often makes us feel helpless.

A second reason we often do not have the strength to be vulnerable to the sufferings of others is that their pain reminds us of our own.

In Jesus we see a person who had an infinite capacity to be vulnerable to the sufferings of others. Oh sure, we might say. It was easy for him. He had the power to heal them. There was something he could do. He didn't have to feel powerless. But Jesus was also unable to remove the sufferings of many, often because of the lack of faith of others. Mark 6:5 demonstrates just this. "And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief."

Jesus certainly could not remove the sufferings of many of the poor. He could not feed all who were hungry in Nazareth, Bethlehem or Jerusalem. But nonetheless, we find in him an endless ability to share in the sufferings of the poor, the downtrodden and the sick. We know from our own limited experience how much strength such vulnerability and openness requires. This raises for us a crucial question, maybe the most important question we shall think about today. What was it that gave Jesus the strength to be so vulnerable and open, both with regard to his own sufferings and with the sufferings of others? What was the source of Jesus' strength, and can this same strength be ours?

God's Love Is the Source of Our Strength to be Vulnerable

Jesus' ability to be vulnerable, to be open to his own struggles and to the struggles of others came from his strong sense of God's loving presence. Certainly his Father's love and acceptance gave Jesus the power to accept himself and to accept others. And if we are to have true Christian strength, the strength to be vulnerable, we too must grow in our sense of God's infinite love for us. One way in which we can grow in our knowledge of God's love is to hear again the "Good News" that Jesus came to preach because that Good News is forever being distorted and made into bad news.

What is that Good News that Jesus preached? He did not say, "You will be accepted once you have gotten yourself together and made yourself worthy of God's Love." Even repentance was not a condition of acceptance. Knowledge of God's love and acceptance leads us to repentance, just as knowledge that we have hurt the ones we love makes us ask for their forgiveness. Jesus' message was "Repent because God loves you." It was not, "Repent if you want God to love you." The Good News that Jesus preached and the Good News that Paul preached is that God loved us while we were yet sinners. "Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!" Luke 12:24

If repentance is not a precondition of God's love, neither is perfection! To know that God accepts us as we are, that we are infinitely precious as we are, means that we don't have to hide our pains and our inadequacies. Nor do we have to be perfect in order to be loved. Why is it that so many of us have come to believe that we have to be perfect in order to be worthy of love?

To know that we are accepted is to know that we need not hide from our own needs and fears. We can have the courage to be honest with ourselves because God knows us. He is closer to us than we are to ourselves. If God accepts us as we are, why can't we?

Like dry soil 'drinking' in the rain, we too need to open ourselves to the love of God. Knowing that God loves us should give us the courage to be vulnerable to our own deepest needs and vulnerable enough to share those needs with the people who care most about us.

Vulnerability is the most important part of healing. To be courageous and open with ourselves and with those we love means that we are becoming Christlike. Like our Lord, we no longer need to try to live a false life in a hopeless search for invulnerability.

As we begin to become more vulnerable to ourselves and with our own pains, as we remove some of the masks and the barriers we have erected within our hearts to shield us from our own pain and the fear of being hurt or disappointed by others, we will find that we are becoming more deeply sensitive to the needs and pains of others.

There is one sure way to know whether you are growing in the life of faith. If you find that you are increasingly unable to turn away from the sufferings of others, then you know you are growing in the practice of vulnerability. On the contrary, if you find it easy to dismiss or forget the pain and suffering of others, it matters not one iota how pious you are, it matters not that you know the

*"You can't turn your back on Christ
if you keep your eyes on him."*

minute and second when you were "born again", you are far from being open to the Love of God in Christ Jesus. It is impossible for a person who practices Christlike vulnerability and openness to be invulnerable to the pains and sufferings of others.

Remember the Rich Man who tore down his old barns to build new ones to accommodate his increasing wealth (Luke 12:13-21). He was convinced that his wealth made him invulnerable. He believed that his wealth would protect him from the pains and difficulties of human life. He hoped that his wealth would allow him to live in splendid isolation from the rest of humanity. And yet, in a single instant, he found out that he had never been invulnerable.

Many of us want one day to be able to say like the Rich man, "Soul, you've got piles of money in the bank and in mutual funds! Relax eat, drink and be merry." If you seek a life of power, security and invulnerability, by all means do so. But don't call yourself a Christian! Christians dedicate their lives to developing another kind of strength, a strength that looks to the rest of the world like weakness and foolishness. Christians seek to cultivate the strength of being vulnerable. They want to become more sensitive to their own pain and the suffering of others.

What gives Christians the strength and the courage to be vulnerable? Christians have the courage to be vulnerable because they are convinced that the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. As Christians, we have seen the strength and the power of vulnerability in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and we want to have that kind of strength in our lives. Jesus' life was the strongest and most powerful life ever lived because it was the most vulnerable life ever lived. He was able to live that kind of life because of his total trust in God's care and acceptance.

Are you convinced that you are accepted by God and that you are infinitely precious to God as you are now? Are you convinced that you need not be perfect to be worthy of God's love? Do you have the courage to accept yourself as you are now? To be vulnerable to your pains and hurts? Do you have the courage to share your needs with others? Do you have the courage to admit that you need the love and acceptance of others? Are you committed to becoming more vulnerable to the sufferings of others? Will you ask God to make you so sensitive to the needs of others that you can no longer turn a deaf ear to their pain and suffering? Let us ask God to help us to see through the lie of invulnerability. Let us ask God to give us the strength to be vulnerable as was His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. ■

*"To be spiritually fit,
feed on the word and exercise your faith."*

MAR THOMA CHURCH BECOMES A MEMBER OF NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

On November 12, 1997, the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in the USA accepted the Mar Thoma Church as a new member of the communion. Given below is the full text of the News Release of NCC.

WASHINGTON, D.C., Nov. 12 — The National Council of Churches (NCC) today became an organization of 34 communions, up from 33.

The Rev. Dr. Bruce Robbins, chair of the Membership and Ecclesial Relations Committee, introduced the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of India noting their "rich history dating back to Thoma the Apostle."

A vote was then called, with each of the NCC's 33 denominations voting "yes," many "with joy." The Greek Orthodox representative gave perhaps the most creative affirmative vote, saying, "We welcome this new church, who walks like us and looks like us, but is not us."

There was then sustained applause as the five-member delegation from the newly accepted church, led by their head of communion, Bishop Zacharias Mar Theophilus, moved to the front of the assembly room to be officially seated as full members of the NCC.

"Personally, I do not welcome a stranger, since Bishop Zacharias and I have served together on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches," said NCC President Melvin Talbert. "I greet you and welcome you in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ."

Said Bishop Theophilus to the NCC Assembly delegates, "I was thrilled when the communion said 'yes.' Without knowing us, but with faith and hope, you accepted us into this fellowship."

"We were a founding member of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches in India and have been in full communion with the Anglican and Episcopal Church, but it took us a half century to become members of the NCC in USA," he continued.

"The Mar Thoma Church dates back to the visit of St. Thomas to India during the first century, and for the last 2,000 years in India we have witnessed and struggled," Bishop Theophilus explained. "This century, we became a diasporic church."

Of the communion's one million members worldwide, 30,000 are in the United States. Dispersed across 35 states with only 26 clergy and 37 parishes, many of them worship regularly at Episcopal Churches (the Mar Thoma Church is

in full communion with the Anglican family).

"These members frequently worship once a month in a Mar Thoma service," explained the Rev. Dr. Eileen Linder, NCC Associate General Secretary for Christian Unity. "The problem is they don't have enough priests to serve them. Clearly it's a church on the rise in this country."

"The Mar Thoma Church has grown rapidly in recent years." Bishop Theophilus added. According to their publication the *Mar Thoma Messenger*, "Our identity is undergoing radical changes, from being a group of few immigrants from India with Christian background to an established church with Eastern symbols and traditions."

"I rejoice with them, that they have grown substantially that they now have the capacity to join us," said NCC General Secretary the Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell. "They will deeply enrich the NCC and expand further its diversity."

Our church is an eastern church and is reformed in this tradition," he (Bishop Theophilus) said. "We are liturgical, biblical, missionary and ecumenical. Some historians call our church a Bridge Church in India, and now we are a bridge from India to the United States."

"We come from a country familiar with pluralism, with a multi-religious and multi-cultural population but a secular government, so we have many things to learn from you and many things to share with you."

In a later interview, Bishop Theophilus said his church's decision to join the NCC came out of the belief that "the Church is never secluded or isolated. We wanted to become part of the ecumenical family here in the U. S."

He said his church has appreciated many of the issues the NCC has taken up throughout its history, particularly its advocacy and development work relevant to Asia and other third world countries. He specially noted the NCC's support of the ban on the production and use of land mines, its support of the human and land rights of indigenous peoples.

"You need the fellowship of all the Churches to handle any of these kinds of issues," Bishop Theophilus said.

At the conclusion of his remarks, Bishop Theophilus and Dr. Campbell exchanged gifts. Dr. Campbell offered him a chalice, which he accepted, saying it is "the most important gift since it is for the taking of communion." Bishop Theophilus gave Dr. Campbell a brass bowl from India.

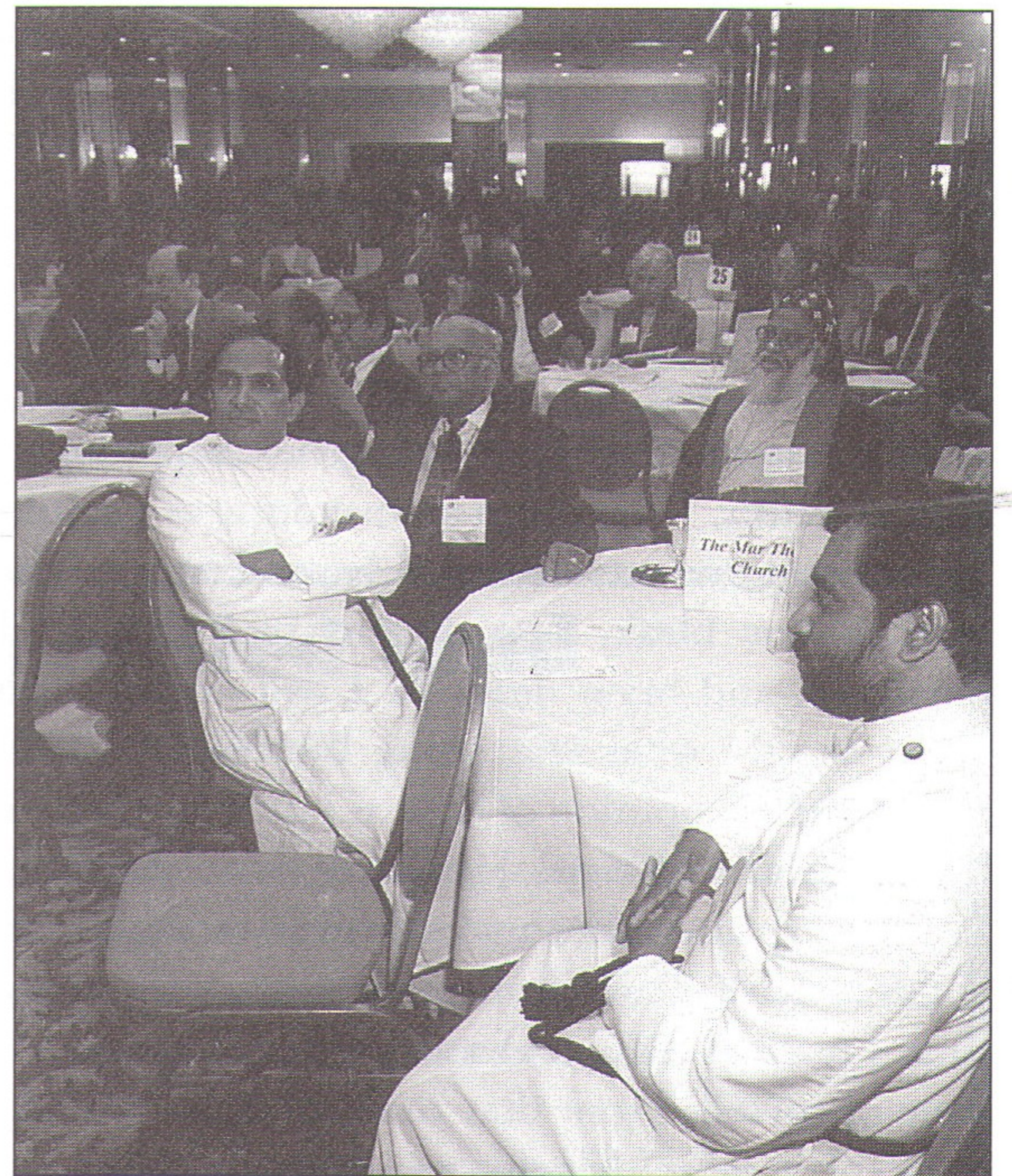


Rev. Dr. Melvin Talbert, outgoing President declaring the membership of Mar Thoma Church to the National Council of Churches in the USA.

Standing behind him from left to right: Rev. Dr. Bruce Robbins, Chair of the membership and ecclesial relations committee; Rt. Rev. Craig B. Anderson, incoming President; Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell, General Secretary; Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Diocesan Bishop; Rev. Oommen Philip, Diocesan Secretary; Rev. Jacob Mathew; Dr. Anna Panackal; and Dr. George Zachariah.



Rev. Dr. Melvin Talbert, NCC President and Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, after the formal acceptance of the membership.



Mar Thoma Church Delegates at the assembly meeting.

THE NEW NCC PRESIDENT: RT. REV. CRAIG B. ANDERSON

The Rt. Rev. Craig B. Anderson was installed as the 19th President of NCC during the General Assembly held in Washington, D.C. from November 12 -14, 1997. NCC presidents serve two year terms. Bishop Anderson is the rector (headmaster) of St. Paul's School in Concord, N.H. Previously, he was the 11th president and dean of The General Theological Seminary in New York City. From 1984-92, he was bishop of the Diocese of South Dakota, which includes eight Native American reservations. He received several honors for his ministry of justice and reconciliation in South Dakota.



Felicitations by the Greek Orthodox Church

Where Would I Be Without Him?

Roni Mathew, Long Island Mar Thoma Church

If I am to give an accurate account of my life and how God has continually guided me, I must first discuss my life apart from Christ. I see this as more beneficial for us and more Godglorifying. First, the contrast between my life with and that without Christ is clear proof that unless one knows God personally, it is impossible for him/her to discern God's hand molding their life to suit His plan. This conscious awareness of God's active presence within our lives provides us with inexplicable peace, joy and gladness, etc. in this life, and prepares us for the glorious life God intends for us: a life which shatters the outstretched boundaries of time.

My birth was a miraculous period. I weighed in at thirty-four ounces (two pounds and two ounces). Being the size of a rodent, my nasal and other air passages not being developed as of yet, I was subjected to a great amount of artificial oxygen. Thinking that I would die due to my under-developed air passages, the doctors gave little attention to monitoring the oxygen being pumped into me. Consequently, I was given an overdose, as a result of which my optic nerve was damaged beyond repair. The medical forecast was bleak. The doctors said that I'd be blind, paralyzed, and brain dead. As I will explain further, God knew exactly what was going on. Well, I really do not remember my opinion of God as I grew up, but I know that for much of that time, He didn't mean that much to me. Let me explain. After my mischievous years, which most children have, I slowly became more self-centered. Being thus, I realized that I had a very low self-esteem—a negative view of myself. From that time till quite recently, I could not explain why I felt this way. Now, however, I remember being yelled at for getting wrong answers in school. I know that my teacher meant it for good, but I hated those stressful, tormentuous times. I do not think that anything else strained my mind more than being yelled at. It felt like a weight crashing on my head, paralyzing me. Also, I remember that my brother always use to tell me to shut up. Whether he was joking or not, I don't know, but there were a few instances in which this took place, and I just ran to my room, or I ran in to the backyard, and sat there crying. No one seemed to care. Nobody thought about how I felt. I guess everyone thought it was a joke, so nobody explained this joke to me. I believe that being subjected to repeated "shut up Roni", and being yelled at for not knowing how to do a math problem explains my poor self-esteem. All this also gave me the idea that my opinion did not count. I never thought about speaking to anyone about this, because I did not understand these things then. As time went on, I



found this Christian radio station, known as Family radio. I started listening very carefully as they spoke about the sinful condition of humanity and about God's eternal punishment of unquenchable, inescapable hell fire soon to come upon us. I heard about how we are all filthy sinners before a holy and righteous God and that we are totally helpless, if we try to save ourselves from this doom. I started listening to my bible tapes, which confirmed everything they said. I found that there is one way by which we can surely be saved from God's anger. I discovered that I had to believe that God Himself came down to earth. I had to believe that He lived perfectly, satisfying every single one of God's laws. Having done all this, He became qualified to bear every last punch of God's anger: the eternal torment of hell to pay the penalty that I deserve. I had to believe that He was stripped, beaten, spat upon, and nailed to a cross, in order to pay for each of my sins. I found that He did not have to suffer eternally, but He rose again on the third day. By rising-breaking the chains of that punishment, He has opened to me a way to heaven, and I do not have to face God's anger. Instead, I would experience eternal joy in heaven, while I praise and honor God with others that believed in Jesus. I also discovered that God wants a *personal* relationship with me here on earth, as well. This is exactly what I was searching for! Thus, I immediately began praying that God would deliver me from this doom and give me the joy of knowing Him personally, and the privilege of praising, worshipping and glorifying Him with others in Heaven. And God, in His immeasurable mercy and love, heard and answered my plea! He gave me the humility to realize my hopelessness and helplessness, and I was able to trust Him fully to do the work of saving me. Since then, God has given me mental stability so that I no longer change moods with the weather. He has shown me that trusting Him is always the surest way to be successful and to maintain peace in life. Why? Because I now realize that God knows everything that happens to me: I know that He oversaw the drama surrounding my birth, that though the doctors predicted that I would be a useless vegetable, God planned otherwise. God has never failed once to provide for my needs; never have I ever thought, "Oh, if I could only see, it would be so much better." Though I am blind, I have never, do never, nor will ever regret my being so, because I have no other problems: there is nothing preventing me from achieving all that I can. Referring back to the account of my birth, my parents prayed continually and tearfully that I would not have anything hindering me from serving Jesus to the max. Well,

their fervent prayers were answered, when I, as a child, was found to be blind and healthy, but not paralyzed or brain dead. God definitely proved Himself fully able at the time of my birth. I strive, therefore, to give all the honor, glory, and praise to God, knowing that He never falls short of His promises. I know this is all God!

(All this is not to imply that I do not believe God can heal me. I fully believe He is able to restore my sight at any time.)

This is why I know God to be the surest source of total happiness, peace, and satisfaction for anyone! There is no exception! Everyone is created by God with a void that only God can fill. Unfortunately, many, not recognizing this, attempt to fill the void, looking to temporary and, in many cases, unhealthy forms of pleasure, which can do nothing but destroy the body. I also realize now that when times get tough, God is my place for consolation, encouragement, refreshment and rejuvenation. Not only this, but God is such a great friend in the good times, as well. I can talk to Him about anything, anything at all! Although I still struggle with bouts of depression and discouragement, God always finds a way to comfort me, just where I need it. Sometimes, He reaches my pain, as I pray, while at other times, His word consoles me. His word is so powerful, in fact, that I could be reading a passage that speaks about something unrelated to my hurt, but knowing that it is God's living word to me gives me joy.

Therefore, I know that God is not interested in the impersonal, ritualistic lifestyle. Instead, He wants to know everyone personally; He desires to be our closest of companion. Observe the contrast between both of my lives! Where would I be without him? I'd either be dead, a vegetable, or mentally insane. Where am I with him? I am living joyfully, and am thankful for knowing him. I am, by God's grace, capable of doing many things. I am mentally stable. Contrasting my life with and without Christ indicates how necessary it is for each person to know Jesus personally. It is also an expression of praise to God, as it proclaims His work in my life.

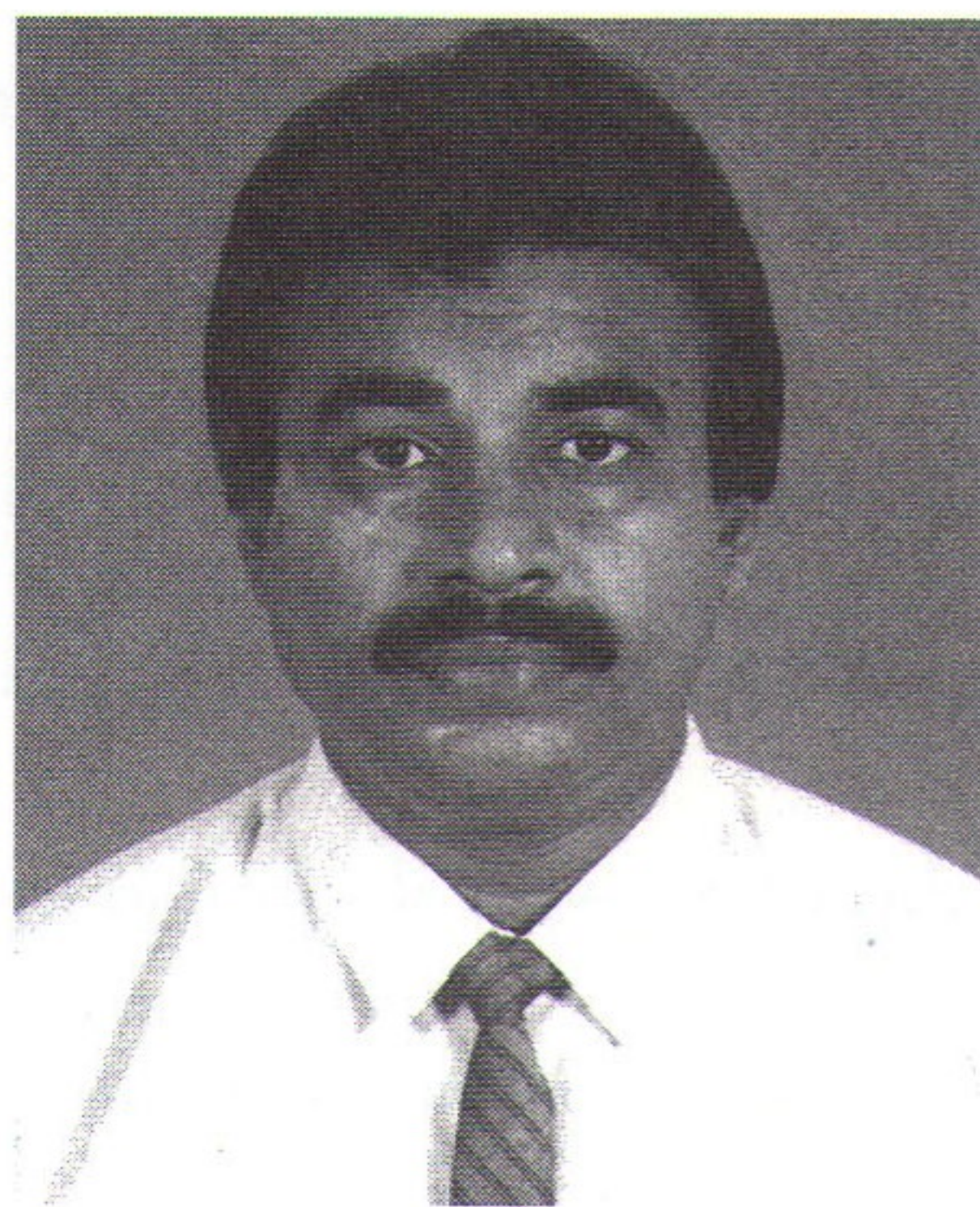
As Jesus' servant and child, one thing I love to do is TO encourage others. Therefore, if you are encouraged by this simple but awesome and illustrative account of God's love, companionship, and His all-knowing character, please feel free to write to me. ■

With all the Glory going to God,
Roni Mathew
702 Crans street, Elmont, NY 11003

Roni Mathew is the son of Rev. K. O. Mathew and Mariamma Kochamma. He is at present doing his divinity studies. He plays the trumpet, the guitar and aspires to actively work for the Kingdom of God.

Grant us, Lord! the dreamfilled land

Elias Abraham, Baltimore Marthoma Church, Maryland



Elias Murickunattu Abraham hails from Kottayam, Kerala. Before coming over to the United States, he had been a teacher of English Language and Literature at the Christian College Chengannur. He writes poetry both in English and Malayalam. He was awarded 'Editor's Choice Award' by the National Library of Poetry, Maryland for his poem "**The Quest**", which was published in the Anthology titled 'Into the Unknown.'

*The love-tied clouds, now, cleaving chide,
The wind, in wrath, his brow raises;
The sun, once, merciless, rides on mild,
How can moon, then, act so wild?*

*The trees that housed at every branch,
Myriad musicians and pipers grand,
Sob, in silence, when they leave
Snow-rimmed sorrow held by peace.*

*The lakes do embrace death and hell,
Let Winter's wings be cast there too,
Shall my Master bring with him,
The fragrant spring when next he comes?*

*Grant us, Lord! the dreamfilled land,
Where the winter chill his face never shows;
And golden lamps with glowing smiles
May light our hearts with rising rhymes.*

ക്ഷണം

ഉമ്മൻ ജോർജ്ജ്, ഹ്യൂസ്റ്റൺ

കാലമേറെയായി ഞാൻ
 അലയുന്നുലകാകെ
 കാലുകൾ ഇടുന്നു
 മാനസ്സം തളരുന്നു
 വേദത്തിൻ പൊരുളുകൾ
 തിരിക്കും വിശ്വഗ്രന്ഥം
 വേദത്തെ അമൃതാക്കി
 ഭുജിക്കും സുഹൃദ്വൃന്ദം
 ഓതുനെന്നതിനേറെ ഞാൻ
 തിരയാനിടമില്ല
 ആ ദിവ്യ സ്നേഹത്തിന്റെ
 ഉദ്ഭവസ്ഥാനം തേടി
 നൂറുണ്ടും മനസ്സിന്റെ
 നൊമ്പരംഒതുക്കി ഞാൻ
 മറക്കാൻ ശ്രമിക്കവെ
 മാറിടം തുടിക്കുന്നു
 കാർമുകിൽ പരക്കുമ്പോൾ
 ഗദ്ഗദമുയരുമ്പോൾ
 ഓർമ്മകൾക്കുള്ളിലെങ്ങോ
 ആശതൻ നിഴലാട്ടം
 പണ്ടങ്ങോ സ്മൃതിക്കുള്ളിൽ
 കുറിച്ചു വചനത്തേ
 കണ്ടു ഞാൻ മനസ്സിന്റെ
 ഭിത്തിയിൽ തെളിവാർന്നു
 “മുട്ടുന്നു തുടരെ ഞാൻ
 വാതിലിൽ സ്നേഹമോടെ
 പെട്ടെന്നു തുറക്കുവോർ
 കുത്തരമരുളുവാൻ
 വിളിക്ക നിങ്ങളെന്നെ
 അൻപോടെയകതാരിൽ
 വെളിച്ചമേകിയൊപ്പം
 അത്താഴം കഴിച്ചിടാം”
 കഷ്ടം! ആ നിരുപമ
 സ്നേഹത്തെ വെടിഞ്ഞു ഹാ!
 നിഷ്ഠയില്ലാതെ ഇഹേ
 അലയുന്നഹോ മർത്യൻ
 ഇന്നിതാ തുറക്കുന്നെൻ
 അടഞ്ഞ വാതായനം
 ഒന്നു നീ എഴുന്നള്ളൂ
 യേശുവേ അകതാരിൽ

My Grandfather's Eyes

Suni Alexander, Nanuet, NY
(10th Grade, St. James MTC)

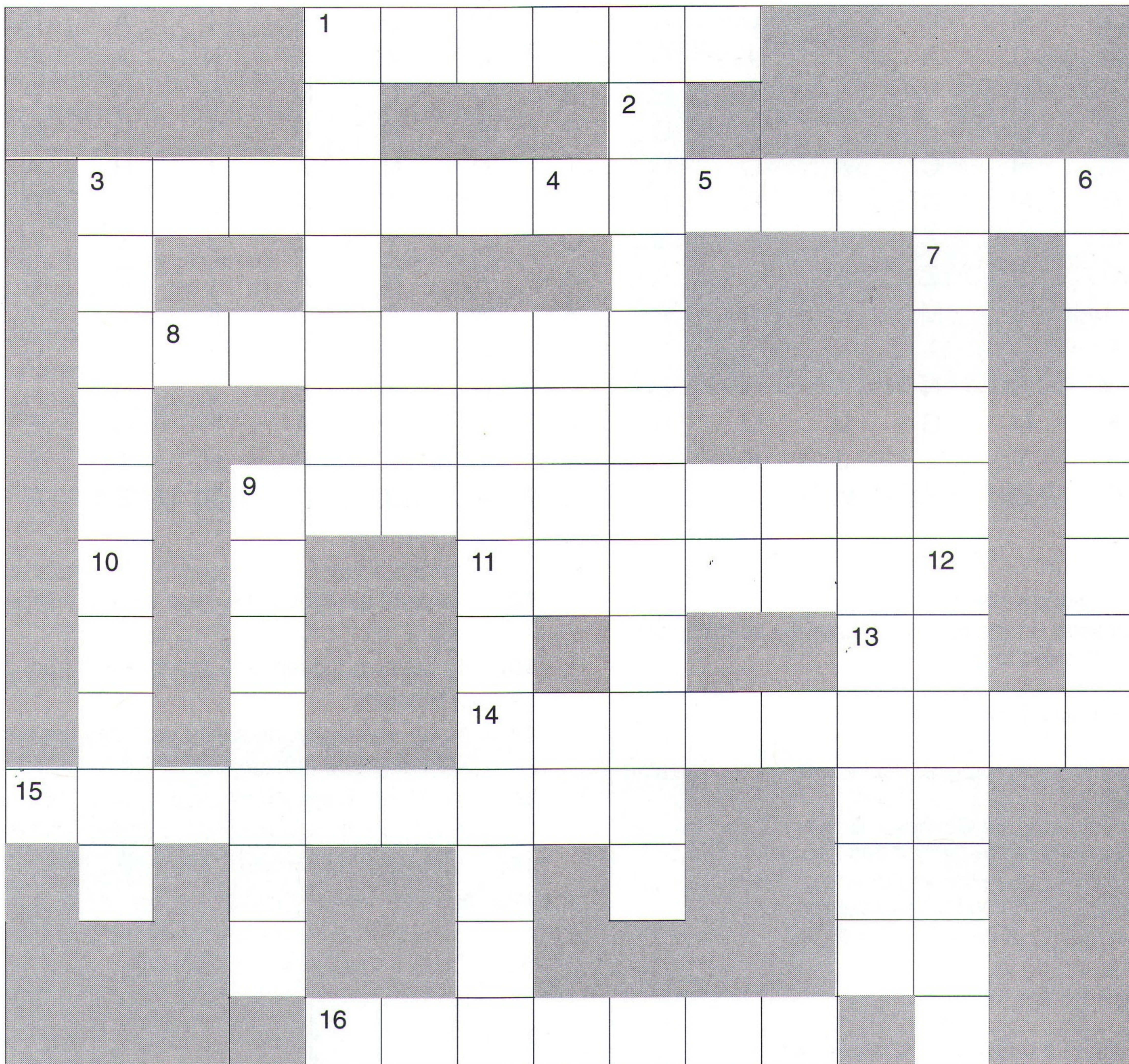
Yours eyes, the same eyes I look into every morning,
 Have a different meaning every day.
 They are so deep, so many phases
 you don't even know.
 The many faces you put on,
 And still the eyes I see are the same.
 The same wrinkles under your eyes,
 the same weak eyelids falling, covering part of your eye.
 Your dark pupil has melted into the rest of your eyes,
 making them yellow.
 They tell your story,
 the one you don't remember, the one my father tells me.
 Your heavy wrinkles show the years of your life.
 You look at me and smile with your eyes.
 The light in your eyes brings me hope.
 Through all you've been through,
 the light is still there.
 Your light, your smile, your shine,
 they discover the darkness you are hiding,
 the darkness you don't realize.
 And though the color of your eyes have transformed
 from a deep black to a pale brown,
 the light is always shining.
 And even if you leave me,
 Your eyes will be with me till the end of time.

BIBLE CROSSWORD PUZZLE

AS IN TODAY'S ENGLISH VERSION

(based on the book of II Kings)

Mrs. Mini Joys Thomas (New York)



Across

1. He was taken up to heaven by a whirlwind.
3. There had never been a king like him before, who served the Lord with all his heart mind and strength, obeying all the law of Moses; nor has there been a king like him since.
4. He wiped out the worship of Baal in Israel.
5. Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to consult a woman prophet who lived in the newer part of Jerusalem.
8. Naaman's disease came upon him.
9. Nebuchadnezzar took him to Babylon as a prisoner, together with his mother, his wives, his officials, and the leading men of Judah.
11. Naaman dipped himself in it seven times, as Elisha had instructed, and he was completely cured.
14. Nebuchadnezzar had his eyes put out, placed him in chains and took him to Babylon.
15. He led the people of Judah to commit even greater sins than those committed by the nations whom the Lord had driven out of the land as his people advanced.
16. He told Shaphan that he had found the book of the law in the temple.

Down

1. People threw the corpse into his tomb, as soon as the body came into contact with his bones, the man came back to life and stood up.
2. He burned down the temple, the palace and the houses of all the important people in Jerusalem.
3. He became king of Judah at the age of seven.
6. God let him live fifteen years longer.
7. His officials plotted against him and assassinated him in the palace.
9. The prophet Elisha was sick with a fatal disease and as he lay dying he went to visit him.
10. He told Hezekiah, "The Lord Almighty says that a time is coming when everything in your palace, everything that your ancestors have stored up to this day, will be carried off to Babylonia.
11. Palace officials threw her down, and her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses.
12. He fell off the balcony on the roof of his palace in Samaria.
13. Elisha said to her "sell the olive oil and pay all your debts, and there will be enough money left over for you and your sons to live on.

BIBLE WORD SEARCH

AS IN TODAY'S ENGLISH VERSION
(based on the book of I & II Chronicles)

Mrs. Mini Joys Thomas (New York)

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

1. He became the world's first great conqueror.
2. He brought disaster on the people of Israel by keeping loot that had been devoted to God.
3. Solomon's mother.
4. He captured Jebusites fortress of Zion, and it became known as his city.
5. The Lord became angry with him and killed him for touching the covenant box.
6. Only they should carry the Covenant Box because they are the ones the Lord chose to carry it and serve him forever.
7. He reported to King David the total number of men capable of military service. 1,100,000 in Israel and 470,000 in Judah.
8. David paid him six hundred gold coins for the threshing place.
9. Solomon built a temple for the worship of the Lord God of Israel in _____.
10. "Here I am living in a house built of cedar, but the Lord's Covenant Box is kept in a tent!" David said to whom?
11. King David said, "I must show loyal friendship to him, as his father Nahash did to me.
12. Name of a mother, she gave his son advice that led him to evil.
13. By keeping hidden, she saved Joash from death at the hands of Athaliah.
14. As he was dying, he called out "May the Lord see what you are doing and punish you!"
15. He became angry with the priests, and immediately a dreaded skin disease broke out on his forehead.
16. The city of palm trees.
17. He had violated the rights of his people and had defied the Lord, the Lord brought troubles on Judah.
18. Commanders of the Assyrian army captured him, stuck hooks in him, put him in chains and took him to Babylon.
19. While he was very young he began to worship the God of his ancestor King David.
20. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Judah, captured him and took him to Babylon in chains.

Bible Word Search Finders (July 1997)

Ruby Abraham	Ebenezer MTC, New Rochelle
Robin Abraham	Ebenezer MTC, New Rochelle
Binsi Koshy	St. John's MTC, New York
Mariamamma Z. Mathai	St. John's MTC, New York
Mercy Thomas	St. John's MTC, New York
Joy V. Mathew	Trinity MTC, Houston
Teena Samuel	Immanuel MTC, Stafford, TX

Bible Cross-Word Puzzle Winners (July 1997)

Ruby Abraham	Ebenezer MTC, New Rochelle
Robin Abraham	Ebenezer MTC, New Rochelle
Mariamamma Zachariah	St. John's MTC, New York
Mercy Thomas	St. John's MTC, New York
Joy V. Mathew	Trinity MTC, Houston
Teena Samuel	Immanuel MTC, Stafford, TX

Congratulations to all winners!

DEADLINE FOR ANSWERS DECEMBER 31, 1997

DIOCESAN NEWS

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCH OFFICIALS VISIT THE DIOCESAN CENTER

Dr. Joan Campbell, Secretary of the National Council of Churches in U. S. A. and Rev. Dr. Eileen Linder, NCC Associate General Secretary for Christian Unity, visited Mar Thoma Center on October 17, 1997. They discussed at length the proceedings of the General Assembly and officially invited Mar Thoma Church to the Assembly. Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos, Rev. Ommen Philip, Diocesan Secretary, Rev. Joseph Chacko, Rev. Varghese M. Easow, Mr. O. C. Abraham, Mrs. Nirmala Abraham, Coordinator of Ecumenical Relations, Mr. P. T. Mathew and Mr. Abraham Thomas were present to greet them and participated in the discussions.



NEW MAR THOMA CENTER CONSTRUCTION PROGRESS

The Mar Thoma Center building at 52 Merrick Avenue is nearing completion. By the grace of God we have made three payments so far. We are grateful to all who have contributed generously. Continued prayers and support of

all our members are necessary to meet our commitments. We urge all of you to participate in the Jubilee fund collection by the end of November.



Diocesan Center work in progress: Picture taken in October, 1997

TRINITY MAR THOMA CHURCH, EDMONTON, CANADA

The annual gospel convention was held from August 1 to 3, 1997. Evangelist Samuel Ganeshan from India, was the main speaker. The Sunday School conducted the VBS from August 16 to 18, 1997 under the leadership of Miss Julie Easow and Rev. L. Varghese, the vicar of the parish. The parish picnic was arranged on Saturday July 12, 1997 with many fun filled activities. The 6th annual parish day celebrated with different programs. Retired CSI Bishop Rt. Rev. Michael John gave the leadership for the retreat with the theme "Repent and Rejoice" for two days followed by Holy Communion Service on October 5, 1997. A public meeting was held after the service for the parish day celebration.

Rajan Daniel, Diocesan Assembly Member



MAR THOMA CHURCH OF DALLAS, FARMERS BRANCH

On August 15, 1997 when India celebrated her 50th Anniversary of Independence, the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch shared the joy and excitement of the occasion at a beautiful program organized by the Youth League. Dr. Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi was the chief guest. Rev. Oommen Philip, our Diocesan Secretary, presided over the function. Dr. Gandhi spoke on the theme "Non-Violence". There were variety cultural programs depicting rich Indian cultural heritage. On Saturday, August 16, Dr. Gandhi led a seminar on "Weapons of Violence and Tools of Non-Violence". Dr. Gandhi also shared his personal experiences with his grandfather Mahatma Gandhi which was very inspirational to all.

Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch, along with India Association of North Texas, hosted a memorial

service and a condolence meeting to pay tribute to Mother Theresa on Sunday, September 7—5:00 pm at the parish hall. About 400 people of different religions from India came together. Rev. Sajan P. Mathew welcomed the gathering and Mr. Gopal Pillai, President, India Association of North Texas introduced the dignitaries. People representing various organizations and churches spoke on that occasion. Sister Mary Sujaya and Sister Stephna of Oak Cliff Convent of Missionaries of Charity were also present. It was a remarkable testimony to Mother Theresa's universal appeal, that more than a dozen religious and civic leaders, including a nun from her order, told how the 'champion of the poor' had touched their lives.

Rev. Sajan P. Mathew, Vicar

IMMANUEL MAR THOMA CHURCH, HOUSTON

The Immanuel Mar Thoma Church Edavaka Mission Convention was held on October 10-11 (Friday & Saturday), 1997. Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa and Rev. G. Samuel were the main speakers. Along with this Southwest Center B Sevikasangham meeting was also held. Parish Day was celebrated on Sunday October 12, 1997. Coorilos Thirumeni celebrated the Holy Communion service and a public meeting was held afterwards.

Rev. Skariah Varghese, Vicar



XIX NATIONAL MAR THOMA YOUTH CONFERENCE

The XIX National Mar Thoma Youth Conference hosted by the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church is scheduled to be held from August 13-16, 1998. The venue of the conference is Team U.S.A. Sports Camps, Port Jervis, NY. The main leaders of the conference are Rt. Rev. Dr.

Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Diocesan Bishop; Rev. Kurien George, Diocesan Youth President; Dr. James W. Sire; Mr. Jimmy McGee and Mr. Paul Yu. For more information please contact Rev. P. M. Thomas or Mr. Manoj M. Zacharia. (914) 856-6546 E-mail: mazacharia@vassar.edu

Valedictorian Speech

Anu Ipe
Skyline High School, Dallas, TX

Dr. Parrot, Mr. Salinas, Other Staff, Parents, and Fellow Graduates,

There are three phrases that I am planning not to mention tonight because I am sure you have all heard them all too often in the past couple of weeks. They are: 1) first step 2) milestone in your life and 3) turning point.

What I want to concentrate on is for whom this evening belongs.

This day is for the delivery room doctor who brought you into this world. Little did he know that this screaming newborn would one day become something as respectable and honorable as a: GRADUATE.

This day is for the kindergarten teacher who put you in the corner and sent you home with misconduct notes so that you would eventually reach this day.

This day is for every teacher, administrator, and school staff member you've ever had, who worked to provide you with a safe environment, clean floors, fine cuisine, and food for your brain. Your victory is their triumph.

The day is for the friend or friends in your life that never let you quit, spoke and meant words of encouragement, and brought laughter to your being.



This day is for the brother and sister who came before you and paved the way and for the ones who follow in your path.

This day is for every mother, father, and guardian who went through any kind of struggle during the years so that this day might come. Who dropped you off in the morning and picked you up at night, fed and clothed you, encouraged and threatened you, punished and loved you. This is their day.

This day is for the search of the unknown, the very basis of education, without which there would be no one to ask "what for?" and no one to find out "why"?

This day is for diversity and simple things like a calm and quiet peace for which each of us here tonight have strived to achieve these 4 years. Where you can pass your neighbor in a crowded hallway or street and feel nothing but goodwill. These have and must continue to be our goals. For today, we are celebrating LIFE!

And...this day is for you...the GRADUATE. It's impossible to describe what all we have been through these many years, so I will simply congratulate you. Good luck, God bless, and thanks! Thanks a lot.

ST. PETER'S MAR THOMA CHURCH, NEW JERSEY

The St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church celebrated its parish day on October 12, 1997. Rev. Kurian George celebrated the Holy Communion service and a public meeting was held afterwards. The vicar Rev. George Abraham welcomed the gathering. Various musical programs were

part of the celebration. Mathew Malayil, Secretary, presented the report and M. K. Thomas, Vice President, conveyed the vote of thanks.

Mathew Malayil, Secretary

ANNUAL COMPETITION— NORTH EAST REGION

Annual Competition for the region was held on October 28, 1997 at St. Thomas MTC. Nine Sunday Schools in the region participated in the competition. Competitions were held for Bible quiz, elocution, Bible reading, singing, storytelling, and group song.

Trophies were distributed at the end with Epiphany MTC winning the championship by securing the maximum points and Long Island MTC second place.

Thomas K. Jose, Secretary (NE Region)



Tessey Jose, Staten Island MTC won first place in elocution



Epiphany MTC won championship

NORTH EAST REGION WORLD SUNDAY SCHOOL DAY CELEBRATIONS

North East Region celebrated World Sunday School Day on November 2, 1997 at the Cathedral House, 50 Cathedral Avenue, Garden City, New York. The celebrations were hosted by St. John's Mar Thoma Church, Queens Village, New York. More than 600 students, teachers and parents attended the rally and

programs. Rev. Tom Philipp, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Merrick was the chief guest and speaker of the occasion. The community was impressed by the orderly march and other festivities of the occasion.

Thomas K. Jose, Secretary (NE Region)



NORTH EAST REGION SUNDAY SCHOOL ONE DAY WORKSHOP

A teacher's training and staff development program was conducted for the Sunday School teachers of North East and South East regions of this diocese on September 27, at St. Andrew's Mar Thoma Church, New York.

Mrs. Carolyn Engelhardt, a church program ministries consultant from Yale University, spoke on the occasion and directed a model class on a Cokesbury lesson for grade 7 and 8. About 60 teachers participated in the workshop.

Thomas K. Jose, Secretary (NE Region)



INDIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS

Special prayers were held in all churches of the diocese. Besides, special meetings and symposiums were held at parish and regional levels. The Mar Thoma parishes also

participated in the meetings and parades held by other organizations and ecumenical movements in their respective regions.



Celebrations held in New York area

Dedication of the New Jersey Mar Thoma Church



The Mar Thoma Church of New Jersey dedicated its newly acquired church building on October 4, 1997 by our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa. The church is located at 790 Route 10 West, Randolph, NJ 07869. The beautiful church building and a parsonage was purchased by the

parish with sixty families after a long period of prayerful waiting. The dedication service and the public meeting were attended by the Most Rev. Mathews Mar Barnabas, Diocesan Metropolitan of the American Diocese, Malankara Orthodox Church, Mayor of Randolph Township, Hon. George Raju, Vice Consul, Indian Consulate, New York, Rev. Oommen Philip, Diocesan Secretary, vicars of sister parishes and a large number of people from various church denominations. Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar

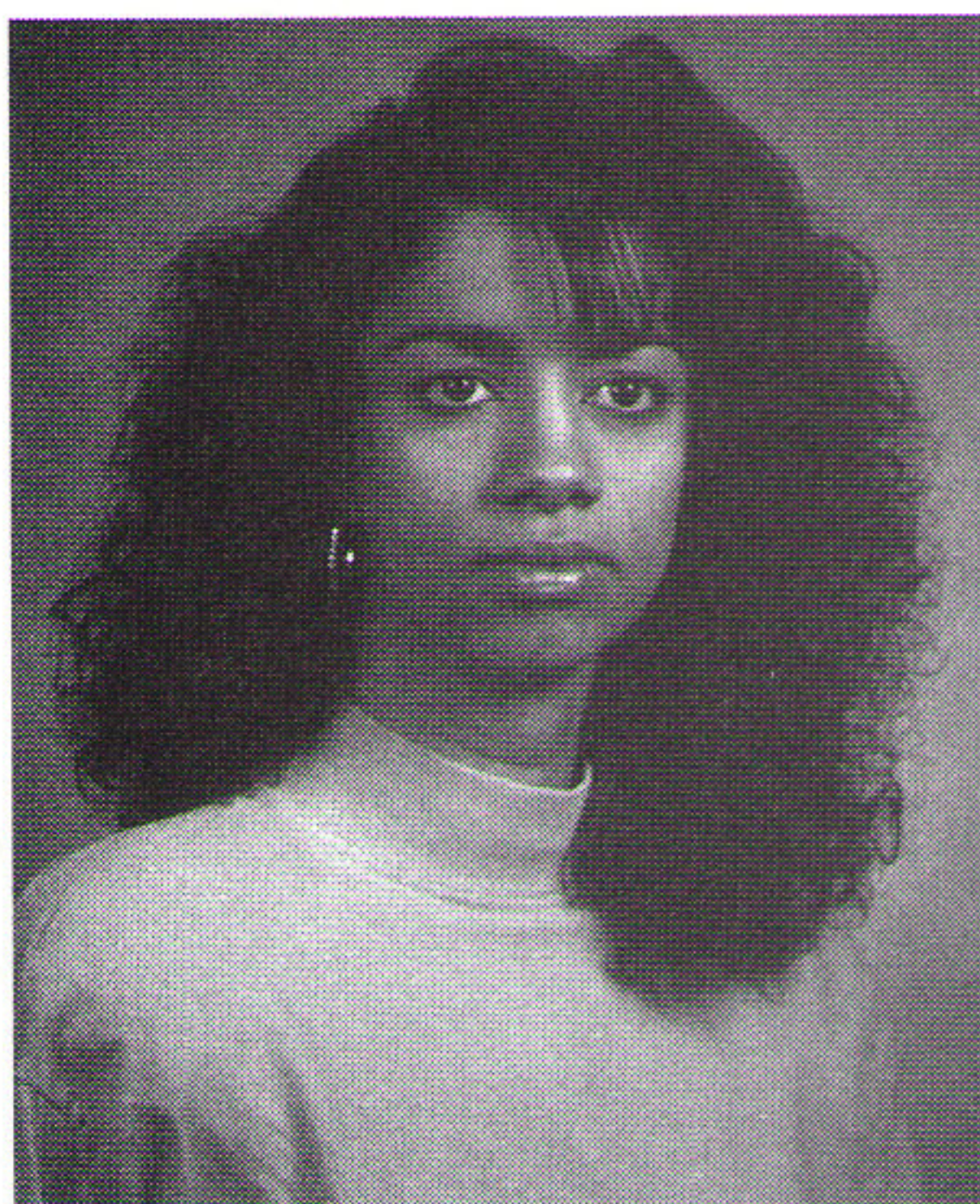


Theophilus Episcopa presided over the meeting that followed. Felicitations were offered by the guests and gifts were presented by our sister parish representatives.

Rev. Samuel Mathai
(Vicar)



ANJU THOMAS HONORED IN RESEARCH



Anju Thomas, who is doing post doctoral research at the Rutgers University was featured in the Star Ledger (New Jersey, Nove. 2, 1997), on her research in advanced biotechnology and medicine. Anju and others in her team are studying apoptosis, the word derived from the Greek phrase describing falling leaves

but grounded in the discovery that all cells carry within them the seeds of their own destruction. This pre-programmed set of instructions for cell suicide is being linked with an ever-expanding set of diseases, from cancer to Alzheimer's. Recent findings elucidating its mechanisms and functions are propelling new labs into the fray every day, making it one of the hottest, most competitive fields of science. Anju is the daughter of Thomas Mattappallil, a member of Staten Island Mar Thoma Parish and the Secretary of the Mar Thoma Literature Society.

JOHN KURIAN NAMED IIT'S STUDENT LAUREATE



John Kurian received the 1997 Lincoln Academy of Illinois Student Laureate Award. This award honors an outstanding senior from each of the four-year degree granting institutions of higher learning in Illinois. Student Laureates are honored for their overall excellence in curricular and co-curricular activities. As a recipient of this award Kurian

will receive a certificate of achievement and the Student Lincoln Academy Medallion. He attended a special

ceremony held on Saturday, November 15, in the House of Representatives of the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois where his award was personally presented by Governor and Mrs. Jim Edgar. Kurian is a senior graduating in May of 1998 majoring in electrical engineering, and is a cadet in the Air Force ROTC program. In addition to his activities on campus, he still finds time to feed the homeless through the Uptown Chicago volunteer program, serve as a Sunday School Teacher at Chicago Mar Thoma Church, and work as a summer counselor for handicapped children. In recognition of his significant academic and co-curricular achievements, Kurian received the prestigious Clinton E. Stryker Distinguished Service Award last spring.

OUR NEW ACHEN

REV. JIJI MATHEWS of Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Pazhavangadi, Ranny, has joined the diocese as the vicar of the Dallas Mar Thoma Church, Grand Prairie and Emmanuel Mar Thoma Church, Lubbock. Achen

studied at the Kottayam Theological Seminary and was ordained in June, 1991. He has served the Kumali (Anakara) and Faridabad parishes. He is accompanied by Bindu Kochamma and daughter Arpita (2 years).

MATRIMONIALS

Marthomite parents invite matrimonial proposal for their daughter, Computer Engineer, B.E. (India), M.S. (USA), widow (7 years old son), 31 years old, 164 cm, fair now working in USA. Professionals from USA/India preferred. Apply with recent photograph to:

P.O. Box 3719
Salmiya-22038
Kuwait
Ph/Fax: (965) 5732351

Marthomite parents invite matrimonial proposal for their son, Computer Science, M.S. (USA), 28 years old, 174 cm, fair, handsome now working in USA. Professionals, Software Engineers from USA preferred. Apply with recent photograph to:

P.O. Box 3719
Salmiya-22038
Kuwait
Ph/Fax: (965) 5732351

CANADIAN MAR THOMA CHURCH, TORONTO

The Silver Jubilee celebrations were held on September 27, 1997 at Thistleton Collegiate Institute in Etobicoke, Ontario. The celebrations were attended by a number of religious and political leaders and members of the area churches. The diocesan bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus celebrated the Holy Communion service and the parish day celebrations that followed the jubilee celebrations.

The Mar Thoma Community started prayer groups in the late sixties and early seventies in the Toronto area. Rev. Abraham Lincoln celebrated Holy Communion service in October 1972. In 1978 the Toronto worshipping group was recognized as a congregation and in 1980 the congregation was elevated to the status of a parish.

In 1983 a unity agreement was reached with the Anglican Church of Canada. In the same year the Toronto Parish hosted the First Mar Thoma Family Conference. The parish was incorporated as a non-profit, charitable religious organization in October 1983.

From 1972 to 1985, worship services were held at the Trinity Chapel of the University of Toronto. From February 1985 to July 1987, services were held at Etienne-Brule Secondary School in North York. In 1987 the parish bought the present church building and the dedication service was held on July 25, 1987. The parish also bought a parsonage close to the church in 1989.

The parish hosted the Mar Thoma Family conference a second time in 1997. The parish currently has over 170 families.

Philip Parathundyil, Diocesan Assembly Memebr.

OBITUARY



ANNAMMA MATHEN

Mrs. Annamma Mathen (Bharanikavoo), passed away on June 28, 1997 in New Milford, New Jersey. Her body was flown to India for final burial. She leaves behind her two sons, Wilson and Philip, and daughter, Aniamma. She was an active member of the St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church,

New Jersey. We express our deepfelt condolence to the bereaved family.



RAJU P. MAMMEN

Mr. Raju P. Mammen, 62 years old (Puthenveetil Malayil, Kumband) passed away on November 1, 1997 after a prolonged illness. He was a member of the Philadelphia Mar Thoma church. He is survived by his wife Peggy Mammen, daughters Rachel and

Lizabeth and son Mammen. We express our deepfelt condolence to the bereaved family.

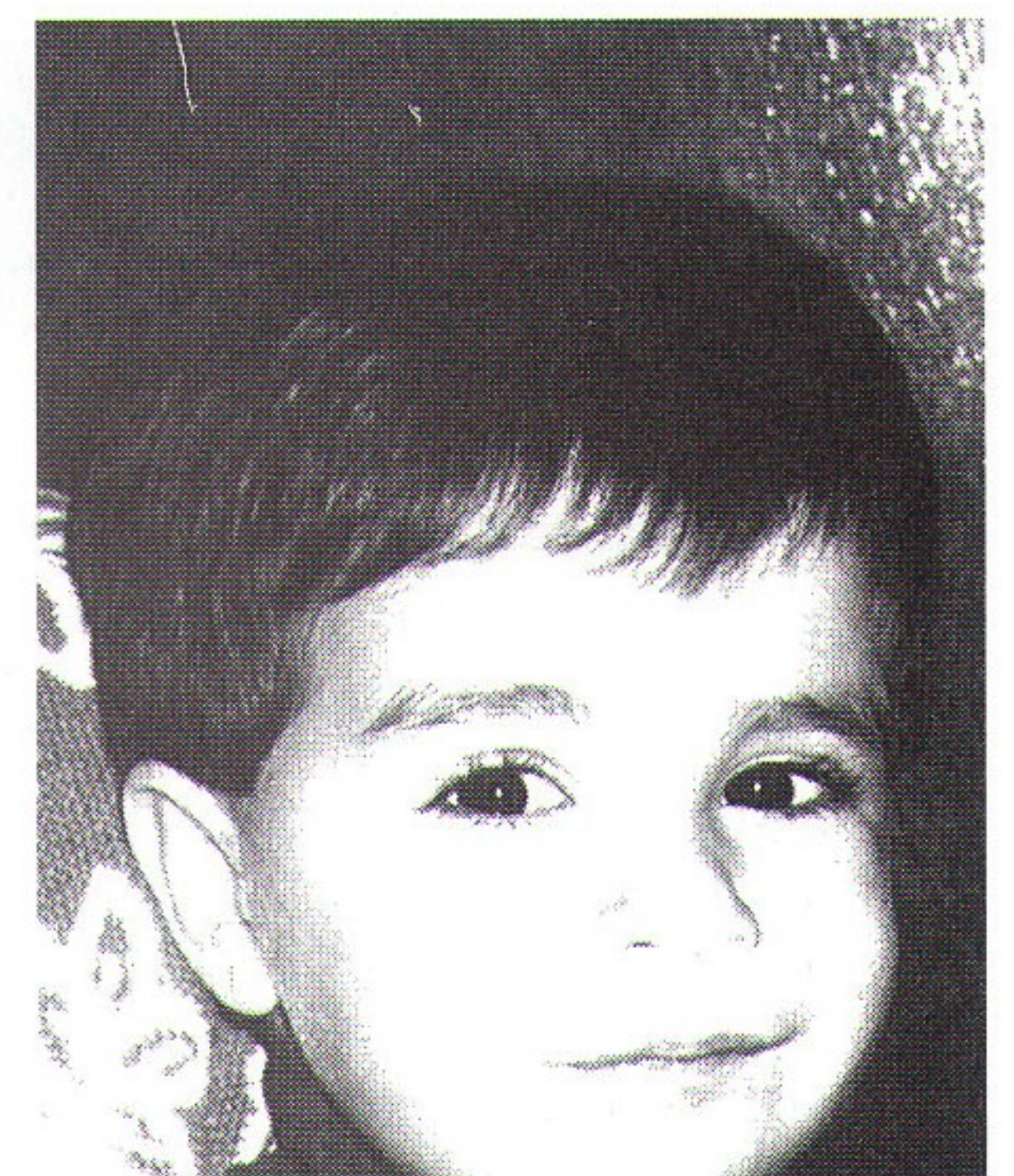
OOMMEN CHERIAN

Mr. Oommen Cherian, 52 years old (Manalethu, Panachamootil/Chengannur), passed away on September 22, 1997 of a heart attack. He was a very active member of the Rochester Mar Thoma Church, serving as accountant at the time of his demise. He is survived by his wife Rachel (Neduvellil/Maramon), daughter Anu and Son Anil. We express our deepfelt condolence to the bereaved family.



SAMUEL V. KURIAN

Master Samuel V. Kurian, 2½ years old son of P. K. Kurian (Bindu) and Julie Kurian of Portland, Oregon, passed away on July 16, 1997 after being infected with a strain of E-coli bacteria. Sammy is survived by his parents, 4 year old sister Elena and one year old brother Jacob. Mr. Kurian is a member of the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Thodupuzha. We express our deepfelt condolence to the bereaved family.



Charitable Remainder Trusts

Reprinted with permission from *The CPA Journal* September 1996 Issue.

Any questions please consult your Accountant/Tax Advisor or Kuruvilla Cherian, CPA, Diocesan Treasurer

By Bart L. Fooden

A charitable remainder trust can accomplish several purposes. While the trust principal eventually goes to charity, its use can result in considerable savings in income, gift, and estate taxes.

The charitable remainder trust (CRT) is a very effective technique not only for satisfying an individual's charitable inclinations but also for providing a mechanism for the transfer of property from one generation to the next without incurring any gift or estate tax liability. The grantor of the CRT may also continue to receive payments from the trust after the property is transferred to the trust for a designated period, or a term covering an individual's lifetime, either the grantor's lifetime or the grantor's and the lifetime of any other designated individuals.

The most effective use of the CRT is to transfer highly appreciated long-term-capital-gain property to it, since the trust will

Advantages and Disadvantages

The principal advantages of a CRT are as follows:

- An income tax charitable deduction in the year in which the trust is funded.
- Avoidance of capital gains tax on the sale of appreciated property after it is transferred to the trust.
- No gift or estate tax is incurred on the value of the property either when the property is transferred to the trust or on the death of the grantor.
- An income interest may be retained and the grantor and others may receive periodic payments for the duration of the trust.

The principal drawback of establishing a CRT is that the grantor gives up control of the property. The grantor has virtually no right to alter the provisions of the trust or to determine the fate of the property transferred to the trust.

How the CRT Works

An individual creates a trust for the ben-

eficiaries designated in the original trust agreement. A charitable deduction for income tax purposes is allowed to the grantor for the present value of the remainder interest in the trust when the CRT is funded. The trust is not subject to tax on its income. However, the non-charitable beneficiaries will be subject to income tax on any money or property distributed to them. When the last surviving income beneficiary dies, or the trust term expires, the property is transferred to the charity pursuant to the terms of the trust.

Types of CRTs

There are two types of CRT: the charitable remainder annuity trust (CRAT) and the charitable remainder unitrust (CRUT). Depending on the individual's needs and goals, either type of CRT might be appropriate.

A GRAT provides for payments of a fixed amount to the noncharitable beneficiary at least annually during the trust term. The annual fixed payment amount may not be less than five percent of the initial fair market value of the trust principal.

A GRUT results in payments to the noncharitable income beneficiary at a fixed percentage of the annual fair market value of the trust property not lower than five percent. The trust property, therefore, must be revalued at the beginning of each year in which the trust is in existence to determine the amount of the payment to which the noncharitable beneficiary is entitled.

Payments. The CRAT provides for a fixed payment. The grantor will always know what the income from the trust will be regardless of what the trust income actually is or of any changes in the value of the trust principal. The CRUT provides for a payment based on the value of the trust property and may

The most effective use of the CRT is to transfer highly appreciated long-term-capital-gain property to it.

not be subject to income tax on the capital gain if the property is sold. In addition to avoiding gift and estate taxes on the property transferred to the trust, no income tax is incurred on the appreciation of the property in the hands of the donor or after it is transferred to the trust. Additionally, these tax avoidance techniques may be accomplished without decreasing the amount of property eventually left to the heirs of the grantor of the CRT.

efit of a public charity, which is an organization qualified under IRC Sec. 501(c)(3). There is no estate or gift tax liability incurred when the trust is created and property is transferred by the grantor to the trust. The grantor retains an income interest in the trust and may continue to receive payments from the trust for a specified term of not more than 20 years or for the grantor's lifetime and the lifetimes of any successor bene-

increase or decrease from year to year.

Subsequent Contributions. Once the CRAT is created and funded, no additional contributions may be made to the trust by the grantor. However, in a CRUT, additional contributions to the trust may be made if provided for in the trust agreement.

Pooled income funds are normally administered by the charitable organizations themselves and are likely to be more restrictive than CRATs or CRUTs.

Timing of Payments. The CRAT trustee must pay to the noncharitable beneficiary the annuity payment each year the trust is in existence. With a CRUT, payments to the noncharitable beneficiary may be deferred under an income exception provision. This presents tax and financial planning opportunities as explained further below.

Risk. The CRAT does not provide for any protection against inflation during the term of the trust since the payment is fixed in the initial year and does not change. However, there is no market risk assumed by the noncharitable CRAT beneficiary either. If the value of the trust property declines, the noncharitable beneficiary still receives the full annuity. The market risk is assumed by the charitable remainder beneficiary. On the other hand, the CRUT provides some measure of protection against inflation risk during the term of the trust, provided the value of the trust property increases at the rate of inflation. The noncharitable beneficiary does however, assume some measure of market risk under a CRUT scenario, since the annual payments are based upon an annual valuation of the trust property and any

decline in the value of the trust property, temporary or otherwise, will result in a decrease in the unitrust payments.

Factors to Consider. Whether a grantor should choose a unitrust or an annuity trust is a decision that should be arrived at after careful consideration of all the factors involved and evaluation of the

grantor's goals by the grantor and financial advisor.

Generally, the longer the expected term of the trust, based on the life expectancies of the noncharitable beneficiaries, the greater the advantages of the unitrust due to the ongoing inflation risk associated with the CRAT. However, a conservative client may wish to ignore such risk for the guarantee of a fixed payment amount.

If hard-to-value property, such as real estate, artwork, or nonpublicly traded

securities, is used to fund the trust, or will be held by the trust during its term, the CRAT might be preferable to the CRUT since the property held in the CRUT must be revalued each year.

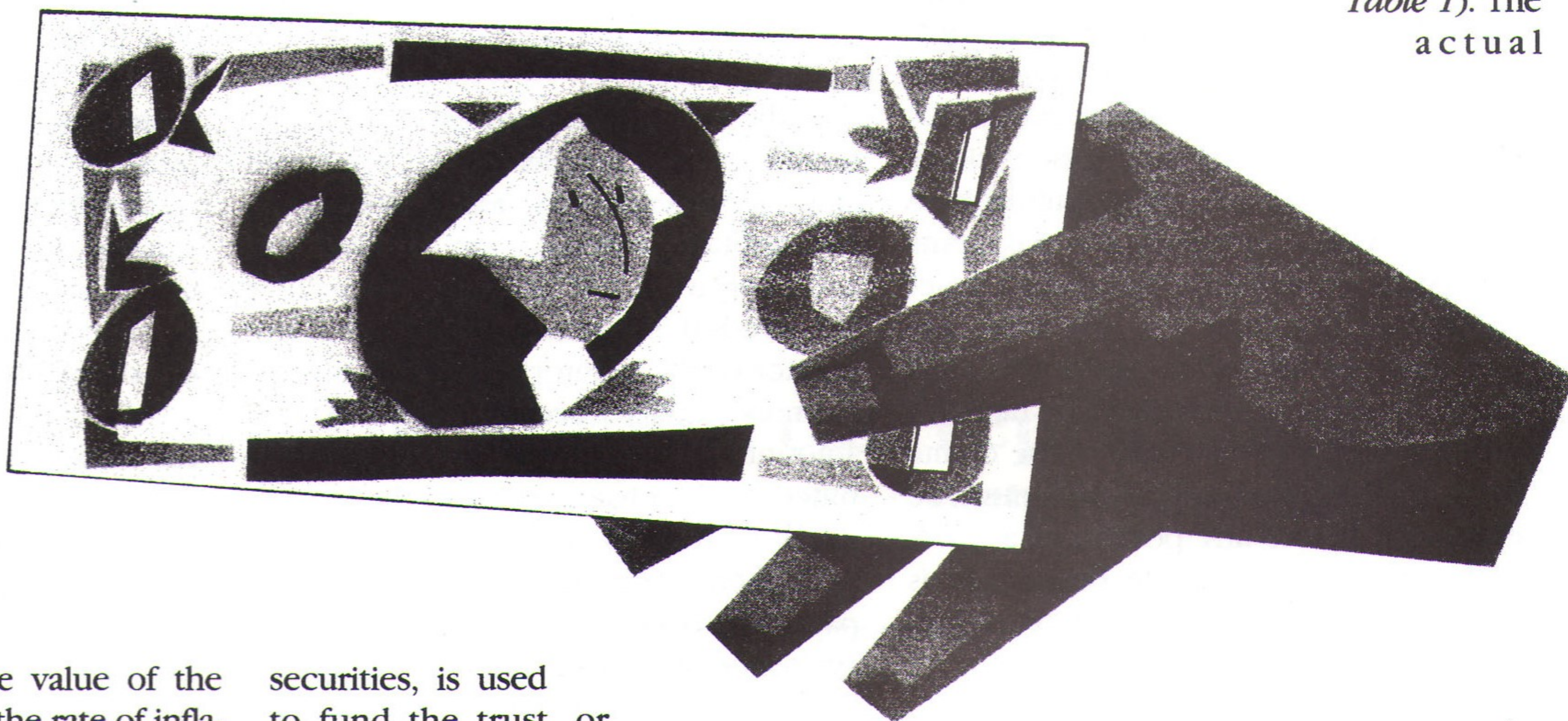
Pooled Income Fund. Another type of CRT is a pooled income fund, in which a group of individuals pool their contributions in a common trust and each receives a fixed percentage of the trust's net income for a predetermined period. Pooled income funds are normally established and administered by the charitable organizations themselves and are likely to be more restrictive than CRATs or CRUTs. For example, a pooled income fund established by a charitable organization may accept only contributions of cash and certain securities. In addition, the power the grantor may have to change the charitable remainder beneficiary under a CRAT or CRUT is forfeited.

Since different rules apply to pooled income funds and to CRATs and CRUTs and since not all the planning opportunities available to grantors of CRATs and CRUTs may be available to contributors to pooled income funds, the remainder of this discussion will focus on CRUTs and CRATs.

The Charitable Deduction

As previously mentioned, the grantor of the CRT is allowed a charitable deduction for income tax purposes in the year in which the trust is funded. The amount of the deduction is the present value of the remainder interest in the trust (see Table 1). The actual

amount of the deduction is dependent on the term of the trust, the amount of the annuity payout or percentage of unitrust payout, the applicable Federal interest rate (AFR)



in effect at the time the trust is funded, and the type of property contributed to the charity via the trust. If non-cash property is contributed to the trust, the deduction is limited to 30% of adjusted gross income in the year of contribution.

As the trust term may continue for a long time if it covers one or more person's lifetimes, the initial deduction for the present value of the remainder interest may be quite small. Considering the reduced value of the contribution, the charitable deduction for property gifted to a CRT is not the primary motivation for entering into such a transaction.

Income Taxation

The CRT is a tax-exempt entity under IRC Sec. 664(c). The distributed net income of the trust is taxable to the grantor or to such person designated by the grantor to be the noncharitable income beneficiary of the trust. Capital gains, which are allocable to the trust corpus, are not subject to income tax at the trust level. This includes the appreciation on property contributed to the trust, even if such appreciation occurred prior to the transfer of the property to the trust. The special tax on a transfer of an appreciated asset to a trust that is sold within two years (IRC Sec. 663) will not apply to a CRT. Even if the unitrust or annuity payment exceeds the net income of the trust, the invasion of principal to pay the required amount to the noncharitable beneficiary will not have any adverse tax consequences. However, a distribution by a trust in a year in which the payments exceed the cumulative undistributed net income of the trust and the trust has cumulative undistributed capital gains, will cause a portion of the gain to be taxed to the noncharitable beneficiary. The cumulative undistributed capital gain must be exhausted before any portion of a distribution to a noncharitable beneficiary is considered a return of principal or corpus.

Estate and Gift Taxes

As stated earlier, there is no estate or gift tax due on the value of property transferred to the trust or on the value of the property in the trust on the grantor's death subsequent to the creation of an *inter vivos* trust. This is due to the fact

TABLE 1
CHARITABLE DEDUCTION FOR REMAINDER INTEREST
IN CHARITABLE REMAINDER TRUST

Assume a 60-year-old individual transfers long-term-capital-gain property worth \$1,000,000 to a charitable remainder trust. Assuming that the grantor retains the right to receive an annuity of \$80,000 each year or a unitrust payout of 8%, the charitable deduction for income tax purposes is computed as follows:

	Charitable Remainder Annuity Trust		Charitable Remainder Unit Trust
Fair market value of property transferred to trust	\$1,000,000		\$1,000,000
Present value of annuity based on AFR of 6.4%. \$80,000 annuity times factor from Table S (10.1962)	<u>815,696</u>	Remainder value of interest in charitable remainder trust for single life payout at 8% starting at age 60 from IRS Table U-1	<u>x .2615</u>
Present value of remainder interest	<u>\$ 184,304</u>		<u>\$ 261,590</u>

The CRUT computation normally involves computation of an adjusted payout rate based upon the time between the valuation date and the date of the initial payment and the frequency of payments to the noncharitable beneficiaries. For purposes of this example, it is assumed the initial payment is made within one month of the valuation date and payments are made annually thereafter.

that the corpus of the trust is held primarily for the benefit of the charitable remainder beneficiary, and therefore no transfer tax is incurred on the value of such corpus. A gift or estate tax will be incurred if someone other than the grantor or the grantor's wife is named as the noncharitable income beneficiary. The amount of the taxable transfer is computed on the present value of the income interest given to such individual at the time such person's right to receive the payments becomes fixed. However, the avoidance of virtually all estate and gift tax liability on the value of the property transferred to a CRT is one of the principal advantages of creating such a trust.

Payments

Payments must be made at least annually. There is no limitation on the maxi-

imum percentage that may be returned by the trust to the noncharitable beneficiaries. The payment may exceed the net income of the trust, so that a portion of the principal can be distributed annually to the noncharitable beneficiary. This will not disqualify the trust from qualifying as a CRT under IRC Sec. 664 or affect the tax advantages realized by the grantor of the trust. However, as previously mentioned, if the trust has undistributed capital gains, a portion of the gain may be taxed to the noncharitable beneficiary. Therefore, if one of the principal objectives of using a CRT is the avoidance of capital gain on appreciated property, this benefit will be reduced or nullified if the payout rate to the noncharitable beneficiary is too high.

One of the primary benefits of the CRT, as compared to other types of trusts with-

TABLE 2
COMPARISON OF OUTRIGHT GIFT OR BEQUEST TO
CHARITABLE REMAINDER TRUST TRANSFER WITH LIFE INSURANCE REPLACEMENT

Assuming an individual leaves appreciated property to a child and the marginal combined Federal and state transfer tax rate on the individual's estate is 50%, the child will only end up with \$500,000 of property after payment of estate tax.

Value of property bequeathed to child	\$1,000,000
Estate tax at 50%	<u>500,000</u>
Value of property inherited by child	<u>\$ 500,000</u>

If the property is gifted to the child, the tax effect is greater since the child could incur a capital gain if the property is sold. There is no step-up in basis on property gifted.

Assume that the individual transfers the property to a CRAT, which pays an \$80,000 annual annuity to the grantor for his lifetime. The grantor is entitled to a charitable deduction for income tax purposes of \$184,304 (see Table 1) in the year in which the property is transferred, receives an annuity of \$80,000 per year for his lifetime, part of which can be used to fund a \$1,000,000 life insurance policy (held in an irrevocable trust), and upon his death, his child receives \$1,000,000 in cash without any estate taxes incurred on the property in either the charitable remainder trust or the irrevocable life insurance trust. The designated charity will receive the property remaining in the charitable remainder trust.

as compared to other types of trusts without a qualified charitable remainder beneficiary, is that the grantor can reserve the right to receive payments from the trust for life. In noncharitable trusts such as grantor retained income trusts (GRITs), grantor retained annuity trusts (GRATs), and grantor retained unitrusts (GRUTs), the period for which the payments may be reserved by the grantor must be for a term determined without reference to the grantor's lifetime. If it is, the trust principal will be includable in the grantor's estate. Additionally, if the grantor dies before the retained interest expires, some portion of the trust corpus is includable in the grantor's estate. Therefore, the CRT is the only vehicle that guarantees no portion of the trust corpus is includable in the grantor's estate and the grantor will not outlive the retained interest.

There are certain techniques that may be used in connection with the payment of distributions to beneficiaries of CRUTs. The trust may limit the annual payment to the net income of the trust if it is less than the unitrust fixed percentage amount. Additionally, the trust can provide that any amounts not paid due to the income exception provision can be paid in later years when net income exceeds the fixed percentage payment (a makeup provision).

Strategies for Maximizing Benefits

Life Insurance. At the beginning, it was noted that one of the primary benefits of the CRT was the ability to transfer property from one generation to the next without payment of estate tax. However, when the trust term ends, the principal of the trust is distributed to the designated charitable organization. The grantor can replace the value of the asset transferred to the trust by using a portion of the trust payments or the initial income tax savings from the charitable deduction to purchase life insurance. If the life insurance is owned by

The grantor can replace the value of the asset using a portion of the trust payments to purchase life insurance.

an irrevocable trust or by the child of the insured, the life insurance proceeds will not be subject to estate tax on the death of the insured. If the CRT provides for payments to the grantor and another individual for their lifetimes, second-to-

die life insurance, with lower premiums, could be utilized to replace the asset on the second death. If a highly appreciated asset is used to fund the CRT and life insurance is used to replace the asset, the heirs of the donor may come out better than if no gift to charity were made, due to the combined income and estate tax savings (Table 2).

Alternative to Qualified Retirement Plans. Small business owners are often averse to setting up and using qualified plans because the nondiscrimination rules require such plans cover other employees as well as the business owner. In addition, the recordkeeping and reporting requirements for qualified plans can be overly burdensome. If an individual has a qualified plan funded to the extent that distributions (or accumulations at death) may be subject to the 15% excess distributions (accumulations) excise tax, or has a defined benefit plan which is fully funded or overfunded, additional contributions to the qualified plans may not be advisable or possible. In these situations, the CRT can be used as a nonqualified plan alternative.

The business owner can use the CRT as a nonqualified plan by transferring cash or other property to the trust and receiving annuity payments in return. If the donor to a CRUT wishes to defer receiving any payments from the trust until a later time, such as when he or she actually retires, this can be done by using the income exception provision (described earlier) in the trust agreement and having the trust hold only non-income producing assets. At the time the donor wishes to commence

receiving payments, the non-income providing assets in the trust can be converted to income producing assets with no income tax ramifications if the non-income providing assets have appreciated.

The trust agreement may also contain a makeup provision so that the noncharitable beneficiary can receive unitrust payments for years in which there was no income if trust income exceeds the amount payable under the fixed percentage. This enables the income beneficiary to defer the receipt and recognition of income until such time as he or she may be in a lower marginal tax bracket.

Converting the Yield. An individual

should be used to shelter the gain on very highly appreciated assets for maximum benefit. If the trust is a unitrust, the income exception provision may be utilized to ensure that no portion of the capital gain realized by the trust is attributed back and taxed to the noncharitable beneficiary.

Investing in Tax-Free Securities. The trustee may invest the trust assets in tax-exempt securities to produce tax-

income, the trust is not exempt from tax for that year and all income, including capital gains, will be subject to tax. For this reason, mortgaged property is not recommended to be used as a contribution to the trust. Under certain circumstances, the holding of mortgaged property will cause the trust to have debt financed income, which constitutes unrelated business taxable income, and the trust will lose its tax exemption. In addition, if the amount of the mortgage exceeds the donor's basis in the property, the donor will recognize a gain on the transfer of the mortgaged property to the trust. Finally, under certain conditions, the assumption of the mortgage by the trust may be considered an act of self dealing under the private foundation rules to which the CRT is subject and trigger an excise tax on the prohibited transaction under IRC Sec. 4941.

If property other than long-term-capital-gain property is gifted to the trust, the initial charitable deduction may be limited to the present value of the donor's basis rather than the fair market value. Also, the donor should be aware of the limitations on gifts of taxable personal property and gifts of future interests in property to charity.

The IRS has indicated in Notice 94-78 that it will not recognize a CRT in which a donor contributes appreciated property to a trust that sells the property and returns a substantial amount of cash to the grantor without the recognition of capital gain. In the situation described in the IRS notice, 80% of the value of the principal of the trust was returned to the grantor in the first year, prior to the realization of the capital gain on the property in the second year. Where a CRT is used for tax evasion for the benefit of the individual who created it, such transactions will be subject to IRS scrutiny and potential disqualification of the trust. □

Bart L. Fooden, CPA, CFP, is a partner in the New York City firm of *Bard & Glassman* and a member of the board of directors and chairman of the *Planned Giving Committee for the Make-a-Wish Foundation of Metro New York, Inc.*

Mortgaged property is not recommended to be used as a contribution to the trust.

whose financial goal is to maximize current income may hold appreciated property (such as real property, growth stocks, artwork, and other collectibles) that yields no income or a very low rate of return. If the owner were to sell this property to reinvest in higher income producing assets, the value of the property would be reduced by the income taxes due on the appreciation, thereby reducing the potential income. As an alternative, the individual could create a CRT and transfer the appreciated low yielding property to the trust. The trust could sell the property and reinvest in higher yielding assets at no tax cost, paying the net income to the donor. This technique enables the individual to realize a higher current income, since the value of the principal assets are not reduced by income taxes.

Transferring Highly Appreciated Assets to Family Members. The CRT is the only vehicle in which the full value of appreciated property can be transferred from one generation to the next without paying any gift, estate, or income tax on capital gains. If property is transferred by gift or by using another type of grantor retained trust, estate and gift taxes may be avoided, but the remainder beneficiary will assume the donor's cost basis. If the recipient thereafter sells the property, a tax on the capital gain will be due. Therefore, the CRT

free annuity or unitrust payments. However, if the trust has undistributed ordinary income or capital gains, these will be deemed to be distributed in full prior to the distribution of any tax-exempt income under the distribution rules of IRC Sec. 664(b).

Other Considerations

There are several mandatory provisions of the Internal Revenue Code and regulations pertaining to the creation and operation of CRTs. There are also several restrictions that apply to these types of trusts.

The grantor should choose an independent trustee for the CRT. Although many of the acts engaged in by the trustee are purely ministerial as provided by the trust agreement, there may be some power the trustee may hold that would potentially cause the grantor to be the owner of the trust if he or she were trustee.

The grantor may reserve the right to change the charitable remainder beneficiary (but not any noncharitable beneficiaries) to another qualified charity at any time during the term of the trust.

IRC Sec. 664 exempts CRTs from income tax, unless the trust has unrelated business taxable income within the meaning of IRC Sec. 512. If the trust does have unrelated business taxable

Answers to your questions

Rev. Kurien George

We had promised in the earlier issue that we would answer questions you have raised to enable you to understand the faith and practices of the church, as also to help you to face issues which affect you. In this issue we are answering the question relating to baptism. The question which you asked was: Why does our church practice child baptism?

Baptism is a Dominical Sacrament i.e. instituted by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All churches agree on this, however the issue which has created division and pain is the understanding regarding baptism and its practice. To ensure that we understand the teaching of the scriptures and of our Lord in the proper context we need to follow a systematic process of study. As we do so we will understand the sacrament of baptism. We will also journey through a methodology of study which will help us to grow in faith and understanding.

A study of baptism in the Jewish religion and also the use of water in purificatory rites of other religions:

Jesus taught in a Jewish environment, though Greek and Roman culture had an impact on Jewish life. The same applies to John the Baptist. John the Baptist as well as our Lord used language and symbols which the Jews could understand. Therefore, it is essential to have a knowledge of the practices and customs prevalent in their time. Also, one of the aspects of baptism involves water. Water has a significant role to play in the sacrament of baptism. Therefore, it becomes necessary for us to study the usage of water in Jewish religious life. **It would however be very parochial and misconcieved if we limit the understanding regarding baptism to immersion in water. Jesus understood baptism in a deeper sense and as church we have this understanding when we practice 'infant baptism'.** In the limited sense however, water had a great role to play in all the major religions of the world.

A look at some of the other religions of the world gives us the following:

In India, the Hindus believe that being immersed in some of the holy rivers like Ganges, brings cleansing from sins.

In Egypt, the cult of Isis—Nile water was carried to distant places as Rome for lustral rites. Nile water was considered as good for cleansing of sins.

The Greeks and the Romans bathed their newborn child and named him/her to recognize the child as the father's own. In Greek religion water was considered a living force. Therefore, it was used in their rites.

Some tribes practice baptism with blood or with saliva as an initiation of the child into the tribe.

A Hindu will not enter the temple unless he/she has bathed.

The Islamic religious regulation requires that before entering the mosque for prayer a person should wash himself.

Some Jewish practices:

The Jewish religion had regulations regarding people who joined the faith. Following circumcision a converted gentile immersed himself in water as cleansing from the contamination of idolatry, while two Jews stood outside the curtained enclosure and recited passages from the Torah. A Jewish religious sect known as the Essenes had elaborate purificatory rites one of which was baptism, i.e. immersion in water for remission of sins, or a rebirth into a new life. They called their Messiah the "Teacher of Righteousness" and their religious community the "New Covenant". Members of the New Covenant were initiated through baptism.

The significance of water in the Old Testament:

Text	Remarks
Gen. 1:1-2	The spirit of God hovered over the waters.
Gen. 2:5-6, Gen. 2:10-14	A steam of water watered the whole face of the ground. Vs 5 indicates that water was considered essential for life. Vs 10-14 speaks of four rivers flowing out of Eden to water the garden.
Gen. 6:9	Water becomes a means of destruction of life.
Exod. 29:4, Exod. 40:12	Before the High Priest put on the holy vestments and entered the sanctuary he was to be washed with water.
Deutro. 21:4-9	Water was used for purging blood guilt from among the people
Lev. 15:1-33	Water is used for ritual cleansing for bodily discharges
Jer. 2:22, 17:13 Eze. 36:25 Isa. 12:3, 44:3, Isa. 55:11 Zech. 14:8	As the religion of Israel progressed from a clannish to a universal one, their relationship with God became more personal and intimate. This brought in greater symbolisation depicting the spiritual cleansing as opposed to ritual cleansing.

Thus we see that immersion in water, cleansing—ritual or spiritual had a basis in the time, prior to our Lord. He used the deep symbolism for a greater purpose. A reading of the above aspects and studying the Gospel will indicate to us that when Jesus taught about baptism and Himself accepted it, he had a greater purpose. He did not merely want it to be a ritual which had to be followed. 'Baptism' for Him and what He wanted it to be for us was much more.

In our next issue we will cover the New Testament understanding of baptism.

Editorial

Repentance may mean only regret or remorse over a past thought or action or, in its fullest sense, may mean a complete change in a person's attitude, will, and behavior, sometimes accompanied by feelings of sorrow and regret for past transgressions and also some form of restitution. The establishment and maintenance of a good relationship with God is central to religion, and repentance is a ritual procedure that exists to repair a breach in the relationship with God. It is an approved means of eliminating excessive guilt from past transgressions in thoughts, words, or deeds. The primary characteristic of repentance is the confession of sin, the verbalization of wrongs committed and the acceptance of its blame for consequences.

In many religions, illness and misfortune are attributed to transgressions. The ancient Egyptian religion is an exception. There is a script for recital by the deceased person on entering the hall of Judgement. The script is the very opposite of confession, a declaration of innocence using a list of crimes and transgressions not committed. It is evident that they are conscious of their sin, but they lack repentance.

Traditional Islamic view is that God is compassionate and merciful and sinners can always repent, be converted to the truth and do good deeds. They are cleansed from sin and restored to their original sinless state. There are factions who believe that repentance is the beginning and a spiritual guide assigns a regimen of practices for them to follow. They also recognize three degrees of repentance (turning to God); motivated by fear, motivated by reward and motivated by love for obedience. Yet another faction emphasizes three elements of repentance; restitution, the importance of not repeating the offence, and continuing remorse. For the most part, formal repentance is absent.

For Judaism, the Bible deals extensively with guilt incurred by conscious and deliberate sin and the Israelites feared the possibility of committing unconscious sin. The prophets addressed Israel as a whole and individually and demanded repentance and called them back to an earlier, better relationship with God. Based on their calling, ancient Judaism practiced rituals and sacrificial offerings. Rituals such as fasting, dressing in sackcloth, sitting in ashes etc. were characteristic expressions of repentance. Although such rituals were expected to be a permanent break with sin, it was often practiced as an escape from past actions. In modern Judaism, Rosh ha-Shanah and a week of repentance is a period of communal confession of sins. On Yom Kippur sins are confessed through prayers recited privately and publicly.

In the New Testament, the call for repentance came from John the Baptist. He called Israel for repentance because of the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God. Jesus proclaimed the same call for repentance. The New Testament calls for the abandonment of the old and the conversion to a new faith, or restoration within the new faith by confession and rejection of sins.

Throughout history, mankind has always been on call for repentance and this continues to be relevant today. 'Can't recollect' and 'don't really mean it' are some of the commonplace confessions of the time to avoid external sanctions like fear of shame, and punishment. We often compromise our conscience or the inherent inner values. Jesus gave us a concise version of commandments; love the Lord and love the neighbor; but we often fail to know the Lord and the neighbor. We are completing twenty years since we started our service in the US and we, in fact, are yet to know our 'neighbor'. Now that we are a member communion of NCC, it has magnified relevance. Our transgressions are to the God, to our 'neighbor' and to our self and that calls for our repentance to God, 'neighbor' and self.

Repentance calls for renewal, a deliberate redirection for the future. A permanent renewal removes the guilt and the painful feelings and restores inner value-structure of the individual conscious. Corollary to repentance and renewal is rejoicing, the state of harmony derived from the removal of guilt and painful feelings.

We have selected "Repent, Renew and Rejoice" as our jubilee theme. As we celebrate the Silver Jubilee, let us examine ourselves and repent to our self, to God, and to our neighbor; renew our self, and our relationship with God and our 'neighbor'; and rejoice in our self, in God and with our 'neighbor'.

Wish you all a very blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Abraham Thomas

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