



MAR THOMA MESSENGER

A PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

JULY 2001



XIX MAR THOMA FAMILY CONFERENCE - 2001

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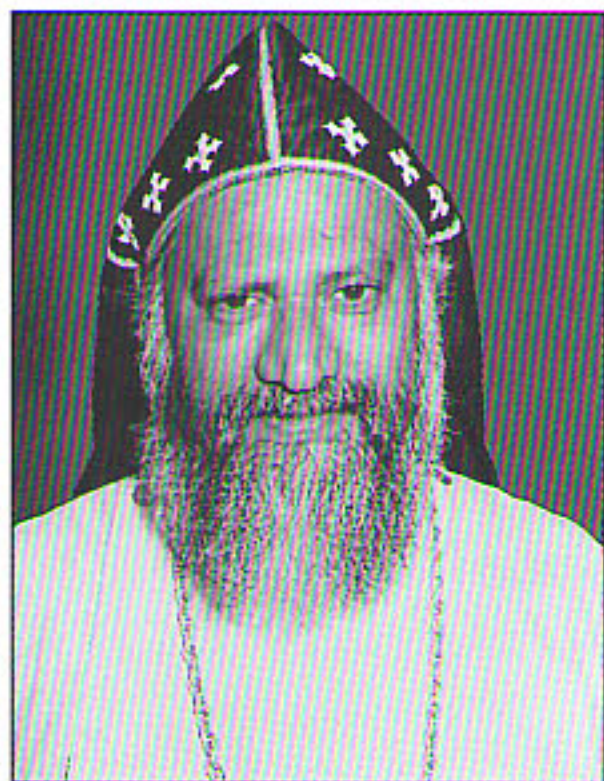
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Cover: XIX Mar Thoma Family Conference-2001

Message from the Diocesan Bishop



Dearly beloved in Christ,

All of us are very happy that our former Diocesan Bishop and the present Metropolitan Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom visited a number of parishes in this Diocese. Thirumeni's presence and messages in various conferences were encouraging and enriching. We wish Thirumeni had visited all the parishes. The words of Dr. Eileen Lindner, the Deputy General Secretary of National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA "It is a rare and wonderful privilege to be in the intimate presence of a man so wise, so humble, and so inspiring as your Metropolitan. The mental image of his commanding presence, twinkling eyes and profoundly simple words is something that will stay with us always," expresses the high regard of Ecumenical leaders of USA who met Thirumeni.

The next Mandalam, which is going to meet at Tiruvalla during the month end of August is very crucial as the topic of having two new Episcopas in the church, is included in the agenda. I urge all to pray to God to give the Mandalam wisdom and discernment to make right and relevant decisions.

The dedication of new church buildings in Boston and Atlanta, formation of a new parish in Toronto and a congregation in Columbia, as well as the purchase of a coveted plot for a new church in Chicago shows fruits of united and committed efforts of our people and marks steady growth. The vicar and members need to be congratulated for their vision and concerted efforts in the midst of divisive forces.

I was very glad to participate in the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the Mar Thoma Church in Dallas, Farmers Branch, along with the Metropolitan. The Los Angeles Parish is making elaborate arrangements to celebrate its jubilee by hosting the Diocesan Council in Los Angeles. Twenty-five years of service and sacrifice has led the church to enormous growth and we need to be grateful to God for His manifold blessings on the pioneers as well as successive generations.

The Diocesan Assembly has made a wise and timely decision in dividing the Diocese into three zones for effective and meaningful functioning. The Metropolitan inaugurated the Western zone on the 14th July at Dallas. The European zone comprising of UK, Germany and Switzerland will be inaugurated on 9th September at Geneva, and the Eastern zone will be inaugurated on the 22nd of September at New York. The zonal system will strengthen the cohesiveness of regional unity and enhance the outreach activities most effectively with the participation of more people. As we enter into a new phase of expansion and mission, a zonal system is inevitable.

I am very happy to welcome the new achen who have taken responsibilities at various parishes. I believe that the presence of their families will add a blessed dimension to their ministry. Rev. Dr. John Joseph has already started functioning as the Bishop's Secretary and Diocesan Secretary. He is staying with his family at the Sinai Mar Thoma Center. Achen and family need special prayers and support for their manifold ministry. I deeply regret to inform the hospitalization of Rev. P.K. Zachariah, vicar of Bethel Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia due to a major accident. Though the operation was successful and treatment is continuing, he has not yet regained mobility. He is very strong in his faith; his family is bearing the stress very well and the parishioners are persisting in prayer. I urge all our members to pray earnestly and continually for the complete healing of our dear achen. I believe God will make him a moving witness for His mighty Power and Glory.

Summer is the season of conferences in this Diocese. Conference for the Family, Junior and Senior Sunday School students, Youth Fellowship and Yuvajanasakhyam, Physicians & Dentists, etc., are very valuable in consolidating the believers and confirming their faith in God and His people. The Philadelphia Mar Thoma Church deserves appreciation for the excellent manner in which they conducted the 19th Family Conference. The theme for the Family Conference "Call the Wind—can these dry bones live" was a very timely topic for meditation, study and thinking. When we find dryness all around in the families, churches and communities, we naturally ask, "Can these structures live again?" In the heap of dry bones, unity, sensitivity, and mobility are lost. When flesh, blood, breath, etc., flow in, the bones rise up as a human community. They regain unity, sensitivity, and mobility. Humanity badly needs these qualities that make people human beings. The Bible teaches us that only the very breath of God that gave life, can give new life to the dry bones. We need to call upon God to send the power of the Holy Spirit to renew every human being and all structures of the world that we may have a mighty army in the service of God.

God alone can give hope in any hopeless situation, make things that seem to be impossible, possible and provide life to the dead. Let God enter and make alive every person and every society.

With all good wishes and prayers,

Yours in Christ's Service,

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus
Diocesan Bishop

XIX Mar Thoma Family Conference-2001



Opening Ceremony

The XIX Mar Thoma Family Conference, hosted by the Mar Thoma Church of Philadelphia, was held at Radisson Hotel, Valley Forge, PA from July 5-8, 2001. After the colorful procession of children, youth and adults representing various parishes of the diocese, aches, council members, civic and church leaders, the children presented a traditional welcome pageant and later a beautiful theme presentation based on the Conference theme—Call the Wind “Son of Man, Can These Bones Live Again?” The Malayalam and the English theme songs were beautifully sung by the inaugural choir.



Inaugural Program

After a short worship service led by the Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia, Rev. Joseph Chacko, Conference President, welcomed all the leaders, guests and delegates. The Conference was inaugurated by our Metropolitan the Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom. Present at the inaugural session were Dr. Bob Edgar, General Secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, Rt. Rev. Sam Mathew, Bishop of the Church of South India, Ms



Choir

Lynne Abraham, the District Attorney of Philadelphia, Dr. Mary White, Board Member of Church Women United, besides the leaders of the Conference including the



Inaugural address by The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan. (L to R) Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Diocesan Bishop; Dr. Bob Edgar, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches; Dr. Sam T. Kamalesan and Rev. Dr. T. J. Thomas.

Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Rev. Dr. Samuel T. Kamalesan, Rev. Dr. T. J. Thomas, Director, Mar Thoma Counseling Center, Trivandrum and Mr. Shane Claiborne of ‘The Simple Way.’

The Friday’s (July 6) Main Talks given by The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom, Rev. Dr. Samuel T.



Inaugural Function

Kamalesan and Rev. Dr. T. J. Thomas centered around ‘Degeneration of Values and Morals in Faith Community/ Personal Life/Family Life.’ Group discussions after the talks helped the delegates examine their own personal/family/ community lives. Rev. Dr. T. J. Thomas led the young couples’ session ‘Breathing “Life” into Marriage’ The afternoon programs included ‘Interactive Sessions’ on children/ teenagers and youth issues and on adult issues led by various panel members. A Choir competition was also held in the afternoon in which various parish choirs participated.

The Saturday’s (July 7) Main Talks dealt with the ‘Restoration of Values and Morals in Faith Community/



Inaugural Session



Opening Ceremony.

Personal Life/Family Life' followed by group discussions on the subjects by the delegates. The afternoon programs included concurrent interactive sessions on 'Mar Thoma Church Visions into the next decade'—spiritual growth, cultural/ethnic identity, social responsibility, community



Sunday Holy Communion Service.

outreach, changes and adaptations. Various sports competitions were held in the afternoon. The witnessing and dedication service in the evening was led by the Diocesan Secretary Rev. Dr. John Joseph.

The Sunday morning (July 8) Holy Communion Service led by The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom and The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus was attended by over 1800 members. The concluding session of the Conference included presentation of awards to the winners of the Diocesan Sunday School Examination, the Mar



Our achen during the Sunday Service.

Thoma Messenger Essay Competition, the Sports Competition and Choir competition. A farewell to Zacharias Thirumeni and Joseph Chacko achen and Kochamma was also part of the concluding session of the Conference. With the prayer and benediction by Chrysostom Thirumeni, the XIX Family Conference in Philadelphia came to a close.



Opening Ceremony.

Sports Competition

As part of the afternoon program of Saturday July 7, 2001 competitions in volley ball, relay races, tracks, tug-of-war, etc., were conducted. Messrs. K.M. Mathew, Samuel Mathew and Mathews Mathew organized the events.

Philadelphia Mar Thoma Church was the recipient of the Ever Rolling Volley Ball Trophy. In the 100-meter sprint, Rev. P. K. Zachariah got the first prize (14.4 second) amongst clergy and Mr. K. M. Thomas got the first prize amongst laity (12.5 seconds). Ms. Shiela Zachariah of MTC, Philadelphia got the first prize amongst women in 100-meter sprint (15 seconds), Shane Mathew Thomas got first prize amongst children (up to 8 years) in the 60-meter sprint.



Dr. Samuel T. Kamaleson addressing the delegates.

The success of this year's conference was, indeed, the result of a collective effort by the Conference Committee led by Rev. Joseph Chacko, the Conference President, Dr. Sam Chacko, the Vice President and Mr. John Philip, the



Sunday Holy Communion Service.

Secretary. Each one of the Conference Committee members had to play crucial, but sometimes difficult, roles in achieving the results that they achieved. All of them deserve our thanks and appreciation for a job well done. The guidance and help given by the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, the previous and present Diocesan Secretaries Rev. K. Y. Jacob and Rev. Dr. John Joseph are gratefully acknowledged.



XIX Mar Thoma Family Conference Executive Committee.



New Achens and their families with Metropolitan and Zacharias thirumeni at the XIX Mar Thoma Family Conference.



Largest attendance from outside parishes St. Thomas MTC, New York



Choir competition 1st place Washington MTC.



Zacharias Thirumeni presenting gift to Rev. Joseph Chacko and Kochamma.



Zacharias Thirumeni presenting gift to Dr. Bob Edgar, General Secretary of National Christian Council of Churches (NCCC).

Photo by: Jacob Joseph, Toronto

AWARDS FOR VALUABLE SERVICE TO THOMAS KOSHY AND DR. T. M. THOMAS



Presented to Thomas Koshy for his valuable contributions to the Diocesan Sunday School in the publication of the Mar Thoma Church – Order of Worship, Prayers and Hymns.

Presented to Dr. T. M. Thomas for his work on the publication of the Sunday School Curriculum Book "Mar Thoma Church – Foundation and Vision"

FOCUS SATELLITE MEETING



A satellite meeting of the FOCUS group was held on July 5, 2001 at 3 p.m. at the Radisson Hotel, Valley Forge, Philadelphia. About 40 people representing various parishes in the diocese of North America & Europe were present at the meeting. Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus presided over the meeting.

Dr. Zac Varghese, Convener of the International FOCUS Committee, talked about the origin and goals of the FOCUS while Mr. Abraham Mattackal talked about the Diaspora Center that is being set up at Santhigiri, Alwaye. Dr. Sam Chacko, co-Convener of the International Committee, earlier welcomed all those who were present at the meeting. During the discussions, there was a consensus of opinion that all efforts have to be made at parish levels to propagate the short term and long term goals of this movement so that the movement itself will have a wider appeal. Since a vast majority of the Mar Thoma Diaspora live in the United States and Canada, it was decided at the meeting to select the following two Regional Committees:

1. Policy and Planning Committee

Mr. Jacob Joseph, Toronto, Canada (Convener)
 Mr. T.A. Mathew, Houston
 Mr. John Thomas, Hartford, Connecticut



Mrs. Elizabeth John, Dallas
 Mr. Thomason Varghese, New York

2. Diaspora Foundation Committee

Mr. Jacob Chacko, Staten Island, New York (Convener)
 Mr. Kuruvilla Cherian, Orangeburg, New York
 Mr. Thomas Koshy, Gaithersburg, MD
 Dr. George Jacob, Teaneck, New Jersey
 Ms Susan John, New York



L. left to Right: Leelamma Chacko, Thomas Mammen, Abraham Mattackal, T. A. Mathew, Dr. George Zachariah, The Most Rev. Dr. Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan, and Thomas K. Jose.

Mar Thoma Church — Next Decade: A Youth Perspective

(Proceedings of the Youth's Interactive Session on *Changes/Adaptation* held on Saturday July 7, 2001 during the Family Conference)

The Youth met separately as a group and discussed on the topic of Changes/Adaptation. This topic was selected by Dr. Samuel Chacko, moderator for the Mar Thoma Church Vision for the Next Decade. Facilitators for the discussion were Mr. Sam George, a member of the M.T.C of Philadelphia and Miss. Jessy Thomas, a member of the Epiphany Mar Thoma Church.

Preamble to question

Problems/concern: In order for the younger generation of Marthomites to survive as a faith community in this country, some adaptations and changes have to be made. Parents want to hold on to the traditions and customs that they grew up with, but the youngsters want to introduce new forms of music, liturgy, etc., to suit their present environment and to make it uniform/similar to the mainstream faith community.

Question

How do we restructure and reorganize the existing system without changing the fundamental values and traditions of the Mar Thoma Church?

Overview of the Discussion and conclusion: Few attempts have been made in the past to gather views of what the youths want from the church. Some of them have been implemented with limited results, while others have been ignored completely. In exercises of this kind, there is often a tendency to be simplistic and attempt superficial changes. Some of the existing structures and people resistant to bring about meaningful changes have already caused a significant exodus of young people to other churches or dropping out of church altogether. Younger generations carry far less loyalty to the institutional church and are much more comfortable at multi-cultural churches.

So in this report, we want to explore tangible changes that should happen in the Mar Thoma Church for it to offer

meaningful experiences to coming generations of marthomites. Churches must focus on changed lives and changing the world around them (keeping with our motto — “Lighted to Lighten”) Just as an unlit lamp can never light another, unchanged lives can never impact others. So when we think about changes needed in our church, we must focus on letting the power of the gospel transform our lives, causing a change in our family, community, and the nation. Some of the changes that the youth raised as relevant issues for the next decade at the recent Family Conference at Philadelphia are listed below:

General:

- Must become culturally adaptable to the coming generations and not impose Malayalee cultural ideology.
- Focus not on doing programs, but making real ministry happen
- Change our attitude of cultural superiority to healthy appreciation of other cultures
- Change from false religiosity to genuine spiritual nature of Christianity
- Change from preservation to intentional adaptation/assimilation
- Change from hypocrisy to deep sincerity and genuine faith
- Change from survive to thrive mode Change from traditional to modern/post-modern ministry paradigms
- Change from top-down to bottom up approach
- Change from clergy-centered to lay-led
- Involve in local outreach as well as global mission (not just some projects in Kerala)
- Develop healthy balance between individual and corporate aspect of faith
- Trust based small group ministry and developing leadership within each church for continued ministry

(Continued on page 11)

Who We Are and What We Need

Dr. Anna A. Panackal, Philadelphia MTC, PA

(A message given at the clergy conference of North America & Europe on July 5, 2001)

“Do not try to rule over those who have been put in your care, but be an example to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:3)

The major attempt here will be to expose some of the unique characteristics of the Mar Thoma Malayalee Christians that we have learned from more than 35 years of experience in this country. The first group of immigrants were academically talented professionals who came to this country for higher education, saw the great opportunities in this country, and settled down here to be a part of the American dream. When the immigration laws were made liberal, a batch of professionals—doctors, engineers and nurses—sought immigration to the USA and sojourned into this country with their families. Presently, almost all of them are citizens of this country, economically better than the average Americans, and still holding on to their sentiments towards the Mar Thoma Church and Indian Christian values. Their children are mostly well educated, well placed, and are currently getting married from their own community and from outside their community. This second wave of immigrants have started with very little financial resources, but they have achieved the most in socio-economic status. Their self-esteem is very high and the culture in this country support their individualism to a great extent. The third wave of immigrants are mainly the relatives (brothers, sisters, parents, and in-laws) of the first two waves of immigrants who have taken citizenship in this country. This group did not have to go through the hard times the first two groups had to go through because they had their close relatives to shelter and support them and give them good orientation. But they had to work in areas they did not like before settling down on jobs they liked. Many of them had to get retrained to get the jobs they are happy with and had to mentally compete with their siblings to attain better economic status. Currently, this third wave of immigrants are also well settled and their children are also well educated and many of them are well settled and some have married from our community and even from outside our community. The fourth wave of immigrants are the relatives of the third wave immigrants and they are coming into this country in large numbers. Many of them had easy money while in India because of the support of their relatives in this country and they do not have a hard time adjusting to the new environment because of the support of the relatives who have already settled here. But they are more envious of their relatives and are competing to economically excel their relatives already here. Some of the children of early settlers are going back to India to get married within our community and bring their spouses back to this country.

All the people who have immigrated to this country have a misconception that they are better than those who have stayed back. They are exposed to a much individualistic society with strong democratic governments, better than any other in this world. They have unlimited freedom of expression, many individual rights and privileges and have a better knowledge of

their rights. Many of them and their children have excellent education coveted by all in Kerala. They have assets and incomes that when converted to Indian Rupees will make them millionaires and multi-millionaires. When they visit India, they are looked upon as superior people by their relatives, friends, and neighbors. The American people have a tendency to look down upon all other nations and cultures unjustly. This arrogance of the nation is supported and even sponsored by other nations through requests for American aid all the time. Those who have worked with our Church Administration know that our American Churches send a huge amount of money to Thiruvalla and for the activities of the Mar Thoma Church in India. Throughout the year, there are special requests for money and our clergy visit us from India with the main purpose of raising money for projects in India. In this money-oriented society, people give as charity and not as their major obligation. Our achenes will have to regularly preach to our people about the sin of looking down upon other people and remind them about their obligation as Christians to help others in need.

Unlike many of the people in this country who have hobbies, recreational activities, as well as political and social interests, the majority of our people are clannish, family oriented, and church centered. Almost all their social activities are centered around their Church, and their achenes and bishops are their leaders. Their children seldom communicate freely with their parents. In almost all families, both parents work. The major wage earner in a large number of families is the mother and usually more people spend more than 40 hours/week on their jobs. They have very little time for family discussions or family prayers together because both parents work different shifts to attend to their children. Alcoholic beverages seen in the movies as luxuries enjoyed by a few in India are cheap and readily available here. Therefore, alcoholism ruins several family lives. The competitive world outside leads parents to compare the achievements of their children with that of others in the parish. This tendency had created a culture among our children, especially the boys, to hate competitions anywhere. Some college students do not even show their transcripts to their parents and some may even give wrong information. The liberal society outside influence the behavior of children to a great extent. Premarital sex, drugs, alcohol, and gambling may not have taken over our children so far, but if family conflicts and authoritarian attitudes of parents without openly expressing love for their children continue, the strong family structure in our community may be destroyed soon.

The social support systems our people enjoyed in India are not here to support them. Almost all our people live in urban areas where nobody cares about the other in their neighborhood. Many of the things our Kerala community did in India to bring social conformity are either illegal or social taboos here. Nobody is allowed to give corporal punishment and nobody can interfere with consenting adult behavior. Scandals and scandalizing are powerful tools used in Kerala, but some scandals about them here

are considered as advertisements for their way of life. We have here a new social structure, a set of new social norms, and a new kind of social life. It is not possible to implant what we have in Kerala here in this country. We have to develop our own social identity here. The social identity and social rewards received by our older people are mainly from our Church and only few of them are looking elsewhere also to build themselves up. While the older generation are more influenced by our church community, the younger generations are more influenced by the community at large. Even the religious young people are moving towards the independent churches in this country.

I feel that it is very critical that we take steps to accommodate the needs of our community here with their democratic government and attitudes taking into consideration their high need for spirituality, and their high economic and educational potential as well as the competing forces of the independent churches in this country. We do not have to make any change in our constitution because it has envisaged a highly democratic organization and government for our church. Perhaps, we may have to enlighten our people about their limits and the administrators their sworn duties. The parish government is democratic, and therefore, there will be political dealings and movements in the parish often forgetting God's love and Christian values. Our achen have to maintain God's love and equilibrium without losing their temper and by example, teach the congregation God's love. We need Church services (Worship/Holy Communion) both in Malayalam and in English each week to serve the older adults and the young ones even it means more work for our achen. We have to make some changes in the order of worship and traditional approaches to parish government without affecting the basic Christian Biblical tenets and values. We have to take steps to counteract the dissident tendencies growing among our youngsters and prayerfully guide them to a Christian way of life in a loving way. We need our children to be successful in this country and at the same time follow the faith our forbearers have bequeathed to us. Our prayer every day is that nobody from our people, especially from our community, is lost from His heavenly kingdom.

Since the people in this country are always reminded of their democratic rights and privileges through mass communication media, our people have found freedom of expression and have learned to enjoy it to the extent they often forget Christian charity and respect for others in their expressions. Our vicars in each parish may have to adjust a little to let the voice of the laymen be heard, discussed, and decisions taken without compromising the Sabha policies or basic Christian values. Many executive committees and vicars are afraid to conduct more than two general body meetings each year mandated in the constitution. The edavaka members are not getting enough opportunities to express themselves and feel themselves as not valuable members of the parish. As a result, many have lost their interest in edavaka yogams. The attendance in edavaka yogams are very low compared to the initial stages of the edavakas when we had many edavaka yogams each year. Thus we lost the input and support of many. For many of our members, edavaka yogams are the only places where they can freely express their opinions. Sometimes, a few may exceed the limits, but soon they learn to control themselves and respect the opinions of others.

That is really a prominent place where the members of the congregation can see the love of God in our vicars and the pleasantries of a democratic government.

Our children, their spiritual development, and their spiritual life are major concerns for us. The girls in the family seem to be more hardworking and achieving than the boys. The boys in general are laid back and easy going. The children, in general, do not consider our Bible studies, prayer meetings, conventions, Sunday School classes, and other church activities as important as their academic studies or professional activities. There is only very little incentive in the church for evangelical work or voluntary pastoral care. In our Sunday Schools or in the Youth Leagues, no one is purposefully trying to develop qualities of evangelists or pastors among our young people. Almost all of them are willing to support evangelical work through monetary contributions. We need to inculcate in our children the desire to serve others by (1) recognizing the youngsters who do such things in our churches, (2) taking spiritually talented youngsters with achen or with edavaka mission people who make hospital visits and/or making visits to bereaved families, (3) emphasizing the qualities of pastors and evangelists in our Sunday school classes and youth league meetings by discussing unique qualities of such servants of Christ, and (4) sponsoring theological education of our youth and support of evangelical work through the effort of youngsters.

Spiritual development of a person does not stop with accepting Jesus Christ as one's personal savior. Actually, it starts when they accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. The youngster who publically accepts Jesus Christ as savior at the first communion should be getting emotional and social support in the church to continue to grow spiritually. Regular Bible classes should be conducted not only before the communion, but also after the event so that they grow in Christ and the Holy Spirit may come and dwell in the children. Such a program should be an integral part of our church programs. Otherwise, we will have plenty of people dedicating themselves on the last day of our conventions or conferences and only very few to grow up to be Christian leaders.

Many of us often face health, social, economic, and/or family problems. The support systems we had back in Kerala are not available here. Counselors in this country give logical and practical suggestions to meet with the immediate crisis. Many of these suggestions may be contrary to our traditions and values. We need our achen to be our counselor who will be guided by the Holy Spirit to help us overcome our problem situations and emotional stress. Our people do not like to confide in achen, unless the problem is too severe, because they have seen other achen speak about the problems of others without mentioning their names. Our people are very good in detective work and they soon will identify the people and their families involved. The sermon may have been impressive and the illustration may have elucidated the point. But it will hurt the person and the family involved to a great extent in our community. Therefore, not to divulge any information directly or indirectly to anybody except God who knows everything. Otherwise, it is a breach of trust and it will be ungodly.

Kochammas are also assigned leaders of our community and they are an integral part of achen's ministry. All of them are

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Who We Are and What We Need

Thomas Varghese, Epiphany MTC, New York

(A message given at the clergy conference of North America & Europe on July 5, 2001)

Scriptures show that God has been a God of missions since the very beginning. He brought Abraham to a foreign land and told him that the nations were to be blessed through him. This promise was not just for Israel but all the nations in the world. This same God has the same plan for the Mar Thoma Church in America. He has taken a church with deep traditions and roots and brought her to a foreign land where the culture and practices are very different. Yet, His plan and desire for the church remains as clear as it was when He entrusted it with Abraham. The church now needs to respond to this call more than ever before.

At the last clergy conference, the Dean of the Princeton Seminary gave a presentation to the clergy and he made an interesting observation. He said that the mainline churches in America were losing membership at a significant rate while the non-denominational churches were significantly increasing its size. The Dean went on to give some explanations for this phenomenon. According to him, the difference between the churches was leadership. The strength and integrity of the leaders have a direct correlation to the health of the church. While the non-denominational churches attract the best and brightest leaders, the mainline churches are not able to do the same. Another explanation given by the Dean was that while the mainline churches have opinions on many issues and beliefs, the non-denominational churches have convictions. It is said that those who do not stand for something will fall for anything. I point out the comments made by the Dean because I believe that we are suffering the same situation in the Mar Thoma Church. We are losing many of the best and brightest youths of the church. Many of them are not leaving christian faith altogether, instead they are simply leaving the Mar Thoma Church and starting to attend and become leaders of other churches. If we ignore this migration out of the church, the church will indeed suffer the consequences. We need to identify the needs of the body and respond immediately so that God can fulfill his purpose through us.

The church is in need of leaders with great vision (who can entrust that vision on to others.) Zacharias Thirumeni once said that if your vision were limited, then the outcome would be limited. Last year, the youth leaders of Epiphany were gathered together to meet with their new Achen, Rev. Dr. John Joseph. After brief introductions, Achen asked us a question. He asked how many years we had owned this church. With great pride, we answered back that we had been here for sixteen years and that we were one of the first Mar Thoma churches. He then quietly responded with another question. In these past sixteen years, how many non-Indians have taken membership? Suddenly all pride left us and embarrassment started settling in. We quietly said there was maybe one or two. He then asked us another question, "In these last sixteen years, how many full time missionaries have you sent out from the church?" Embarrassment turned to shame, as we answered none. Achen then told us that the only evidence for

existence of Epiphany really being a church was the wooden cross erected on top of the building and the sign by the parking lot. He told us that God would hold us accountable for these things. Thus began a movement by the youth to start reaching out of its four walls and to begin obeying the call of Christ to share the gospel with all. The work has just begun and is nowhere near the point of contentment but at the very least, the seed has been planted and the vision has been entrusted. Since then, God has given us another leader with a great burden for gospel outreach, therefore our work continues. Jesus Christ, the leader of all worked in the same way. He entrusted His vision onto his disciples and had them carry the gospel to the ends of the world. The church needs leaders that can bring vision to the local church and entrust it to the body so that they do not sit back but become participants in the gospel work.

Robert Coleman wrote a book entitled, "The Master Plan of Evangelism." In this book, he described the way in which Jesus laid out his strategy in bringing the Good News to the world. It was not with mass crusades and high pulpits that He went around with His message. Christ knew the masses could not be trusted. The very crowds that hailed him King and lay palm leaves at his feet shouted to crucify Him weeks later. Instead, He knew the power and intimacy that came with relationships. That was the very purpose of His coming, to restore the relationship that was broken by sin. Jesus formed a close relationship with the twelve disciples and revealed to them His purposes. It was these twelve that then went out and spent their lives spreading the Good News to the ends of the world. The leaders of the church need to follow the same pattern. Achen can only be effective with the youth if they form relationships with them. It is through this, the work of the church begins. When the message of Christ goes beyond the pulpit and is seen in the lives of the messengers through interaction, the work begins. If you are to observe the Achen that have been Very successful in working with the youth, the one common pattern will be the fact that they have had close relationships with them.

Someone once said that the bringing of two different traditions together is like two rivers joining together. The place where they meet will have great turbulence, but from it will come a stronger current that flows. This is also true for the Mar Thoma Church in America as long as the place where the two meet are at the truth of who Jesus Christ is. In this land of relativism where what is true for one person may not be true for another person, we need to hold on to the absolute truth. Christ is absolute truth. If salvation could be attained in any other way, Jesus would definitely have asked the Father to take away the cup of suffering from Him. It is those churches that preach the truth of Christ that thrive while the churches that have taken on a watered down version of the gospel suffer. The church cannot afford to sway to the left or right but has to remain rooted in the word of God where there is no room for compromise. Our higher levels of education should always bring us closer to the truth and not away

from it. With this as our meeting place, the richness of both lands will serve to make us an even stronger force in carrying out the gospel to the nations.

In John 12:32, Christ says, "...if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all peoples to myself." This should be our battle cry, that

we lift Christ to the highest place and all people will be drawn to Him. The early fathers of our church had a great burden to bring Christ to their land. We need that same burden for America and if we seek His face with all that we have, I truly believe that God will bless our efforts. ■

Who We Are and What We Need *(Continued from page 9)*

talented people in one way or another. Often their talents are missed under the bright glow of Achen's ministry. It is not only enough that they accompany achen to prayer meetings or visits to the sick and the bereaved families. They should take an active role in the church especially among the women. We often find that our girls have good leadership qualities and willingness to serve the people. We need our kochammas to guide these young women to become great leaders of our community. Kochammas can develop programs designed for the development of female leadership in our community and help our children grow in Christ.

My dear achen, people need your recognition because God had put us in your care. Even people who speak nonsense to you recognize you as a leader. Instead of subduing them with harsh words or comments or social pressures, if you can deal with them in God's love without losing temper you will be able to win them to your side. Of course, there are some lost cases, but you can continually pray for them. Our people need good examples and we expect you to be the example.

I pray to God for His love to be reflected on us through our achen whom we look up to. May God help us all in His grace. ■

Mar Thoma Church — Next Decade: A Youth Perspective *(Continued from page 7)*

Church/People:

- Church must be a safe, affirming place where people genuinely love God.
- Church must be intentional in building loving, caring relationships within families, between members and within the community they serve.
- Church must be purposeful in everything it does. (five fold purposes of a local church - fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry and leadership)
- Change from ritualistic to intellectual and spiritual growth oriented church
- Change from inward to outward focussed community - break our human tendency to focus inward.
- Change from exclusive club to The Body of Christ - establish Inter-church networking. Churches must work with other churches (both Indian and others) in the city or region in reaching and impacting the society with the truths of the gospel.
- Change from mono-cultural, ethnic church to multi-cultural and multi-ethnic church. Welcome and provide space for non-Malayalees (other Indians, Americans, African-Americans, Chinese etc.).

- Diverse formats must be tried - Liturgy, Praise & Worship, Contemporary, Integrated etc. One size does not fit all.
- Sensitive towards seekers and non-Malayalees
- Special evangelistic worship services & mid week events for spiritual growth

Achen:

- Achen must understand and love youth for who they are. They should be able to come down to their level and be willing to learn the youth culture without being judgmental.
- Achen must make himself available to the youths in the church who need him.
- Change from short-term to long-term pastorate—a sustained personal relationship with kids and able to walk through their life stages and struggles.
- Change from authoritative, controlling mentality to offering genuine friendship
- Change from a pastor figure to cross-cultural missionary
- Change from doing ministry to enabling others (lay, professionals) for ministry
- Becoming culturally liberal and theologically conservative and not vice-versa
- Interact with other local Christian leaders and be willing to learn from them
- Must have a spiritual conversion experience and possess deep conviction about Biblical Christianity
- Must be a powerful communicator, empathetic counselor and personal mentor to youth leaders

Sam George, MTC of Philadelphia

Worship:

- Meaningful connection with God (drawing near and knowing God by celebrating life in Christ with other believers)
- Include Biblical, spiritual growth oriented teaching and discipleship programs
- Life transforming experience - lives through the week consistent with Sunday morning experience.

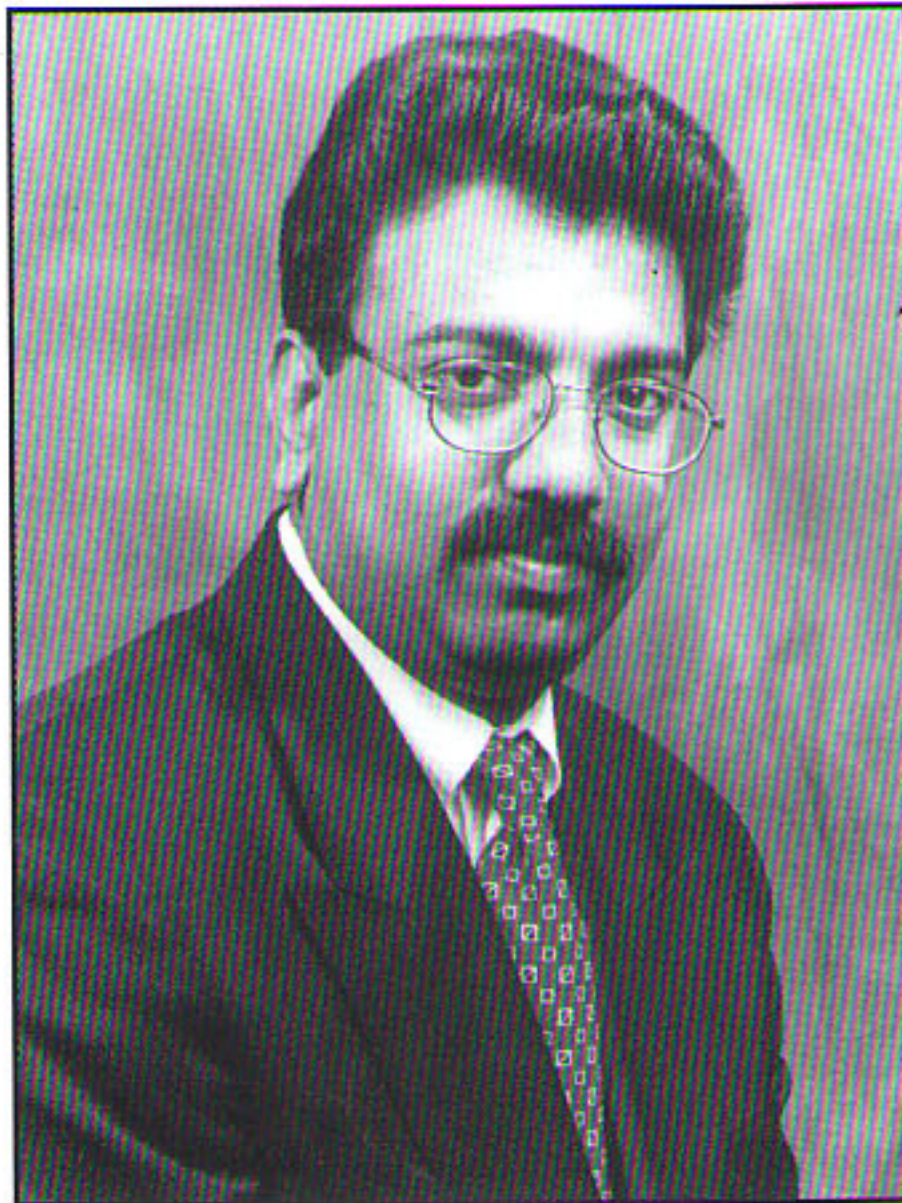
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Family Promotion Workshop Transition in Life

Sister Dr. Joann Chunkapura

[The family promotion workshop, sponsored by the Diocese of North America and Europe and conducted by Dr. Joann Chunkapura and Juli Mathew, was a great success. The two well-known speakers talked about the importance of family structure, boundaries, development stage of a family, leadership patterns in the family, role structures, communications, and many other areas. The church members in New York, Detroit, Philadelphia, Chicago, Houston, and Dallas enthusiastically participated in the workshop and group discussion.] – *Mariam Thomas, Houston*

Transition can be defined as the corridor (dark night of the soul) between two major events in life. A child turning into a teenager, a healthy person becoming terminally ill, and retirement of an earning member of the family are all examples of transitions we make during the lifetime. To make through this difficult time, we need the moral support of the people around us. The big family system, which once aided us in Kerala, is no more there to help us in this process in this land. Most people prefer to have their own community support rather than going to the unknown. In this context, it is imperative to have a mechanism to cope with the challenge of transitions in life.

The circumstance we live in is unique. It is very important to evaluate our situations from time to time to make this transition smooth, without sacrificing our faith and values. A dynamic growth in the family is possible only if we are willing to take a step in this direction. Workshops, talks, and discussions will aid the participants to understand the process of change and make the transition less painstaking. The path is going to be a difficult one but eventually will lead us to a higher level of joy and harmony.

It is said that every seven-year we pass through transitions. Are we equipped to face these changes? Especially, when we live in a multi-cultural society with a hazy value system. A person groomed in a certain environment, married to another person from a different background, and the children born out of that marriage, growing in a different culture, can be a puzzle placed mystery.

As we go through the passages of life, we are confronted with many obstacles. If we do not know how to overcome these hurdles, we will find other means to vent our anger and frustrations. Blaming our partners is the commonly used outlet for most people. This is not a solution to our problems rather an escape from it. Problems are part of life despite our education, financial status, and heritage. Developing the right coping mechanism is the challenge to the parents and children living in a country where all cultures make its good and bad impact.

For Christians, family life is a sacred call from the Heavenly Father. Paul in his epistle to Ephesians underlines



this truth by stating that God has called men and women to fatherhood and motherhood. In other words, we are in partnership with God in this sacred mission of family life. He reminds us to go through the process of self-giving as Christ did it for the church. If we fail to get rid of the selfishness in us, it will become a stumbling block in building up the relationships in family life. A mutual understanding among the partners is very important for it. It is difficult to find a person with a perfect personality. Some people are strong in some areas while others in another area. As we

mentioned above, the person who has gone through the self-emptying process can understand his or her drawback and can be a helping hand for their partners rather than a critic in everything.

Family Structure

Like any other configuration, family structure is also important. As we look into this structure, it is essential to study at least three generations closely. Grandparents, parents, children, and their behavior patterns must be subjected to study. It has been proved beyond doubt that the past impressions left in the mind can haunt us in many ways. A dictatorship attitude demonstrated by a grandparent can be a trait of the grandchild in the future. Hence, understanding the family background and structure is very important to make changes in life and relieve us from the grips of past influences.

Boundaries

Recognizing boundaries and staying within those boundaries, is important in a family relationship. This is very significant when it comes to husband and wife. Some people are like the eclipse, and overshadow the other by curtailing their freedom. On the other hand some are like, "East is east and west is west never the twain shall meet," and cut off completely from each other. Either state can slowly punch holes in the family life and disintegrate relationships. Finding a common ground for husband and wife is critical to save the family from reaching this stage.

As the common area shrinks, the chances of conflict increase and as it expands, the chances decrease.

It may not be possible for everyone in a family to meet the mental, physical, and other needs of each others all time. Understanding the situation and respecting it can stop us from this kind of demands. Respecting each other is as important as establishing a common ground. One should allow the other person to achieve their needs without hurting each other. A balanced approach is important to sustain the family life. Too much freedom and too little freedom, too much control and too little control are all harmful in a relationship. This will reflect later in an individual's life in different forms. The children who are reluctant to follow the faith system, refuse to learn the mother tongue, seeking out relationship outside the family, and resorting to many other unacceptable lifestyles all stem out from an imbalance in life.

Developmental state of a family

No family stays in the same place for a long time. It is a spiritual journey through human experiences. Childhood, toddler, teenage, adulthood, middle age, old age, and finally death are all part of this journey with transition made on each stage. The responsibilities and burdens associated with it, different needs, and other demands during this time are overwhelming. Failure to understand this can draw families back to the chaotic state where they started. Intercaste marriage, disputes in family life, and rejections are examples of traumas in life and undermine the developmental process of a family. Open discussions on these matters will help families to overcome the difficulties in life and make our life journey joyous and fulfilling.

Leadership pattern in the family

Family is a divinely orchestrated system and to sustain it, disciplined leadership is essential. There are so many issues in a family and have to make critical decisions to the best interests of everyone. Engaging everyone in discussions and implementing the best out of it is the responsibility of the leader. Each individual in a family is a leader and have the responsibility to comply with the final decision of the group leader. Leadership should not be autocratic but can be democratic with delegation of responsibility to others. A participatory leadership will work best for the families.

Role Structure

There are specific roles for husband and wife to play in a family. Running the day-to-day activities of the house, making and management of money, leadership in spiritual affairs, building social relationship, recreational activities are all areas where husband and wife can play different roles. Taking such roles by the parents can pave the way to a solid

structure for the next generation. Otherwise, we will be building a confused society with lost identity.

Communication

Communications are classified into so many. Direct and indirect, verbal and nonverbal, usage of abusive language, manipulative language, and talking with high pitch are various forms of communications through which we try to exchange our thoughts. Improper communication can be detrimental and undermine relationships.

Reinforcement is another form of affirmation. It is very important to encourage each other by appreciating the goodness and talent in a person. In a Christian context this is very relevant. After Jesus was baptized by John in Jordan, and there came a voice from heaven, saying, "Thou art my beloved son in whom I am well pleased," (Mark 1:11) which is an affirmation by the Father. Affirmation is part of life. In western culture it is very prevalent but for the easterners, it is nothing but empty talk. There is nothing wrong in telling our partners, children, and fellow human beings about their positive qualities and encouraging them. This will drive them to explore new avenues in life and bring out hidden treasures for the benefit of humankind. Our misinterpretations and reluctance to do so may be tied to the genealogy and needs a close look. Expressing our love and affection in day-to-day life, verbally or materially, will reinforce us to have a healthy and more relaxed life.

Cohesiveness

Healthy connectedness and healthy separateness are needed for a healthy family life. An engaged but detached approach can make cohesiveness meaningful. Freedom to do and practise the things a person likes is as important as doing things together as husbands and wives. Developing individual interest is crucial and will come handy in loneliness, during retirement life, or any such occasions. Playing Golf, Tennis, or jogging for physical health, reading and chess for mental health are some areas where we can get trained for recreational activities.

Building a 'we feeling' with family members, relatives, and friends through different means will enhance the scope of cohesiveness. A day must be dedicated to build the 'we feeling' bond between relatives and friends. This will give everyone time to reflect on the events and incidents that shaped their life, and help the relationship to get deep rooted. Many of the immigrants who came to this country did not have the chance to develop the 'we feeling' bond due to many reasons. They were either training themselves for a profession, moving from apartments to houses, or preoccupied with children's education and so on. By the time we are ready to settle down, many years elapse, and reach the next transition point. However, a deep-rootedness must be established somewhere to assure the security of "we feeling" bond.

Family rituals

Family rituals or a silent rule is also vital part of cohesiveness. Family prayer, carrying and caring of something that has sentimental values, observing some traditions are examples for this. By examining the history of Israelites, we can learn how much family rituals and symbols helped them to stay together in the midst of their troubles. One can reject this by saying that, "in America it is difficult to work out." A careful study on this matter will tell us otherwise. Many American families treasure tradition by preserving the mementos of the past or celebrating it. Rituals and symbols can anchor the family when tidal waves of problems bang on the shore of life.

The intolerance to situations tells us how ignorant and unaware we are about many things. Most children talk about the filth and inconvenience they face when visiting India. This scornful attitude brings out the lack of that person's knowledge about that situations. Connecting to different situations through rituals and symbols can change this situation and help lay the foundation for a future generation with ties to their past. Are we disregarding this important factor as we explore the new and green pastures of America?

Do we sit down and reflect upon the past where God's abundance, mercy, and grace guarded us? The experience of the past, time we spent in our village or town, the mountains we climbed, the river we swam across, the pits and the falls we went through, are all reinforcing thoughts to stabilize our family life.

Preserving one's identity by learning one's mother tongue is as important as globalization through one language or one system. Many European countries are reluctant to get into this bandwagon for this very reason. They are afraid that the globalization will destroy the infrastructure and undermine everything they stood for. Learning the mother tongue is not going to take any one out of the global map, rather it will help them to stand out as an unique culture in this universe of diversities.

Emotional growth is another area where we need careful workout. Different activities will help us to improve our communication and strengthen our emotional attachments. Playing chess, snake and ladders, and many other games will aid us in this process. ■

(To be continued)

Butterfly Fossil

I am the butterfly fossil...

*buried incognito within the chrysalis of humanity's ignorance,
encased in stubborn boundaries impenetrable to reason,
shrouded by man's suppressive layers of traditional expectations and ancient misinterpretations.
Continuously charged with the unpardonable sin of being a daughter of Eve.*

*Clinging to their vanishing world for fear of invasion,
they block change, even those that would establish the next viable future.
Locked inside their insular perspectives, with an unwillingness to allow the entrance of difference.
I must remain camouflaged and incomplete in my self-expression, if I desire to be heard at all.*

*But You alone Lord, desire to have me thoroughly expressed,
As a daughter of Esther you tell me, "This is your time, your time has come!"
Of how You have placed me in a specific place, at a specific time, with a specific role...
so that through the fulfilled purpose of my life, Your name may be glorified!*

*Unearth me from this prison, I cry!
Call me forth, as you have others, into the power of your resurrection!
Enable me to emerge through these walls, even as you did from the sealed garden tomb!
Fill me with the spirit of your double-edged Truth!*

*Teach me to break free from this world's mold!
Send life, I plead, into my immobilized wings!
Teach me to dream, to surrender, to dance and to soar!
I am humbled by this trepid cycle of metamorphosis...but I want to be whole!
Envelop me in Your boldness, to "embrace the mystery of all" that you want me to be.*

Chris Varughese Mathew, Houston

A Mother's Weapon

Dr. Bindu Alice Philip, San Diego, California

The message given by Dr. Bindu Alice Philip on Mother's Day, May 13, 2001 at the Los Angeles Mar Thoma Church.

Introduction: Mothers across cultures are at the emotional center of the home and collectively of the world. They are the primary nurturers of all human beings. Mothers are quintessential people. Becoming a mother is absolutely the most demanding experience one can have in life, but it is also one of the most exhilarating and profound. When my newborn daughter Shalomi was placed in my arms, I felt a depth of boundless love and protectiveness for her that I had never known before....



nuclear family, and other similar signs. We have been watching the braiding of an intricate rope that will ultimately strangle the family to death. So are we as the children of God going to sit around and helplessly watch the degeneration around us, or are we going to get ready for Battle.

There is a Battle

Irrespective of what walk of life we are in right now, each of us is fighting some battle. To think otherwise is to surrender. We may be battling

Whether it is the wounded soldier on the battlefield calling "Mother" or the young player on the sidelines mouthing "Hi Mom" to the TV camera—in moments of distress or elation where do people's minds always turn? To MOM. No one else can take her place. No tie in life is as strong or lasting as that of a child to his mother. Scripture clearly teaches that children are a blessing from the Lord. Psalm 127:3-5 says:

*Behold children are a gift of the Lord
The fruit of the womb is a reward
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
So are the children of one's youth.
How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them;
They will not be ashamed
When they speak with their enemies in the gate.*

Motherhood is definitely one of the noblest of callings and no other vocation supercedes it. To be entrusted with the very life, health and well being of a tiny human being, who is totally dependent on you is a great gift and privilege. How is it then that motherhood, the nurturing and building up of children has taken such a nose-dive in honor and respect in the last few decades. Television doesn't seem to know how to portray Moms. Teachers often encourage young girls not to waste their lives just being Moms. It is pretty obvious to anyone who has any commitment to the truth of Scripture that our culture as a whole is rapidly disintegrating morally, ethically, and above all spiritually. Women are continually urged to assert their influence everywhere but not in the home. Sadly no one seems to see the connection: minimize the importance of motherhood, and witness the decline of the family and society.

Signs of the family's demise are abundantly clear all around us. Numerous facts confirm the grim prognosis. For the past forty years or more, the signs of the family's collapse have been paraded before us continually: divorce, abortion, infidelity, homosexuality, radical feminism, together with the normalization of the single-parent home, the decline of the

through a physical ailment, an emotional stress, depression, a marital relationship, an arrogant teenager, or an unexpected circumstance at work. But the battle is on and we need to remember that for us as Christians the battle belongs to the Lord. Our battles are most often not just physical, but spiritual! We fight them in the unseen territory of God's Holy presence, in faith. The Word of God in Exodus 17:8-13 tells us of how the men of God have fought similar battles and destroyed their enemies.

The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up, one on one side and one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

Know Your Enemy

Here was a fight between the people of God (the Israelites) and their enemy Satan (the Amalekites). This conflict has some essential lessons which we need to glean for our own private battles. It is not just enough for us to know that there is a fight but we also need to know who our enemy is, so that we can be prepared for his attack.

The enemy attacks without any warning In the war that the Israelites had, we understand that the enemy attacked without any warning. There was no hint as to when the soldiers would strike. The Israelites would wake up in the morning and discover that some of their people had been killed during the night. Could this happen with us today? Are we aware that the enemy (the destroyer of the soul) is

lurking right around the corner to snatch us and our children by surprise. We ourselves need to have the armor of God and the spiritual discernment to recognize him in his many disguises. The demands of a hectic lifestyle are overwhelming. It is often hard for us to remember what is really important as we go through each day. Before the enemy snatches our children off guard, we need to keep them in the “front burner” of our schedule and actively pray over them. Our time with our children is fleeting. Our children are not always going to remain the cute little babies that they once were. Time moves on, things change. We need to analyze if we are actively involved in their lives or are we letting the devil get a foothold. If we do not shape their values, others will do it for us. We hear of school shootings; the recent one in Santee was close to where I live in San Diego...The reason violence is in to schools these days, is because God and His Word are out of the schools. Our children are growing up in a hostile anti-Christian culture. Day and night they are exposed to a cultural explosion of conflicting values. Where are our children building their values and where are they rooted? All of us Malayalee Christians in America have left our former country India and come to this land. But we need to remember that even as our geographic and Indian cultural roots may have been transplanted, we have a great responsibility as Christian parents to ensure that our children and our families are rooted in the infallible biblical values. Our generation lives in the shade of many trees that were planted by our ancestors. I owe a great tribute to my Dad and Mom for the sense of security and rootedness that I experience today through their leading me into a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The enemy attacks strategically The enemy did not make random attacks into the Israelite camp. He did not attack on the front lines where the strongest soldiers were. He aimed at the weakest members of the Israelite band. Satan too will push the door that is most easily opened. Every time we succumb to a temptation, ourselves as adults, whether it be flirting with pornography on the internet, getting into draining relationships or unethical practices, the propensity to do it again becomes stronger. Sin, someone has said, takes us farther than we ever wanted to go, keeps us longer than we intended to stay and costs us more than we intended to pay! Is the lure for “more”—I mean, “Have it all and Have it now” philosophy—enticing us as parents and compelling us to stay longer hours away from our home? Are we trampling our children, the seed of the next generation by depriving them of ourselves—our time, our love, our care and attention. In our pursuit to reach greater heights are we not mortgaging the next generation into day care centers at a very early age...

Using our weapons to win

Having realized that there is a battle and having identified the schemes of our enemy, we now come to the next and final stage of the battle—Using our weapons to win.

Exodus 17:11&12 tells us: “So it came about when Moses held his hands up that Israel prevailed and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed.....”

Visualize with me, if you could—A City that is continually under attack by the enemy. About every other week enemy soldiers climb through a hole in the wall and wreak havoc among the inhabitants. Don't you think that the city council would have enough sense to strengthen that part of the wall? Yet countless parents are defeated week after week, day after day by passive parenting.

From the text we see that behind the battle that Joshua fought in the valley with the *visible enemy*—the Amalekites, there was a simultaneous spiritual battle fought by Moses on the hilltop. Moses was not shirking his duty. Even at the age of 81, he went to the hilltop to intercede for Joshua who was in the bloody battle. What a beautiful picture of “Intercession.” Abraham Lincoln once said: “No man is poor who has had a godly mother.” Unless we as parents have the personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we cannot boldly fight the battle in the spiritual realm for our children. Personally I have found escape from the enemy many-a-time through the prayers of my parents. As Paul put it, “*Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and against the powers, against the forces of darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*” (Eph 6.12)

What was the connection between the physical battle in the valley and the spiritual battle on the hilltop? Moses was reaching out to God in intercession, lifting up holy hands in prayer. We too as parents need to intercede for our children. Only prayer can account for the invisible connection between the valley and the hilltop. We might wonder how the raised hand of one man could affect the defeat or victory of two million people. But that exactly is the power of prayer. What a great privilege we have as parents and grandparents in interceding for the generations ahead of us.

There is a hidden, yet very evident and powerful connection between prayer and the victories we celebrate. Our intercession is not like a cellular phone with limited connection. Prayer actually moves the hands of God, which in turn moves the world. Martin Luther prayed, “Dear Lord, although I am sure of my position, I am unable to sustain it without Thee. Help me or I am lost.” The valleys of today are filled with every spiritual and moral battle imaginable—both for us and for our children. When we lose, we tend to pour more resources into the valley; we raise our voices, we shout at one another....But the key is to stand in the gap in prayer and see the miracles of God unfold.

Battles often follow blessings

Prior to this battle, the Israelites had just been given manna and the rock had just brought forth water, but they were still vulnerable. After all when everything is going well, our personal satisfaction often distracts us from complete

dependence on God, and that is when God sends us a reminder—as to how much we need him. All sunshine makes a desert. The storms must come to disturb our cloudless skies. Tomorrow may be your day. Remember plans for your downfall are already being laid by the enemy camp.

Conclusion

What hedge of protection are we as parents providing against the enemy's attack on our children. God has already won the victory for us when we abide in Him and lift up holy hands in prayer. Dear Mothers, take heart and do not grow weary. May the words of this poem urge us to re-prioritize our lives.

*There will be a time to look back and know that these years of
Motherhood were not wasted.
I pray there will be a time to see him an upright and honest man,
Loving God and serving all.
God, give me wisdom to see that today is my day with my children,
That there is no unimportant moment in their lives.
May I know that no other career is so precious,
No other work so rewarding,
No other task so urgent.
May I not defer it nor neglect it,
But by Thy Spirit accept it gladly, joyously, and by Thy grace realize
That the time is short and my time is now—
For children don't wait. ■*

A Shift in Paradigm

Thomas Mathew, Arlington, Texas

The Mar Thoma Community in U.S.A is no longer a transient community, rather it is a community in quick transition. What do I mean by this characterization? The members of the community who came here in the early part of the settlement believed that they were going to work here for a short span of time, earn some money and return to India. They thought they would build a house and settle down in India and make it their final destination in their earthly existence. These are proven to be mere dreams for many, although some have gone back. The percentage of those who have returned to India is relatively small, a mere three to five percent. For the vast majority, life goes on here as usual. The fact of the matter is that most of us are working here and are going to retire here. We are marrying our children and are burying our deceased. We are doing the same thing as immigrants from other countries or early immigrants are doing. If the majority of us are going to live here on a permanent basis, we must set our priorities and plan accordingly.

When we look back into the history of our parish and the diocese we have made tremendous strides. What are some of them? The diocese has grown to a full-fledged diocese with a resident bishop and supporting administration. The diocese has a beautiful center to operate from. As a parish we are poised for the future filled with opportunity for Christian witnessing, fellowship and growth. We have a tremendously dynamic youth group. With a full time achen assigned for the youth ministry, we are giving them more attention in counseling and in developing leadership among them. We have held several leadership conferences. Our church has put some concepts of building a community by having regular fellowship meetings, seminars, counseling sessions, symposiums and games for adults and children. But let us look into the future and see what our challenges are.



I read excerpts from a talk our Metropolitan, The Most Rev. Philipose Mar Chrysostom gave at Focus 2001 in Santhigiri Alwaye, Kerala last February. In this talk Thirumeni was speaking of the Mar Thoma Diaspora (scattered) community living outside Kerala. His Grace told his audience "Do not expect to get directions from Tiruvella: instead give Tiruvella directions." He was speaking to Mar Thoma people who live outside India (Ref: Mar Thoma Messenger, April 2001) This is a profound statement. It is significant in many ways. First

of all it is a departure from the way Church hierarchy has been thinking in the past. Normally such a call for change comes from the grass root level and moves upwards. In this case it has broken all traditions and norms because it comes from top. This is not only a call to change but also a challenge to us to change the way we think and operate here, the way we function as individuals, family units and as parishes or as a diocese. Let us echo to the call made by the Metropolitan. There are four major areas where change is needed in our Church. These are worship, leadership, structure and management and mission.

Our Worship, liturgy and Bible Study

I think everyone would agree with me in saying that our English liturgy needs some changes. I believe it was made for use outside Kerala in India in the latter part of last century. It has not been changed or revised since then. As a matter of fact it was created for use in India and may be to some extent in East Asian countries, such as Singapore or Malaysia. But now time has changed. The liturgy needs revision and appropriate modifications. As a layman, I am least qualified to comment on matters related to liturgy. However, I would say this that our liturgy needs revision. Even Malayalam

liturgy and worship may have some areas where improvement or modification may have to be made to suit local needs and cultural differences. Whether we are aware of it or not the Church is moving towards a global perspective. So change is necessary to make it work in all places.

A second topic I would like to talk about is Bible study. For the purpose of making my point clear, I want to say that Churches can be classified into two categories, liturgical and non-liturgical. Liturgical churches such as the Catholic Church has strong foundation in Catechism which help children understand what their faith is all about. The catechism covers a wide range of subjects with respect to faith, God, man, family, sacraments, marriage, death, life after death and so forth. They are taught from an early age what their beliefs are. So we see them nurture in their faith and become mature believers. The churches on the other end of the spectrum, on the other hand spend a lot of time in bible study for both youngsters and adults.

Let us ask ourselves a question. What are we? My answer to this is that we are neither a bible church nor liturgical church when it comes to these matters. The primary source of faith is family. The Church has a secondary role in nurturing faith. What do we teach ourselves or our children about either the faith or the Bible. Where do we expect our children to learn about our faith (Christian) in relation to their everyday life? What we have is 30 minutes of Sunday school for children. Is that enough to teach everything about all these things? Do we teach our youths about our beliefs? They leave the church and go to colleges and universities or join the work force. In these circumstances they are constantly being challenged and questioned. Are they adequately prepared to meet these challenges? We need to develop a structured bible study or Sunday school for adults as well.

Leadership roles?

Let me ask the simple question? What is our long term vision of leadership in this continent? Should we not spend more time praying, talking and planning about developing leaders from here? If the Church has to exist here in a significantly meaningful way, we should consider developing leadership locally. Our Church has a very effective hierarchical structure and leadership. Staying within that structure, this diocese should think of having more young people join leadership roles. There is a saying about an Indian community living among another majority community outside India. It goes something like this, 'they milked the cow, but forgot to feed it'. What a great characterization about our community. If we do not take responsibility and develop local leadership, we will be the same as the above case.

From the time we had a resident diocesan bishop, this diocese has grown significantly in many ways. There is order, structure, and efficiency. The diocese has expanded

significantly. Now is the time to think about 5-10 years in to the future. What type of people we will be and what kind of people we need in ministry in the future. This is the time to start this type of dialogue. We are moving fast from a forming stage to a developing stage and then to a matured stage. Our needs are changing constantly. I think it should be the prayer of each parish that there should be at least one young person from that parish who will join the ministry or another full time leadership role. How do we show that it is our priority? We can show it by committing money in our budget for leadership training. We should commit money in our budget to send our youngsters for training in leadership within church. We should pray and work to have at least 20 priests from our second generation in the next five years from the diocese. This means at least two young people from one parish

Structure and Management

We are guided by the constitution of the Mar Thoma Church for administrative matters. It is a profound document. I admire its authors for its clarity and appropriateness in the Kerala context. However, it is intended for a local church in Kerala with mostly rural parishes. How much is this document appropriate to us? Are there not areas that need to be changed? Of course there are. We have to ask ourselves and make those changes happen.

Our parishes should watch local parishes and see how they do their business. There is nothing wrong in emulating good examples from them when it comes to ministering and functioning. Local parishes are 24/7 operations, they operate 7 days, 24 hours a day. Our achenes are available seven days a week, 24 hours also. However, there are areas where changes are needed in general administration and functioning. Our achenes may interact with the local Church leaders and gain new experiences that would help them in their ministry and for their future assignments in India.

Mission

What is our mission? Is it simple worshipping? Our churches should be places of learning and teaching, of coaching and counseling. Church life has to be transformed to a vibrant Christian experience. We have to change the way we think and operate if we have to grow as a healthy Church community. There are several critical areas where we must make some changes. We need to redefine ourselves as a community and as a Church. Our mission is to serve our Lord and master Jesus Christ in this land and be witness to him. Now we remain as a gated community. We must be able to move from the walled community and grow into full maturity as quickly as possible. May God guide us and give us wisdom and courage to take up these challenges. ■

A Brief Report on a Mission Trip to South India

September 14, 2000–March 15, 2001

Saramma G. Poikail, Dallas

At the invitation of some leaders of our church, George and I spent six months in South India, traveling extensively, preaching, teaching, and conducting seminars, for youth, women, and large groups of adults. Besides these we also preached in churches, twenty-six of them, the Mallappally Convention and other conventions. In addition, George lectured twice at the Theological Seminary in Kottayam and the AMM Biblical Institute in Kompadi.

Those of us who left Kerala and India some decades ago when that area was a neighborly society without much fear, paranoia, or threat would now be amazed as to how it has changed. Women are afraid to travel even in public transportation, what with P. E. Usha case and other cases of sexual violations in trains and buses. Gang rapes and incest are reported often. THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS on January 26, 2001 reported in RISING RATE OF SUICIDE IN KERALA; A DILEMMA that while suicide rate in other states in India is ten per hundred thousand, in Kerala it is 28.5 per hundred thousand. Of these 56% percent commit suicide due to marital problems, 7% do so due to mental health problems, 6% do so due to financial stringency or debts, etc. A daughter of one of our Mar Thoma Achens committed suicide. A lady professor at Tiruvalla College whose husband teaches at Thuruthicadu college, committed suicide during the lunch break after teaching two morning classes. She immolated herself. Many children are given cocca-cola laced with Feuderol and whole families commit suicide. Recent reports suggest that there is one suicide per hour in Kerala.

Murder and rapes, especially in the Northern districts of Kerala, have become rampant and it has become risky to travel even in closed air-conditioned railway coaches! What has become of our beloved Kerala, with 99% literacy, the highest saturation of Christian preaching with the longest standing Christian tradition outside the Biblical lands? This will take entirely another paper for discussion.

Some of the places where we preached and conducted seminars are: Annanagar in Madras. Mar Thoma Church in Alwaye, St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church in Alwaye, UC College in Alwaye, Salem Mar Thoma Church in Ernakulam; altogether ten churches in that area. A seminar for the teachers at the Mar Thoma College in Perumbavoor and another for the Mar Thoma Higher Secondary School (English) in Ernakulam, were illustrative of the terrible

burdens that the teachers face in dealing with problems of students who face mental health or family problems. One student took some chemicals to kill herself and then ran and fell in front of the Mar Thoma Church in Perumbavoor and luckily they were able to save her. During our visit to Keezhillam, and other churches in that centre, as well as churches in the Alwaye-Ernakulam center we stayed at Santhigiri, Alwaye and we were taken care of extremely well. Thanks to Zacharias Thirumeni, K. G. Joseph Achen and Sicily Kochamma, Raju and Mary, Raju the driver, and the several relief drivers and taxi drivers, we were well-fed and taken care of. While we were at Santhigiri, we also attended the Samootha Vivaham in December and the second international FOCUS Conference where George presented a paper.

Moving north, we preached and conducted seminars at Kannur and then at Kasargod. We visited Kasargod twice, and during the second visit George taught at the Chemical Dependency Seminar. He also preached at the New Year Eve service. It is quite enthralling to see the result of our mission support in Kasargod where the physically handicapped are trained in usable trades. We also visited the senior citizen center nearby and conducted a revival meeting at our chapel there.

The seminars at our church in Manglore was remarkable in that it brought a large number of young people who are students at the nearby medical college and nursing schools. Both seminars ran long and their questions were most appropriate. We also preached at the Sunday service. The visit to Angola and Kumta stand out in that there was an average of three meetings a day and the sermons had to be translated because we didn't know the Kannada language. The trip from Kasargod to Bangalore was remarkable in that we passed through a former French colony. We preached in Bangalore and conducted a seminar for the nursing students at Hoskote.

Once we returned to Central Travancore, we preached at Pullad Sehion, Karakal, St. John's, Niranam Jerusalem, Kavungumprayar St. Thomas, Punnaveli St. John's, SCS Thiruvalla, Mallappally, Ambalamedu Seenai, Pathanamthitta St. Thomas, et al.

Attending the Maramon Convention, speaking to the Diocesan Youth Leaders at Nilakkal-Ranni Diocese, were all heart-warming. What is most remarkable was that many people who had come to us stating that they were born-

again through the ministry of Mundkayam John Upadeshi, and people, especially in North Travancore received us with great warmth and joy. We already have several invitations for later this year to return, especially to the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-sciences at Bangalore and the Mallappally Convention. Whether we go or not depends on God's plan. We have been able to write and publish articles which have resulted in a lot of questions and referrals. To speak at the birth centenary of the late Mathews Mar Athanasius thirumeni who conducted our wedding on April 9, 1959 was a thrill.

One remarkable thing that we noticed was that mental health disorders which once seemed absent are present now. Depression, especially senile depression, schizophrenia, paranoia, obsessive-compulsive disorders, personality disorders, alcoholism and other chemical addictions, attention-deficit disorders along with hyperactive disorders, are all there. The problem is that many people do not come forward for treatment because of perceived shame attached. Hundreds suffer and scores were referred to us. Parent

children conflict threaten family life and violence in the family threaten dissolution of the family. What are the solutions? There are certainly some counseling centers but comprehensive treatment approaches are to be made.

We still get a lot of letters from people sharing their burdens. We have been enriched enormously through the opportunity to minister to others and pray and wait for further opportunities from God. We thank the Thirumenis and the many achans who have been more than kind to us and thank the many believers who gave us opportunities to witness.

As a whole, the trip was beneficial to many. We could feel the needs of the people. Many suffer from poverty, abuse, and mental sickness. Thousands of young people, including college graduates, are going around without a decent job. In mission fields the persecution of christian workers continue but tremendous opportunities await. We remember the many who are doing God's work in the mission fields. Their simplicity and services to the Lord are remarkable. The trip helped us to enlighten our vision and direct our priorities in different ways. ■

I Saw Jesus

A Recap of my Mission Tour of India

By Shibu George

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'



Old age home Ankola.

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'"

"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"



Group with Giri Deepthi School for Tribal Children at Cochin.

On May 30, 2001, I embarked on a journey through various parts of our mother country India, to catch a glimpse of the mission works of our church. What did I see? I saw Jesus...everywhere. I saw Him hungry...i saw Him thirsty...I saw Him as a stranger...I saw Him sick...I saw him as a prisoner. But that's not the only Jesus I saw. I also saw the one who gave the hungry and thirsty something to eat and drink, the one who invited in the stranger, the one who clothed the naked, the one who looked after the sick, and visited the prisoners.

We began our journey in Delhi where we not only visited schools established for children of the slums, but we actually had the chance to walk through the slums. From there we went onto Kasargode, and the school for the deaf. We stopped at Manipal, where we have a counseling center and a place for



Ankola Day Care.

the terminally ill. We traveled through Karnataka, where we visited a school for the local people, a hostel for children of evangelists and converted believers located where there are no good schools, an old age home, an ashram, and a hospital with only one doctor because of low pay and the community situation. Something worth mentioning is that most of the evangelists in Karnataka are converted believers originally from other faiths. In Kottayam we visited the TRADA Rehab Center for Alcohol and Drug Addicts, a women's college, half-way home for the mentally ill, a hostel for tribal children, and an old age home in Kottarakara. On the way back, in



Group with Sisters Ankola Ashram.

Mumbai, we visited Raju George achen's church, the school for the children of the slums he is in charge of, and a clinic within the slums run by a doctor, a member of our church there, who volunteers his time. All of these mentioned are establishments of our own Mar Thoma Church.

Having been given the opportunity to see these things first hand with my own eyes, I came upon many different emotions, realizations, and feelings, one of which was Thankfulness. Thankfulness, that I was born into a Christian family...into a situation where I am a resident of the United States of America. I also came to the realization of how blessed we are here in this country, and of how much we actually take for granted here. One thing I never really thought is that we take so much for granted here in in this country, especially us kids who grew up here. In India, an education may be a child's only chance to get out of the slums, to overcome poverty and social persecution and exclusion...their only ticket to success. And that in itself is not enough with overpopulation and the lack of opportunities available for all those people. It made me

think of all the times I blew off school, didn't pay attention in class, and didn't study...yet I had a better chance to succeed than they ever will. These kids in the slums were incredibly intelligent and talented. I was amazed. If ever given the opportunity, I believe they could change the world. All of this made me much more aware of God's overflowing Grace in my life. And it made me realize how unworthy I am of that grace, and of all the rich blessings that are available to me.

And then there were all the teachers, the doctors, the nuns, the caretakers, the evangelists, and our achen, and thirumenis. I saw Christ in all of them. Their hearts are so



Group with Zacharias Thirumeni and Rev. K. G. Joseph at Santhigiri.

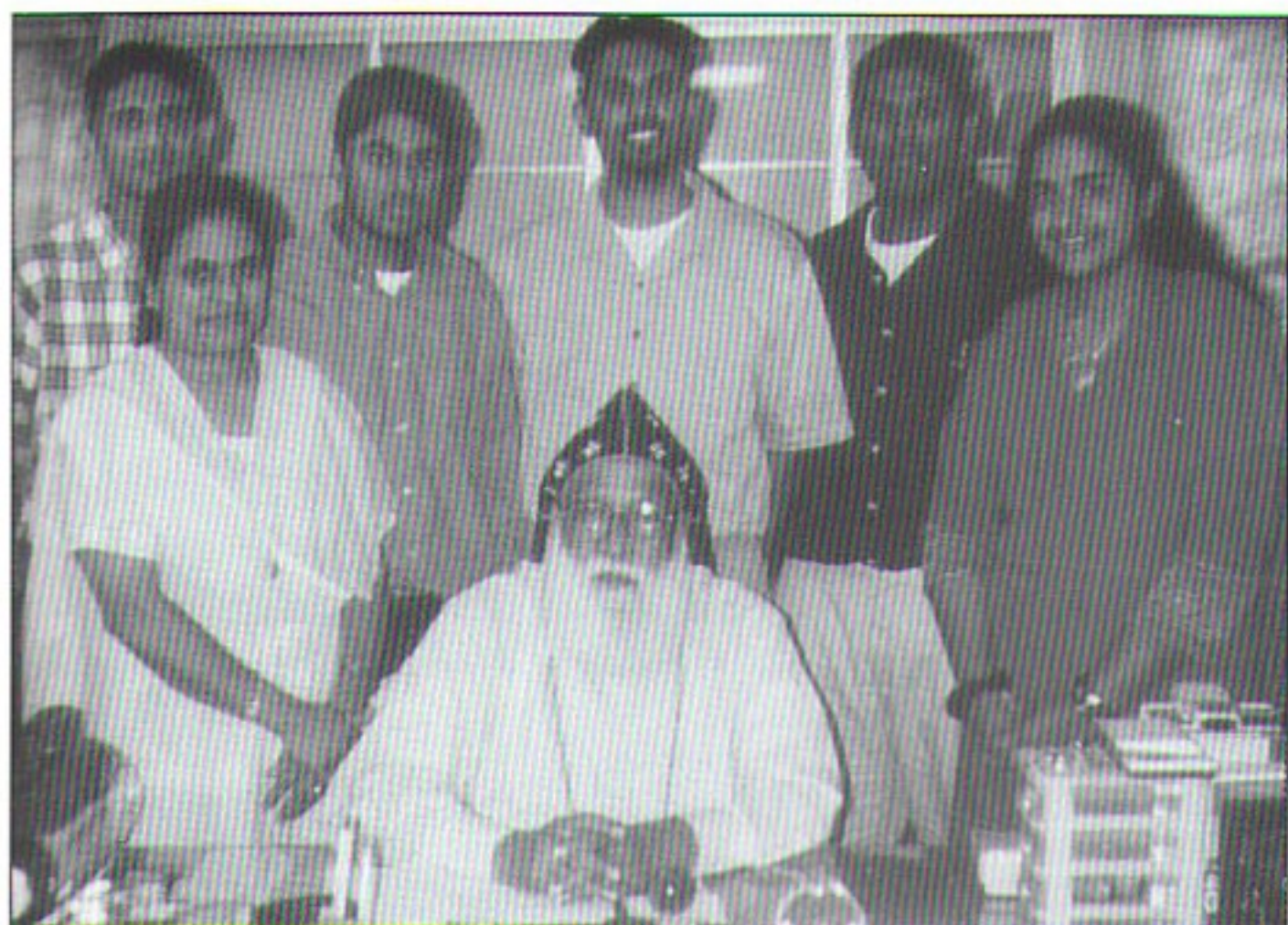
big...so full of love for Christ...and so full of the love of Christ for His people. I have a much greater admiration for these servants of the church after this trip.

So, my plea now is to you—you who have been led by the hand of God into Canaan...into the land of milk and honey...here to these United States, from that small beautiful state of Kerala. God has brought you thus far and has prospered you. The Israelites, when they were brought from Egypt to Canaan, continued to grumble and complain...and we do the same. And God asks the same question: Do they not remember from where I have brought them out from? First and foremost, what those who work for the Lord over there in India need from us is our consistent prayers. Second, they need our financial support—and for those who are able and are willing, they could use our time and services in India. So if



Group with Delhi Deepalaya—Children from slums.

you plan to go out to eat once a week, may be make it every other week. If you plan to go to couple of basketball or baseball games, make it one. If you plan to purchase a



Group with Metropolitan at Poolatheen.

big screen tv, may be make it a 32 inch. These small sacrifices can make a huge impact...Save that money, and send it to the various mission fields that are in India.

May the work of the building up of God's kingdom continue with or without us. May the Holy Spirit create within us a giving heart, that we also may partake in the building up of the kingdom of God.



Group with Theodosius Thirumeni at Trivandrum.

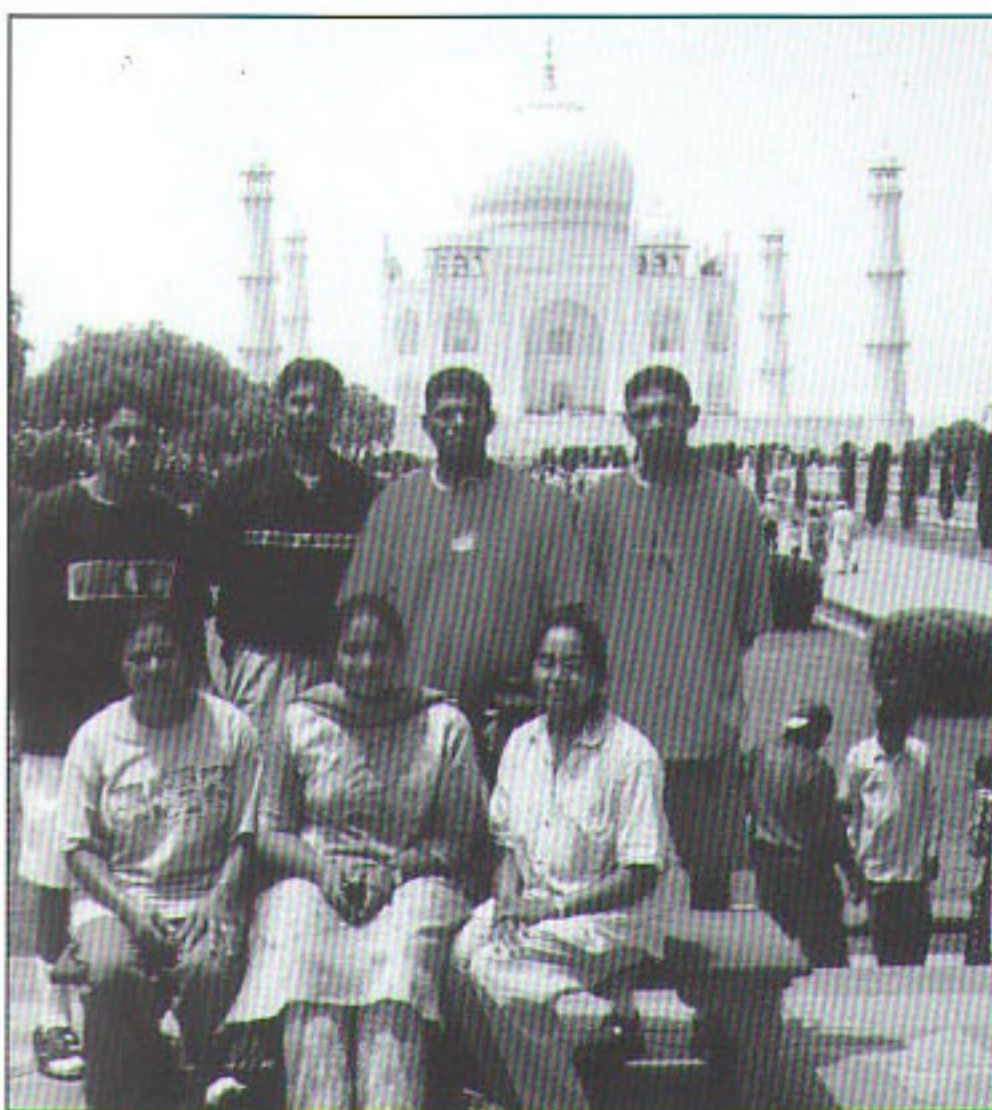
I would like to thank the Diocese for giving us youth the opportunity to go India, and see and experience our mission fields. I would also like to thank Mrs. Mariamma Thomas (Diocesan Council Member) for coordinating the tour and all the thirumenis, achens, and evangelists who provided for us and spent time with us throughout our journey. ■

Pilgrim Mission Tour to India

Mariamma Thomas, Diocesan Council Member, Houston

The Pilgrim mission tour to India, conducted as per the decision of the Assembly and Council of the Diocese of North America & Europe, was a great blessing and a wonderful experience for everyone involved. This was part of the various millennium projects, the assembly and council has undertaken, for the youths. The tour started on May 30, 2001 and lasted for three weeks. There were a total of six youths including four boys and two girls aging sixteen to twenty six years. Though, I volunteered to coordinate the tour to India for the youths, God's guidance was always there with me.

Many people were praying for this trip ever since we made the decision to travel to India with the youth. The presence of God was felt throughout the journey. As the psalmist says, in 34:8, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." We were literally able to taste our Lord and His guidance on many occasions. We experienced God's miraculous work from the beginning of the journey, at Delhi airport, until we returned home. God had sent His angels, ahead of us, to prepare people to help and places to stay. He took care of us from getting sick, especially from food and water, and protected us from all the troubles. Our Lord is same yesterday,



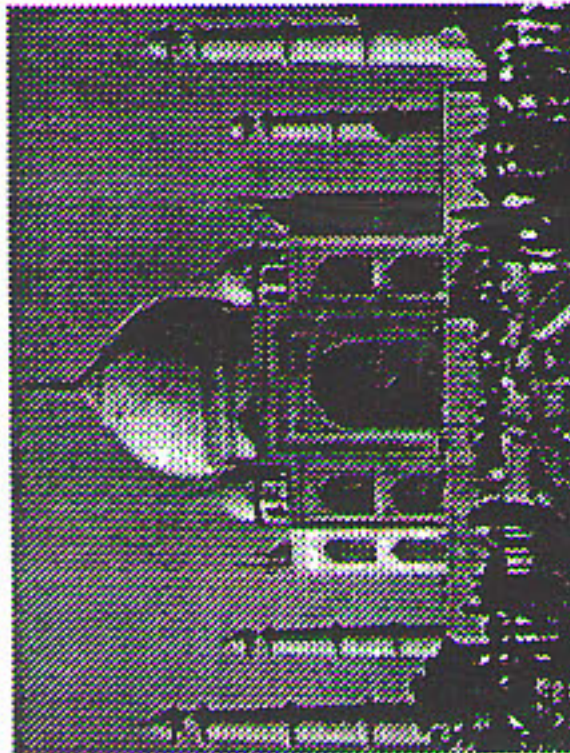
Group visiting Taj Mahal at Agra: (From L to R:) Standing: Samuel Thomas, Shibu George, Abraham George, Jerry Mathew; Sitting: Mariamma Thomas, Libby Zachariah, Lissy Lukose.

today, and tomorrow and He answers our prayers even after two thousand years.

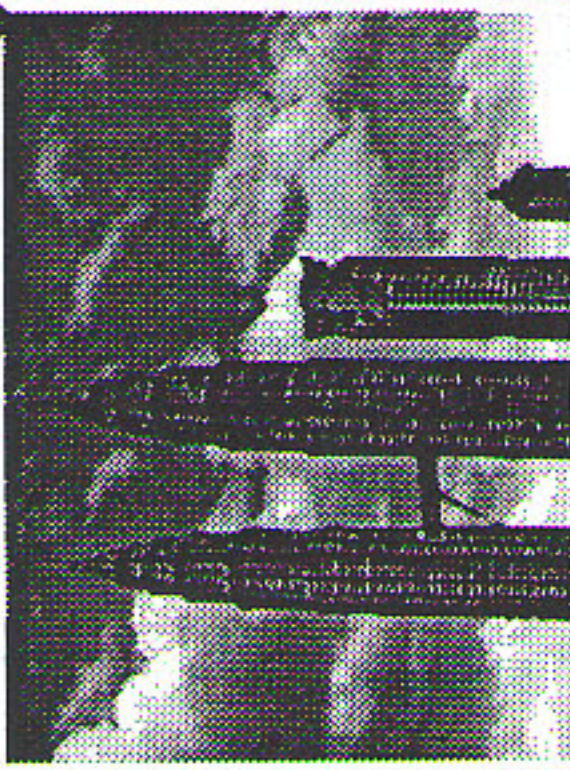
I take this opportunity to thank the Assembly and the Council, especially our diocesan bishop The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus for permitting me to coordinate the tour. My thanks go to the parents who trusted me in taking the children to the unknown places of India where mission work is becoming hard day by day. I am indebted to many people for their gracious support in this mission tour. Dr. P. P. Job, Rev. Eapen Cherian, Brother George Cherian, and their families are a few to be mentioned here for providing us accommodation, food, and meeting our other needs. We are grateful to many Thirumenis, Achens and families for their warm welcome and care. My sincere thanks go to Mr. Thomas Koshy, my husband, who supported me throughout this mission.

As this tour humbles me in my Lord's presence, it also gives me courage to tell our community to get involved in the mission fieldwork in India. There is a totally different world out there where people struggle to make their living. Our Christian responsibility will be fulfilled only when we reach out to these less fortunate. If we believe that youth is our hope and future, it is time to invest in them. ■


HOLIDAYS TO DO



INDIA
GOLDEN TRIANGLE
OR NORTH & SOUTH




MALAYSIA
STOP OVER
ENROUTE INDIA



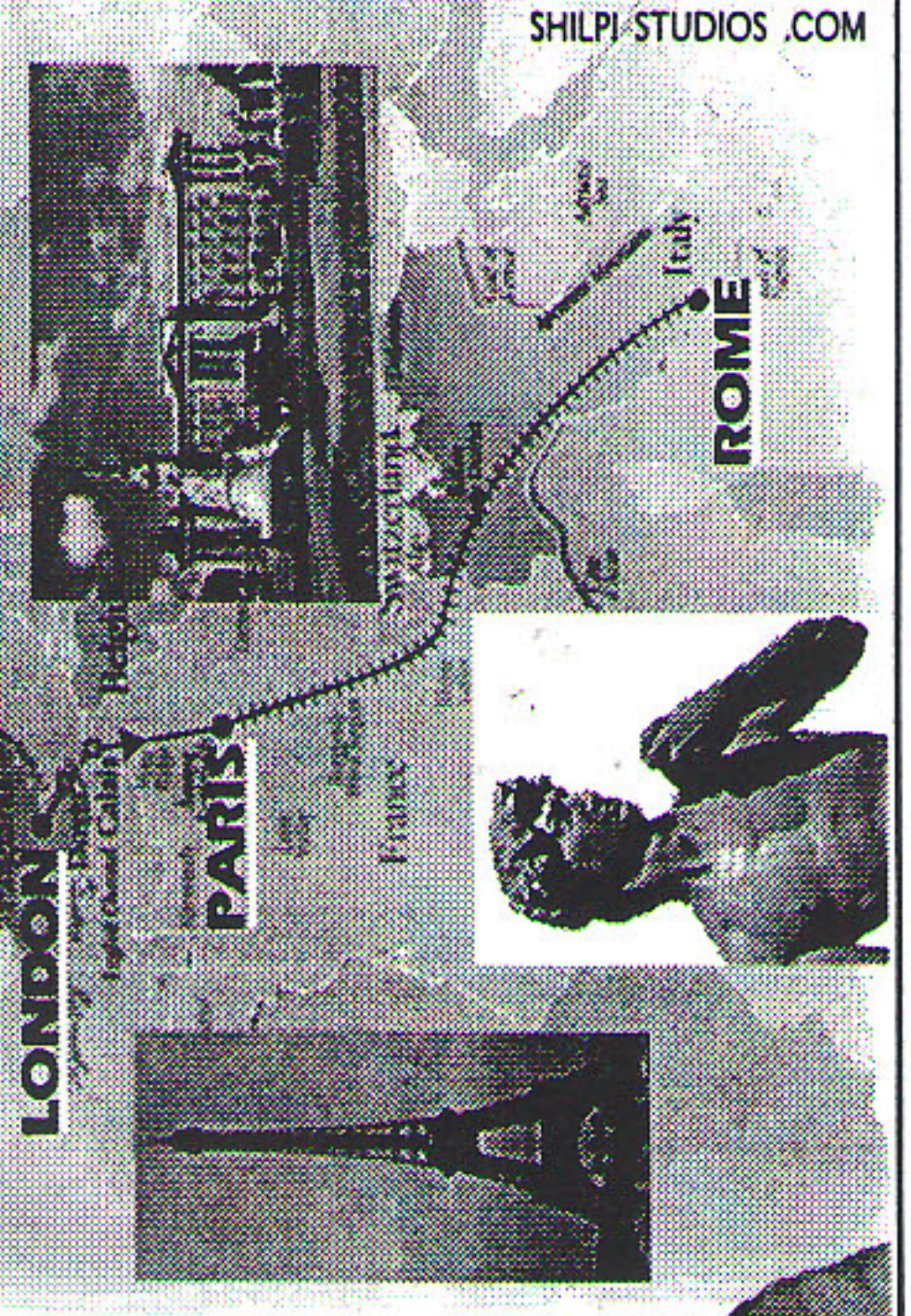
ISRAEL
STOP OVER
ENROUTE INDIA

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exclusive LONDON & PARIS
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What Does It Mean To Be An American Marthomite?

Kavya Sarah John, Los Angeles Mar Thoma Church

Juniors—1st place winner—Mar Thoma Messenger Essay Competition—2001

What exactly is the church? The book of Corinthians describes the church as the Body of Christ and Revelations describes it as the Bride of Christ. The dictionary describes the church as an organized group of people who follow and believe in the teachings of Jesus Christ. This one question, however, arouses several others: What is a Christian? What is a Marthomite Christian, or better yet, what is an American Marthomite Christian? Being an American Marthomite Christian probably means different things to different people. To some it means continuing their fellowship and culture, which they had in India, here in the United States. To others it is just a church in which they were born into. Whatever the Mar Thoma Church might mean to specific individuals, we must all be aware of the fact that the Mar Thoma Church is more than just another Indian church. It has a rich history behind it, which gives much more meaning to the words "American Marthomite."

As we know, St. Thomas who was a disciple of Jesus, is credited for bringing the word of God to India. He was commissioned by the Lord Jesus Himself to "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mathew 28:19-20). Fulfilling his mission to make disciples of all nations, it is believed that St. Thomas arrived on the Malabar Coast of India in the year AD 52 to seek out and save the many "lost sheep" of India, and establish churches. Very little is known about the detailed history of the early period of the church. The Mar Thoma Church is the offshoot of a series of changes in the Malankara Church at different periods in history including the reformation pioneered by Abraham Malpan. Just as Christianity started in Jerusalem and then spread to all of Judea and Samaria and eventually to ends of the earth, from its humble beginning in Kerala, the Mar Thoma Church spread to other parts of India, Asia, Europe and eventually to the Americas. It is by divine design and not by accident that the Mar Thoma Church has spread to several parts of the world. Now many years later, here we are, descendants of the early Marthomites, carrying on the tradition and keeping the Church alive.

Worshipping God through praising and glorifying Him, obeying His commandments, and spreading His word are all important aspects of any Evangelical Church, not the Mar Thoma Church alone. So why do people still want to come to our Church and not go to a local Christian Church? I come to the Mar Thoma Church because I think that it is a place where I can not only receive my Christian values, but also preserve my Indian culture. Part of being an American Marthomite means that I am able to worship and maintain a fellowship with people of my own background and heritage, while living here in the United States. However, in doing so, we must remember not to become cultural islands and isolate ourselves from the society we live in, but instead we should try to maintain a link with them and reach out to them.

We are fortunate to attend a church, which is both flexible and understanding, and is willing to change in order to adapt to

its constantly changing surroundings. As a young American Marthomite, I appreciate the fact that the Mar Thoma Church is trying to change in order to reach out to the younger generation. As our late Valiathirumeni Alexander Mar Thoma wrote in his book *The Mar Thoma Church: Its Heritage and Mission*, "We should be able to identify the problems of our current generation and solve them with understanding and Christian love." While our church is being constantly reformed, the main tenets of our church—teaching the Word of God, the experience of salvation by grace, and evangelism—have not been compromised. To me, being an American Marthomite means that I am attending a church that is willing to modify itself so that it can better identify with me and the coming generation.

Now, as American Marthomites, we are living here in the United States amongst several people who come from various religious and cultural backgrounds. We should not forget the fact that mission work is a major aspect of our church. The late Abraham Mar Thoma once said, "Every Marthomite is a missionary." As Marthomites, I feel that it is our duty to honor this statement. As Christians I feel that it is our duty to reach out and spread the word of God to all non-believers. We should remember the motto of our Church, "Lighted to Lighten" and we should apply the motto to our daily lives. We must remember Jesus' words when He said, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Mathew 5: 16). Being an American Marthomite means that we should be evangelists and do our best to shine amongst all the immorality, vices, and darkness in this world.

Undoubtedly, living in the United States has many privileges in comparison with many other countries all over the world. Here we can enjoy our televisions, computers, stereo systems, DVD players, and much more. However, despite all of the luxuries that we have, we must also deal with all the pressures of growing up in a country where we have access to numerous things, which could harm us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We should respond to these situations in ways that Jesus would want us to and do our best to resist and overcome temptations and peer pressure. This is all part of being a good disciple for Jesus. Jesus said, "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27), to people who wanted to follow him and become his disciples, but were not willing to pay the price of being a true follower of Christ. To me, part of being an American Marthomite includes being unselfish and making sacrifices so that I can follow Jesus and be his disciple, even if it isn't always the easiest thing to do.

God gives each and everyone of us a special talent or resource. The important thing, though, is not what we have or how much we have, but how we use whatever God has given us. As an American Marthomite, I believe that I have an obligation to become a good steward of the resources which God has entrusted me with. Like Jesus explained in the Parable of the Talents in the book of Mathew, Chapter 25, God expects us to take whatever he has given us and to utilize it to its full

potential. In a world where many talents are going to waste because of evil and sin, being an American Marthomite means that we should use the skills and talents that God has given us in a positive way to help others.

In conclusion, I believe that by being an American Marthomite, I am a steward, an evangelist, and a disciple of Jesus. Being a steward of the time, talent, and resources which God has given me, it is my responsibility to use them wisely and for the glory of God. As an evangelist, it is my duty to spread the word of God to all people with Christian love and understanding. And as a disciple of Jesus I should be a good witness for him in society and show others God's love through the way I live my life. There is an old proverb that says, "Once you cut off a person's nose, there is no point in giving him a rose to smell." In other words, if a Christian's attitude turns off someone, that person will not be receptive to the Christian

message. Mahatma Gandhi once said about Christianity, "I like their Christ, I don't like their Christians." This profound statement reflects back on Christians throughout the world. Being Marthomites, I feel that we should do our part to change attitudes such as these and try to become beacons of light, shining for Jesus with love. Last, but not least, being an American Marthomite means that I am a Christian, worshipping in a church with people whom I share a common background and culture. As a young member of the Mar Thoma Church, I am blessed to attend a church, which is both traditional and dynamic in its views. I feel that the younger generation, including myself, should be determined to continue the work that our forefathers have set before us. In doing so, certainly, I and other young Marthomites like me, will be able to gain a better understanding of what it means to be a true American Marthomite. ■

What Does It Mean To Be An American Marthomite?

Anika Chacko, Detroit Mar Thoma Church

Juniors—2nd place winner—Mar Thoma Messenger Essay Competition—2001

An American Marthomite is a Christian who is born and raised in America with the rich, spiritual heritage and faith of the Marthoma Church. The Marthoma Church is an ancient, reformed church of Malabar, India. I am a third generation Marthomite since my grandparents who were Marthomites immigrated into this country in the late sixties to seek better job and educational opportunities for themselves and their children. As far as I can remember, I have always attended a Marthoma church with my family almost every Sunday and have taken an active part in the church life. Though my family had to move due to job transfers, we always attended a Marthoma Church despite the lengthy commutes. The Marthoma Church and the community mean a great deal to me from a spiritual as well as from a social point of view.

As a Marthomite in America, my first memories of the church are etched in my mind. I remember attending my first day of Sunday school at the age of four. Sunday school has taught me to apply important values and morals from the bible stories to my life. Over the past few years, I have learned a great deal about the history of the church and the invaluable contributions made by the Church Fathers. We have studied the book titled "The Marthoma Church: What it is and what it stands for." The book has given me a greater understanding and appreciation of the liturgy that is rich in symbols. It has enabled me to better comprehend the administrative system of the church. I have had the opportunity to learn numerous Christian songs and bible portions at Sunday school. My parents and most of my Sunday school teachers have motivated me to increase my knowledge of God's word. Over the years, I have had a lot of fun taking part in singing competitions, bible reading competitions, memory verse competitions, etc. at Sunday school. Moreover, I have been blessed to attend various Vacation Bible Schools and Junior Camps sponsored by the Sunday school. In many ways, Sunday school has molded my character. As I am progressing in my spiritual life, I have learned to value

Marthomite traditions. To appreciate tradition, one has to look at the positive side. While one may find tradition stifling, it assigns the individual a place in the world among others. It links people to the generations that preceded them. Tradition offers identity, security, and diversity. When the Achen begins the chanting that preludes the service, it gives me a sense of peace. The repetitive nature of the liturgy provides a feeling of familiarity and comfort. The Church preserves tradition through maintaining our oriental values. Each generation will modify traditions to fit their ideas and needs. For example, Abraham Malpan reformed the Church by implementing changes in the Church. Abraham Malpan was bold enough to change the service from Syriac into the vernacular. We as Marthomites in America must be flexible to accommodate the needs of the majority of the Marthomites. Abraham reformed the Church by removing the inconsistencies and retaining the rich oriental faith. He told us that salvation is not through works but through faith. We as American Marthomites must try to incorporate the necessary changes to make the services fulfilling to everyone. We should follow his lead by assimilating the positive traits of the American and Indian values. There should always be a blend of the Eastern and Western worlds while we preserve our spiritual heritage.

Another trait I admire about our church is our sense of community and fellowship. Two years ago, I attended my grandfather's funeral. At my grandfather's funeral service, the whole community helped. People arranged for the hall, and everyone brought food for the lunch after the service. They brought flowers and comfort. What amazed me the most was that people came in the middle of the night of his death to pray at his side and to sing songs. Friends from Church took a day off work and flew in from all over the country to support us and to pay their last respects to my grandfather. Even after the funeral, there were so many people who came to our aid. When my family arrived home from Delaware, church members brought

bags of food. They sent flowers and cards and called to express condolences. They held a prayer meeting in honor of my grandpa. I witnessed the link of love and caring of our church at that point. In my mind, the Church was living up to what James had said in his epistle, "We must be preachers and doers of the Gospel."

The Marthoma Church also provides the opportunity to gather as a large community in many places. We meet others through Choir Festivals, Family Conferences, and various youth functions. We come together for Christmas plays and programs. We have fellowship through coffee hour and Easter meals. We go to Church Picnics and attend the Sunday school programs. For those who are willing to travel a great distance, there is the Maramon Convention, one of the largest Christian gatherings in the world. At my church, there is always something going on every day. Tuesday is Intercessory Prayer meeting. Malayalam classes are held on various evenings. There are practices for both of our choirs held on the weekends. There are Edavaka Mission and Sevika Sanghom meetings. The church holds combined prayers every month. Practices are held for any upcoming programs. There are Youth meetings every weekend as well. In short, people use our church every day. For many members of the church, it is a home away from home. They eat doughnuts from the fridge and Oreos from the cabinet. Some drink coffee and others drink pop. This atmosphere strengthens friendship and fellowship among the members of the Church. Spiritual and emotional ties are strengthened through these informal gatherings.

As I grow older, I am beginning to notice other details about the Church. The Church encourages witnessing among everyone and not just adults. Some witnesses share information that enhances the spirituality of the Church members. The Marthoma Church is more active in mission work than I had previously thought. My church doesn't have many opportunities for people who want to help others. Our community service is to the extent of an occasional food drive or donation of clothing to those who need it. Most of my American friends were making their Confirmation when I received my First Communion.

They were required to participate in anywhere from 40–100 hours of community service. I was not required to do any, so I assumed that the Church as a whole wasn't too focused on helping those in need. I was wrong. The Marthoma Church recently sponsored several marriages for those who couldn't afford the expenses. I also learned of the Bhoo Bhavan movement that Juhanon Marthoma invented. The movement set up 100 houses per year for those lacking in financial resources. The Church sponsors the building of orphanages and schools. The Church has also built ashrams in Sihora, Satna, Hoskote, and Ankola to promote evangelism. I was surprised and pleased to be a member of a Church that lives up to what Jesus stated in the Great Commission. I also have learned that the Church is globally recognized as well. I was under the impression that the Church was only in North America and India, but I found out that the Bishop represents us at many global Christian organizations such as the World Council of Churches.

I am proud to be one among the 15,000 American Marthomites. To be an American Marthomite is a privilege with responsibility. One has to take the best out of his or her faith life and integrate those values in the daily life. I heard someone once say, "Give all you have to your church. Give your time and energy. Devote that time to whatever you are best at. If it is to sing, conduct the choir or be a member of the choir. Don't sing to impress others with your voice. Rather, sing for God and devote your soul to please His ears. If you work well with children, share your knowledge with others. If you are an orator, speak boldly of your experiences. Tithe your money to the church. Giving may involve a sacrifice of a vacation or a new house. But God knows what you have done, and he will bless you abundantly. Yet don't let 'your left hand know what your right hand is doing.' Don't be a hypocrite and tell of your goodness to everyone you see, for then God will not recognize your sacrifices." These statements have clarified what the Marthoma Church means to me: 'Lighted to Lighten.' ■

The Mar Thoma Church, As I See It, Twenty-Five Years From Now

Melvy Sarah Mathew, Chicago Mar Thoma Church

Seniors—1st place winner—Mar Thoma Messenger Essay Competition—2001

Recently, revolutionary changes have led to greater importance being placed on the church and its influence. With the world constantly changing and with Satan constantly devising new ways to create detours on believers' paths to God, the church must keep up by accommodating such alterations and constantly monitoring the church's effectiveness. The Mar Thoma church, in particular, must anticipate the changes that are sure to take place in the world within the next several decades, and it must take steps to ensure that the church's beliefs and values remain untouched. Twenty-five years from now, the Mar Thoma church is sure to have made advances that will allow it to further fulfill its mission to spread God's Word.

In the future, there will be more Mar Thoma churches scattered throughout the United States. As the number of Marthomites migrating to this country increases, in order to avoid overpopulation in existing churches, it will become necessary to build more edifices to serve as places of worship and fellowship. In this way, more people will have the opportunity to attend church services and strengthen their faith in God. Having access to a church is important for every follower of God for the church represents the body of Christ: "Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior" (Ephesians 5:23). In addition, a church facilitates unity among believers by providing each one with the support of

fellow disciples who share a common faith in God. This fact is supported by Paul's words, "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5-6).

Mar Thoma churches of the future will make allowances for the fact that many members of the congregation will be more comfortable with services conducted in English rather than with those conducted in Malayalam. In order to communicate God's Word in a manner in which all church members can understand, the Achen will conduct services in both English and Malayalam on each Sunday. Such a system is already in effect at the Chicago Mar Thoma Church. The liturgy, or order of worship, will be available in both English and Malayalam. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he advises the people of Corinth that the interpreting of different tongues is necessary for "the strengthening of the church" (1 Corinthians 14:26).

A greater percentage of the Achens of future Mar Thoma churches will be American-born. As the congregations in the churches become larger, more people will be drawn closer to God, and some members may be called upon to join the priesthood of God. In 1999, Rev. Roy Thomas of Dallas, Texas became the first priest of the Mar Thoma church to be ordained from the second generation Marthomites born and brought up in the United States. More American-born Achens are sure to follow in the years to come.

Within the next twenty-five years, seminaries dedicated to training Achens will be built in the United States. Currently, those who wish to become Achens of the Mar Thoma church find it necessary to travel to India in order to acquire the guidance and the knowledge they need. As the number of American-born individuals interested in dedicating their lives to serving God increases, the idea of having seminaries available in America itself will become a practical one.

Future Mar Thoma congregations will reflect the diversity that characterizes the population of this country. In 1998, the *Chicago Tribune* published an article entitled "Keeping the Faith" that informed others about the traditions characteristic of the Mar Thoma church. As the number of Mar Thoma churches multiplies, people of varied ethnic and racial backgrounds will be drawn to them and the values and beliefs they uphold. In this way, the Mar Thoma church will serve as an accurate representative of the heterogeneous mixture of peoples that actually exist in the world.

In the years to come, Marthomites will serve in many prominent positions in society. Even today, many Marthomites have succeeded in securing positions of political power in this country. While fulfilling their professional duties, these individuals can promote the mission of the Mar Thoma church and emphasize that they are "lighted to lighten." As a result of being like Jesus, who was a "light of the world" (John 8:12), more people will become aware of God's grace and be drawn to Him.

However, adversity in response to the upward mobility of Christians in society is to be expected. The violence caused by

Hindu radical groups in India following the success of Sonia Gandhi attests to this fact. According to *U.S. News & World Report* magazine, the 27 million Christians of India who make up barely 2.5% of the population are now at the crux of the country's political struggle. General secretary Acharya Giriraj Kishore stated, "Sonia personifies Christian values and Christian power in this country, and we want to put the spotlight on her Christian identity." Like Gandhi, Marthomites are sure to be persecuted in the future. However, the Bible reminds "rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:12).

Despite the difficulties Marthomites will encounter, they will be reassured by fellow believers. According to *U.S. News & World Report* magazine, some of today's religious leaders suggest that the future will bring "a resurgence in religious tolerance and tranquility." Rev. John Buchanan mused, "There is a kind of energy, 'a moving of the Spirit' that the Apostle Paul promised would bring all things together."

In response to future technological advances, Marthomites will find it necessary to call upon their faith to remind them of God's truths. For example, Sun Microsystems' Bill Joy warns, "advances in robotics, genetic engineering, and nanotechnology could lead to a world populated by super-organisms, both biological and mechanical." Christians should be wary of assuming the role of God, the creator of life. "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things were created by him and for him." (Colossians 1:16).

Marthomites can prevent social problems by encouraging fellow church members to attend services regularly. According to a study conducted by Harvard University, regular church attendance has a greater impact on youths' urge to turn to drugs or crime than does family structure or income. Evidence shows that there is a definite link between religious participation and avoidance of social pathologies like drug abuse, alcoholism, and crime.

The Mar Thoma church will also succeed in helping the poor of this nation. Some believe the church can do a better job of helping those less fortunate than the government, schools, or other institutions could. Marthomites will continue to collect money to purchase Bibles for the poor and to buy the resources needed to build housing for them. Those receiving aid from the church will come to know the truth of the verse "Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all." (Proverbs 22:2).

Thanks to recent innovations, the world is moving at a remarkable and slightly alarming pace. The rate of progression is sure to only increase in the next twenty-five years. As long as the Mar Thoma church continues to experience growth, Marthomites will be able to keep up and continue to fulfill their mission of serving as lights of the world by heeding Jesus' words: "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). ■

The Mar Thoma Church, As I See It, Twenty-Five Years From Now

Shiny Mathewkutty, St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church, Dallas

Seniors-2nd place winner—Mar Thoma Messenger Essay Competition-2001

Bright and glowing, a lamp has the power to remove darkness wherever it goes. Dispelling darkness, it surrounds not only itself but also, others in its warm-glowing light. A lamp possesses the amazing capacity of sharing its light with the objects surrounding it, lighting other lamps, burning itself while striving to light others, and removing darkness at the same time. Realizing this, it is no coincidence that Jesus Christ called us, Christians, the "lamps of this World." Lighted to Lighten, our succinct Marthoma slogan based upon the above words of Christ, beautifully accomplish what we, Marthoma Christians, stand for. Treading earnestly on a path filled with temptations and sacrifices, burning as a lamp, our Church, established in A.D. 52 by St. Thomas, has come a long way. Our history recounts many instances, such as the period after St. Thomas' martyrdom, when progress died and existence itself was a mystery, when strong winds of evil strived to extinguish the little flame lit in A.D. 52. However, under the caring gaze of the Almighty Potter who conceived us, we not only kept our flame alive but also, grew stronger by sharing this flame with those around us. Looking back at all the progress we have been able to achieve, I can see the future bubbling with immense possibilities.

Expanding our horizons from our bases in Kerala, we have started several evangelical missions in several different parts of India. Marthoma missionaries are actively engaged in sharing the knowledge of Christ. In the last twenty-five years, several mission centers have been established in Rajasthan, Shadol, Siddhi, Nepal, and various other Northern parts. Although spread almost all throughout India, our impact on the Northern and Western states is relatively less compared to the successes in South. In the next twenty-five years, I can see the Mar Thoma Church actively spreading the light in the Northern States. Brought up in Gujarat, I have seen the rapid progress Mar Thoma Church has achieved in the past seventeen years in Gujarat. We expanded rapidly from a small church in a remote part of Ahemadabad to two Churches with large memberships in the main city. This knowledge further strengthens me in foretelling the transformation that will occur in Gujarat. In the coming years, I can see Mar Thoma Church establishing evangelical mission centers in the Northern States, not only spreading the Word of Christ, but also helping the community through various service projects. Not only in India, but also, in the next twenty-five years, I can see Mar Thoma Mission Centers being established in the Northeastern Asian countries. Several mission centers, akin to those recently established in Tibet and Nepal, will be established in the predominantly Buddhist countries of China, Korea, and Japan. Although struggles will be great, I can see our Church actively bringing about a change in China. Tremendous progress has also been achieved in non-Asian countries, such as the United States, Canada, and European countries. My present Church, St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, itself stands as a testimony of the rapid development of Mar Thoma Churches in the United States.

Established as a Church with few members in 1988, St. Paul's has grown to accommodate seventy-two members in 2001 and is continuously growing. Keeping in mind this rate of progress, I can see the birth of many more Mar Thoma Churches in these countries and an increase in the workshops and the conferences conducted. In the coming years, I can also envision a new crusade beginning in the hearts of Africa, where the knowledge of Christianity is rare. While performing crusades and missionary work, I can see our Church facing several formidable temptations, but like a lamp, burning constantly, dispelling darkness and spreading the Light, we will continue on the path no matter how thorn infested it may be.

Lighting others is the main goal of Christianity. As described above, I can see our church vigorously lighting the spiritual lives of many in the dark. I can also see our Church being strengthened spiritually. When a lamp lights another lamp, its flame may flicker for a moment, but, after that flicker, it burns evermore zealously. In the next twenty-five years, our Church will be filled with enormous spiritual vigor and vitality. However, the Mar Thoma Church Mission does not stop here. Ever since the birth of our Church, we have been greatly involved in numerous community service projects. From Schools for the blind to homes for the unfortunate women, we have a wide range of community service projects. In the next twenty-five years, I can see an expansion in this area. In the coming years, I can also envision a large number of hospitals, like the Bishop Memorial Hospital in Palghat, and care centers being established at different sectors that are in dire need of such services. I can also see an increased involvement of the Youth Leagues from all the Mar Thoma Churches in various activities requiring personal involvement, such as spending time with mentally challenged children, orphans, and elders in the old age homes. Having been a part of such projects organized by our Youth League and Schools, I have come to realize the impact that these activities have both on the person receiving this service, and the rewarding satisfaction that fills the person administering it. I can thus, see our flame shining evermore brightly in the coming years.

Finally, in the coming years, I can see us burning. Being a lamp, it is important to realize the meaning of pain. It was only because he was thrown in the midst of flames that Daniel was saved, because they were thrown in the prisons, stoned, that the disciples were able to understand the true meaning of Christianity, because he died on the Cross, that Christ achieved our Salvation. We, Mar Thoma Christians, have burned in the past to survive in the present and we will continue to burn, sacrifice, undergo sufferings, to continue to grow spiritually and fulfill our mission to spread the Light.

In the coming years I can see the Mar Thoma Church, performing the mission entrusted to us, treading on the untrodden frontiers, lighting the unlit, sharing our oil with those less fortunate, and burning as we move on. We have led our lives as lamps and will continue to do so in the next twenty-five years, burning ever-more brightly and spreading the light. ■

വിതുമ്പേണ്ടനിക്കായ്

ഉമ്മൻ ജോർജ്ജ്, ഹ്യൂസ്റ്റൺ

(ഒരു നല്ല സുഹൃത്തിന്റെ ദേഹ വിധോഗം വേദനാജനകമാണു. ഈ അടുത്ത ദിവസം നിരിയാതനായ ശ്രീ. ടി. ഓ. സാമുവേലിനെ അടുത്തു പരിചയപ്പെടാനും, മരണത്തെ കുറിച്ചുള്ള ഭയത്തെ കുറിച്ചും, മരണാനന്തര ജീവിതത്തെ കുറിച്ചും, ക്രിസ്തുവിൽ അതിന്റെ മനോഹരിതയെ കുറിച്ചുമൊക്കെ പലപ്പോഴും ചിന്തകൾ പങ്കു വയ്ക്കാനും കഴിഞ്ഞിട്ടുണ്ടു. ആ ചിന്താധാരകളെ ഉൾക്കൊണ്ടുഴുതിയ 'വിതുമ്പേണ്ടനിക്കായ്' എന്ന കവിത സഹൃദയ സമക്ഷം വെച്ചുകൊള്ളട്ടെ. ഭൗതിക ജീവിതത്തിനപ്പുറത്തുള്ള ആദ്ധ്യാത്മിക ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ വതായനം തുറക്കാൻ ഇതു ഉപകരിക്കട്ടെ എന്നു പ്രാർത്ഥിക്കുന്നു.)

വേദനകൾ തീർന്നു കുളിർകാറ്റു വീശി

ഖേദിക്കാനായിനി എന്തുളളു സുഹൃത്തേ
ചാഞ്ഞു ഞാൻ കർത്താവിൻ വക്ഷസിൽ
മാഞ്ഞെന്റെ സംസാര ദുഃഖമെന്നേക്കുമായ്.

കരയേണ്ട ഒരുന്നാളും നിങ്ങളാരും
മരണം അമർത്തുതയിൻ നാദിമാത്രം
അറിയുന്നതിങ്ങു ഞാനിന്നു സത്യമായ്
കരയറ്റവന്റെ സ്നേഹലാളനത്തിൽ.

ഭയമായിരുന്നു ഞാൻ പലനാളതിൻ
കയത്തിൽ മുങ്ങി ഉഴറുമായിരുന്നു
സ്വയബുദ്ധിയിൽ നിന്നങ്ങനെ ചെയ്തുവതു
വ്യയമെന്നറിഞ്ഞു ഞാൻ അനുഭവത്താൽ.

കഷ്ടങ്ങൾ വന്നുഭവിപ്പതും ഉള്ളതാ
സ്യഷ്ടാവ് കൈവിടില്ലെന്നുള്ളതും നൂനമാ
"ഒരുന്നാളും കൈവിടില്ല നിന്നെ വൃഥാ"
അരുളിയോനരികിലുണ്ടു സോദരാ.

പരിപൂർണ്ണമാണാസത്യമെന്നേവരും
അറിയേണം ഭൗതിക ജീവിതത്തിലും
അതിനായികുറിച്ചതാണിതൊക്കെയും
വിതുമ്പേണ്ടനിക്കായിനിയൊരിക്കലും.

THE LORD! MY GOD!

Stanley Samuelkuty, MTC, Los Angeles (12 years)

The Lord is great. He has almighty powers. There is no limit of His understanding. Great is His love. It is higher than the heavens. His truth reaches the skies. I want your love to be in my mind and heart every day, Lord.

There is one thing we can be sure of when we come to God in prayer. If we ask anything in keeping with the faith, He hears our prayers. Through out my life, God has been gracious and compassionate to me. He has helped me achieve great lengths in schools and everywhere else I go. I have seen many times God's helping hand to me.

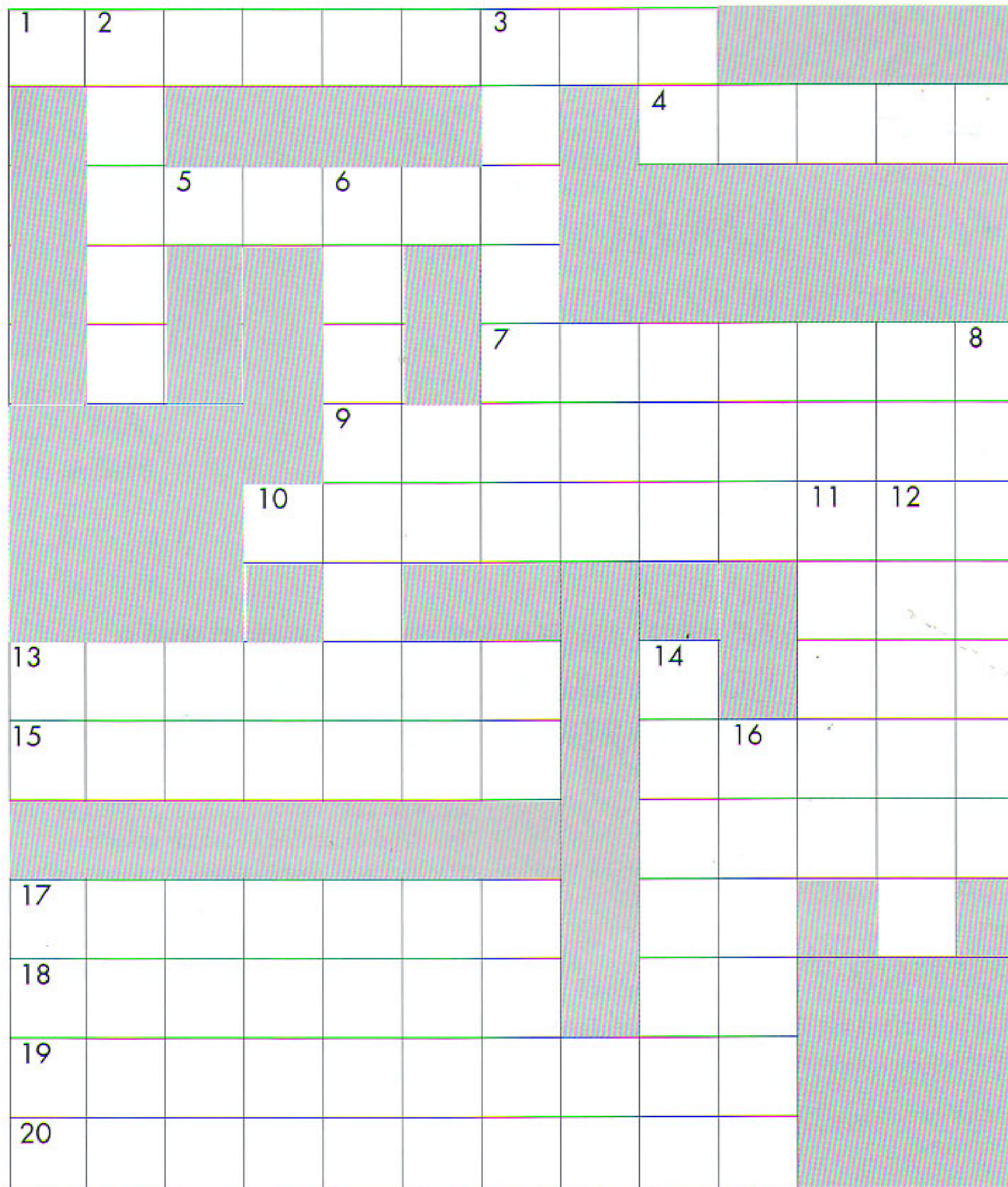
God is also good to each and every one of us in another way, because He will always forgive our sins if we repent. Also if we are the children of God, we should not keep on sinning. We should be thankful that our God has forgiven us once before.

I have seen how much the Lord has been good to me. I hope He helps me in the years to come. Amen.

BIBLE CROSS WORD PUZZLE

AS IN THE NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION
(based on II Kings Chapters 1-12)

Mrs. Jessy Kurien (New York)



Across

1. Who was the daughter of King Jehoram and sister of Ahaziah?
4. King _____ of Moab was a sheepbreeder.
5. _____ destroyed Ball worship in Israel.
7. Who was the commander of the army of the King of Aram?
9. What was King Ahaziah's mother's name?
10. On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs will devour _____'s flesh.
13. _____ succeeded Ahaziah as king.
15. Naaman suffered from _____.
17. Who succeeded king Joash as king?
18. Who was the father of Elisha?
19. _____ the priest instructed king Joash all the years.
20. Elijah ascended in a _____ into heaven.

Down

2. Jehoram reigned in Jerusalem as king of Judah _____ years.
3. Baal-Zebub was the God of _____.
6. _____ took a thick cloth, soaked it in water and spread it over king Ben-Hadad's face, so that he died.
8. The names of two rivers of Damascus mentioned in this book are Abana and _____.
11. _____ was seven years old when he began to reign.
12. Joash's mother's name was _____.
14. Elisha's servant's name?
16. Naaman immersed himself seven times in _____.

BIBLE WORD SEARCH

AS IN THE NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION
(based on II Kings Chapters 13-25)

Mrs. Jessy Kurien (New York)

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

- King Azariah's mother's name was _____.
- The Lord afflicted the king Azariah with _____ until he died, and he lived in a separate house.
- Who rebuilt the upper gate of the temple of the Lord?
- Who was the last king of Israel?
- Who seized Hoshea and put him in prison?
- Israelites set up sacred stones and _____ poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree.
- The Gods of Sepharvaim were _____ and Anammelech.
- The men from cuth made _____ as their God.
- The men from Hamath made _____ as their God.
- There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord, and did not cease to follow Him. What was his name?
- Who was the palace administrator of king Hezekiah of Judah?
- Who prophesied sennacherib's fall?
- The Lord added _____ years to Hezekiah's life.
- Who succeeded Hezekiah as king?
- Manasseh was buried in his palace garden, the garden of _____.
- Who was the prophetess mentioned in this book?
- King _____ turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the law of Moses.
- Nebuchadnezzar made Mattaniah, king in Jehoiachin's place and changed his name to _____.
- Nebuchadnezzar appointed _____ as governor to be over the people he had left behind in Judah.

Bible Word Search Finders (April 2001)

- Juley George
- Christopher George Chacko
- Denny Simon
- Saumya Simon
- Kunjamma Thomas
- Sicily Joseph
- Sheba Susan Philip
- Omana Rajee
- Varughese Thomas
- Mariamamma Zachariah
- Siby David
- Prathik Manuel Philip
- Asha & Vinod John

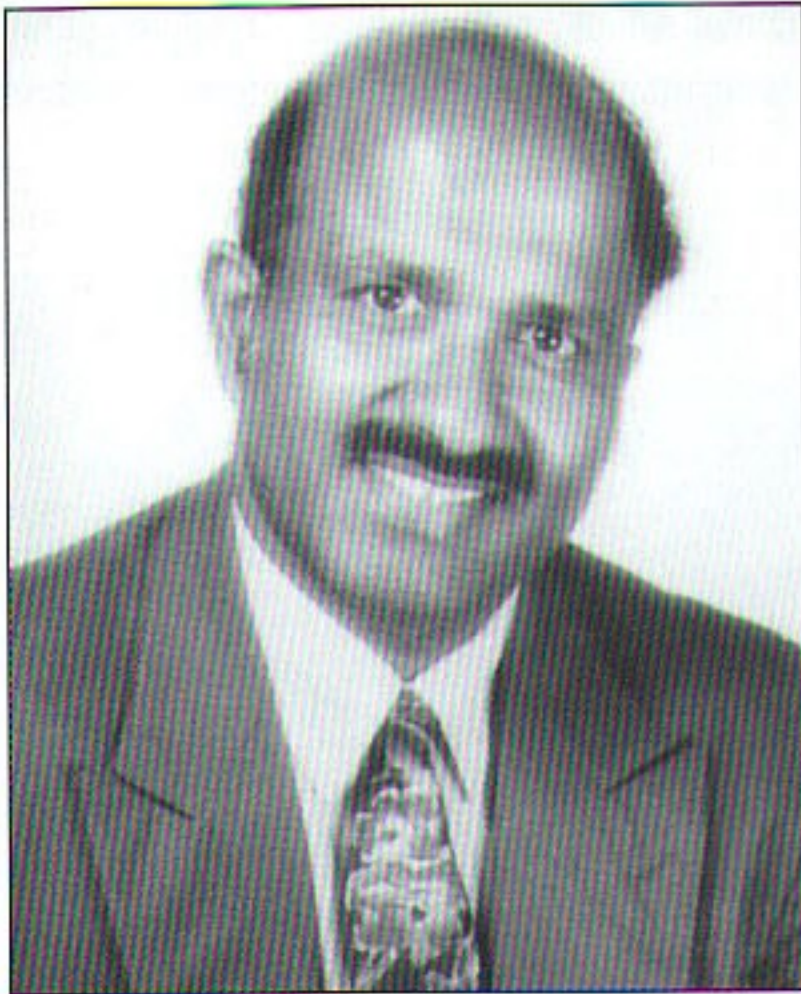
Bible Cross-Word Puzzle Winners (April 2001)

- Juley George
- Saumya Simon
- Sheba Susan Philip
- Varughese Thomas
- Mariamamma Zachariah
- Siby David
- Prathik Manuel Philip
- Asha & Vinod John

ATTENTION ALL CONTESTANTS!!!

Please mail your answers to:
Mrs. Suma Varghese, 103-10 104th Street,
Ozone Park, NY 11417

DEADLINE FOR ANSWERS September 15, 2001



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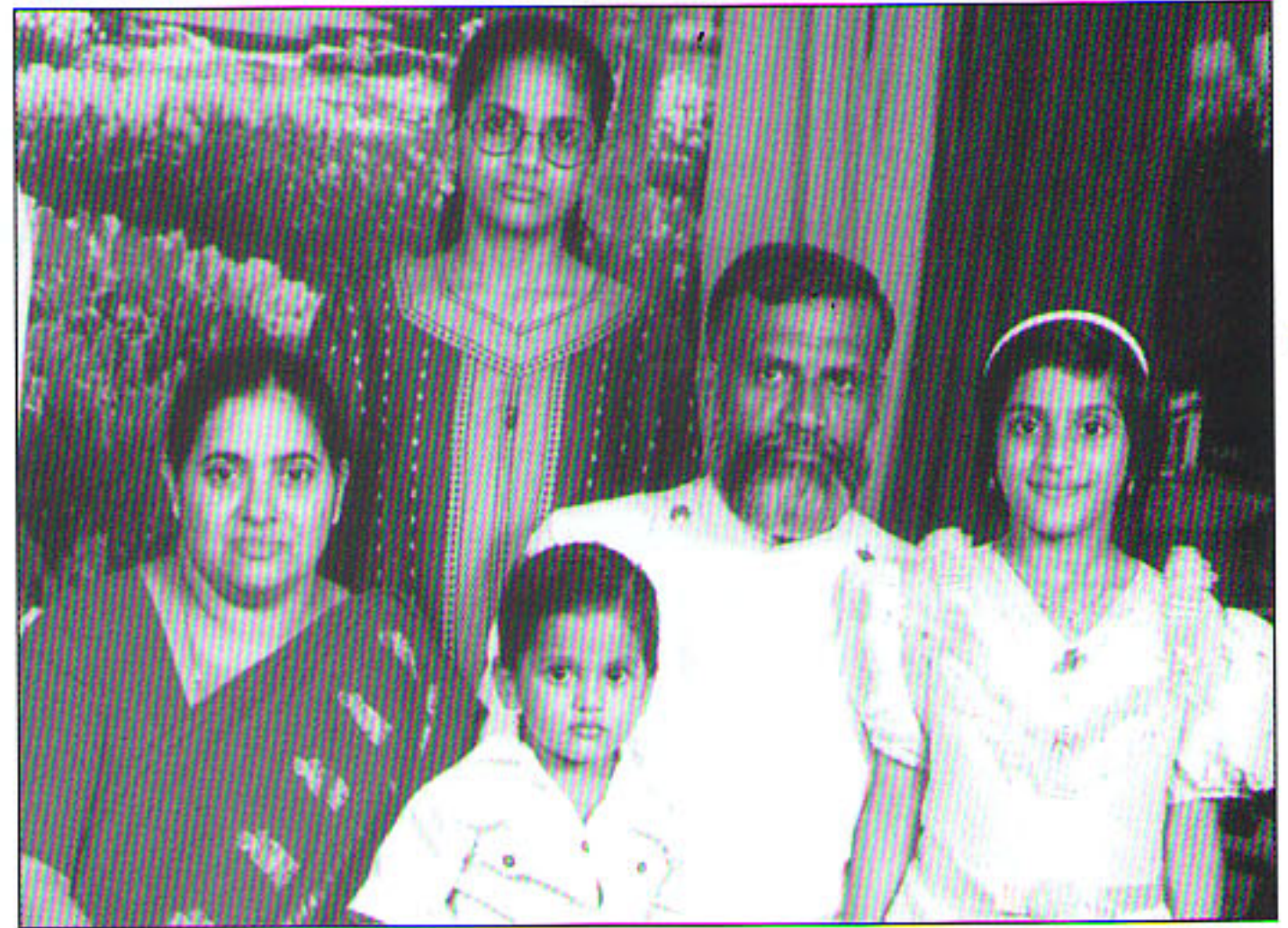
DIOCESAN/PARISH NEWS

BETHEL MAR THOMA CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA

ZACHARIAH ACHEN IS HOSPITALIZED IN A TRAGIC CAR ACCIDENT

We are saddened to report that Rev. P. K. Zachariah, Vicar of the Bethel Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia was injured in a car accident on July 8, 2001. He was admitted to Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, Philadelphia where he is now undergoing treatment.

We must continuously pray for achen's speedy recovery. Those who visited him at the hospital were amazed at Zachariah achen's deep convictions about God's abundant grace in the midst of excruciating pain that he suffers. He believes that God will use this incident to bring about a revival in our churches. Let us remember Zachariah achen, Kochamma and their three children in our daily prayers.



P. K. Zachariah Achen and Family.

DIOCESAN AWARD FOR VALUABLE SERVICE



Abraham Mattackal, Daniel Thomas and James T. Philip were awarded certificates in recognition of the valuable service rendered to the Diocese of North America and Europe in the publication of Mar Thoma Messenger.

(Left to right:) Zacharias Thirumeni, Abraham Mattackal, Daniel Thomas and Rev. K. Y. Jacob. (James T. Philip is not in the picture)

THANK YOU ACHEN & KOCHAMMA

Mrs. Jessy Kurien, wife of Rev. Kurien George, New York has been helping our Sunday School children with the 'Bible Word Search' and 'Bible Cross Word Puzzle' section of the Mar Thoma Messenger for the last about two years. Kurien George achen was earlier a member of the Editorial Board of the Messenger as well. They will be returning to Kerala by the beginning of October.

The Messenger expresses its gratitude for the valuable services rendered by achen and Kochamma and wish them God's abundant blessings and mercies at their new place of assignment.

FIRST AND SECOND PLACE WINNERS OF THE DIOCESAN SUNDAY SCHOOL EXAM

JUNIOR - GRADE 5

First Place



Aleena Cherian
St. Thomas MTC, NY

Second Place



Merlyn Varghese
St. John's MTC, NY

JUNIOR - GRADE 6

First Place



Ivy Abraham
Chicago MTC, Chicago, IL

Second Places

JUNIOR HIGH - GRADE 7

First Place

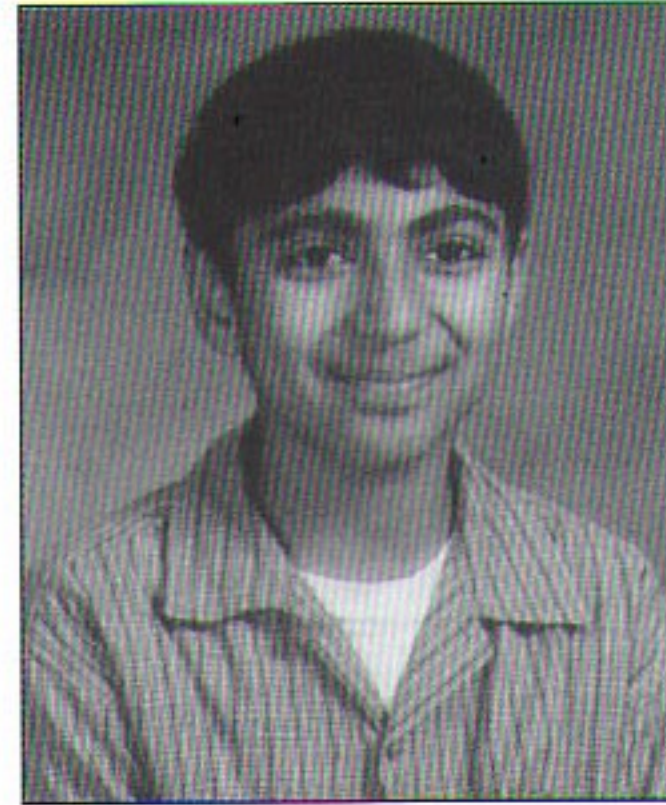


Gena Mathew
Trinity MTC, Houston, TX

Second Place



Susan Grace Koshy
Bethel MTC, Frankfort, IL



Titus Kurian
Ebenezer MTC, NY



Bincy Philip
Chicago MTC, Chicago, IL

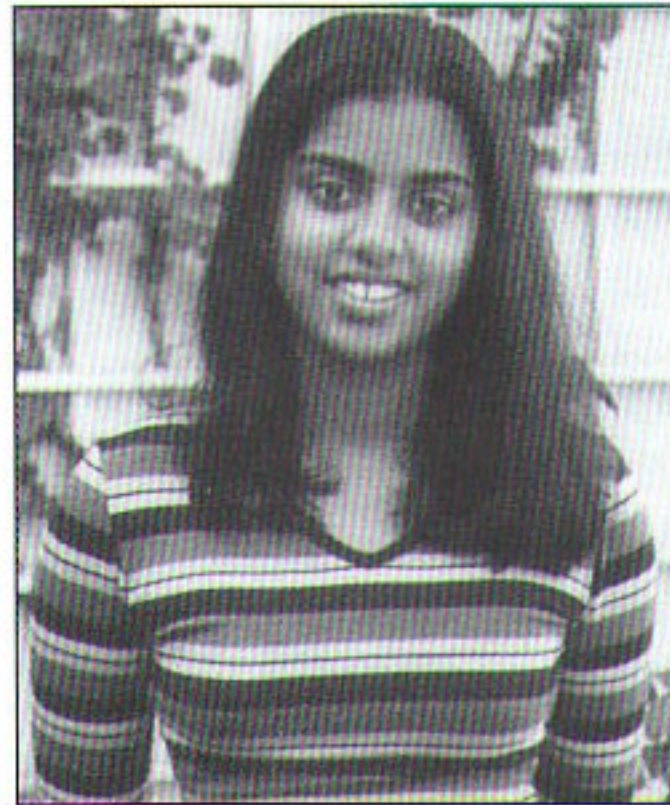
JUNIOR HIGH - GRADE 8

First Place



Shane Thomas
Canadian MTC, Toronto

Second Place



Kavya John
MTC of Los Angeles, CA

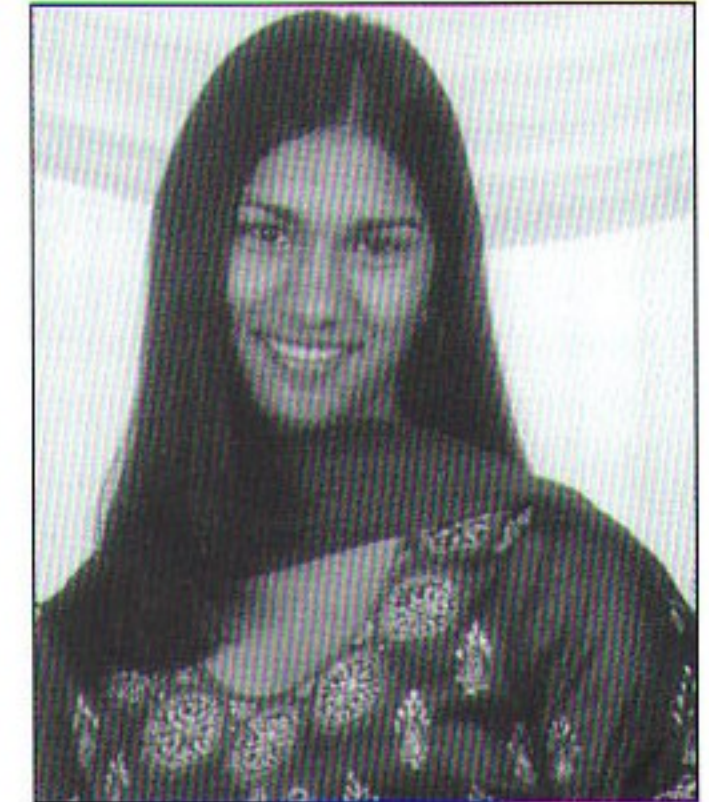
SENIOR HIGH - GRADE 9

First Place



Merlin Chacko
Bethel MTC, PA

Second Place

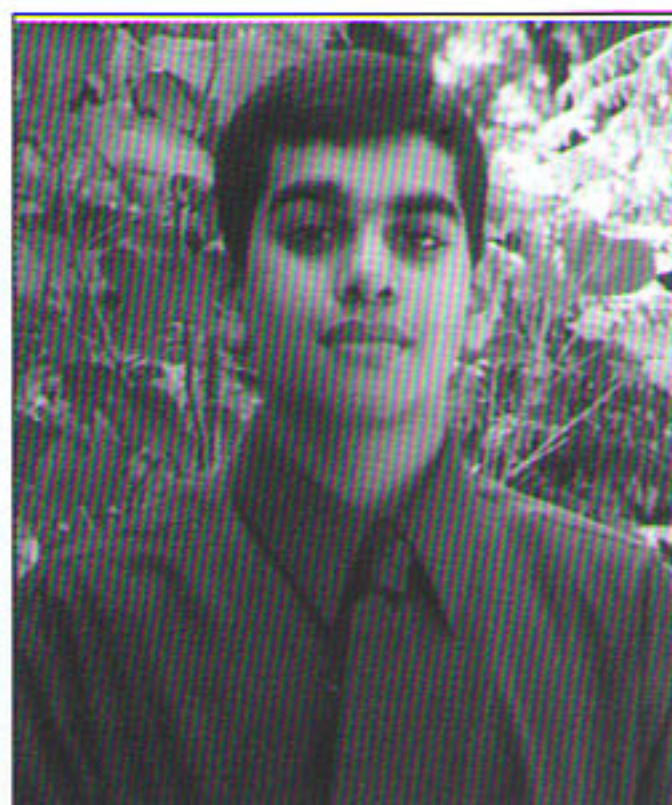
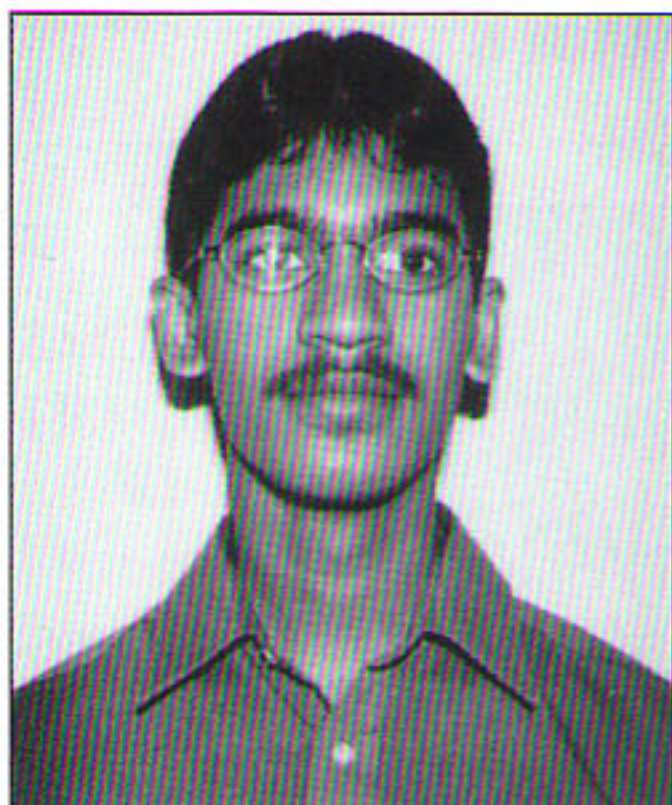


Jenny Varughese
The MTC Staten Island, NY

SENIOR HIGH – GRADE 10

First Place

Second Place



Joseph Varghese
St. John's MTC, NY

Shaun Ninan
Trinity MTC, Houston, TX

**Top 3 parishes
which scored the highest points
in the Diocesan Sunday School Exam:**

- Chicago Mar Thoma Church, Chicago, IL18
- St. John's Mar Thoma Church, New York14
- Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston, TX13

DIOCESAN SUNDAY SCHOOL EXAMINATION

This year 956 students registered for the Diocesan Sunday School Examination, and 761 students from 33 Sunday Schools participated in the examination. Our sincere thanks to all the superintendents and teachers for their support and cooperation and to members of the examination board for their dedicated services. Special thanks to Rev. George Jose, Vicar, Immanuel MTC, Houston, Rev. Thomas Mathew, Vicar, St. Paul's MTC, Dallas, Mr. Jojy Jacob, Superintendent, Trinity MTC

Houston, Mrs. Liji George, Superintendent, Immanuel MTC, Houston, Mr. Saji P. George, Superintendent, St. Paul's, Dallas, for their support and cooperation in the grading of the papers. The top 10% of the students in each grade will be awarded distinction certificates signed by the Diocesan Bishop. Congratulations to all students who participated in the examination and teachers who prepared them for the examination.

T. A. Mathew, Diocesan Sunday School Secretary

MILLENNIUM MISSION PROJECT — WALK-A-THON—2001

The Diocesan Sunday School Committee Meeting held on April 21, 2001 at the Sinai Mar Thoma Center has decided to continue the Walk-a-thon project this year also, and we encourage all the Sunday Schools in our Diocese to take special interest and support this project. We were able to raise about \$15,000.00 last year. It was decided to give \$2500.00 to Trivandrum-Quilon Diocese, \$2500.00 to Kunnumkulum-Malabar Diocese, and \$5000.00 to Madras-Calcutta Diocese, and \$3000.00 to NCC sponsored projects in the United States. All these amounts are used for Children's projects

in those Dioceses, and the check will be mailed to the respective Diocesan Bishops after the family conference. We request all the Sunday Schools which are interested to participate in this project, to please make a copy of the pledge form and give it to the Sunday School Students and Teachers and conduct this program on Saturday, August 4, 2001. If we all work as a team, we can make \$15,000.00 this year also. Together we can make a difference in the life of these children. So "arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached."

T. A. Mathew, Diocesan Sunday School Secretary

MAR THOMA OPPORTUNITY SCHOOL in Bangalore is providing special educational and developmental facilities for the mentally retarded children. The school was started with four children in 1980. Despite the meagre facilities over the years, the school progressed and it has now 66 children (45 Hindus, 5 Muslims, 14 Christians and 2 Sikhs) The training in the school includes, besides academic subjects, pre-vocational training in craft and manual skills, self help, daily living skills, music, dancing and physical education.

Due to the efforts of our Mr. Alex Thomas, Northside United Methodist Church in Jackson, Tennessee has decided to support the Opportunity School on an ongoing basis. This year they have sent over \$1300.00 to the School. The money they sent is raised from the offering of their children when they come forward for the "Moments With Children" during Sunday Service.

Those who wish to support the school, may send in their contribution to Ms Molly Varghese, Director, Opportunity School, #394 HAL II Stage, Bangalore 560008

MAR THOMA MESSENGER AWARDS

ESSAY COMPETITION

At the concluding session of the Family Conference, after the Holy Communion Service on Sunday July 8, 2001, awards were presented to the first, second and third prize winners of the *Mar Thoma Messenger 2nd Annual Essay Competition*, both in Junior and Senior Divisions, held in April 2001. Mr Abraham Mattackal, Chief Editor, in his introductory remarks, congratulated all the winners and also the vicar Rev. Monsi K. Philip, Sunday School Headmaster Mr. M. Thomas and the parents of the St. John's Mar Thoma Church, New York for having encouraged and motivated the students resulting in over 20 entries for the competition from that parish alone. When the names of our students or even any Kerala names are seldom

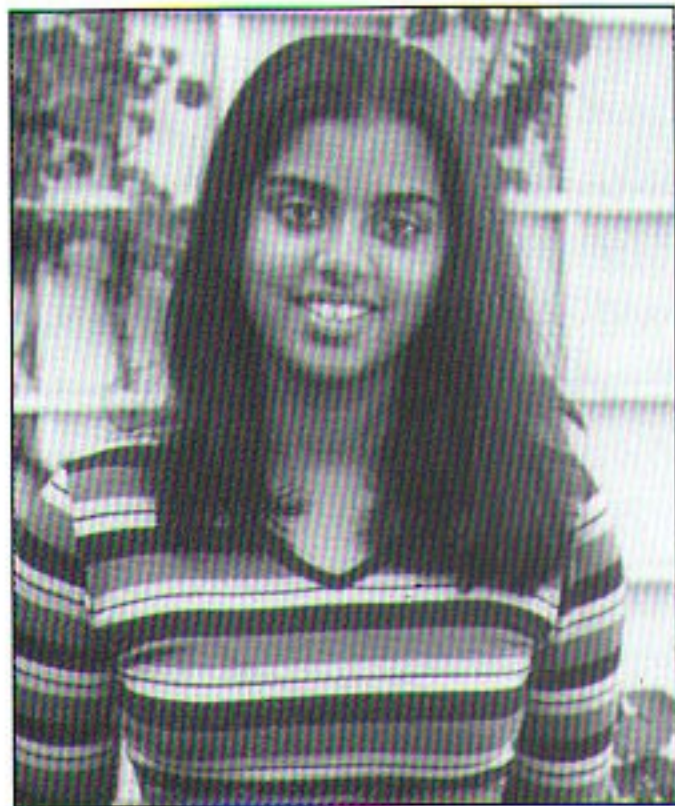
found in the winners list of many national competitions published in the newspapers, it's the responsibility of our parents and Sunday School teachers to encourage our children to take part in the diocesan Sunday School and Messenger award competitions, Mr. Mattackal continued.

The Editorial Board and the Management Committee thank the judges Dr. T. M. Thomas, Dr. Mrs. Anna Panackal and Mr. Abraham Thariath and the following members for their valuable services in the Essay competition and the award presentation: Dr. Zac Varghese, London, England, Mr. T. A. Mathew, Houston, Mr. Eapen Daniel, Philadelphia and W. Thomas K. Jose, Staten Island, NY.

The First prize winning essays are published elsewhere in this issue.

JUNIORS:

First Prize



Kavya Sarah John
Los Angeles MTC, CA

Second Prize



Anika Chacko
Detroit Mar Thoma Church

Names of Top Five Winners

- 1st **Kavya Sarah John**, Los Angeles MTC, CA
- 2nd **Anika Chacko**, Detroit MTC, Detroit, MI
- 3rd **Kelvin Varghese**, MTC of Dallas, Farmers Branch, TX
- 4th **Amy Kurien**, MTC, San Francisco, CA
- 5th **Siby Samuel**, Chicago, MTC, Chicago, IL

SENIORS:

First Prize



Melvy Sarah Mathew
Chicago Mar Thoma Church

Second Prize



Shiny Mathewkutty
St. Paul's MTC, Dallas, TX

Names of Top Five Winners

- 1st **Melvy Sarah Mathew**, Chicago, MTC, Chicago, IL
- 2nd **Shiny Mathewkutty**, St. Paul's MTC, Dallas, TX
- 3rd **Joseph Varghese**, St. John's MTC, NY
- 4th **Julie Sadhu**, Bethel MTC, Frankfort, IL
- 5th **Jerry T. Mathew**, Trinity MTC, Houston, TX

DIOCESAN SUNDAY SCHOOL — CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| August 4, 2001 | Walk-a-thon-2001 |
| September 2, 2001 | New Sunday School Year Starts |
| September 2, 2001 | Teacher's Dedication and Recognition Day |
| November 4, 2001 | World Sunday School Day Celebration |

SUJIT ITTY - VALEDICTORIAN

GILBERT UNIFIED SCHOOL DIST., ARIZONA—VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

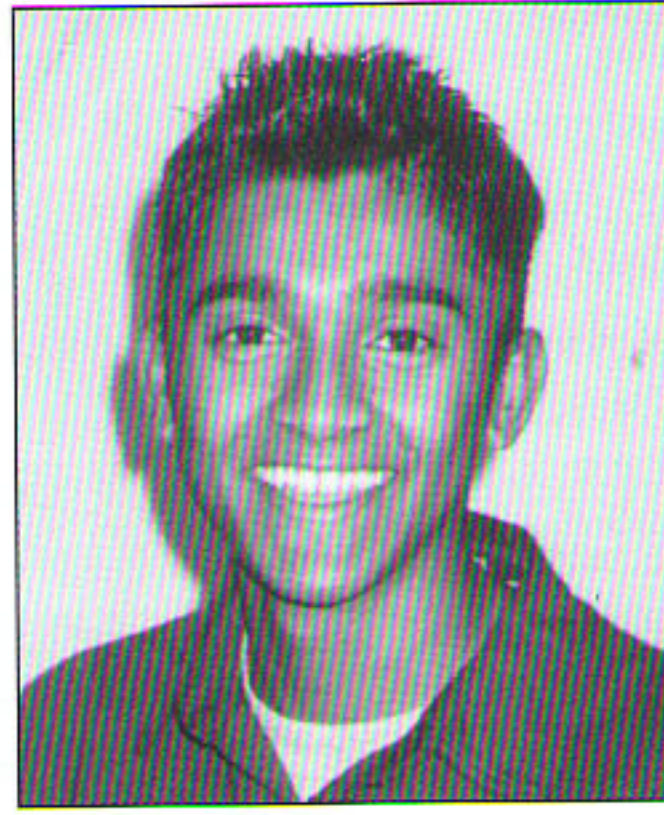
Tonight my fellow valedictorians have done a superb job supplying motivating words and expressing gratitude where it is due. I want to talk about friends, yearbooks, and the end of our senior year.

The most memorable high school moments involve our friends. We have so many different types of friends—those who say “hi” when we pass in the hall, those we eat lunch with, and those we stay up all night with sharing our innermost secrets. It’s funny how we greet some friends with prolonged hugs and handshakes as if we just came back from war. In reality, we hung out at the coffee shop the night before. It is our friends we lean on and learn from. Without our friends, high school would be an empty experience, merely a place with books and classrooms.

Since elementary school, yearbooks help us to remember dear friends. Just the other day, I stumbled over my 5th grade yearbook. There was a single blank page for signatures, with the word “autographs” in big letters on the top. This was more than enough space. The longest message read, “Have a great summer, Smarty!” The next longest message: “Youre cool.” Our friends didn’t have much to say.

In high school, though, there is a different, and “almost official process for handling yearbooks. First, we have to find a spot to sign. Some pages are reserved for our closest friends, and writing on these pages would be to flirt with death. Second, we consider how to write a final message to a friend. Even the most distant friends get at least three full length sentences. For close friends we write “novels.” Finally, the tears flow as these messages are composed and read...

Why? We did not realize the value of friends in elementary school. Anybody who played tether ball with us was considered our friend. In high school, though, we need friends to affirm us and to support us, even if all we get from them is a smile in between classes. As we move on from here in this life, some of us go off to college, some of



us to work. Though we may not have the same friends, we will value forever the impact friends have on our lives. Hopefully, as we mature, we will pick our friends wisely.

Along with friends and the emotions of yearbooks comes the senior activities. It’s an attempt to cram four years into one short week. As seniors, we become painfully aware that this will be the last time we do many things. We may say, “This is the last time I’ll be able to rest my feet on the metal book holder under your desk.” Or, we may say “You know, this is the last time we’ll be eating lunch together at this place.” As trivial as this may seem, the lasts are important because they remind us of the firsts, and the seconds, and thirds. They remind us of all the in betweens that led us to this moment. Most importantly, they remind us that it is time to move on.

From that frightful first day of freshman year, through friendships, all-nighters, and parties, to this graduation celebration, this is the end of one journey and the beginning of another.

As we reminisce with laughter and with tears, we realize that today we wear more than our caps and our gowns. Today we wear everything we have lived through, worked through, laughed through and cried through for the past four years on our sleeves. We view the unknown future with apprehension, yet we must approach it with courage, with the knowledge that we, the Gilbert High School Graduating Class of 2001, have the ability to conquer the world, the power to change lives, a chance to affect others, and the responsibility to make a difference.

So we stand here, graduating proudly, accepting the challenge to truly live the lives of great men and women. For we are bold, and strong, and alive. We are destined for the successes we choose to make our lives. We are the graduating class of 2001.

Sujit Itty is the son of Itty P. & Sherly Itty, Gilbert, Arizona. They belong to Phoenix Mar Thoma Congregation.

Women’s leadership Conference

The second Annual Women’s Leadership Conference will be held on October 11-14, 2001, at the Trinity Pines Conference center in Texas. More details will be sent to the parishes later. Please plan to attend the conference.

For further information, please call:
Mrs. Mariamma Thomas (Diocesan Council member)
(713) 773-1322

XXII NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE

The XXII Mar Thoma National Youth Conference hosted by the Youth Fellowship of the Mar Thoma Church of Los Angeles will be held from August 9–12, 2001 at the Whittier College, Whittier, California. The theme of this year's conference is **"Communion and Community—Intimacy with God and His people."**

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, the diocesan bishop, Reverends Kurien George and M. O. Oommen Jr., student chaplains, and Rev. Kemper Crabb, Cultural Missionary for the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches will be the leaders at the Conference. For further details, contact any one of the Conference Committee members at www.marthomala.org



Rev. David Daniel, President of the Conference inaugurating the registration kick-off by giving the first registration to Mr. Thomas Philip, Youth Representative to Diocesan Assembly. Lejo Mammen, Convener Registration and Jerome Mammen, Secretary are also seen with David Daniel achen.

FOURTH NATIONAL MAR THOMA YUVAJANA SAKHYAM CONFERENCE

The 4th National Conference of the Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam of the Diocese of North America and Europe is scheduled to be conducted from September 14–16 at St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church, Dallas, Texas. It is really a great privilege and challenge to host a conference of this magnitude. We hope that with the dedication and commitment of our members we would be able to carry out this cumbersome task. We, the members of the St. Paul's MTC Yuvajana Sakhyam, request your prayers and presence to make this year's National Conference a spiritually enriching experience.

The registration kickoff for the conference was held on Sunday, July 8th, 2001 at St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church, Dallas, TX. Conference Committee President, Rev. Thomas Mathew inaugurated the kickoff by accepting the first registration from Mr. Zachariah Thomas, General Convener of this year's conference. All the members of the Yuvajana Sakhyam were in attendance for this kickoff celebration.

The theme for this year's conference is **"Faith and Praxis."** Our Diocesan Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa will be the patron of the conference. The leaders for the conference include Rev. Dr. John Joseph, the Diocesan Secretary, Rev. P. Mathew, the vicar of the MTC of Dallas, Farmers Branch and Mr. George Zachariah.



Rev. Thomas Mathew, Mr. Thomas Easo, Registration Convener and Mr. Zachariah Thomas, General Convener, inaugurating the registration kickoff.

We invite all the Yuvajana Sakhyam members to please pray, plan ahead and attend the conference. With your prayers and support, this will be a blessed conference. For more information about the conference and to register on line please visit our website: www.stpauls.freeservers.com or email at registration42001@hotmail.com

Mr. Thomas Easo, Registration Convener

ST. PETER'S MAR THOMA CHURCH, TEANECK, NEW JERSEY

After completing three years of service, Rev. Philip P. George was transferred back to India this April. A farewell meeting was held on April 25, 2001. Rev. V. S. Varghese, our former vicar, presided over the meeting. Rev. Thomas Tharayil and Rev. Jacob David were the guest speakers. Our new vicar Rev. Oommen Samuel took charge on the second week of May. Our Family Camp was held on May 25–27, at the Frost Valley YMCA of Catskill, Claryville, New York, 186 members attended. Our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa celebrated the Holy Communion service on June 17th Sunday. Farewell meeting for Zacharias thirumeni and the Ordination Silver Jubilee

celebration of our vicar Rev. Oommen Samuel was held immediately after the service. Our Diocesan secretary Rev. Dr. John Joseph presided over the meeting. As a token of our appreciation a gift and a plaque were presented to both Thirumeni and Achen. Lunch was served after the meeting. Our parishioners contributed \$8,042 towards the Gujarat relief fund and \$13,656 towards the Yuvajana Sakhyam Project. Our Church won the overall Championships of both Ecumenical Kalolsavam conducted by North East Region Yuvajana Sakhyam and Ecumenical Kalamela conducted by C.S.I. Congregation of New York.

Saji T. Mathew, Secretary

CHICAGO MAR THOMA CHURCH

Chicago Mar Thoma Edavaka Mission starts its mission project in Anducode Village

Chicago Mar Thoma church has started a mission work through the Edavaka Mission in Anducode Village of South Travancore in Tamilnadu. The Suffragan Metropolitan Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Irenaeus inaugurated the mission filed on Sunday June 24, 2001 at a public meeting after the Holy Communion service. Vicar Rev. V. T. Josen and Vice president of Edavaka Mission Mr. P. C. Philip talked about the mission field for the information of the public. Mrs. Saramma Mathew gave the first sponsorship followed by Mr. Kochumman Bobby and Mr. N. M. Philip.



Suffragan Metropolitan Thirumeni inaugurating the "Anducodu Mission" by receiving the first sponsorship from Saramma Mathew.

Anducodu is a village in South Travancore on the border of Tamilnadu. The Diocese of Thiruvananthapuram-Kollam has started the Land for the Landless Project at Malaikodu in Anducodu village. There are 18 families living as a colony in the newly constructed houses. The proposed mission project covers a larger community. Majority of the population here is economically backward. The villagers lack proper health care, sanitation, housing, education and job opportunity. The work will spread over to the unreached people in Anducodu neighborhood. Anducodu being an entry point and gateway to Tamilnadu area gives more hope for future expansion of the Mission.

It is a project of Integrated Rural Development giving emphasis on:

1. **Evangelistic works**
Person to person evangelism, evangelistic campaign, worship and fellowship meetings and value orientation etc.
2. **Development projects**
Job oriented training, saving schemes, self-help groups and other developmental programs,
3. **Personality development and community health programs**
Education of the children, health care of the family members, proper sanitation in the village and cultural programs including recreation.
4. **Caring Ministry**
Caring for the aged, handicapped and mentally sick.
5. **Housing Schemes**
Construction of low cost houses for 5 families every year; The total cost will come to Rs. 12,00,000 (approx. \$27,000.00) per year.

CHICAGO MAR THOMA CHURCH CELEBRATED EASTER THROUGH MUSICAL PLAY



The Chicago Mar Thoma church celebrated Easter with a Play through music. The whole life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were narrated through musical play. The English Choir organized the play.

Reception to Suffragan Metropolitan

The Chicago Mar Thoma Church gave a warm reception to the Suffragan Metropolitan His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Irenaeus on his visit to Chicago Mar Thoma Church on June 24th immediately after the Holy Communion in the Church. Rev. V. T. Josen welcomed Thirumeni and other dignitaries. Rev. V. T. John, Rev. George Samuel, Rev. Roy Abraham Thomas, Dr. M.V. Mathew, Prof. E.J. Jacob and Mr. M.E. Eapen of Kerala Express felicitated Thirumeni. Vice president Dr. K. Philip welcomed Thirumeni with flowers, Mr. Easow P Mathai and Mr. Kochumman Bobby prayed and Secretary Mr. Joe Thomas gave vote of thanks. The First communicants gave a donation to Balika Bhawan Pallippad. The 70th Birthday of Thirumeni was celebrated. Thirumeni thanked the Parish for the reception and appreciated the zeal for mission and of starting the new mission field in Anducodu.

V.B.S.: The Chicago Mar Thoma Sunday School V.B.S was held in the Church from June 27-30. Rev. V. T. John and Mr. Saju were the main leaders. About 200 students participated. Sunday School Superintendent Mr. Mathew Varghese, conveners Mr. Abraham Mathew and Kurien Zachariah gave leadership in arranging the programs. About 40 teachers and volunteers helped. The theme of the V.B.S. was **"Jesus To The Rescue."**

Mar Thoma Midwestern Yuvajana Sakhyam Conference

The First Regional Conference of the Midwestern Yuvajana Sakhyam was held from March 30 to April 1, 2001 at Detroit Mar Thoma Church, Detroit. About 200 youth participated. The theme of the conference was Faith and Praxis. Rev. George Samuel, Mr. Prakash George and Prof. Royce Mallassery were the main leaders. The Detroit Parish hosted the conference.

Midwestern Regional Choir Festival

The Midwestern Choir Festival consisting of Chicago, Detroit and Toronto Mar Thoma Parishes will be held on Saturday July 28, 2001 from 5.30. to 8.30 p.m. at Taft High

School, Chicago. The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa will be the chief guest. The Chicago Mar Thoma Parish hosts the festival.

Rev. V. T. Josen, Vicar

MAR THOMA CHURCH OF DALLAS, FARMERS BRANCH

The Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch is celebrating its Silver Jubilee Year this year. The year of the jubilee is from August 2000 through August 2001. The purpose of celebrating the jubilee year is to remember God's grace and providence that He has shown during the past 25 years in the life of our parish. Therefore to mark the jubilee year, the members expressed their thanks and showed the renewal of their spiritual growth by celebrating it in a special way. The theme for the jubilee year is "Celebrating 25 years of God's love through Worship and Witness." The Parish focused on three areas under this theme where it showed thankfulness during the jubilee year. The three areas we are: (i) witness within the church; (ii) witness to the community; and (iii) Mission and outreach.

The first jubilee celebration was conducted in March of this year. The parish celebrated it with the theme "Witness to the community." To show our witness to the community, we invited the police chief and the fire chief from the City of Farmers Branch. The parish recognized the chiefs with an award for the great service the fine men and women of their department provide every day to this community. As part of this theme the committee also decided to come up with programs for the parish to be involved with the local voluntary organizations.

The second jubilee celebration was conducted in the month of May with the theme "Mission and Outreach." As part of this theme, arrangements are being made to identify and support a missionary in India that is needed in a critical area but is not able to work due to financial reasons. Manoj Zacharia, a seminary student from Kottayam Theological Seminary, was invited to speak on the theme "Mission and Outreach." Manoj helped us to understand what it really means to be a missionary and encouraged the members to give generously and wholehearted support to Mission and Outreach work.

The third Jubilee Celebration was conducted in the month of June with the theme "Witness within the church." To show our witness within the church, 21 current members and families who were pioneers in establishing the Mar Thoma Church in Dallas were honored and recognized.

They were specially recognized for their dedication and faith that helped a small group of people meeting in Southern Methodist University in Dallas, to grow into one of the largest parishes in the diocese. Also as part of this theme, we conducted a panel discussion on Mar Thoma church history. The discussion focused on the history of the Mar Thoma Church since AD 52, history of Mar Thoma Church in Dallas and history of Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch. The panel discussion was done in an interactive style with the audience. It proved to be a day when members came out not only educated about the history of their church but also saw the providence and mercy of God in establishing His church in this community and all over the world. Also as part of this theme, a High School graduate of year 2001 was honored with a cash award of \$500.00 for exhibiting Christian leadership within the church. The award was called "Lighted to Lighten Jubilee Award." Ms. Tara Thomas, d/o of Thomas Mathew and Mrs. Bamini Thomas won the Lighted to Lighten Jubilee award. Tara not only excelled in her academic achievements but also proved to be a promising Christian leader for this church.

In addition to the monthly celebrations, a jubilee souvenir publication, coffee mug and pen with our jubilee logo was released. A special silver anniversary edition pictorial church directory was also made. The finale of the jubilee was celebrated from July 13 -15. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa and the Mayor of Farmers Branch, Mr. Bob Phelps and his wife Dee Phelps and Rev. V. T. John were the chief guests. The programs included theme presentation by Youth Fellowship and Sunday School, special songs by Choir, skits and plays by Sevika Sanghom, Parish Mission and Yuvajana Sakhyam. Our Metropolitan blessed us with his presence on the closing day of the jubilee celebration.

The jubilee celebrations helped us to reflect upon the providence and mercy of god, renew the commitment to our families, church and community and rejoice in the hope and the blessings our Lord Jesus Christ has in store for us.

Thomas Andrews, Secretary

Matrimonial

Marthomite parents settled in the United States seeking marriage proposals for their daughter, 25 years old, 5' 4", completed masters in administration and is working. She is fair, nice looking, talented, has a pleasing personality and is also a committed Christian with strong moral and spiritual values. We are inviting proposals from Mar Thoma or CSI parents of professional boys between the ages of 25-30. If interested please respond with bio-data and a recent returnable photograph to Marthoma Messenger, Sinai Mar Thoma Center, Box Mo620, 2320 S. Merrick Avenue, Merrick, NY 11566.

TRINITY MAR THOMA CHURCH, HOUSTON, TEXAS

DON'T YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE THE TEMPLE?

Many times, rather than focusing on what God sees in us we tend to focus on how the world views us. God has said that we are "temples." What does this exactly mean? Everyday in our lives many of us are faced with different temptations, whether it is drugs, alcohol, or even sexual immorality, but we as Christians are called to be "temples" for God. Many of you might be thinking, "it's easier said than done." I tell you today that God has said that He will never leave your side, even when the journey gets long and hard. We should value our bodies and ourselves. Corrupting our "temples" with sexual immorality, drugs, or alcohol can lead us to fall in the eyes of our Lord. It is time we stood up and realized how much we are worth to our God and to this world.

The Trinity Mar Thoma Church Youth Fellowship learned this and more on January 12-14, 2001 at a youth retreat. The theme was "Don't you know that you are a



temple?" and it took place at Trinity Pines Conference Center in Trinity, Texas. For the year 2000 the Trinity Mar Thoma Church youths were growing slowly in unity and this retreat helped the youths to take a bigger step towards our goal, which is unity. It was amazing what God did at the retreat. Not only did the retreat bring all of our youths together, but it also built a bond between many of our youths. The three main speakers at the retreat were Rev. M.O. Oommen Jr. (our Youth Chaplain), Anish Varughese, and Sudeep John. Also, our past Achen, Rev. C. Joseph attended the three-day retreat. Special thanks to Reji

Kochamma and Biji Kochamma, for their presence at the retreat which was truly a blessing. At the retreat we had three dedicated parents who joined us in prayer and support. We would like to thank Mr. E.M. Thomas, Mrs. Mariamma Thomas (Diocesan Council Member), and Ms. Gracy Vattakunnel. We were also blessed to have our worship team lead our sessions in songs of worship.

Friday night consisted of a short service, praise and worship, and introductions. Saturday was a blessing to us all. We had group discussions and different sessions with the speakers. Saturday night, the closing session, was a candle lit dedication/testimony time. That night changed many of our lives. Friendships were reunited, hearts were opened up to God, and a bond was created between each and every one of our youths. Tears of joy and happiness were shed because we saw what God was doing in all of us.

This retreat was life changing to many of our youths. Because of the words that were taught at this retreat, our youths have understood the true meaning of being a "temple" for God. As Trinity Mar Thoma Church Youth Fellowship reflects back on that retreat, we give all the praise to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for all that He did.

Betty Vattakunnel



temple?" and it took place at Trinity Pines Conference Center in Trinity, Texas. For the year 2000 the Trinity Mar Thoma Church youths were growing slowly in unity and this retreat helped the youths to take a bigger step towards our goal, which is unity. It was amazing what God did at the retreat. Not only did the retreat bring all of our youths together, but it also built a bond between many of our youths. The three main speakers at the retreat were Rev. M.O. Oommen Jr. (our Youth Chaplain), Anish Varughese, and Sudeep John. Also, our past Achen, Rev. C. Joseph attended the three-day retreat. Special thanks to Reji



Trinity Mar Thoma Sunday School, Houston, the overall champions in the Southwest Region Competitions during the Junior/Senior Conference held at Dallas from March 9-11, 2001 with the trophies. Rev. C. Joseph (former vicar) Mr. Jojoy Jacob (Superintendent) Mrs. Alice Mathews (Associate Superintendent) with the participants in the competitions.



Edavaka Mission and Sevika Sanghom members of the Trinity MTC, Houston, with Rev. C. Joseph and family after the farewell meeting and lunch on April 28, 2001. Rev. Thomas Mathew, vicar of St. Paul's Dallas was the chief guest.



Titus Joseph, Sunday School student (Trinity Mar Thoma Sunday School, Houston) receiving the plaque from Mr. T. A. Mathew, Diocesan Secretary for raising the most amount (\$500) for the Walk-a-thon - 2000 mission project.



Rev. C. Joseph and Mr. Jojy Jacob (Superintendent/Trinity Sunday School, Houston) receiving the plaque from Mr. T. A. Mathew (Diocesan Sunday School Secretary) for raising the most amount (\$4543) in our Diocese for the Walk-a-thon - 2000 mission project.

Diocesan Council members Rev. C. Joseph and Mrs. Mariamma Thomas handing over the check raised from the millennium celebrations to the Diocesan Episcopa thirumeni.



THE MAR THOMA EASTERN REGION ANNUAL JUNIOR AND SENIOR CONFERENCE

The Eastern region held its annual Junior & Senior Students Conference on July 12 -15, 2001, sponsored by the Southeastern region. The conference was held at Long Island University, C.W. Post Campus. The theme of the conference was **"Put on the Armor of God."** The main speakers on the theme included the Most. Rev. Dr.

Perspectives & Boundaries on Dating" and a witnessing and dedication service. The Mar Thoma Diocesan Band, "Exiles for Him," offered a special concert at the conference on Saturday night. There was a basketball tournament held on Friday between teams consisting of 3 people, open to all churches. The championship team consisted of 3

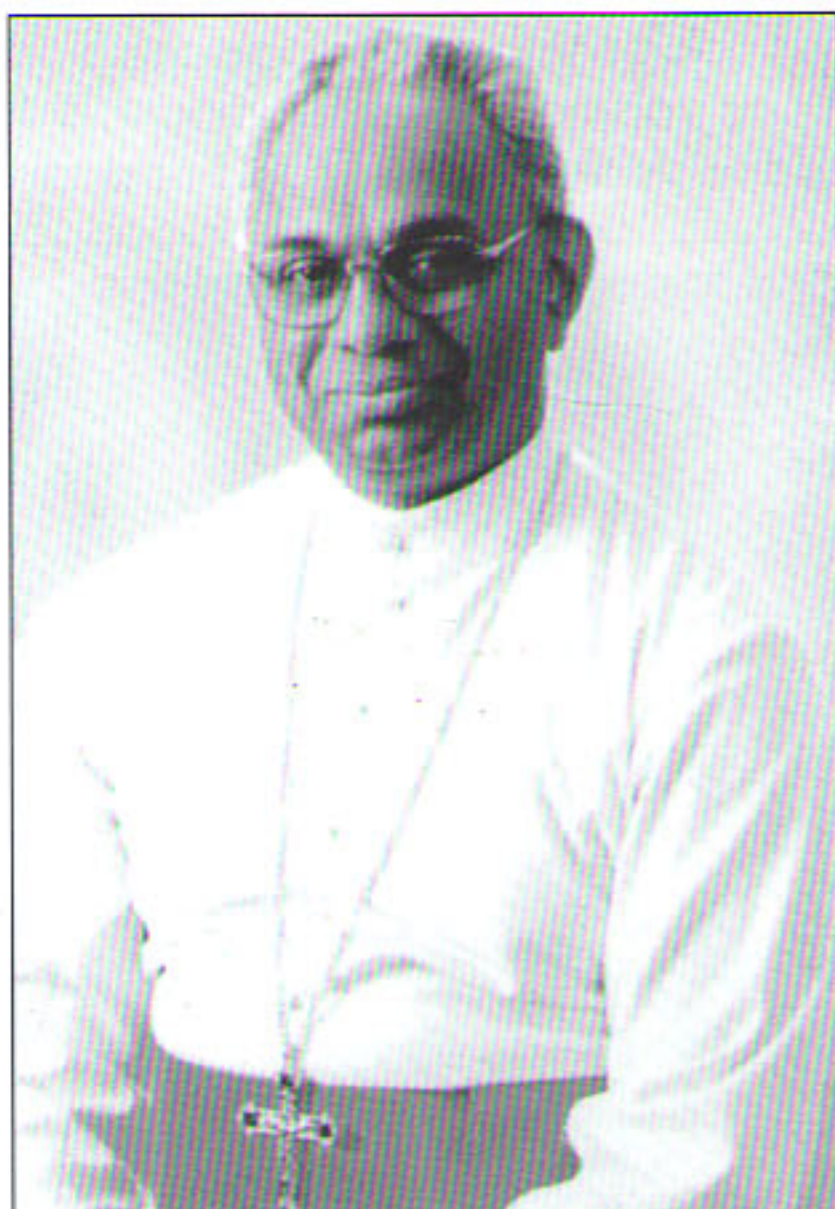


Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan, our diocesan bishop The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa, and Professor Cleophus Larue, who is a frequent speaker in churches, including the 2001 Maramon Convention. Bible studies were conducted by Rev. Dr. John Joseph, Diocesan Secretary and Rev. Kurien George, Youth Chaplain. The conference sessions consisted of sing-alongs, worship, a theme skit presentation, discussion groups, a talent show, a symposium on "Christian

senior St. Peters' Sunday School students. About 350 students and teachers from both the northeastern and southeastern regions attended the conference and represented their churches. The conference came to a close on Sunday with an English Holy Communion service attended by a large gathering of 600 people including conference participants, parents, and visitors.

Thomas Koshy, Secretary Southeast Region

POPE JOHN PAUL II APPOINTED REV. JACOB ANGADIATH AS BISHOP



Pope John Paul II appointed REV. JACOB ANGADIATH as the Bishop of St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic, Diocese of Chicago on March 13, 2001 and he was consecrated on July 1, 2001. The Church has about 50,000 followers across the US and traces its ancestry to the group founded in the first century by St. Thomas.

The Syro-Malabar Church is in union with Rome but has its own liturgical worship, language, Canon Laws and hierarchy. It follows the eastern traditions and uses Malayalam in its services.

Mar Jacob Angadiath grew up in Kerala, was appointed a minister in 1972 and spent 15 years as a priest in Dallas before coming to Chicago in 1999.



The diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus visited our parish during the parish day weekend from April 13-15 and led the Good Friday service and Easter Sunday service. On Easter Sunday after the service, a special farewell meeting was arranged for Thirumeni.

A retreat was organized by the Edmonton and Calgary Mar Thoma parishes youth groups on April 6th and 7th at Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Edmonton. In addition to the vicar Rev. L. Varghese, special invited speakers also lead the retreat.

After four years of dynamic and superb service in Edmonton and surrounding Mar Thoma parishes from May 1997 to April 2001, Rev. L. Varghese was transferred to Khariar Road Mission field in Orissa. A farewell meeting was arranged on April 25th Saturday at 5:00 p.m. for him. Felicitations were given by representatives from our parish and other church groups.

Rajan Daniel, Secretary

സമർപ്പണം

ചരിത്രരേഖകൾ പ്രതിദ്യനിക്കും, ക്രിസ്തുവിൻനാമം ഉത്ഘോഷിക്കും, കാലത്തിന്റെ തികവിൽ മികവായ്, മൃഗുവായ്, തണലായ് പ്രതിബിംബിക്കും അന്തർലീനമാം കുരിശിൻ നിഴലിൽ, പ്രകാശധാരയായ് വാക്യോരണിയിൽ നർമ്മത്തിന്റെ നറുമുഖം ഉയർത്തി, എന്നും സ്മരണയിൽ നിലനിന്നീടും

വിശക്കുന്നവന്റെ വിഷമമകറ്റും, സ്നേഹത്തിന്റെ പ്രകാശം വിതറും ദാസ്യത്തിന്റെ സാദൃശമേകി, ക്രൂശിലെ സ്നേഹം ഉയർത്തിക്കാട്ടും കൃപയുടെ ദാനം നിറഞ്ഞു കവിയും, അനിയന്ത്രിതമായ് വർദ്ധിച്ചീടും പൗലോസിന്റെ വചനാനുസൃതം, കൃപമേൽ കൃപയുടെ നിറകുടമാകും

കർമ്മസിദ്ധാന്തം ഉയർന്നിടുമ്പോൾ, യഥാർത്ഥ വഴികൾ നിത്യവഴികൾ സ്തുതിന്റെ കൃപയുടെ വിത്തുകൾ, വിതറാനെന്നും ഉൾക്കരുത്തേകും സഹസ്രാബ്ദത്തിൻ മാറ്റൊലികേട്ട്, മോഹങ്ങൾതൻ വേലിക്കെട്ടിൽ കൈകാൽ കൊട്ടി ആർത്തിട്ടിപ്പോൾ, നട്ടുതിരിയും ജനതതിയെവിടെ

രുദ്രാക്ഷത്തിൻ മുദ്രണം ഏറ്റ്, നേതൃത്വത്തിൽ ധീരത നൽകി ആദർശത്തിൻ ഉന്നത ശ്രേണിയിൽ, ആത്മനിറവിൽ ദിവ്യത നൽകും രക്ഷാവചനം ശ്രവിച്ചീടുമ്പോൾ, സുവിശേഷത്തിൻ മകുടകിരിടം അണിഞ്ഞീടുവാൻ ഉത്തേജനമായ്, യുവഹൃദയങ്ങളിൽ ജീവൻ പകരും

സഭയുടെ നൗകയെ ദിവ്യപ്രഭയിൽ, നിലനിർത്തുന്നതു പ്രാർത്ഥന മുഖം. എളിമയിൽ, താഴ്മയിൽ, വിനയത്തിങ്കൽ, ലോകോത്തരനായ് ഭവിക്കുക എന്നും. വിശ്വാസത്തിൽ അന്ധതയുള്ള, മർത്ത്യകുലത്തിനു മാർഗ്ഗം കാട്ടി പ്രകാശ പുരിത ദിവ്യഗുണത്താൽ, എന്നും എവിടേയും നേർവഴികാട്ടൂ.

സുജാ നൈനാൻ
എബനേസർ മാർത്തോമ്മാ ചർച്ച്
ന്യൂയോർക്ക്

DECISIONS OF THE DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE-APRIL 20-21, 2001

The following is a summary of the decisions taken at the Diocesan Assembly.

1. The Annual Report, Annual Accounts for the year 2000 and Budget for the year 2001 were approved.
2. Resolved to form a Publication Board to publish materials including messages from conferences and camps conducted in the Diocese. The following members constitute the Publications Board:

Rev. C. P. Mathew	Convener
Rev. Roy A. Thomas	Dallas
Rev. M. C. Thomas	New Jersey
Mr. Koshy P. Thomas	Houston

3. Resolved to develop the Lubbock property as the 'Late Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan Memorial Retreat Center.'
4. Resolved to sponsor a mission field in Karnataka as part of the millennium and silver jubilee celebrations.
5. Resolved to form a Mission Board to oversee the mission Programs and Projects of the Diocese with the following members:

Mrs. Mariamma Mathew	Convener
Rev. C. A. Varghese	Epiphany
Mr. K. A. Varghese	Philadelphia
Dr. Roy Mathew	Dallas
Mr. Abraham Chacko	Epiphany
Mr. Thomas Mammen	Chicago
Mr. Thomas mammen	Los Angeles
Mr. George Varghese	Washington
Mrs. Mariamma Thomas	Houston

6. Resolved to form a Mar Thoma Business People's Fellowship with the following members:

Mr. Kalathil Varghese	Convener
Mr. Thomas Daniel	Epiphany
Mr. George Chandy	Toronto
Mr. Mathew Varghese	Detroit
Mr. Chacko Jacob	Houston
Mr. Varghese P. Varghese	Staten Island
Mr. Simon Varghese	New York
Mr. John Titus	Seattle
Mr. Thampi Kurian	Boston

Mrs. Molly Zachariah	Dallas
Mr. Varkey Abraham	New York

7. Resolved to reorganize Young Couples' Fellowship as an official organization of the Diocese. It was decided to conduct an Annual Young Couples' Fellowship Conference in conjunction with the Annual Family Conference.
8. Renc and Company were appointed as the auditors for the year 2001.
9. Resolved to merge the present Educational Endowment Funds to Zacharias Mar Theophilus Education Endowment Fund.
10. The appointment of Rev. Dr. John Joseph as the Diocesan Secretary of the Diocese of North America and Europe from May 1, 2001 was ratified.
11. Resolved to start 'Alexander Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan Memorial Endowment Fund' for music ministry.
12. Resolved to request the Sabha Council to take necessary action to apply the same subscription fee for the Sabha Tharaka irrespective of the country in which the subscriber resides.
13. Resolved that a Mar Thoma Diocesan Directory be published at the earliest.
14. The Assembly authorized the Diocesan Council to inform Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Houston the proposal of a Youth Center in Houston Area and to request the Immanuel Mar Thoma Church to avail its property for the same purpose.
15. Since there was no request from the parishes to host the 2003 Family Conference, the Diocesan Assembly authorized the Diocesan Council to make the appropriate decision for 2003 Family Conference.
16. The Assembly accepted the proposal of zonal division of the Diocese into three zones, the Eastern and Western zones in USA and one in Europe. The Council was authorized to work out the details and to implement it.
17. Decided to arrange a proper farewell program by the Diocese on the 22nd of September at NY for the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus who is transferred to Madras-Calcutta Diocese.



Rev. K. Y. Jacob, the outgoing Diocesan Secretary giving his farewell speech during the Assembly.



Rev. K. Y. Jacob with Zacharias Thirumeni and the new Diocesan Secretary Rev. Dr. John Joseph at the Assembly.

OBITUARY

IN LOVING MEMORY OF MR. STEPHEN JACOB, MONTREAL, CANADA

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." 2 Timothy 4:7

Mr. Stephen Jacob of Pulickakudy House Keezhilam, India was born to the late Rev. P. M. Stephen and Mrs. Kunjamma Stephen on April 24, 1942. This middle child of a Mar Thoma achen was born to fulfill a life of greatness. A life that produced a legacy that will be difficult to match. Sadly his life was cut short due to complications from cancer, and he passed away on May 21, 2001. However, his family believes that cancer was simply a means to bring him to the Father, and that his life meant more than that.

Mr. Jacob (Babykutty, as he was known in the Malayalee community) completed his graduate degree (M.A.) at Karnataka University, India. He furthered his education completing a Physical Education teaching program at Madras Christian College. This led him to become Y.M.C.A. Secretary at Kottayam, Chenganoor and Cochin. He also had the incredible opportunity in overseeing the care of Tibetan refugees under the Dalai Lama's leadership in Houbli, India. In 1971, he immigrated to Canada and settled in Montreal, Quebec into the profession of teaching; a career that he began in 1972, after completing courses at both McGill and Concordia Universities.

His education and training alone was a testament to the way he saw life, which was to get out and meet people from all walks of life and to do his best to make their world a better place. Better yet, if he could persuade them to get out there and do something positive for others, all the better. Babykutty was a man who was hard to keep down. The need and urgency to get up and take an active role in working for Christ by reaching out to others coursed through his veins and ignited his fire to do something about it. This passion and desire to not be idle for Christ influenced much of his life, as was seen in his accomplishments and involvement with the church, his community and his personal life.

In terms of the church, it was hard to find a man so dedicated to the Mar Thoma Church as Stephen Jacob. For over twenty-five years Mr. Jacob was the driving force in helping a struggling Mar Thoma parish become an organized and close knit church. Babykutty was never shy to communicate with various achen and thirumenis, and always assisted them during the services (he even had the opportunity to assist his own father during several services). Despite the low numbers, Mr. Jacob was able to bring the community together in ecumenical fellowship, a feat that he was congratulated on by many achen and thirumenis alike. His involvement with the church went past the Montreal parish and this led him to be an active member of the Diocesan Assembly of North America and Europe. As a council member, he was able to get involved in matters of the Diocese and affected change and progress within the structure.

Alongside his commitment to the church, he never forgot about the youth. He always took initiative to make sure that the youth were always involved. He introduced them to the conference circuit and was ever present at each youth event. He taught



them the importance of being involved for and with Christ, and giving back in return for what we are so blessed to have. Babykutty steer-lined their commitment to organizing conferences and partaking in charity work. The children eventually saw him as a part of the gang, an asset to their spiritual growth, and a friend.

His message was clear: Don't be idle; do what is necessary to improve your health, to strengthen your spiritual growth, to create friendships with God's children, and to live life to the fullest. Let us do what we can to keep Babykutty's mission alive, which is to make use of God's gifts, share it with others, and give back selflessly for what we have been blessed with.

In his final moments, Stephen Jacob had calmness and a sense of peace. He knew that he had left this world having fought every battle with strength from God, that he had provided well for his family, that he kept his mission closely tied with the spirit of God, and knowing that he had done his best with the life he was given. He was taken to serve God in a mightier place, but we can rest assured that he is not remaining idle in heaven, but working hard to prepare for us to join him there.

Mr. Jacob is survived by his wife saramma, the daughter of the late Mr. P. J. Varghese (headmaster of KDHP High School, Munnar); his children Ronny and Reena and his two brothers, Stephen Joseph Pulickakudy of Montreal and Dr. P. S. Mathew of Sharjah.

The Jacob Family

A Friend's demise

"On the day when death will knock at the door what will thou offer to him? Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life—I will never let him go with empty hands. All the sweet vintage of all my autumn days and summer nights, all the earnings and gleanings of my busy life will I place before him at the close of my days when death will knock at my door." As I sat down to write few words about Mr. Stephen Jacob's death, the passage from Geethanjali came to the mind. It talked about death but didn't talk any thing about life after death. Life after death is only in Christ. "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." (John 11:25)

Mr. Stephen Jacob (Babykutty) was a fine and devoted Christian. I met him in New York during the 1999 Diocesan Assembly Council meeting. His devotion and dedication to the church revealed the depth of God's love in him. His humility and enthusiasm to help others proved it further. I was able to spend a couple of days with him in the hospital before his death. A true Christian never dies, even after his death, he lives on.

My words may not be sufficient to comfort the family who bereaves over the death of their beloved husband or father. But, my Lord's living words are still powerful to soothe and strengthen any troubled heart.

Mariamamma Thomas, Houston

We just had a great annual festival of sermons, songs, worship, discussions, fellowship, prize distributions and social outings at the Mar Thoma Family Conference at Philadelphia. The organizers should be congratulated for a job well done. Whatever our age or experience, we need one another in Christian fellowship in order to become increasingly whole and mature as Christians. Like well-fed houseplants, everyone at the conference displayed an abundance of delightful luscious green foliage and most colorful varieties of flowers. We know that houseplants need regular feeding with water, minerals, sunlight and other growth factors; otherwise, they may become straggly, yellow-tinged eyesores as if they have not been tendered for weeks. Unfortunately, that is not often the reality: it might seem as though we fed and watered them every week on a Sunday morning, but it might have been many Sundays ago or at another family conference. For the world famous Chelsea flower show in London, gardeners and horticulturist plan their strategies and work through out the year to create a most endearing and excellent flower festival. They invest so much of their talents and time to bring out the whole human experience of art, religion, culture, tradition, and science through a most amazing flower show. This degree of attention to details and continued care is vital for our spiritual health and growth as well because it is only in the context of love, truth, trust and meaningful worship that we can fully receive from and give to one another all the nourishment we need from the Lord.

This post family conference period is clearly an excellent time to reflect on our values, goals and priorities. What is ultimately of importance to us? We have enormous responsibilities when we come together for these big show piece occasions. As others are watching us, we should be courteous to each other in sharing and not wasting food and other resources available to us. It is not what we say, it is the way we say it is important. Most of our efforts are directed to preserve our identity as Mar Thoma Christians. Unless we cherish in our God-given identity we will have nothing to give to others. Our Metropolitan challenged us to think about what this identity means and Thirumeni also reminded us that we have a responsibility to make distinct and specific contributions to host communities in developing a society that is peaceful, orderly and just. At the FOCUS seminar this year, Thirumeni asked the question, "Will the diaspora community ever become the local community?" This is a very important question, but whose responsibility is it to answer such important questions.

At present, a visiting priest, whose leadership is truncated at the end of a three-year cycle, orchestrates our parish life. I call this a "hello and goodbye ministry" because the first year of the cycle is used for knowing people and saying hello; the final year is used for saying goodbyes. There is no time to develop cohesive policies for integration with host communities within this three year cycles. This is not a criticism against clergy or the leadership of the Church. But one of our priorities should be to establish continuity in our pastoral care. For this we need an effective lay leadership and lay ministry to facilitate the services of our well-qualified clergy in our parishes. Parish is not just a place that you worship, but it is a place where you are understood. We have sometimes confused the Gospel with our traditional values and try to make a song and dance of it at every opportunity. After the exuberance and self-confidence of the rapid expansion of the Diocese of North America and Europe under the able and sacrificial leadership of Zacharias Thirumeni, we should seek humility and maturity to admit that Christ is so much greater than the view any of us have of Him. Let us hope that the next phase of our development will help us to find such humility in seeking greater integration with local communities. We are not islands; we are bound up in networks of relationships with others in the society. We need to pray for a lay movement in our Church as the Kalliserry gathering of 1888 to bring about a 'wind of change' so that God will be able to breath His spirit into our 'dry bones'. This will bring about a restoration greater than we ever could imagine. Ezekiel was fascinated at the miracles of bones clicking together, yet lifelessly. Then he was told to address the wind, this time an army of people came to life before his eyes. Spiritual rebirth is always God's work.

I cannot help agreeing with Mark Twain: 'Most people are bothered by those passages in Scriptures which they cannot understand; but for me, I always noticed that passages in Scriptures which trouble me most are those I do understand.' Our conference leaders particularly our Metropolitan, Zacharias Thirumeni, Rev. Dr. Samuel Kamaleson and Rev. Dr. T. J. Thomas explained to us very clearly many things, using many of their God-given talents, and I wish they could trouble us at all time for our spiritual growth. Our religion is, nothing if it is not practical, can a critical society see that our family conference really makes a difference? It will not do to say that we believe in truth and fail to practice that truth in our homes, parish assemblies and offices where it may be observed, where it is costly. In the end, it boils down to, personal commitment and it is the time to think, pray and commit ourselves for a lay-centered Church, it is in this post conference period we should be asking the following questions. If not me, who? If not now, when?

Dr. Zac Varghese, London, England.

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