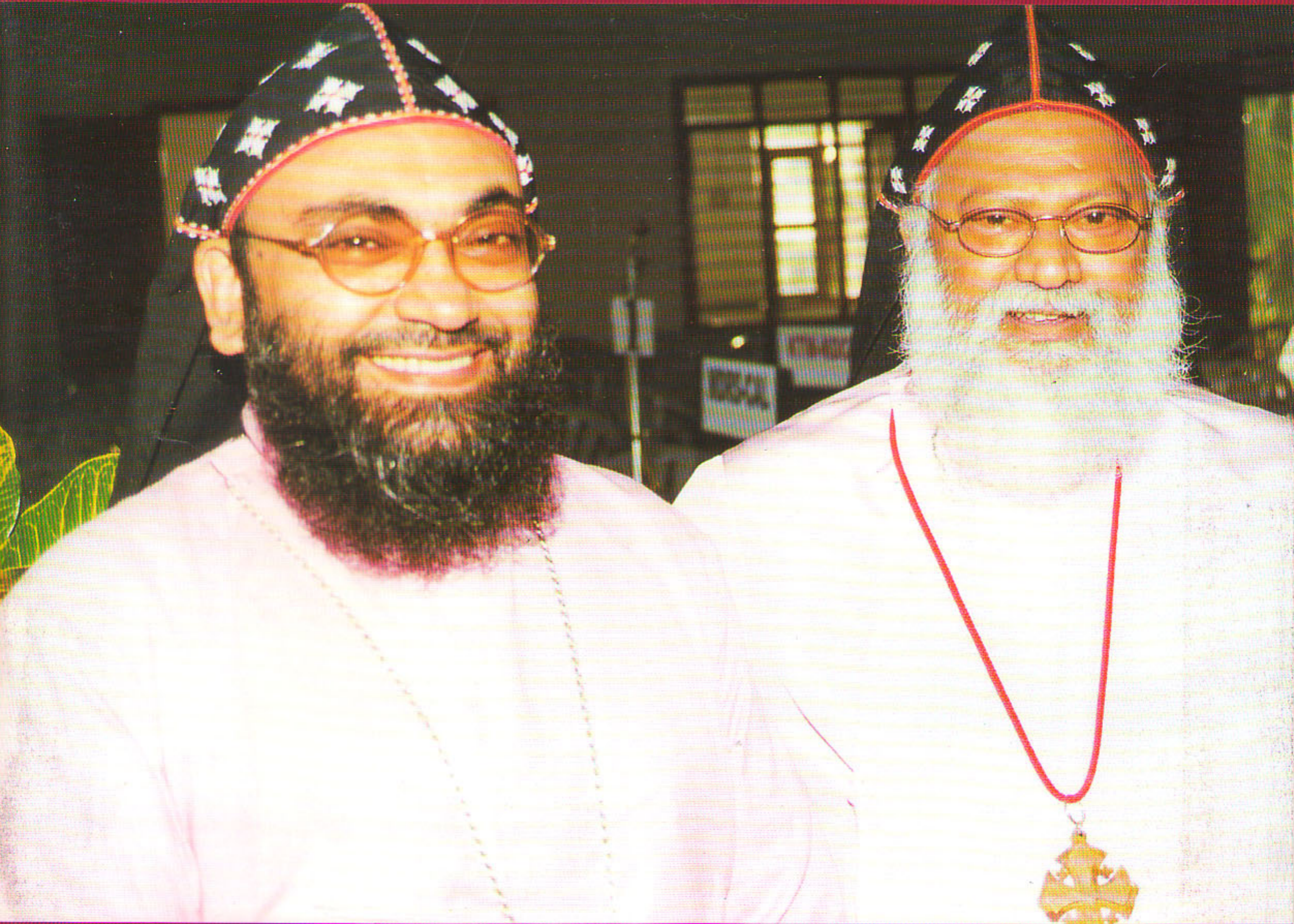




MAR THOMA MESSENGER

A PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

OCTOBER 2001



MAR THOMA DIASPORA

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(Cover) Photo: **Sonny Abraham Anaparackal** (Philadelphia)

Message from the Diocesan Bishop



Dearly beloved in Christ,

In God's divine providence I have been chosen to serve the Diocese of North America & Europe. I consider this as a privilege and honor. I am committing myself to serve Him and the Diocese, not leaning on my strength, but trusting the faithfulness and empowering presence of the Lord. I seek your prayers, and support in fulfilling this God given task and thereby participating in the furtherance of God's Kingdom.

I acknowledge with gratitude the powerful service rendered by Zacharias Thirumeni, who by his untiring and sacrificial work laid a strong foundation for this Diocese. During the last eight years, the Diocese has grown radically, and its growth is unparalleled to any other Diocese. I thank God for the ministry of Thirumeni and what He has done in and through Thirumeni. I am here to build on the foundation laid.

We are entering into a second phase of the Diocese. The initial struggle to survive and exist is over. So it is time for us to coin and define the purpose of our existence. I realize that our church has got a vital mission in this country and outside. Church's authentic existence can be proved only by developing a sensitivity to the needs of the community around. We should not remain as an exclusive community, but we have a role to this nation, in its building up.

I see tremendous potential in this Diocese which needs to be tapped. Often we tend to neglect the God given resources and talents in building up God's Kingdom. The advancement in the field of science and technology and progress in the areas of communication, are rarely used in translating God's Truth to the contemporary world. Let us avail the opportunities given to us and participate in the building up of God's Kingdom.

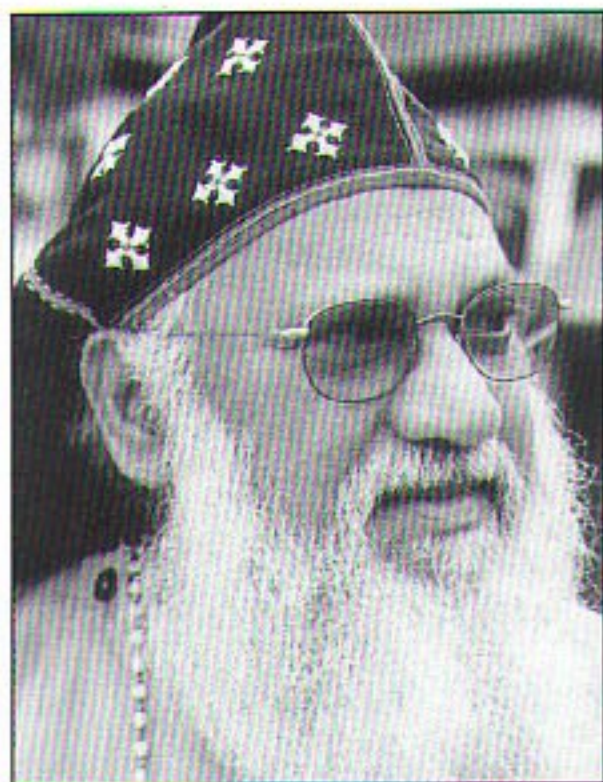
I appreciate the role of *Mar Thoma Messenger* in communicating the life of the Diocese. It has a major role in binding the Diocese as a wholesome unit. I wish and pray that in the days to come this publication will grow both in quality and quantity.

May God Bless you all.

Yours in Christ's Service,

Coorilos Methrachen
Diocesan Bishop

Farewell Message from Zacharias Thirumeni



Dearly beloved in Christ,

I thank God for the great privilege endowed on me to serve this Diocese for the past eight years. Time has come for me to depart and I leave with joy, satisfaction and gratitude. God has been intimately present with me and my ministry in its rough and smooth sailings. I have received prayerful support from the members of the Diocese. If we have achieved anything it is only by the great grace of God and good cooperation of our members.

I cannot forget the hard labor and invaluable services of Rev. Dr. P. G. George, Rev. Oommen Philip, Rev. K. Y. Jacob, and Rev. Dr. John Joseph, the Diocesan secretaries and their families. Similarly, Mr. M. K. Thomas, Dr. John P. Lincoln, Mr. Kuruvilla Cherian, and Mr. Abraham Thomas, the Treasurers of the Diocese, deserve gratitude and appreciation. The members of the Council and the Assembly gave always unanimous support to all projects and programs which enhanced the growth and progress of this Diocese. Mr. Abraham Mattackal and Mr. James T. Philip and the Editorial Board always well projected the work and life of the Diocese through the pages of the *Messenger*. The silent service of Mr. Daniel Thomas at the Sinai Center will never be forgotten.

The clergy who served the Diocese and the lay leaders who lead the various organizations and numerous other persons, by their dedicated services made my labor easy. I want to thank all our members in Canada, USA, Germany, United Kingdom, South Africa and Switzerland whom I had the privilege to serve and know during my ministry in the Western Hemisphere. I am very proud of their faith, commitment, and loyalty to church. The enthusiasm of our people and the love for the church and leadership has encouraged me to move forward in the ministry and mission of the church.

We could achieve much. We should strive for more. More place and position have to be given to the younger generation and women. We need to reach out further to the local community in their life and need. We have reached a stage to consider ourselves as a national church and America as our own country. We need to play our role in the country with responsibility and missionary zeal. The oneness we have achieved needs to be further consolidated. Our worshipping community must live out as a witnessing community. The resources we have should be shared and utilized for the betterment of humanity and for the glory of God.

The church we build up in this land need not be a replica of the Kerala church. A new vibrant church, relevant to the time and country as well as challenging the members of the church and country might come out as we commit ourselves fully in the hand of God. The new generation of ministers born and raised in the USA is going to lead the future church here. They are blessed with the heritage and tradition of the Indian Mar Thoma Church as well as of the American Mar Thoma Church. Though the essence of the church may be the same, the outfit can be different. The growing generation and the older generation have to stand together under the leadership and guidance of the Bishop with discipline and dedication and discern the will of God and discharge it without any fear or favor.

I am so grateful to God for in His divine providence, He has chosen Euyakim Mar Coorilos Thirumeni to shoulder the great responsibilities of this Diocese. I am sure God will render a beautiful ministry through Thirumeni to the Diocese in the coming years. I am confident that all of you will provide much more love and support to Thirumeni to fulfill God's task through him.

As I depart, let me thank God for He had not given me anything except goodness. Let me thank all members for the love you lavished on me. I don't have anything to give you except assurance of continued prayer and blessings on all of you.

With love, prayers, and blessings...

Yours in Christ's Service,

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

The African Challenges of an Indian Church

Rev. Varghese Jacob, Pretoria, South Africa

History has never been very kind to Africa and its people. And the problem started not in recent times, but in those ancient days when civilizations started springing up in various corners of the world (Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, China, and Greece, to name a few) and acted as beacons of Light to the enveloping world of darkness. Traders, mainly Phoenicians and later the Arabs carried the flame of knowledge from these great centers of civilization and learning to other parts of the world, thus enriching them. Where two or more great civilizations had a simultaneous existence in different places, they often vied with each other for domination and yet they complemented, supported and stimulated one another. These intellectual and spiritual interaction that happened as a regular matter of course between the East and the West, challenging and invigorating them both, unfortunately left the innermost part of Africa almost completely untouched and unaffected. Not that nothing happened here in Africa.

Great civilizations and unique cultures existed in many parts, the ancient Nok culture of West Africa being one of the most remarkable among them. But they shared the same fate of the great ancient civilizations of America—the Maya, the Inca and the Aztec—they were mostly cut off from the rest of the world. When the rest of the world heard about them for the first time, it was often from people who had neither the sense nor the sensibility to appreciate anything that existed beyond their own culture, tradition and practices. In most cases, the first set of outsiders who had the privilege to witness and experience some of the finer points of these civilizations, reported about them after first destroying them for ever! Africa, thus, started with a handicap. They would, still, have survived, had it not been for the woes that befell them one after the other. And their inhibitions, caused by their lack of exposure to the outside world, added to the tragedy.

The Arab traders who once acted as the torch-bearers of Learning from one civilization to the other, came to the interior of Africa—not to smuggle in knowledge, but to smuggle out the slaves whom they sold mostly in European markets. The Europeans who circumnavigated Africa touched the western and the southern shores of Africa; but their stay, as well as their interest in the continent, was limited. At best they left a new genetic pool behind and at worst, a lot of fear and ill feelings.

Then came the explorers and the missionaries, who had greater interests and nobler intentions and, obviously, stayed longer. But most of them (as we learn now with the advantage of hind sight) must have made the same mistake they made elsewhere—taking it for granted that the people of Africa knew nothing, that they had no knowledge of a God, and that they had to be taught everything. They coined the expression 'the Dark Continent' and for them the African mind and psyche was a blank paper eagerly waiting to be filled in.

Those who brought the God of the Gospels to Africa did not always make an effort to find out more about the gods of Africa. Even though "the Gospel is the same always and everywhere", as William Temple said, "its manner of presentation changes in accordance with the culture within which it is proclaimed". But there was almost no attempt made by any one to study the African culture and spirituality before adding a new and strange appendage to it. And Africa had much to offer to Europe and the rest of the world and also to the universal church if only people had the openness and objectivity to listen

In African thought, religion is not a separate entity; instead it encompasses all of life. There is harmony of life between this world and the next. The African view of life is holistic, as conveyed by one of their popular questions of greeting: "How full is life with you?" If a child is sick or there are problems with livestock or there is a drought, the response would be: "There is no life in us." The statement that Jesus made: "I have come that you might have life in its fullness" finds much resonance with the people of Africa.

Europe and the Universal Church could have gained also from a better understanding of the great African spirit conveyed by expressions like "*Ubuntu*" and "*Harambe*"—the spirit of humaneness and the spirit of community. The African idiom "a person is a person through other persons" summarizes the spirit which believes that whatever happens to the individual happens to the community and vice versa, establishing the person's existence only in conjunction with the existence of his community. The Universal Brotherhood that we often talk about had already found an expression in this continent under a different guise and different name.

As it turned out, the missionaries introduced the idea of Life after Death, explaining why Christians had no reason to fear death, without realizing that for most Africans, death had never been anything to fear about; it was only a change from one form of existence to another. In South Africa, for example, they speak of "*Abaphantsi*"—the living dead. It is a state of heightened existence in which their ancestors live, remaining "the same people they were on earth." But the African Paradise, unlike its counterpart elsewhere, is not in the sky; it is in the underworld of the ancestors—*kwabaphantsi*. This, incidentally, explains the attachment of an African to the land; it is not just a piece of real estate—it is rather the organism that sustains the bond between the unborn, the living and the dead.

The new idea of a heaven in the sky created only confusion in the African mind. In the wake of the explorers and the missionaries came the others—the traders, the fortune-seekers, the adventurers, and the scoundrels, who, when they were not fighting among themselves, joined hands together and finally colonized almost the entire continent.

Most of them were unsympathetic and often cruel to the African people whom they exploited as they pleased. That these 'new arrivals' looked the same and had the same skin colour as those who had come earlier with medicines, and the message of a kind and humane God, only added to the confusion of the African mind.

The confusion still remains in the form of what can best be described as 'an identity crisis' for the African Christian who combines the Christian, the Traditional and even the new Political values in almost everything that he does. He is in the church in the morning singing and dancing as he worships. We see him again in the afternoon, dancing and singing at an *Ukukhapa*, the feast to accompany a dead man on his journey to the world of his ancestors. Or he would be at an *Ukubuyisa*, the feast conducted after a year of someone's death, which symbolizes the integration of the deceased into the community of all guardian spirits. Or, he could be found in the village hall opening a combined meeting of the Communist Party of South Africa, COSATU, and ANC with a wonderfully musical rendering of 'Amazing Grace.' An average African's strong faith in the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit is equally matched by his faith in the 'talking pot' in the next village.

The Political and Social World

The political and the social world of the African is also in a state of chaos and uncertainty. The virulent strains of destruction had always been there in all systems all over the world, either actively expressing itself or lying dormant. Added to this inherited supply of chaos and destruction, Africa received some liberal contribution from other systems too.

Firstly, the idea of Private Property,—often protected by Law—was introduced into a continent which was the home of what Will Durant called 'primitive communism.' In Africa, the land belonged to the community and its benefits belonged to all. Even the tools of hunting and farming belonged to the community, which supported the individual members who also worked for it. The alien idea of private property turned the African world upside down and the people are still sorting it out while struggling often with two different systems at the rural and urban levels.

Most African communities had been led by tribal chiefs or traditional rulers. In most cases they were not 'rulers'; they were simply the Custodians—of the land, of the cultural heritage, of the moral and ethical values of the community. When the political power of these rulers eroded under the colonial rule, it was also their moral authority and the cultural heritage of the people that eroded. This erosion became a landslide in the apartheid days. Nothing was and nothing could be introduced to fill this void that remains, without any noticeable change, to this day.

The political fervor that swept South Africa in the latter part of the Apartheid days only kindled a new political will and spirit in the African youth. There was no corresponding reawakening of the social, cultural, and moral values. Thus, in

a society which was once characterized by its respect for the elders, respect for any one has become highly conspicuous by its absence. And no one—neither the traditional heads, nor the elders, nor even the spiritual leaders—is in control and dares to take control.

The result is the moral decay and the degeneration of values at a steady rate. As early as the apartheid days, when men were brought into the cities to work in mines, thus separating them from their families for long periods, the rate of homosexuality, polygamous relations and other promiscuous practices had been very high. The *ilobolo* system, whereby a man pays a dowry to marry a woman, encouraged some to look for easier and cheaper options—to find a woman to live together, have children, and then move on to new partners. This uncontrolled promiscuity is the major cause of the very high percentage of people living with AIDS in South Africa.

It also leads to a very serious social problem in the form of children under the care of single parents. The high rate of divorces (in all the communities) and teenage pregnancies add to the list of such children, a good number of whom are looked after by the grand parents who are too old to look after themselves. These children miss out on the warmth, the care and the emotional support of a normal family. These often uncared—for and emotionally unstable children have a greater tendency to turn to drugs and crime as they grow up. And the effect of this could be staggering in a community where the crime rate is already very high, with the poor and the unemployed easily drawn to it.

Mar Thoma Congregation of Southern Africa

It is in the middle of these complex and highly sensitive problems that the Mar Thoma Congregation of Southern Africa finds itself today and functions as a responsible unit of the church. But the members of the congregation, belonging to 175 families and scattered over four countries (South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, and Swaziland) with nearly 2500 km separating some of them, are unified not only in Christian faith but also by the awareness of the problems of the continent. A good number of them have been working in Africa for decades and have developed a genuine liking for its people and a deep concern for their welfare.

Many South Africans often express their surprise at the realization that there are Christians in India and are deeply impressed learning that the ancient churches of India date back to the early days of Christianity. When we make use of a church building or hall in a town (to have a church building of our own is not viable at least because our members are widely scattered.) for our worship, we are constantly watched, for what we preach and what we practice.

I am confident that our members can stand up to the challenge and will continue to receive His blessings to glorify His name, by their commitment and dedication, not only to the tasks assigned to them but also to the people of Africa whom they serve. ■

The Mar Thoma Church in Arabian Gulf

A. Luke, Abu Dhabi

Introduction

Universality and unity being important marks of the church, and we marthomites being members of the reformed church with the unique rich eastern heritage of traditionalism in worship and revivalism in preaching take their culture of faith, worship and fellowship wherever we go. In this context, with the advent of the prospecting of oil and the resulting prosperity in the Gulf, many Marthomites arrived here as early as the late fifties (1950's). (Bahrain, Kuwait & Trucial States—present UAE). When our Late Valia Metropolitan was the missionary bishop, His Grace had taken special care in establishing and nurturing the parishes in these places. As such, Mar thoma parishes were formed in Kuwait and in Bahrain by the 1960s. Now large parishes are in existence throughout the Gulf Countries except in Saudi Arabia. Praise the Lord!

Mar thoma Church in UAE

UAE is a federation of seven Emirates Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Ras Al Khima & Fujairah with a total population of 2 million with 50% expatriates. In His abundant grace and mercy, exclusive Mar thoma worshipping communities are coming together in all these emirates for fellowship and worship. Dubai, Sharjah and Abu Dhabi parishes are quite large parishes by any yard stick. Al Ain, Ras Al Khima and Fujairah have their own parishes nurturing the spiritual needs of the Marthomites in those areas. There are prayer groups, Sunday schools and Sevika Sanghoms virtually in all major habitat centers of UAE. There are six full time Mar thoma Vicars working in United Arab Emirates (Total of 14 Mar thoma Vicars throughout the Gulf). The present Vicars in the various parishes of UAE are as follows:

Abu Dhabi: Rev. Mammen Samuel; Al Ain: Rev. K. M. Issac; Dubai: Rev. Thomas George; Rev. Joseph Varghese; Sharjah: Rev. K. A. Thomas; Ras Al Khima, Fujairah: Rev. V. S. John

Sharjah parish have their own church complex, where they conduct regular worship services and Sunday Schools. Dubai parish is in the process of completing their own church complex. At Abu Dhabi, we share The St. Andrew's Church Complex with the Anglican Church for worship services and for conducting Sunday Schools. But our exclusive parish hall, parsonage and chapel provides lot of conveniences and logistic support for all parish activities.

Inspite of the fact that these different parishes are accommodated in different Dioceses, all the Church organizations have UAE wide Centre meetings and get

together. Bi Annual Gulf Youth seminar is planned to be conducted at Abu Dhabi in February 2002. Abu Dhabi Yuva Jana Sakhyam is the main host for this Gulf wide get together of youths for the year 2002. Sunday Schools (conducted on Fridays, as it is the national weekly day off in the Gulf) V.B.S., Edavaka Mission, Sevika Sanghoms, Church Choir and teenagers fellowships are being regularly conducted in all these parishes. Parish life is quite hectic and busy. Large sums are raised from these parishes for all worthwhile Church projects and for meeting the needs of our various mission fields. The priority of Jesus Christ as proclamation of Good News of the Kingdom is crucial for the recovery of the real essence of the biblical Church. The true Church must demonstrate the totality of God's concerns. It is the people of God who witness to the reality of the Kingdom.

The challenges ahead

The present culture clash, disinformation and misinformation resulting from the September 11th terrorist attack in USA, the future of our parishes in the Gulf is uncertain but His purpose will be glorified.

“God is our refuge and strength,
an ever present help in trouble”

“The Lord Almighty is with us,
The God of Jacob is our Fortress” *Psalm: 46*

With the proven mindset of a sojourn passage, every Marthomite in the Gulf is very closely tied emotionally to the mother Church in Kerala. As such, the inherent tensions and problems we see in the parishes of other parts of the world such as USA, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and Europe are practically not there in the parishes of the Gulf. The Diaspora here in the Gulf needs more avenues and modes to strengthen the ties with the mother Church in a caring and nurturing manner. More and more opportunities for sharing and fellowship as well as for more in-depth study of the Bible and spiritual truths have to be facilitated in selected locations and institutions of the Church. This will be of help for those people who go on vacation from the Gulf as well as for those gulf returnees spending their retirement in Kerala.

In the networked global village, there should be Church instruments and portals to keep us connected together virtually and to the Lord in reality all the time. Let His abundant Grace and blessings be with us in preparing His people to welcome the glorious second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. ■

Sabha Prathinidhi Mandalam 2000-2001



The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan giving the presidential address.

Sabha Prathinidhi Mandalam 2000-2001 was held from August 28th to 30th, 2001 in Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Valia Metropolitan Smaraka Auditorium, Tiruvalla, India. The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Marthoma Metropolitan presided over the meetings. All our Episcopas were present and gave leadership during the Mandalam proceedings. Over one thousand Mandalam members representing Mar Thoma parishes in and outside India were present at the Mandalam. Among them were several members from the Diocese of North America and Europe.

The Mandalam Meeting began with a worship service led by The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Irenaeus Suffragan Metropolitan, The Rt. Rev. Geevarghese Mar Athanasius Episcopa, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa and The Rt. Rev. Dr. Issac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa. This worship service helped set the tone for the three-day meeting. A specially prepared order of worship with prayer for forgiveness and prayer for thanksgiving were very meaningful.

The Rt. Rev. Geevarghese Mar Athanasius Episcopa gave the devotional talk during the worship service. His devotional talk was based on the text: Matthew:25:31. "As a church, we denied the light of Jesus and failed to behold His glory; Let the fire in our hearts be burning against the evil and injustice in our society." Athanasius Thirumeni said to the Mandalam members.

Sabha Secretary Rev. Dr. P. J. Philip gave a hearty welcome to everyone in his welcome speech.

Presidential address

Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Marthoma Metropolitan delivered the presidential address in which he reminded the Mandalam members, "The mission of the church is to carry out the Ministry of Love in the world where the forces of evil one getting very strong." He called upon the members to be the voice against injustice and corruption in the society. He said, "The church and its believers should not close their eyes against the evils of the society and should respond to it in a meaningful way." He exhorted the Mandalam members to be filled with the spirit of love and to help strengthen the relationship in the society and families. "The ordained priest and the laity in the workplace need to work together to uplift the marginalized in the society" the Metropolitan continued.

Condolence

A minute's silence was observed as a mark of respect to the aches and Mandalam members who passed away in the past year: Rev. C. M. Thomas; Rev. M. S. Jacob; Rev. P. I. Chacko; Rev. K. V. John; Rev. Dr. K. P. Mathai; Mr. P. O. Koshy; Mr. K. C. Varghese; Mr. M. D. Zachariah.

Question and Answer Session

76 questions and its answers were given out to the members in a 58-page printed booklet. However, due to the limitation of time only 15 questions were taken for discussion. It was suggested to keep more time for questions and answers in the future session.



Some of our mandalam members.

Study

The topic for this year's study was "Faith Formation in the New Century." Copies of a book published by the Committee appointed by the Sabha Council was given to each Mandalam member. Rev. Dr. Abraham Kuruvilla, Convener deserves special thanks and appreciation for preparing this very useful study material. All the Mandalam members were urged to take this booklet to their respective parishes for further study and reflection. Feedback and suggestions based on the study may be submitted to the Sabha Secretary.

Major decisions taken in the Mandalam are as follows:

1. The annual report and accounts were passed.
2. The Council resolution "to select two people to be Bishops in the church" was discussed and debated. However, then it was decided not to have the Episcopal Election this year.
3. The following amendment to the constitution was made by a special Mandalam: According to the section 390 of the constitution;

"Those who are eligible to be elected as Bishops in the Mar Thoma Church must be at least 40 years old and must have at least 15 years experience as an ordained priest in the church" (earlier the age bar was 35 years old).
4. To build an office complex and council chamber on S. C. S Campus. The Sabha Council was authorized to borrow 35 lakhs rupees for the civil work of this project. This complex will be known as Thomas Mar Athanasius Mar Thoma Metropolitan Smaraka Building. (He was the second Metropolitan of our church).
5. The new offset press is named as *The Mar Thoma Press*. The Sabha Council was authorized to borrow 30 lakhs rupees for this project.

6. Approved report regarding different Trusts and Societies within the church as per the decision of 1998 Sabha Mandalam.
7. Rules and regulation regarding Sabha Mandalam proceedings and election process of Sabha Council members were approved.
 - * Lunch and snacks were provided to all the members at a minimum cost to the members.
 - * All visitors had to have a special pass to sit in the visiting gallery.
 - * All kinds of collections and sales were prohibited in and around the Sabha Auditorium on S. C. S. Campus.
8. Report regarding the church starting a professional college of its own was discussed. It was resolved to authorize the Sabha Council to make necessary arrangements for starting professional self-financing colleges.
9. Approved amendments to the constitution of the *Joint Council of the CNI, CSI and Mar Thoma Church*. Now the new name is *The Communion of Churches in India*.
10. Permission granted to Diocese of Adoor-Mavelikara, to start a Dental College in the compound of Kattanam Hospital. Also permission is given to use the hospital buildings and 5 acres of land in the hospital complex for this purpose.
11. Approved decision of Mar Thoma Medical Mission to start a new Nursing College and a Physical Therapy course in the Kumbanad Fellowship Mission Hospital compound.
12. Passed a resolution to request the Government of Kerala not to give permission to private contractors for the sale and distribution of alcoholic beverages.
13. Authorized Sabha Council to initiate steps to start the following two new organizations in the church.
 - * An organization for the Senior Youth – 35 years and older.
 - * An organization for Senior Citizens – 60 years and older.
14. To translate and publish a worship book in Tamil language for the use of Tamil speaking church members. Now we have worship book in English, Hindi and Kanarese.
15. Adv. Suresh Koshy introduced the budget for the year 2001-2002. The Mandalam passed a 900-million-rupee budget. This amount is allotted to about 15 different organizations and institutions in the church.

Awards and Mementos

The following persons who retired from the active service of the church were recognized and awarded mementos: Rev. N. I. Mathai; Rev. V. T. John; Rev. T. G. Varghese; Rev. Dr. A. P. Athyal.



Our Sabha Council Members

The Mar Thoma Church 2001 "Service to the Humanity Award" was presented to Mr. T. O. John for his 33 years of meritorious and community service teaching deaf children.

Miss Aphaya Sankeetha, a Dalit student was recognized for achieving the highest marks in the S. S. L. C. Examination.

Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Valia Metropolitan Smaraka Award for music was given to Dr. George Varghese and Rev. Kurian Thomas. This award was for the best lyrics in



Metropolitan giving Manava Seva Award to Mr. T. O. John

congregational and devotional songs. The Department of Sacred Music and Communication instituted this award in memory of our beloved Alexander Mar Thoma.

C. V. Samuel, Detroit MTC

MALANKARA SABHA THARAKA

November 2001—'Sabha Tharaka Month'

The Mar Thoma Sabha Council has decided to observe November 2001 as the Sabha Tharaka month. In order to increase circulation, local meetings, parish visits, workshops, etc. are being organized. The publication of Sabha Tharaka which started in January 1893 is entering into 110th year in January 2002.

"A Sabha Tharaka for each Mar Thoma Home" is our goal. This aim is to be attained through gradual growth, stage by stage. We intend to increase the circulation by another 10,000 this year.

- Become a subscriber • Renew your subscription • Encourage others to take subscription

The one who enrolls the maximum number of subscribers will be given a special prize. Those who enroll 10 subscribers in November 2001 will get complimentary copy of Tharaka for a year.

We solicit the prayerful and wholehearted support of all Achen, the office-bearers of parishes and well wishers.

Thank you for your support and encouragement hitherto.

A Sabha Tharaka for each Mar Thoma Home

Very Rev. P. V. Thomas
Chairman
s/d

Rev. K. M. Mammen
Manager
s/d

Rev. Dr. P. J. Philip
Sabha Secretary
s/d

Prof. K. A. Mathew
Chief Editor
s/d

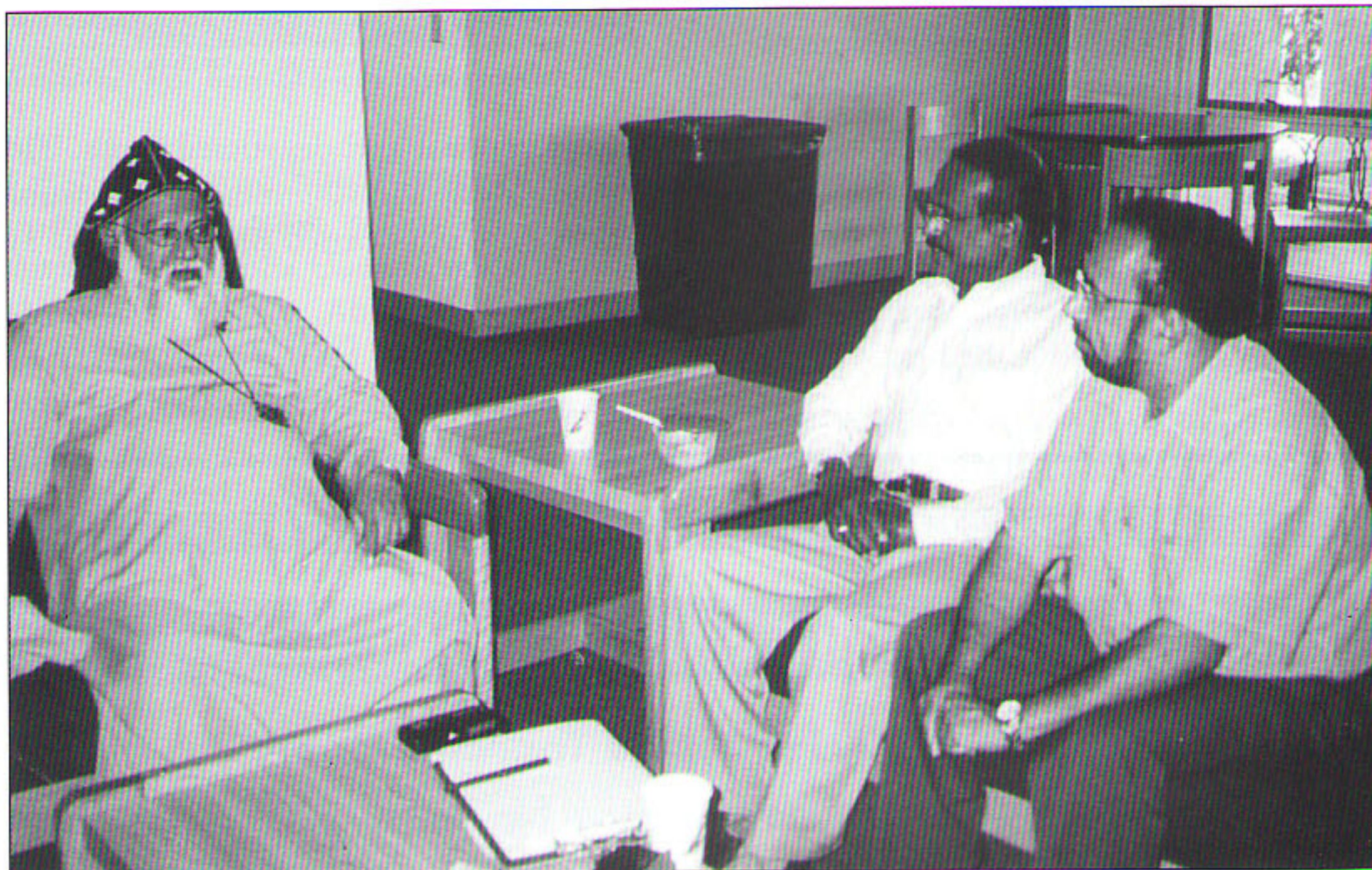
Mailing Address: Rev. K. M. Mammen, Manager; Sabha Tharaka, Thiruvalla, Kerala, Pin: 689101

Goals Achieved and Opportunities Missed

An Interview with the Outgoing Diocesan Bishop

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus

During a week long stay in Los Angeles in connection with the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Mar Thoma Church of L.A., a meeting of the Diocesan Council and the National Youth Fellowship Conference, the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus was willing to sit down with the Diocesan Council Member Mr. Thomas Mammen and the Chief Editor Mr. Abraham Mattackal for an interview on August 11, 2001. Given below are the excerpts of the interview.



Q. When Thirumeni took over as the Diocesan Bishop in November of 1993, comparatively, it was an easier assignment for you, as you have had a number of old friends all across the United States, Canada and U.K. Do you agree?

A. The presence of a large number of friends in the U.S. and Canada encouraged me and gave me hope that I could work in any complex situations. I had faith and hope in my friends that they would support me but at the same time I knew in my mind that I should be cautious about my friends so that I may not do any undue favor to the friends or allow myself to be manipulated by them.

Q. In our opinion, the greatest of all your achievements as the Diocesan Bishop, is the rapid growth of our diocese from 26 parishes and congregations to the present 69 parishes and congregations. You traveled far and wide in search of the Marthomites scattered around and helped them to organize themselves as congregations and parishes. Do you agree?

A. In my opinion, that is not the greatest but only one of the achievements. My aim was to bring together all Marthomites scattered in isolated places so that they could form as a congregation and be ministered and provided with the services of an achen, thereby strengthening their faith and helping them with their spiritual growth. As far as I'm concerned, the greatest of all achievements is neither the growth of the diocese nor the establishment of a Diocesan Center in New York, but it is the bringing up of young people into the ministry. When I took over as the Diocesan Bishop, many of our young people were departing from the Mar Thoma Church. They were, in a way, anti-Mar Thoma Church and were afraid to go to India to study ministry. Even some of the parents discouraged them and one of their first questions had always been whether the youngsters had to go to India or not. But things have changed. Now there are many who are willing to come into the ministry and serve the Church. Many youngsters are taking up leadership roles in our parishes and congregations.

Q. Our entry into the NCC and your contributions to the WCC have made it easier for the MTC to become a global church. But in the present set up and practices, the MTC is still a “Kerala Church”. Do you agree?

A. Yes, in worshipping and its activities, the Mar Thoma Church is a Kerala Church because the adults who form the majority in all parishes and congregations want the method of worship in the Kerala style—some even desire the style of services they attended to as children in Kerala. But though smaller in size, according to the National Council of Churches, our contributions are much valuable and greater than many larger Churches. I have had the privilege of working with many world Church leaders in WCC and that, in my opinion, has gone a long way in elevating the status of the MTC as a global church.

Q. As a worshipping community. We have grown in size and numbers, but as a witnessing community, our growth rate has been near zero or very negligible. Do you agree?

A. We have families of four generations—visiting grandpas and grandmas, the first generation parents, their children and grand children, all going to church and worshipping together on any given Sunday, is a witness in itself. This is something very very rare in the American churches. Yes, as far as evangelization or mission activities are concerned, we have to go a long way. The next phase is the outreaching phase, the missionary phase. We could not do much with regards to witnessing through mission in the US, Canada or Europe but we have been actively participating with mission projects in India and we have made substantial monetary contributions to various mission projects.

Q. Amongst our Organizations, the Sunday School and the Sevika Sanghom, both at the diocesan and parish level, are at the fore front in terms of its services and outreach activities whereas the Edavaka Mission and the Youth Fellowship need to take up more dynamic leadership roles in its service to the poor and the needy. Do you have any suggestions?

A. Edavaka Mission, comparatively, is not doing much but it is giving a spiritual nurture to one section of people. You should not, at the same time, evaluate an organization by comparison. Evaluation has to be made on its own performance. Youth Fellowship is a very lively organization in this diocese. Look at the LA Conference- 270 youngsters attending the conference, each one carrying a bible. They pray, they do bible classes for their Hindu friends in the campuses, as was evident from their witnessing. They are more zealous as a Marthomite than most of us. They want to be Marthomites, they want to do mission work. They want to be real Marthomites in the US, but their Mar Thoma con-

cept may be slightly different from ours. They do the bible studies, their life is controlled by biblical guidance. They are a vibrant group. I am very proud of them.

Q. Majority of our adult members are in the fifties and sixties, some in the seventies too. Slowly but surely, they all will fade away from the Church activities. One of the concerns of the adults is the fate of the Mar Thoma Church beyond 2015 or 2020.

A. Our older generation, as they get older, will not fade away from the church, but naturally they will fade away from the leadership roles and they must, so that the younger generation can take over leadership roles in the Church.

Q. If and when the second generation American Marthomites take up most of the leadership roles of the Church, they may have to alter the mode of worship to suit their needs without deviating from the faith of the church. In such a scenario, bringing achen from Kerala would be unwise and unwelcome. Do you agree?

A. In the beginning we had all four services in Malayalam in a month. But as our children grew older, most of our parishes changed the pattern of services as two Malayalam and two English services in a month. Some congregations have one Malayalam and three English services. In some parishes there are English and Malayalam services on one Sunday. I have preached sermons only in English in the last four years. May be in the next five or ten years there may not be any Malayalam service at all in some of our parishes. There are many options. I cannot predict how exactly the turn of events will be. It's quite possible there may be a Malayalam and an English service on a given Sunday as the elders would opt for Malayalam Service as the youngsters have opted for English service.

As for achen, we cannot say the achen selected from the second generation Marthomites here would be better than the achen sent from Kerala to serve in this diocese. It all depends on their commitment, efficiency, work, adapting to the needs of the people they serve etc. There were instances where the people asked for an achen from Kerala when they had an achen from their own place of worship.

Q. There are a number of youth members who are planning to be full time workers in God's ministry. But at the same time they are not interested in becoming Mar Thoma achen. Why?

A. We should not worry about it. Why should we think that a Mar Thoma person should only be useful to the Mar Thoma Church? Our contribution to the world church is tremendous. Even in the United States, our Mar Thoma people are working in Methodist Churches, Presbyterian Churches. Mar Thoma girls are working as Priests in the

Methodist Churches and I think one of them is going to be a Bishop of the Methodist Church. We have given Mar Thoma people biblical background, spiritual background and if they go and serve other Churches, we should be proud of it. I'm the one who encouraged our young people to go out for the mission rather than being in the Mar Thoma Church without any mission. I'm not worried about our people going to other churches doing the mission. If there is a useful youth worker, our youngsters may not need an achen. Now they want achen and that's why I provided achen to them. I had encouraged one of our girls attending the Youth Conference to go for theology studies and she has joined SMU for M.Div. and I wish and hope that probably in three years she would be appointed as a Youth Worker to work amongst boys and girls. So I have initiated appointing a girl as a Youth Worker.

Q. If our youngsters are encouraged to get involved in Diocesan activities and motivated to go for theological studies in the institutions of their choice and are not required to work in Kerala, in our opinion, more and more youths will go for theological studies and will be willing to become achen in our diocese.

A. This is an adult fear. Young people have not expressed this fear. In fact a young person when told he could be enrolled in Princeton Theological Seminary, he refused and expressed his desire to go to Kerala because he would otherwise be incompetent to serve the older generation. So for some more time, the ministry to both the older and new generation is needed and for that an education in Kerala is important. But time is fast approaching when we should not insist that all should go to Kerala for theological studies.

Q. The monetary contributions that our well settled and well-employed second generation Marthomites make to our Church are comparatively negligible, how can we persuade them or motivate them to contribute liberally for the Church and its activities?

A. Nobody has taken any statistics on it. It's only an opinion. There are a number of youngsters who regularly support missions and set apart tithe. If they are not regularly giving monthly subscriptions or for other church collections, I would say that the parents might not have taught them as they started earning. Many a time the children were told by parents that they would give the church its dues and the earning children were not told that they should also contribute their share to the Church. Even after the marriage of their children, there are families in which the parents only contribute to the church. I don't have any doubt in my mind that if our children are taught from their childhood the quality of Christian giving, they would continue to do so without any hesitation when they start earning.

Q. We have at present two Youth Chaplains. Their services are commendable but many parishes in our diocese are not getting their services. At the moment, mostly Houston, Dallas and New York area parishes are benefited. If we could appoint a few well qualified youth lay leaders as counselors, their services could be availed of by most of our youths in different regions of the diocese.

A. These two Youth Chaplains are appointed by the Regions. They are funded by the Regions. In my opinion, even New York and Texas Regions need two chaplains each one for the New York area and one for the Philadelphia, Washington DC & Baltimore areas; one for Houston and one for Dallas area. Then we need one for Chicago Detroit area, one for Western area like LA-San Francisco, one for Toronto area and so on. So we need more youth workers. But we also need money. The parents and the young people should contribute for the funds needed for this purpose.

Q. You declared the last Sunday in November, to coincide with the Thanksgiving celebrations, as the Diaspora Sunday. When you take over as the Bishop of the Madras Singapore/Malaysia diocese, would you declare the last Sunday in November as Diaspora Sunday in that diocese too so that the Mar Thoma Church could celebrate Diaspora Sunday on a global basis?

A. Well, I cannot commit anything now. I need to consult with the Council, make people aware of its significance and if they agree, I would be willing to do it.

Q. It has been said that we have a 'hello-goodbye' ministry. How do we change this into a lasting, caring and loving ministry?

A. It's a difficult question. The effectiveness of an achen depends on many things—the cooperation of the Executive Committee, the concern of the people, selfless service etc. In my opinion, the tenure of our achen should be five years instead of the three years that we have now. But there should also be a provision that in the event of an achen's services being non-productive or detrimental to the growth of the parish, the Diocesan Bishop, in consultation with the Synod, should be in a position to remove the achen from the parish.

Q. Do you think that we have to take measures in providing a continued lay ministry to facilitate the ordained ministry in our Diaspora parishes?

A. When I am leaving, one thing I want to tell our people of this diocese is the importance of the lay ministry. We have a lot of talented lay people in our diocese whose services we could not make use of in the past. Very soon we will have a large retired community—their talents, resources, dedication all could be of immense benefit to

the diocese. We have to think very seriously as to how we could make use of the people resources in the ministry as well as in the mission of the Church especially in the context of our achens being transferred in three years. In order to maintain the continuity and for the sake of the growth of the community, more participation of lay people in the ministry is needed. Continuity should be maintained through lay people rather than through clergy. We have to find out how we can achieve this—there should be lay training institute, lay leadership training, lay participation...and so on.

Q. During your tenure of almost eight years, you presided over two different assemblies and Councils. What were the two most important decisions taken by the Assembly or the Council?

A. Relocating the Diocesan Center to Long Island was a major decision as also the decision of the 2001 Assembly to accept the proposal of zonal division of the Diocese into three zones.

Q. The decision to divide the diocese into three zones is not well received by everyone alike. There a few who oppose it. What are the benefits of such a division?

A. The zonal division of the diocese will not only be beneficial for the growth of the diocese but also will help in more participation of the people. For example, the European zone will consist of parishes in UK, Germany and Switzerland. So they will be able to work together, take decisions locally and implement the decisions with more participation of the people. There will be a Zonal Secretary, Zonal Assembly and a Zonal Council. The division will not harm anybody's interests but only will help in the growth of the diocese as a whole and more participation of the people in its activities and programs.

Q. The last Assembly and the Council decided to sponsor a mission field. In what ways could we help this Mission field to attain its set goals apart from our monetary support?

A. The Mission Board of our diocese is meeting in the third week of August when they would select two mission fields. During that meeting all aspects of our support will be discussed.

Q. The decision to introduce Mar Thoma Credit Cards was criticized by a few of our members in the diocese. How would you evaluate that decision now?

A. The decision was a right one. But as in every case, there are always a group of people who would oppose anything and everything that is 'new'. When the Worship book

was published, there were some who opposed it. First time 4000 copies were printed. Now 8000 copies more are going to be printed. So it is clear that a vast majority of our people wanted to buy the copies for their own use. In a country like US where millions of people use all kinds of Credit Cards, our diocese would have immensely benefited if the use of Mar Thoma Credit Cards was properly implemented and followed up.

Q. In the view of some people, Sinai Center is an epitome of pomp and pride—with its expensive marble floors, fixtures, etc. In their opinion, it's another example of excessive spending on structures. What's your reply to them?

A. In my opinion, an average house of our members is probably better than the Sinai Center as the Center is not one housing structure, but it's a campus in one way. There is Bishop's residence, Diocesan Secretary's residence, an office, dining hall, guest house, council chamber, chapel, library etc. As for me, whatever we spent, it was well spent. Nothing was wasted.

Q. Some of our members felt that they could not get in touch with you in time of need as you were mostly out on travel to different places.

A. Yes, that's true. I had to spend time with WCC, travel to different places where our Mar Thoma members were scattered so that I could bring them together as a congregation. If I was sitting at the Diocesan Headquarters for most of the time, I could not have done much to the growth of our diocese both in terms of the numbers and our closer relationship with the WCC, NCC etc.

Q. Although most of our bishops and Diaspora lay leaders support a lay movement like FOCUS, may be because the movement itself is in its infant stage, support from our Achens for lay movements in general is 'lukewarm'. Any comments on this?

A. Depends on what type of lay movement. Some lay movements that sprung up in India and in this diocese, have died down even before they took roots. If the purpose of the movement is to criticize the church, the Bishop, the Achens or the mission of the church, then the movement will die down very soon. This doesn't mean I'm against criticism. Constructive criticisms are good for the growth of the Church, but not continuous negative and destructive criticisms.

As for the FOCUS movement, I support it because it is a positive lay movement. You are enhancing the growth of the Church, you are giving ideas, you are supporting the

Church, you are supporting the Achens. So the Achens will support such positive lay movements.

Q. A good leader, whether political or a Church leader, had always been subjected to criticisms. One of the criticisms we heard is that you were a little bit lenient when faced with taking disciplinary action towards some "trouble makers" with the result that the situations got worse and that you had to take disciplinary action belatedly which you earlier refused to take.

A. There are two sides to every event. One side is the maintenance of the rules and the other is compassion and grace. One can take very tough actions on the people and if the situations warrant, they could be expelled from the Church. I have been lenient and loving though I have disapproved many actions of some individuals. I have taken some stern measures against individuals but even then I have never lost love for them. Looking back, I'm happy that I didn't take drastic actions in a hurry. However, I do admit there were delays in some cases but those delays were due to my being away from the Center. On an average I could spend only 20% of my time at the Diocesan Headquarters.

Q. In the minds of some members, Santhigiri Ashram is a project of your own. We have heard criticism that all the gift money that you receive from friends and other members are utilized for building more structures at Santhigiri. If there were no Santhigiri, all the money could have been utilized for mission projects and for the help of the poor. Your comments please?

A. From the very beginning of my ministry, whatever I have done, I have done with a vision. Santhigiri is an example of that vision. I bought the land in Santhigiri with the proceeds from the sale of my family share and contributions made by my brother and some other relatives. But I didn't want it to be a personal or family property. Therefore, it was deeded in the form of a Trust with the Church as the beneficiary. With a view to enhancing the spiritual growth of both the old and the young, a meditation center was started. There is a medical clinic with a doctor, there are health workers going around the neighborhood villages to teach the villagers basic health care and hygiene, a dental clinic with the services of two voluntary dentists and school lunch programs are some of the numerous charity works that Santhigiri is associated with. Now a Chapel with an estimated cost of Rs. 40 lakhs is under construction at Santhigiri. Forty families gave Rs. 1 lakh each towards the construction of this Chapel. They

would not have given this money if there was no need like this. The people who gave me gift money knew that I would use the same for Santhigiri and everyone was given a receipt for whatever amount they gave me. If there were no Santhigiri, most of them probably would not have given any money and in some cases I would not have accepted also. So I do not agree that other Church's projects would have been benefited if there were no Santhigiri.

Q. Thirumeni, in a lighter note, are there any members to be 'pardoned' just before you relinquish your responsibilities as the Bishop of this diocese, as is often customary with the Presidents of the United States of America when they relinquish their positions at the end of a 4 or 8 year term as the President?

A. By God's grace, there is peace everywhere. Those who were out are in now.

Q. If you were given an extension of another five years, what would be the items to do on your priority list?

A. When I took over as the Diocesan Bishop here, I had certain goals. And for that matter, I had certain goals for Santhigiri too. Two important things that remain as my unaccomplished goals in this diocese are: i) establishing a Retirement Center for our soon-to-be retirees like the cottage system in Santhigiri. This was my dream and is a need to be fulfilled without losing any time, ii) establishing Retreat Centers for our Students and Youths—one in the East and one in the West. We should also have a Retreat Center for adults. Another thing that we can do is establishing a Seminary in this land. I don't think it's a difficult goal to achieve as we have a lot of resources here. Even some of our Achens from Kerala as also those who have completed higher theological studies from this diocese, could come and teach in the seminary where lay training and theological training could be arranged. Another area that needs our attention is our wholehearted participation in the ecumenical movement.

Q. What was the most glorious moment in your tenure as the Diocesan Bishop?

A. I would say it's our acceptance in the National Council of Churches. Though smaller in number, they accepted us as a vibrant Church with global influence and stature.

Q. Lastly, Thirumeni, any regrets you want to share with the readers?

A. I go back as a happy man. I have no regrets. ■

The end of an amazing journey, but the beginning of another: May He Fly on the Wings of Angels!

Dr. Zac Varghese, London, England

When Solomon was leading the celebrations to dedicate the temple in Jerusalem, he reviewed the past from the perspective of what God had done. Looking back over the past in the light of the present can be a most rewarding experience, especially if you are imposing a particular perspective on a chain of events.

It was half past five in the morning in London. The telephone rang, I picked it up and answered

"Good morning"

"Good morning, Zac, did I wake you up?" Came the reply in a most apologetic and charming manner.

"No, Thirumeni, I was just getting up."

Over the past eight years the above situation was not an uncommon event for many people while Bishop Zacharias Mar Theophilus was in the business of building the Diocese of North America and Europe. Thirumeni must have been finishing his day's work and getting ready to go to bed. It was probably one of his last calls of the day, or possibly the first call of the next day. Thus, Thirumeni worked day and night to build parishes and support the Diaspora communities and commitments around the world.

He is a visionary; his brother bishops call him a dreamer, it is true that even in his sleep he dreams about various aspects of his ministry. He converts those dreams into realities at other times. His is a sacrificial leadership, he continues to sacrifice his health and physical needs like food, rest and sleep to cater to the needs of the community of which he is the spiritual father.

This is not an uncommon tradition for the bishops of the Mar Thoma Church, this is how our bishops express their blessings through their mystical concept of an apostolic succession. Under this tradition they are faithfully following the footsteps of St. Thomas, the builder. Bishop Zacharias Mar Theophilus has been a bishop for twenty one years, but in those years his achievements have been incalculable. By the bright flame of deep humanity, his love of fellow human beings, his courage, his spirituality and humility he has done certain things extraordinarily well and joined a very small band of legendary bishops of the Mar Thoma Church before him. He felt the pulses and the heartbeats of Mar Thoma Christians in the Diaspora communities around the world and he also put his arm around the world in his ecumenical work through the World Council of Churches.

Bishop Zacharias has no ecclesiastical pomp and circumstances. There is no retinue of aides; the Diocesan secretary and his family have cared for his simple and very modest needs. He has carried the massive burden of building the Diocese with inner strength, tenderness with toughness, compassion with competence. He has helped to build many parishes, congregations, institutions, organizations, movements, and fellowships

for various professional groups and practices for the Diocese and the Church. Notable among these are the Sinai Mar Thoma Centre, Santhigiri Ashram, Diaspora Sunday, FOCUS Movement, clergy self-appraisal initiative, the Association of Mar Thoma Physicians and Dentists, the Diaspora Centre, Messenger and other publications. In undertaking these enormous tasks, he regarded others as fellow travellers. For these journeys he coined a most engaging phrase,

"Praying, paying partners."

For he knew that praying is costly, paying is costly and partnership is costly. He searched for such commitments in his fellow travellers. It was indeed a joy to travel with him for a while for a number of reasons including the following:

His looks have words that attract me,
His smiles have waves that stroke me,
His stances have forces that move me,
His words have sweetness that pleases me.

No wonder, why his looks, smiles, stances
And words have graces and blazes.
May angels carry him on their wings,
In his next mission for his master!

Each man's achievement is his own under the most benevolent grace of God and only the person can tell what the cost has been. No one can live the life of another and no one can make his own life out of another's. But love and compassion can help everyone, strengthening the weak and encouraging the strong; whilst hate, anger and malice can only slow down everyone's progress. During these years it would not have been possible, in spite of the best efforts, for Thirumeni to please everyone, particularly during various bifurcation disputes and placement of clergy and lay leaders for various positions in the Diocese or other forums. But Thirumeni's actions were guided by faith in a master guide; hope in a promise; charity in pouring out, and an utter humility in receiving. These are the essential Christian virtues and Kingdom values for anyone intending to do anything well in this world for building His Kingdom.

Thirumeni is well endowed with a vision, determination, optimism, sympathetic understanding, and detailed planning and preparation for any journey or any mission for his master. He just finished one such mission very successfully and in the process of embarking on another journey through the uncharted skies of reality. Let us offer him our thanks and the sincerity of our prayers to fly on the wings of angels and wish him a bon voyage. ■

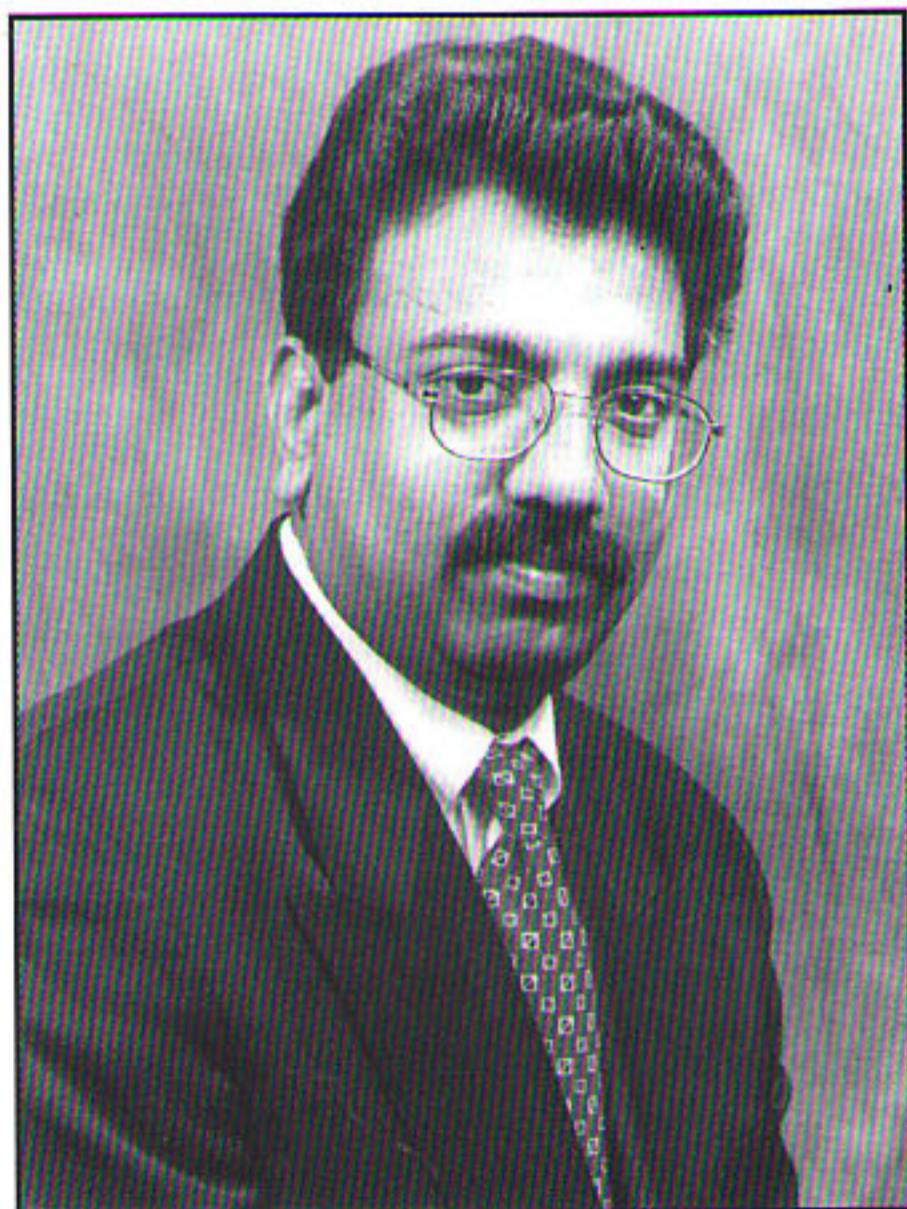
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Concerns and Dreams of a Member of the Mar Thoma Diaspora Community in England

John Thomas, St John's Mar Thoma Church, Hounslow, UK

History

A few came to this small island in the 1960s mainly for postgraduate studies. If this was a trickle, a flow started in the 1970s when there was fairly large immigration from countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and East Africa.

With 2 parishes and an estimated membership of 250 families, the Mar Thoma community in the UK has now become well established in the Diocese of North America and Europe. The vast majority of the youths is born here and considers this land to be their home.

Social and religious pressures

Sociological studies reveal that there are immense pressures facing the immigrant communities in the UK. Unlike in the USA where nearly all are 'foreigners' of varying degrees, in an Anglo-Saxon historical setting of the UK, the concept of a 'foreigner' could still be fairly strong. In most cities, however, it is striking to see a mix of ethnic and religious groups. In multi-cultural Britain, social and religious demands have resulted in a general deterioration of the mental health amongst some groups. These could be described as victims of the 'clash of civilizations'. Oriental expectations, both social and religious, imposed by the parents on children brought up in this western society sometimes result in very painful and sad experiences. Resentment, anger, rebellion, confusion, lack of self worth, depression, etc. are not uncommon, particularly amongst members of the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. Against this backdrop, I have no doubt that our children are not immune to such pressures. There is a quest, at least by some, for meaning and relevance in being part of the Mar Thoma community in the UK.

Here are some of the concerns raised by the youths.

1. Language

i) **Malayalam.** Cannot 'connect' with Malayalam services, as they are not able to read or understand the language of their forefathers.

ii) **English.** The English used in our liturgy is archaic—written by our church authorities in Kerala some decades ago.

2. Contextualisation

There is a desperate lack of contextualisation of the Word of God. Biblical preaching must attempt to deal with issues

facing the hearers, otherwise it becomes terribly tedious. Every generation has to grapple with linking the never-changing Word of God to a fast-changing world. In order to do this in a meaningful way, a good understanding is required both of the Word and the world i.e. the socio-political and economic dynamics of society and the moral and ethical choices that are available.

3. Resistance to change in the name of tradition

In any ancient tradition, there is always a danger of resistance to change. Every living organism must undergo change and a parish/church is no exception. This rigidity is often found to be more in overseas parishes of the Mar Thoma Church as there is a tendency to hold on to the past for the fear of 'moving away from the original'. This brings a comforting sense of the familiar to the older folks but raises questions of relevance to the younger ones.

4. An unhealthy reliance on 'Achen centredness'

Students of Church history and analysts of church movements agree that sustained growth and health of any parish is directly proportional to the extent of the involvement of the laity. If concerted effort is not made in developing and encouraging leadership amongst the laity, there is bound to be concerns about our long-term visions and goals.

Here are my personal comments about these concerns.

1.1 Malayalam

I am convinced that the best way to overcome this problem is to learn Malayalam! Being able to read and understand our mother tongue will introduce our youngsters to our cultural and spiritual heritage. It is an enormous privilege to appreciate this not only through writings but also through music and the wealth of oral tradition in Kerala. Unwritten 'gems' are passed down the generations. We need to work hard to impress upon our youngsters the importance of this and start and restart Malayalam classes! If our younger generation does not learn the language, they will be closed to this wonderful and ancient heritage.

1.2 English

There is an urgent need to update our liturgy to modern English, in recognition of the fact that languages go through changes over periods of time. It is this process of revisions that has kept the Bible to be the best seller of all times. It is rather sad, that despite encouragement from the present Metropolitan, parishes do not seem to take an interest in developing their own liturgy.

2. Contextualisation

There are no simple or quick ways to deal with this crucial issue. We must raise up men and women who will take the responsibility of balanced biblical preaching seriously. Theological colleges must incorporate this in their curriculum. Unless preachers engage in 'double listening'—to the Spirit through His Word and to the cries and pains of the world—we will not make disciples of Jesus. Achens posted overseas should be encouraged to attend courses such as the one organized by the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity. *'Christian in the modern world'* is a ten-week course that deals with such issues.

3. Resistance to change

The key to survival of any species is the ability to adapt to changing environment. As the late Alexander Metropolitan wrote so wisely 'Natural science teaches us that any species that does not adapt to the changing environment, will in due course, become extinct.' Mar Thoma diaspora is no exception. If it is to be a dynamic and relevant community it must recognize the need for change and be bold and wise enough to make them. Of course change for the sake of change is not the answer. The motto here should be 'preserving the timeless while adapting to the times'—a brilliant theme formulated by Dr. Zac Varghese of London who is a well known thinker and author on such issues. Preserving the ancient heritage, guarding it at all costs and passing it on to the next generation is just as crucial as

making our existence meaningful in any society by making relevant changes. I see these as twin blades of a scissors: both are required to do the job effectively!

Specifically, we must bring creativity to our worship services by using a range of musical instruments, sing both ancient and modern hymns/choruses, and encourage drama and modern forms of communication using latest technology. (How many times have we seen a multi-media presentation in our churches?) Leaders need to consider ways and means of effective communication to our youths, both of form and substance.

4. Achen centredness

To avoid any misunderstanding, may I state that we must at all times respect our achens as leaders of our parishes. However, I share the view of some that for any parish to have a long-term vision and to carry out tasks to fulfill that vision, it cannot rely on achens who are going to be around for only 3 to 4 years. Historically, laity have played a significant role in the growth and witness of the church. We need to encourage participation of laity in all areas of church life, not just in administration. Young people should be encouraged to lead services, prayer meetings, and engage with social issues. In order to preserve the Mar Thoma identity, achens who have 'not let go', consequently have been seen to be rather autocratic. On the other hand, there are achens who have taken a servant leadership style and encouraged youths to lead, resulting in moulding a generation of disciples who love and serve the Lord.

In conclusion, it's my hope and prayer that all Mar Thoma diaspora parishes will take the demands of the gospel seriously, being a worshipping and sharing community and play an active role with local churches to be the light of the world and salt of the earth, articulating with humility and boldness Christian response to moral and ethical dilemmas thereby shaping the destiny of nations and being part of the vast and diverse community worldwide that acknowledges the lordship of Christ. ■

Matrimonial

Marthomite girl, 26 years, BSN, RN, with fair complexion, daughter of a prominent Mar Thoma Priest (posted in India). Born, brought up and educated in India. Educated in Nicholson and BSN from Kasthurba Medical College. Fluent in English and Malayalam. Girl is currently working in Houston as a RN. Invite proposals from well qualified Marthomite boys. Interested parties, please send bio-data with recent photo to Mr. M. John, 602 Cannon Lane, Sugar Land, Texas 77479 or e-mail M-john@ti.com
Tel: 281-565-1365 or 281-458-5163.

Mar Thoma Church Beyond the Present Horizon

Dr. Thomas Abraham, New Jersey

Those of us who love the Mar Thoma Church want this Church not only to survive but also to live faithfully and strongly beyond the present horizon into the future. Therefore, we must heed the words of the prophet Isaiah addressed to another people who were anxious about their future: "Cease to dwell on days gone by and to brood over past history. Here and now I will do a new thing; this moment it will break from the bud. Can you perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:18-19) Mar Thoma Church, which was founded in AD52 following the visit of St. Thomas apostle, inherited the present name after the reformation in the early parts of the 19th century. This was a Church established around the Pampa River base, and later Tiruvalla became its headquarters. The Church grew faster in the twentieth century and spread to different parts of India and the world and established itself as a global Church. This fast expansion has presented itself with new sets of challenges and we need to think about what lies beyond the immediate horizon, Possibilities may become probabilities as time passes, like the horizon moves farther as ship sails forward. What our eyes and mind cannot see at the present time will become more clear and visible with the passage of time.

As our people started migrating to other countries for better economic opportunities, Mar Thoma Church has grown beyond all expectations. The migration started from Central Travancore to Malaysia and Singapore nearly a century ago, then to Ceylon, Middle East, Europe, America, Australia and Africa. Wherever our people went, they established prayer groups and then parishes. Our mother Church recognized the spiritual needs of this dispersed community, agreed to establish parishes and sent priests from Kerala for pastoral care. I believe that God will lead us and those who come after us to create new forms of the Church and new structures to respond to God's grace in various Diaspora communities across the world; we may even develop into a Mar Thoma Communion like the Anglicans. We cannot completely ignore the possibility of Mar Thoma Diaspora regions acquiring the status of a federation of self-governing Churches, held together at the most by an Episcopal overseeing/supervision.

Mar Thoma Church today is no longer predominantly a 'Syrian Christian caste-based Church' nor can it be expected that it will continue to attach special values and place of importance to Syrian Christian traditions. The newly emerging parishes in Karnataka and other places in India, as a direct result of the activities of missionary work, poses questions whether we should attach importance to our common past, or seek to find other answers. We have not yet

resolved the problems relating to Dalit community in our Church, at the same time we are sleep walking into a new situation, which will destroy the cohesion that we enjoyed as a close knit community. Some may think that it is not politically correct to raise these issues: but how long we can pretend that these issues are not important? This is another horizon beyond the present. There is a need for a debate on this important question; instead, we are running with a confidence that there is nothing to be lost and everything to be gained by this church planting and church expansion exercise in other regions of India. This will be a special problem for the Indian Diaspora in the years to come.

As we interact with host communities of the adopted countries and their cultures, we need to modify our thinking and our actions. We need to anticipate changes and cannot hold on to rigid rules and structures that we carried in our memories from the old country; as Goldsmith wrote in the 'Village Schoolmaster': "Old order changeth yielding place to new." But as Christians we believe in "preserving the timeless while adapting to the times." The Church today is experiencing conflicts over a number of issues, but here I want to stress on issues that are important for the Mar Thoma Diaspora Christians. These issues can be divided into the following categories:

1. Local issues at the Parish level
2. Issues at the Diocese level and its interaction with the mother Church in Kerala
3. Global issues linking with other Diaspora communities, 'FOCUS Movement'
4. Issues relating to a lay-centered Church
5. Issues relating to a youth-centered Church
6. Issues relating to the development of ecumenical relationships and integration with host communities.

I highlighted the above issues for our continuous study, consideration and prayer; there is not enough scope to develop all these in this limited analysis. The following are some specific issues at parish level and the importance of this may vary from one parish to another:

1. Family sitting together for worship
2. Issue of youth fellowship such as newly arriving young people (Youth League) versus those who are born and raised in the adopted countries (Youth Fellowship)
3. Frequency of English worship or the need to have separate Malayalam and English liturgies on every Sunday, more youth participation and youth liturgies.

4. Social issues such as interfaith marriages.
5. Clash of cultures and traditions including the generation gap
6. Ecumenical relationship with other Christians in the locality.
7. Outreach programs.

Sometimes, decisions and policies are made in the 'insulated environment' of the Council and the Mandalam without really understanding the problems of the Diaspora. They should consider the needs of people outside Kerala who do not speak Malayalam. Community is based on Communication; a community without adequate means of communication at every level is a dead community. We cannot go on ignoring the needs of our children who do not understand Malayalam. Transliteration of the liturgy is not the answer, which only gives amusement to the older generation that understands the intricacies and nuance of the language. We need to cater to the needs of the next generation; we should allow them to paint their canvases from real life situations and not from printed lifeless two-dimensional pictures. These are real people with several stories to tell and we should give opportunities to them and give them adequate leadership training to take us beyond the present horizon.

We should also make sure that the Diaspora communities do get adequate representations in the decision-making bodies. It is our life and we should have a say in it and not the people who live in the towns and villages around the 'Pampa River basin.' We should provide support at every level so that our elected representatives can represent us at various levels. Not many of the elected Mandalam members or the Council members have the time or the resources to attend all the meetings at Tiruvalla because of the scheduling of these meetings and its frequency. We cannot afford to forget the economic, social and career consequences of representing the constituencies in the Mandalam, Council and its various sub-committees. There is an urgent need to reduce the frequency of the Council meetings to three or four, and then it would be possible to make the attendance of these meetings mandatory. Many other Churches in the world have only one or two Council meetings a year; our council meetings are not problem solving meetings, but they are problem-breeding encounters. The current practice is undemocratic and totally unacceptable to the Diaspora communities. Therefore Diaspora communities only have token representation at the higher councils of the Church. It is very difficult to understand how our highly educated and enlightened leadership allows this to go on without critical evaluation and restructuring. This is an instance of looking beyond the present horizon. Otherwise, we may become very proud of an ostrich-like mentality of hiding our head underneath the sand.

From the narrow band of an American experience, it is time for a rethinking or even a revolution. The old order

should change, its transformation should be the part of a bigger picture of integration with host communities, and this could be viewed as the expansion or shift of the horizon. Young people in our parishes are asking serious religious questions with new urgency. Questions of value, meaning, hope, and the human prospects are answered one way or another by other ministries. There is a hunger for authentic religion in our young people, a religion of heart as well as mind. It is time to ask the serious question: do we recognize this need? Do we cater to this need? Do we have the ability to cater for this need? Should we provide for such needs? If we are not prepared to cater to this need, other ministries will quench their thirst. The churches that we are proudly buying at the present time will be back on the market in twenty or thirty year's time with a sale sign. We should think and study how these churches came to the marketplace in the first place; they are part of a musical chair game or cycle of events. This is why we should think and project ourselves beyond the present comfort zones of our activities. Harvey Cox maintains that while mainline religion is declining, Pentecostalism "has succeeded because it has spoken to the spiritual emptiness of our time reaching beyond the level of creed and ceremony into the core of human religiousness, into what might be called 'primal spirituality' that largely unprocessed nucleus of the psyche in which the unending struggle for a sense of purpose and significance goes on." Yes, we should be providing a purpose and significance for developing spirituality in our young people through our pastoral ministry. We may be witnessing the beginning of the marginalisation of traditional Mar Thoma culture by our young people, but they are wide awake spiritually and open to new expressions, new forms, and new ways of being religious. This is why we need to look beyond our comfort zones. It is not an entirely new phenomenon, as the psalmist wrote: "O God, thou art my God, I seek thee early with a heart that thirst for thee and a body wasted with longing for thee like a dry and thirsty land that has no water." (Psalm 63:1) Therefore, there is a compelling reason to look again at our traditions as a source for lively and authentic reformation in the context of newer realities. We need ongoing continuous transformation, which contributes meaning and purpose for our younger generation in the midst of modern rapidly transforming life in their new towns, cities and university campuses.

Therefore, our strategy must be to embrace the spiritual needs of our younger generation and must equip our clergy to provide adequate help for them in every way. Those of us who care about the Church and who pray and work for the renewal of the Church must help the Church in the demanding task of listening to communities and the equally demanding task of responding to the needs of communities faithfully. This is what pastoral care is all about. In these critical times, we must have a comforting word to say, we must have a love to share, which may be costly, and we have a saving gospel to spread. May these attitudes help us to project ourselves beyond the present horizon! ■

Excerpts from the interactive forum at the XIX Mar Thoma Family Conference

Fr. Chacko Thadathil, Dr. Beena Fenn, and Dr. Zac Varghese

At the very outset the organizers of this interactive forum, Dr. Anna A. Panackal and her team, should be congratulated for conducting a wide-ranging survey among parents on Christian parenting. The questionnaire was designed to collect information about parental concerns about children aged up to 12 years. It was not surprising that the greatest concern was about health for this particular age group followed by spiritual development, selection of friends and eating patterns. Based on this survey the following six questions were formulated for discussion among parents in an interactive format.

1. In our society, where both parents are working, how do you instill Christian faith and values in our children?
2. What are your thoughts on how the Church can be more effective in the spiritual development of our children?
3. How do you avoid inconsistencies in parenting?
4. What are the methods you use to regulate TV viewing/computer use/playing video games by your children and improve their study habit?
5. Do you consider yourself a good role model for your children? Why or why not?
6. How do you encourage your children to choose right friends?

Participants of this interactive forum divided into three groups and discussed two questions each and then they came together to present a summary of their finding. About 40 people participated in this worthwhile exercise and everyone was very serious about what they had to say. The following is a summary of the discussion.

There was general consensus on three basic facts: children are the products of many influences; children are the products of the age they grow up in; parents are the single most important factor in shaping the character of toddlers and preteens. Parents gift them with genes that shape their bodies and their personalities Teachers and society stretch their mind with ideas that challenge them to make choices. As we were talking about Christian parenting, parental responsibilities in providing a Christian home and a Christian influence were absolutely clear to everyone.

We generally agreed that we cannot absolutely control children regarding who they become or what choices they make, but we can certainly make a strong influence to help them to navigate their way around difficult issues. For this we need a road map and should be able to see danger signals and accident spots. Exclusion zones and one way traffic is not the answer to remove these moral and ethical congestion and road blocks. We should be prepared to take our children round

these difficult corners, like a driving instructor. We cannot hand over these responsibilities to teachers and the Church. Occasionally, we hand over these responsibilities to others by throwing money or by buying expensive presents with the hope that a good product will come out at the other end. There is no easy way; we need to invest in our children with time, space and our whole being.

Some 'super parents' have military discipline and strategies for dealing with children, you probably remember the children in "Sound of Music"; they answered to a whistle and not to their father. As the survey showed, we are all concerned with the spirituality of our children. In this respect, some well-meaning Christian parents are trying to replace the whistle in Captain Von Trapp's hand with a Bible. They want their toddlers and preteens to answer to a Bible instead of living under the influence of a Christian lifestyle with love, hope and charity. We should allow them to see in our homes the love of Jesus through our commitment to others in the community and His Kingdom. Christian parents should take these responsibilities in their own hands and it is part and parcel of their Christian commitment. It was said very clearly that we could not just escape and hide behind our work, social obligations, church based activities and prayer meetings; these are familiar escape routes and excuses. Children should be our first concern. In all families children need strong parenting who will guide firmly in love, draw the line, say no when it is required and guide them survive adolescent pressures and temptations. In a world where almost everything goes, where diversity and total tolerance are politically correct, parents can become totally paralyzed into inaction. Other parents or faith community may intimidate them or become fearful of making mistakes. One of the suggestions was to get children involved in decision making. Here Christian parents may borrow a phrase from Zacharias Thirumeni and try to become "praying, paying, partners" to their children. If parents are not careful, young people will be learning more from the media and their peer groups than from previous generations. This makes them susceptible to the latest fads and also makes it difficult for parents to pass on religious faith and practices. Children feel a strong need to fit in; they will do almost anything to be accepted by a preferred peer group and by their friends. At this stage, preteens are developing their social skills, they are learning to relate, communicate and find their place in a social group. Children feel pulled into friendship for survival, independence and in search for an identity. It was obvious from the survey that parents become wary of the friends their children choose, but we should try to understand why children are choosing friends and the way they do.

Parents should become friends to children and they also should try hard in becoming friends to their children's friend. Most parents hope that their children will connect with good kids from good families, even from a family above their social class, who will help their children to become good kids. We should not be waiting for the lottery ticket to turn up in finding good friends for our children. Children from good Christian families should become nucleus around which friendship circles could be formed. This should be our distinct and specific contributions in these troubled times. Parents can respond to their children's choice of friends in several ways. But passivity, resignation and confrontations are counter productive. Parents cannot choose friends for their children, but they can prepare grounds for developing healthy relationships. Kids choose friends who meet a particular need in their lives. It may be love, shyness, leadership qualities, popularity, acceptance and so on, but do get involved with their friends. Provide facilities at home for them to bring their friends, use your imagination and abilities to attract your children's friends to your house and keep them there as long as possible. Make your homes a place of acceptance and laughter. Finally include the names of your children's friends in family prayers; share a genuine concern and interest in them to develop a healthy relationship.

Television plays a major role in our society, entertaining, informing, moulding public opinion, promoting lifestyles and shaping values. Instead of allowing this electronic invader to use you and your family in showing the influence of violence, sex and materialism, use television to teach and build your faith. Plan and select your viewing with your children, give them a role in selecting. Let them begin to see your likes and dislikes. In such homes children may record programs for parents because they know their interests.

Most parents want their children to be involved in church. So they bring their babies and toddlers to nursery, Sunday school and vacation Bible schools. This makes parents happy. When these kids grow up and suddenly talk about their Sunday experiences as 'boring' parents become puzzled, frustrated and confused and they are not sure how to respond. Whatever you do, be sure not to force your religion down your children's throats. Instead, put pressure on the church to become sensitive to the needs of the children; improve youth ministry; start additional services with a contemporary format; attempt to communicate to children in thoughtful sermons. Give young people also opportunities to express their complaints and concerns. As parents we should be sensitive to the needs and capabilities of our children and should be able to realize that they finished their nappy changing and potty training a long time back. Parents are at fault in not recognizing responsible and caring attitudes of our children.

Some children have a lack of perspective, misunderstanding of time, excitement of being children and they live for the present. They want everything now and often will sacrifice their future to get it. Responsible Christian parents

who love their children should hold them back, teach them to wait and steer them in the right direction. Do not deny your kid's tomorrows by allowing them to make foolish decisions today. Help them to make tough choices to teach them the lessons you have learnt and the principles of Scriptures. Parental dominance is a serious problem in certain families, parents need guidance to prevent them from exercising their neurotic attitudes in bringing up their children. It is ironic that in our society we need license for just about anything, but there is no parenting licenses.

In families where both parents work outside the home, they carry their problems with them when they return to their homes and they do not have time for their children. Children are very clever in noticing strains in the relationship between parents, it is very important to present a joint front to children. Often parents want to talk to their children at their convenience and when they are ready. If one is serious about communication then one should be patient, never talk when one is very angry or the children are agitated and very emotional, one should wait for children's readiness to talk or listen. One should create opportunities to talk at mealtime or go out with them for a game or a play and create opportunities to talk. It is important to listen to children when they talk, do not interrupt or let your mind wander. If you want kids to talk and tell what is really going on, put yourself in their trust and respects them for what they are. The more transparent parents are the more authentic and they are the more approachable parents. Christian parents should be able to walk with their values and not just talk about it and children know the difference.

There is a lot of confusing information out there about parenting these days. But in this interactive forum, we were concerned about Christian parenting. The principles of Christian parenting can be summed in the readings from St. Paul's letter to Ephesians (Ephesians 6:14). In some liberal and so-called liberated families children are in control. But in other more conservative families parents are in total control. These are two extremes, but St. Paul points out the responsibilities of both parents and children, it is not a one way street.

This interactive forum was helpful identifying certain problems. Unless we identify, admit and face these problems we would not be able to solve any of these issues. These problems are significant and we cannot face it alone; we need to walk with Jesus and need to have His blessings to overcome these burdens, Christian parenting is all about that confidence. We need to find friends who have the ability to keep confidences and preserve reputations of others to share these burdens. In reality, each child is different and each family is unique with special characteristics, circumstances and contingencies. Therefore, there is no common answer to concerns and questions raised in the beginning, we need to find answers within ourselves with a Christian understanding. ■

How Important is it for Christian Leaders to Exercise Authority?

Dr. Mariamma Thomas, New Jersey

When Jesus arrived in Caesarea Philippi, he asked His disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter without any hesitation immediately replied: "you are Messiah, the son of the living God." Jesus was pleased with this explosive revelation and Jesus said to Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, you are favored indeed! You did not learn that from mortal man; it was revealed to you by my heavenly Father. And I say to you: You are Peter, the Rock; and on this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall never conquer it." (Matthew 16:16-18) Thus, Jesus himself first mentioned the word 'Church' as applied to Christian society in this most sacred and intimate of occasions. We use 'the Church' for the mysterious 'body of Christ', which includes all Christians everywhere in all the ages. New Testament teaches that there is actually only one universal Church and Jesus Christ is the head of this Church from who springs all activities and teaching. He is the source of all Christian experiences. He is the Commander General and it is upon His orders that the Church has its existence, and its very power comes directly from Him through the Holy Spirit. He expects His commands to be carried out faithfully. But the talk of 'a Church' can imply division indicating an exclusive community rather than as 'a Christian.' This exclusive notion is the basis of separate compartmentalisation into Marthomites, Anglicans, Catholics, Lutherans, and so on.

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of authority that we are subjected to in our daily living, secular and religious authority. Sometimes, under certain set of conditions, it is difficult to distinguish religious and secular authority as we see in certain fundamentalist Muslim countries. At the time of Emperor Constantine both secular and religious authority and influences merged. When we look around the world today, the only state with a Christian label is the tiny Vatican city, but Vatican and Pope exercise tremendous religious and secular authority over millions of people across the world. The point that I would like to stress is that good religious leaders will be able to wear both secular and religious authority in an inseparable way like a seamless robe of Jesus Christ. Our late Metropolitan, Juhanon Mar Thoma had such a stature in Kerala. Mother Teresa also had an enormous secular influence and authority far and beyond her religious affiliation. Martin Luther King Junior was a Baptist pastor with enormous secular and religious authority. On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi was a secular leader with extraordinary spirituality. These people are few and far between.

What is clear is that Jesus left no clear instruction during His lifetime about what His disciples were to do if He departed before establishing His Kingdom. He did not write a book and He did not inaugurate an organization, but He gave an emphatic manifesto for His Kingdom, the Sermon on the Mount. After His death on the cross and the resurrection, the Church took off. It began as a fellowship of disciples who were convinced that Jesus was alive and well. They met to break bread together and to tell others of His presence and power. The early members of the Church were an inward looking bunch, separating themselves from the world which was hostile to them and which held different values. Although this was necessary for their survival, in some ways their emphasis was different from that of Jesus. For example, Jesus defined loving one's neighbor in the story of the Good Samaritan. The early Church felt free to adapt its ethos to requirements of its situation. So the Church in later centuries followed this practice. This is an excuse for not being totally faithful to the unadulterated teaching of Jesus.

In the early Church details of organization were comparatively unimportant. Christians belonged to one another because they belonged to Christ. Paul had a vision of the whole universal Church in addition to various congregations, which composed it. But Paul knew only too well the sins, inadequacies, quarrels and disunity of the local congregation (Paul's letters), which were not different from the situation today. Paul was insistent on the necessity for apostolic authority to resolve these problems and the paramount necessity of retaining the unity within the Church. Therefore, apostolic authority was important for the growth of the Church. The early churches had no Bibles, printing machines, seminars, and educational institutions; no radio, television, computers, automobiles or aeroplanes, but the Gospel was spread with the power of the Holy Spirit. Personal commitment to Christ is the primary basis of the membership of a church. A church affiliation is not something to be entered into lightly. Christians who are not actively involved in the life of a church remind us of what happen when a burning coal is removed from the fire; the coal gradually cools and its flame dies. Today the immediately available feet that Christ has is our feet, the hands our hands, and the tongue our tongue. We must submit our whole being to Him and allow Him to use every talent, faculty and methods to win others for His causes and concerns.

The Church can be considered mainly in two aspects, as an organism and as an organization. As an organism it

claims to be living and divine, in the sense that God upholds it. But the Church must also exist as an organization because continuity is required, organisms wither and die. But all organized bodies by their nature tend towards deterioration. That is why Church always needs reformation, regeneration and transformation. This reformation is just not one event like a 'Damascus Road' experience, but it is a continued process. We as Mar Thoma Christians cannot stop with Abraham Malpan, we must move on and we must have more and more checks and balances and more and more reformations. The organized Church is open to the same sociological critique as any other organization. Both these aspects of organism and organization should interact with each other and attain a proper balance.

Thus, in Episcopal churches the ministry of the bishops is based on Biblical authority; the three-fold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons plays a crucial role in the church as an organism. But in terms of organization, the autocratic rule of the threefold ministry had evident connection with the hierarchical view of society. The inclusion of men and women in Anglican and other church synods is a realization of this deficiency and based on the growing involvement of ordinary membership in secular organizations under democratic influence. We also have our Mandalam and Council to keep a check on the three-fold ministry. But it should also provide a positive theology of the laity, which unfortunately is lacking in our Church. A lay centred Church is important because the life of the Church is not set apart from the rest of the community or society.

Christ has promised to be with us in carrying out the mission that he gave to His eleven disciples: "I will be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age." We should consider the Church as an organism and not merely as an organization. This aspect is often missing from our understanding. There is a mystery about Church, with its human and divine natures. Some Christian leaders are very nervous about this divine nature of the Church. In the struggle for popularity and inventing a few buzz words, slogans and sound bites some leaders are ready to sacrifice the divine nature of the Church. They begin to describe God as a mate, whom they pretend to meet in their clubs. On the other hand, the so-called fundamentalists vulgarize their relationship with God and make a God in their own image and try to make others believe that it springs from an intervention of the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit has become a useful agent for winning all sorts of arguments for both the proponents of happy-clappy churches and upward looking fundamentalists with literal application of convenient and selected scriptural texts. Present day Christian leaders are shy and nervous to make authoritative statements based on their true convictions.

There has been a tendency in the Catholic Church to exaggerate the claims of doctrine over the claims of true

Christian fellowship in Christ. Jesus did not require any statement of faith from his disciples before he shared with them his Last Supper. Indeed He included the one who would betray him. It is wrong to think that the communion table belongs to a particular church denomination. It belongs to Christ. There is deep division about this in Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Even members of the WCC have some difficulty with Lima liturgy. It is because of this most people do not believe in a holy Church, but believe in a God who makes the Church holy. We need authoritative leadership in giving guidance on these issues and these issues cannot be decided on a show of hand in a Mandalam or Council meetings organized at the convenience of the few at the drop of a hat and for the inconvenience of many.

I want to return to the topic of the Church as an organism. Apostolic ministry involves faithfulness in teaching and in pastoral care. Apostolic ministry later transformed into apostolic succession. The authority of the bishops, priests and deacons come from this apostolic succession. It is based on the tradition of laying on of hands from Apostles onwards. Here is the divine mystery; here is the power of the bishops and their authority. We should not allow our familiarity with bishops to remove this mystery and we should never dilute out or diminish the importance of this apostolic succession. This is the continuation of a blessing, the continuation of the new covenant in Christ. The authority of the Church and its leadership has this divine nature. There are two different concepts about the authority in the Church. One is a hierarchical one, followed by Roman Catholics and Orthodox Churches. The other concept is dispersed authority as practiced by Protestant churches. In a hierarchical church, the faith and practices of that church can be clearly laid down, and people know where they stand, but it has the dangers of unchecked power in the hand one person, Pope or limited number of cardinals.

On the other hand, dispersed authority is a concept of a shared leadership, leaders being one among equals. The authority is derived from scripture, tradition, creeds, and the ministry of word and sacraments. This dispersed authority has many elements which contributes to a process of mutual support, mutual checking and rechecking errors or exaggeration to the many sided fullness of authority. What we have in our Church is a form of dispersed authority with delegation of authority from the Metropolitan to other bishops and bishops to priests and finally to elected lay people.

One of the important aspects of dispersed authority is subsidiarity, which means all decision making should be made at the lowest appropriate level. This is a bottom-up process, and not from top to bottom as in a hierarchical paradigm, Lay people also should have a role in formulating policies but at the same time lay people should respect and value the hierarchical role and the apostolic succession of the bishops. This in practical terms means that Church

leaders carry authority and theologians may carry respect, but individuals have to make up their own mind for themselves. We need safeguards against leaders acquiring authority through a simple manipulated majority in the Mandalam, Council or Episcopal Synod. True love and mutual respect should be able to produce a general consensus on issues of importance. In such a scenario leadership automatically becomes undisputed authority.

We should be able to distinguish the organism from the organization. When we recognize the importance of Church as an organism with vitality, emotion, and sensitivity and so on, we begin to realize this authority is a sacred mystery. We should never try to take away this mystery from our Christian leaders, particularly our ordained leaders. It is really up to our Christian leaders to cultivate this mystery through their holy living. Sometimes our leaders have a tendency to depend on the authority given to them by the Mandalam or the Council. But when Jesus was asked by what authority he spoke, he refused to give a direct answer. (Mark 11:28-33) Therefore it is essential for Christian leaders to exercise authority; authority based on scripture, traditions, creeds, and ministry of word and sacraments. We need a Christian leadership that is authority, but not a leadership that has authority. We should be proud of our Church fathers in accepting the dispersed model of authority for our Church.

The very purpose of Church's existence in the world is to bear witness to the Divine will, and to work for the

fulfillment of that will in the elevation, respect, perfection and sanctity of human life. Therefore, we can no more behave as an exclusive community wearing safety shields and carrying insurance policies for a better life elsewhere. We should be in the business of creating a responsible inclusive community with appropriate leadership roles for women, downtrodden and marginalised people in the society. The centrality of Christ is not a negotiable option; with Christ at the centre there is room for movement, rearrangement and opportunity for transformation.

There must be a caring pastoral leadership, not self-appointed, but recognized and respected by those it serves as called and sent by the Holy Spirit and acting at the same time as the community's representative so that the community may be at one. There must be good and enforceable discipline. The ministry of the word must be authoritative both within the existing community and in mission to those who are outside at the present time. In ministries lead by such leadership would have no problem whatsoever in joining king David to sing: "Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name." (Psalms 103:1) Authority is a closely guarded mystery, it is very special and difficult to explain in secular terms, some people have it because of their holy living and presence of the Holy Spirit with them, and it is reflected in having the fruits of the spirit. We were blessed with such leadership in the past and let us pray for these blessings to continue for the future generations of Mar Thoma Christians throughout the world. ■

The Sydney Mar Thoma Youth Group

Lana Philip, Sydney, Australia

The Sydney Mar Thoma youth group is an important part of the Marthoma Church in Sydney. We are a close knit group of people who love spending time with each other and with the Lord. We have two regular meetings every month. One is with Achen and is a bible study and the other is a youth led informal meeting which takes place at youth member's homes. These meetings are integral in our spiritual development and enable us to build our understanding of our faith in terms of what it means to be a Malayalee Christian in the Australian setting.

We have also done other things such as talent nights, where we have showcased our talents for other church members and non-church members to see. We regularly take part in fundraising activities for charities. Our recent work was a nursing home visit, where we sang to the elderly and spent time talking to them. We all enjoy times of fellowship and bonding through youth activities.

Our regular youth newsletter "Livewire" lets youth members as well as church members stay informed of youth

activities as well as issues which youths feel are important and should be expressed.

In addition to all these we have youth services once every two months. These allow for a range of talents to come through: from singers, to people playing musical instruments, to speakers, to actors. We are able to send a strong message to the church about what we believe Christ's message to be.

At the end of each year we unite with youth all over Australia for our annual youth camp. This is a time where new friends are made and great spiritual growth occurs. Everyone is able to spend time in a different environment to our usual lives and learn more about our faith and what the Christian journey is all about.

The Sydney Mar Thoma youth group has a role to play in bringing us young Malayalee Christians in a different country together. It helps build cultural, spiritual and friendship bonds between us. ■

Diaspora Sunday

Abraham Mattackal, Los Angeles

For the first time in our existence as a Diaspora community, most of our parishes and congregations in our diocese celebrated Diaspora Sunday on the last Sunday in November 2000 to coincide with the Thanksgiving celebrations which is the second most celebration in the United States after Christmas. In accordance with the decision taken by the 2000 Assembly of the Diocese of North America & Europe and a subsequent *Kalpana* issued by the Diocesan Bishop, Diaspora Sunday will continue to be celebrated every year in our diocese. This year it falls on Sunday the 25th of November.

What is this celebration about? The word Diaspora, although spelled as '*diaspora*' is pronounced as '*diaspara*.' It is a Greek word used to designate the dispersal of the Jews at the time of the destruction of the first temple in 586 BC and the forced exile to Babylonia. The diaspora became a permanent feature of Jewish life. By A.D. 70 Jewish communities existed in Babylonia, Syria, Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece and Rome. The term diaspora has also been applied to other peoples with large numbers living outside their traditional homelands. We are a perfect example. We left our homeland of Kerala and settled down in different parts of the world. Like us, there are other numerous Indian diaspora communities in the world. But our focus is only on the Mar Thoma diaspora.

With the advancement of English education in the erstwhile states of Travancore and Cochin by the end of the 19th century, there was a movement of a large number of educated men from the rural areas of Travancore and Cochin to the great cities of Calcutta, Madras, Bombay and Delhi in search of jobs. It was part of this wave that swept beyond the Indian borders to the shores of British Malaya. After the end of the 1st World War, more Malayalees including some Marthomites left for Malaya and took up jobs there. In the 1920's it has been estimated that there were about 70 Syrian Christians in Malaya and Singapore. Although Divine Services were held in Malayalam from as early as 1926, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church was formally established only in 1936 with the posting of Rev. T. N. Koshy. In 1982 the Malaysia/Singapore parishes came under a separate diocese. They have now about 2000 members in Malaysia and over 700 members in Singapore. Theirs is the oldest Mar Thoma diaspora community established outside India. Today their membership include third and fourth generation Marthomites.

Later on, from early 1950's on our people went to Saudi Arabia, Aden, Bahrain and other Middle Eastern countries to seek job opportunities and to U.K. and the United States for higher studies. Congregations and later

parishes were formed in 1960's in some of the Middle Eastern countries. Later in the 1970's, Mar Thoma congregations were formed in the United States, Canada and UK. In 1991 the Synod approved the first two congregations in Australia—one in Melbourne and the other in Sydney. Most of the members are immigrants from Malaysia/Singapore and are third generation Marthomites. Finally, the newest Mar Thoma Diaspora parishes/congregations are situated in Pretoria, South Africa, Essen, Germany and Geneva, Switzerland.

After the death of Moses, God appeared to Joshua and told him to lead the children of Israel to the promised land of Canaan. God also told him to select 12 men, one from each of the 12 tribes and ask them to carry 12 stones when the waters of Jordan dried up for the passage of the children of Israel, out of the midst of the river Jordan, where the priests' feet stood firm (*Joshua 4:3*) and set up these stones in front of the arc of the covenant in the lodging place in Gilgal. Joshua selected 12 men—one from each tribe and they collected 12 stones from the midst of Jordan when the waters were cut off and set them up in front of the arc of the covenant in Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. Joshua then asked the children of Israel to bear in mind that these stones were a memorial to their posterity. "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, what these stones are for, then you shall let your children know, saying, Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land." (*Joshua 4:21-22*)

What do these two celebrations—Diaspora Sunday and Thanksgiving—have in common? The early English settlers, pilgrims as they are often called, had to undergo enormous difficulties. The harsh voyage and the fierce winter of New England were taking their tolls. Nearly half of the pilgrims who landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts in December of 1620 died within the first few months. Yet, they did not lose hope or their faith in God. With the onset of spring, they planted Indian corn and in summer they had rich harvest. The native Indians in the area turned out to be friendly and helpful. The settlement was going to survive. And in the fall, in a spirit of victory over awesome odds and a feeling of home sickness for the land they grew up and left behind, they held a harvest festival. It is their triumph we all celebrate. Every year Americans observe this most typical national holiday with no real understanding of its significance or meaning. Mostly it just means a time to feast—a bountiful meal with turkey and stuffing, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie.

Just as the pilgrims had to undergo great hardships, the early Mar Thoma settlers in Malaya/Singapore, U.K., United States and Canada also had to overcome many

(Continued on page 29)

പ്രബുദ്ധനായപ്പോൾ

ഉമ്മൻ ജോർജ്ജ്, ഹ്യൂസ്റ്റൺ

കാപട്യമെ നിന്റെ ചേവകനാകാനും
താപസ്സനായിട്ടു വേഷം ധരിക്കാനും
ആവില്ലെന്നിരിക്കിനി എന്നെ വിളിക്കണ്ടോ
പോവുക പോവുക എന്നെ വെടിഞ്ഞു നീ.

മതി മതി നിന്റെ വേദാന്തമൊക്കെയും
മതി നീ നൽകുമാ സുരക്ഷിതത്വവും
വെറുതെ വിടുക മതമെ നീ എന്നെ
കറക്കല്ലെ മനം മയക്കും ശക്തിയാൽ

ഒന്നു തിരിഞ്ഞൊന്നു നോക്കു ചരിത്രത്തിൽ
ഒന്നതിൻ ഏടുകൾ മെല്ലെ മറിക്കുവിൻ
കാണാം മതത്തിന്റെ താഡവ നൃത്തങ്ങൾ
കാണാമതിന്റെ കറോരമാം ചെയ്തികൾ

സ്വർഗ്ഗരാജ്യത്തിന്റെ വാഗ്ദാവായി നര
വർഗ്ഗത്തിൻ കണ്ണിൽ പൊടിയിട്ടു പോന്നു നീ
ബുദ്ധിയാൽ ശക്തിയാൽ എന്നും മനുഷ്യന്റെ
ബുദ്ധിയെ നിഷ്ക്രിയമാക്കി ഭരിച്ചു നീ

മർത്ത്യ മനസ്സിൽ വസിക്കുന്ന ദൈവത്തെ
എത്രയോ വിദൂരനാക്കി നിറുത്തി നീ
തൊട്ടടുത്തുത്തങ്ങാനും ചെന്നുപെട്ടാൽ പിന്നെ
ചുട്ടുകരിക്കുന്ന കോപാഗ്നിയാക്കി നീ

ഭീതിയും ആധിയും കുട്ടികൾത്തി നീ
നീതിയെകുറിച്ചു തോരാതെ ഭാഷിച്ചു
ഭയത്താൽ വിറച്ച ഭക്തരെ നീ നിന്റെ
ദയയിൻ കാൽകീഴിൽ ഇട്ടുമെതിച്ചുപോ!

ഭൂമി ചെകുത്താന്റെ വാസസ്ഥലമെന്നും
നാമതിൽ പാപത്താൽ ബദ്ധിതരാണെന്നും
മതമെന്ന മാർഗ്ഗമല്ലാതതിനൊരു
പ്രതിവിധി വേറെയില്ലെന്നും ചൊന്നു നീ

സത്യത്താൽ ഈ മതം മാറ്റാൻ ശ്രമിച്ചോരെ
ഹത്യയിൽ കൊണ്ടുചെന്നെത്തിച്ചു നിൻപൊളി
എന്നിട്ടവരെ നീ പുണ്യാളരാക്കി ഹാ!
ഇന്നും തുടരുന്നു വൻചതി ഞങ്ങളിൽ

ഒന്നു തിരിഞ്ഞൊന്നു നോക്കു ചരിത്രത്തിൽ
ഒന്നതിൻ ഏടുകൾ മെല്ലെ മറിക്കുവിൻ
കാണാം മതത്തിന്റെ കുത്സിത ബുദ്ധികൾ
കാണാം അതിന്റെ കറോരമാം ചെയ്തികൾ

സ്നേഹത്തിൻപാശത്തിൽകോർത്തിണക്കാനീശൻ
ലോകത്തിൽ വന്നചരിത്രം മറന്നുവോ
സത്യവും ജീവനും മാർഗ്ഗവുമായവൻ
എത്തി നരരെ വിമോചിതരാക്കുവാൻ

മർത്ത്യ മനസ്സിന്റെ നാഭിയിലെന്നന്നും
കുത്തിപിടിച്ചു ഭരിക്കും മതത്തിന്റെ
മുഷ്ടി തകർക്കുവാൻ മുക്തിയരുളുവാൻ
സൃഷ്ടാവു ഭൂമിയിൽ വന്നവതാരമായ്

ഞെട്ടി നൃപർ മതപണ്ഡിത ശ്രേഷ്ഠരും
കുട്ടിക്കായ് വേട്ട തുടങ്ങിയുടനവർ
കുട്ടുകുല! ശിരസ്സറ്ററ്റു വീഴുന്നു
നാട്ടിൽ നടമാടി സംഹാരതാഡവം

എത്തിനിവിടെ ഞാൻ ഏറെ കഥിക്കുന്നു
ചിന്തിച്ചാൽ വിഭ്രാന്തമാക്കുമി പാതകം
സത്യം സനാതനമാണതിനെയങ്ങു
ഹത്യയാലുമുലമാക്കാൻ കഴിയുമോ

അന്നു പീലാത്തോസിൻ മൂന്നിൽ പതറാതെ
നിന്നതാം മന്നനെ ഓർക്കുന്നില്ലെ നിങ്ങൾ
ചുറ്റിലും മൃത്യുവിൻ നൃത്തം തുടരുമ്പോൾ
ഒറ്റക്കു നിന്നതാം സത്യ സ്വരൂപനെ

ഭുള്ളുകൾ തല്ലുകൾ മുളളിൻ കിരീടവും
തെല്ലും ഭയമെന്നു ക്രൂശു വഹിച്ചവൻ
കല്ലു നിറഞ്ഞൊരാ പാതയിലുടന്നു
ഉള്ളു തകർന്നു നടന്നതങ്ങോർക്കുന്നോ?

ആണികൾ കൈയിലും കാലിലും പാഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ
പ്രാണവേദനയാൽ നിന്നു പിടഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ
കേണു “പിതാവേ പൊറുക്കുകി തെറ്റുകൾ”
കാണി നീ കരുണ കാട്ടുക മർത്ത്യരിൽ.

ഇന്നോളം മതത്തിനപ്രാപ്യമായതാം
ഉന്നത സത്യങ്ങൾ കാണിച്ചു തന്നോനെ
കുന്നിൻ മുകളിലാ കള്ളരോടത്തവർ
കൊന്നു കഴുകിന്മേൽ തൂക്കി നികൃഷ്ടമായ്.

സത്യം സനാതനമാണതിനെയങ്ങു
ഹത്യയാൽ ഉന്മൂലമാക്കാൻ കഴിയുമോ?
മൃത്യുവിൻ ദംഷ്ട്രങ്ങളാലതിനെയങ്ങു
നിത്യമൊതുക്കി നിറുത്താൻ കഴിയുമോ?

തകർത്തു മൃത്യുവിൻ ബന്ധനമൊക്കെയും
തികച്ചവൻ ലക്ഷ്യം ഉയർത്തേഴുന്നേറ്റു
പകച്ചു മതവും അതിനാചാര്യരും
ചകിതരായവർ തിരഞ്ഞു പോവഴി.

“കള്ളരാ ശിഷ്യന്മാർ ഗുരുവിൻ ശരീരം
കൊള്ളചെയ്തെങ്ങോ മറഞ്ഞതാവാനും നൂനം
ഭദ്രമാം കല്ലറക്കുള്ളിൽ കിടന്നവൻ
ഉദ്ധരിക്കാൻ വഴിയില്ലതസത്യമേ”

സത്യമേ നിന്നെ അകറ്റി നിറുത്തുവാൻ
നിത്യവും പാടുപെടുന്നതെന്തെ മതം
നശ്വരമായതിൻ പൊള്ളത്തരങ്ങളിൽ
വിശ്വസിച്ചു ജനം പായുന്നതിശയം

കൊല്ലമൊന്നല്ല രണ്ടായിരം പിന്നിട്ടു
ഇല്ലമതത്തിനു മാറ്റമൊരല്പവും
കൊല്ലം കൊലയും തുടരുന്നു മാനുഷർ
എല്ലാം മതത്തിന്റെ പേരിലീയുഴിയിൽ

വീണ്ടുംവരില്ലെ വിശ്വംഭരാ നീയിനി
വീണ്ടെടുക്കാനിങ്ങു പൊയ്പോയ ചൈതന്യം
നിവർത്തിയാക്കുമോ നീ ചൊന്ന വാക്കുകൾ
വിവശരായിതാ കാത്തിരിപ്പു ഞങ്ങൾ

(പ്രബുദ്ധനായപ്പോൾ ഏക കവിതയുടെ
പശ്ചാത്തലം)

യഹൂദസമൂഹം

യഹൂദ സമൂഹത്തിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാനം, അവരുടെ വേദമായ തോറായും, (Law of the prophet or divine instruction) അതിന്റെ വ്യഖ്യാനങ്ങളും ഉപവ്യഖ്യാനങ്ങളും അടക്കം അറുനൂറ്റി പതിമൂന്നു നിയമങ്ങളിലാണു നിലനല്കുന്നതു.(Sprit, culture, and the discipleship of Jesus by Marcus J. Borg) അവരുടെ സാമൂഹ്യ, രാഷ്ട്രീയ ജീവിതത്തെ രൂപാന്തരപ്പെടുത്തിയെടുക്കുന്ന, സിവിൽ, ക്രിമിനൽ, കുടുംബം, നികുതി നിയമങ്ങൾ എല്ലാം തന്നെ ഇതിൽ നിന്നു ഉരുതിരിഞ്ഞു വന്നിട്ടുള്ളതാണു. വ്യക്തി ജീവിതം, സാമൂഹ്യ ജീവതം, സുഹൃദ് ബന്ധങ്ങൾ ഇവയെക്കെ എങ്ങനെ നയിക്കണം എന്നതിനെ കുറിച്ചു ഇതിൽ വ്യക്തമായ പരാമർശങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടു. പ്രതിഫലവും ശിക്ഷയും നൽകി അവരുടെ യാഥാസ്ഥിതിക വിശ്വാസങ്ങളെ കാത്തും പരിരക്ഷിച്ചും പോന്നു. അവരുടെ വിശ്വാസങ്ങൾക്കനുസരിച്ചു ജീവിക്കുന്നവർക്കു നന്മയും വിജയവും അതിനെ ലംഘിക്കുന്നവർക്കു നാശവും മരണവും. ഇങ്ങനെ പലതരത്തിലുള്ള മാന്യതകളും സ്ഥാനമാനങ്ങളും

നൽകി സാമൂഹ്യ ജീവതത്തിനു അവർ രൂപവും ഭാവവും നൽകി (ആധുനിക ലോകം ഇതിൽ നിന്നു ഒട്ടും വ്യത്യസ്തം അല്ല എന്നു ഓർമ്മിക്കുന്നതു നന്നായിരിക്കും)

രണ്ടു സാമൂഹ്യ ലോകങ്ങളുടെ ഇടച്ചിൽ

യഹൂദരും, യവനനും റോമരും തമ്മിലുള്ള ഇടച്ചിൽ, ബി. സി അറുപത്തി മൂന്നിലെ പലസ്തിനിയൻ അനുബന്ധിക്കൽ, രാഷ്ട്രീയമായ ഇടർച്ചകൾ അതിലുപരി സാമ്പത്തിക സമ്മർദ്ദവും സാധാരണ ജനങ്ങളുടെ പൊറുതിമുട്ടിച്ചു. യഹൂദരുടെ ദിവ്യമായ റൂയിത്തോ, റോമാക്കാരുടെ പോലീസ് നിയമപ്രകാരമുള്ള നികുതിയോ നൽകാൻ കഴിയാതെ ജനം ഞെരുങ്ങി. പലയിടങ്ങളിലും കുഴപ്പങ്ങൾ തലപൊക്കി. റോമൻ സാമ്പ്രാജ്യവാദികളെ തുരത്താൻ കഴിയാതെ ആദർശവാദികളായി (ഒരു ദിവ്യമായ ഇടപെടൽ അവർ പ്രതിക്ഷിച്ചിരുന്നു) കഴിഞ്ഞിരുന്ന യഹൂദാ നേതൃത്വത്തെയും അവരുടെ നിയമങ്ങളെയും ജനം ലംഘിക്കുകയും, റോമർക്കെതിരെയുള്ള വിപ്ലവ പ്രവർത്തനത്തിനു ആക്കം കൂട്ടുകയും ചെയ്തു. യഹൂദാ നിയമങ്ങൾ ലംഘിച്ചവർ പലരും അനുസരണം കെട്ടവരും, ജാതിഭ്രഷ്ടരും, പാപികളുമായി പാളയത്തിനു പുറത്തു തള്ളപ്പെട്ടു. ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ രംഗ പ്രവേശം

“ദൈവം ലോകത്തെപ്പറ്റി സ്നേഹിക്കുകയും, നാം നശിച്ചു പോകാതെ രക്ഷ പ്രാപിക്കേണ്ടതിനു തന്റെ ഏകജാതനായ പുത്രനെ ഭൂമിയിലേക്കു അയച്ചു.” എന്ന വിശ്വാസത്തിൽ കാലുണി നിന്നുകൊണ്ടാണു സർവ്വ സകേളം ക്രിസ്തുവിലേക്കും നിത്യയതയിലേക്കു മനഷ്യരാശിയെ ക്ഷണിക്കുന്നതു. എന്നാൽ ഈ രക്ഷയും നിത്യയതയും പോലെ, ക്രിസ്തുവിനു സുപ്രധാനമായ ഒന്നായിരുന്നു, തന്റെ സമൂഹത്തിന്റെ സത്യം നഷ്ടപ്പെട്ട യാഥാസ്ഥിതിക വിശ്വാസപ്രമാണങ്ങളെയും അടിസ്ഥാനങ്ങളെയും ഉടച്ചു വാർക്കുക എന്നുള്ളതെന്ന സത്യം പലപ്പോഴും, സൗകര്യ പൂർവ്വം, നാം വിസ്മരിക്കാറാണു പതിവ്. (പൗരാണികമായാലും, ആധുനികമായാലും, “ഓരോ സമൂഹത്തിന്റേയും യാഥാസ്ഥിതിക വിശ്വാസങ്ങൾ പവിത്രമായ അതിന്റെ പാരമ്പര്യങ്ങളിലാണു വേരൂന്നി നിലക്കുന്നതു” ഏക ശ്രീ മാർക്കസ്സ് ജേ. ബോർഗ്ഗിന്റെ, പ്രസ്താവനയെ ഈ അവസരത്തിൽ ഓർത്തു പോകയാണു.) യെറൂശലേം നകരപ്രാന്തങ്ങളിലെ അനാഥരും, അശരണരും, പാപികളും, ഈ വ്യവസ്ഥിതിയുടെ ജാര സന്തതികളായിരുന്നു. ഇവരുടെ സംരക്ഷണ ചുമതല

ഏറ്റെടുത്തുകൊണ്ടു, ക്രിസ്തു ഇതിനു ഉത്തരവാദികളായിരുന്ന മതരാഷ്ട്രീയ കൂട്ടുകെട്ടിനും യാഥാസ്ഥിതിക വിശ്വാസങ്ങൾക്കും നേരെ തിരിഞ്ഞു. ദൃശ്യ വസ്തുക്കൾക്കപ്പുറത്തുള്ള അദൃശ്യ സത്തയിൽ മുറുകെ പിടിച്ചുകൊണ്ടു, കരുണയുടെ കൂടക്കിഴിൽ, പാപികളെയും, കള്ളന്മാരെയും, വേശ്യകളെയും, ചുങ്കക്കാരെയും, അണിനിരത്തിക്കൊണ്ടു, “മർത്ത്യ മനസ്സിന്റെ നാഭിയിലെന്നെന്നും “കുത്തിപിടിച്ചു ഭരിക്കും മതത്തിന്റെ മുഷ്ടി തകർക്കുവാൻ” തുടക്കം കുറിച്ചു. യാഥാസ്ഥിതിക വിശ്വാസങ്ങളുടെ സുന്ദര ഗോപുരങ്ങളിൽ ശയിച്ചിരുന്നവർ അസ്വസ്ഥരായി. അവർ ആ ഭിക്ഷുവിനെ വകവരുത്തുവാൻ കെണികൾ ഒരുക്കി.

ഒരു പുതിയ മാർഗ്ഗം ആധ്യത്മിക ലോകത്തിന്റെ അസ്തിത്വത്തെ കുറിച്ചു എല്ലാ വിഭാഗവും സംശയ ദൃഷ്ടിയോടെ മാത്രമേ വീക്ഷിച്ചിട്ടുള്ളു. പ്രത്യേകിച്ചു യാതൊരു വിധത്തിലുള്ള പരീക്ഷണ നിരീക്ഷണങ്ങൾക്കു സാധ്യതകൾ ഒട്ടും തന്നെ ഇല്ലായിരുന്ന ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ കാലഘട്ടത്തിൽ. (ആധുനിക ലോകത്തിന്റെ കാഴ്ചപ്പാടിനെ കുറിച്ചറിയാൻ താത്പര്യം ഉള്ളവർക്കു, ഭിഷഗ്വരനായ ശ്രീ ദീപക് ചോപ്രയുടെ, ഹൗ റ്റു നോ ഗോഡ് എന്ന പുസ്തകവും, ഊർജ്ജതന്ത്ര ശാസ്ത്രജ്ഞനായ, പ്രൊഫസ്സർ ഈ. ഏച്ചി. ആഡ്രസ്സിന്റെ ഫ്രം നത്തിംഗ് റ്റു നെയിച്ച് എന്ന പുസ്തകവും സഹായകരമായിരിക്കും) തന്റെ ലോകം ഐഹികം അല്ലെന്നും, തന്റെ ശക്തിയുടെ ഉറവിടം ഈ ദൃശ്യ ലോകത്തിനു രൂപവും ഭാവവും നൽകി നിൽക്കുന്ന ചേതനയിൽ നിന്നാണെന്നും പറഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ അവർ ക്രിസ്തുവിനെ ഭൂതങ്ങളുടെ രാജാവായി പ്രഖ്യാപിച്ചു. ക്രിസ്തുവോ തന്റെ പിതാവായ ആ ചൈതന്യത്തിൽ അമഗ്നനായി നിന്നുകൊണ്ടു ‘സച്ചിതാനന്ദത്തിലേക്ക്’ ഏവരെയും ക്ഷണിച്ചു.

“ഞാൻ തന്നെ വഴിയും സത്യവും ജീവനും” എന്ന അഭൗമിക മുദ്രാവാക്യത്തിന്റെ മുഴക്കങ്ങളിൽ യാഥാസ്ഥിതിക വിശ്വാസികളുടെ കൊട്ടാരങ്ങളുടെ മതിൽ കെട്ടുകൾ തകർന്നു വീണു. അവർ അവനെ വേട്ടയാടി. എന്തിനേറെ പറയുന്നു,

“ഇന്നോളം മതത്തിനപ്രാപ്യമായതാം ഉന്നത സത്യങ്ങൾ കാണിച്ചു തന്നോനെ കുന്നിൻ മുകളിലാ കള്ളരോടത്തവർ കൊന്നു കഴുകിന്മേൽ തൂക്കി നികൃഷ്ടമായ്.”

പക്ഷെ,
“സത്യം സനാതനമാണതിനെയങ്ങു ഹത്യയാലുമുലമാക്കാൻ കഴിയുമോ?”

ചില ചോദ്യങ്ങൾ

1. പൗരാണിക വ്യവസ്ഥിതിയേയും ആധുനിക വ്യവസ്ഥിതിയേയും ഏതെങ്കിലും തരത്തിൽ വിവേചിക്കാൻ കഴിയുമോ?
2. ക്രിസ്തു ഉടച്ചു വാർക്കാൻ ശ്രമിച്ച യാഥാസ്ഥിതിക വിശ്വാസങ്ങളുടെയും വ്യവസ്ഥിതികളുടെയും അതെ തട്ടിൽ നിന്നുകൊണ്ടല്ലെ ആധുനിക ക്രിസ്ത്യൻ സഭകളുടെ സുവിശേഷ പ്രകോഷണങ്ങൾ?
3. അവൻ ഏൽപ്പിച്ച ദൗത്യത്തിന്റെ പൂർത്തീകരണത്തിനുവേണ്ടി ഒരു ചെറു വിരലെങ്കിലും അനക്കാൻ നമ്മൾക്കു കഴിഞ്ഞിട്ടുണ്ടോ?
4. ആ ദൗത്യം മുഴിയിപ്പിക്കാൻ അവൻ വീണ്ടും വരില്ലെ?

Diaspora Sunday (Continued from page 26)

difficulties. Taking roots in the new land of their choice, with totally different culture and traditions, was not an easy task. Parents had to go with many a sleepless night working and taking care of their little ones. Left without no one to turn to or a role model to look up to, without losing hope or their faith in God, they gathered together in small group of five or six families to sing God's grace as often as they could, which later gave way to regular prayer groups. Subsequently, these prayer groups, started with laity's leadership at different cities and towns, were recognized as Congregations and parishes. We have now 70 such congregations spread across the North American continent

and Europe. So, as the early pilgrims celebrated their first Thanksgiving in the fall of 1621, we too are celebrating Diaspora Sunday in a spirit of Thanksgiving.

As Joshua told the children of Israel the significance of the 12 stones set up at Gilgal, we too should tell our children and grandchildren the significance of the Diaspora Sunday so that its real meaning would never be lost with the passage of time and that it would ever remain as a memorial to our posterity. “What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.” (Psalm 116:12-13) ■

The Influence of Sunday School In My Life

Kelvin Varghese, Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch

Sunday School plays a significant role to enhance the spiritual growth of an individual by molding one's own life to become a true Christian. It influences us to be true Christians, how to forgive others, how to love others, and how to trust God in our life. Proverbs Chapter 22:6 says: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it". This is exactly what Sunday School is doing to you and me—training us in our early ages in the way God wants us to face this world, so that we will not turn away from Him.

In this changing world to live honestly and truthfully is very important. The Sunday school plays a vital role in shaping our lives, by teaching us to be honest and truthful in our dealings with others. To be honest and truthful, one needs some kind of training and education to understand the difference between the good and bad and the truthful and untruthful. This is where Sunday school plays its role in teaching and training each one of us to distinguish between the right and wrong choices. Sunday School does it with the help of the Scripture, which contains the words of God himself.

We must learn to love others, to show concern for others, doing good to our brothers and sisters, sharing and caring for those who need us. We should prove that Christians are different because Christ lives in us. When Christ lives in us, our lives bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This is possible only by being trained and taught in the right way, which is being done Sunday school by its influence in our life.

We must learn that by believing, accepting and receiving Jesus Christ, every Christian submits to his Lordship. We should look to Christ as our role model, and allow him be our ruler, and follow him daily in our lives. We must take roles of sharing our faith in Jesus Christ with others. The spiritual growth of the Church has its roots in the faith of our forefathers. We should love others and influence them to do the same. We must be a good example to our elders and our fellow men. Sunday School helps us to achieve these goals in our life.

Many of the new age believers reject Christianity because they fail to see Christ's influence in the lives of today's Christians. The most effective way to share our faith to others is to show others through one's actions the true meaning of Christianity. The importance of prayer is also relevant in a society like this. Prayer is the only way we can talk to God. All these place a great responsibility on the Church to become more relevant, in addressing the needs of the people and to help them to live as true Christians. The Sunday school influences us to meet this challenge to face the world of tomorrow with true faith in God.

Church is a community of believers, bonded together by the Holy Spirit. The commandments that God gave to his people are to be obeyed, and passed from generation to generation. In Sunday school influences us in passing the commandments of God to our future generations. We should play the role of loving and obeying God. We should mold our character in a Christian fashion so that we will not fall to the worldly pleasures when we grow up. Often we ask the question—Why we should attend the church and Sunday school all the time?

The answer is by being influenced by the Sunday school and Church, we can learn the Word of God revealed through the Bible. We can mold our character in order to be a good Christian.

The Church is the body of Christ, and we are all the parts of the same body. So we need each other, and we need the head, the Christ. Christian life and growth is primarily focused on the community, because it always contributes to the well being of the individual. Christians grow as a result of being nourished and taught in a Christian way. The influence of the Sunday school in a changing world is to provide the nourishment and direction that will enhance spiritual growth for individuals. Sunday School has a great responsibility in a changing world, by teaching us that every Christian should be a living example of Jesus Christ himself. We must bear one another's burdens. We must nurture, care and assist rather than use, abuse and throw away

The Sunday school influences our lives to prepare us to meet the challenges of this world. We must be mentally and spiritually prepared to meet the challenges of this world by living up to expectations of Jesus Christ. Sunday School is relevant in such a circumstance since it enables us to learn more about Christ, and His words, which are given in the Bible. Sunday School makes you and me as we are today. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it". So let us train ourselves to be the children of God through the influence of Sunday school. Let us inherit the good qualities of a true Christian in our life by being influenced by the Sunday school in order to meet the challenges of this world.

These days the believers act like a football team that sends the coach out on the field to play the game all by himself, while the players sit in the bleachers as spectators. Church members leave the work of evangelism to the Pastor, while they sit passively in the pews. As Sunday school students we should join the team and get out on the field and in to the game. This is the only way we can win the world for Christ, and Sunday school helps us to achieve this mission by influencing us to become true Christians.

The recent terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, has shocked our country, and the believers. Why did God allow such things to happen? Being a Sunday school student, I know that God has purpose in everything that happens in our lives. There are two sets of forces in this world, God and Satan. There are also two kinds of people, the good and the bad. The good people belong to God and bad people belong to Satan. Good people do good things and bad people do bad things. The recent terrorist attacks were the action of bad people. Ultimately bad people will be punished for their deeds and good people will be rewarded by eternal life. This ability to distinguish between the right and wrong is an example of influence of Sunday school in my life.

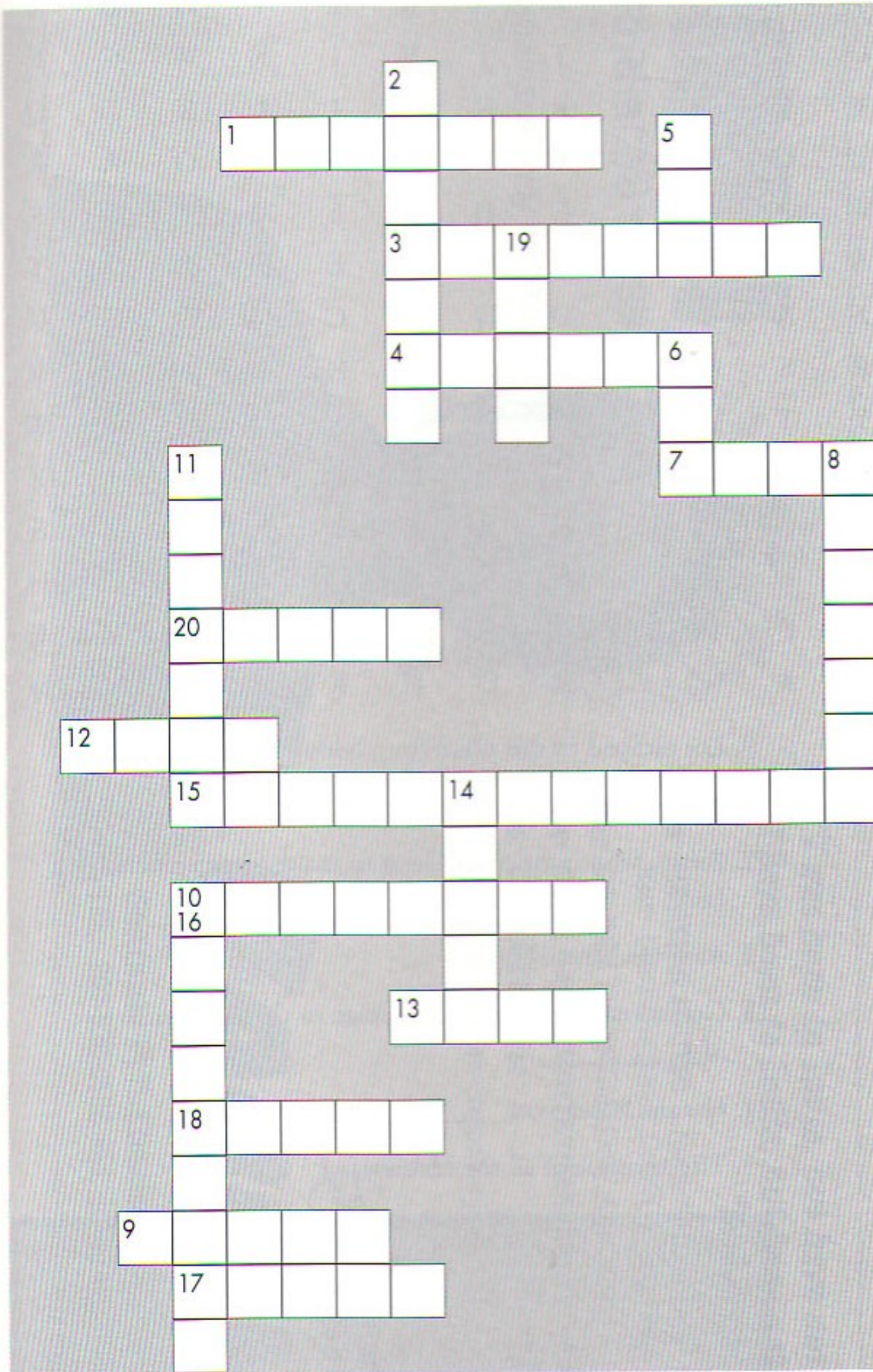
Martin Luther, a pioneering Protestant, stressed that every Christian could and should establish his own relationship with Christ by learning the Scripture. As Sunday school students we must contribute to the spiritual growth of the church, and not for its destruction. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, that Christians must not hide their light. So let us turn our lights to others so that they can come to the light by our roles as Sunday school children. ■

BIBLE CROSS WORD PUZZLE

AS IN THE TODAY'S ENGLISH VERSION

(based on Genesis Chapters 1-26)

Mrs. Suma Varghese (New York)



Across

1. The Lord said to Cain, "If you had done the right thing, you would be _____."
3. The Lord _____ Abraham.
4. As long as the world _____ there will be time for harvesting, there will always be cold and heat, summer and winter....
7. _____ did everything that God had commanded him.
- 10, 15. God said to Noah, "I am now making my 10) _____ with you and all your descendants and with all 15) _____."
13. _____ lived for 930 years.
9. Ishmael lived in _____ as he was a hunter.
17. Abraham put his _____ in the Lord.
18. The name _____ in Hebrew means, 'he laughs.'
20. Name of the one who called God, the God who sees is _____
12. God said to Abram, 'Now I know that you honour and _____ God because you have not kept back your only son from me.'

Down

6. Ishmael was Hagar's _____.
2. God was _____ with Abraham.
5. _____ was the son of Haran.
8. God created human beings making them like _____.
11. _____ was Rebecca's father.
- 14, 16. God placed man in the garden of Eden to 14) _____ and 16) _____ it.
19. _____ was the first person to commit murder.

Bible Cross-Word Puzzle Winners (July 2001)

1. Annamma John
2. Keren Cherian
3. Kunjamma Thomas
4. Mariamma Zachariah

BIBLE WORD SEARCH

AS IN THE TODAY'S ENGLISH VERSION
(based on Genesis Chapters 1-26)

Mrs. Suma Varghese (New York)

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

1. Person who lived for 777 years.
2. Well of the vow.
3. Third son of Adom and Eve.
4. Abraham's wife after Sarah's death.
5. Third son of Noah.
6. Abram's slave.
7. Enoch lived in _____ with God.
8. A person who helped Abraham to rescue Lot.
9. Lot escaped to this place from Sodom and Gomorah.
10. King of Salem.
11. Person who came from Gerar to make an agreement with Isaac.
12. Abraham's burial place.
13. God asked Abraham to take Isaac to the mountain of_____.
14. Haran's father was_____.
15. The ancestor of all the Hebrews.

Bible Word Search Finders (July 2001)

1. Anika Chacko
2. Annamma John
3. Kunjamma Thomas
4. Mariamma Zachariah
5. Omana Rajee
6. Shaila Mathew
7. Sicily Joseph

ATTENTION ALL CONTESTANTS!!!

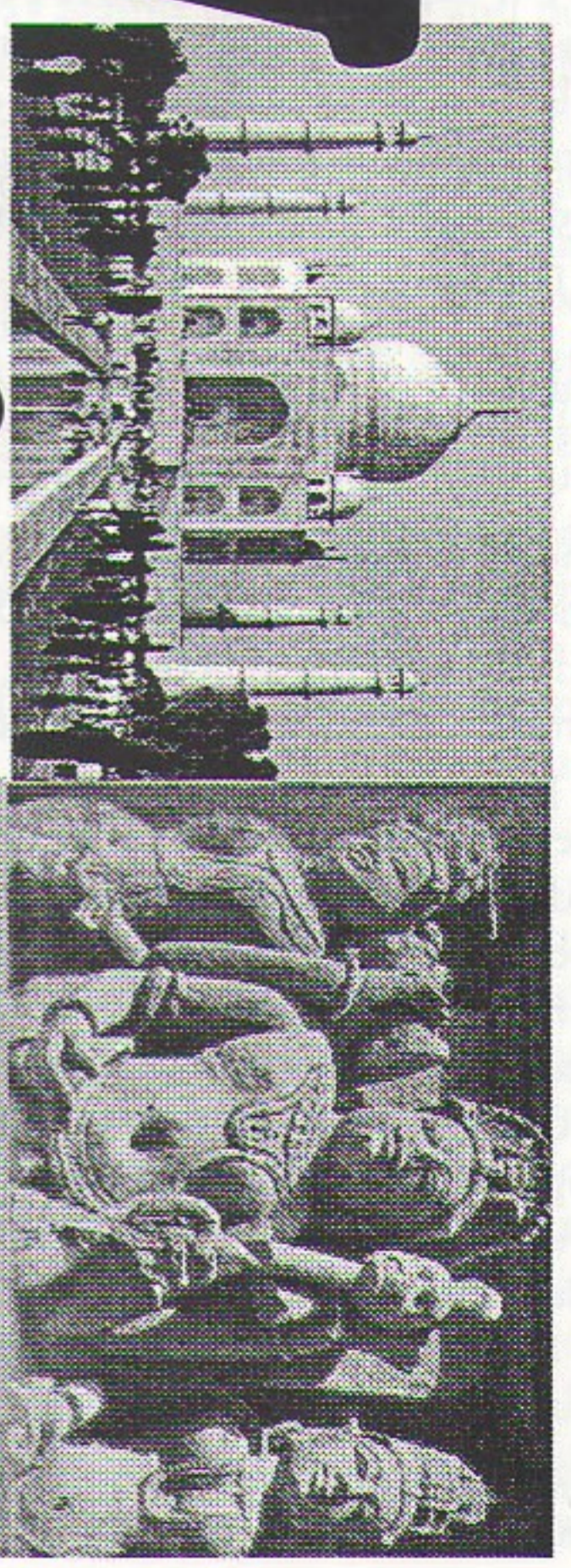
Please mail your answers to:

**Mrs. Suma Varghese, 103-10 104th Street,
Ozone Park, NY 11417**

DEADLINE FOR ANSWERS December 15, 2001

From India to India

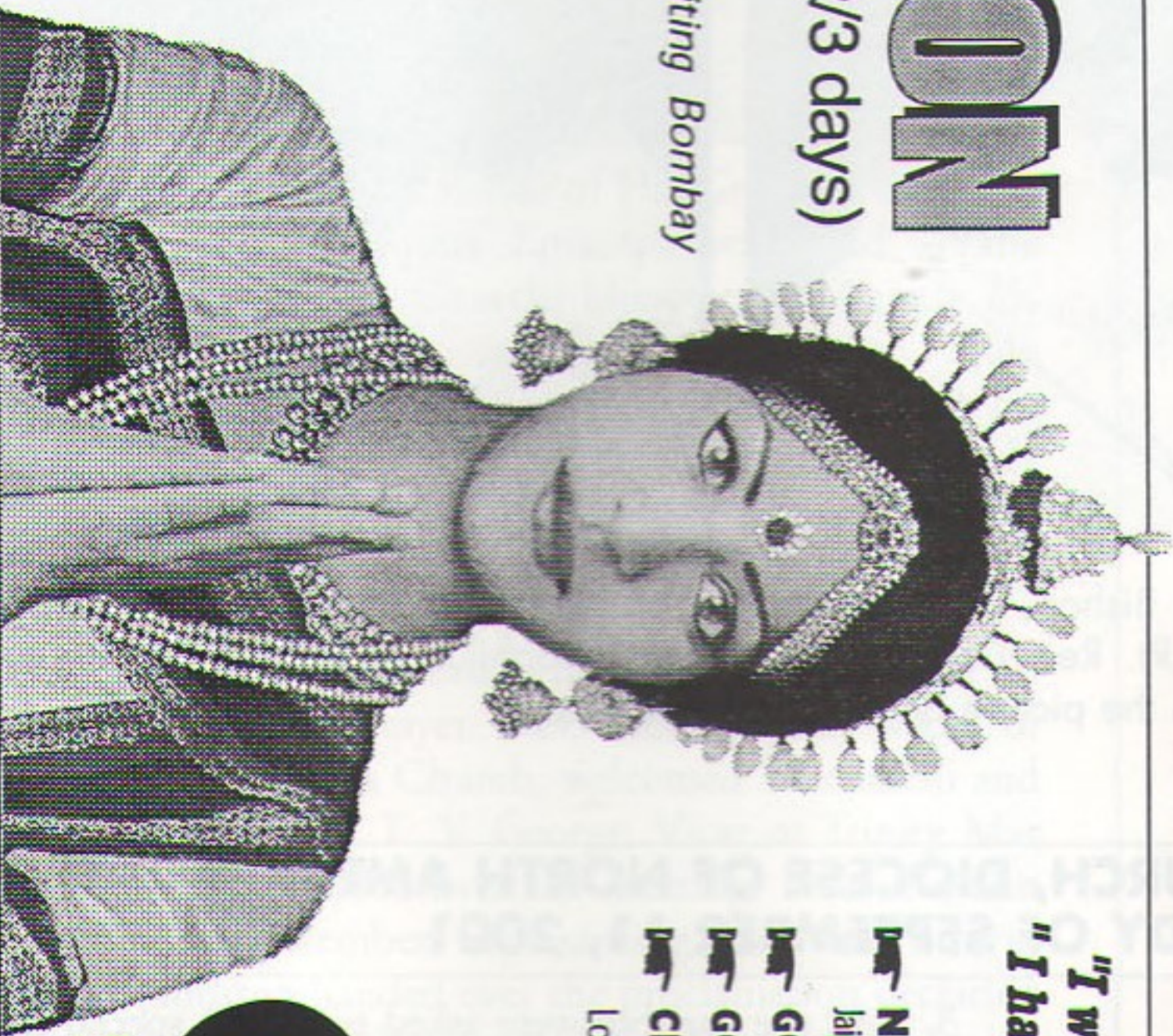
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DIOCESAN/PARISH NEWS

WELCOME TO AMERICA



The Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos, our new Diocesan Bishop, being welcomed on his arrival at the Sinai Mar Thoma Diocesan Center, by the outgoing Diocesan Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus and Diocesan Secretary Rev. Dr. John Joseph on Tuesday, October 2, 2001. Also in the picture is Mr. Jaison Thomas.

RESPONSE OF THE MAR THOMA CHURCH, DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE TO THE TRAGEDY OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

On September 11, 2001, people throughout the world were shocked and shaken by the merciless act of terrorism on the United States of America. As children of God, we mourn for our brothers and sisters who tragically lost their lives and remember the many families enduring pain and heartache in our prayers.

The Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church responded to this tragic situation in several ways:

1. Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Diocesan Bishop, through a Circular to the parishes, stated the following: "The Mar Thoma Church as a whole stand in solidarity with the afflicted in the recent national tragedy and express deep condolence and condemn all sorts of terrorism." He proclaimed solidarity with the nation and people of America in this time of grief and pain. He conveyed condolences to all the bereaved on behalf of the church. The Diocesan Bishop continued by urging people to stand with the nation in its crisis and asked all members of the church to participate in the rescue and relief work in one way or another. The Diocesan Bishop also communicated our sympathy and solidarity to the President of the United States of America, the New York City Mayor, and other church leaders and officials.

2. All Clergy of the Diocese held prayer services and vigils at their respective parishes on the same day. All parishioners participated in these services. Special prayers were held on the Sunday following the 11th.

3. All the parishes were asked to collect special donations for the restoration/relief work. Our members individually and collectively participated in blood donation campaigns. A few churches are also holding their own blood drives as well. Interdenominational prayer meetings were held in many parishes and special prayers were organized in association with the neighboring communities. There were silent processions through communities reflecting the Church's solidarity with the country.

4. The Diocesan Bishop handed over \$11,000.00 to the 911 Charity Fund through the Richmond County Fire Brigade. This amount was raised by 100 families of Staten Island Mar Thoma Church.

5. The Mar Thoma Church also joined with other national councils of churches, especially the NCCC in releasing statements protesting the terrorist act. The Metropolitan in India, the Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma, through a letter, also expressed shock and grief at this gruesome, devastating tragedy. He expressed his condemnation of all terrorism in very strong words and urged us all to join together in prayer for the nation.

We pray for this country and hope that in the days to come the nation will prove its quality of leadership. May God shed His grace and mercy upon the people of this nation and may the evil that perpetrates this world be neutralized by the love of God.

God Bless America!

Rev. Dr. John Joseph, Diocesan Secretary

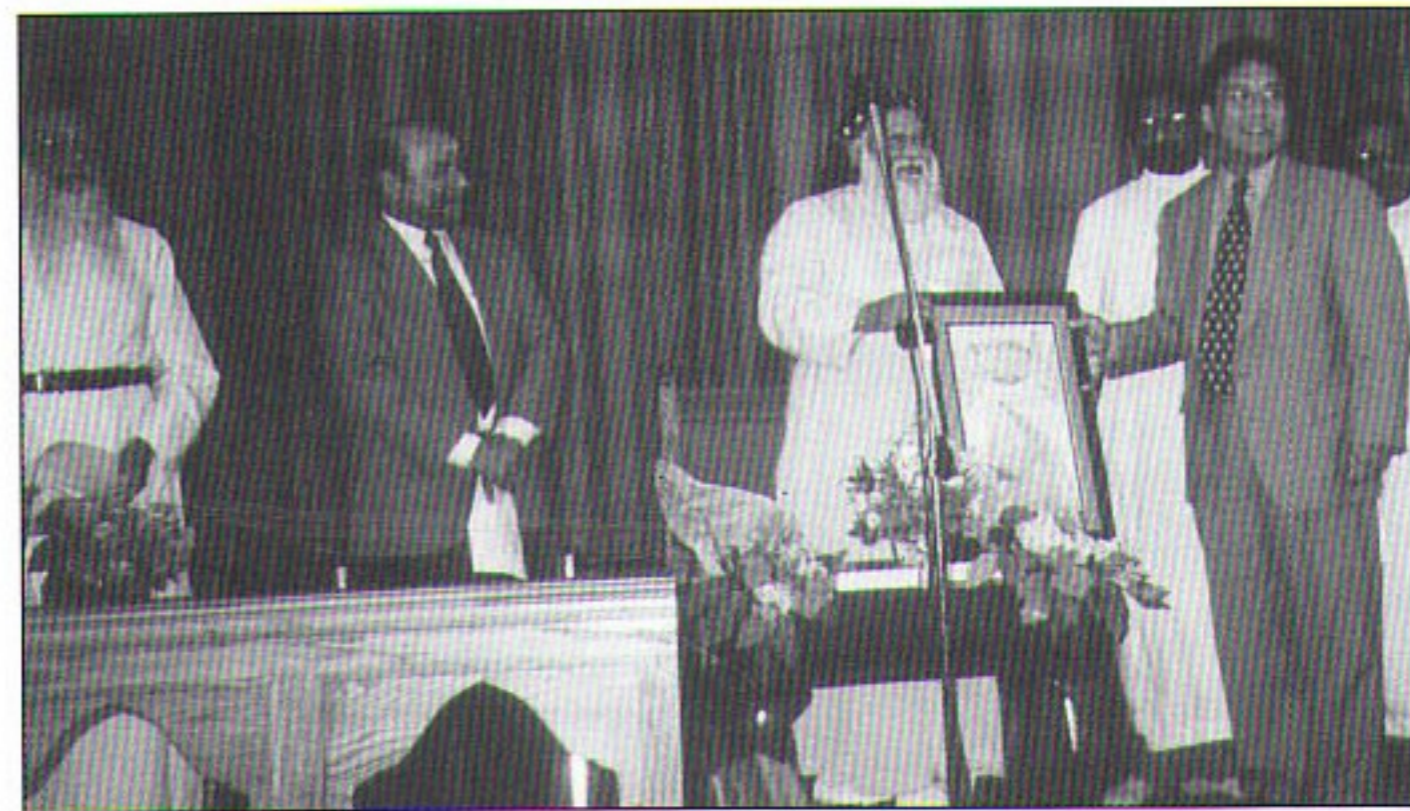
FAREWELL TO DIOCESAN BISHOP – AUGUST 25, 2001, HOUSTON



A farewell meeting in honor of His Grace Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa was held at the Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Houston on August 25, 2001. The celebration concluded with the Holy Communion Service at the Trinity Mar Thoma Church on Sunday August 26, 2001. Both functions were jointly sponsored and organized by Trinity and Immanuel parishes of Houston, Southwest Center B of The Diocese of North America and Europe.

The program on Saturday the 25th, started with an opening hymn and prayer. Rev. George Jose, Vicar of Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, welcomed Thirumeni and other dignitaries. Rev. T. V. George, Vicar of Trinity Mar Thoma Church presided over the meeting. Hon. Gordon Quan, Council Member, representing Mr. Lee Brown, Mayor of Houston handed over the proclamation declaring August 25, 2001 as Zacharias Mar Theophilus day in Houston. After a series of felicitations by Rev. Fr. M. T. Philip, President of India Christian Ecumenical Community of Houston, Rev. T. I. Joseph, Rev. M. O. Oommen Jr., Youth Chaplain, Mr. George Muthalay, Secretary, TMTC, Mr. P. K. Thomas, Diocesan Assembly member, TMTC, Mr. Allen Varghese representing both IMTC/TMTC Sunday schools, Mrs. Mariamma Thomas, Diocesan Council member, TMTC, Mr. Liju Varghese, TMTC and Miss Bincy Jacob, IMTC representing Youth fellowship of both parishes, Mr. T. A. Mathew, TMTC, representing both TMTC/IMTC Edavaka Mission, Mrs. Chis Mathew, IMTC representing both IMTC/TMTC Young Couples Fellowship, Mrs. Mariamma Thomas, TMTC representing both TMTC/IMTC Sevika Sanghom, Mr. M.A. Varghese, Secretary IMTC and songs by both Youth and Adult Choirs of both parishes, the Trustees of IMTC and TMTC presented the gifts to Thirumeni.

All speakers acknowledged that as the first resident Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa, has set a pace of tremendous growth of the Diocese, which now has about 70 parishes and congregations spreading over two Continents North America & Europe. Thirumeni, has also brought world recognition to our Mar Thoma Church by securing membership in the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the mainstream American Christian community which is the



National Council of Churches (NCC). Sinai Mar Thoma Center and Santhigiri are the symbols of Zacharias Thirumeni's innovative ideas, intellectual brilliance, great vision and focus. Thirumeni also made sure that our Marthoma Church will be deep rooted in this land for generations to come. Our Youth Chaplain's ministry here started bearing fruits. From our younger generation, Roy Achen is already serving the Diocese and three other youths are pursuing studies in Mar Thoma Theological Seminary. Our concerns and worries about the future of Mar Thoma Church in this Continent is gradually disappearing. All of these great accomplishments of Zacharias Thirumeni has helped to elevate the position of the Mar Thoma Church to a global Church.

Thirumeni, in his address to the audience, thanked both parishes for arranging the farewell meeting, and indicated that, "at first I was against the farewell and now I enjoy it. Bishops are symbols of love and unity. In my busy life, I forgot to love my members. But I received lot of love from others and I am humbled by your love and caring. I have a vision for a larger community. Our Marthomites should get involved in American political arena as well. Local Marthomites should stand together as a community. Houston has great potential to grow as an important, large Center of the Diocese. We have come a long way and I exhort all to keep the momentum. Our members should come forward and work for the Glory of His Kingdom in the years to come".

Mr. Jacob Thomas, IMTC Diocesan Assembly member, in his concluding remarks and vote of thanks, emphasized the significance of Zacharias Thirumeni's leadership and guidance, which played a vital role in the formation of a second Parish in Houston, the smooth transition from the parent Trinity Parish and building up of the beautiful Immanuel Mar Thoma Church. On behalf of Immanuel and Trinity Parishes of Houston, he extended their sincere gratitude, love, appreciation and thanks to the most beloved Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa and prayed that the Good Lord may continue to bless His Grace with the divine gift of the spirit to lead our Marthoma Church and attract masses to the Kingdom of God.

**Jacob Thomas, Diocesan Assembly Member
Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Houston**

**FAREWELL TO RT. REV. DR. ZACHARIAS MAR THEOPHILUS – SEPTEMBER 22, 2001
MARTIN VAN BUREN HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM, NY**



On September 22, 2001, the Diocese of North America and Europe honored our Diocesan Episcopa, Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus for his tireless service and dedication to stabilize and build up our Diocese. Zacharias Thirumeni took charge of this Diocese at the end of 1993 and served for 8 years. During his tenure here, Thirumeni made great advancements for the church in the local, national, and international levels. A few young men took the decision to enter the full-time ministry of the church through Thirumeni's guidance and help. Thirumeni fulfilled his vision to have a Diocesan Center by overseeing the building of the Sinai Center at Merrick. As an Executive Member of the World Council of Churches, Thirumeni placed the Mar Thoma Church on the universal map. In all these things, Thirumeni bore the burden of guiding this Diocese into the 21st Century. An example of his forward-thinking nature is the creation of the Mission Board to oversee the mission activities of the Diocese. He took special care to lay the groundwork for our church to make a smooth transition into the second phase of its development. Therefore, the farewell program on the 22nd of September was not only to bid him farewell but also a chance to praise God for the work of His servant. Over 500 members of our Diocesan family from all over the nation attended the meeting. They expressed their sincere love and appreciation for all that Zacharias Thirumeni has accomplished for the glory of God and His kingdom over the past eight years.

Memories of the recent tragedy that struck America on September 11th, made the meeting somber and



meaningful. The church community expressed solidarity with our nation by starting the evening with a moving rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner sung by the Diocesan band, *Exiles for Him*. During the worship service, led by Mr. P. V. Varghese and Mr. Liju Varghese, we remembered the victims, their families, the rescue workers and all people affected by this act of terrorism with a moment of silence.

Our Diocesan Secretary, Rev. Dr. John Joseph, began his welcome speech by recounting numerous contributions made by Thirumeni over the last 8 years. He welcomed the esteemed clergy, dignitaries and all attendees to the auspicious occasion. Among the honored guests were the Most Rev. Mathews Mar Barnabas, Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church, Most Rev. Zachariah Mar Nicolovos, Archbishop of the Orthodox Church, Very Rev. Fr. John



Peter Meno, representing Bishop Karim, of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Rev. Dr. Winston Ching of the Episcopal Church, Rev. Fr. Joseph Koilparampil of the St. Thomas Federation and a Representative from Nassau County. Achen cordially welcomed and introduced them all.

The Most Rev. Mathews Mar Barnabas gave the Presidential address. Barnabas Thirumeni spoke of the dedication and commitment to God's service, loyalty to ecumenism and friendship he had found in Zacharias Thirumeni. Barnabas Thirumeni testified of the hard work and effort Zacharias Thirumeni had put to establishing the close familial relationship between the two churches and envisioned that Zacharias Thirumeni will continue to do great things and excel in all that God calls Thirumeni to do.

The Presidential Address was followed by poignant felicitations from all the honored dignitaries. Rev. Dr. Winston Ching and his associates gave Thirumeni a beautiful gift on their behalf. The Representative from Nassau County presented Thirumeni with a citation from Nassau County presented Thirumeni with a citation from Nassau County. These were followed by additional felicitations on behalf of clergy and organizations of the church. Malayalam and English songs sung by *Exiles for Him*, led by Mr. Christy



Mr. Abraham Thomas, Diocesan Treasurer speaking before handing over a monetary gift to Zacharias Thirumeni

Mathew, were meaningfully interwoven within the program.

Rev. Thomas P. Chandy, St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Yonkers, represented the clergy and expressed devotion, love and sincerity to Thirumeni and genuinely thanked Thirumeni for his fatherly guidance and leadership. Rev. Roy Abraham Thomas, Chicago Mar Thoma Church, spoke of his personal relationship

and inspiration through Zacharias Thirumeni. As the first Achen from this Diocese, he thanked Thirumeni for all the initiatives Thirumeni has taken to develop and encourage youth in following the path of Christ. Mr. Thompson David spoke on behalf of the Council. He spoke of Thirumeni's commitment toward growth and unity within our church and Diocese as a cornerstone of Thirumeni's legacy in this Diocese. Mr. Thomas Daniel of the Sabha Council disserted all that Thirumeni has done for the growth and stability of the Church as a leader with a vision that urges us all to continually reach higher and higher for the service and glory of God.

Master Joseph Varghese from the St. John's Mar Thoma Church, 1st place winner of the Diocesan Sunday school examination for his grade level, spoke on behalf of the Sunday School. He conveyed gratitude to Thirumeni for Thirumeni's initiative to build up and hone the Sunday school in our Diocese as a place of proper Christian



Mr. Thomas Mammen, council member from Los Angeles, giving a memento on behalf of the Diocese to Zacharias Thirumeni.

nurturing and spiritual growth. Mr. Liju Varghese, Representative to the Diocesan Assembly from the Diocesan Youth Fellowship, spoke on behalf of the youth of this Diocese. He highlighted Thirumeni's establishment of the Diocesan Youth Fellowship, an organization that oversees

Diocesan level youth and mission programs. He spoke of the special love and concern that Thirumeni has for the youth of this Diocese. Mrs. Annamma Koshy representing the Sevika Sanghom praised Thirumeni's enterprise to have women more actively involved in church activities and organizations. This has spurred growth in various aspects of the church at all levels as well as the formation of an annual Sevika Sanghom conference.



Rev. Dr. John Joseph, Diocesan Secretary, giving welcome speech.

Leaders of the Indian Christian Forum were also in attendance. Collectively, they presented Zacharias Thirumeni with a memento. Mr. Thomas Mammen, council member from Los Angeles, also gave a memento on behalf of the Diocesan Council extolling Zacharias Thirumeni and his devoted service to God, Church and Diocese. Mr. Abraham Thomas, Diocesan Treasurer, presented Thirumeni with a monetary gift on behalf of the Diocese.

Zacharias Thirumeni then gave a moving response to the sentiments shared by the speakers. He thanked all the members of this Diocese for their cooperation over the past eight years as they furthered God's plans for this Diocese. He expressed his appreciation to all who helped him to fulfill his vision for the Diocese and for the renewed interest and life within the church. Nevertheless, Thirumeni reminded us that the Diocese must continue to strive for higher goals. He articulated his desire for a continuing and never-ending vision within the church and in our own personal lives and appealed that his unrealized dreams of developing an old-age (nursing) home and other ministries be achieved in coming years. He spoke of the love that was shown to him and was regretful that he didn't have enough time to show us more of his love. Thirumeni closed expressing his love for all of us and thanking all for their love and care for him.

Mr. Kuruvilla Cherian, the previous Diocesan Treasurer, gave the final vote of thanks. Rev. John P. Oommen, St. Stephen's Mar Thoma Church, New Jersey, gave the closing prayer and Zacharias Thirumeni ended the program with the benediction. Afterwards there was a time of fellowship with refreshments during which Thirumeni mingled with his beloved children. The meeting was a testimony to the life and work of a great man with a great vision and a love of God and His people. ■

XXII NATIONAL MAR THOMA YOUTH CONFERENCE

The XXII National Youth Conference, hosted by the Youth Fellowship of the Mar Thoma Church of Los Angeles, was held on August 9-12, 2001. The entire conference took place at the campus of Whittier College in the city of Whittier, California. There was a total of 264 Delegates from throughout the nation.

The inaugural session began on Thursday evening under the leadership of Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Rev. Kurien George, Rev. M.O. Oommen, Rev. David Daniel, Rev. Kemper Crabb, Jerome Mammen, and Mathew Thomas. After the worship time and welcome addresses, our Thirumeni officially inaugurated the conference followed by Rev. Kemper Crabb's personal introduction.



Zacharias Thirumeni celebrating Holy Communion along with Rev. Kurien George, Rev. Kemper Crabb, Rev. M. O. Oommen, Rev. P. Mathew and Rev. David Daniel (not in the picture).

For the next two days we heard a series of four talks from Rev. Kemper Crabb revolving around the theme of Communion and Community, Intimacy with God and His people. After each of the talks the delegates had the opportunity to process the teaching in the context of small groups. Through the course of the four talks Rev. Crabb was effective in challenging our understanding of relating to God as Mar Thoma Christians. He further went on to define the biblical picture of community comparing that to our current situation. Finally Rev. Crabb spent a good deal of time challenging our notion of Mar Thoma community and understanding its influence as a bridge church here in America.



Youth Conference — A section of the audience.

During the free times on Saturday and Sunday we were also able to conduct six different seminars addressing issues pertinent to the Mar Thoma Youth. Rev. Kurien George and Rev. M. O. Oommen led two seminars one on the



Choir members.

doctrines of Baptism and Qurbana and another on the Foundations of the Mar Thoma Church. Joshi John led a seminar entitled, *Why is Jesus Unique?*, intended for those youth having questions about faith in Christ. Jerome Mammen led a seminar entitled, *The role of Bicultural Christians in the mission of the Church.* And finally we had two gender specific seminars led by Saji Oommen, Bindu Oommen and Merry George. The seminars were overall effective in addressing specific needs and questions in the midst of the larger theme of the conference.

The Friday evening session included a short message from Anson Thomas a missionary to the city Bombay. We watched two videos documenting the oppression of women in Bombay and the response of the Mar Thoma Church. The night was concluded with a time of commitment led by Rev. Kemper Crabb for those delegates who wanted to take a new step of faith both in relationship with God and with the community.



Zacharias Thirumeni addressing the youth during concluding session of the Conference.

Sunday morning worship was led by our Thirumeni and was followed by the closing ceremony. During this time both Matthew Thomas of the DYF and Jerome Mammen gave their vote of thanks and Rev. David Daniel gave the closing prayer. Finally the conference ended with a farewell time for Thirumeni and Kurien George Achen. Overall, the XXII National Conference was a great success. It provided a sense of community and included challenging and prophetic words for the youth of this nation.

Jerome Mammen, General Secretary

MAR THOMA CHURCH OF LOS ANGELES – SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS

The Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Mar Thoma Church of Los Angeles were held on Saturday, August 4, 2001 and Sunday, August 5, 2001.



From L to R: Rev. Dr. John Joseph, Dr. Earl Grant, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Mr. Marshal Mow and Rev. David Daniel.

A public celebration of the 25th anniversary was held at Azusa Pacific University auditorium on 24- August 2001 from 5 p.m. to 10.00 p.m. Our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa inaugurated the Silver Jubilee Celebrations. Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Diocesan Episcopa of the Bombay-Delhi Diocese was the Chief Guest.

Rev. Dr. John Joseph, the Diocesan Secretary, Rev. Fr. Yohannan Panikkar of the Orthodox Church of Los



"Hey! Don't click now" — A moment of laughter after the treasurer Mr. Oommen Easow presented the gift check to Zacharias Thirumeni.

Angeles, Rev Kurian Thomas, Vicar, San Francisco Mar Thoma church, Rev. C. A. Varghese, Vicar of Epiphany Mar Thoma Church, New York, Dr. Earl Grant representing the President of the Azusa Pacific University and Mr. Marshal Mow, Member of Glendora City Council, blessed the occasion with their presence and felicitations. North American Diocesan Council members, members of various denominations from Los Angeles, and members of San Francisco Parish attended the celebrations.

In his inaugural speech Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus applauded the parish for its achievements and contributions both to the Diocese and to the West Coast for the last 25 years. Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos reminded the role of the Church as a witnessing community placed in the world to reflect the life of Jesus Christ.

The Vicar Rev. David Daniel welcomed the Bishops, dignitaries and the gathering. The Parish Secretary Mr. Jai Johnson in his report remembered the humble beginning of the Parish in the year 1976. The encouragement and call to start off as a parish was given to the Mar Thoma members by the late Rt. Rev. Easow Mar Timotheos who visited Los Angeles to attend to the spiritual needs of the Marthomites in July 1976. The first worship service as a parish was held on August 15, 1976 to coincide with the Indian Independence Day at the West Culver City Baptist Church. Dr. Jacob O Mathew and Mr. Jacob A Mathew conducted the service. The parish is happy to have received pastoral care from Rev. Dr. Joseph Chacko, Rev. Dr. P. P. Abraham,



Zacharias Thirumeni presenting the 'Best Parish Award' to the Trustees (year 2000) Mr. A. K. John and Mrs. Aleyamma Mathew.

Rev. Dr. D. Philip, Rev. Dr. K.G. Pothen, Rev. Dr. Alexander Thomas, Rev. C. John, Rev. Dr. K. V. Simon through the years.

During the celebrations the pioneer members of the parish as of August 15, 1976 and Sapthathi members of the parish were honored with the presentation of "Ponnada". As part of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations the parish decided to support a mission project in India. Zacharias Thirumeni inaugurated the project by accepting a check for \$2000 from the parish Treasurer, Mr. Oommen Easow. Various sub-committees worked very hard for the success of the celebrations. Mr. Abraham Mattackal (Program), Mr. Thomas Mammen, Laverne (Souvenir), Mr. Thomas Mammen, Long Beach (Reception), Mrs. Rachel Mathew (Food), Mr. Rajan Mathai (Ushers), Mr. P. V. Mathew



Zacharias Thirumeni celebrating Holy Communion along with Rev. Dr. John Joseph, Rev. C. A. Varghese and Rev. David Daniel.

(Mission). Mr. Abraham Mattackal, Mr. Joshi John and Miss Ashley Simon were the masters of ceremony.

The Malayalam and English Choirs and the Sunday School children sang their melodious tunes to the delight of the audience. A cultural program conducted by the Sunday School children, youth and adults of the Parish followed the public meeting. The Parish Vice President Mr. P.V. Mathews extended the vote of thanks.

On Sunday, August 05, 2001 Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Thirumeni celebrated Holy Communion service at the Church. Rev. Dr. John Joseph Rev. C. A. Varghese, Diocesan Council members and members of the parish participated in the Holy Communion. Two First Communicants received Holy Communion. After the service Thirumeni presented the Diocesan Best Parish Award to Parish trustees (2000) Mr. A. K. John and Mrs. Aleyamma Mathew. A Farewell meeting was held in honor of Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus. Rev. David Daniel (Vicar) Mr. P.V. Mathew (Vice President) Mr. Jai Johnson (Secretary) Mrs. Anu George (Lady Rep.) gave farewell speeches. The parish expressed its deep gratitude to Zacharias Thirumeni for the guidance and spiritual leadership for the last 8 years and wished him all spiritual and physical well being in the coming years. The parish Treasurer Mr. Oommen Easow presented Thirumeni a farewell gift on behalf of the parish.

The Annual Convention of the Mar Thoma Church of Los Angeles was held at the Church from September 28 to



The First Communicants William and Merrill with Zacharias Thirumeni and Rev. David Daniel.

30, 2001. Rev. Dr. George Samuel, Chicago was the main speaker. Thought provoking, spirit-reviving messages were reflective of the recent disasters inflicted on freedom loving humanity by the evildoers. The message reminded that God's gift of freedom and choice to His people comes with responsibility. The messages were forceful enough to break the "hard rock" hearts of the members who were ready to respond positively to the call.

The messages were very helpful for the people to cope with the tragedies of the nation and its aftermath. It was also a time of self-reflection.

The members of the parish pray and wish Rev. Dr. George Samuel all the best, who is returning to Kerala after his doctoral studies, to continue the ministry of spiritual revival.

Rev. David Daniel, Vicar

THE MAR THOMA CHURCH STATEN ISLAND



Zacharias Thirumeni with the invited firemen from the Port Richmond Ladder Company 80

The Mar Thoma Church Staten Island, in a special function, bid farewell to the Diocesan Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus on September 30, 2001. The Diocesan Secretary, Rev. Dr. John Joseph was also present. Thirumeni celebrated Holy Communion service prior to the function. Vicar Rev. Samuel M. Samuel and Vice President Mr. Jacob Chacko felicitated the Thirumeni. Treasurer, Mr. Sabu Abraham presented a farewell gift to Thirumeni, and Secretary, Dr. John K. Thomas gave the vote of thanks. In his address, the Thirumeni expressed profound thanks to the parish members for their support, cooperation and love.

Thirumeni inaugurated a Fund Raising Raffle of the Yuvajana Sakhyam, giving the first raffle ticket to the Diocesan Secretary Achen.



Treasurer Sabu Abraham giving the check for \$11,100 to New York Fire Fighters Disaster-9-11 Relief Fund.

Thirumeni also participated in the special meeting to express condolences over the tragic terrorist attack and also presented a check for \$11,100 to the invited firemen of the Port Richmond Ladder Company 80. The donation would go to the New York Fire Fighters Disaster-9-11 Relief Fund. In a resolution passed earlier, the parish expressed support for the rescue efforts and solidarity with the nation in its sorrow.

The recent regional competitions of the Sevika Sanghom and Sunday School saw active participation from our parish. Our Sevika Sanghom brought home the first prize in the Bible Quiz.

Rev. Samuel M. Samuel, Vicar

MAR THOMA FEST 2001 – THE MAR THOMA CHURCH OF DALLAS, FARMERS BRANCH

Mar Thoma Fest 2001, the annual fall festival of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas at Farmers Branch was celebrated on September 30th. Mar Thoma Fest was an occasion to celebrate the Mar Thoma Day, proclaimed by the City of Farmers Branch to commemorate the laying of the foundation stone of our church on October 2, 1994. On this day, the whole community was invited to share the joy of our blessings and witness the mission and outreach projects of our church. The theme of Mar Thoma Fest was "Giving the Deaf a Voice". The focus of the celebration is to bring community awareness and support for the hearing impaired students at the Industrial Training Center (I T C) in Kasargod, Kerala.

ITC is one of the projects operated by The Society to Educate, Aid, Rehabilitate and Care the Handicapped (SEARCH), a society registered by Kunnankulam-Malabar Diocese in 1992 for initiating rehabilitation programs for the handicapped in North Kerala. The ITC program offers hearing impaired students, national and state Government certificate or diplomas in Electrician Training, Electrical Engineering, Aluminum Fabrication, Tailoring, Computer courses and Farming Technology. In the dawn of the new millennium, the members of the MTC in Farmers Branch pledged to undertake the full sponsorship of ITC, as one of its Silver Jubilee mission and outreach project. The support for the students at ITC, gave a special meaning and purpose behind the celebration of Mar Thoma Fest each year.

This year the members of the church decided to fund the construction of a new hostel, kitchen and cafeteria for 50 students at an estimated cost of \$12,000.00. This is in addition to the support of the recurring and non-recurring expenses of the center.

To bring community awareness and support for ITC, the Mar Thoma Fest 2001 was advertised in newspapers and on Radio. This generated a big support from major local business and individuals who readily came forward to sponsor the activities of the festival. Farmers Branch City Manager, Mr. Richard Escalante and Rev. V. M. Thomas, representing the Ecumenical churches in Dallas inaugurated the festival at 3:00 P.M. Afternoon activities included fun games and rides for children, live music, talent show, food and fellowship for everyone. Booths were set up for various business, ministries, church organizations and prayer groups

to display their activities and programs. Cultural programs including skits, folk dances by our members and a musical concert by the Holy Beats group were held in the evening. Two airline tickets from DFW to India, Saris, U S Savings Bond and gift certificates donated by our sponsors were auctioned. Local India Association donated the proceeds from the sale of patriotic T-shirts to the ITC project. Some lucky people won attractive prizes during raffle drawings. Thanks to all the Mar Thoma Fest committee members and volunteers under the leadership of the vicar, Rev. P. Mathew, and convener T. P. Mathew for a commendable job in coordinating the event.

Mar Thoma Fest 2001 also became a witness of our community to show solidarity with fellow Americans in support for the victims of the terrorist attack on September 11th. A special fund for the victims was raised and a sum of \$5000.00 was contributed to the Spirit of America Relief fund sponsored by the Dallas Morning News and WFM TV for the American Red Cross. A slide show and a skit about the tragic events of September 11th, a day we will never forget, were presented to remember and honor the victims.

Mar Thoma Fest 2001 is history now but it was a historical event in the life of our church. We thank God for this type of an ongoing and direct sponsorship arrangement we have with the ITC. This has definitely helped to invigorate the missionary zeal of the members of Mar Thoma Church of Dallas in Farmers Branch and brought our church and the community closer than ever.

POSTER PRESENTATION AWARD

Mar Thoma Church of Dallas at Farmers Branch won the 1st place in the Poster Presentation competition at the XIX Mar Thoma Family conference held in Philadelphia this year. Historical documents and photographs arranged in chronological order visibly showed the grace and providence of God during the last 25 years of our growth from humble origins to one of the largest parish in the diocese. It was a special honor for the members to receive this award in the presence of our Metropolitan during the silver jubilee celebrations. Our thanks to the Vicar, Rev. P. Mathew, Mr. Alex Chacko and Mr. Philip Kochyll for the team effort in winning this great trophy for the church.

Thomas Andrews, Secretary

XIX MAR THOMA FAMILY CONFERENCE, UK

Being a *diaspora* community far away from the homeland the Marthomites in UK and Europe find it hard to keep up the faith and heritage while living in a different culture. The Western lifestyle has already made tremendous influence on our community, especially on the second generation. As the people are scattered all over Europe, many of them are living and working far away from the worshipping places and thus unable to participate in the Sunday services and other regular activities of the church.

Looking back, we have to thank God for our humble beginning. It all began when three families assembled at the Indian YMCA, London in 1957 to sing and pray together. At present we have two parishes in London, St. John's Mar Thoma Parish in Hounslow (West London) and St. James Mar Thoma Parish in Central London, with almost 100 families each. Also we have two congregations: one in Germany and another one in Switzerland. There are other Marthomites living and working in France, Italy, Austria, Belgium

and other European countries. We are thankful to the leadership and guidance given by the Metropolitans, the Diocesan Episcopas, the previous Achens and the lay leaders in the past.

The annual family conference is an occasion in which all our members can come together to have spiritual nourishment, the joy of living together, sharing the fellowship, meeting new friends and so on. The Conference was first organized in 1982 at Oxford University under the able and farsighted leadership of Rev. Abraham Philip and Mr. V. M. Kattappuram. In the initial years it was convened as a Youth Conference and later became a Family Conference.

The XIX family conference was held from Aug 17-19 at the High Leigh Conference Center at Hoddesdon in the outskirts of London. The theme of the Conference was "... **therefore choose life.**" (Deut.30:19). The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa led us in the main talk and Rev. Sham P. Thomas led the Bible study session. Rev. Jules Gomez, a research scholar at Cambridge University and his wife Mrs. Kshitija Gomez served as resident counselors. There were 165 participants who were divided into three age groups viz. the adult group, the youth group, and the Sunday school group. Each group met separately except for the opening and concluding sessions.

A souvenir, containing articles highlighting the different view points regarding the theme, earlier experiences in the Conference, mission challenges of the Church, etc. was released by Thirumeni in the opening session. We thank the Mar Thoma Metropolitan, the Archbishop of Canterbury, our Diocesan bishop et al. who have sent messages and best wishes through the pages of the Souvenir.

The main thrusts while discussing the theme were: "What is life, how it is entrusted with us, and what are our responsibilities to fulfill the task?" Expounding on the theme Thirumeni highlighted how good life is as it is a gift of God,

a choice by us, and a commitment for us to share. Jesus' life as the model for fullness of life was explained in various heads such as i) Jesus Christ brought newness of life, ii) Life in incarnation, iii) Life in history, iv) Life in Galilee, v) Life in service, vi) Life in death, vii) Life in Resurrection and so on.

Then the question turned to us. What is the meaning and relevance of life today? What models can we find in Jesus Christ? How did Jesus respond to the challenging situations? The challenges of becoming a martyr, consecrating life for the poorest of the poor, life as a struggle against evil, life for the well-being of the community, the sacramental element, etc. were highlighted and discussed in detail. In the bible study session the chief call was to return to life abundant.

The following points were considered in the discussion groups.

1. The life negating factors in the context of UK and Europe and our Christian response.
2. Cultural variations and affirmation of life
3. The possibility, potential, willingness and commitment to have a meaningful life of faith in Europe without losing our heritage.
4. The mission of the Mar Thoma Church in Europe to the people on this Continent.

On the whole, the Conference was an enriching experience for all those who participated. The Rev. V. V. Alexander, Rev. K. V. Cherian, Mr. V. T. Abraham, Mr. Prakash Abraham and others chaired and led various sessions.

The conference was hosted by the St. James Mar Thoma Church UK. Mr. Jacob George and Mr. Koshy Abraham served as the General convenors and Mrs. Mary Abraham as the convenor of the Souvenir Committee.

Rev. Prasad Mathew, Conference President

ASSOCIATION OF PHYSICIANS AND DENTISTS OF MAR THOMA CHURCH



The attendees with Metropolitan

The Annual Conference of the members of the Association of Physicians and Dentists was held at Montrose Bible Conference Center, Montrose, Pennsylvania from July 20-22, 2001. The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Metropolitan was the leader of the Conference. Rev. Dr. John Joseph, Diocesan Secretary was also present at the Conference.

The main topic of discussions was "Baptism and Marriage" — Its relevance and importance as we believe and practice. Holy Communion was celebrated by the Metropolitan on Sunday July 22nd and at the concluding session, an 'Award of Honor' was presented to Chrysostom Thirumeni on behalf of the Association by its president Dr. Mrs. Mariamma Thomas.



Award of honor presented to Metropolitan by Dr. Mariamma Thomas, president on behalf of the Association of Physicians and Dentists of Mar Thoma Church of North America.

The Association of Physicians and Dentists was inaugurated in 1991 by the late Most Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan in the presence of the then Diocesan Bishop The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom. The next year's Conference will be held at Warwick Conference Center, Warwick, New York from July 19-21, 2002.

NEW MAR THOMA CONGREGATION IN COLUMBUS, OHIO



The youngest congregation in the Diocese of North America & Europe had the privilege of a visit by Zacharias Thirumeni on Tuesday, September 25, 2001. Thirumeni officially inaugurated this congregation and conducted the Holy Communion Service. Rev. Sonny Thomas and Rev. P. Chacko were also present during the service. The members of this small congregation is indeed thankful to Thirumeni for his love and consideration and blessing when he had only ten more days in this Diocese before leaving for the Madras-Calcutta Diocese. Rev. Sonny Thomas, vicar of the Detroit Mar Thoma Church was asked by the Diocesan Bishop to look after the interest of this congregation. For further information please contact Mr. Jacob Vengal, 3318 Wigham Court, Pickerington, OH 43147-9523. Tel: (614) 501-7678.

C. V. Samuel, Detroit, MI

Members with Zacharias Thirumeni after forming Columbus Mar Thoma Congregation.

Recently 15 Mar Thoma families in Columbus, Ohio along with members of other sister churches of Kerala, held a prayer meeting at the residence of Mr. Jacob Vengal. At their request, permission was granted by Zacharias Thirumeni to start a Mar Thoma Congregation in Columbus, Ohio. The first Holy Communion Service was held on Sunday, August 19, 2001 by The Rev. Sonny Thomas, Vicar of the Detroit Mar Thoma Church. Several members of the Detroit Mar Thoma Church and several family members from CSI and Jacobite churches were also present at this momentous occasion.



Zacharias Thirumeni at the Messenger Booth during the inauguration of Columbus Mar Thoma Congregation.

“ We are no more a foreign church in the United States, but a well-rooted American Church measured not by its number but by its Mission, Vision, and Witness. ”

*Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus
on September 22, 2001 at NY*

A NEW PARISH IN TORONTO



Representatives from Anglican Church of Canada, Orthodox Church, CSI Church and other sister churches with Zacharias Thirumeni attending the inauguration of St. Mathew's Mar Thoma Church, Toronto.

Photo: Jacob Joseph

A new parish has been formed in the west end of Greater Toronto Area. This parish will be more convenient for our members who live in Mississauga, Brampton, Hamilton, Brantford, Guelph, Cambridge, Waterloo, Stratford, London and St. Thomas.

For the Mar Thoma families living in these cities and smaller towns, it was a dream come true to have a parish closer to home. The steady growth of our membership in these areas made this dream a reality. A formal request from prayer groups in these areas through an elected ad-hoc committee, under the leadership of Rev. George Mathew and Rev. Mathew Thomas, began the process for the formation of a new parish.

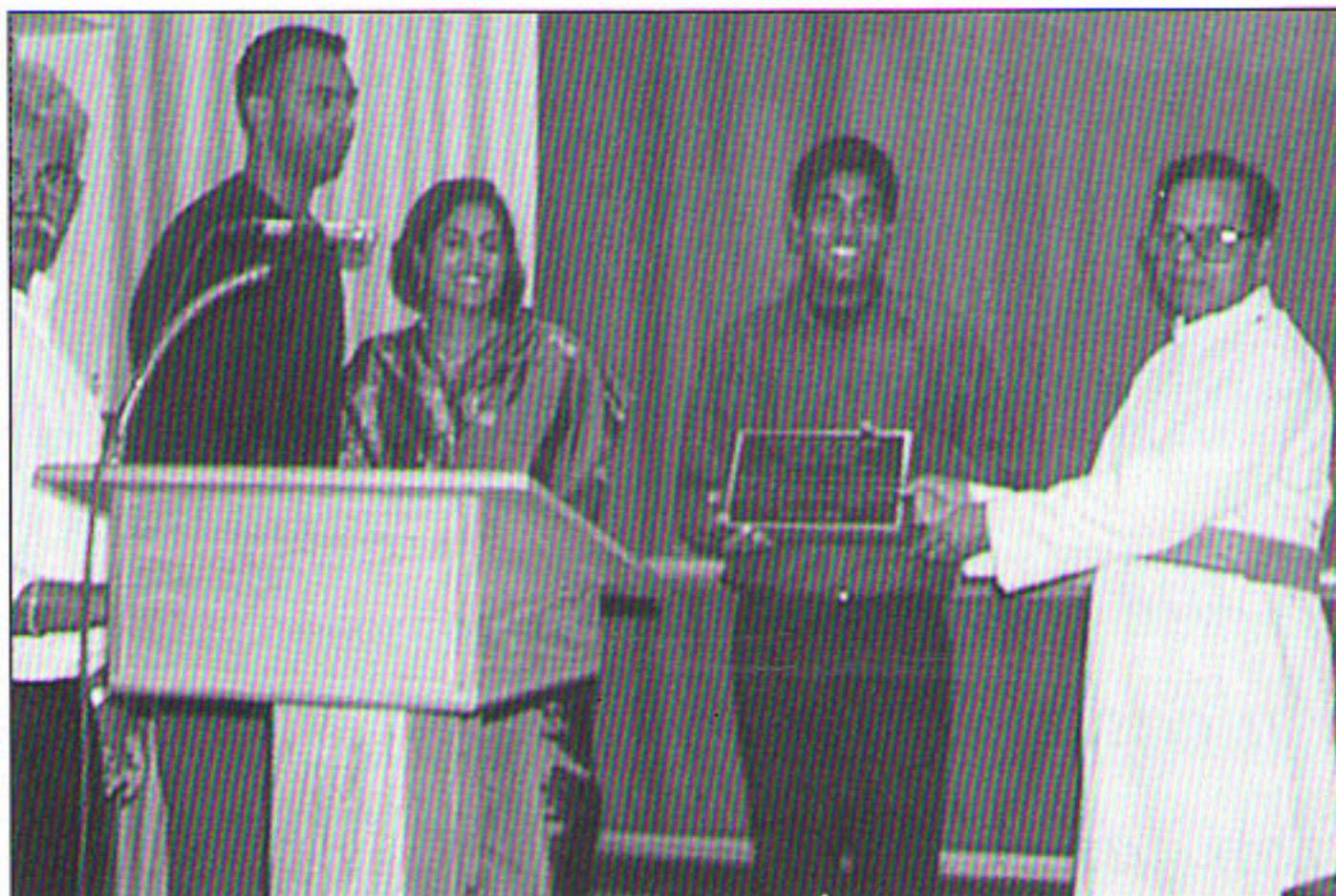
The ad-hoc committee submitted an application for a new parish to the Diocesan Bishop The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus. Thirumeni's leadership, guidance and favorable recommendation to the Mar Thoma Synod granted our wish. His Grace The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan, named the new parish ST. MATHEW'S MAR THOMA CHURCH, TORONTO.

The Inaugural Holy Communion service of this new parish was celebrated by Zacharias Thirumeni on July 22, 2001 and it was followed by a public meeting. Bishops and clergy from the Anglican Church of Canada, Orthodox Church, Catholic Church, CSI Church and other sister churches attended the event and gave their felicitations. Vicar General Very Rev. P. M. George, and the new Vicar Rev. Mathew Thomas congratulated the members of the new parish for their dedication and hard work to achieve this goal.

Now there are about 100 families in the new parish and it is growing. Worship services are held at 12:30 p.m. on Sundays at Christ Anglican Church in Toronto.

Rev. Mathew Thomas, Vicar

CANADIAN MAR THOMA CHURCH, TORONTO



Master Shane Thomas receiving a plaque from Very Rev. P. M. George for his outstanding achievement by scoring first place in the Diocesan Sunday School Examination (Jr. High Division) on August 19, 2001. Also in the picture are Ms. Anita Samuel, Sunday School Superintendent; Jason Joseph and Mr. Samuel Pappy, Eastern Region Coordinator, Diocesan Sunday School.

TRINITY MAR THOMA CHURCH, HOUSTON



The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan with the Trinity Mar Thoma Church Sunday School students who received prizes for the Diocesan Sunday School Examination held on May 13, 2001.

LONG ISLAND MAR THOMA CHURCH



Parish Summer Camp participants with Sabu Achen at Indian Lake, Burlingham, N.Y.

The Long Island Mar Thoma Church, consisting of 160 families celebrated its 14th Parish Day on Sunday, July 1, 2001 with Rev. Dr. John Joseph, Diocesan Secretary as the Chief Guest. There are seven prayer groups, which meet regularly for prayer and Bible Study. The parish received the Best Parish Award of 2000 from the Diocesan Bishop.

The parish actively participated in the 19th Family Conference at Philadelphia, in the National Youth Conference at Los Angeles and in the Junior & Senior Conference at New York. The Long Island Parish was the second largest participating parish in the Family Conference and won 2nd prize in the Poster Presentation, 2nd prize in the Choir competition and 3 first prizes in the sports competitions.

Graduating Students' Recognition Ceremony was held on July 15. Eleven School graduates were felicitated and honored. Dr. T. M. Thomas was the chief guest. The graduating students jointly donated an amount to be used for the education of deserving students. The amount was given away for the education of Sextons' children in the Kunnamkulam-Malabar Diocese and for sponsoring two theological students in the *Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peet, Delhi*.

A Sports Meet cum Picnic was organized on July 28 in order to create and maintain the spirit of sports among the members.

The Annual Convention was held from August 9 to 12. Dr. T. V. Thomas, Canada was the main speaker. New Academic Year dedication service for the students was held on August 19, 2001.

A three-day Summer Camp of the Parish was held from August 24 to 26, at Indian Lake, Burlingham, N.Y. Classes and discussions were held based on the themes—*Authentic Christian Living, Authentic Family Life and Authentic Abiding in Christ*. There was time for spiritual as well as physical exercises.

The Parish responded to the national tragedy on September 11 with heart and soul. We conducted prayer services at the Church. The Members donated blood. Materials were collected and given to the rescue workers. A substantial amount was collected from the members towards the SEPTEMBER 11 FUND. A silent procession was organized on Sunday,

September 23 immediately after the service. All the members who had come for the service participated in the procession holding candles and National Flags. The neighborhood and the local community very well appreciated the procession.

Senior Citizens' Day was observed on Sunday, September 30, 2001. Thirty eight senior members who are 60 and above were honored

by the parish in a special meeting. Special gifts were given to them. Mr. Thomas Koshy, Washington gave the message.

A joint retreat for the Executive Committee and the office bearers of organization was held on Saturday, October 6, 2001 at the Church. The subject of study was *Leading People to their Objectives*. It was a time to make aware of the responsibilities and duties of each committee member and the office bearer in the building up of the community of the faithful.



Members with Sabu Achen after the Senior Citizen's Day function.

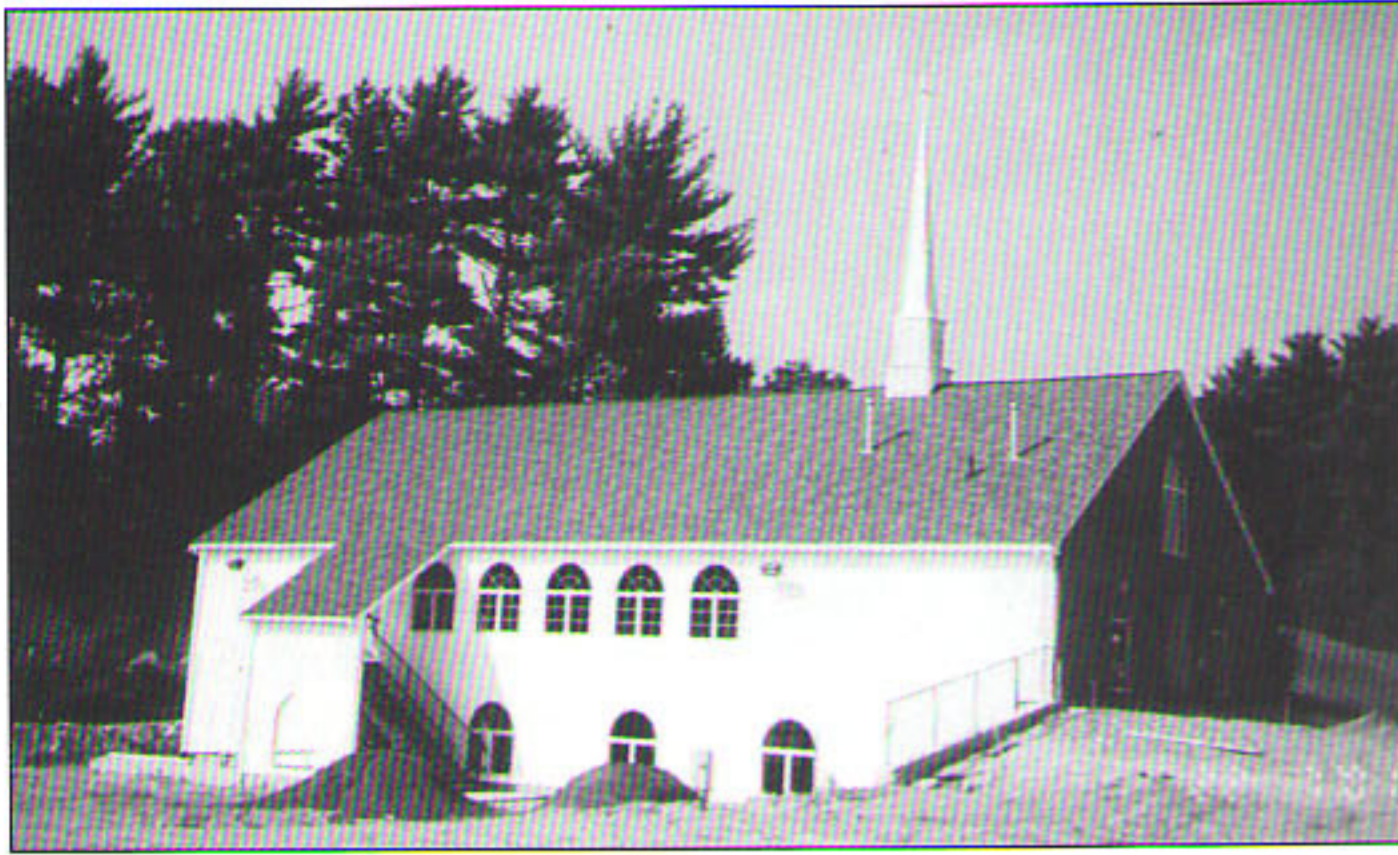
New Academic Year Dedication Service was held for the students on August 12. V.B.S. was held on August 2-5, for four full days. Teachers' dedication service and a retreat for the teachers were organized. Four students won distinction in the Diocesan Sunday School Exam 2001. The Sunday School received 3 first prizes, 2 second prizes and 6 third prizes in the Regional Sunday School competition held on September 29.

Regular bible studies and prayer meetings are being held for Sevika Sanghom, Edavaka Mission, Youth Fellowship and Yuvajana Sakhyam. A Music Team has been organized within the Youth Fellowship and they presented a Music and praise night on 7th October. Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos, Diocesan Episcopa was the Chief Guest. Thirumeni offered his first Holy Communion Service as the Diocesan Episcopa at the Long Island Mar Thoma Church on October 7, 2001.

Mr. Samuel Chacko serves the parish as the Vice President, Mr. Thomas Oonnoony as the Treasurer, Mr. Chacko Mathew as the Secretary, Mr. Shaju Sam as the Accountant, Mr. Yohannan Jacob and Mr. Shawn Rajan as the Lay Leaders. Rev. K. P. Sabu serves the Parish as the Vicar from May 2001.

Rev. K. P. Sabu, Vicar

A NEW SANTUARY FOR CARMEL MAR THOMA CHURCH, BOSTON



A cherished dream of the Carmel Mar Thoma Church Boston was accomplished by having a church building of their own. At present we have only 55 families, and it is because of the enthusiasm of this small community that they could finish a church building project of \$800,000. The newly built church is situated in a beautiful place close to 495 highway. The church has a beautiful sanctuary that can accommodate 300 persons and a finished basement which can also accommodate more than 250 persons. The construction of this new sanctuary is a great help for the members of the Mar Thoma Church scattered in the states of Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts to come together for worship.

Boston was one of the destinations of early Mar Thoma immigrants. The early immigrants consisted of students and professionals, and they organized joint worship services. Later the Marthomites organized their own congregation and



used the sanctuary of the Episcopal church of Burlington for worship. Since 1995 the members of this parish felt the need to have their own worship place for two reasons, the number of families increased and the rented space was insufficient to conduct the activities of the parish. A building committee was formed in 1995 and they started searching for a land or

a church building. In 1999 we were able to purchase two acres of land in Hudson, and our Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus laid the foundation stone for the new building on April 2, 2000. The church building committee with Thampi Kurien as its convener, did a commendable job to finish the building in time. The dedication of the new church building was done on June 23, 2001 by our Diocesan Episcopa. The dedication service and the public meeting were largely attended by the members of



sister churches and the local community. Rev. Dr. John Joseph, and Rev. Alexander M. Isaac also attended the dedication service. After the dedication service, a public meeting was held in the newly built church. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Diocesan Bishop presided over the meeting. Felicitations were given by Dr. Bryan Stone (Boston University), Rev. Bill Biggs (Walker Ecumenical Center, Boston), Pastor Neil Davidson (Grace Baptist Church Hudson), Mr. John Kelly (St. Mark's Episcopal Church Burlington), Rev. Ivan Alberts (CSI Church Boston), Rev. Alexander M. Isaac, and Mr. John Abraham.

The meeting started with the prayer of Rev. Dr. John Joseph. Mr. Thampi Kurien, the Convener of the Building Committee presented the report while the vicar Rev. Alex Thomas welcomed the gathering, and Mr. Rajan George gave the vote of thanks. The youth and adult choir of the parish also participated in the public meeting.

Zacharias Thirumeni led the first Holy Communion service in the new Church on June 24, 2001 which was followed by a send off meeting to Thirumeni. The parish members are thankful to Thirumeni for his commendable leadership and support to finish this project.

Rev. Alex Thomas, Vicar

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Commander P. M. Varghese

*Lord help me to grow in grace
Thus with joy finish my race
See my Savior face to face
Always in that glorious place.*

*May your Word in me take root
That it should produce the fruit
Thirty, sixty, hundred fold
Not backslide to ways of old.*

*With your knowledge help me grow
For tomorrow no sorrow
Knowing God of truth, and Son
Surely life e'er lasting won.*

*Show your way that I should take
Guide me follow in your wake
Lead me in your truth my God
In you is salvation Lord.*

*Thank you for your gift of love
Jesus Christ from up above
Glory be to God on high
Who remains ever so nigh.*

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

The article "A Shift in Paradigm" by Thomas Mathew published in Mar Thoma Messenger, July, 2001 is not only interesting but also most encouraging. While reminding his readers that Marthomites in North America is a community in quick transition, he appears to stimulate the Marthomites to ask questions and challenges them to change the ways of operations instead of clinging on to age old practices just because "that is the way it always has been." For example, in most of our churches men and women sit in two separate sections with children dispersed all over the church. In local churches families sit together. Perhaps this may be the only time in a week, family members sit together, next to each other, because of busy schedules in everyone's life. Besides, by sitting together, children will attend and participate in church services, instead of wandering around in some instances. An opportunity to encourage the togetherness in a family unit is lost by following our age-old practice.

I agree with Mr. Mathew when he says that our liturgy needs revision. If the Late Abraham Malpan took initiative to change the liturgy from Syriac to Malayalam and took a firm stand against the then ingrained practices such as serving "pookaila" to all male guests at weddings, we too should be courageous to take a stand in the needed areas—be that liturgy, bible study, structure or mission. I once asked one of our Bishops why our liturgy contains so many repetitions. His reply that "back then we did not have printed books and hence repetitions were necessary" was an eye-opener for me. I am a firm believer that the richness embedded in Mar Thoma liturgy should not be compromised.

Bible Study is of paramount importance as it is the Life-line of a Christian's life. There are numerous excellent Bible studies available in this country. Hence we do not have to re-invent the wheel. A Christian longs to be fed with the word of God. If we do not feed ourselves how can we feed our children, grandchildren and others? Israel was commanded to tell the wonders God manifested to their succeeding generations. As Christians we have certain duties and obligations to our immediate families and to the community at large. Are we fulfilling that mandate? We have Christ's mandate "to go into all the nations and make disciples" Let us do this by beginning our mission at home and then expanding it to the community and to the world at large.

Mr. Mathew talks about operating our parishes 7 days a week 24 hours a day. I agree with him as the members will need help at unpredictable times and we should be available to offer our support when needed. However we should not expect our vicars to be available to the same extent. It is impossible for the priests to function effectively with out having some time off. The local priests get at least one day off a week with 2-3 weeks vacation in summer. At present, as far as I have seen, our vicars do not even get a day off. We seem to look up to our priest for everything and therefore his presence is needed for almost every church activity. Parishioners in local churches accept the lay leadership and hence many programs are run simultaneously. Local churches usually have a paid full or part-time secretary and an administrator, depending on the size of the parish. They also have scores of volunteers who have identified their gifts and offer services to other parishioners without seeking recognition for their contributions. In many cases the volunteers have been equipped and trained by the priests. We have a lot to learn and emulate from effective local churches. I also believe that our priests assigned to North American parishes will benefit from a 2-3 day orientation course offered at a central location, using qualified and experienced leaders who are familiar with Eastern and Western cultures.

We have many people on church committees but they are not necessarily equipped to provide the spiritual and biblical support that the members need from time to time. The Bible says that "unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it." It is the power of the Holy Spirit that changes lives and not programs or buildings although these are needed to accomplish His desired growth in us.

Our parishes must be reformed to reflect the image of the first Church in Jerusalem. It is my prayer that together we will learn from the Bible and seek God's help in reshaping our parishes to fulfill His plans for us.

Yours in Christ's Love,

Marykutti Philip
The Canadian Mar Thoma Church, Toronto

September 24, 2001

Editorial

We are living in unprecedented days. We have watched in disbelief and horror as our nation's great tragedy unfolded on television on that fateful morning of September 11, 2001. It is amazing how a single event could change the lives of so many people, not only that of the thousands related to the missing or dead, but also of millions across this great nation and outside its borders. Since the last six weeks or so, we have been a changed people—a little more gentle, a little more cognizant of the fact that our life is precious but short, that every day we get to live in this world is a gift from God and that 'no man is an island' and, therefore, we need each other.

Sometimes we wonder "Why would God allow this to happen?" We can of course never fully comprehend in this life the 'why' and 'wherefore' of God's dealing with us in our everyday life. The Rev. Billy Graham tried to answer this question during the National Day of Prayer on Friday the September 14th when he said "I have to accept, by faith, that God is sovereign and He is a God of love and mercy and compassion in the midst of suffering. The Bible says God is not the author of evil." At a time when we experience so much uncertainty and fear of the unknown, it is good to know that Jesus is the answer. He is the answer for those with troubled minds—for He never leaves us or forsakes us. Our hearts and prayers are with those who lost their dear ones and all those who risked their lives to help others—the police officers, the firefighters, the medical personnel and hundreds of volunteers. Our thoughts and prayers are also with the dear ones of two of our own—Mrs. Valsa Raju and Mrs. Sneha Ann Philip M.D.

After eight years of selfless service to our diocese, Zacharias Thirumeni has left New York on October 5, 2001 to take up his new assignment as the Diocesan Bishop of the Madras/Calcutta, Malaysia/Singapore and Australia diocese. Zacharias Thirumeni came to this diocese at a time when it was in its infant stage. We had about twenty six parishes/congregations and 12,000 members in our diocese then, but today we have seventy parishes/congregations and close to 30,000 members in our diocese. So in terms of growth in number and activities, we have had phenomenal success. From the very beginning, Zacharias Thirumeni wanted to look for the 'lost sheep' in different and distant regions of the United States, Canada and Europe and bring them together as a congregation so as to enable them to avail themselves of the services of a Mar Thoma priest.

The establishment of the first diocesan center in Philadelphia, the construction and dedication of the new Sinai Center in Long Island, the consecration of Rev. Roy Thomas as the first *Kasseessa* from our second generation American Marthomites, bringing together the youth of our diocese through various activities and forums with the help of two youth chaplains, encouraging and guiding various organizations of the Church especially Sunday School and Sevikasanghom each to its full potential, maintaining high level personal relationship with the Episcopal Church and other Church leaders on a global basis, the acceptance of Mar Thoma Church as a member of the NCC, are some of the achievements of the Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus. As a member of the Central Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, Zacharias Thirumeni has been able to maintain a strong and lasting relationship with different world church leaders, thereby elevating the position of the Mar Thoma Church to a higher level of global perspective. We wish Zacharias Thirumeni the very best and pray to God to shower His choicest blessings upon him and keep him in His tender care for years to come.

We are fortunate to have the leadership services of our new Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos. Coorilos Thirumeni is personally known to many members of our diocese ever since he served as Vicar of our parishes in Staten Island, Philadelphia (Bethel), Washington D.C., Baltimore and Florida before he was consecrated as Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church on September 12, 1989.

After a decade of progress both in number and activities, our diocese has now entered into a new phase of its existence as part of a global church. The next decade will bring forth a different set of problems and possibilities, a different set of priorities and accomplishments. The second generation American Marthomites have to be encouraged and supported not only to take up more and more leadership roles in our parishes but also to join the ministry by undergoing theological studies. Our status quo as a worshipping community needs to be transformed as a witnessing community. A large number of our members are at the threshold of their retirement ages and as a Church, we need to think about building up retirement communities. And the list goes on...

With the able leadership of our new Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos, we will, as a diocese, achieve and accomplish many things. We welcome you and uphold you Thirumeni, in our daily prayers so that the Almighty God will strengthen you and guide you as you take up the responsibilities and challenges of this great diocese.

Abraham Mattackal

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