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A PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

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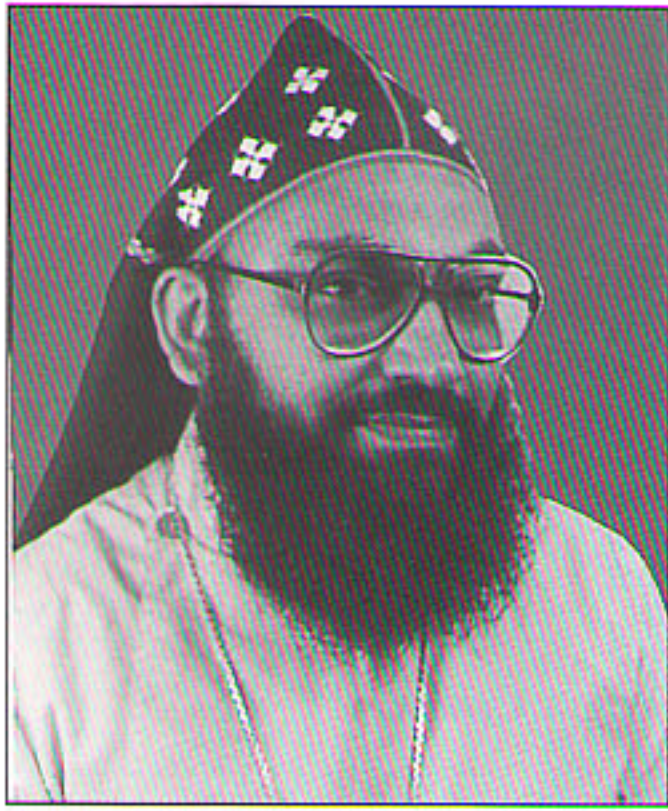
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Presidential Address

Diocesan Assembly: June 3 & 4, 2005



It is my pleasant privilege to address the Diocesan Assembly of the Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church. This being the first session of the newly constituted Assembly, I extend a warm welcome to all of you. I am counting on your creative contributions, deliberations and involvement in the overall functioning of the Diocese. At the outset, let us resolve that we will do our very best to make our Diocese more dynamic and lively so that the mission entrusted to us by our Lord would find fruition.

I am indeed indebted to you for the cooperation and support in the activities of the Diocese. I cherish the love and fellowship that I receive from our Achen and fellow believers. This makes me humble and more responsible in the Lord's ministry. I am also looking forward to your continued support and fellowship.

Context of our Ministry

As you are aware, last year the plethora of catastrophes and the stunning array of calamities, both natural and man-made, have unleashed innumerable pain and suffering far and wide. The gigantic waves of Tsunami washed away scores of our brothers and sisters along with the flora and fauna for reasons that are beyond our comprehension. In the context of such natural calamities, many have wondered whether God is at work in the world and how does He allow such tragedies to happen. While agnostics and nihilists have found one more occasion to declare their ideology of a Godless world, the people of faith and philanthropists worldwide took a different course. The response to the victims and the survivors of the disaster was overwhelming. I express my sincere thanks to all of you for your timely response. So far, we have received \$364,096.00 towards this cause.

We are also aware of human hostility in its myriad forms such as terrorism, ethnic cleansing and exploitation. How do we respond to such issues? The Hindu daily dated July 18, 2004 had the story of an aircrew that showed exemplary courage and sacrifice in a crisis situation. On September 5, 1986, in Karachi, Neerja Bhanot, a 23 year old Indian air hostess followed the hijack code beyond the call of professional duty. Even after being hit by the hijackers' bullet and eventually breathing her last, she could save the life of several of the passengers. In a newspaper interview her mother recalled: "One day, she told me about training to confront hijacking, given by Pan Am. As a mother I had advised her to run away or hide if hijacking took place, and look, she did the opposite". Our Master also challenges us to go beyond the standards of the world and to do the opposite.

At the heights of his wisdom King Solomon said: "I am here on earth for just a little while" (Psalms 119:19). God doesn't allow us to get attached to what is around us as it is transitory. "All that is not eternal is eternally useless," says C. S. Lewis. The challenge before us is whether we can keep this in mind and stand for eternal values, viz., the values of the Kingdom of God at all levels.

Revitalization

Ours is a world of plurality: a world that is divided on ethnic, linguistic, and caste issues. It seems very often that the forces of Babel are still at work. Yet in the midst of such chaotic forces, from the perspective of faith, signs of hope could be discerned. The Malayalam poet Balachandran Chullikad wrote: "I am white, you are brown, but both our shadows are black." This is reminiscent of the words of the Psalmist: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity" (Ps. 133). What is at stake everywhere is the dimension of relationships; relationship between countries, religions, churches and members of the Parishes. Hence what is to be underscored is participatory communication. In order to have spiritual dynamism in our Parishes and in the wider community, we need to have mutual encouragement, acceptance and a dialogical existence.

Here I acknowledge the contributions of The Late Pope John Paul II who at the threshold of the new millennium wrote: "The challenge of the new millennium is the evangelization of the unevangelized and the re-evangelization of the evangelized". I strongly believe this as the need of our times. I pray that Almighty God may strengthen the new Pope Benedict XVI to lead the Church to new heights.

The New Episcopa

Though the Episcopal Nomination Board recommended two candidates, it was unfortunate that only one was elected by the special Mandalam. By God's grace, the consecration of Ramban Rev. Dr. K. U. Abraham took place on May 14, 2005 in Thiruvalla. On behalf of this Assembly, I congratulate and offer our prayerful support to The Rt. Rev. Dr. Abraham Mar Paulose in his ministry in the days to come.

Organizational Witness

The foundational objectives of the various organizations are to give spiritual edification and Christian nurture to different age groups so that our witness in the community would be credible. I am glad to see that the various organizations such as Sunday School, Youth Fellowship, Sevika Sanghom and Edavaka Mission are active at various levels. In addition, we have other organizations like Young Families Fellowship, Doctors' Fellowship, Educators'

Fellowship, Nurses Fellowship and so on. All of them contribute to the growth of the Diocese. I gratefully appreciate all their work.

The Diocesan Sunday School is making significant leaps in developing its own curriculum in association with the Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam. This laborious work is undertaken by the representatives of various Sunday Schools under the meticulous leadership of Dr. T. M. Thomas. This year they have already done five lessons and by next year, I hope we will have our own curriculum. I commend and appreciate their work and pray that the Lord will enable us to actualize their efforts.

Pastoral Ministry

I take this opportunity to place on record the valuable services rendered by the Achens who were transferred back to India this year. The ministry of the youth chaplains among the youngsters is worth mentioning. I also welcome all the new Achens who are to replace the outgoing team. Let us pray that their ministry will enrich the Diocese in its witness.

Mexico Mission and Mission Among the Native Americans

The most significant decision of the previous Assembly was to start the Mission work in the Mexican Islands and among the Native Americans. As you are aware, this project is named as the Mar Chrysostom Golden Jubilee project in commemoration of his Episcopal ministry. By God's grace, we have already adopted the Pontia Norte and Fantasia Islands on the East coast of Mexico. We have already constructed and handed over new houses to all the homeless in both Islands. We also have a tailoring school, medical camp and so on there. We have already announced summer programs for this year. We are also going to have four VBS this summer for the children of the Native Americans. In recognition of our work, the Federal Government in Mexico has offered us 20 acres of land. Once the land is made available, it's my dream and the decision of the Mission Board to start two hostels for the children of the island: one for boys and one for girls, a medical clinic and a mission center in the long run. Eventually, we have to appoint an Achen as our missionary there. On Jan. 25, 2003 when I declared the inaugural day as the 'second phase of the Diocese', I never expected such a dynamic growth in a short span of time. By God's grace and with the support of all, our mission endeavor is in full swing. I earnestly request your wholehearted cooperation in all our mission activities.

The involvement of our second generation in the mission endeavor and in parish work is an encouraging sign. After having visited the Mexican Islands, some of the youngsters wrote to me "Thirumeni, now I am proud to be a Marthomite." This shows that they have started to own the Church more than ever. I want to congratulate the elders for the magnanimity that they have shown in promoting the youngsters in our parish life. Now we have three ordained youngsters who are citizens of this country. I pray and wish that within 10-15 years at least 50% of the Achens of the Diocese must be from this place itself for which the encouragement of parents is inevitable.

Spiritual Life and Christian nurture

I believe that all our people must find time to study the Word of God and the faith and doctrines of the church. During Youth Fellowship Conferences, they always ask for study books on the Faith and Practice of the Church. We are in the process of publishing a few such booklets. All are urged to make use of these study booklets.

Condolence

I thank God for the services of Rev. T. I. Joseph. He was instrumental in the formation of our parishes in Houston and other places. Achen's funeral service took place at the Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Houston on November 18, 2004. I thank the parish for having arranged the funeral in a befitting manner. Let us remember the bereaved family in our prayers.

Conclusion

I cherish the effective leadership and work of the Editorial Board of the Messenger, the official publication of the Diocese, especially the leadership of Mr. Eapen Daniel, the Editor and the Managing Board, especially Mr. James T. Philip, the Manager. The qualitative and quantitative growth of the Messenger also reflects the hard work of the promoters.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the outgoing Council, especially to Rev. Dr. John Joseph and family for all their sacrificial contributions to the smooth conduct of the Diocesan activities. I thank Dr. John P. Lincoln for his valuable services as the Treasurer. I acknowledge the efficient leadership of Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham as the Diocesan secretary for the last one year.

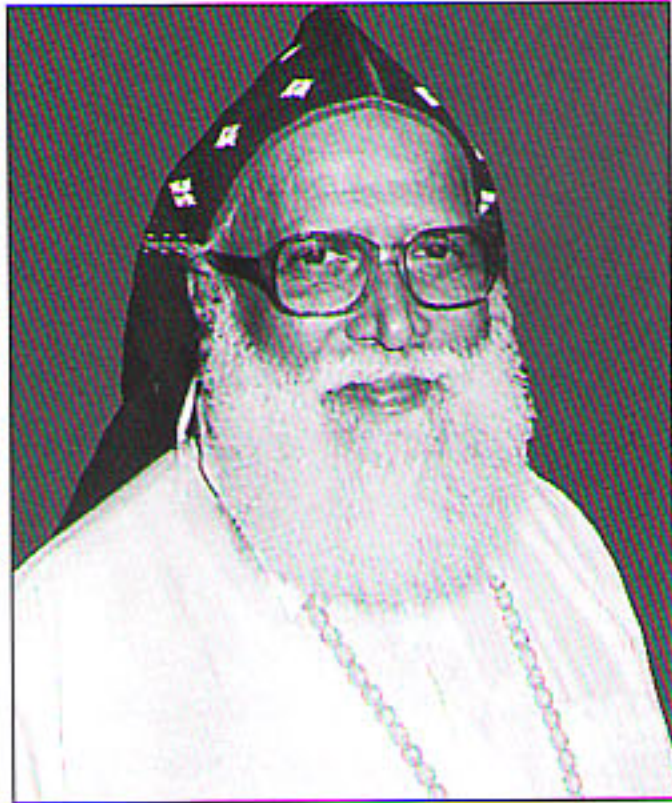
As this is the first session of this Assembly, as pointed out earlier, let us resolve to work together for the next three years. The Diocesan Council is the executive body to execute the decisions of the Assembly. Please see that people with commitment to Christ and loyalty to the Church are elected to the various offices. I solicit your active and committed participation in the deliberations and discussions. We still have miles and miles to go. Some one has said: Past is history, future is mystery, And the 'now' is a gift; that is why we call it 'Present'.

We do not know what is ahead of us; but we know in whose hands we are. Let us once again be assured that we are co-workers with God in His vineyard. Let me conclude this with the following words of John Wesley: "Give me hundred who desire nothing but God, who fear nothing but sin, and I shall shake the gates of hell and establish the Kingdom of God on earth."

May the Lord bless us all.

Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa

Message from the Metropolitan



Dearly beloved in Christ,

On May 14, 2005, the Very Rev. Dr. K. U. Abraham Ramban was consecrated as Episcopa of the Mar Thoma Church under the title Abraham Mar Paulose. I believe everyone has heard about this from the media or through the *Kalpanas* sent to each parish. An Episcopa is a calling, selected by God, and a boon to the church. Do pray for the new Episcopa to be blessed with God's grace, Holy Spirit, and a ministry of love. From henceforth, we should include Abraham Mar Paulose in our Great Intercession immediately after Issac Mar Philoxenos.

The consecration ceremony was conducted very well as a result of the selfless efforts of many individuals. The sincere prayers of all church members were also an invaluable factor. I thank all who came from far and near regardless of the hardships.

It is natural every parish would want to give a reception to the new Thirumeni. However, spending too much time on receptions only delays the more important tasks in His ministry. Therefore it would be helpful if neighboring parishes gave receptions collectively.

May 15, 2005, was celebrated as Pentecost Sunday. It is a major festival for our church. It is the culmination of the divine act of redemption. In front of Jews from different lands and cultures, God showered the promised Holy Spirit on His disciples. The onlookers were stunned. Why were they stunned? Because the disciples were talking in "our own tongues". The language of Pentecost is a language that others understand. There is mention in the Epistle to Corinthians of a language that listeners did not understand. But that is not the language of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sets right our relationship with others. Language is used to understand and accept each other. That is love. The language of love is becoming extinct today. Those who claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit use misinformation, misunderstanding, and the language of disunity.

On this Pentecost Day, let us as a church learn the language of love, consciously speak it and affixing ourselves in love, transform our church into a community that transcends boundaries. Spreading baseless rumors is an act of separation from the Holy Spirit. Let us seek out places where love has been lost and transform them into situations abundant with love.

Maintaining relationships with other churches is also part of our Christian witnessing. The church is but a variation of the world. Care should be taken to organize parish activities with these truths in perspective.

Our Vicar General, the Very Reverend Dr. D. Philip Kaseesa retired from active service on May 31, 2005. He has provided invaluable service to the church for years and I thank Achen for that. May God bless his continued ministry.

Some parents have voiced concern that our youngsters are distancing themselves from Mar Thoma traditions. Language, culture, attitude, style of worship, etc. have accentuated it. Our Yuvajanasakhyam has started an action-oriented study towards understanding the causes and solutions for this increasing alienation of our youth. Please do send in your opinions and thoughts on this matter to Rev. V. M. Mathew (Assistant Secretary, Mar Thoma Yuvajanasakhyam, Bangalore office), Ebenezer M.T. Old Parsonage, Gangamma Circle, Jelahally P.O., Bangalore.

The election of Mandalam and Assembly members is almost over. There have been complaints about some elections. A commission has been appointed to look into the matter and submit a report. Elections should be seen as a divine ministry. We should not adopt the political style in toto. On the contrary, our elections should be a model for the nation. We should try to give others what we already have and they do not. Positions are not to be hoarded by a few. At the same time we should understand each one's talents and abilities and strive to utilize them. Those who do not have the time or the inclination should not try to get into committees just to become popular. We should responsibly carry out the duties of the office we assume.

It is our duty to respect and accept the decisions of the parish and the church. Of course every citizen has the right to approach a court, but is it necessary to use that right without discretion? As the Apostle said, "Can we not decide Church affairs within the Church itself?" When people move to the courts, church leaders have to bring in lawyers. Therefore we should reduce unwanted litigation in all areas, especially in the Church, and encourage others to do the same too.

The external trappings of the church and the technological progress are all fine. However, the foundation of the church is its relation with Christ. Is Christ the center of our lives and our dealings today? Is our counsel centered with Christ and in the Holy Spirit? Where does our help come from? Can we boldly say, "I am heir to the salvation through Jesus Christ"? Are we intent on growing in that salvation? Have we seriously taken up family worship, participation in Holy Communion, studying the word of God, prayer, fellowship, and an attitude of service? Are we a community of salvation? A group of believers? A family of love? Soldiers of service? Are we dear children of God?

May the grace of Christ the Messiah be with each one of you.

Philipose Mar Chrysostom
Mar Thoma Metropolitan

Translated and Reprinted from Sabha Tharaka

"On Being a Blessing in the Land"

Rev. Dr. Valsan Thampu

(Main Address at the Mar Thoma Family Conference at Washington, D.C. [Text: Genesis 12:1-3])

The theme of the conference speaks for itself. It is hard to imagine a theme more contextually relevant than this. The choice of the theme is inspired by a two-fold prophetic awareness:

- a. The critical need we have in this increasingly secular world to wake up to the importance of the 'Christian presence' in any given society or nation. In doing so, we honor the vision of Jesus Christ, who defined the Christian presence in the world as the 'salt of the earth' and the 'light of the world'. (Matthew 5:13-16)
- b. Jesus urged his disciples, as the Word of God does to all believers, to imbibe a wider and world-transforming vision so as to exemplify the power of biblical spirituality. To fail to do so would be to succumb to what St. Paul considers to be the telltale symptom of spiritual degeneration: that of 'holding on to the form of faith, denying the power of it' (2 Timothy 3:5). The feeling of being increasingly marginalized from the mainstream of life—quite widespread among Christians all over the world today—is a clear warning to this effect.



At the root of the idea of being a blessing in the land is the awareness that we cannot be alienated from the land, which symbolizes the physical context, in which we live. This spiritual awareness rules out a dichotomized outlook: one that divides the world into two mutually exclusive compartments: the religious and the secular. All through the Bible we find a tension between this dichotomized religiosity and the integrative vision of spirituality. Jesus is the incarnation of that integrated vision and the glorious personhood that emerges from it. He is the Word become flesh. He came to dismantle the walls of division and alienation. This, indeed, is the authentic way of life, which is the business of spirituality to promote and enable.

In the teachings and public ministry of our Lord, we find a continual keenness to promote an integrated vision of life. It is enough to take a familiar example for the sake of clarity. Nicodemus, in St. John 3, is the agent of a dichotomized religiosity. He feels free to visit Jesus only at night. In the context, this is the 'night of spiritual dichotomy'. The 'night' does not lend itself to any meaningful or spiritually fruitful work or action. It breeds, instead, a religiosity that is empty of substance. We need to wonder if Nicodemus symbolizes our religiosity. All through the day we are busy with everything other than our spiritual

vocation. We have nothing to do with Jesus. Come night, the outlook changes and we are bold to acknowledge this relationship and claim the benefits thereof. In urging Nicodemus to be 'born again' Jesus was leading him to the heart of spirituality: the need to live an authentic and integrated existence. The Holy Spirit, points out Jesus, blows where it pleases. It defies dichotomy and compartmentalization. The wind is a symbol, in this context, of dynamic integration. It is abundantly clear that without this radical

reorientation, we cannot be a blessing in any aspect of life.

Very likely, the spiritual goal of being a blessing in the land is alien to the outlook and practice of our religiosity. Of course, all of us want to 'have' blessings. It is doubtful if we want to 'be' blessings. It is even more doubtful if we want to be blessings 'in the land' and run the risk of others enjoying the fruits of our efforts and gifts. Moreover, we want land; and we want more and more of it. But we do not bother if the vision that shapes us and the way of life we live—the selfishness and the pettiness that drive both—could enable us to be a blessing or degrade us into a curse. Yet, given the nature and culture of the Kingdom of God, even the birds in the air are not excluded from the blessings of a sprouting mustard seed. A mustard seed that wants to be a blessing only for itself or its kith and kin cannot be a blessing in the land. Mustard seeds of that persuasion become indistinguishable from tares. The mustard and lily of the field—even the birds of the air—are blessing on the land.

Are we?

We need to ask; for there is hardly a question that we can raise more crucial than this. Everything about us that the Word of God tells us makes this one thing disarmingly clear. We are not created to merely exist! Created in God's own image—the dust of the earth enlivened by the breath of God—mandated to be fruitful and to multiply, to till the land and to take care of the garden on behalf of the Creator—like the vineyard that the master entrusted to the servants in Jesus' parable—the envisaged by God as the defining element in the wholeness of creation, we cannot afford to be indifferent to the world. We cannot afford to be indifferent to the fact, also, that the land can be the canvas either for our creativity or cruelty. The crucial thing is not the land, but our vision, or who we are. 'Only one thing is needed,' said Jesus to Martha of Bethany. That one thing is a spiritually wise vision of life that enables us to

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make the right choices. The question is how to attain this vision. The instance of God calling Abram out of his homeland to lead him to a land he had never seen before, gives us some important insights into this subject.

God asks Abraham to do two things. He has to leave. He has to go. The two together comprise matrix in which a new vision is born. On the face of it, this looks somewhat irresponsible and cruel. Is it right to abandon one's home and homeland, and to leave the dear ones and friends behind? Yet, unless Abram does this, he would not grow into the new vision, the new heaven and new earth, that God has in mind for him. The idea of being a blessing in the land belongs to that vision and is feasible only on account of it. This vision is far more important than the land. It is not that the land Abram had 'never seen before' to which he is asked to go is more fertile or magically potent than the homeland he had to abandon, but the vision that God had for Abram was so radical that a new beginning was essential. We cannot build a new society based on an old vision. The old wineskin cannot hold the new wine.

The vision that Abram inherited from his cultural and family upbringing was a tribal one. The hallmark of a tribal vision is its narrowness. Its scope rarely exceeds the concerns for oneself and one's family. Within that vision, it becomes a sacred duty to secure the best for one's own family. The vision to be a blessing in the land is a radical departure from this limited obsession.

It is not, as though, a new vision cannot be born without cross-cultural migrations. It is true, at the same time that leaving the old makes one freer to embrace the new. Domesticated in familiar environment, we lose the ability to make radical beginnings. That was the problem with Nicodemus. That was the problem, even more acutely, with the rich, young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22). Jesus sought to liberate him from this 'old land' and to lead him to an 'unknown land' of new possibilities. But, lacking the courage to make a new beginning, he went away frustrated and embittered.

Spiritually, no matter where we are, it is still 'the land we have never seen before'. God called Abram into a new vision. Responsibility is the quintessence of this vision. A practical expression of this sense of responsibility is the proverbial hospitality that Abram practices (Genesis 18). To be responsible is to be hospitable. The first principle in being a blessing in the land is to be hospitable or responsive to human needs. It may be noted in passing that the Beatitudes are the identification marks of those who hold themselves responsible for the world on behalf of God.

What are we to do?

We have seen, so far, that being a blessing in the land is basic to our spiritual calling. Being now convinced of this, how do we go about this? Mere good intentions are not

enough! We must act on our intentions. Our intention to be a blessing in the land needs to be complemented with a willingness to accept the reorientation it takes to fulfill this new vision.

- (a) **Enter the land.** To be a blessing in the land, we have to enter the land. No one or nothing can be a blessing from a distance. There are two possibilities. (i) We enter the land. (ii) Alternately, the land enters us, in which event, the land becomes the ultimate value. We live, die or kill for the land (which was the problem with one of the men invited to the wedding feast in Luke. (14:16-24) The land he owned prevented him, apparently, from enjoying the banquet! (V. 18). That way, our relationship with the land becomes idolatrous. [Note: We will be contained in what we worship. Jesus' words "abide in me" are the same as "worship in Spirit and in truth". To worship is to abide in. So, worshipping what is small and petty, imprisons us! The land became this man's de facto prison! Worship is meant to be a liberating experience.]
- (b) **The paradox of entering the land.** Biblically, the land is entered by leaving the land! (This is true of anything we own. Hence the spiritual paradox that we can have only what we give away). Abram has to leave his homeland to reach the land he has never seen before. Symbolically, what this means is not so much giving up the land as giving up the sense of ownership of the land. We have not created the earth and we cannot own it. As the Psalmist reminds us, the land belongs to God. (Ps. 24:1). So, we are not the owners, but the stewards of the land (Gen. 2:15). Wherever man indulges in the ownership mentality regarding the land, the land becomes a theatre of oppression, exploitation, cruelty and, ultimately, of self-destruction. Egypt became a land of oppression because Pharaoh thought it belonged to him. The root of the violence that convulses Palestine today lies in the same outlook. It is an inexorable principle that what we own will own us. The spiritual pattern of the Exodus event is that of leaving Egypt (or, human ownership of the land) and entering Canaan (i.e., acknowledging that God alone owns the land).
- (c) **Be born again.** To enter the land, and to ensure that the land does not enter us and enslave us, we have to be born again or transformed. Transformation involves a radical re-orientation from being parasites or paralytics to becoming partners with Jesus in mission. God called Abram to be with him. The outcome of this 'being with' is a new vision and a new person. Abram becomes Abraham. A transformed person knows that God, not the land, is the ground of one's existence. This insight defines how we conduct ourselves in the land. The Ten

(Continued on page 22)

Be a Blessing in the Land and not a Curse

Atty. Lal Varghese, MTC of Dallas, Farmers Branch

The book of Genesis focuses on the promises of God. The restoration of Eden begins with a promise to Abraham and his descendents. The restoration of humanity created in the image of God also begins with this promise to Abraham. The promise to Abraham was a promise of blessing to him and, through him, to the world. The promise of a “great nation” and a great name is more specifically a promise for many descendents. Abraham follows God and sets out for Canaan. His journey into Canaan is one completely of faith. He takes God at His word, and as the Apostle Paul often reminds us, his “faith is reckoned to him as righteousness.” Faith is what matters, and we should lead our journey of faith day by day, and make sure that our generations also follow us in this faith journey being a blessing in the land.

The Lord’s call for Abraham to journey to the Promised Land is not a call as a promise of blessing. Abraham is told to journey to Canaan, for there God will give him a land for his inheritance. He will have descendents as the stars in the sky and through his seed the world will be blessed. Abraham simply takes God at his word; he believes in the promised blessing. Abraham is clearly a man of faith. For most of his life he has no descendents, and even at its end he has no land. Yet Abraham believes God, he takes God at his word, and we are told that this faith-act of his is accounted to him as righteousness. Abraham was not a righteous man since he lived a compromised life like most of us. Yet, by resting on God’s promise, believing it when life’s circumstances seemed to demand another conclusion, he was graciously regarded by God as a righteous man and rewarded as such. Like Abraham, we have the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. The circumstances of life often deny the reality of this promise, yet when we believe the promise, our faith is accounted to us as righteousness and thus, the gift of eternity will be ours. We may be building ‘mansions’ in this land, but if we are not leading a faithful life we will not receive the promise of ‘another land’ with many mansions.

In today’s Christian Church people interpret and specify God’s words for their own self glorification and egotistic goals, like the Pharisees did during the Old Testament days. Like the Pharisees, a term derived from the Hebrew *perusim*, which means ‘separated ones’, they also think at times that they are the separated ones, not because of their faith, but because of their wealth, power, and influence over the church and its leaders. The word is also believed to be derived from Hebrew *parosim*, meaning “specifier,” since they sought to specify the correct meaning



of God’s law to the people. They practiced a strict form of law in the ancient biblical days, and interpreted it to accomplish their selfish goals. They were so ostentatious in their piety when they prayed and gave. Today in our churches the same ‘Pharisees’ thrive, as they did in those biblical days. They specify to others what they expect and interpret the constitution and bylaws of the church in such a way that their agenda may get done, and their names may be glorified ignoring the biblical truth that all we do should be for the glory of God.

There has been little change in the practice of their sanctimonious ways. They are smug, complacent, and content in their role. They interpret the biblical truths to conform to their personal goals and needs. They build their own churches and fill the pews with their minions to attain their selfish motives. They are comfortable only when they hold higher positions and they feel dissatisfied when they cannot attain what they seek. They pretend to carry the cross to follow Jesus, but in reality they intend to gain positions and popularity. Their crosses are not of wood stained with the blood of Jesus, but of silver and gold, and at times they become a curse to others. They tend to divide believers as in the Corinthian Church—“I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos, and I am of Cephas”. But listen to Paul—“neither he that plants anything, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase, and is providing abundant blessings so that we can be a blessing in the land.” They label themselves as “Christos” (anointed ones) and act like they provide everything to the church. Jesus angered the Pharisees by His teachings. Likewise, anyone who speaks against the modern Pharisees will be crucified with words and hostility. Like Jesus, let us not fear the Pharisees, but rather raise the voice of the believers, and be a blessing in the land, and not a curse to our generations.

The confrontations depicted in the gospels between Jesus and the Pharisees were one of escalating tension. Jesus spoke the truth to them openly in the presence of all. The positive response of the common people disturbed the Pharisees. Their response was to harden their resolve to rid themselves of this troublesome Rabbi. Spiritual leaders and church authorities struggle with the same sinful nature. The true spiritual authority comes from the moral authority of servant leadership. It wasn’t just the words of Jesus spoken publicly against the Pharisees that turned them against Him. It was the stark contrast between the humble servant with great moral authority in comparison to the Pharisees who held positional authority and were arrogant and uncaring for the people. When the people

(Continued on page 15)

Drug Abuse: A Global Menace

M. John Punnen

Former Assistant Director, Narcotics Control Bureau, South Zone, Chennai, India

Drug abuse has emerged as one of the major concerns of modern society, the causes of which are exceedingly complex and stem from different variables including individual, family, social, psychological and even environmental factors. The problem of drug addiction needs to be addressed due to its negative effects on human motivation, judgment and mental perception. Drugs also generate feelings of fear, anxiety, insecurity and produce social isolation leading to chronic loneliness and destructive tendencies.

Being seized of the problem of drug abuse and drug trafficking and its serious impact on humanity, the United Nations General Assembly in 1987 decided to observe June 26 every year as International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking. On this day, an year long campaign based on a theme selected by The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is launched by calling upon member countries to organize various programs to create awareness about the global drug problem. The theme for this year is **"VALUE YOURSELF—MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES"**.

The 2005 Anti-Drug Campaign targets teenagers and youth because they are the most vulnerable. Misused drugs commonly used by teenagers include natural products like cocaine, heroin, cannabis and synthetic products such as ecstasy and amphetamines that are available in the illegal market. Serious drug addiction in young people may stem out of mere curiosity or peer pressure in schools and colleges. The lure of drugs may tempt youth while they search for self-identity at the beginning of their struggle for independence. In the existing complex social conditions, youngsters may be confused as they face the realities of their lives. In their bid to escape from frustrations, they resort to drugs or alcohol that suppress some of their disappointments eventually forcing them to adopt an artificial life.

Prevention of drug abuse calls for a multi-pronged intervention strategy and comprehensive preventive measures. The family and the school system exert the most profound influence on the growing child and they can prove instrumental in preventing children from falling prey to the evil of drug abuse. Adolescents need warm, loving and caring relationships with their parents, teachers and friends. Whatever happens in the formative years of their lives leaves an indelible impression on their innocent minds. Hence, it becomes essential on the part of adults to extend their warmth and support and be available as and

when youngsters look up to them for help. Providing a child with secure, stable home environment and promoting a well knit family feeling of interdependence helps him to keep away from evil outlets. Lack of love and affection often acts as a preparatory ground for rebellious indulgences.

Parents and other elders must develop an understanding with youngsters under their care and encourage frank and honest discussions on any issues having a bearing on building up their character. It is unfortunate that many parents view education as a passport for entry into better careers rather than as a system to inculcate independent, balanced and rational thinking. They should try to understand the peer group and the relationships their children keep. It is important that they teach children to be responsible for their own actions. They must provide support and keep the channels of healthy communication open.

Educational institutions, in addition to teaching, must supplement the effort of the family in the socialization of the child. Teachers need to talk to students about the evil effects of drugs and alcohol by including these discussions as part of the syllabus. Films, posters, discussions, seminars, exhibitions, rallies, etc. should be organized as part of the drive to fight drug addiction. Ability to say NO to drugs, resistance to peer pressure, courage to have responsibility and empathy towards each other should be inculcated. With proper approach, understanding and treatment, drug addicts can be motivated to get rid of these habits. What is needed is humane and rational intervention and determined social strategies for combating the problem of drug abuse on several fronts.

It is heartening that drug abuse is receiving a lot of publicity and many voluntary organizations have been working in the field in a big way along with governmental agencies to reduce the demand for drugs. Rehabilitation centers have programs that combine counseling, psychotherapy and appropriate use of medicine to suppress the urge to consume drugs. Any effective action for combating drug trafficking and drug abuse requires combined effort by the drug enforcement agencies and social welfare organizations. However every Individual citizen can play a major role in the war against illegal drugs by saying a firm "NO" to drugs and associating with the campaign against illegal drugs and drug trafficking by raising the slogan **"VALUE YOURSELF—MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES"**. ■

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

—Jim Elliot

XXIII Mar Thoma Family Conference—2005

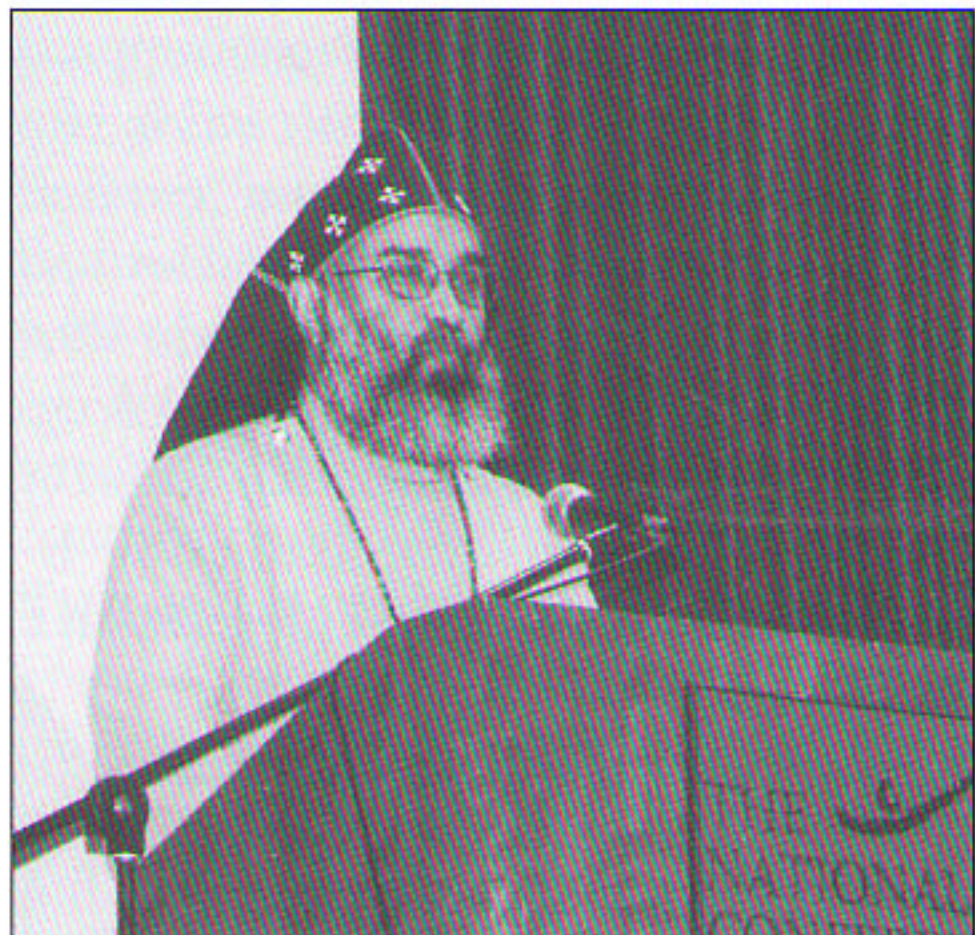


Theme Song presentation—Conference Choir

The Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington celebrates the joy of having presented the XXIII Mar Thoma Family Conference at the National Conference Center for the Diocese of North America & Europe in great splendor, magnificence and elegance. The conference had participation of 554 adults and 107 children. What the Diocese experienced from June 30 to July 3, 2005 was the culmination of the fervent prayers and hard work that involved most of the Washington

Mar Thoma Church members for the last one and a half years.

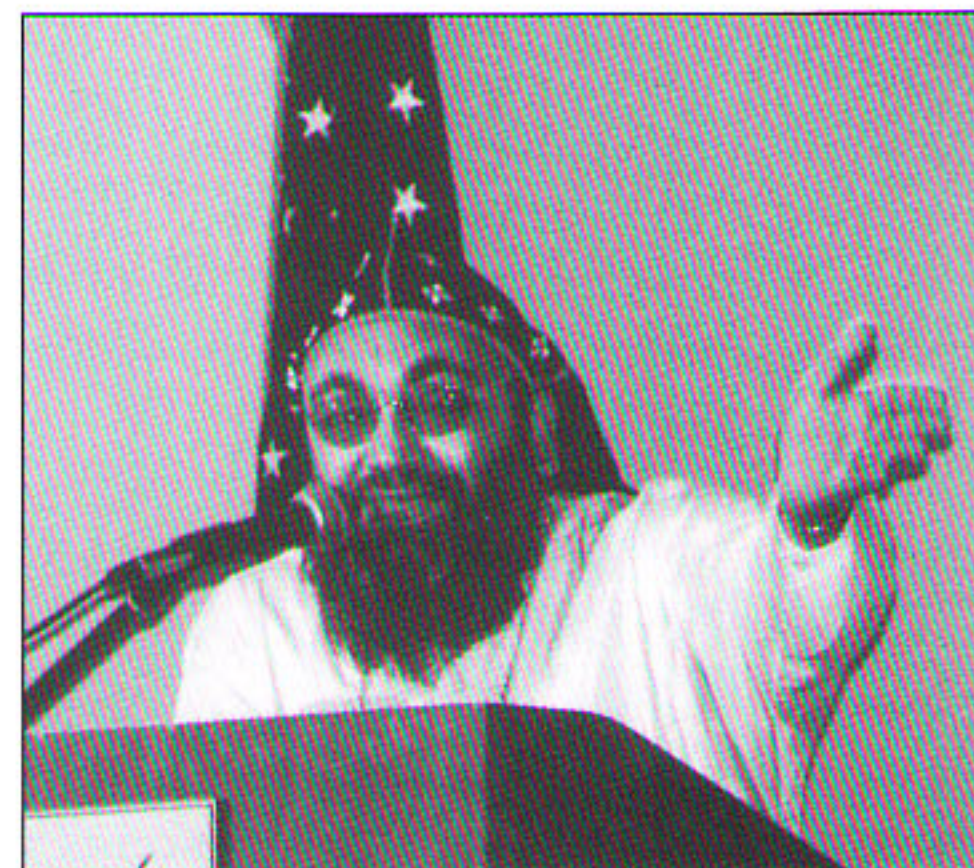
The leaders were Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos, Rt. Rev. Dr. Issac Mar Philoxenos, Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham, Rev. Dr. Valsan



The Rt. Rev. Dr. Issac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa at the Conference.

Thampu, Dr. Ivy George, and Mr. Bart Campolo. The theme “Be a Blessing in the Land” was thoroughly addressed in all angles of theological depth and life application through the great servants of the Almighty who were blessed and equipped for the occasion. Several members of the clergy and other leaders from our community along with the Child Evangelism fellowship helped conduct five tracks of excellent programs specially designed for all age groups. Sight seeing trips and sports were further attractions of the conference.

A team of 18 subcommittees consisting of 135 people worked with the executive committee of the conference to make this conference an occasion for spiritual rejuvenation



Diocesan Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos at the Conference.



Diocesan Secretary Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham at the Conference.

in an elegant setting. The programs were well received and were given special words of appreciation by our Bishops, leaders, and participants of all ages from all over the Diocese. Those who performed on stage in various roles in music, entertainment, and skits received a great deal of appreciation.

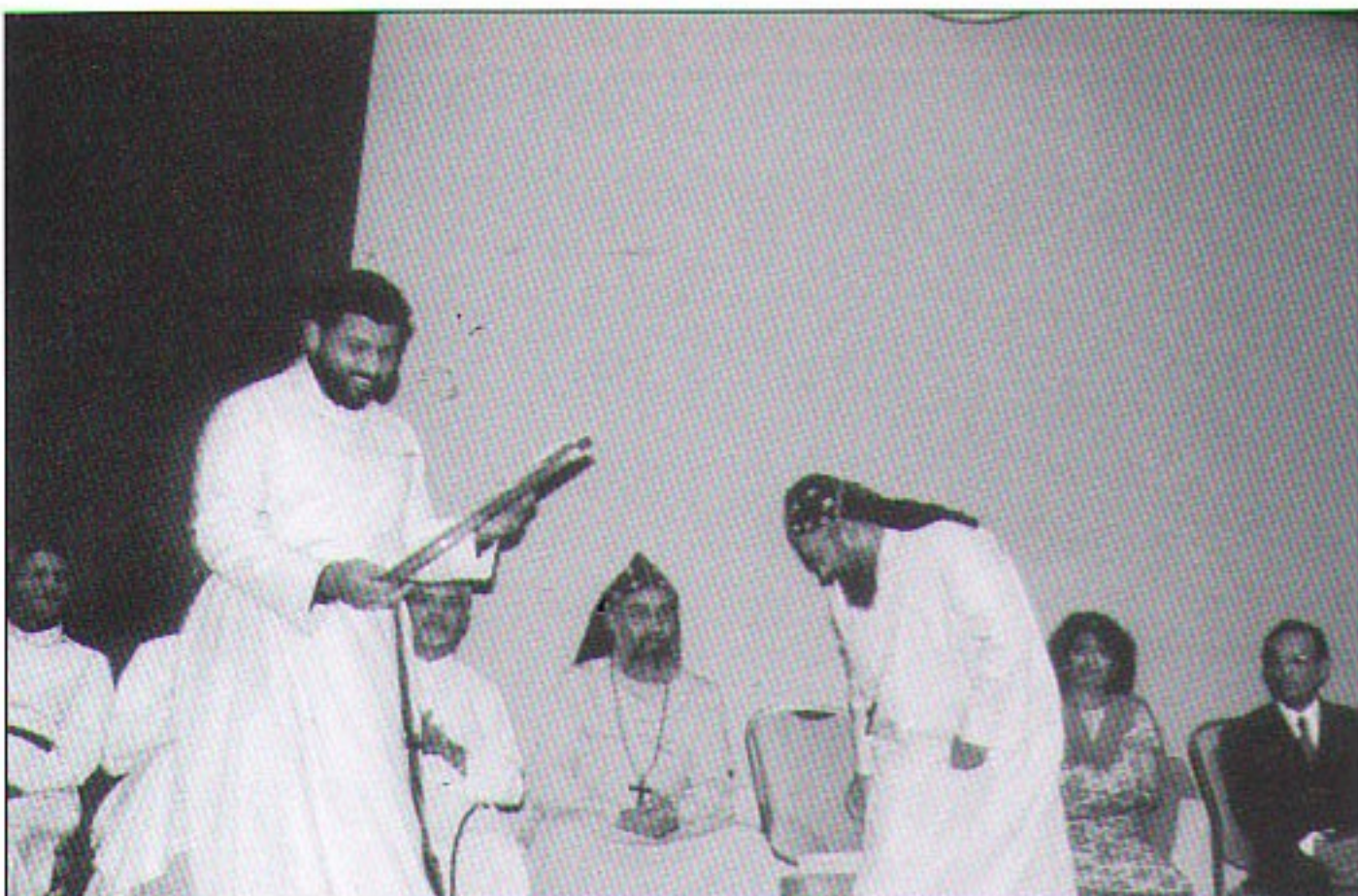
May it be our personal prayer to:
"Make me a blessing; Out of my life, may Jesus shine. Make me a blessing O Savior, I pray., Make me a blessing to someone today."

Let us remember the words of William Carey, to go forth and "Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God" in the sharing of blessedness.

XXIII Mar Thoma Family Conference Secretary Mr. Thomas Koshy at the Conference.



XXIII Mar Thoma Family Conference Secretary Mr. Thomas Koshy at the Conference.



Most Participants Award—St. Peter's MTC Vicar Rev. P. Y. Mathew receiving the Award from Coorilos Thirumeni.



Passing of the Family Conference Torch to the 2006 conference at Chicago. May The Lord lead us all in the blessed duties that we attempt in His mighty name.

Thomas Koshy, Conference Secretary



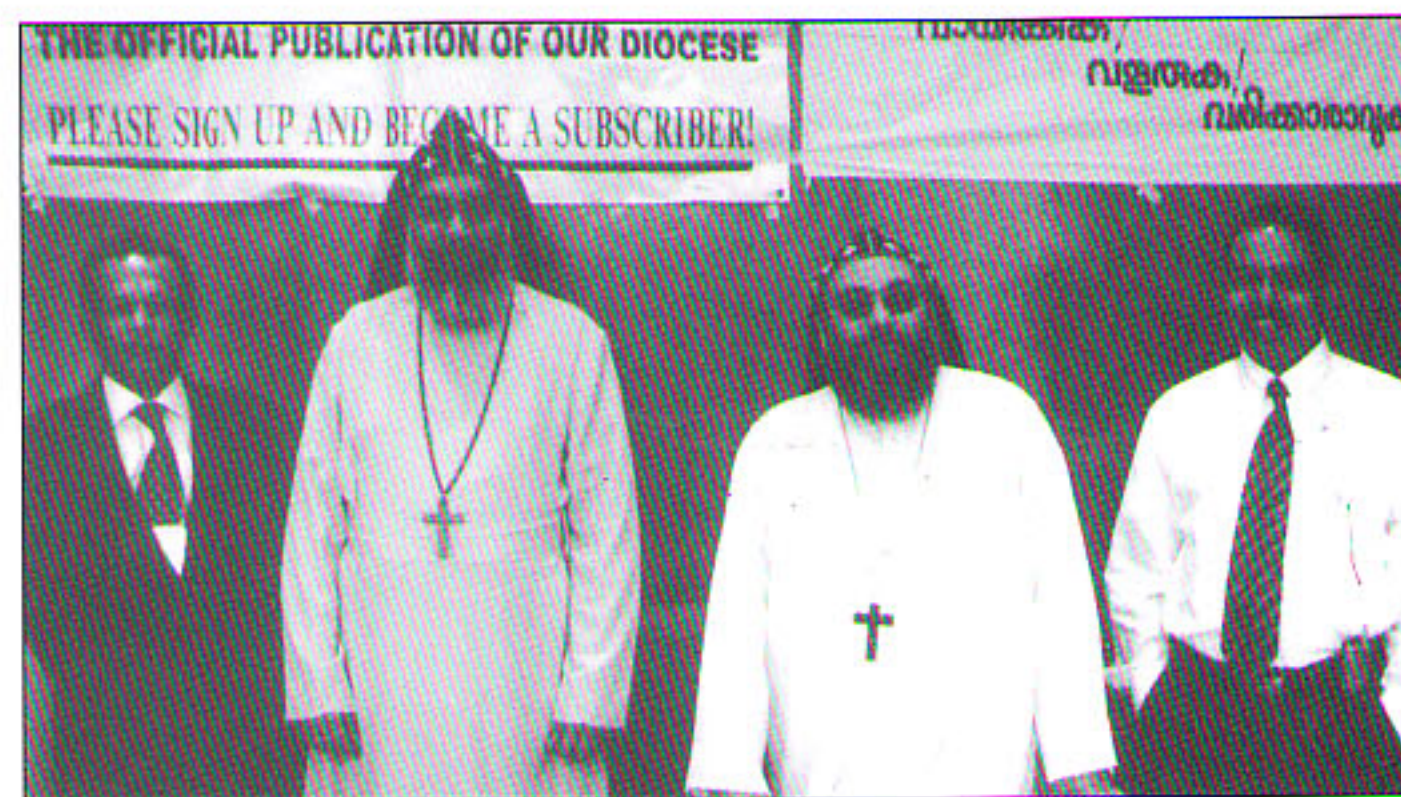
Dr. T. M. Thomas of St. Thomas MTC, NY was presented with a "Ponnada" by our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos in the presence of Rt. Rev. Dr. Issac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa, in appreciation of his outstanding efforts towards the formation of a new Sunday School Curriculum for this Diocese.



Theme Presentation



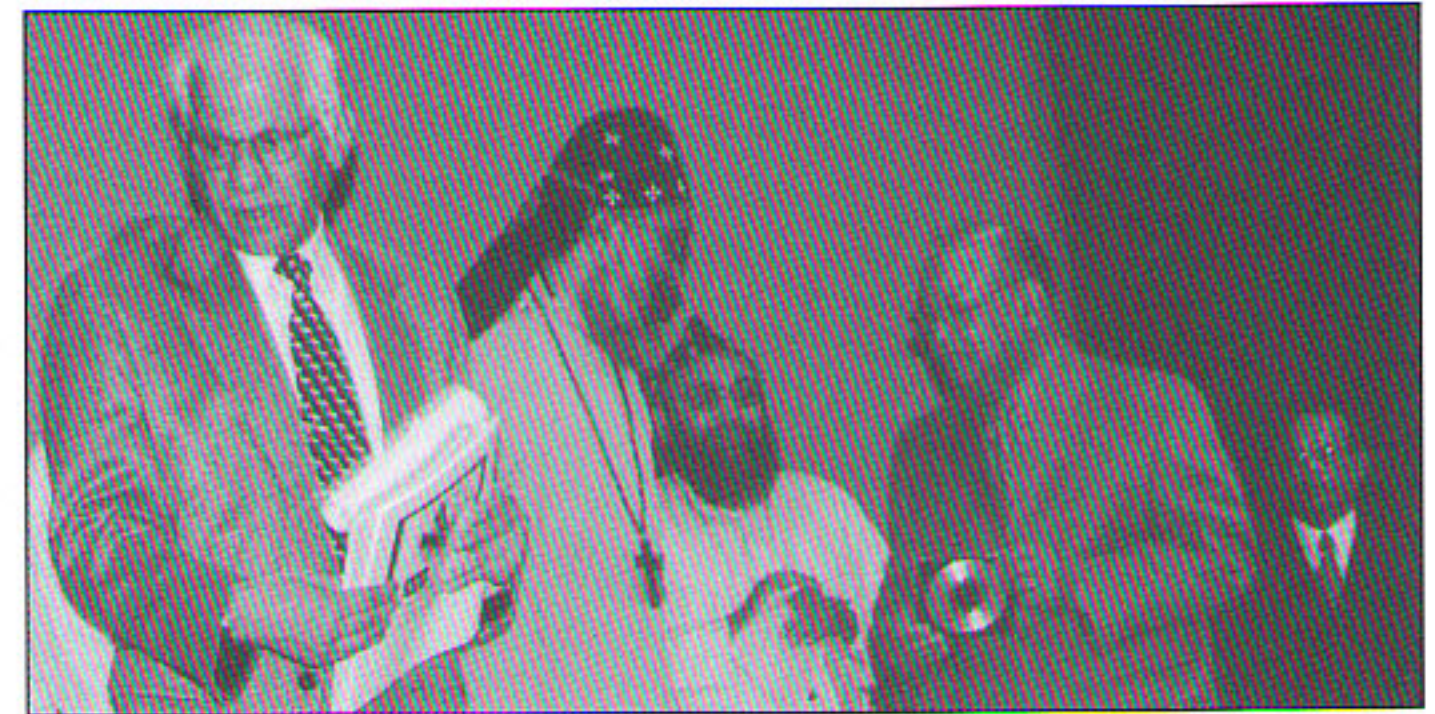
Talent Show



Mar Thoma Messenger Chief Editor Mr. Eapen Daniel (R) and Diocesan Treasurer Mr. T. A. Mathew (L) with Philoxenos Thirumeni and Coorilos Thirumeni at the Messenger/Tharaka Booth.



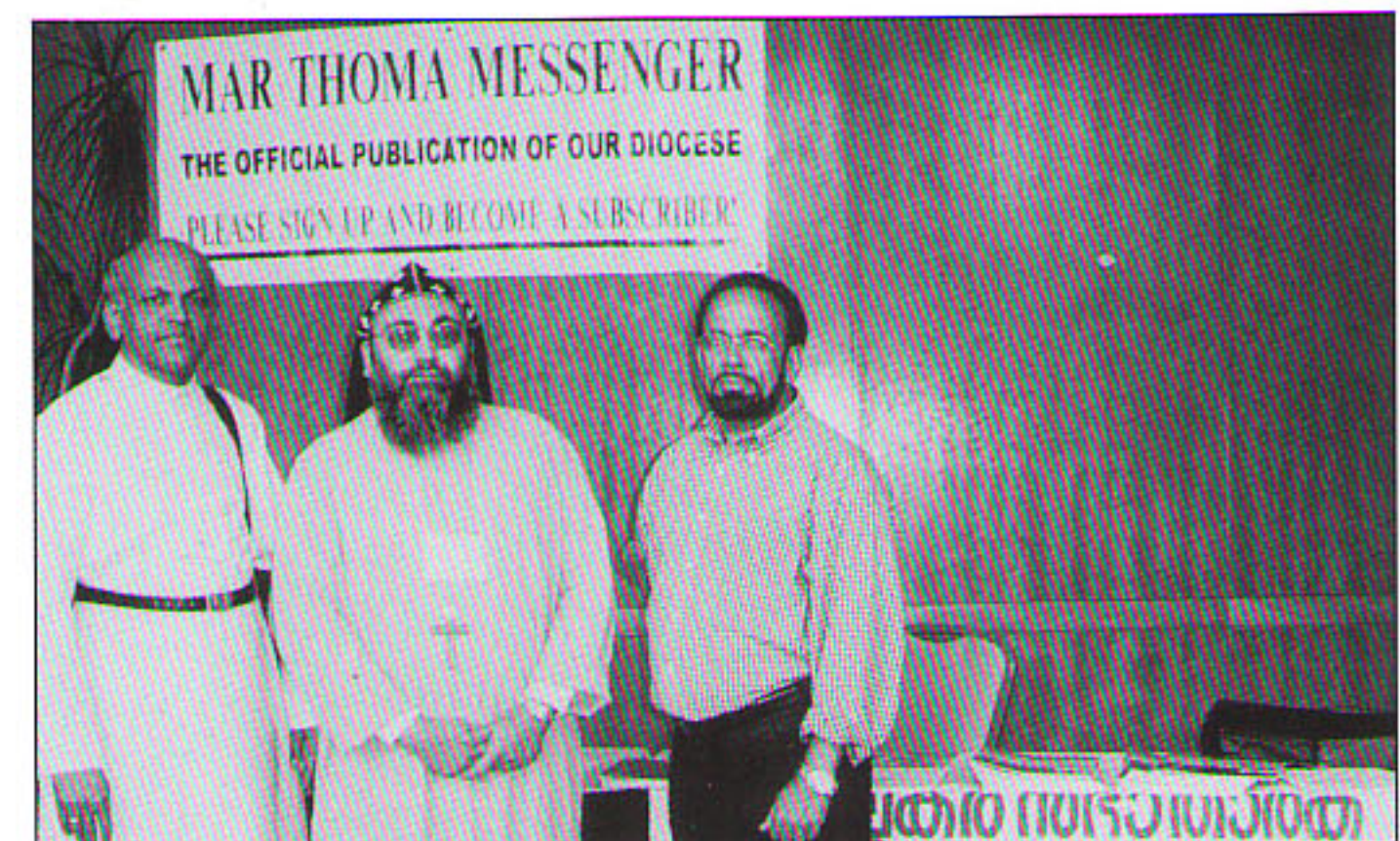
Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham and Kochamma at the Mexico Mission Booth with Mr. O. C. & Nirmala Abraham and Kurian & Leelamma Thomas.



After prolonged studies, reviews and compiling by many, the new Sunday School Curriculum was released by The Rt. Rev. Dr. Issac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa on July 3rd, 2005.



Coorilos Thirumeni at the Mar Thoma Literature Society Booth.



Coorilos Thirumeni and Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham with the Messenger promoter Mr. Thomas Mammen (Los Angeles) at the Messenger/Tharaka Booth.



Family Conference General Committee with Coorilos Thirumeni and Vicar, Rev. Sabu Koshy.



Diocesan Council members having lunch with Thirumeni at the Family Conference.



Closing ceremony



Talent Night



Talent Night

Gender Stereotypes

Dr. Elsy Mathew, MTC of Los Angeles

[This is a paper presented in a seminar at the Family Conference held at Washington D.C.]

Gender stereotype refers to the extent to which an individual identifies with a culture's perspective of masculinity and femininity. Let's take a look at some of the universal stereotypes. This varies from culture to culture.

1. Women are supposed to stay at home. Men are supposed to work in offices.
2. Women should follow their husband. Men should be in charge of the home.
3. Women are gentle, meek, and soft-spoken. Men are strong, aggressive, and powerful.
4. Women are encouraged to express their feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Men are not supposed to express their real feelings.
5. Women should be housewives or nurses. Men should be engineers or doctors.
6. Women should be housekeepers. Men should be college professors.
7. Women should be baby-sitters or kindergarten teachers. Men should be leading the nation.
8. Women are objectified and seen as sex symbols. Men are seen as smart and powerful.

Gender stereotypes are apparent everywhere in our society especially in the media. Advertisements portray women in housecleaning and child rearing roles to sell cleaners and baby products. They sell beers and cars to men by showing women in revealing outfits, or a sweating man out in the yard working hard on his lawn. These gender stereotypes are used to sell the products to people they believe would use them the most, showing them in the situations they would most likely be in.

On the other end, there are many books and pamphlets available that focus on dispelling gender stereotypes. We are encouraged to push our girls into more science and engineering classes. We are asked to use non-gender terminology when speaking to children. Fathers need to spend more time at home than at the office. They need to have tea parties with their children and help clean up the house. Women need to show that they can discipline and be aggressive in various situations. Children learn by example and we need to be setting a good one.

The Bible, Jesus, and Gender

We do not find any explicit answers in Jesus' teachings that might settle the matter. Was Jesus as radical in His practice in relation to women as egalitarians suggest? Jesus did, after all, select twelve men to be his apostles. However, let us look at Jesus' actions.



- a. Jesus placed responsibility for lust and adultery on man.
- b. Jesus does not warn his disciples about women but about themselves. This was revolutionary.

c. Jesus warned men about vicious cycles related to sexuality. He placed responsibility on them to remove the attitudes, actions, and practices that deepened their descent into sin in this area of life.

- d. Likewise, Jesus forbade men to divorce their wives. These teachings reflect a respect

for women that, rightly understood, would transform the attitudes and actions of Christian discipleship and the church as a whole. Men were not to regard women as sex objects, simultaneously alluring and dangerous.

- e. His traveling band of itinerants included women (Luke 8:1-3).
- f. He did not hesitate to touch or to be touched by women in order to heal them (Matthew 9:18-26, Luke 13:10-16).
- g. He allowed a woman of questionable reputation to express her love for Him through anointing of His feet (Luke 7:36-50).
- h. Jesus spoke at length to the Samaritan woman (John 4).
- i. Jesus spoke to a lowly Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28).
- j. Jesus affirmed Mary in her desire to sit at His feet and receive His teachings along with His male followers (Luke 10:38-42) and treated both Mary and Martha as close friends.
- k. Women were the first witnesses of His resurrection and the first proclaimers of the Good News (Matthew 28:8-10, John 20:11-18).

There is no evidence that Jesus ever treated women with anything other than full respect.

Why did Jesus take this approach towards women?

1. We believe that it is because Jesus was concerned above all things "with the reign of God."
2. Jesus invited everyone who heard Him to join in the great work of deliverance that God was inaugurating through Him.
3. Jesus did not articulate a revolutionary overthrow of the deeply embedded patriarchy of Jewish culture. He did by His practice open the door to new roles and new freedom for women in the service of the gospel movement.

Apostle Paul dealt with the issue of gender roles in the context of how to structure the life of early Christian communities under his care. Egalitarians notice the role of certain prominent women in proclaiming the Gospel message.

1. Priscilla, for example, is described as working alongside her husband in "explaining the way of God more accurately" to Apollos (Acts 18:26). She is mentioned six times in the New Testament, each time without any distinction from her husband, as a fellow church leader (Acts 18:2, 26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Timothy 4:19).
2. List of fellow workers and brothers and sisters in Christ include women's names, regularly with those of men (Romans 16).
3. Euodia and Synticle (Philippians 4:2-3) are described by Paul as women, who have "struggled beside me" in the work of the Gospel.

Biblical egalitarians also emphasize Jesus' universalism. In Paul's own message. Galatians 3:26-28 is a key text, "In Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Paul consistently exulted in breakthrough in human community accomplished by the Gospel (Ephesians 2:15).

Egalitarians point to Paul's emphasis on spiritual gifts. It was Paul who strongly emphasized both the gift of the spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-11, Ephesians 4:11) and the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Both were bestowed on believers without any gender distinction. However, Paul's controversial discussions on public worship (1 Corinthians 11:2-16, 1 Corinthians 14:33-35) are pivotal to arguments for male leadership.

He makes a claim for man grounded in creation as the head of woman or husband as the head of wife. In

1 Timothy 2:12, Paul makes an argument from the creation story for the authority of male on female and says that he does not permit a woman, "to teach or to have authority over man." Complimentarians appeal to the so-called "household passages." Ephesians 5:21-33 and Colossians 3:18-19 says that married women are taught to submit to their husbands, who in turn are taught to love their wives in a Christ-like manner. Complimentarians seek to reclaim the notion that male leadership is the divine plan for male/female relations. Ephesians 5:21 "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." Contemporary complimentarians stress the sacrificial and servanthood dimension of male leadership and authority.

Look at the Trinity. The relationship is unity. They compliment one another. Look at the Pentecostal day. The Holy Spirit was on everyone without gender distinction. Our identity as Christians is not in gender roles but in Christ Jesus. In terms of church life and work, gender differences are not dissolved but gender as a determinant fades in light of the massive goals of:

1. Aggressive world evangelization
2. Making disciples of new believers
3. Healing and deliverance
4. Justice making works of Christ
5. Practicing the gifts of spirit to edify the church, until Christ returns.

If the goal of Christ's followers is to seek God's kingdom, the primary issue is not specifying gender roles but maximizing mission, effectiveness, and impact mutual service. In love, mutual service creates checks and balances on the exercise, both the freedom and power that preserve justice. This is the best model for all relationships in the body of Christ, including men and women, husband and wife. This is not a man's world, this is not a woman's world, but it is God's world (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). "We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making His appeal through us. Be reconciled to God." ■

Be a Blessing in the Land and not a Curse *(Cont'd from page 8)*

responded to Jesus, the Pharisees had to act to silence this exposure of their own hypocrisy.

The Pharisees and their allies have deliberately distorted and mystified God. God stands for spiritual ideals such as justice, truth, goodness, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and love that have an objective existence and constitute reality. We may enter into His Kingdom only by bringing these ideals into our lives. Apostle Paul reminds us that, "for all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for he through whom faith becomes righteous shall live; but the law does not rest on faith, for he who does them shall live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by hanging

on the Cross. Through Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham came upon the gentiles so that we the descendents of Abraham may receive the promise of the spirit through faith. Let the love of God flow from us through our actions and deeds so that God's name will be glorified thereby we can be a blessing in the land. God called Abraham according to His own sovereign and elective choice. Paul again reminds that Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"... that the blessing of Abraham came on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we should receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. This is the way that God calls us as well. He does not save us according to some intrinsic goodness in us, but only according to His sovereign grace and mercy. ■

Cherish Your Spouse

Dr. Ivy George

[Presented at the Mar Thoma Family Conference 2005]

I want to start with two disclaimers. First, I am no expert on the subject, while it is true that I wrote a book on how one might go about getting into a marriage, I have not written about how one might stay in one. Second, someone wisely said, "Anyone who says they have a good marriage and have good children is not coming clean on the real state of things."

Are there bad marriages? Yes, indeed there are. Good marriages and good children do not just happen, they are always a work in progress and that is precisely it. Any time one senses a healthy family you can be sure that a lot of hard work has gone into that marriage and its children.

Marriage is a social institution that has been in existence from time immemorial. Every culture celebrates the institution in one form or another. Early in the biblical text we note that this is an institution ordained by God. Genesis 2:18-24 shows that partnership between a man and a woman is part of God's creation plan. The scriptures also tell us that the goal of marriage is that it stand as an intimate and permanent bond. Matthew 19:5-6 "Wherefore they are no more two, but one flesh, what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." It is to be dissolved only by death. It is a source of human happiness. On a practical note, Genesis 1:28 says that marriage facilitates the continuation of the species. As Christians we are also familiar with the understanding that human marriage stands as a metaphor for Christ's union with the church (Ephesians 5:23-32). Clearly, marriage is treated as an institution that is ordained by God and deserving our ultimate investment.

Social scientists and those in the medical and mental health professions tell us that married people score higher on social and health indicators, "Virtually all forms of civic engagement are substantially higher among married people, and especially among parents than among singles and the childless ... mostly because spouses and kids draw into the community" is what Robert Putnam, the author of 'Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community' had to say recently.

Having said this, there is a curious twist in the Bible that leads us to rethink the supremacy we give to marriage. In Matthew 22:30 we are told that in the resurrected life, "they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

This stands to reason when one considers Jesus' mission on earth. Jesus is not pro-family as he is pro-Life in a cosmic way. Matthew 10:34-39 is quite explicit about this with



Jesus saying that one who does not take up the cross and follows Him is not worthy of Christ's name. I think it is remarkable that nowhere in the gospel does Jesus offer to His mother anything more than He did for anyone else. All were His mothers, brothers and sisters and throughout the gospels we find Holiness is achieved by stepping outside of prescribed roles, be it mother, son, or sister. Jesus calls her, "Woman," not 'mother' as he bids her farewell while he lies dying on the Cross. Jesus shows us the way of Holiness by His embrace of

unholiness in others—the adulterous woman, the Samaritan woman, the lepers, the Syro-Phoenician woman and others. So in the final analysis we are called to embrace a tension as in marriage.

As new immigrants we are quite vulnerable when it comes to elevating and idolizing our spouses, our children, our economic and professional status and so on. Jesus' life example zooms in on one of the most prized of human spaces, human marriage, and demolishes the status that we tend to give it. We are reminded that we have been put on earth for a greater purpose: To have faith, to walk humbly, to seek mercy and to do justice. If marriage is a channel for the fulfillment of this mission, so be it

While these messages may appear to be contradictory, I think they hang together rather seamlessly, i.e., marriage and family can serve as a crucible, a nucleus for society at large, it is a unique place where our species are civilized to become relational beings with the potential to become Christians relating to self, to others and to God. Understandably, marriage becomes a tool that would have run its full course at the end of the Christian's life on earth. Marriage provides, or at least ought to provide a secure setting where people can explore their dreams and hopes as free beings. It becomes the foundation for the way children in families to fashion themselves as relational creatures. To enter into marriage and to plan a family are some of the most defining decisions of our life and must not be considered frivolously.

The institution of marriage is supported and challenged by multiple forces around us and in that sense one can argue that these are some of the most trying times for marriage, but these are also opportunities to strengthen marriages.

As Kerala Christians there are so many stressors that our marriages are put to. Common among these are absence of support systems such as extended family and kin networks, the nature of our careers—frequent mobility,

economic uncertainty, retraining for employment, layoffs, the inordinate stresses of the work environment, the need for dual employment, our financial responsibilities. As recent immigrants most of us do not have the privilege of discretionary incomes through inherited wealth, we are also committed to providing for our children's education well into their graduate school. In the absence of help from family or others, care for our children in their early years puts an additional stress on couples as they balance work and finances. To add to these, we face issues as multicultural families having to deal with societal issues in the realms of race, gender and sexuality. We are faced with issues of cultural conflict in our home where our children and we stand in as interpreters and apologists for our traditional and adopted cultures. We are also overcome by the galloping advances in technology as a source of communication and information, which have become easier and overwhelming simultaneously. As if these bombardments are not enough, some among us are also dealing with the dissolution of our marriages and the reconstitution of our families.

In addition to these external stresses generated by our living in the US, there is one subject that I would like to address: Has the Indian family and marriage been overly idealized and glamourised and in turn internalized by us with an unrealistic assessment of how things might really be in our lives? Like the whole language of 'model minority,' is this also an exaggeration of who we are? And are our women particularly paying to 'keep up appearances'?

Here's how the description goes: An Indian social scientist, Suman Kakar writes in an anthology on "Minority Families in the US."

The Asian Indian Family structure and family dynamics are important factors linked to the understanding of Asian Indian personality, mental health, accomplishment and prosperity.

Some of the main features of Asian Indian families are:

1. Cultural stability and continuity; indicated by low rates of marriage outside the caste, divorce, illegitimacy, adultery.
2. Close ties between generations
3. Cultural maintenance, evidenced by almost no delinquency
4. Economic self-sufficiency, demonstrated by willingness to work at any job and little reliance on welfare, and
5. Female subordination, shown by the close control over women and wives' responsibility for childcare and domestic work. Females usually perform all household chores, take care of the children, relatives, and elderly, and are responsible for transmitting and instilling cultural values in children. Even in households in which both males and females work, most of the

cooking, cleaning, and other household activities are performed by women, with occasional help from men. The emphasis on sacrifice, inherited and transmitted through Indian culture, teaches individuals to consider family welfare over individual interest (1998).

I want to suggest that the strength of such Indian tradition is fast turning into a weakness and the burden of holding up the family has fallen disproportionately on the females in our families. Such tradition coupled with the fact that most of our women today work as much as our men puts a great burden on them, and we have to examine the cost of this. Here are some pointers on strong marriages. Strong marriages don't exist as an accomplished fact. They are always works in progress.

1. **Self-awareness:** Self-awareness is an important life skill. After all, we teach our children early about the consequences of their behaviors. Self-awareness involves an exercise in asking not only how I feel/or what I know about myself, but also how I am perceived by my partner. It is an ongoing exercise that is required for a free and open relationship.
2. **Communication:** Self-awareness is promoted in a marriage when the couple is committed to keeping communication channels open. The pressure of our daily schedules along with a seemingly inexorable scarcity of time reduces many of our marriage relationships to maintaining a 'Please pass the salt' status. Internalized silence and repression of speech is a terrible violence to the flourishing of one's self. If communication is routine, there will be no place for accumulated grievances and outbursts.
3. **The importance of biographies:** Allow for an intensive examination of individual personality and to ask some seminal questions of the person's biography. For example, how was the individual socialized at home, what sort of role models did these individuals have for 'spouses,' how did they experience 'marriage' in their home, what central experiences in their lives have defined their growth and development? Such questions are important considerations in explaining individual human behavior and goes a long way towards our understanding and acceptance of our spouse with all their strengths and idiosyncrasies. Again, this has to be attempted mutually, intentionally and over time.
4. **The real meaning of Sacrifice:** The common understanding of the term has mutilated the real meaning of the word and sapped the life from it. It comes from Latin *saucer* which means 'sacred' and *facere* which means to 'make.' Looked at 'sacrifice' in this new light, it means that when we engage in a sacrifice, we are making something sacred. Sacrifice is a positive term, especially for a Christian believer. Additionally, we sets up a false dichotomy that we have to choose

(Continued on page 19)

Take Control! Be Proactive with your Health

Anisha Abraham, MD, MPH (Assistant Professor of Pediatrics Georgetown University Hospital)

[Presented as Power Point Slide Show at the 2005 Family Conference, Washington D.C.]

Living healthy is essential to our well being. However, for many, health issues are often a low priority in daily lives. Chronic health conditions can affect not only ourselves, but also our families and our communities. Prevention, not cure, is key to living healthy.

There are 2 million people of South Asian origin living in the United States. This population grew 106 percent from 1990 to 2000. According to the SAPHA's Brown Paper Report, the leading cause of death among South Asians is heart disease.

The top chronic illnesses are obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure. Oral, pharyngeal and liver cancers occur at higher rates. Osteoporosis is more common among South Asians. The incidence of HIV among South Asians in the US is also on the rise.

From a socio-cultural perspective, we are at higher risk for the following conditions.

Diabetes: A condition that correlates with high degree of insulin resistance/central obesity. It is commonly diagnosed in adults over the age of 40 although younger age of onset is now being seen. Type 2 diabetes is six times more common in South Asians

Coronary Artery Disease: The prevalence of coronary heart disease (CHD) and its risk factors in first-generation Asian Indian immigrants to US was studied in 1996 by Dr Enas, et al. Participants were Asian Indian physicians and their family members.

Results of study revealed that Asian Indian men in the US had a higher prevalence of CHD. The key risk factors included smoking, physically inactive lifestyles, poor diet, excess salt, obesity, high blood pressure, stress and diabetes. Genetics also contribute to risk. Recent data suggests that there may be a genetic abnormality in triglyceride regulation. Greater physical activity and improved diet are means of prevention.

Hypertension: High blood pressure due to stress, poor diet, infections etc.

Obesity: Obesity has spread to epidemic proportions in the US, characterized by overnutrition and sedentary lifestyle. It is one of the most apparent risk factors for diabetes, CHD, hypertension. Greater physical activity and improved diet are means of prevention.

Osteoporosis: Osteoporosis is widely prevalent in adult Indian men and women, probably due to dietary deficiency of calcium which leads to a lower peak bone mass.



Malabsorption of calcium is attributed to sub-clinical deficiency of vitamin D. Prevention is by increasing Vitamin D, calcium and performing weight-bearing exercises.

Mental Health: There are a number of stressors in our community that affect mental health and contribute to depression/anxiety. For new immigrants, it might be loss of family and property, culture shock, and job stature. Young couples are stressed out by juggling multiple responsibilities of work, families, and children. For those with older children,

intergenerational issues including communicating about dating/sexuality can be considered a source of tension. Older individuals could be stressed out dealing with chronic health conditions, retirement, loss of identity through workplace, receiving inadequate support. Young women immigrants have higher rates of suicide than their male counterparts, in which family conflict appears to be a precipitating factor. Among young Indian-Americans, there is noticeably increasing substance abuse and diagnosis of eating disorders.

On the brighter side, there are protective factors in our community. For example, recent study shows that there is less schizophrenia in India. However, treatment for mental health issues are variable given the stigma and concern about privacy.

What is the importance of the mind-body-soul connection?

MIND: Maintain the health of your mind by stress reduction, increased sleep, improving time spent with family, and if possible, changing job hours

BODY: Take care of your body through regular health screening which includes glucose and blood pressure monitoring, weight control, regular mammogram, gynecologic exam, diet control and increased physical activity.

SOUL: Nourish your soul by cultivating support from community, engaging in extracurricular activities, and developing deep spirituality.

How can we take charge of our own health needs?

Increase quality family time. Make family meals a priority and minimize TV, video games, computer usage. Get adequate sleep for at least 8 hrs a day! Consider practicing Yoga/Meditation.

Develop resiliency by seeing problems as challenges.

Focus on opportunities not losses, gratitude not complaints. Create an inventory of things that make you feel good and embrace strengths. Cultivate empathy. Maintain a good sense of humor.

Eat a variety of foods including at least five fruits and vegetables a day. Minimize intake of saturated fats. Eat more fiber. Increase iron and calcium intake (especially women). Practice good oral hygiene.

Physical activity is a major independent protective factor against coronary heart disease in men and women. South Asians have poor levels of physical activity. Barriers include time, access to resources, and lack of knowledge and discipline. Try thirty minutes or more of moderate intensity physical activity per day

Know your ABC's

- A-Ask your doc about your HgA1c
- B- Know your Blood Pressure
- C-Know your bad and good cholesterol

Know your height and weight and body/mass index.

Keep your medication list updated and know dosages. Ask your health care provider how medications are prescribed. Explore side effects and dosages. Consider alternative modalities. Consider a baby aspirin (unless contraindicated)

What are general medical screening recommendations by age?

For men below 50 years of age

- Blood pressure, weight check
- Consider cholesterol
- Dental, vision, every year

For men above 50 years of age

- Fecal occult blood every year
- Sigmoidoscopy every 3-5 yrs
- Prostate exam/PSAMen and women over 85 years
- Test for hearing impairment, visual acuity, thyroid function, EKG, glaucoma screening, blood glucose
- Mental/functional status, osteoporosis screen, chest x-ray

For women 35-40 years of age

- Pap smear, q 2-3 yrs after 3 negative
- Breast exam
- Dental, vision every year
- Cholesterol and CBC

For women 40-49 years of age

- Add Mammogram every 1-2 years plus above

For women 50 years of age and older:

- Add annual mammogram

Finally, everyone, regardless of age and gender, should develop extracurricular interests, harness creative instincts, and realize the power of prayer and spirituality. ■

Cherish Your Spouse *(Cont'd from page 17)*

between individual freedom and happiness over family and community concerns, in actuality the two don't stand in opposition to each other, because ultimately individual freedom and happiness cannot be had in a vacuum. We have to be able to distinguish between narcissistic hedonism and human freedom. Thus for men and women to engage sacrificially for the good of something larger than themselves is an act of freedom. Human choice and capabilities, rather than custom are key factors in understanding the nature of sacrifice within our marriages.

5. ***Living with our mortality frees us to live with our limitations:*** For the most part we are all ordinary people, with ordinary gifts and goals and capable of getting along with most people. It is our ordinariness we have come to terms with and celebrate. If we can rely on the Grace of God to see us through our struggles through the ordinary in our marriages, we might be said to have a 'good' marriage.
6. ***Seek help if we must:*** We are a proud people, and we have great difficulty accepting the fact that we might have troubled relationships that need professional help.

We cannot count on old supports of family and friends, but we can go and get help without all the baggage of stigma attached to it. Professionals can help us overcome our ego needs, they can travel with some of us on the inward journey towards self-awareness and in the process enable us to delve into the deepest part of ourselves and bring healing from the inside out and outside in.

7. ***Lastly, keep the faith:*** Faith in God is our first and last hope. Much of what I have said above can be sorted out if we practice emptying ourselves to God regularly. When we recognize that we have been saved by Grace, we too can generate some Grace for our partners and thank God for him or her. Our Christian faith challenges us to see others and ourselves as God might see us—kindly, lovingly and wholly acceptable. Such an approach does not tolerate any inflation or deflation of self or other. Rather, it calls for the lens of Grace. This is a continual process in all our lives and therein lays our hope. ■

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July 22, 2005

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Maintaining our Identity and Being a Blessing in the Land

P. Mathew George, St. Johns Mar Thoma Church, New York

During the XXIII Mar Thoma Family Conference hosted by the Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington from June 30–July 3, 2005 one of the major questions raised by many delegates was, “How can we maintain our family values/identity and be a blessing in the land?” This is a perplexing question to many first generation immigrant parents as well as to American-born children of Indian origin. If we have to become a blessing in the adopted land, we cannot be at the receiving end always, but we have to give back to the community in which we live. Some people might argue that by being a responsible person in the society, making a decent living by working or doing own business, paying tax and taking care of their own children are all different ways to be blessings in the land. These are all great things we do which are mostly self-serving.

Adjustment Strategies of the First Generation Indian Americans

The first generation of Asian Indians immigrated to the United States by choice. It is important to keep in mind that they left India voluntarily for better economic opportunities and not out of cultural frustration. Characteristics of Asian Indian immigrants include: development of a network of community ties focused around religion and voluntary associations; participation in a social life founded on home, work and community ties. A support structure developed around the Asian Indian group in the form of grocery stores, clothing stores, restaurants and institutions for religious practices. Practically every family not only socializes with their own ethnic group, but also with their religious group. They did so in order to preserve a sense of cultural identity, and to facilitate the transmission of religious tradition to the next generation.

Socialization of the Second Generation

The second generation was born into this country; they did not choose it. As they grew up they had to cope daily with different cultures, which confronted them with opposing messages. Cultural conflicts occur when they enter the public school system. Especially during their teenage years they often want to free themselves from the strictness of their parents' control and assimilate more with their peers at school. As they grow up, most of them can function very well as Americans, but feel more Indian as they grow older. Teaching values is very important for Indian parents: mutual respect, especially respect for parents and elders,

maintaining close family ties, being a hard worker, and having a high motivation for academic achievements are some of the core values transmitted to the second generation. Indian parents are often protective and very strict with their children during formative years. Most of the parents encourage their children to be doctors, engineers, lawyers, or business owners. All these careers are potentially high paying in the society and the parents want their children to have a comfortable life style with no financial worries. Asian American parents make unbelievable sacrifices for their children and they consider the failure of their children as their own failure and very difficult for them to accept. Many of the second generation Asian Indians are holding high paying jobs and are respected in the community. A majority of the second generation Indian Americans holds on to the value systems of their parents and at the same time, blends into mainstream America. What I am implying is that we can hold on to our family values and identity and at the same time be respectable in the society.

Jewish American Example

One ethnic group from whom we can learn lessons of success and assimilation are the Jewish Americans. It is hard to imagine American history without the movies of Samuel Goldwyn, the music of Leonard Bernstein, the science of Albert Einstein, films of Steven Spielberg, or the business savvy of Levi Strauss! With Jewish Americans having made such a mark on all facets of American life, it is hard to think of them as an ethnic community. Certainly there was a time when they were every bit so as Asians are today. Their distinct language, customs, food, steadfastness to the orthodox Jewish heritage and their social enclaves had set them apart from the Anglo Saxon mainstream. The ugly shades of persecution and anti-Semitism had followed them into the new country as well. They were isolated and ostracized as a minority. It is therefore impossible not to be moved by the courage, perseverance and patience of this community in its rise to incredible heights. Despite the odds, Jewish Americans have not only carved their own niche, but have also provided America with some of its greatest icons and have maintained their identity and value systems.

Many historians point out that Jews arrived on the shores of America in 1654. Just like some of the Indian immigrants of recent times, the earlier Jews had humble beginnings in America, driving cabs, cleaning motels, shop keeping and working in factories. Gradually through their

grit and determination, these immigrants went on to start some of the most successful businesses in America, many of which still exist. Today the Jewish community stands at 6 million and its culture has influenced all areas of the American dream. Having been persecuted for centuries, Jews have learned survival techniques by complementing their limited manpower with intelligence, foresight and courage towards their common cause.

How can we be a blessing to the land?

After arriving in this land 20 or 30 years ago, as a community we have accomplished a lot. If we look at the Malayalee/Marthomite community alone, most of us own homes, hold respectable jobs, enjoy all the privileges of an affluent society and own places of worship. How can we be a blessing to our adopted homeland? The American Jewish way of giving is influenced by a strong religious imperative

for individualized tzedakah (charity) and by the development of modern American legal mechanisms that encourage private philanthropy. Dr. Gary Tobin of Brandeis University's Institute for Community and Religion, estimates that there are more than 7,000 Jewish foundations with assets over \$10-15 billion in America. These foundations support the needs in all sectors of the society, including health, education, social services, the environment, religion, and the arts. The Mar Thoma community should start many outreach programs such as volunteering at community service events, fundraising for the needs of the community, and participate in local events. Conducting VBS among Native Americans is a good start. Wealthy Marthomites should start foundations that will give grants for various needs of the society and must start missionary work among the American general public. These gestures will earn us respect in the society and at the same time we will be a blessing to this land! ■

"On Being a Blessing in the Land" (Cont'd from page 7)

Commandments, or the New Commandment that Jesus has given us, would not make sense if human beings were the owners, not stewards, of the land. The killing of Abel by Cain, fouling the land with innocent blood, is an early warning of what can happen when we enter the land with our unregenerate nature.

- (d) **Be responsible:** To enter the land is to come under the responsibility to make it "fruitful". In the Bible, the word 'fruitful' always has 'the other-orientation'. It is for the sake and benefit of others that we must bear fruit (John 15:1-6; Galatians 5:22-23). The land brings forth harvests for the sake of others. Every fruit-bearing tree or plant does the same. But the land can also be, as the parable of talents warns us, a burial ground. The man who got one talent went and buried it (Matthew 25:18, 25). The prospect of either the master or anyone else benefiting from his efforts was unbearable to him! These are the two orientations that we can choose from: the land as a medium of fruitfulness or land as a burial ground. If we do not see the spiritual duty to make the land fruitful, we are at peril of degrading it into a burial ground. Being buried is a state of confirmed fruitlessness. That includes also burying the fruitfulness of the earth, as the rich fool in the parable did (Luke 12:13-21). He rebuilt his granaries as tombs for God's blessings!
- (e) **Merely stewards of the land:** To be a blessing in the land, we must enter the land as the stewards of the land's bounties. The profound insight that the parable of the talents gives us is that 'thanksgiving' is the hallmark of stewardship. The essence of 'thanksgiving' is the 'giving' personality orientation. Thieves, or those who know only to take, cannot be thanks-givers. It was only after he encountered Jesus that Zacchaeus earned

the right, or gained the stature, to give thanks. Is our life dry of thanksgiving? Are we anxious-minded and worried? Do we grumble and complain, feel aggrieved and wronged all the time? If we do, we are a burden, not a blessing, on the land.

- (f) **Grow in stature:** Finally, to be a blessing in the land we need to grow in stature. The greatest famine in the world is the famine of humaneness. And it is escalating. People responded so overwhelmingly to Jesus, because he was fully human, even as he was fully divine. In him we have the most authentic revelation of the full glory of being human. Attaining and celebrating life in all its fullness (John 10:10a) is, hence, basic to being a blessing in the land.

In closing, here are a few questions for my readers to meditate on.

Are we parasites or blessings in this land? What are we to do, if we want to move from being parasites to blessings?

Where is 'our land': (a) Kerala (b) America (c) Kingdom of God. If Jesus is not yet the ground of our existence, what are the changes that we need to accept to abide in him (John 15:4)?

Do we want to be a blessing? Or only want to have blessings? Recall (i) some personal experiences in which you dealt with situations with a view to being a blessing in the given context (ii) some situations in which you failed to be so and how differently you would respond if the same situation arises hereafter.

How can we make the Christian presence 'a blessing in the land' in a globalized world? What message do we have to the Church in America in this context? ■

Eight Questions on Suffering

An interview with Dr. George Samuel

Q. 1: *Dr. Samuel, we understand that you have faced situations in your life that cause one to think about 'suffering' in more than a peripheral way.*

Dr. George Samuel: Yes. Three of my four children have died before their time. One son died in early infancy. He and his two brothers all suffered from cystic fibrosis, a condition for which there is no curative therapy available. My wife used to stay awake for days, to give them suction, oxygen, inhalation therapy, and artificial respiration. The prolonged exhaustion and stress for over twenty-eight years wore her down, producing muscle paralysis and associated problems. Her death was followed by the deaths of my younger son (aged 22) and that of my older son (aged 32), after life-long struggles between life and death.



Q. 2: *How did you respond to these heartbreaking events?*

Dr. George Samuel: It was tempting to be discouraged when we faced such insurmountable problems. But those same problems gave us the opportunity to prove whether the One who gave us His promises really would step in. **What had happened to us is not so important, we realized. What mattered was what happened through us.** What God does inside us, when painful experiences arrive, is of greater value than keeping such sufferings at bay. Within a space of three years, I lost not only my wife and two sons, but also both of my parents. Yet at their funeral services I was able to celebrate the certainty of our hope in Jesus. Because of this certainty, I am able to decide on the priorities of today. With God's help, we have been able to turn tragedy into triumph, obstacles into opportunities, the worst into the best, and problems into projects that will have great and lasting value.

Q. 3: *It is indeed an unusual attitude for our times!*

Dr. George Samuel: In an earlier age, this attitude may have been less unusual. In the past, suffering was an incentive to inquiry and not an excuse for unbelief. Only since the Enlightenment, has the problem of suffering been seen as ground for unbelief. Rationalism, though, has no answer to evil. **Evil cannot be explained in scientific terms. Our understanding of it must come from 'revelation'.**

Q. 4: *What is your understanding of the Biblical explanation for the evil that we see all around us?*

Dr. George Samuel: Scripture is very clear on the problem of evil (see Job 5:7; II Corinthians 13:4). God made Satan the most beautiful of all creatures, with the gift of free will.

Satan rebelled against God, and that was the first sin and the pattern for all sin that followed. Nothing outside his own free will caused Satan to sin. He was the first cause of his sin, and we can't go back any further than that. As the story of the Garden of Eden shows, Satan has passed his sin down to man. Man [generic sense] brought evil upon himself, like Satan, by selfishly choosing his own way apart from God's way.

The idea of evil lies in the idea of perfection. God made everything perfect. One of the perfect things God made was freedom of choice. Such free will opens the door to evil. We, by our wills, are the cause of the evil we do. God allowed for that possibility by making us free creatures. He actually took the risk of giving us freedom. Both the opportunities—to choose good and ability to choose evil are included. Freedom of choice endows with responsibility and accountability. **God created the fact of freedom. We perform the act of freedom.** And sadly, those actions are all too often foolish, sinful, and unwise. Thus imperfection arises from perfection—not directly, but indirectly through freedom.

Q. 5: *So, how will you hold on to a good Almighty God in the face of evil? Is that not a contradiction?*

Dr. George Samuel: The idea of a good and powerful God is not irreconcilable with the existence of evil. God's existence and the reality of evil are not logically contradictory. God is morally free, in that nothing can make him do anything against His nature. God's nature is perfectly good. But, having exercised His omnipotence in creating the universe and endowing His creatures with freedom, He does not block the outcome of that freedom—even if that outcome is suffering and pain. The corollary of this is that evil cannot be destroyed without destroying the freedom. If freedom were destroyed, that would be evil in itself, because it would deprive free creatures of their greatest good. Scripture says that God is victor. The devil is not out of hand. Evil is not running loose and unchecked. God will triumph over all the evils of the world. This is declared on the basis of revelation in God's word. God is a God of judgment—in history as well as at the end of time (Romans 1-2).

Q. 6: *How has God dealt with this issue of evil and suffering?*

Dr. George Samuel: Just because evil is not destroyed right now does not mean it will continue forever. God's will is holy, wise, good and just. God will have a good reason for allowing

(Continued on page 32)

നമ്മുടെ പകയും ശത്രുതയും ദൈവസേവയും

THOMAS P. PHILIP, Gaithersburg, MD

ദൈവം മനുഷ്യന് നൽകിയ വിലപ്പെട്ട കൽപ്പന കൂട്ടുകാരനെ നിന്നെപ്പോലെ തന്നെ സ്നേഹിക്കേണം എന്നുള്ളതാകുന്നു. സകല ധർമ്മങ്ങളെയും ന്യായപ്രമാണങ്ങളെയും ഈ കൽപ്പനയിൽ ദൈവം ഒതുക്കിയിരിക്കുന്നു. 'പരോപകാരമേ പുണ്യം പാപമേ പരപീഡനം' എന്ന ഹൈന്ദവ ധർമ്മത്തിലും ഈ സ്നേഹം അടങ്ങിയിരിക്കുന്നു. മഹത്തായ ഈ രണ്ട് ധർമ്മോപദേശങ്ങളും അനുസരിച്ച് ജീവിച്ചിരുന്നെങ്കിൽ ഭൂമിയിൽ സ്വർഗ്ഗരാജ്യം കെട്ടിപ്പടുക്കുവാൻ മനുഷ്യർക്ക് എന്നേ കഴിയുമായിരുന്നു!

ദൈവത്തിന്റെ പേരിൽ ലോകത്തിന് ഭീകരാക്രമണങ്ങളും കൂട്ടക്കൊലകളും നടന്നു കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. വർഗ്ഗീയ സംഘട്ടനങ്ങളും മതവിഭേദങ്ങളും ഇൻഡ്യയിലും വർദ്ധിച്ചു കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. പല ക്രൈസ്തവ ദേവാലയങ്ങളിലും ദൈവത്തിന്റെ പേരിൽ ഇന്ന് ശബ്ദം കലഹങ്ങളും നടന്നു കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. സഭകളിൽ വ്യവഹാരങ്ങൾ നടക്കുന്നു. ബിഷോപ്പന്മാരെയാക്കെ കോടതി കയറ്റുന്നു. ഈ വ്യവഹാരങ്ങളിൽ ജയിക്കുന്നത് ആരാണ്? ദൈവമോ, മനുഷ്യ ദൈവങ്ങളോ? തമ്മിൽ തമ്മിൽ കലഹിക്കുന്നതും സ്ഥാനമാനങ്ങൾക്കും അധികാരത്തിനും വേണ്ടി പോരാടുന്നതുമാണോ ഭക്തിയും ദൈവാരാധനയും?

ദൈവത്തെയും അവന്റെ വചനങ്ങളെയും മാനിക്കാത്തവരാകുന്നു ബിഷോപ്പന്മാരെയാക്കെ കോടതി കയറ്റുന്നത്? വ്യവഹാരം സംബന്ധിച്ച് ദൈവവചനം പറയുന്നതെന്താണെന്ന് ശ്രദ്ധിക്കാം. 'എന്നാൽ നിങ്ങൾക്ക് ഐഹികകാര്യങ്ങളെക്കുറിച്ച് വ്യവഹാരമുണ്ടെങ്കിൽ വിധിപ്പാൻ സഭ ഗണ്യമാക്കാത്തവരെ ഇരുത്തുന്നുവോ? നിങ്ങൾക്കു തമ്മിൽ വ്യവഹാരം ഉണ്ടാകുന്നതു തന്നെ കേവലം പേരായ്‌മയാകുന്നു'. (1കൊരി, 6). ദൈവജനങ്ങൾ തമ്മിൽ വ്യവഹാരം നടക്കുന്നത് എത്രയോ പോരായ്‌മയാകുന്നു. ദൈവ സ്നേഹവും ദൈവാത്മാവിന്റെ ഫലങ്ങളും പുറപ്പെടുവിച്ച് ദൈവത്തെ ആരാധിപ്പാൻ സന്നദ്ധരല്ലാത്ത മത ഭക്തന്മാർ ഒന്നിച്ചു കൂടി വഴക്കും വക്കാണവും പോർ വിളികളുമൊക്കെ നടത്തുന്ന പള്ളികൾ സാത്താന്റെ പള്ളികളാകുന്നു.

നമ്മുടെ ആത്മീയ ജീവിതത്തിലും ഐഹിക ജീവിതത്തിലും നമുക്ക് ദൈവസ്നേഹമുണ്ടോ? സ്വന്തക്കാർ തമ്മിൽ തമ്മിലും അന്യരുമായിട്ടുള്ള ഇടപാടുകളിലും ദോഷം കണക്കിടാത്ത ഈ ദൈവസ്നേഹമുണ്ടോ? പകയുടെയും വിദ്വേഷത്തിന്റെയും പ്രതികാര ചിന്തകളുടെയും അന്ധകാരം നിറഞ്ഞ തടവറയിൽ തന്നെയല്ലേ നാം ഇന്നും ജീവിക്കുന്നത്? നമ്മുടെ അടിതൊട്ടു മുടിവരെയും ചതവും പഴുത്ത വ്രണങ്ങളും തന്നെയല്ലേ? ഒരിക്കലും പൊറുക്കാനും മറക്കാനും തയ്യാറല്ലാത്ത വിധത്തിൽ കടുത്തപകയും ശത്രുതയും ഉള്ളിന്റെ ഉള്ളിന്റെ ഉള്ളിൽ ഒതുക്കിവെച്ചു കൊണ്ടല്ലേ മുടങ്ങാതെ ദേവാലയങ്ങളിലും പ്രാർത്ഥന യോഗങ്ങളിലും പോയി നാം 'ഞങ്ങളുടെ കടക്കാരോട് ഞങ്ങൾ ക്ഷമിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നതു പോലെ ഞങ്ങളുടെ കടങ്ങളും ദോഷങ്ങളും ഞങ്ങളോടും ക്ഷമിക്കേണമേ' എന്ന് പ്രാർത്ഥിക്കുന്നത്? ദൈവം ഈ പ്രാർത്ഥന എങ്ങനെ കൈക്കൊള്ളും?

മനുഷ്യജീവിതത്തിന് സന്തുഷ്ടിയും സമാധാനവും ആത്മരക്ഷയുമേകുന്ന നിതാന്ത മനോജന്മമായ ദൈവ സ്നേഹത്തിന്റെ മുന്തിരിവള്ളിയിലെ കൊമ്പുകളായി തീരാതെ ആത്മീയാനുഗ്രഹങ്ങൾ പ്രാപിക്കുവാൻ ആർക്കും കഴിയുകയില്ല.

ബൈബിളിൽ അങ്ങോളമിങ്ങോളം നിറഞ്ഞു നിൽക്കുന്ന മഹൽസത്യം സ്നേഹമാകുന്നു. ഈ സ്നേഹം ആവോളമനുഭവിച്ച് ജീവിക്കുവാനാകുന്നു ദൈവം നമുക്ക് ജീവിതം തന്നിരിക്കുന്നത്. ഈ സ്നേഹത്തിൽ കൂടിയല്ലാതെ ദൈവത്തെ ആരാധിപ്പാൻ ആർക്കും കഴിയുകയില്ല.

മറ്റുള്ളവർക്ക് നന്മയും ഉപകാരങ്ങളും നാം ചെയ്തില്ലെങ്കിലും അത് സാരമില്ല. എന്നാൽ മറ്റുള്ളവർക്ക് ദോഷം ചെയ്യാതെയും ചിന്തിക്കാതെയും നാം ജീവിക്കേണ്ടതല്ലേ? ജീവകാലം മുഴുവൻ മറ്റുള്ളവരോട് മനസ്സിൽ പകയും പ്രതികാര ചിന്തകളും വെച്ചു പുലർത്തി ജീവിക്കുന്ന അനേകർ ആത്മീയ ലോകത്തിലുമുണ്ട്. ജീവിതത്തിലെ മാറ്റമില്ലാത്ത മഹൽ സത്യത്തിലേക്ക് ഞാനവരുടെ ശ്രദ്ധയെ ക്ഷണിക്കുന്നു. 'നിങ്ങൾ വിധിക്കുന്ന വിധിയാൽ നിങ്ങളെയും വിധിക്കും; നിങ്ങൾ അളക്കുന്ന അളവിനാൽ നിങ്ങൾക്കും അളന്നു കിട്ടും'. തിരുക്കുറലിൽ പറയുന്നത് ഇങ്ങനെയാകുന്നു. 'The pain that a man causes to another in the forenoon returns to him that very afternoon'. ഇതാരും മറക്കണ്ട. തങ്ങളെ പരാജയപ്പെടുത്താൻ ലോകത്തിൽ ആർക്കും കഴിയുകയില്ലെന്നാണല്ലോ വിസ്തൃകളുടെ വിചാരം.

പകയും വിദ്വേഷവും കൈവിടാതെ ദൈവത്തെ ആരാധിപ്പാൻ ദേവാലയത്തിലേക്ക് പോകുന്ന കപട ഭക്തരോട് ദൈവം കൽപ്പിക്കുന്നത് ശ്രദ്ധിക്കുക. 'ആകയാൽ നിന്റെ വഴിപാട് യാഗപീഠത്തിങ്കൽ കൊണ്ടുവരുമ്പോൾ സഹോദരന് നിന്റെ നേരേ വല്ലതും ഉണ്ടെന്ന് അവിടെ വെച്ച് ഓർമ്മ വന്നാൽ നിന്റെ വഴിപാട് അവിടെ യാഗപീഠത്തിന്റെ മുമ്പിൽ വെച്ചേച്ച് ഒന്നാമത് ചെന്നു സഹോദരനോട് നിരന്നു കൊൾക; പിന്നെ വന്നു നിന്റെ വഴിപാട് കഴിക്ക'. ഈ നിരപ്പുകൾ പ്രക്രിയ ദൈവഭക്തന്മാരെ സംബന്ധിച്ചു പോലും അഭിമാനത്തിന്റെ പ്രശ്നമായി തീർന്നിരിക്കയാണിന്ന്. പക്ഷേ, ഒന്നുറപ്പാണ്. ദൈവാത്മാവിലുള്ള നിരപ്പിന്റെ അനുഭവം കൂടാതെ സ്വർഗ്ഗരാജ്യത്തിന്റെ ഉമ്മറത്തു പോലും ചെന്നെത്തുവാൻ ആർക്കും കഴിയുകയില്ല. ഓർക്കുക, യാഗത്തിലല്ല, കരുണയിൽ പ്രസാദിക്കുന്ന ദൈവമാകുന്നു ക്രിസ്തു. മനുഷ്യനെ സ്നേഹിക്കുകയും അവന്റെ ദുഃഖങ്ങളിൽ പങ്കു കൊള്ളുകയും ചെയ്യാത്തവന് ഒരിക്കലും ദൈവത്തെ സ്നേഹിക്കുവാൻ കഴിയുന്നതല്ല. 'താൻ കണ്ടിട്ടുള്ള സഹോദരനെ സ്നേഹിക്കാത്തവന് കണ്ടിട്ടില്ലാത്ത ദൈവത്തെ സ്നേഹിപ്പാൻ കഴിയുന്നതല്ല'.

യഥാർത്ഥമായി ദൈവത്തെ അറിയുന്നവർ ദൈവാത്മാവിൽ ജീവിക്കുന്നവരാകുന്നു. അങ്ങനെയുള്ളവർക്ക് ദേവാലയങ്ങളിൽ പോയി തമ്മിലടിക്കാൻ ഒരിക്കലും സാധ്യമല്ല. ക്രിസ്തുവിനുള്ളവർ സ്വയത്തെയും അഹംഭാവത്തെയും വിദ്വേഷങ്ങളെയുമൊക്കെ ക്രൂശിച്ചവരാകുന്നു. ദൈവത്തെയും മാമ്മോനെയും സേവിച്ചു കൊണ്ടുള്ള ആത്മീയ ജീവിതമല്ലേ നാം ഇന്ന് നയിക്കുന്നത്? ഇന്നത്തെ അധികം ആത്മീയ നേതാക്കന്മാരും ഇഹലോകത്തിലും പരലോകത്തിലും സ്വർഗ്ഗം തേടുന്നവരാകുന്നു. കിട്ടുമോ രണ്ടു സ്വർഗ്ഗങ്ങൾ അവർക്ക്?

ദൈവ സ്നേഹത്തിന്റെ കമനീയ ഭാവങ്ങൾ ക്ഷമയും കരുണയും ത്യാഗവും താഴ്മയുമൊക്കെയാകുന്നു. അപ്പോസ്തലനായ പൗലോസ് ആ സ്നേഹത്തെ ഇങ്ങനെ വർണ്ണിക്കുന്നു. 'സ്നേഹം ദീർഘമായി ക്ഷമിക്കുകയും ദയ കാണിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു.

സ്നേഹം നിഗളിക്കുന്നില്ല. സ്വാർത്ഥം അന്വേഷിക്കുന്നില്ല'. ഇതാണ് ദൈവസ്നേഹം. ഈ സ്നേഹം ഇന്നത്തെ ആത്മീയ ജീവിതം നയിക്കുന്ന നാം മനുഷ്യരോട് ക്ഷമിക്കുന്നവരും ദയകാണിക്കുന്നവരുമാണോ? ദൈവത്തിന്റെ കൽപ്പന വീണ്ടും ശ്രദ്ധിക്കുക. 'നിങ്ങൾ തമ്മിൽ ദയയും മനസ്സലിവുമുള്ളവരായി ദൈവം ക്രിസ്തുവിൽ നിങ്ങളോടു ക്ഷമിച്ചതുപോലെ അന്യോന്യം ക്ഷമിപ്പിൻ'. ക്രിസ്തു ശിഷ്യന്മാരോട് പറഞ്ഞത് 'നിങ്ങൾ ഏഴ് എഴുപത് വട്ടം ക്ഷമിക്കണമെന്നാണ്'. ക്ഷമിക്കുന്നവരിൽ അല്ലാഹു പ്രസാദിക്കുന്നു എന്ന് ഖുർആൻ പറയുന്നു. ഹൈന്ദവ പൂജാണത്തിലെ ഭക്തനായ പ്രഹ്ലാദൻ ഭഗവാനോട് ചോദിച്ച ഉൽകൃഷ്ടമായ വരം എന്നെ ഉപദ്രവിച്ചിട്ടുള്ള ആർക്കും ഒരു ദേഷവും വരുത് എന്നുള്ളതായിരുന്നു. ആർഷ ഭാരതത്തിന്റെ ആത്മസത്ത ഒരിക്കൽ ഇതായിരുന്നു.

കാബീ കാമകോഡി ശങ്കരാചാര്യ സ്വാമിമാർക്കും, അല്ലാഹു ദയാലുവാകുന്നു എന്ന് ഉച്ചെയ്സ്തരം ഘോഷിക്കുന്ന ഇസ്ലാം മതാചാര്യന്മാർക്കും ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ ക്രൂൾ കഴുത്തിലണിഞ്ഞ് ജീവിക്കുന്ന ക്രൈസ്തവ പുരോഹിതന്മാർക്കും, ദൈവവേലക്കാർക്കും

ഭക്തന്മാർക്കും തങ്ങളെ ഉപദ്രവിച്ചിട്ടുള്ളവർക്ക് ഒരു ദേഷവും വരുതെന്ന് പ്രഹ്ലാദനെപ്പോലെ ഹൃദയം തുറന്ന് പ്രാർത്ഥിക്കുവാൻ കഴിയുമോ? ഒരു ചെറിയ വിഭാഗം ദൈവമനുഷ്യർക്ക് ഇന്നും അതിനു കഴിയുമെന്നാണെന്റെ ഉത്തമ വിശ്വാസം. അതാ, കാൽവറി കുരിശിലേക്ക് ഒന്ന് നോക്കുക. തന്നെ അതിദാരുണമായി കൊല ചെയ്യുന്നവർക്കു വേണ്ടി 'പിതാവേ ഇവർ ചെയ്യുന്നത് ഇന്നത്തെ അറിയാതെയാൽ ഇവരോട് ക്ഷമിക്കേണമേ' എന്ന് യേശുദേവൻ പ്രാർത്ഥിച്ചു. നമ്മുടെ മാതൃക അവനാകുന്നു. ആത്മീയ മോക്ഷയാത്ര നടത്തുന്ന ഇന്നത്തെ എല്ലാ ദൈവവിശ്വാസികളും ഓർക്കട്ടെ. 'നിങ്ങൾ ജീവിച്ചിരിക്കേണ്ടതിന് തിന്മയല്ല നന്മ തന്നെ അന്വേഷിപ്പിൻ; അപ്പോൾ നിങ്ങൾ പറയുന്നതുപോലെ സൈന്യങ്ങളുടെ ദൈവമായ യഹോവ നിങ്ങളോടു കൂടെ ഇരിക്കും'. മനുഷ്യർക്ക് നന്മ ചെയ്യാൻ വേണ്ടിയാകുന്നു ദൈവം നമുക്ക് ജീവിതം തന്നിരിക്കുന്നത്. അതു ചെയ്യാതെ ആരും ദൈവത്തെ കാണുകയില്ല.

വൈകുണ്ഠം, നാഥാ?

ഏബ്രഹാം മാമൻ, എപ്പിഫനി മാർത്തോമ ചർച്ച്, ന്യൂയോർക്ക്.

ഹൃദയം നൂറുങ്ങിയിന്നുയരുമീ പ്രാർത്ഥന
അവിടുന്ന് സ്വീകരിക്കില്ലേ?
മനം തകർന്നുയരുമെൻ യാചനയിൻ സ്വരം
നാഥാ, നീ കൈകൊള്ളുകില്ലേ?... (ഹൃദയം)



ജീവിതത്തിൽ കൊടും ചൂടിൽ വെന്തുരുകുമ്പോൾ
നാഥാ നിൻ സാന്നിധ്യം ഏകു
ശാശ്വതമാം ഒരു ജീവ വൃക്ഷത്തണൽ
നൽകി നീ ആശ്വസിപ്പിക്കു!... (ഹൃദയം)

ഏകയായ് ഈ ലോക വാതായനത്തിങ്കൽ
ധ്യാനിച്ചു രാ പാർത്തിടുന്ന്
പൊന്നുഷസ്തികളെൻ പ്രിയന്റെ കാലൊച്ച
കേൾക്കുവാൻ കാതോർത്തിടുന്ന്... (ഹൃദയം)

തപ്തമാം ഹൃദയത്തിനാശ്വാസ ധാരയായ്
വേഗമണയു മ്ശീഹാ
വിതുമ്പുമെൻ മാനസതേങ്ങലതിൻ സ്വരം
തിരിച്ചറിഞ്ഞാശു വന്നീടു... (ഹൃദയം)

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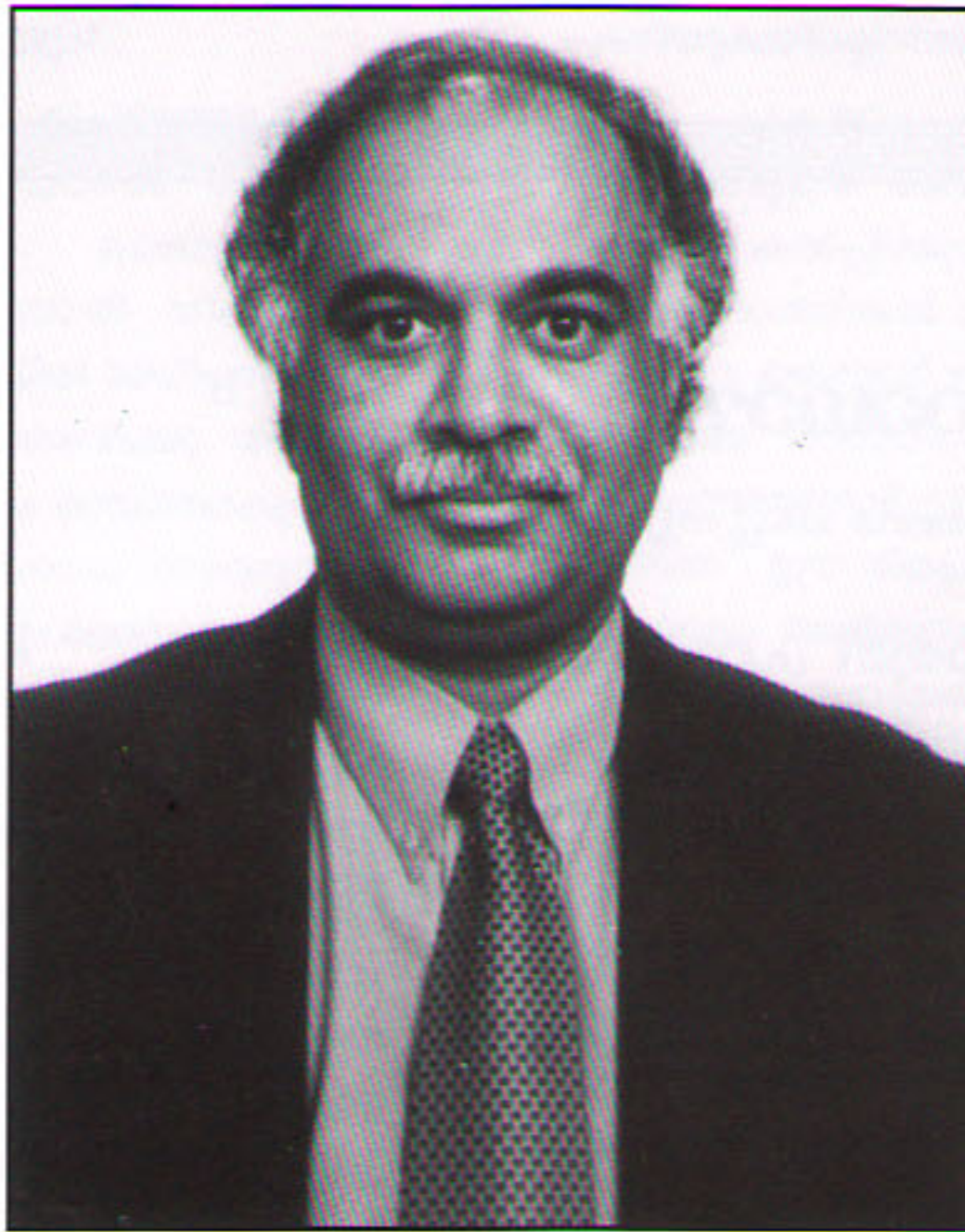


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Blessing

P. V. Varghese, Epiphany MTC, NY

Ephesians 1-3 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the Heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ". Blessing means different things to different people. What does it mean to be blessed? Jewish people used the word 'bless' to express both God's kindness to us and our thanks to him. To bless generally means to speak good or to do good things for another. There are many types of blessings in the scripture.

The first is the blessing God communicates to people. When God blessed Abraham by saying "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you, I will make your name great and you will be a blessing". (Genesis 12-2) God was pronouncing a benediction promising His favor. A second type of blessing is spoken by people to God. Psalms 103:1-2. King David blessing God by saying "Bless Lord O my soul....". Speaking well of or expressing praise to God is blessing Him. When we bless Him we acknowledge Him as the source for all what we have. Another type of blessing is one spoken by one person to another often invoking the name of God when we bless someone superior to us as when Jacob blessed Pharaoh in Genesis 47-7; suggests honoring or showing respect.

The Old Testament Hebrew word for blessing means "The transmission or endowment of the power of God's goodness or favor." In the Old Testament alone the term blessing is used 415 times.

God's blessing is manifested in many ways. In the OT blessing often referred to fertility in procreation. (Genesis 1:22, 28). Repeatedly, in Genesis we read God's promise to multiply Abraham's descendants. Long life was considered to be a blessing from God. The power to defeat enemies in the OT times was also considered a blessing from God. (Genesis 24:60). Sometimes blessing was related to obedience to God and was associated with physical health and material well-being. In other words the OT blessings were often viewed as being primarily material.

Abraham was blessed with lot of land, herd and other wealth. So was Job. If people didn't have children, land, herds, or a victorious army they didn't feel blessed by God. Many people even today feel the same way. They don't think they are blessed unless they have plenty of money, a comfortable life and excellent health. Can we experience God's blessings apart from material abundance? Yes, we can. In the New Testament the word 'bless' means to speak well of or to express praise. On the Sermon on the Mount (Mathew Chap. 5), the blessings Jesus promised are basically spiritual, not material. Jesus is saying repeatedly that you are blessed. But, He is talking about poverty, hunger, thirst, suffering, persecution etc. The real rewards of blessings are found in one's relationship with God and in serving Him.

Furthermore, blessings in the NT include God providing our salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus



Christ. The essence of the blessings of God is the assurance that we belong to Him and He delights in us. God created us and keeps us day by day—we are blessed. God redeemed us through His Son Jesus Christ—we are blessed. God fills us with His Spirit and equips us for life—we are blessed. God protect us from iniquities—we are blessed. God turned towards us not away from us—we are blessed.

Dr. Lloyd Ogilvie says, "To be a blessed person is to know, feel and relish God's affirmation and assurance of acceptance and approval. It is the experience of being chosen and cherished, valued and enjoyed".

In the OT, this assurance belongs to the children of Israel, the direct descendants of Abraham and God's chosen people. In the NT it belongs to everyone who receives Jesus Christ by faith. (Galatians 3:14) Jesus redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to gentiles through Christ Jesus so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. You belong to God through Christ. He delights in you and you are blessed.

People usually say that since I became saved or received Jesus Christ as savior "I got this and that"... Your financial situation might have improved considerably and you may be in excellent health. That is good! But you have to realize that you don't have to be a "saved Christian" to have these healthy, wealthy conditions. In fact, many of the very rich and healthy people are not Christians, some times may not even believe in God at all or may even be followers of idol Gods. The main difference is that a worldly person may say that I made all these things that I have with my intelligence and I made use of the best opportunity to acquire all these. Remember the parable of the rich fool ... But a Christian in good financial standing will say, "I cried out to God and He answered my prayers, whatever I have is a gift from God and I am eternally grateful to Him. He has entrusted all these things to me and I will be a good and trustworthy steward and will use all these to bring glory and honor to His name."

How much has God Blessed us? How can you measure it?

Paul says we have been blessed with the indescribable gift. (2 Corinthians 9-15). How do we know that? Ephesians 1:3 says, God blessed us with all the realms of Heaven. When God blessed us by sending his only Son it was a complete blessing. That's why it is called "The Heaven emptying blessing". Nothing was held back. That is the greatest gift man has ever received. So we are richly blessed irrespective of our financial, or health related conditions. The other difference is that the material blessings may come and go. But spiritual blessings cannot be taken away. (Romans 8:38-39). "Neither height nor.... Jesus our Lord."

(Continued on page 54)

Living by Faith

2005 Diocesan Youth Mission Trip to India

Participants: Sheena Philip, Anisha Joseph, Dione Mathew, Mathew Abraham, Jiju Abraham, Anil Varghese, Aleyamma Mathew

Coordinator: Mariamma Thomas

Written by: Mathew Abraham



Group with The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan.

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ Mathew 25:37-40

Early this year my friends and I were given a wonderful opportunity to go and observe the Lord’s work being done in India by the Mar Thoma Church. It was such an awesome experience and we all were truly blessed by it. We were able to see first hand the sacrifices made by men and women, some not much older than myself and some even younger, everyday. We were able to live with them, if only for a week.

We started our tour in New Delhi, where we met

with Rev. K.G. Joseph and stayed with his family. He took us to the slums in New Delhi and we met with the men and women of the Mar Thoma Social Action Project. Everyday these men and women go out directly into the slums of New Delhi and pick up kids who have no chance of education, or health care, or food or clothing and bring them back to the facility. This facility is located directly across one of the many slums in New Delhi. The kids are fed, clothed, taken care of, and then educated both in general knowledge and in the gospel. The men and women who work there are themselves a testament of the love of Christ, they have come to a saving knowledge of Him from someone in their lives who took the time out to evangelize and disciple them in the way of the LORD.

After we were done in New Delhi, we went to Sihora ashram. We stayed there for a week. The atmosphere at Sihora was one of service and love. We met the achens and the sisters there who have dedicated their whole lives to serving GOD by serving others. The ashram sits on 30 acres of land that was given to the achens there 50 years ago. A



Group with the new Episcopal Designate Very Rev. K. U. Abraham Ramban and Bishops.



Group at Maramon Convention Stage for the Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam Centennial programs.

Bible college on the campus gives opportunity for young men to study and prepare to go out into the world to do God's work. They have a hostel for young boys who live and work in the ashram. They have a house for the destitute, where they are cared for and given a home where they are loved and nurtured and treated with dignity and respect. There is a hospital on the premises that caters to the people of Sihora and surrounding areas; there is a doctor on staff who is there to serve for 2-3 years at a time and several staff. We were able to go into the villages and visit with the missionaries who live in the villages among the people and minister to them on a daily basis.

The sisters of Sihora are, essentially, a group of Mar Thoma nuns. There is a group of sisters that live in the city of Sihora. They have a house and surrounding the house



Group with Sihora Ashram Achens, Sisters and Evangelists

them as their own. They along with the rest of the missionary team there are entrusted with not only the care of the boys, but also of the whole town and surrounding area. They live there among the people and evangelize by example, not only preaching. We were able to participate in



Group with Missionaries and their families

they have a hostel for girls and a school for them as well. Some of the girls who are there at the house would have had a very uncertain future if it were not for the sisters of Sihora. The sisters of Sihora were a group of women, who have been there for about 50 years or so; they have come there just like the missionaries and the achens forsaking everything for God. They live each day relying on God to provide for their every need.

After Sihora, we headed to Pollachi in Tamil Nadu. The Mar Thoma Church has a mission project there that is about 19 years old. We were able to

stay with the missionaries where they lived. They too have a hostel for boys and they feed them, clothe them, and raise

the local prayer meetings that were held in each of the villages that we went to, both in Sihora and Pollachi. In Pollachi they have one achen and twenty evangelists that live in the surrounding areas and minister to the people there. We were able to meet all of them, visit with them, and find out about their work and the needs that they have.

Our next destination was Karunagapally to visit the tsunami affected areas. Then we visited a facility for children with mental



Children who lost parents by Tsunami attack

retardation. We were able to meet with the missionaries of Missions India.

Everywhere we went, what we saw as a team were great examples of living by faith. The people that we met were completely submitted to God, He was their everything,

We as a team wish to thank The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan, Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa, Achens, and Evangelists who supported and prayed for us. A special thanks to Molly aunty

for taking the time out of her life and coming with us and putting up with us for three weeks. It was a truly blessed time and we know that we will be going back.

May God bless all who read this, as you do please know that HE has called all of us to be missionaries, maybe not out of the country but missionaries nonetheless, wherever you are at work, school, and your community. Know what it means to live by faith and depend on God first not after all

other possibilities have been exhausted. ■

***Next mission trip is scheduled for January 2006. If interested call Mariamma Thomas at (281) 431-4335 or (832) 606-4346.**



KNS Children and teachers.

they did not turn to Him out of convenience, but rather out of necessity and longing because their complete hope, everyday was in Him. It made the whole team think about our lives and what was important to us. Everywhere we went, every prayer meeting we attended the presence of the Holy Spirit was welcomed. We were able to experience first

Eight Questions on Suffering *(Cont'd from page 23)*

evil and suffering. God grieves over tragedy, sin, and evil. God can work in the area where there is evil, rebellion, and sin, no matter how great the evil is (see Genesis 50:20; Acts 2:23; Romans 9:17). Whenever He wills, God can enter the very arena of evil, and turn it to His purposes. Remember, God allowed the occurrence of evil in His universe from the very beginning. He did this in order to display His own perfection. **His plan was to punish evil by taking the punishment on Himself and pardoning those who committed it.** That involves saving us from the power of evil, while using it to build virtues we couldn't have gained without it.

Q. 7: *What are some of the lessons you had learnt from your encounter with suffering?*

Dr. George Samuel: We need to lean on the promises of God, and not be thrown into confusion when something bad happens to us. We need not let sufferings confuse our mind between what God wills in His goodness and what Satan wills in his wickedness. We have to approach the problem of evil with humility and openness. **It is better to learn to live with it, while trying our best to alleviate it.**

The cross gives us the ability and the strength to withstand evil, to endure suffering, and to live in this context

of confusion. We are challenged to do good and noble things and to overcome evil tendencies. Courage is only possible where there is real danger. Self-sacrifice is only noble when there is selfishness to overcome. Hope in God enables us to cope with sufferings in this present life. Just as suffering is real, so are the promises of God and the hope of eternal life. We are on our way to a better world.

Q. 8: *What does the future mean for a child of God?*

Dr. George Samuel: Revelation 21:8, 27 foretells a day when everyone has free will but no one will sin. The God who Himself suffered transfigures the sufferings of His people. The glorious transfiguration of suffering is an integral part of our faith. Suffering and glorification are part of the same process of growth in the Christian life. We have nothing in this world to compare with the glory that is to come (see Romans 8:18). When we hold such a purpose before us, the suffering of today is not felt as suffering. In this world of suffering and evil, we know that, wherever we go, the God of all compassion goes ahead of us and journeys with us, consoling and strengthening us until we see Him face to face.

Dr. George Samuel, formerly a nuclear scientist, is currently Director of Value Education Centre, Tiruvalla, Kerala

APRIL WINNERS AND ANSWERS. CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL WINNERS!!!

Bible Cross-Word Puzzle Winners (April 2005)

Bible Cross-Word Puzzle Winners (April 2005)	
1. Ajin John, Detroit MTC	ANSWERS ACROSS 2. FIRST 5. ROOSTER 9. TWODRACHMA 10. WATER 13. DISOWN 14. ANDREW 15. MALCHUS DOWN 1. EVERYTHING 3. SEVENTY 4. NATHANAE 6. HADES 7. JAMES 8. FAITH 11. SIMON 12. JONAH
2. Alex Vaidyan, St. Thomas MTC, NY	
3. Alwin David, Detroit MTC	
4. Annamma John, St. Lukes MTC	
5. Christopher George Chacko, Detroit MTC	
6. Daniel P. Thomas, MTC San Francisco	
7. Edwin David, Detroit MTC	
8. Jayshree Thomas, Sugarland, TX	
9. Jeena Mathew, St. Peter's MTC	
10. Jerry Alex John, Detroit MTC	
11. Justin Vaidyan, St. Thomas MTC, NY	
12. Justy John, St. James MTC, NY	
13. Lilly Abraham, Horeb MTC, Colorado	
14. Omana Rajee, Staten Island MTC	
15. Sally Abraham, Epiphany MTC	
16. Saramma Koshy, St. Lukes MTC	
17. Shaila Mathew, Dallas MTC Farmers Branch	
18. Sheeba Abraham, Horeb MTC, Colorado	
19. Sherry Zachariah, St. Johns MTC, NY	
20. Shobi Mathew, Detroit MTC	
21. Susan Thomas, Epiphany MTC	
22. Tony Varghese, Bergenfield, NJ	

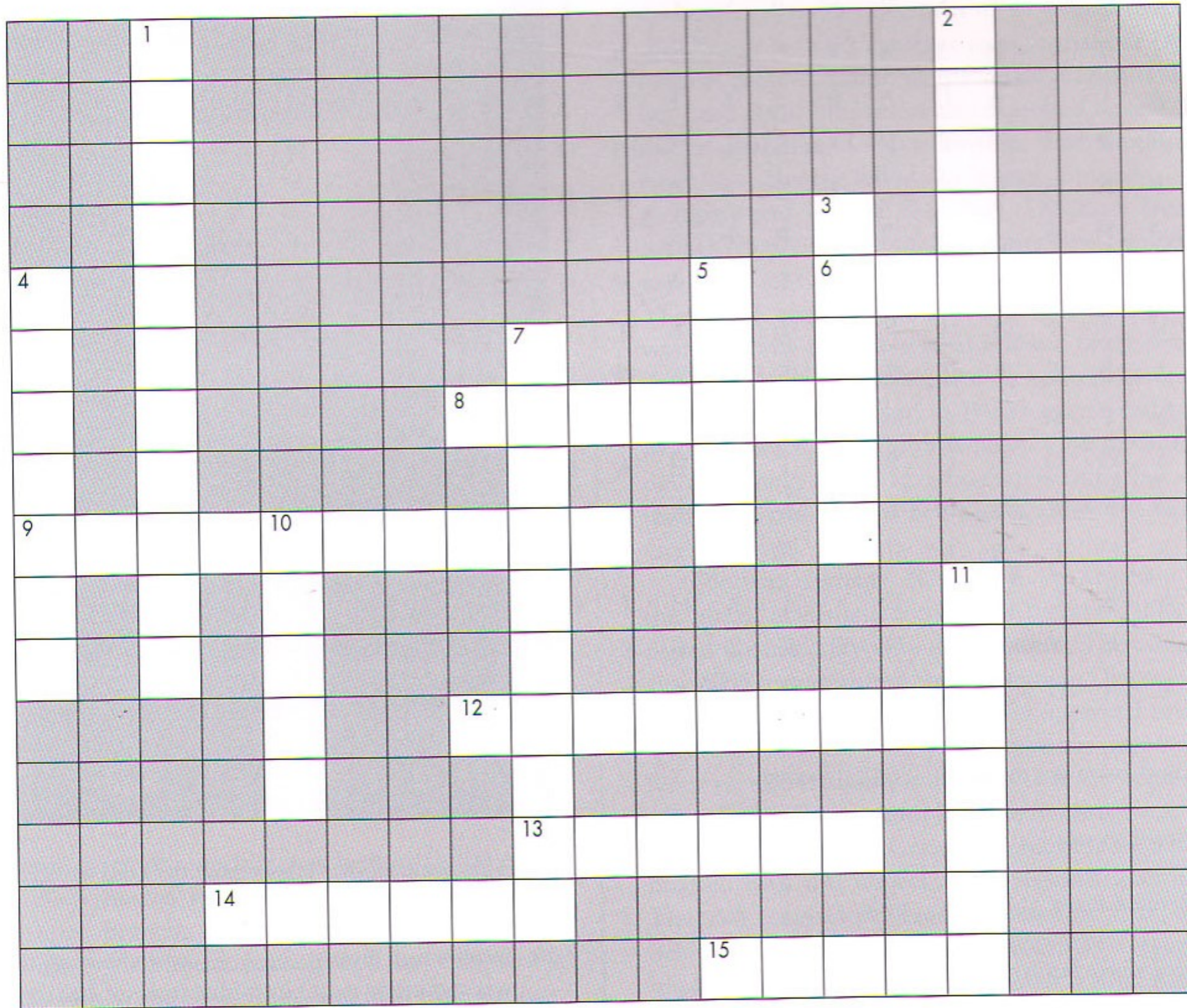
Bible Word Search Winners (April 2005)

Bible Word Search Winners (April 2005)	
1. Ajin John, Detroit MTC	ANSWERS 1. BETHUEL 2. LABAN 3. SARAH 4. NAHOR 5. VEIL 6. SIXTY 7. JACOB 8. ABIMELECH 9. GOATS 10. GOATSKINS 11. SUBSIDES 12. HITTITE 13. JOSTLED 14. TENTS 15. OLDER 16. ABRAHAM
2. Alex Vaidyan, St. Thomas MTC, NY	
3. Alwin David, Detroit MTC	
4. Annamma John, St. Lukes MTC	
5. Ansu Andrews, St. Thomas MTC, NY	
6. Athira John, St. Johns MTC, NY	
7. Bency Abraham, Horeb MTC, Colorado	
8. Daniel P. Thomas, MTC San Francisco	
9. Jasmine Alex John, Detroit MTC	
10. Jennifer John, St. Thomas MTC, Chicago	
11. Jerry Alex John, Detroit MTC	
12. Justin Vaidyan, St. Thomas MTC, NY	
13. Justy John, St. James MTC, NY	
14. Kunjumol Jose, Chicago MTC	
15. Mariamma Mathew, Sparks, NV	
16. Omana Rajee, Staten Island MTC	
17. Sally Abraham, Epiphany MTC	
18. Saramma Koshy, St. Lukes MTC	
19. Saramma Poikail, MTC Greater Washington	
20. Shaila Mathew, Dallas MTC Farmers Branch	
21. Sherry Zachariah, St. Johns MTC, NY	
22. Shobi Mathew, Detroit MTC	
23. Stacey Jacob, St. James MTC, NY	
24. Susan Thomas, Epiphany MTC	
25. Tony Varghese, Bergenfield, NJ	

BIBLE CROSS WORD PUZZLE

AS IN TODAY'S NIV
GENESIS: 1-25

Mrs. Joel M. Zacharia (New York)



Across

1. The place where Rebekah was from. (2 words—include space in puzzle).
2. Cain's son.
3. The place where Abram built an altar and called upon the name of the Lord.
4. The sign of the covenant between God and the earth during Noah's time.
5. The father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran.
7. He lived for 969 years.
10. She said "I have now seen the One who sees me."
11. To avoid a _____ Abraham said to Lot, "if you go to the left, I'll go to the right: if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

Down

6. The Hittite from whom Abraham bought a burial site for Sarah.
8. Abraham's second wife.
9. Esau sold his _____ to Jacob for food.
12. The place where Abraham and Abimelech made a treaty and swore an oath.
13. Noah's ark came to a rest on this mountain.
14. Nahor's wife.
15. The father of all who play the harp and flute.

BIBLE WORD SEARCH

AS IN TODAY'S NIV
(Genesis: 28-50)

Mrs. Joel M. Zacharia (New York)

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

1. Isaac asked Jacob not to marry a _____ woman.
2. Leah's maid servant.
3. Rachel stole Laban's _____ gods.
4. The place where Jacob saw God face to face.
5. In his agony, Jacob prayed to God "I had only my _____ when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups."
6. God blessed Jacob with this name.
7. Describing a dream to his brothers, Joseph narrated that the sun, moon, and _____ stars bowed before him.
8. In his dream, Jacob saw a _____ descending from the heavens on his way to Haran from Bersheeba.
9. This name means "It is because the Lord has seen my misery."
10. Jacob was in great _____ when he heard that Esau was coming to meet him with a troop of 400 men.
11. Esau is also known as _____.
12. He said to Joseph, "only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."
13. At his death bed, Jacob blessed _____, though the youngest, with his right hand.
14. During the time of the famine, Joseph bought all the land in Egypt except the lands of the _____.

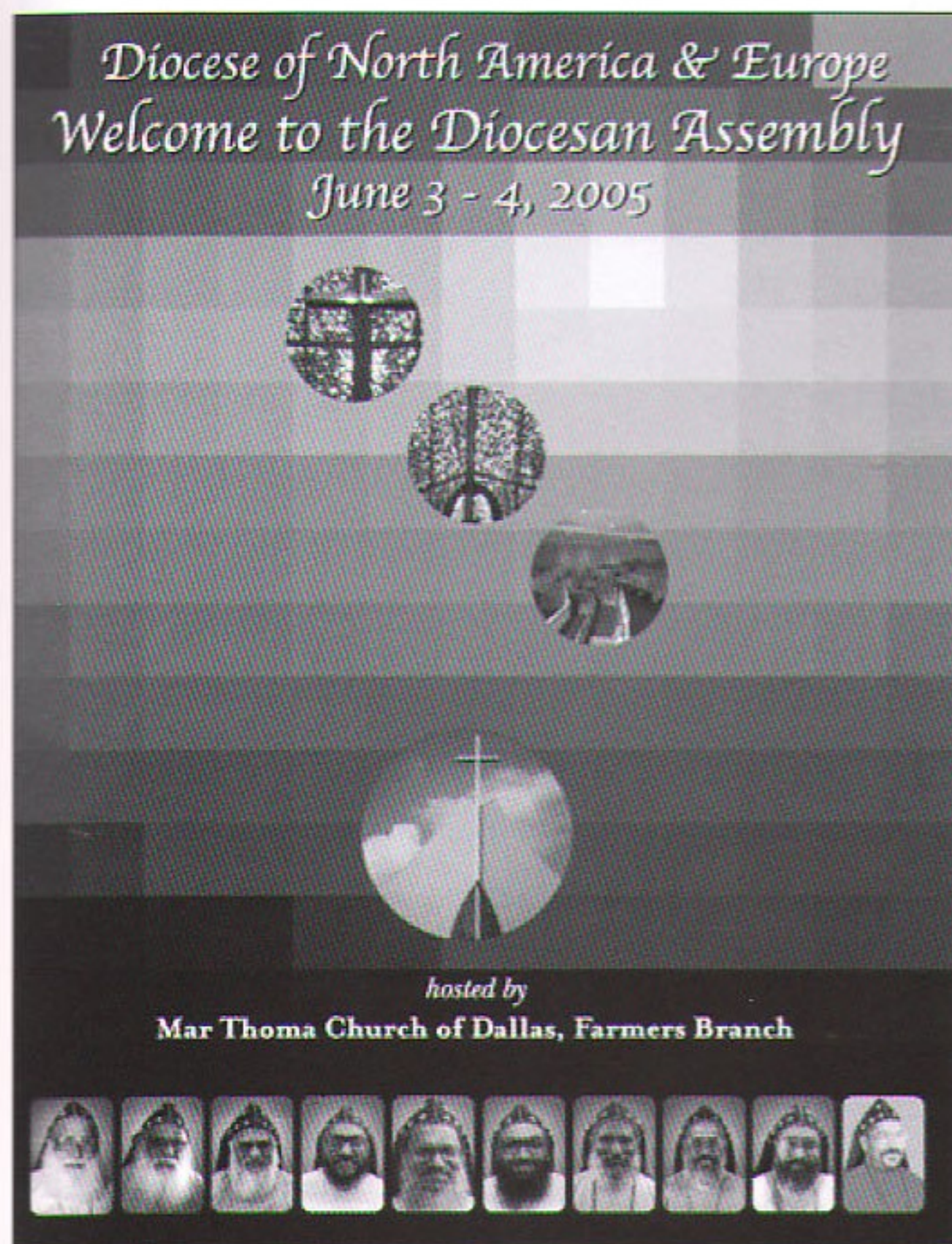
Please mail your answers to:

Mrs. Joel M. Zacharia, 28 Graves Street, Staten Island, NY 10314

DEADLINE FOR ANSWERS September 21, 2005

DIOCESAN/PARISH NEWS

DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY MEETING HELD IN DALLAS FROM JUNE 3 - 4, 2005



The Diocesan Assembly meeting was held at Dallas from June 3-4, 2005 hosted by the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch. About 100 assembly members including clergy members participated in this year's meeting. Election to the council was also held from various centers of the Diocese. The Diocesan Council consists of 17 members including the Diocesan Episcopa-President, Diocesan Secretary Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham and Diocesan Treasurer Mr. T. A. Mathew. The elected members from various centers will hold the position as council members for next three years. MTC of Dallas, Farmers Branch under the leadership of Vicar Rev. Anil George made elaborate arrangements for the Assembly meeting including transportation, accommodation, and food. PowerPoint presentation of the two-day program was also arranged in an excellent manner. The worship service and devotional talk on Friday was led by Rev. Joseph Oommen of Long Island MTC, New York, and Rev. Biju S. Cherian, Youth Chaplain NE Region respectively. The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos in his presidential address extended a warm welcome to the new Assembly

members and requested their creative contributions, deliberations and involvement in the overall functioning of the Diocese for the next three years so that our Diocese will become more dynamic in the mission entrusted to us by our Lord Jesus. Thirumeni also expressed sincere thanks for the co-operation, love, fellowship, and support received from the clergy, fellow believers, outgoing Assembly members and Council members, Diocesan Treasurer Dr. John P. Lincoln, Diocesan Secretaries Rev. Dr. John Joseph, and Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham during the past three years. Thirumeni concluded his presidential address by these words: 'We do not know what is ahead of us; but we know in whose hands we are. Let us once again be assured that we are co-workers with God in His vineyard, and quoted the following words from John Wesley: "Give me hundred who desire nothing but God, who fear nothing but sin, and I shall shake the gates of hell and establish the Kingdom of God on earth."

Diocesan Secretary Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham presented the annual report and account for the year 2004, and were passed unanimously after deliberations. The budget for the year 2005 was presented by the outgoing Diocesan Treasurer Dr. John P. Lincoln and it was also approved unanimously after deliberations. The sub committee recommendation based on the feasibility study was that the implementation of the Senior Retirement Homes is not feasible at present in United States and the Canadian Churches are authorized to proceed with this project at the regional level in Canada. The sub committee recommendation that the earlier decision of the Diocesan Assembly regarding the implementation of the Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan Memorial Project at Lubbock be revoked and an alternative project as a suitable memorial to the Late Metropolitan be explored was also unanimously approved by the Assembly. Minutes were recorded by recording secretaries Rev. Manoj M. Zacharia, and Mr. P. M. Jacob. Sincere thanks to Vicar Rev. Anil George, Office Bearers, the Executive Committee, Sub Committee Conveners Mr. Alex Chacko (Transportation), Mr. Joseph M. Varghese (Accommodation), and Mr. Abraham Mathew (Food), all volunteers, Mr. Alex Paul Philip for designing the colorful welcome flyer, Mr. Bijo K. Abraham for the PowerPoint presentation, and Mr. Thomas Philip and Mr. Eipe Skariah for arrangements in the sanctuary and in the fellowship hall. The two-day session concluded with vote of thanks by Dr. John P. Lincoln, and Thirumeni's benediction.

Atty. Lal Varghese, Diocesan Council Member, Dallas

2005 CLERGY FAMILY CONFERENCE AT BALTIMORE MAR THOMA CHURCH



It was a once in a life time experience, for the Baltimore Mar Thoma parish, to host a conference that included two Bishops Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa as well as Rt. Rev. Dr. Issac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa along with approximately forty clergies with their families. It was a challenge, as there were less number of members in the parish compared to the number of clergies with families attending this event and they had to be accommodated. Credit goes to each of the members who received two or three clergy families in their homes and especially to those who were going out of town and left their doors open for the clergy families. Special thanks to Joshua Abraham a Jacobite member who volunteered to host three families. The circle would not be complete if each one had not participated.

Preparation to host the conference began much ahead of time as the church had to be cleaned and refinished. Many of the members had to forgo the opportunity to attend the family conference that the Greater Washington Mar Thoma Church hosted, in order to get the Baltimore parish ready. Many children and youth came on weekends and late nights to help. The finished product was the effort of many people that worked behind the curtain and never even desired any recognition. May God see their genuine and dedicated efforts and bless there lives abundantly. Every good thing comes from God and to God be the glory for providing this opportunity to this church.

It was not only amazing to have these many Achens in one place but to be able to converse with them and share their faith with the host families was even more rewarding. Some Achens shared testimonies that restored the faith in the listeners as to why they were chosen by God for the ministry as many times there are unanswered questions.

The experience of having so many Kochammas and children from various backgrounds and sharing the time with them was an eye opener as we usually see them from a formal perspective and this was a very informal event. The youth of the church managed to keep the children occupied when the Achens and Kochammas were attending the sessions. It was not an easy task to keep the little ones interested in one activity for a period of time as the age group of children varied. The interesting event was the talents show that they prepared and presented at the close of the program that few of us had the privilege to attend. Older children were very involved and helped the younger ones.

Unlike any other event in the church, this was an unique panorama, as there was a rare opportunity to visualize the variation in personality and presentation of each Achen. The communication between the Achens and Thirumeni as well as the communication between themselves would have been a very intrinsic aspect for those who were interested in the area of communication. Such events are of great value in creating a strong bond between not only the Achens and their families but also for the church members hosting the event. There may be some who may not agree but it is said beauty lies in the eye of the beholder and it truly was a beautiful fellowship. Above every thing else this was a door opened by God to express the love and respect for our Achens in opening our homes and heart and receiving them. Whether it be taking care of Achens and their families at home or help with cooking in the church, every helping hand was valuable in making it a success as the saying goes "each drop counts" when we want the glass to be filled. To God be the Glory great things He has done!

Anita Panicker

The Mar Thoma Church Staten Island: New Church Consecration



The new Church Building

The Mar Thoma Church Staten Island has been on a trying yet ultimately triumphant journey. Since the inception of the parish in February, 1981, the parish has undergone various developments and changes. With certainty, the prayerful support of the Episcopal Synod of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, along with the leadership of her Vicars, members of the parish, Diocese, and community, have nurtured the church in her tremendous growth. The consecration of her new church building, located at 134 Faber Street, Staten Island, NY, 10302, on June 25, 2005 completed a new chapter for the parish.



Procession—Choir



Procession—Thirumeni and achens

The new chapter in the history of the parish was initiated by the leadership of The Rev. Samuel M. Samuel who guided the General Body to purchase property at 135 Faber Street, across the street from the existing church, for the explicit purpose of creating additional parking space. Within weeks, an amount of \$275,000 was raised to close this deal (December 2002). During this time, the church unanimously decided to demolish the existing building and construct a worship facility encompassing a seating facility for 500, provision for balcony, office space, and full basement. Diffendale and Kubec, AIA and Solutions Contracting Inc., were selected by the Church Building Committee as architect and builder, respectively.

On April 14, 2004, the foundation stone for the new building was ceremoniously laid under the leadership of Rev. Dr. John Joseph (Diocesan Secretary), Rev. P. M. Mathew, Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham, Rev. Raju Philip Zachariah, Rev. Johnson Varghese, and Rev. Roy A. Thomas. The catalytic

leadership of the former vicar, Rev. Samuel M. Samuel in gathering pledge and personal loan commitments as well as leading a successful raffle program (\$155,000) needs special mention. As per the norms and decision of the church, Samuel Achen had to relinquish charge on April 30, 2004. Rev. Manoj M. Zacharia assumed responsibility of the parish on May 1, 2004 for the execution stage of the project.

Thus far, the church was able to collect more than \$720,000 as pledge and memorial items, \$94,000 from the church souvenir as well as contributions from organizations like the Sevika Sanghom (\$80,000), Sunday School (\$5,000), Yuvajana Sakhyam (\$5,000), Edavaka Mission (\$6,500), and Choir (\$10,000). The church also organized a fete on the Saturday after Thanksgiving which raised \$9,000. Along with these amounts, additional monetary assistance was procured



Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos ceremoniously opening the new Church Building for worship.

from 31 families that contributed a total of \$395,000 as loan and the Independence Community Bank which assisted the church through sanctioning a construction loan. For a parish with a membership of 128 families, the \$2.1 million dollar project certainly proved to be a challenge.

The spiritual backbone of the project was the prayer of the church membership. An intercessory prayer was organized on every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. In terms of organization, the Church Building Committee was convened by the strong and able leadership of Mr. Jacob Chacko. The Church Building Committee along with the Executive Committee of the parish, and the hard work of site supervisor Mr. Mathai P. Mathew and Mr. James T. Philip (Treasurer 2002-2004) deserve special mention.

The dreams of the church were fulfilled on June 25, 2005. His Grace The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan allowed the church to consecrate her new building under the leadership of our Diocesan Bishop (and former Vicar) His Lordship The Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos. The consecration service was led by His Lordship Coorilos Thirumeni, as well as Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham (Diocesan Secretary), Rev. Manoj M. Zacharia (Vicar), Rev. Dr. Koshy Mathew (New Jersey and Salem MTC), Rev. Johncey George (St. James and Bethany MTC), Rev. K. M. Philip (Carmel MTC, Boston), Rev. Joseph Oommen (Long Island MTC), Rev. Thomas Paul (St. Stephens MTC), Rev. P. Y. Mathew (St. Peters MTC), Rev. T. A. Varughese (Epiphany MTC), Rev. Johnson Varghese (St. Andrews and Ebenezer MTC), Rev. Jojan Mathews John (St. Thomas MTC), Rev. Biju S. Cherian (Youth Chaplain), and Rev. Roy Abraham Thomas (St. Johns MTC). We were blessed with the presence of a plethora of ecumenical and civil leaders including: Rev. Dr. Winfred Vergara (Episcopal Asia America Ministries), Rev. Dr. Virginia Kaada (Council of Churches), Senator Diane Savino, Assembly Member John Lavelle, Rev. Fr. Philip C. Abraham (Malarkara Syrian Orthodox representative), as well as representatives from the office of the New York City Council, Borough President, Community Board, and members of Sister Churches.

The gathering of approximately 700 was taken aback by the Eastern style architecture and the admixture of contemporary, Gothic, and Eastern Orthodox styles inside the church. The building stands as a monument of the reality that our church is a bridge between East and West, Traditional and Contemporary, as well as Orthodox and Reformed.

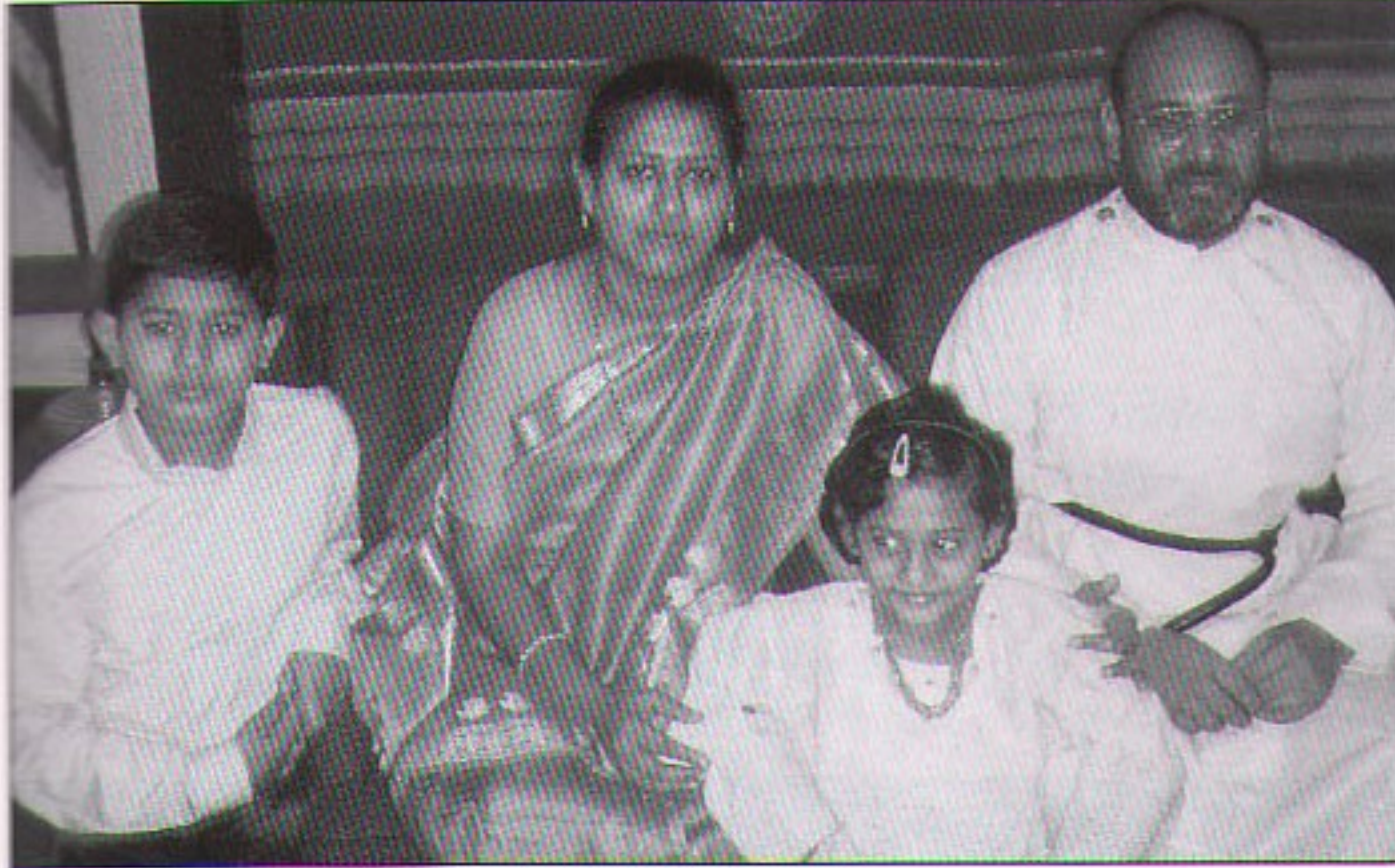
Rev. Manoj M. Zacharia, Vicar



Members of The Mar Thoma Church Staten Island with the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos, Diocesan Secretary Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham and Vicar Rev. Manoj M. Zacharia at the step of the New Church Building after the first Holy Communion service in the new church on Sunday, June 26, 2005.

OUR NEW ACHENS

REV. NOBLE V. JACOB, Los Angeles Mar Thoma Church
Mother Parish—Gudalur St. Thomas
Date of Ordination—July 2, 1988

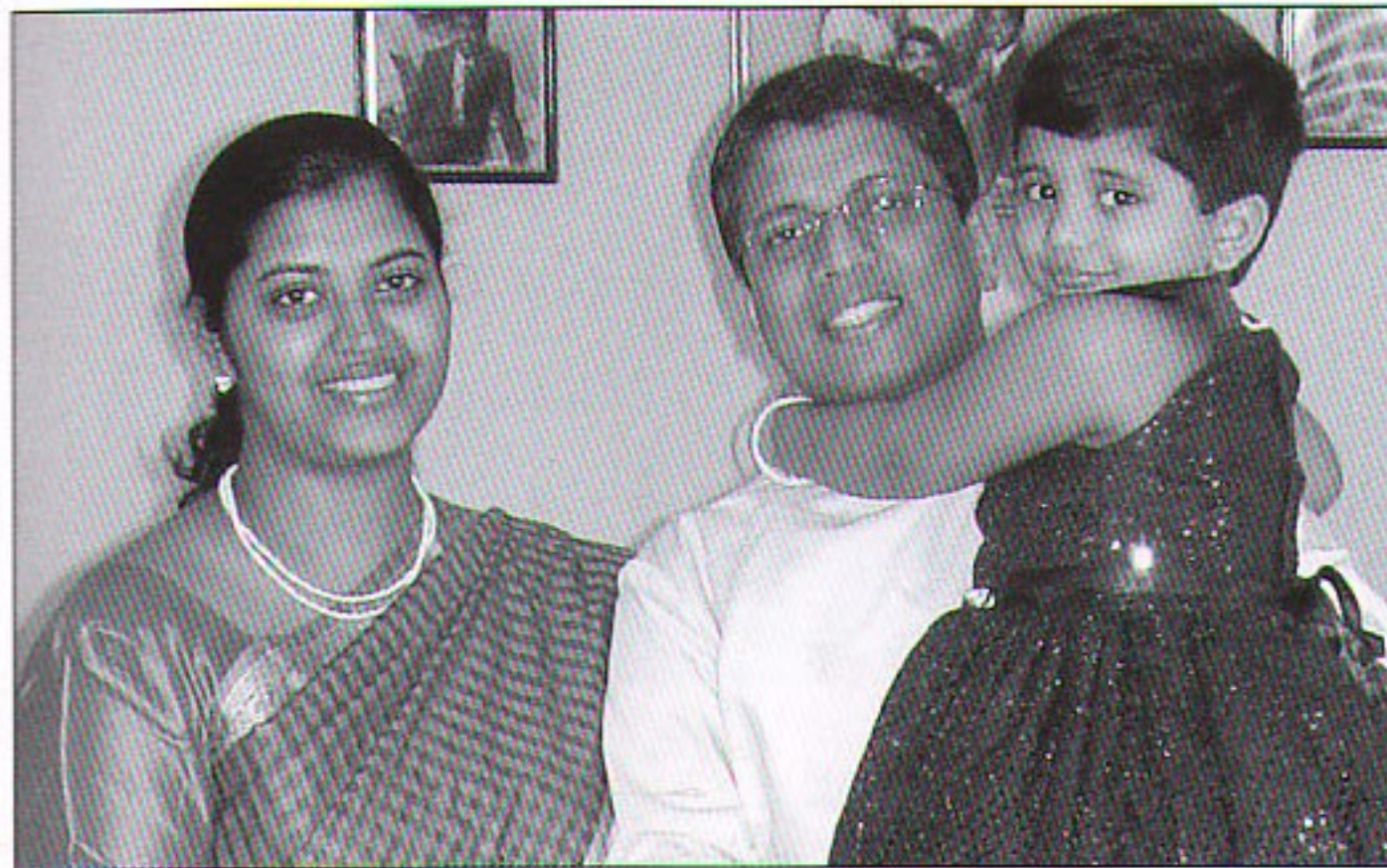


Parishes Served: Plaveli Niravu Salem, Kulamamkuzhi St. Andrews, Vechoochira St. Thomas, Vechoochira St. Johns, Aanakkulam Sehion, Chempanoda Karmel, Chengaroth Immanuel, Iamnagar MTC, Porbander, Veraval, Goregaon St. Peters, Muthukulam MTC, Moothedam MTC, Chalikkal Potty, Vellimattom and Honavar St. Thomas.

Wife: Jini Noble

Children: Ashish Noble Jacob; Akhila Sairah Noble

REV. NINU CHANDY: Youth Chaplain, Dallas
Ninu Achen is a native of Venmony, Chengannur and his mother parish is Venmony Sehion MTC. Achen graduated



from Mar Thoma Vaideeka Seminary in Kottayam in 1995, and was ordained as a priest of Mar Thoma Church in 1995. Achen did his Masters degree in Theology from Princeton University, Princeton, NJ in 2005. Achen has married Lekha Kochamma, who is daughter of Rev. Kurian Thomas Jr. who is now serving as Vicar of Chetpet MTC, Madras. They have a daughter namely Leya. Achen served as the chaplain of late Alexander Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan, Assistant Vicar of Bangalore Primrose MTC,

Vicar of Palghat and Olavakode MTC, Pengamukku MTC, Chelakkara MTC, Mangalapuram MTC, Ichilampadi MTC, as student chaplain at Mangalapuram, and as associate vicar at Long Island MTC, New York, NY. Achen also served as the secretary of Kunnamkulam – Malabar Diocesan Sunday School, and as the director of Sacred Audio Visual Evangelism (SAVE) of Kunnamkulam – Malabar Diocese.

REV. BIJU S CHERIAN, Youth Chaplain, North-East
Native Parish: Salem MTC, Edanad, Chengannur
Education: Jabalpur, India



Theological Studies: Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam 1998

Positions: Tibetan Boarder Mission 1998-2001

Parishes served: Santacruz MTC, Bombay (2001-'04), Jhansi MTC, UP, India (2004-'05)

Wife: Tina Biju

Daughter: Angela Biju

REV. JOHN THOMAS: St. Johns MTC, London UK
Mother parish: St Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Anicadu, Mallappally.



BD: MT Theological Seminary Kottayam (1983-86)

Parishes served: Tabore MTC Thachampara (Palghat), Jerusalem MTC Manarghat; Horeb MTC & Carmel MTC

Attappady (1986-89); Bethel MTC Mundakayam, St. George MTC Peerumedu (1989-91); Immanuel MTC Punalur, (1991-94); Carmel MTC Vadassericara (1994-97) Mar Thoma Church Rourkela, Orissa (1997-2000); St. Thomas MTC Valakom Kottarakara (2000-04)

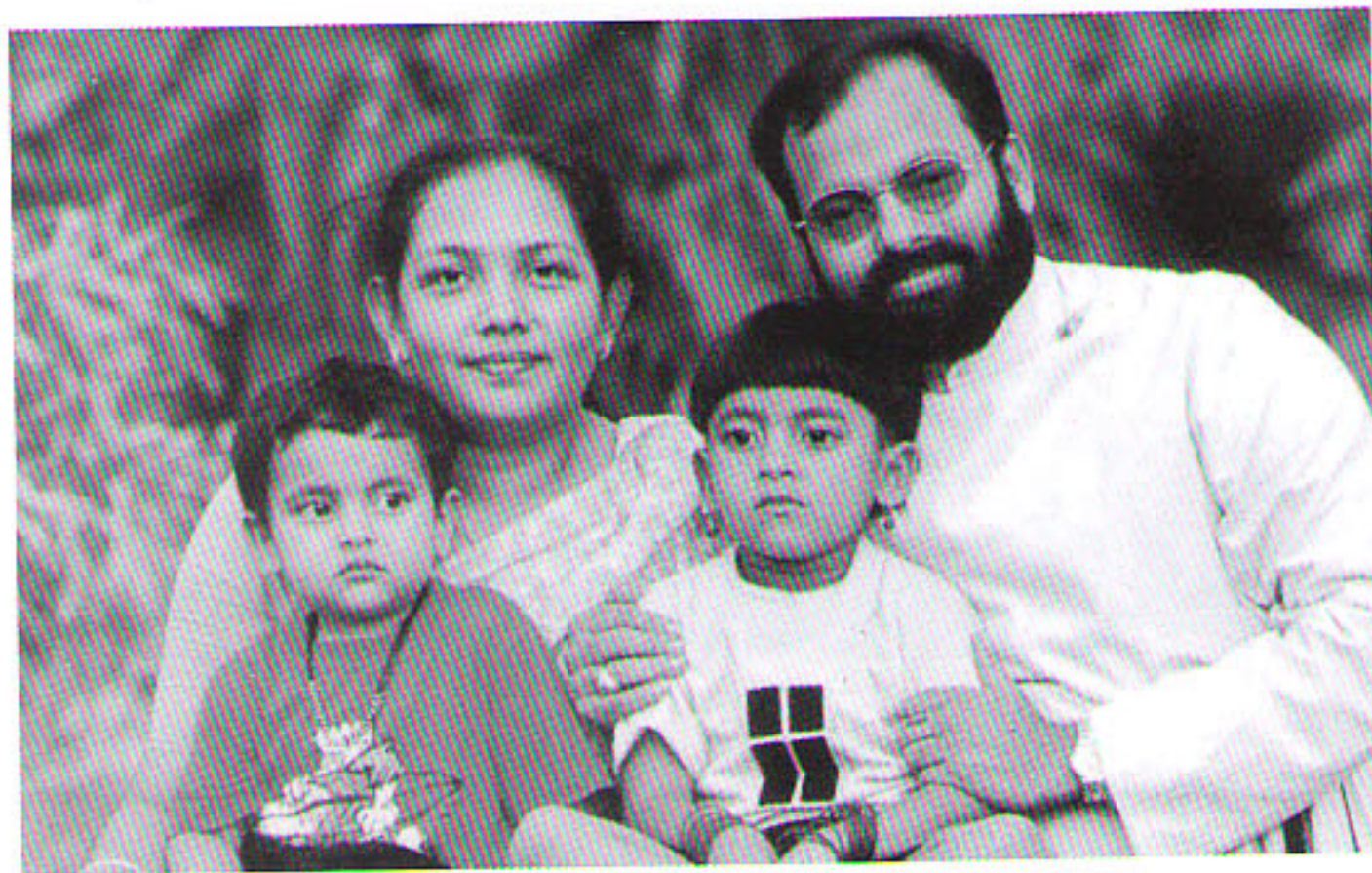
Special positions held: Diocesan Council Member: Ranni Nilakal Diocese (1994-97); Madras Calcutta Diocese (1999-2000); Managing Committee Member: Mar Thoma Sunday school Samajam (1994-97)

Christian Agency for Rural Development (2003-2004)

Wife: Mrs. Moly John

Children: Nutan Elizabeth John; Yamini Susan John

REV SUSIEAL VARGHESE, Bethel MTC, Philadelphia
College: Guruswamy College, Kozhikode, Kerala



BD from Leonard Theological Seminary, Jabalpur, India (1997).

Mother Parish: Salem MTC, Ernakulam, Cochin

Served as: Bishop's secretary for Rt. Rev. Issac Mar Phelexinos
Parishes served: Primrose Rd MTC, Bangalore, St Thomas MTC Punnaveli, Kadammanitta Salem MTC & Valiyanthi Jerusalem MTC .

Wife: Saramma Susiel

Children: Surya Susieal (7) and Aishwaria Susieal (5).

REV. VARGHESE A. JOHN, Youth Chaplain, Houston
Native parish: Bethany MTC, Channapetta, Anchal



College: MA from University College, Kariavattam, Trivandrum

BD from MT Theological Seminary, Kottayam 1998
Bishop's secretary for Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Iraneus 1998-2001

Vicar, Goregaon MTC, Bombay (2001-'03)

Asst Vicar: Primrose Rd MTC, Bangalore (2004 - '05)

Wife: Sakhy Varghese Maramon.

Daughter: Achsa Liz varghese (9 months)

REV. JOSEPH OOMMEN, Long Island MTC

Place of Birth: Ranny, Mannamaruthy

Education: B.Sc., BD., MTh

BD: Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam



MTh: The UTC, Bangalore

Ordination: June 24, 1987

Parishes served: Udaipur, Bhilwara, Banswara, Dungarpur, Vazhoor, Kanam, Ullayam, Thevalakkara, Patharam, Valakom, Andoor, Bangalore, Thumkur, Noida, Ghaziabad

Institution served: Dharmajyothi Vidya Peeth, Faridabad

Wife: Ayishamma Joseph, Kottayam, Puthuppally

Children: Allen Joseph (son), Helen Ann Joseph (daughter)

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ST. PAUL'S MAR THOMA CHURCH, DALLAS—CLERGY CONFERENCE



St. Paul's Marthoma Church Dallas had the privilege of hosting the Clergy Conference of North America and Europe Diocese. The conference was conducted on June 1st and 2nd of 2005. It was a great success by all accounts. The Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa and 46 clergymen from around the Diocese

attended the conference. It is by no means that this event was a great success other than through the hard work and diligent support of the Vicar, Rev. Saju Zachariah and the many members of this church.

Thomas Easo, Diocesan council member

SOUTH FLORIDA MAR THOMA CHURCH



The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa inaugurating the Silver Jubilee programs of the Mar Thoma Church of South Florida. Jubilee Committee members and Vicar Rev. T. K. Alexander Tharakan & Rev. Jojan Mathews John (Vicar, St. Thomas MTC, NY) with Thirumeni.

South Florida MTC is celebrating its Silver Jubilee in 2005. Programs were inaugurated by our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos on Sunday May 1, 2005, following the Eucharist. The Vicar Rev. Alexander Tharakan welcomed everyone to the program and announced the 25 various programs that are made part of the silver jubilee celebrations. Some of the major items include: (i) Adopting a mission field, (ii) Charity works in India (Home for Homeless), (iii) Community Outreach, (iv) Ecumenical Programs, (v) Jubilee Retreats, (vi) Youth programs, and (vii) Renovation of the present church.

Coorlos Thirumeni, in his inaugural speech, appreciated the parish members for their zeal and reminded the need of continuing the Lord's ministry depending on the Grace of God, for the good of others. The most important question to be asked about a parish is not how big or small the congregation is or how fast it is growing, but what influence it thrusts to the community that it is placed. Jubilee committee convener Mr. George Varghese requested Thirumeni to release the Silver Jubilee Bookmark & Logo, which contained the milestones in the history and growth of the church. Thirumeni solemnly released the bookmark and logo by presenting copies to Mr. Thomas Idichandy. Rev. Jojan John, Vicar of St. Thomas MTC, New York, and Rev. George Daniel, Vicar of St. Thomas Orthodox Church of South Florida. Dr. Mammen C. Jacob, convener of Fundraising Committee, gave felicitations on the occasion. Following the inauguration of fundraising, Mr. Rajan George (secretary) expressed vote of thanks to all who were present.

Rev. T. K. Alexander Tharakan, Vicar

ST. THOMAS MAR THOMA CHURCH OF CHICAGO



Architectual rendering of the new Church Building

St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church of Chicago was formed as a result of the conviction of the members of the Chicago Mar Thoma Church, that a new Church was needed in Chicago land area. 107 families from the mother parish expressed their willingness to join and form a new parish and requested the respected Episcopal Synod for its approval. By the grace of God, and the valuable support of our Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa, the Episcopal synod which met on December 5, 2003 decided to accept this request. The new parish was christened as St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church of Chicago. On Sunday, January 4, 2004, Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos celebrated the Holy Communion and an inaugural public meeting was held immediately after the service.

Presently, the parish is using The Chicago Mar Thoma Church sanctuary in the evening for our regular Sunday services and basement for our Sunday school classes. At present the parish has a membership of 119 families. Even before the official formation of this new Parish, significant work had been made as a single parish over the last few years under the dynamic leadership of Rev. V. T. Josen, Rev. David Daniel, Rev. Roy Thomas, Rev. S. George and Rev. P. L. Joseprakash, who is serving as the Vicar of parish presently. We are currently in the process of constructing a Church building at 710 Main St. in Lombard. As we look back, we cannot but praise God from whom all blessings flow. May God Almighty strengthen us to work so that its testimony to the glorious truth of God may continue into the future.

Rev. P. L. Joseprakash, Vicar

LOS ANGELES MAR THOMA CHURCH

Our newly appointed vicar Rev. Noble V. Jacob and family arrived on July 14th, 2005. A welcome was given by parish members on Sunday July 17th after the service. We were blessed by the visit of our Suffragan Metropolitan Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus on June 16th to 19th. A reception was given by parish members on Sunday, June 19th after service. 6th Annual Western Regional Youth Conference was hosted by the Los Angeles Parish from June 23rd to 26, 2005.

The main speakers were, Pastor Greg Koukl and Rev. Issac P. Johnson. Rev. Regi K. Philip also led the conference. Upcoming events of the parish are: Annual Picnic & Sunday School Sports on Saturday July 30th, V.B.S. from Aug 4th to 7th, Family Retreat from Aug 26th to 28 and we will be celebrating our 30th Anniversary of the Parish on Aug 14th, 2005.

Dr. Elsy Mathew, Secretary

VALEDICTORIANS-2005

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS—JENCY SUSAN GEORGE NORTH SHORE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL, TEXAS

Thirty years ago, half way around the globe, a young boy dreamed to conquer the world of medicine. My father, however, was not able to pursue his dreams because of social and economic dilemmas. Today, thanks to the hard work and encouragement from the teachers, administrators, family, and fellow students gathered here on this memorable occasion, I have been able to tread the path my father could only experience in dreams. Without my dad's constant support, guidance, and yes, of course, nagging I would not be standing here today. Mommy and Chechi, you too have played a major role in keeping me from giving up hope when times got rough and seemed too much for me to handle. Mere words cannot express my unfailing thankfulness to God for His guiding hand. When I have three tests back to back on the same day, or when I wake up without finishing my homework, or even during the week of finals, I remember "everything is made possible by God".



Life is ruled by the risks we encounter and the decisions we make. For the past four years we have taken every test under the sun, run every inch of the football field, sang our hearts out for the multitudes, and have kept audiences at the edge of their seats with our many dramatic productions. But, the lingering question is, for what? The answer lies in the momentary feeling of complete success after accom-

plishing a challenging feat. Today is our day, graduates. We have fought the good fight and have finished the race, triumphant. The future might bring things that might now seem too much to bear, but because of the experiences we have gone through in high school, when that time comes, we will again be victorious.

Tomorrow, we proceed to our individual pots at the end of the proverbial rainbow. However, the only way we can get there is by arming ourselves with determination and bravery. If we do not face our fears and be courageous enough to take risks, we will accomplish nothing in life. Success is selective, but only to those who don't try. Thus, it is imperative to understand that the world is there, ready to be taken and led into the future.

In a few moments each one of us will walk across this stage, receive our well-earned diplomas, and prepare to take our places in life as the curtain finally descends on this chapter in our lives. What we should remember, however, is that success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts. This indeed is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning. Class of 2005, congratulations and God bless!

(Jency Susan George is the daughter of Pulinthitta C. George and Emily George, Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston, TX)

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS—ABRAHAM ITTY GILBERT HIGH SCHOOL, GILBERT, ARIZONA

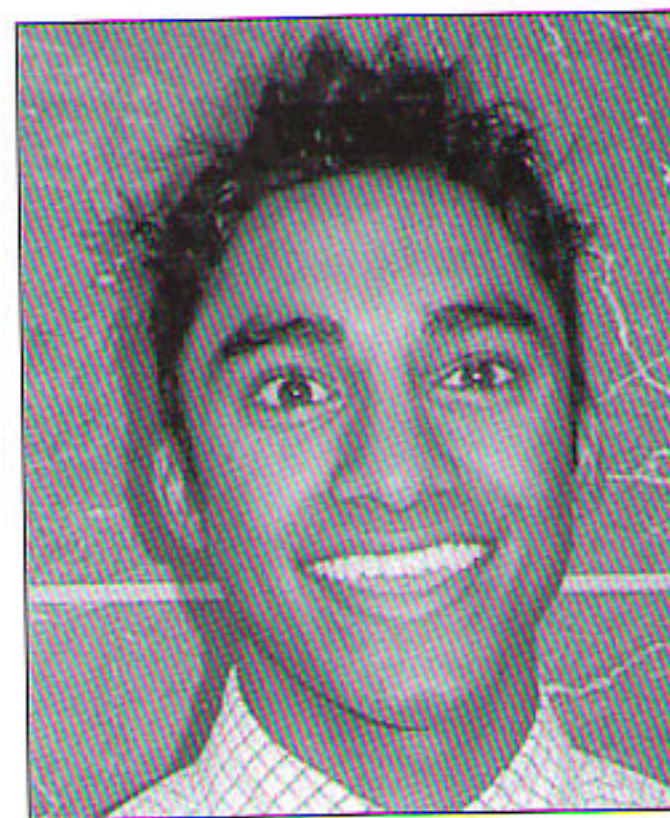
Be Happy Now

Just because I get good grades doesn't mean I can give good advice. Being up here has not endowed me with more wisdom or life experience than any of you. Like you, I'm still young; like you, I don't know what life is all about, so there would be little meaning in my advice.

So I decided to take a different approach. I found advice from successful people on their deathbeds, who had experienced all life has to offer, people who understood what is really important and what isn't, what really matters and what doesn't. Surprisingly, the advice from these people centered on one theme:

Be Happy Now

Find happiness in life now. Don't wait until next week or next year. These people on their deathbeds were so wrapped up in looking for what they didn't have that they failed to



appreciate what they did have. They wished they had taken more time to enjoy it. They realized that happiness is a journey, not a destination. If you're like me, you constantly think to yourself "I will be happy whennnnn..." But in this phrase lies the Great Western Disease. Because the truth is that the next diploma, the next promotion, the next brand new car, the next pay check doesn't really make our life any easier or change our world all that much.

Be Happy Now

Don't wait for the next achievement to be happy. Enjoy the journey and all the struggles it takes to reach that goal. Yes, we should be happy when we receive an "A" on our English papers. But we should also try to enjoy the late night studying and hours of cramming it took to get that "A".

Be Happy Now

I know for members of our basketball team, winning a state championship didn't change our lives radically. What did change our lives was the discipline we acquired by doing preseason conditioning in the 100 degree weather, the camaraderie we developed by waking up in the morning at 5:00 a.m. to shoot free throws, the unity we built through the realization of our common goal. State Championships are great, but happiness is found in the journey there.

Be Happy Now

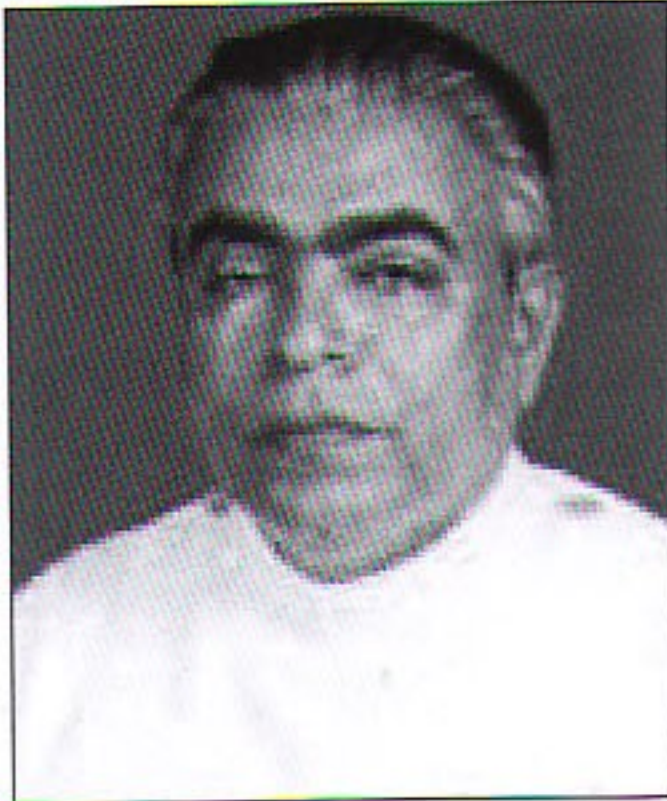
On this day of achievement, yes, we should all celebrate. But life certainly isn't going to get any easier from here. If

you graduate from college, life will not become less busy. When you get promoted to CEO, your problems will not go away. Don't wait until the next stage of your life to be happy with who you are and what you are doing. Whether we go to college, join the work force, or serve on a mission, we will always have to overcome obstacles and challenges. The future is uncertain. So let's not wait.

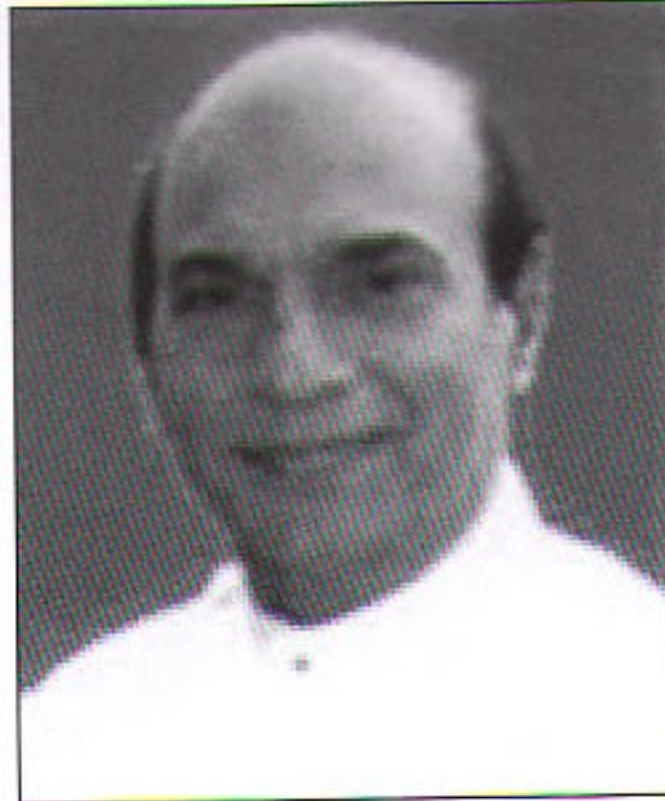
Let's Be Happy Now.

Abraham Itty is the son of Mr. Itty P. Itty and Sherly Paul of Arizona MT Congregation.

OUR NEW VICAR GENERALS



Very Rev. Abraham Samuel



Very Rev. George Zachariah P.



Very Rev. K. O. Philipose

Rev. Dr. Abraham Samuel, Rev. George Zachariah P. and Rev. K. O. Philipose are appointed as the Vicar-Generals of the Mar Thoma Church by the Episcopal Synod in consultation with the Sabha Council. They will assume their respective positions with effect from July 1, 2005. Rev. Abraham Samuel will be the Senior Vicar General, and will

assist the Metropolitan in Niranam-Maramon Diocese. Rev. K. O. Philipose will assist Rt. Rev. Joseph Mar Barnabas Episcopa in Mumbai Diocese, and Rev. George Zachariah P. will assist Rt. Rev. Dr. Abraham Mar Paulose Episcopa in Thiruvananthapuram-Kollam Diocese.

Atty. Lal Varghese, Diocesan Council member, Dallas

OBITUARY



Prof. VERGHESE NINAN, a founder member of the Chicago Mar Thoma Church was born to Onami1 Chacko Vergheese and Sosamma on November 10, 1934 and called to eternity on May 18, 2005.

KunjuNinanachen, as he was lovingly called by his kith and kin, is a native of

Othera. He spent his childhood with siblings, George, Kunjumariamamma (Chicago) and late Kunjamma. He was an active member of the Ebenezer Mar Thoma Church, Othera until he graduated from high school. In pursuit of theological studies he completed a three-year course from a Christian Seminary in Madras, but never preferred clergyhood. He moved to Agra to attend University, where he received his Bachelor of Science in Biology and later

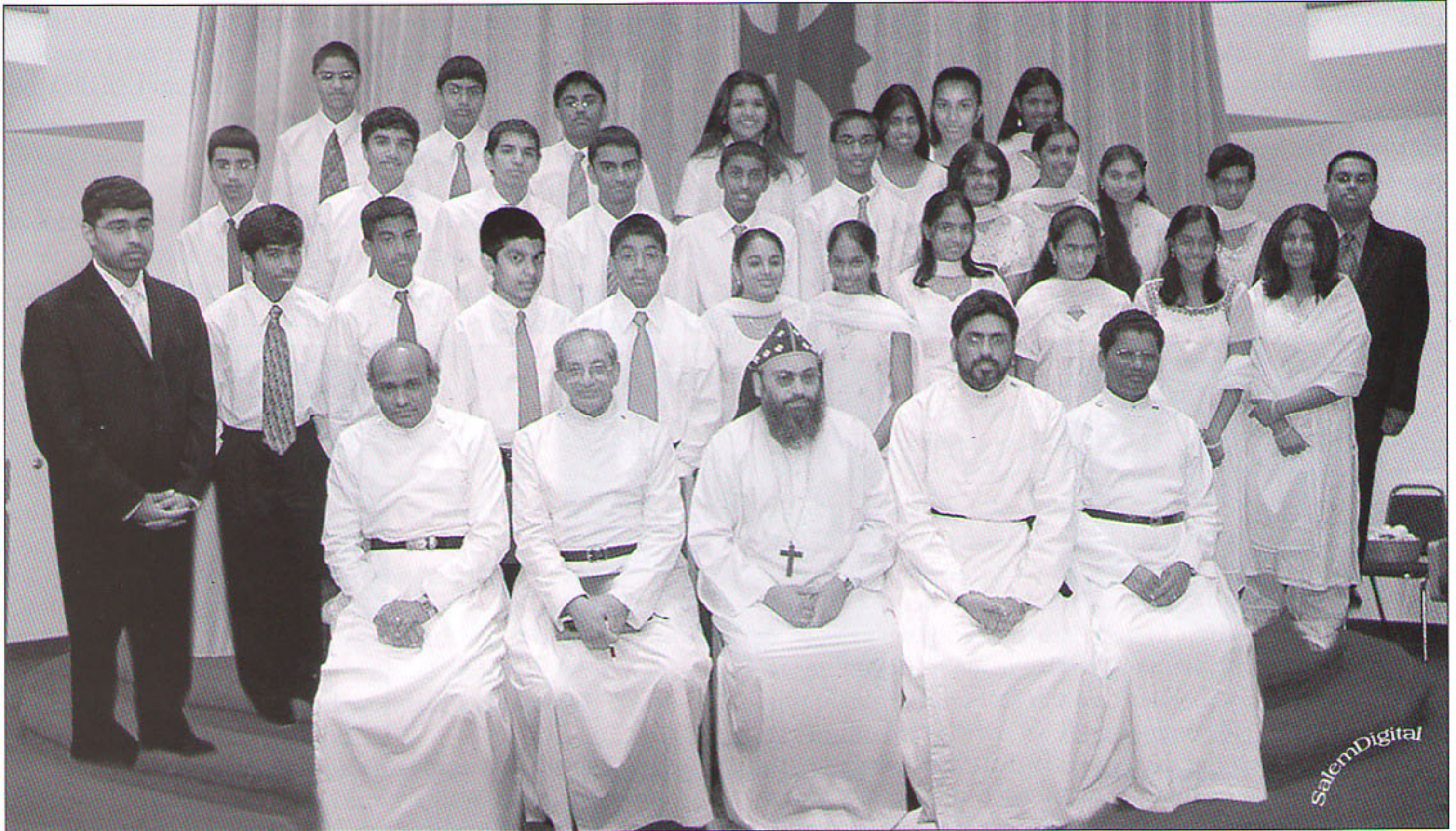
Masters in Zoology. He pursued his passion for education and teaching by joining the faculty of St. Andrews's College in Gorakhpur, U.P. State as Professor of Biology.

KunjuNinachen married Glory, daughter of the late Mrs. and Mr. Perangattupadickal Abraham George, Edayaranmula in 1969. He migrated to Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A. in 1973 and became a vital part of the community in many ways. He qualified to be a Medical Technologist at the University of Illinois Hospital Laboratory. He actively participated in all church activities. He represented the Chicago Mar Thoma Church to the American Diocesan Assembly in 2000.

Prof. Vergheese Ninan, as a man of highest dignity and integrity, whose friendship and care will be deeply missed by all who knew his heart. He is a beloved father to Susan and Suja and their respective husbands, Mohan Zachariah and Timothy Mark. As a loving grandfather, he will be missed by Josiah, Nathan and Alisha.

Ravy Mathews

MAR THOMA CHURCH OF DALLAS, FARMERS BRANCH



First Communicants with Coorilos Thirumeni

Twenty-seven children took their first Holy Communion from our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos on June 5, 2005. Before taking the first communion all of them attended the mandatory first communicant's class led by Rev. Anil George. Thirumeni was in Dallas to preside over the Diocesan Assembly meeting held at MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch from June 3-4, 2005. Rev. P. Chacko from Indianapolis, Rev. Joseph Oommen Vicar of Long Island MTC, New York, Rev. V. J. Mathew, Vicar of Lubbock MTC and Sehion MTC Dallas, and Rev. Anil George, Vicar of MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch assisted in the Holy Communion service.

Messenger Life Membership Certificates Distribution: Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Thirumeni distributed Mar Thoma Messenger Life Membership certificates to Mr. Babu C. Mathew, Mr. Eipe Skariah, Mr. Ponnachen K. Thomas, Mr. Philip Thomas (Carrollton), Mr. Philip Thomas (Flower Mound), Mr. K. K. Raju, Mr. Anil Jacob, and Mr. Sunny Jacob, all members of MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch, after Holy Communion service on June 5, 2005. With 21 life members now our parish has the most life memberships in the Diocese. On behalf of the Mar Thoma Messenger Managing Committee, Diocesan Council member Atty. Lal

Varghese expressed sincere thanks to those who took life memberships. Thirumeni congratulated the parish and its members for being at the forefront in mission activities and being part of all Diocesan activities.

Inauguration of Mission Partner Program by Edavaka Mission: Our Parish Mission is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. Among the various programs to be initiated this year includes Mission Partners Program. The Mission Partners Program sponsored by the Parish Mission was inaugurated by Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos on June 05, 2005 by receiving the first contribution amount from Mr. Cherian Alexander. Parish Mission secretary Mr. George Varghese explained the various projects of the Parish Mission and requested the parishioners to become mission partners. Our parish spent more than \$74,000.00 during the year 2004 for mission activities sponsored by the Diocese, church, and through various organizations including Parish Mission. The parish is actively involved in the Diocesan mission programs among Native Americans and in Mexico. This year the Parish Mission is planning to have at least one hundred mission partners registered in this program to help various activities in India, U. S. A., and in Mexico.

Rev. Anil George, Vicar

BETHEL MAR THOMA CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA



Bethel Youth Fellowship members with Philoxenos Thirumeni and Vicar Rev. Susieal Varghese

ST. JOHN'S MAR THOMA CHURCH, NEW YORK



South East Region Sunday School Conference Center Fund Raising Walk-A-Thon: St. John's Sunday School Walk-a-thon on December 11, 2004 at Cunningham Park, Queens.

Matrimonial

Marthomite parents invite marriage proposal for their daughter 26 years old, Pharm.D., born and raised in America, God fearing, and family oriented. We are looking for professionals raised in North America, preferably with masters degree or higher, God fearing and with good family background. Please respond with a recent photograph and bio-data to: jtphilip@hotmail.com or to: Mar Thoma Messenger, Box MESJUL 319, Sinai Mar Thoma Center, 2320 South Merrick Avenue, Merrick, NY 11566.

Marthomite parents settled in India, invite proposals for their daughter 29, 5'1, wheatish complexion, working in USA from professionally qualified, God-fearing boys working in USA raised in India. Please contact 022-25281972 or email: koshyelizabeth@rediffmail.com

Marthomite Parents looking for professionally qualified, employed, good looking and God-fearing girl from USA with respectable Christian family background for their son 27, 5' 7", born and raised in North India, B.E., Software Engineer employed in Houston, Family (Father, mother & only one brother) well settled in USA and owns established export business in Houston. Parents of Doctors, Engineers, Pharmacists or equal status may respond with details and photograph to e-Mail:hitechcgnr@yahoo.com or sam@hitechoilfield.com

Marthoma Parents invite marriage proposal for their 24 year old daughter born and brought up in the U.S., God fearing family oriented medical student doing her clinical rotation in the U.S. Looking for Godfearing family oriented professionals from Marthoma/CSI/Orthodox Denominations. Interested parties please respond to cphilip1120@yahoo.com or call 650 201 8114.

Marthomite parents settled in U.S. invite proposals for their 25 year old daughter, 5'4" holding a Master degree in Health Profession. We are looking for a professionally qualified, God fearing boy, and age 26-29 years. Interested parties please send the relevant details with a photograph to: keziah03@hotmail.com

DIOCESAN COUNCIL MEMBERS



Rrv. Dr. K. A. Abraham, Secretary



**Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos
Episcopa
Diocesan Bishop**



T. A. Mathew, Treasurer



Rev. Mathew M. Thomas, Canada



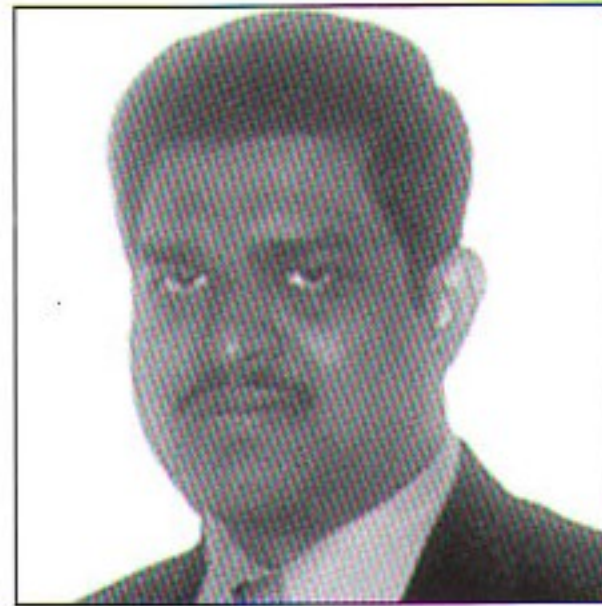
Rev. John Thomas, U.K.



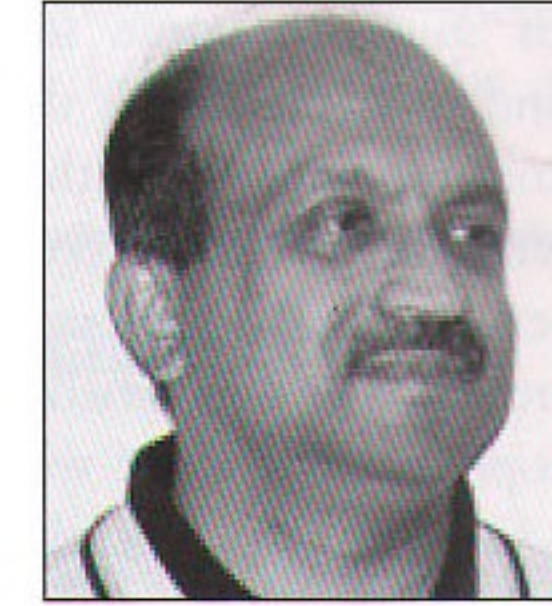
Atty. Lal Varghese, TX



Cherian Philip, CA



Thomas Easo, TX



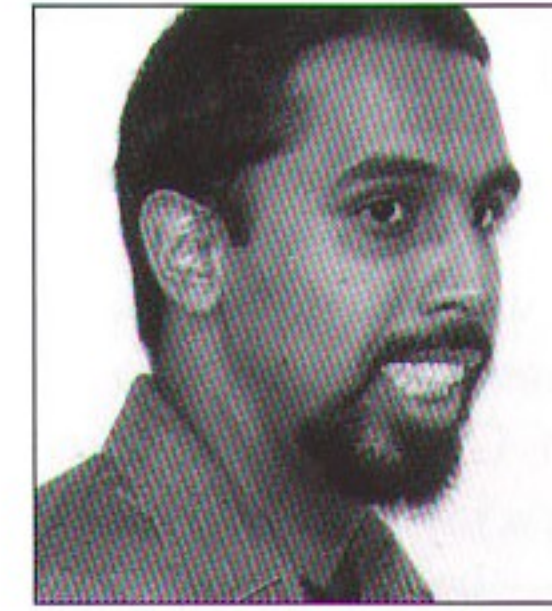
Mathew Varghese, FL



Jason M. Thomas, NJ



Abraham K. Daniel, NY



John C. Thomas, NY



Leelamma Thomas, NY



Kumjumol Cherian, Detroit



Sara Philip, Detroit



Dr. Ashley Mathew, PA

Church As A Community of Hope

Anisha Jacob, Bethel Mar Thoma Church, Frankfort, IL

Seniors—1st place winner—Mar Thoma Messenger Essay Competition—2005

As the human race moves towards more and more problems, there seems to be a greater need for this concept we know as hope because “hope is an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast” (Hebrews 6:18-19). Jesus said to Peter, “I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18). If Jesus built His church upon the rock then it is the only safe place on earth amidst any catastrophes. It is certainly the only place of hope in a world full of confusion and suffering.



have grown and divided and we now have more than 20,000 members in this diocese alone. The churches have grown steadfastly under the instruction and in the fellowship of the apostles.

These first worshippers were not under a spell, they were not crazy, they were not being pressured to become believers; yet, all of them came to Christ. Seeing how much the believers had to give up (their idols, many of their possessions, their old sinful ways of life), it is surprising that thousands upon thousands

The first Pentecost was the timid beginnings of the first apostolic church and the Holy Spirit, which did and still continues to transform thousands of lives to this day. In the most beautiful season of the year, Pentecost was a feast of enjoyment and happiness. Many exotic visitors traveled hundreds of miles to come to Jerusalem in hopes of relaxation and merriment. On this day, the Holy Spirit of truth and holiness came upon the hearts of the people and made believers out of many skeptics. Its purpose was to reveal and exalt Christ in everyone's hearts and minds as Christ had revealed and glorified God the Father.

The people present there with the disciples, “devoted themselves fully to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). This was the first church type community in which the transformed people “continued to meet together... broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:46). The love between the believers of Christ, the unyielding faithfulness, the selling of all their earthly possessions, and most of all, the hope of the kingdom of God on earth astounded the people in that town. Such a joy filled community attracted people, just as a copious garden attracts different insects. Eventually, the number of believers grew and God's churches grew quite naturally. This was the first time people saw the church Jesus established as a community of hope.

As more disciples preached the gospel of our Lord, worked miracles, and told of God's great love and mercy, the number of the disciples, believers and saints soon grew to five thousand. St. Stephan, St. Thomas, Paul, Peter and many other apostles risked their lives for the betterment of the church. St. Thomas himself started seven churches in the Malabar Coast of Kerala and they became a great hope for many of the idol worshippers in India. Our churches

were converted. It leads to the question of what exactly was the attraction for these people.

Paul defines the church as the body of Jesus Christ. Christ is the ruling head and the church without Christ is like a body without its head, a pen without its tip and a bride without her bridegroom. It would be, in essence, lifeless. In the Bible, the church is called the bride of Christ, a flock, the temple of God, God's building, God's field, God's household, the pillar and ground of the truth and a dwelling place of God.

All these names sound startling but they all simply mean that the church is where God is. It is a place where there is communion between brethren and where people can find nourishment.

There is only one Rock on which people can find hope: the church. People “desire the pure milk of the Word” as Peter said in 1 Peter 2:2. The church is a place where people can be transformed and renewed in spirit because it is where they meet with God. God is the everlasting possessor of spiritual enrichment and sustenance. In his book, *Desiring God*, Dr. John Piper states that, “God is most glorified in us where we are most satisfied in Him.” This is the reason so many people come to church; they want a sense of satisfaction in mind, body, and soul. We eat food to be filled, and in the same way, our spiritual self desires to be fed as well. We come to church and worship God in the hope that He will give us all the spiritual food that we need to be filled and refreshed in spirit. Since God is the head of the church, it is only natural that people put their hope in the church.

This, however, is not the only reason the church can be seen as a community of hope. Churches have been bearers of hope for millions of souls throughout the centuries. There have been a lot of problems and corruption within many churches but thankfully the church is also known for its mercy, its kindness among the poorest of the poor and

its fortitude when everything else is in despair. It has been the mission of the church to encourage and strengthen Christianity in every nation, while helping the people there. For example, in many Latin American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile and others, the Catholic Church has been a paragon of hope amidst political chaos. In those decades, while the authoritarian governments looked for economic stability and ignored other problems, the large poor population slipped further into poverty. These poor masses could not put their hope in corrupt officials or unstable governments. Instead they put their hope in the church, which helped build houses and provided food for the masses.

The Catholic Church is not the only source of aid; our own Marthoma church has been responsible for saving many lives. After adopting the island of Puntilla Norte in Mexico, there was construction of a community center, schools, houses and drinking water locations. We brought solar power, education about hygiene and health, VBS and more.

This year, the next island, Fantasia, is being adopted by our church; how beautiful are the hands of all the Marthomites extending a helping hand. Just like Joan of Arc, the heroine of the Hundred Years War between France and England was a hope for millions in France, the Marthomite church has become a community of hope for millions.

These are only a few examples of how different churches throughout the world, including the Marthoma Church, offer hope and inspiration to millions of people.

Our church alone has built countless orphanages, shelters, schools, houses and churches all over the world. We have sent missionaries and food to the destitute and oppressed. Since its inception, the church has become a community of hope for the untouchables, for the forsaken, for the penniless, those without jobs, and even those who say they have no hope.

The church's mission and its improvements for society are best captured by John Paul II when he said, "Millions of human beings are denied the most basic necessities of life – food, water and shelter. Diseases both new and old continue to affect countless lives. The scourge of violence and war is unceasing. Scientific and technological progress is not always accompanied by attention to moral and ethical values. The hope of which the Church speaks entails a vision of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God... In this respect, in this last part of the twentieth century, a positive sign is the fact that through the efforts of many [various organizations including the church], there is a growing sense of the human person's worth and dignity."

The coming of God's kingdom is the primary hope of the church. It is slow, but progress is made through various efforts of all Christians who put their hope in the church. There are many hardships but as the Lord commanded, it should be every Christian's objective to be "shepherds of the church of God which he bought with His own blood" (Acts 20:27).

Hope in the Midst of Crisis and Tragedy

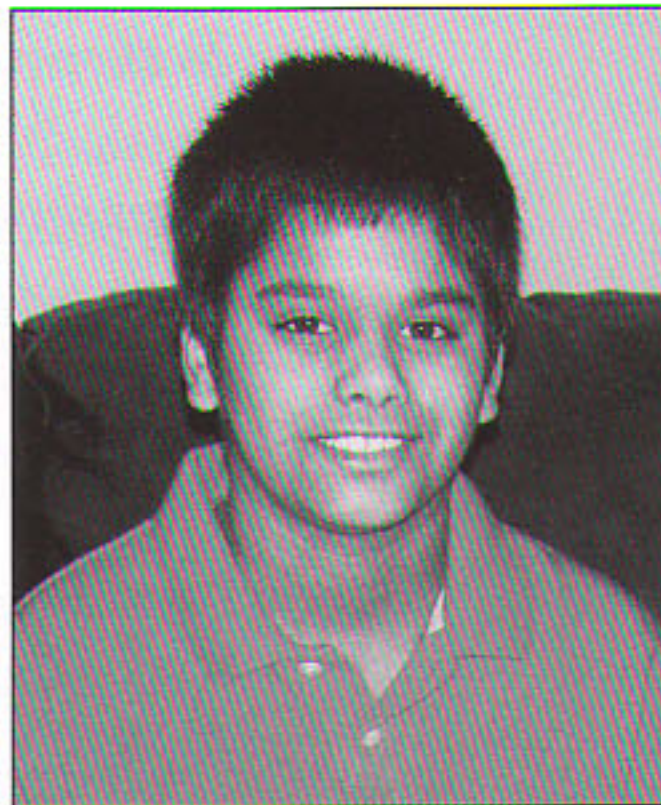
Shobi Mathew, Detroit Mar Thoma Church

Juniors—1st place winner—Mar Thoma Messenger Essay Competition—2005

Today is May 8, 2005. I was reading The Detroit News. I have found a lot of accidents and tragedies in today's newspaper. A mom and two kids died in a car crash by a drunk driver. A two year old died bitten by the family dog. Twenty-five people killed by a suicide bomber in Iraq. The December 2004 tsunami (natural disaster) took at least 150,000 souls in South Asian countries.

Recently I read an article in the magazine, Christianity Today. In that magazine, it said that the Barna group researched and had a report that told in the U.S. about 10 million self-proclaimed born again Christians have not been going to Church for the last six months, excluding Christmas and Easter. About a third of Americans are unchurched according to Barna's national data. I could write more on crises and tragedies but I have to get on with the subject.

In this world, we are living amidst a lot of crises and tragedies. What is the hope in these situations? I read in



2 Chronicles 20:12 "We do not know what to do, but we look to you for help". The Moabite army and the Ammonite army are after King Jehoshaphat. The army of the king did not know what to do. So their eyes were upon the Lord. Jesus is our hope in times of crises and tragedies. I would like to share a few points about this subject.

CONFESSION: The definition of confession is telling your sins to God or prayers of personal confession. In the story of Jehoshaphat, his people believed in God but their actions were wrong. In Chapter 17 of 2 Chronicles, the Lord was with Jehoshaphat because in his early years he walked in the ways of his father and followed his commands. He sought the God of his father. He was afraid of God because some of his actions were wrong or disloyal to God. God almost punished him. But He gave Jehoshaphat relief. You have to be loyal to God. You also have to confess your sins to God to walk in the right path.

Do not sin against God or His commandments. If you confess your sins to God, that is the beginning of relief.

CHURCH AND MISSION: The church has an important role in difficult situations, such as tragedies and crises. God has been calling out from the world of people for Himself and sending His people back into the world to be His servants and witnesses for the extension of His kingdom. We confess with shame that we often denied our calling and failed in our mission. The gospel is good news about personal, social, ecological and cosmic healing and reconciliation. It is good news to the whole creation. Life in Christ is a corporate affair. The church is the Body of Christ and it carries His wounds. To know Christ is to share in the fellowship of His sufferings—even if the suffering comes at

the hands of the sinners. God's thinking is different than ours and His working habits are different than ours. Jesus knows our circumstances better than us. There are difficulties and crises in political, social and religious areas. The church should be pointing to God. The church is full of people ready to make a difference.

GOD'S COMFORT: Our sincere confession leads us to a meaningful worship. In a time of tragedy and crisis, God will console us. God's unconditional love will heal everybody in their trouble. God gives us strength in our difficult situations. God is our hope in these times.

He helps us in times of need. Sometimes we do not know what to do. But our eyes are upon the Lord. When we walk in uncertainty, God will guide us now and forever. ■

Messenger of Hope

Christopher Chacko, Detroit Mar Thoma Church

Juniors—1st place winner—Mar Thoma Messenger Poetry Competition—2005

*I can be a messenger of hope
To those who cannot simply cope.
I pray that God sends them a rope
And helps them climb the enduring slope.*

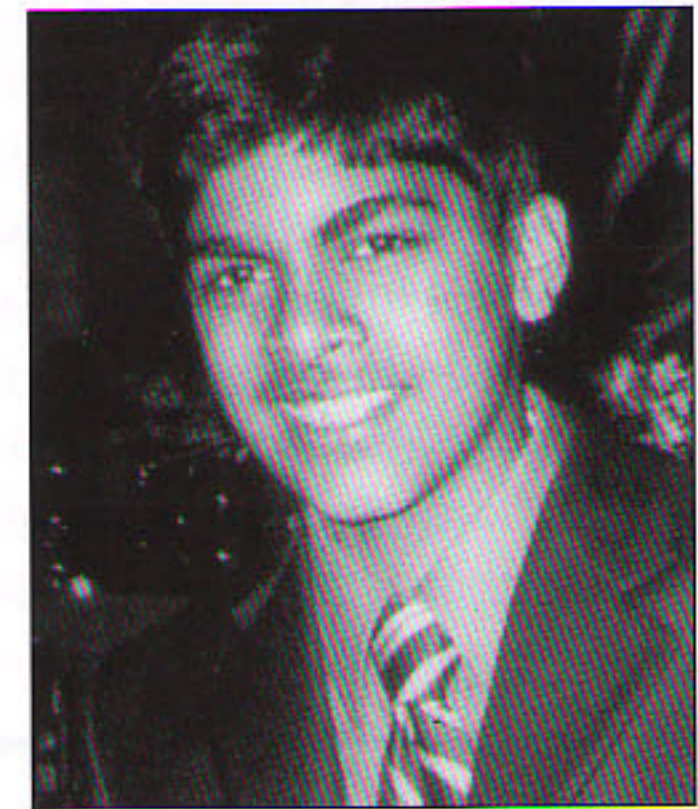
*God expects us to uplift souls,
To dig people from their sinful holes,
Through His Son He shared His Word,
He sends us like a soaring bird.*

*For each of us He gave His life,
Embracing us as we go through strife;
Through Him we can turn back to right,
And show others the life giving light.*

*To those who question His unparalleled might,
His Son has replaced every needless rite,
For all are equal in Our Father's sight,
We must cease our frivolous fights.*

*We can spread His Word to the world,
We can make it as shiny as pearls,
Gold's loving message must pour out from us,
That is what our Father expects from us.*

*I can be a messenger of hope,
Loving and serving others with all my heart,
Inviting others on to the salvation route,
Jesus Christ is the one and only route.*



*I am lighted to lighten others,
To live in harmony with sisters and brothers,
Listening to those who are lonely and dismayed,
To those who are feeling a bit discouraged.*

*I can show others the right path,
Spare others from God's wrath,
Live a life God expects of me,
Spread God's love so that all can see.*

*I can be a messenger of hope,
Empowering others who have lost their hope,
For Jesus is the true beacon of our hope,
God counts on me to be His ambassador of hope.*

Jesus, Our Hope

Ajin John, Detroit Mar Thoma Church

Seniors—1st place winner—Mar Thoma Messenger Poetry Competition—2005

*Betrayal has spewed its venom,
And has revealed a heart of anger.
Its raging fires expand,
Parching everything around it.
At such times of fury,
Neither the iciest,
Nor purest waters can appease it,
Hope for consolation and contentment,
Lies solely in our Lord Jesus Christ.*



*A rocky bridge dangles ahead menacingly,
This bridge is life.
It dangles under the weight,
Of insecurities, distress, anguish and fear,
It seems that the plummeting fall downward
Is unavoidable and terrifying;
But when you fix your eyes on Jesus,
There is hope of safely crossing,
And landing in the grace and comfort of our Savior.*

*Walking along the path of life in tattered clothes of black,
One turns his head and views a life of sin,
Shameful, hateful, unintentional and pleasurable sin.
Then the road ahead of you disappears,
Your are plunging into utter darkness.
Landing in a mattress of flowers,
You find your clothes of black gone,
Replaced by a robe of white,
With crystals that shimmer its silver radiance incessantly.
Your sins have vanished from sight,
And as you turn,
You see the Lord Jesus on the cross,
The sins re-piled at his guiltless feet.
You will not have to suffer
The scorching pits of hell and eternal torment.
Instead, the majestic doors of heaven have opened
Its brilliance and magnificence indescribable, but perfect.
Our Savior stands by the doors,
His arms wide open.
Our Savior, Jesus Christ,
Our Hope.*



Participants of the retreat with Rev. Johncey George and Rev. Dr. Jacob Thomas

Parish Retreat

A Family retreat was held from July 29th to 31st at the Montrose Bible Conference Center in Montrose, Pennsylvania. The theme of the conference was "Stewardship in Christian discipline". The main leaders for the retreat were Rev. Manoj M. Zacharia (Staten Island), Rev. Dr. Jacob Thomas (UBS Pune), and Rev. Johncey George. Mr. Adam Tyson from Campus Crusade led the sessions for the youths. A Holy Communion service was held on the final day for the attendees. Mr. Philip Yohannan and Mr. Abraham Thomas served as conveners.

Rev. Johncey George, Vicar

Doctorate for Mr. Winson T. George

Mr. Winson Thloor George, S/o Mrs. & Mr. Thloor George received his Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Orthopedic Biomechanics. He is an active member of the St. James Mar Thoma Church, Rockland, New York.



Blessing *(Cont'd from page 27)*

Your spiritual blessings in Christ are secure and constant. (John 3:16) You are blessed with eternal life. Revelations 3:5 says, "Your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life". No matter how well or how poorly you perform as a Christian, these blessings cannot be diminished or taken away. This assurance that we belong to God and are eternally blessed is the central theme of our Christian faith. This does not mean that you will be healthy, wealthy, and pain free all your life.

The primary evidence of God's blessings in our life is who we have become in Christ not what we have. We know the story of Jacob. If ever there was a man who wanted blessings it was Jacob. His hunger for blessing was undeniable. After all the deceit and deceptions in life, after his face to face encounter with God, Jacob—renamed Israel—was a changed person. His fear was gone, his guilt was gone, and finally he could face his brother, because of God's touch in his life. God has chosen you to be His child.

In other words we have become co-heirs of God with Christ. (Romans 8:17) This is one of the greatest blessings that the Gospel offers you. You are in the family of God. You are loved and cared for by your Father. Your relationship as an heir is the basis of your Christian life and the foundation of all other blessings you received in your life.

Along with the receipt of these blessings comes the responsibility of sharing this blessing with others. Abraham was blessed to be a blessing for all nations. The Good Samaritan was a blessing. How do we know that? Because he blessed the person who was in need. Knowing that we belong to God is a blessed assurance. We are blessed to bless others. Are you aware of all the blessings available? Are you aware of all the blessings you have received? But you are a person chosen for blessing. Discover it, experience it and share it!!! ■

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Parish Representatives who collect the most "Life" and "Regular" Subscriptions will be recognized and rewarded with plaques at the 2006 Family Conference in Chicago!!!

I have always been fascinated by the ocean; by its enormity, the waves, light glimmering on it at sunrise, noon, and sunset, and its fury during storms. One can meditate on the waves alone, on their infinite variety. When we allow our consciousness to become saturated by the quietness of calm waters or the silence of a graveyard, or even the loneliness of the wilderness, it refreshes and replenishes our thought mechanisms. In such quietness, conversation with God is possible. Conversing with God is a very strong and powerful act that can uncover deep and bothersome issues that we may have.

St. Francis of Assisi asked God to use him as a tool for real blessings to the people around him. His prayer was:

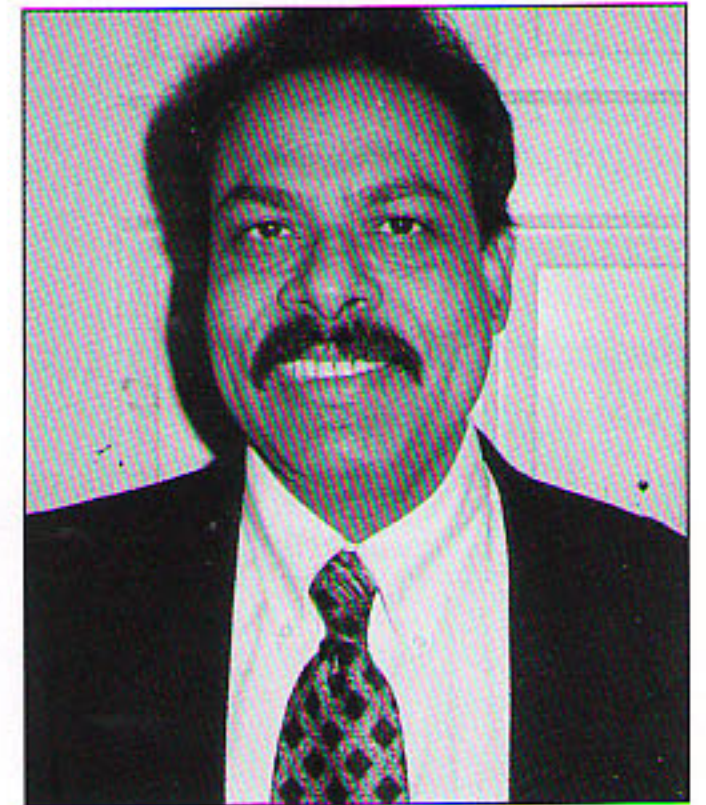
Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace
Where there is hatred, let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is despair, hope
Where there is darkness, light
And where there is sadness, joy.

Asking God to provide the strength and willingness to accept what is happening around us and to us is very important to stay peaceful and faithful.

O Lord, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love
For it is in giving that we receive
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life

The theme of this issue of the Messenger "Be a blessing in the land", is a very challenging theme which can truly inspire our lives on this earth. We see great examples in the Bible where God has called men like Abraham, Moses, and many others who became His obedient servants and lived richly blessed lives. We often talk about great traditions of the east and forget the fundamental fact that the eastern tradition is rooted in intense love and care for one's own people and the people in the community. Mutual support, interwoven and intensified with love and caring made the eastern communities so vibrant and colorful. Even in the midst of famine, natural disasters and other struggles of harsh living, they enjoyed what little they had, content with minimal amenities. In today's world of abundance and luxury, we are still dissatisfied and irate with many issues. Are we instruments of blessing for the people around us? As individuals and a community, are we bothered about the problems of our society at large?

It is important to stop and think before we proceed any further in life. It is more critical to take time to converse with God and know His plans for us. It is God's intention for us to be a great blessing, rather than a curse. It does not require any deep philosophy for one to understand that the mere existence of humans depends on the providence of God, and if we are blessed to have anything at all, it is wise to share our blessings. When it comes to donating our time and talents for the goodness of others, we often tend to limit ourselves. In the divine mind, there are no limitations, but only wholehearted extension of care and support.



Eapen Daniel

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