

MAR THOMA

MESSENGER

A PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

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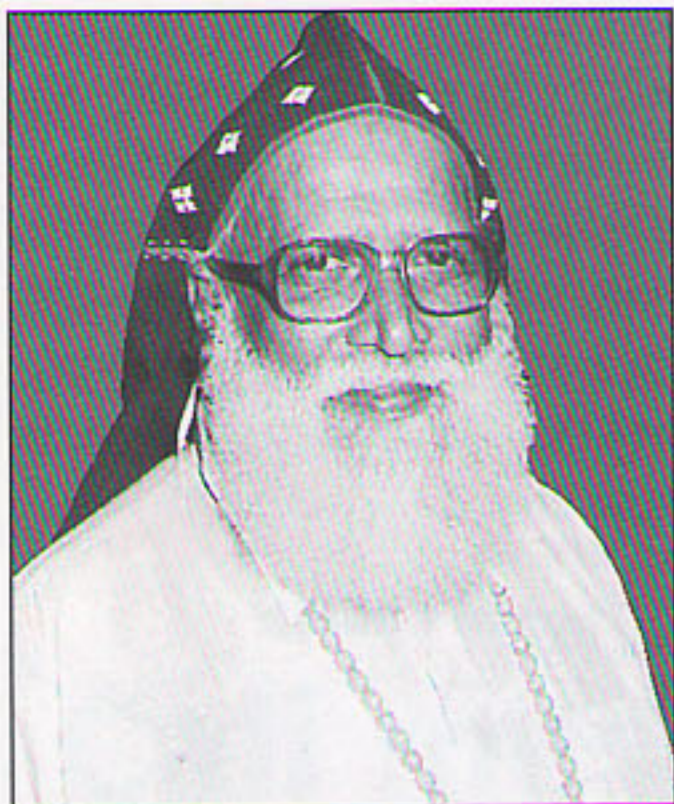
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Message from the Metropolitan



Dearly beloved in the Lord,

The Maramon convention has become a traditional annual program of our area with multitude attending. We get plenty of help and cooperation from the Government, Panchayats, and the local communities. With sincere thanks we remember all these agencies, and all those who labor to make this event magnificent. This convention is a ministry centered on the Word of God for spiritual renovation. It is a holy sacrifice through the instigation and obedience of the Holy Spirit for making the lost peace and hope in today's world, a true experience, by thinking and meditating the life, teachings, and instructions of the word-conceived Jesus Christ.

The Lent is not a food centered program. It is the Christ centered holy sacrifice. Lent is the quest for the will of God and the renunciation of whatever to be renounced for the conduct of the same. It is not our interests, likes, and dislikes reigning over us, but what we need is to search and obey the will of God. Individuals, families, and the prayer groups must specially try to spend more time for Bible study and meditation. It will be good, if the parish sets aside one day each week for special Bible study.

We have to observe certain discipline in our daily routines. As the Church traditionally has been observing, it is good discipline to relinquish some materials. We must be partners in the great events such as the crucifixion, and the resurrection that are the culmination of our Lord's human incarnation. It is to serve, and to give His own life as a substitute that the Christ became a human. The newborn experience of the cross must become a reality for us. Jesus Christ said, "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit." In the world of increasing sins, the Church has to be a corrective force, and a means of purification. The main source of this is the life in Christ. The study of the Word of God, life of worship, and love ministries should become our essential needs. Parishes should invent and encourage programs for this. The executive committee is not an administrative body only, but it must turn out to be the life pulse of the parish as well.

We remembered Medical Mission in February. Owing to many failures such as man's disobedience, inattention, and greed, the human body, in various ways, does not become useful for the accomplishment of the mission. We call this sickness. Jesus accepted the ministry of redeeming man from this ailing condition, very seriously. Though it is not possible for us to be Christ like, we can be partners in the healing ministry in that spirit and pattern. We must be. Deadly diseases like cancer, kidney failure, heart disease, and AIDS is on the rise today. In the spirit and strength of God, we should accept remedial programs, without remaining fear-stricken in front of these. We must be able to conduct instruction classes. We should chalk out planned programs to treat those ailments and chalk out plans to materialize financial support. Prayer for patients must be conducted, at least, once a week. Effort must be made to arrange prayer at sometime, in all the churches.

The cooperation for the effort to give 1500 homes for the homeless this year is encouraging. This should not be seen as a holy act. 'Love your neighbor as yourself' is the commandment of the Lord, Jesus Christ. All must join in this ministry. To build homes, youth must be partners in the work. The cooperation of those who get the homes also should be there. The clergy should extend selfless leadership in this endeavor.

Total renewal of the Church is necessary for the formation of the new firmament and earth. God must become the center of life. Let us pray, "Our Father, Thy will be done in me, in us, completely."

I do express the empathy of the Mar Thoma Church, towards the grief stricken family members involved in the tragic boat accident in Kerala in February 2007. Excursions and study tours are necessary and good. But proper precautions and attention should be given while planning such events. Parishes and schools must take necessary steps of caution in this area.

May the grace, love, and protection of our Lord be always with us all.

Philipose Mar Chrysostom
Mar Thoma Metropolitan

Translated and Reprinted from Sabha Tharaka

Message from the Diocesan Bishop



Dearly Beloved in Christ,

This edition of the Mar Thoma Messenger is dedicated Diocesan Sunday School and Youth Fellowship. We commonly state that the future of our Church and Diocese is with our children and the youth. However, it is more appropriate to convey that our children and youth should be the concern of the Church in the present day. It is in this regard, that we need to continue our support for the activities of the Diocesan Sunday School and Diocesan Youth Fellowship.

The Diocesan Sunday School has been effective in the co-ordination and organization of activities throughout various parts of the Diocese. The Diocesan Sunday School Council has taken the initiative to re-vamp the curriculum so that we now have our own curriculum catered to the developmental and theological needs of the children. Along with teaching our children Biblical lessons and Church history, we must teach them to respond ethically to moral challenges that they face. It is in regard to this that we as a Diocese must re-invigorate conferences and discussions for children to meet these challenges. Moreover, the vision of the Sunday school to "bring every child to Jesus" must be expanded by teaching our children the value of community involvement and service. Each Sunday school should find a local community service project to be part and parcel of.

The Diocesan Youth Fellowship and the mission of the Youth Chaplaincy programs have been very effective. The chaplaincy is a vital and dynamic part of the ministry and the Diocesan Youth Fellowship has served actively in the development of this Diocese. More youth participation at the parish level must be encouraged. The process of passing down—transitioning—the administration of the parish to the youth must be conducted with proper attention and concern. Our parishes must encourage the prayerful leadership of youths at various levels of the parish administration.

As a Diocese, our contemporary challenge is to deal with the ethical and moral issues that we all face. In this regard, we must encourage our children to develop a keen Christian ethical sense that entails reading about and discussing ethical issues at the local level. Let us pray that our work as a Diocese among our children and youth is empowered with heavenly wisdom.

Yours in His Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Coorilos Metrachan". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Coorilos Metrachan

Towards a Youth Friendly (Mar Thoma) Church

Rev. Mathew Skariah, Youth Chaplain

Living in a distant land and keeping up with the long history and tradition of the parent church and society is a challenging experience .
—*Mar Paulos*

...that's the situation...

Youth ministry is not about ministering to the youth alone anyway. It is about getting everyone involved—parents, sibling, friends, teachers and everything else that affects the youths, in ministering to the youths.
—*Sam George*

...those are the stakeholders...the ones who make (or unmake) the church, youth—friendly...

Adolescents are looking for a soul-shaking, heart-waking, world-changing God to fall in love with, and if they do not find that God in the Christian Church, they will most certainly settle for lesser Gods elsewhere. Youth look to the church to show them something. Most of the time, we have offered them pizza.
—*Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster*

...that's almost where we are...sorry...

Listen, not just talk

The road to youth friendliness starts from listening. As a church, we may wonder whether there is anything that we could listen from the youth. We assume that youth are worthy to be taught but never to be listened. Unless we start listening to the youth, we cannot really come to know the expectations they have for the church and their disappointments they may have with their own church.

Listening to the youth voice also involves being sensitive to the situations in which they exist beyond the church. As immigrants always caught between two worlds, our youth struggle to find their space in the world and its culture, and they would always like to voice how the church would help them in finding their identity in Christ.

A Space for Faith

As an immigrant church, our church is a great place for community building. It is an oasis where the people who share the same faith tradition would gather for worship and to reinforce cultural roots.

Faith community can never aspire to become culturally neutral, but the church and worship need to go beyond a cultural event. If the chief motivating factor to attend church remains cultural hangout for many parents and not a genuine desire for communion with the Lord, the church is being unfriendly to the aspirations of the youth.

We do not always experience the grace and unconditional love that is the mark of a redeemed community. But it is more of a judgmental attitude that is shared. These are some of what I have listened to...

A person who was in a very difficult situation being assisted in the process of healing, shares about the unfriendly and indif-

ferent attitudes that he experienced from most of the parishners.

Another youth lady who is unmarried confides, "Achen, everyone at church asks me why you aren't getting married, sometimes in a sarcastic way too, as if something is wrong with me. But no one ever tells me, I am praying for you in this matter".

We need not generalize based on these responses, but we need to consider them as they are genuine responses.

Two perspectives of the church could be helpful in our journey

Hospitality of/to the stranger (Orthodox perspective —The Silent Roots, KM George)

Space to experience grace (Evangelical perspective—Church, why bother, Philip Yancey)

The nostalgia and the cultural familiarity, if not engaged by the dynamic faith and an inclusive understanding of community, can enslave us in a cultural ghetto, preventing us from looking beyond ourselves. We need to move on in the path of a multicultural fellowship, where people are welcomed. When inter racial marriages are a reality even in our own church, we need to strive to make our parish space open and inclusive.

Church should also become a space where, sin and sinful structures are confronted, but people are accepted in grace, in spite of the messiness that has happened in their lives. It should become a place of affirmation and healing. This is good news for our youth.

Furthermore, our church should be a sacred space that becomes a womb of transformation of lives, where people get a new vision of their purpose and a new and intimate relation with God.adult interactions with them should move the youth to a real encounter with the living God; a growing awareness of God's purpose for their lives and owning the faith for themselves, rather than a "hand-me-down" faith of their forefathers.

Family matters/Families matter

In his 1999 report, Third Millennium Teens, George Barna identifies myths and realities of the state of youth ministry:

Myth: The church is where teen spiritual progress is made;
Reality: Spiritual development in teenagers depend mostly on their family.

This makes the role of families vital in the life and impact of the church. The youth attitudes are mostly a reflection of the attitudes of their families. The church, as the family of families, should be influencing the content and quality of life of the individual family, which in turn moulds the faith and character of the children.

It's all about you, Jesus... Heart of Worship

Much has been said about the dislike of youth for liturgical worship, and their passion for contemporary. But it is only part of the story. The real issue is the youth craving for an intimate and passionate experience with God in worship. Youth desire liturgical worship that would involve their innermost being in relation with God. This is a challenge for the worshipping community to move beyond any mechanical repetition of prayers, to a life challenging and life changing participation in liturgy.

This would call for a creativity of the congregation I being open to experimental or experiential liturgies which would combine the beauty and breadth of our traditional liturgies to that of the strength of contemporary songs and praise services. (St. James meeting Chris Tomilin!)

Moments of adoration, confession and thanksgiving (not excluding the other elements) should be glorious occasions of healing and transformation of the people of God.

Passionate narrative of scripture and priority of prayer create space for youth to encounter the transformation of Holy Spirit. Praying and meditating on scripture naturally (and supernaturally) lead young people to acts of mercy and ultimately to justice.

In rediscovering our own spiritual resources we are being credible, and in engaging the contemporary trends we are being relevant.

Mission—Passionate for God

Youth are always passionate for mission. The enthusiastic support and participation in missionary activities is evident from the experience of the past and especially with the Mexico Mission. In addition mission in a far away place, the church need to

explore the possibilities of contextual mission. Such an engagement in local and contextual mission is part of becoming the church; it's not an optional extra, but a sure sign of existence of a sacramental community. It can inspire. Kenda Creasy Dean, Associate Professor of Youth, Church and Culture at Princeton says that the church should be passionate in order to become youth friendly, "A passionless church will never address passionate youth. It is highly questionable whether a passionless church addresses anybody, or if it even is the church in the first place. Christianity requires passion, and youth know it. If the church offers less, they will rightly point to our Easter heritage and expose us for fraud, revealing youth ministry for what it has often become: a form of institutional life support for a church fearing extinction."

Making the church youth friendly is not another program to be undertaken or even an exclusive program for the youth. It is a way of telling that the church has to be reformed anew, from the inside, involving every member of the church. It is being true to our own tradition.

Becoming youth friendly is not optional, it is mandatory. Let it be. ■

The Importance of Sunday School

Sheryl Merin Johnson, St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, New York (grade 7)

Sunday School is very essential in a Christian life. Sunday school helps to plan and prepare for a successful life. Attending Sunday School is similar to a farmer who plans to work hard to ensure a good crop. Like the farmer who struggles for months to receive a joyful harvest, Sunday School helps to receive joyful gifts from our God almighty. Sunday School is a time to make sure our actions are godly ones and most importantly, it is a time to turn back to Jesus when we have sinned. We should not take Sunday School lightly. We have to remember that what we learned in Sunday School can bring us closer to God. If we take Sunday School lightly, we miss an opportunity to get close to God. We have to remember that there is nothing more important than God. When we have a Sunday School test, we should study hard. We should be totally committed to knowing and learning about God.

"Jesus died on the cross to save us from sin." We have heard this many times but when one thinks about it, one realizes that Jesus was only thinking about us. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was not thinking about Himself. We should act as Jesus did: we should not think about ourselves but about others and God. The whole New Testament and Sunday School tries to teach us this message. When we meditate on God's Word and we do not understand what it is trying to teach us we should ask God to help us understand it.

We are the people of Christ. Our job is to spread the Good News. We can do this by telling our non-Christian friends about

Jesus. We can also do this by trying our best to put an end to something that is evil and against God. Sunday School helps us to be good stewards of God. We can be good stewards by accepting God as the creator of everything. We should be grateful to God for his protection, care and concern about us. God made us in his own image. Every human is God's creation so we should accept all human beings as God's creation and love them as God loves them. Sunday School helps us to learn deeper about God's creation. It helps us to understand that the renewal of creation is only through Jesus. 1 Corinthians 1:16 says that the fulfillment of creation begins in the new creation and continues through Jesus Christ.

Sunday School helps us to become good believers. Believing means accepting Jesus as our Savior and only God. Sunday School builds a foundation for our beliefs and we accept Jesus as our Savior.

Sunday School also helps us to build our character and personality. For example, when we meet different people we could easily recognize a person who attended Sunday school from his or her choices. He or she will always talk and act in fear of God.

The Almighty God has blessed all of us with many physical and spiritual gifts. God gave us a land in which we can worship and attend Sunday School freely. Be good stewards of God in the land that we live in and thank God for all the opportunities he gives us to learn about him. ■

The 2007 Youth Mission Trip to various Indian mission fields is tentatively scheduled for the third week in October.

If you are interested, please contact Mrs. Mariamma Thomas AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE

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Assimilation of the Immigrant Church

Alex Kolath, MTC Dallas, FB

In Sam Huntington's book, 'Who Are We?' it is presented that the American identity is changing. He does not explicitly say it is changing for the better or worse, but he strongly hints that it will be to America's disadvantage. The American identity that he wants to salvage is found in the American culture, which he defines as Anglo-protestant; and the American identity he wishes to move away from—but it is where we are headed, is that of a multicultural immigrant nation. Sam's focus on the Anglo-protestant culture includes not just the protestant Christian religion, but the English language as well. He raises many points, good and bad, to make the case that America is an Anglo-protestant, English-speaking country, and that America is on the verge of losing both aspects of its culture, and hence, its identity.

A review and analysis of this book is not the purpose of this article however. But I feel it serves as a good lens to view a problem our church is facing in this diocese. There are many valid points and observations he makes that can be applicable to us. Before I go on, let me first say that I do not endorse many of the ideas that Sam Huntington brings forth in this book. But I am not going to throw it all away just because I do not like his conclusions. On that note, let me continue with some more of his observations.

Are we an immigrant nation?

The strongest point Sam makes is in the answer to the question: are we an immigrant nation? President Clinton mentioned in a speech that this country was founded by immigrants; therefore we are an immigrant nation. The melting pot society we are, or as Sam may say, "the salad bowl" (since we do not melt with each other but we maintain our distinct ethnic cultures in this nation), is the American way. We have been a nation of many ethnic flavors in culture, language and religion since its founding. This certainly makes sense. Or does it?

Sam argues that our founding fathers were not immigrants. Immigrants are people who have moved to a new land and culture and they learn to adapt to the foreign land in which they came. Immigrants do not come to a populated land expecting to live as they did in their mother land. Rather, they assimilate themselves into the new land. Was this what our founding fathers did? Did they move here from Great Britain in order to keep living as they did in Great Britain? Did they move here to assimilate into the culture of the natives?

The answer to these questions is no. The founding fathers were not immigrants. They were settlers (or as some may say, they were invaders and occupiers). The difference is that as settlers they came here wanting to make a new home, a new land, a new culture. They wanted out of the British way of life seeking religious freedom and wished to start anew. The settlers formed colonies that had their own laws, culture and religion. Their hope was to form a better society than that which they came from.

These settlers then set the tone of what this country should be like: Anglo, protestant, and English-speaking. In the modern day this certainly does not sit well with the non-white, non-protestant, non-English-speaking person. But this is just the way things were in those days.



The Anglo-Protestant Culture

The Anglo-protestant culture that America has, the one that Sam Huntington wishes to preserve, does not mean that it is required for an American to be both Anglo and protestant. This is obviously not the case since this country's Declaration of Independence was signed by a Catholic. Also, Maryland was founded by a Catholic. Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin were not even Christians. The overwhelming majority of them were Anglo, but they did not turn non-Anglos away for being non-Anglo. The Anglo-protestant culture is a culture, not a mandate.

You can look in the history of this country dating back to its inception and see that there were non-Anglos also who shaped this country. However, the way it was back then was that non-Anglos assimilated themselves to the culture of the Anglo-Protestant. They knew that the only way to survive in this country was to adopt the culture of those who already live here — those who settled this country: the Anglo-Protestant.

To be Anglo, literally, is to be of British descent, white and English-speaking since those are who initially settled in this country. Immigrants obviously cannot become Anglo or change their ancestry, but they can adopt the language and culture of the American Anglo. When German and Dutch immigrants came, they knew to learn the language of this country in order to live successfully. Certainly there are pockets of German-speaking communities, but German is not their only language. Mostly they assimilated themselves into the culture of the country by first learning the language of American English.

I. Assimilation

This long introduction leads to that one point: assimilation. Sam Huntington has this fear that the modern day immigrant is not assimilating. The immigrant is not learning the culture of this land, in particular, the language. The immigrant is not assimilating to this country but retaining the culture of the land they left. But I am not writing this to further push his political agenda he may have regarding this subject, but rather, I want to look at this in the context of our church. While we are a mix of immigrants and natives to whichever country we live in this diocese, we are an immigrant church—so then, I should ask: Have we assimilated into this non-Indian land? Do we even have to?

a. Counter-cultural Church

One thing that Jesus Christ did was totally reverse the social structure. He made the last first. He led by serving. He was very much counter-cultural in those times. Paul stressed this too in his epistles. He removed the notion of rank and status, race and sex that people were accustomed to. He even said not to be conformed to this world. We are citizens of heaven, not of this world.

But wait did not Jesus speak the language of his people? Did not Paul speak the language of his churches? Or did they transform their language to some heavenly language not of this world? God's prophets sent God's message in the language of the receiver. The Scriptures themselves is an act of God's condescension to speak to his creation in the vulgar language of humankind so that they can understand.

To say that we must be counter-cultural, it does not include language. While I do think language is a part of culture, I do not think it is what we, as Christians, need to be counter to. It is how we communicate. Certainly, the way in which we use the language in our communication with one another needs to be transformed, but the language itself does not need such a change. This certainly sounds like an obvious point and one that does not need to be made, but I feel like stating the obvious.

There are other things that could be of a native culture that are not necessarily anti-Christian. The Church at large, not just the Indian church, has adopted many things of the native pagan culture but set them apart for the Church. For example, the white wedding dress, the 'thali', the pulpit, preaching styles, songs, etc. If you go to Africa and find a tribe that was converted to Christianity, they will still sing the same style songs and dance the same dances, but now it is for the Lord. They transformed their culture—they did not delete the culture. That being said, I ask again have we, as an immigrant church, assimilated into the culture of this land? Or are we still trying to retain India? Should we even have to assimilate?

b. Cultural

Being a cultural church is not a bad thing. Our church would be the first to agree since there are elements in our church life that are very Indian. After all, the women wear 'saris' to church (this is not mandatory obviously). That is Indian—not some counter-cultural dress, not some heavenly dress. If we wanted to be strictly counter-cultural, we would not allow such clothing to be worn. But we do not have such restrictions. Why? It would be an extreme ignorant response to a trivial matter.

The same things can be said with the way Indians eat, the food they eat, the proper etiquette of shaking hands, taking shoes off before entering a home or a church, etc. These are things truly Indian—not Christian. But yet, the Indian Christian will still conform to that culture.

But if any such culture were contrary to our faith, we transform it. When we find that elements of our culture are racist, classiest, sexist, we will (should) transform it. When we find that elements of our culture are self-honoring, we should transform it. When we find that elements of our culture devalue family life, we should transform it. When we find that elements of our culture devalue marital sexual intimacy, we should transform it. When we find that elements of our culture are damaging and oppressive to the poor, we should transform it. So a church can be both cultural and counter-cultural at the same time. Assimilation does not mean conforming to the flesh, the sinful ways of man. That being said I ask again have we as an immigrant church, assimilated into the culture of this land? Or are we still trying to retain India? Should we even have to assimilate?

II. The Immigrant Church

I raise these questions because I think Sam Huntington's analysis of the lack of immigrant assimilation being a cause of America losing its identity is also a cause, in my opinion, for immigrant churches to lose its ability to function in this land. I hope in my very brief and inadequate reasoning above shows that for a church to be cultural is not an evil. There is a difference between conforming to the world (as Paul meant it) and relating to people through their culture. An immigrant church that does not assimilate to their new land's culture is not them being counter-cultural—but just being resistant. But how does an immigrant church that refuses to assimilate essentially hurt itself? It can hurt in two ways (and possibly more): congregationally and also in its missionary effects.

a. Congregational effects

It does not take long for an immigrant family to start having kids, and then grandkids, and so on. In the same way, it does not take long for an immigrant church to begin to start having native members. But when those native members and immigrant members try to coexist, there will be tension.

Language is the most obvious issue. The native child of an immigrant will likely speak the native language very fluently. He may or may not know his parents' native language, however. So what happens when he goes to the immigrant church that is primarily of the church's native language? He will not have a clue.

The customs of the immigrant people and other trivial matters will also clash with native born children: The clothing, hair styles, signs of affection, how one grieves, how to console, etc. It can cause tension, offenses, etc. This list can go on and on. But the point is that the life of the parish can hurt if the immigrant church does not assimilate. The natives will be lost and confused, and one culture can be offended by the other because of unfamiliar customs.

b. Missionary effects

When a missionary goes to a foreign land, they do not expect the natives to learn his language before he can share the Gospel with them. Rather, if he is a good missionary, he will try and learn their language, their customs and be with them, live with them, relate to them, and share the Gospel in word and deed. If they choose Christ, the missionary will not then make them conform to all of his "Christian" customs and traditions. Rather, he will continually point them to Christ as they learn to transform their customs and traditions to be Christ honoring.

When an immigrant church is planted in a community, it has essentially become a vehicle for the Gospel in that community. But if the immigrant church has not assimilated to the community, how can they be such a vehicle? The church does not speak the language, it does not relate to customs and traditions. It just exists on its own. The light, the church, is not supposed to be hidden under the table.

If the immigrant church does not assimilate into the culture of its community, it will prove to be difficult to be missionaries to that community. They cannot even speak to them. I attended a service at a church that used to be a Korean church. The entire pastoral staff is Korean, but the culture of the church was American—in song, language, etc. The congregation was majority Korean, but there were also other ethnicities of the community as active members. That is what an immigrant church should strive for. This being a country of many ethnicities, our parish demographic should reflect that as well.

III. Our challenge

The Mar Thoma Church is an immigrant church in North America and Europe. Have we assimilated to our local culture? Should we? Our challenge now is that we are in that transition of immigrant families and then their native born children coexisting in the same church.

Language has been an issue for a long time. Many times you have people not engaged in a service because it is not English. The sermon is not English. Some do not even go to church on a Malayalam service day. Although, before one criticizes them for that, you should also note that more people come to church when it is Malayalam service. When it is English service, some of the immigrants do not show up also. Language is a major issue for both immigrants and native born children.

What do we do? How do we possibly appease both "parties" in this situation? This may be a very unpopular opinion, but I

think the burden lies in the immigrant families in assimilating. Certainly they already assimilate to some extent since they work in this country. But why that assimilation is not taking place in the church and it is set on a different standard?

To be counter-cultural, to be culture transforming, it is not to make people Indian. To be missionaries, it is living with, relating with, being with a community and sharing the Gospel with them. But we are not doing that. If we are trying to do that, we are not making it much of a priority.

I do not think that the first generation native born children will eventually be the majority and then the transition to be more English will be easier, because immigrants are still coming in. That tension will always be there unless the families of this diocese make it a priority to assimilate. Then the incoming immigrants will know they should assimilate too.

Should the native born generation try to learn the language of his parents and ancestors? May be for own benefit, sure. That type of culturing should begin from families if they wish to do so, not from the church. Do we need to learn a foreign language just to attend church? The church has lost its priorities if they answer yes. Need I share the missionary example again?

Myself, being a native born and English speaking and very minimal Malayalam speaking, if I were to go to India to live, I do not have the audacity to expect them to learn English just so I can go to church in their land. Rather, it is my responsibility to learn the language of the people there. It is my responsibility to understand the other customs and traditions that are foreign to an American. I would do my best to assimilate (although I confess I still might insist on using a fork instead of eating with my hand).

If our diocese does not assimilate, then the idea of having English-only congregations needs to be further pressed. When surveyed, the youth of the diocese did not like this idea of English-only congregations—and they had valid reasons. One opponent of the idea, whom I respect a great deal, during our discussions on the matter (I was for the idea), suggested instead of creating new English-only congregations, why not just have each church become English-only. That idea is something I am more and more leaning towards as you can sense by this article. But if the immigrants of our church are unwilling to assimilate, and yet we are concerned with being missionaries in this community, and we are concerned about our children not finding church to be a headache because they do not understand the language (it literally was a headache for me for a long time, and still is to some extent), then we should strongly consider forming separate English-only congregations in this diocese.

I admit the weakness in having each church assimilate and become English-only. For example, when our families bring their parents or grandparents from India, it probably is not in their immediate best interests to learn English. Who will minister to them? Who will fellowship with them? Certainly they need a Christian Malayalee community. But I believe it is a much greater weakness for the non-Malayalam speaker in our primarily Malayalam speaking churches in a non-Malayalee country. Being an English-only or primarily English church does not mean the Malayalee community will disappear. There can still be Malayalam services for them if they desire.

We should not be concerned here with retaining culture of any land. We should be concerned to be light in darkness. We should be concerned with the edification and building up of one another in any land, and proclaiming the Gospel to the community around us. And if that means that we, as an immigrant church, need to assimilate into its new found land, then we should. Not because the native culture is superior to Indian, but rather, the native culture is more helpful to the natives in communication and relating to one another. And as Sam Huntington said, when immigrants came to America in the past, they did not come expecting to live just like they did in the land they left because they knew they had to assimilate in order to live here. So for the immigrant church to assimilate to a culture, it is not to endorse a culture, but it is to live in a culture while being transforming within it.

In Christ, with love for one another, regardless of race, sex, social status, or culture, we should strive to be a Christ honoring and serving church, and less of an ethnic church. I am not writing these things to demean the immigrant. Rather, I hope to encourage us all, immigrant and native, to change our perspective, to value our Christian citizenship more than any other citizenship and culture of this world, and with that humbled heart, for the health of our immigrant church, do what is best. Certainly there are more weaknesses that our church must change as we are a continually reforming church (or we claim to be). I am merely discussing one of them. So I ask again: should we assimilate? ■

Editor's Note: Mr. Alex Kolath is born and brought up in Dallas to immigrant parents from Kerala, India and is an active member of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, FB. He expects to graduate in Master of Arts in Religion from Westminster Theological Seminary in May 2007. Alex has been recently selected by our Diocesan Vaideeka Selection Committee to continue his theological studies at Mar Thoma Theological Seminary at Kottayam, Kerala to become an ordained Priest of our Church. Presently he is working as a Software Engineer Consultant. He can be reached at e-mail: kalex76@pobox.com

"Who Can You Talk To"

Nina Varughese, Ebenezer MTC, New York

*Talk to your doctor,
Talk to your lawyer
Talk to your friend,
Or talk to your neighbor
But there's no one better
To Talk to than your Savior.
The Lord is our way,
He is our path, Without him,
We couldn't go through each*

*And every day. He is our helper,
He is our guide. With him our days,
Will be much brighter, he'll be our
Strength, he'll be our power, With him,
We'll be as tall as towers. He is our,
Master, he is our shepherd, without him,
We'll end in disaster. So talk to your Savior,
It's better than talking to your doctor, lawyer,
Friend or even your neighbor.*

Culture Shock, Young People in the Mar Thoma Church

Shino John, Staten Island MTC

This is an age of Web Enabled Phones, BlackBerry's, MySpace, FaceBook, and iPods. There is unlimited access to infinite volumes of information for anyone who can afford an internet connection. We manage hundreds of emails, dozens of phone calls, high volumes of information and network across the globe with people we have never met all in the span of 24 hours. We accomplish more with less and work longer hours than ever before in history. I am not simply talking about some of the senior Fortune 500 executives we work with at Rutgers; I am talking about the young people of our Diocese.



In recent months I had the opportunity to visit several MySpace and Face book web pages of the young people in MTC community across the US. The content of the pages is typically restricted to friends of the page owners. The information on the pages was incredibly detailed and forced me to ask the question how many of the parents, Sunday school teachers and leaders of the Church know what is really happening in the lives of our young people? They speak in a language that grows in complexity and content every day. They evolve their vernacular and are typically able to communicate volumes of information using succinct codes. These are our young people and with every passing month we are further disconnected from who they are.

One of the first issues in the lives of our young people is their identity. An Indian living in America is typically what a Marthoma parent will perceive themselves and their family to be. They are Indians (subject or noun) who are described as Americans (adjective), they are primarily Indians. Our children, on the other hand will refer to themselves as Americans of Indian decent—Americans (noun) who describe themselves as Indian (adjective). Rather than trying to argue one's perspectives, coming to grips with the fact that both parents and children have different (even contrasting!) worldviews would be a start in dealing with these identity issues.

One of the other key things across these MySpace pages is a cry for deeper intimacy, affection and affirmation. When a typical Indian child is asked when was the last time they hugged their parents, they usually give you the most odd stare and reply—"we're Indian... we don't hug!" There is very little physical touch between parent and children and even less affirmation. A way to combat this is to be reminded that before we are Indians or Americans, we find our identity is Jesus Christ. Intimacy is a particularly difficult issue among Indian fathers. Because affection and affirmation are not a part of the normative developmental experience in Kerala, it has never been modeled to the parents of our church today. We have often have difficulty demonstrating affection and speaking words of affirmation to the next generation. Becoming conscious of the young person's needs including intimacy, affection and affirmation from the people close to them will allow us to change the cycle and reclaim many young people. Rather than maintaining the cultural norm, we

need to address the need for intimacy/affection as a family of God.

We need to discover, discern, develop, and deploy individual gifts rather than dictate roles and career path. Not every child is musically inclined, nor is every child artistic and not all Indian kids are mathematicians. Allowing youth to discover their gifts and then steering them towards building up those gifts is very different from dictating their career path and interests. It is generally the case that the parents are more knowledgeable about their children's areas of giftedness and capabilities. However, if we help, empower and enable our young people to develop their own natural discernment

abilities, to come to grips with how they are created in the image of God and the Lord's desire for them to fulfill their calling is what many call "empowering." The challenge for us is to empower the next generation to use their unique gifts in the church and community to affect positive change locally and abroad.

One of the challenges we face is being in what many term a shame based culture. For Indian families, motivation is quite often "shame-based"—meaning that parents will shame and guilt their children into doing things. Because this is such a part of culture as well as a historically effective method of motivation, the parents have never given a second thought of its impact on the children. Things get done, and done very well usually, but the lasting effect is more negative than good—bitterness harbored, and worse, this shame-based method being passed down through the generations. Something else that needs to be understood is that the parents actually are thinking of their children as they do this. Helping them to become aware of this and providing other much more positive methods of affirmation will help begin the process. For the children, reminding them that ultimately, their parents do mean the best for them helps in the healing process. The shame based culture leads to a spirit of competition/comparison, when we need to simply "Focus on our own Family." Anything and anyone, from our children to our dogs are compared with everything and everyone else. The truth is, even if the family does continue this comparison and competition attitude and eventually conform to what appears to be the ideal family to them, they will never be like them. Encourage the family to be who they are—focus on your own family. There is a key difference between encouraging a child to do their best vs. telling them to be the best or to do better than someone else's child. Telling them to do their best rather than being the best takes the focus away from the "best" and instead, puts it on the "doing." In this area it is important to work with children to set attainable goals.

Young people also need the permission to make mistakes. There is a tremendous fear of failure within the Indian American community. For the child the fear stems from an overwhelming sense of duty and obligation to make their parents proud. For the parents this fear stems from the possibility of losing social status within the structure of the community.

- **Fail Early.** Individuals should be encouraged to make mistakes early and to learn from those mistakes immediately. Rather than getting upset and distraught because of failure they should be taught to embrace their failure and admit their mistakes early in the process. Focus should be placed on empowerment and encouragement rather than unfair comparison and negative reinforcement. The family's focus needs to be on the individual as a part of the family and not a member of the community.
- **Fail as much as you like.** The road to success is through many failures. The person must be given permission to fail and encouraged to rise up immediately after the failure. This will encourage the person not only to grow as an individual but will increase their willingness to explore new levels of creativity and innovation.
- **Fail Forward.** Each failure should be a learning experience through which the person grows. Family members can encourage each other in the midst of failure with tactfully stated constructive criticisms and different perspectives.

Finally we would be better served to nurture dreams and vision rather than setting them. This is a control issue. Rather than determining so much of what our children's lives are going to be, allowing them to dream their dreams and then encouraging them to go after those dreams is something that is foreign to the Indian parent—because too much control is being released. Reminding parents that the discipling of a child is more about the child than

the parent, helps parents move towards releasing control and teaching responsibility. We have eighteen years to teach a child how to think, make decision and take responsibility for their actions. If we make all the decisions for them and fail to teach them how to make choices, when they get to college there will be other people to teach how to make some of the most important decisions of their life. I wish I could show you some of our young people's MySpace and Face book pages, it would give us such a glimpse into their lives, hopes, dreams and desires. But unfortunately the language changes faster than we are able to learn it. So before our children leave home, we need to empower them as credible decision making members of our church, society and most importantly our family. ■

(Shino G. John was born and raised in the boroughs of New York City; he holds a Bachelors degree in Psychology and World Religions from Rutgers University and a Masters in Divinity from the Alliance Theological Seminary. He has served in higher education development for the past seven years. During his tenure in higher education Shino has served as Associate Director, Assistant to the President and more recently as Vice President for Institutional Advancement. A role in which he gave oversight to all areas of Public Relations, Alumni Relations and Development for Nyack College, a private college and seminary of 3,000 students headquartered in Nyack, New York. Shino currently serves as the Director of Development for the School of Management and Labor Relations of Rutgers University.

Shino is married to Alycia Ruth; the couple resides in Nyack, New York where Alycia currently serves as the Assistant Director of Nyack Colleges 1,000 student residential program).

The Secret to Success in Life

Janina Marie Jose, Age 12, Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston, TX

Why is it important for us to pray and read the Bible everyday? What is the right way to pray? Why is prayer important to me? Prayer is a time when we intercede with the Lord and talk to God, in our daily lives. I believe that the secret to success in life is prayer. Prayer is a form of communication with our Heavenly Father.

Without prayer, horrible things can happen to us in our daily lives. If we have a hard decision to make, prayer and reading the Bible can help us make the right decision. The Bible can tell us many stories. For example, in the Bible, Daniel prayed three times a day and God was always with him. If we study the Bible, we can see that so many people solve their problems through prayer. In the first chapter of 1 Samuel we see Hannah's desire for a son as a perfect example of prayer. They did not have a child for many years, but Hannah prayed to God with a broken heart. The Lord answered Hannah's prayer and she was blessed with Samuel.

When we pray, we must have faith in God. Also, we should thank God for what we receive daily. We start our prayer by asking for the forgiveness of our sins. We not only mention our own problems and desires, but we also pray for other people. Our heavenly father knows our needs, and all we have to do is ask. Family prayer is very important in our lives, but we also need to



make time for personal prayer. I think we should pray by closing our eyes and picturing that we are talking to God. When we study the Bible (Matthew 26:36-46), we see that in Gethsemane, Jesus went away from his disciples to pray to God. Jesus received strength and shared his dilemma with God the father. As a child of God, we should follow the life of Christ. As a believer of Christ, we need to spend time with God and listen to him daily.

Prayer always helps me in my personal life. I can still remember the time when I had a problem in school and God answered my prayer. One day, I forgot my ID badge in the car. I knew that I would

get in trouble. I was waiting in line to get another one, but I had no money. In my heart, I was praying to God. As I got closer to the window, I looked through the window and I saw some parents standing in line purchasing uniforms. All of a sudden, I saw my mom. My mom never told me that she was going to purchase uniforms that day. I immediately went up to my mom and explained what had happened and she got my badge from the car. This made my faith in prayer stronger; therefore, whenever I have a problem I pray to God.

In conclusion, prayer and reading the Bible are important in a Christian life. God's purpose for us is to praise Him in everything that we do as well as help others and support them through prayers. Let the Almighty God help us in fulfilling this purpose. ■

The Role of Sunday School in a Child's Life

Dr. Leena Susan John, Sunday School Superintendent, MTC of Baltimore, Maryland

Sunday school was started in 1780 by Robert Reiks with 12 children in England. All church denominations have a some sort of variation of a Sunday School. We as parents are mostly involved with the academic education of our children than the spiritual development of our children. We are happy as long as our children do not get involved in evil vices, get married by a certain age and the next generation goes along the same path. The Word of God clearly tells us that Jesus Christ wants us to make progress in our spiritual life. Our job as parents and teachers is to make sure that our children learn the meaning of Christianity, faith and practices of the Church and to study the Bible.

Why do we need Sunday School?

President Calvin Coolidge pinpointed this problem some years ago with these words:

"We do not need more material development, we need more spiritual development. We do not need more intellectual power, we need more moral power. We do not need more knowledge, we need more character. We do not need more government, we need more culture. We do not need more law, we need more religion. We do not need more of things that are seen, we need more of the things that are unseen. It is on that side of life that is desirable to put the emphasis at the present time. If that side is strengthened, the other side will take care of itself. It is that side which is the foundation of all else. If the foundation be firm, the superstructure will stand".

The objective is to teach our children the following

Humility: Humility is not a popular word in any culture. We are so afraid of inferiority complex that we hesitate to admit any inferiority. We are so sure we could do a better job than the President, write a better sermon than the preacher. We are not only proud but proud of our pride. We associate humility with weakness and believe that to be humble means to "crawl" or "lick the dust". True greatness is always humble.

A young girl was shown about the house of Mendelssohn, the great musician. At last she stood before the piano where the great composer had done his great pieces. With unabashed eagerness she blurted "It would be a thrill to play Mendelssohn's piano, May I?" Her guide was annoyed but consented. She sat down without embarrassment or any evidence of reverence and proceeded to "tickle the ironies". She satisfied her craving for the thrill and turned to her guide and said, "I believe you play too. Sit down and give us a number". The guide himself a musician of no mean ability, bowed and replied "No madam, I am not worthy to touch the keys over which Mendelssohn's magic fingers once roamed"

Obedience: We need to teach habits of obedience and to practice the disciplines of obedience in the realm of our human relationships. While waiting in line for food at some store where

the supply is rapidly diminishing to the zero point, someone by an elbow or a wiggle may virtually ask you to step back one place. DO IT. This may be the most; note worthy act of obedience you may have performed for many a day.

Simplicity: Simplicity helps to deliver us from the tyranny of people. Only the simple are free. All the rest are under tyranny of the ambitious ego, its demand for recognition and for things and its preoccupation with people. Jesus said, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven".

Generosity: A stingy man is no friend of ours. We do not see how he could be a friend of God's. We want to avoid him and cannot believe that God wants to keep his company. The generous citizen however small his resources, is a beloved citizen. When we hear of his gifts and services, we are proud to call him "friend". It is important that generosity be generous. Much so called generosity is really only a farce. It has none of the qualities of a truly generous spirit.

Truthfulness: There has been much debate about the necessity of truth telling. It is provoked by a simple question "Is a lie ever justifiable"? In serious illness, physicians will argue that it is alright to lie to the patient about his condition. They fear that the truth will literally "frighten him to death". Truthfulness is not therefore merely the requisite of our living together with other human beings. It is one essential condition which must be faithfully observed if we are to live with God in intimate fellowship.

Purity: In this adulterous generation, it has an important meaning. When the concern for virginity is dismissed as a superstition and promiscuity is condoned as necessity, it is time for all us to reaffirm that only "the pure in heart shall see God". Guard your imagination. It is a contest between the will and imagination, the imagination usually wins.

Honor: Children need to be taught the value of respect. We as parent should set the example by respecting others in our church congregations and in our communities. A story tells about an old man who lived with his married son and daughter-in-law. His hands trembled when he ate and therefore he spilled everything. They made him a little table out in the back. One day the couple noticed their own son playing with some bits of wood. They asked him what he was doing and he said "I am making a little table where I can feed you when I am big". If you would like to be the sort of parents whose child find him honorable you should begin today by being the sort of child who honors his parents.

In concluding, Sunday school points our children to Christ and the message his grace and salvation. By imitating Christ's obedience, simplicity, generosity, truthfulness, purity and honor, our children grow in their walk with the Lord. ■

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Mar Thoma Sunday Schools in North America

Past, Present and Future

M. C. Varghese, Secretary, Diocesan Sunday schools

".....and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" Matt: 28:20

Introduction:

Church is a teaching community and Jesus Christ is our perfect teacher and Guru. Mar Thoma Church has taken the ultimate commandment of our Lord (Matt: 28.20) in its real meaning and started the Sunday School Samajam. The primary objective was to cater the spiritual, emotional and social needs of our growing generation. Now the Samajam is little over 100 years old. Recent advancements in the field of science and technology transformed the academic arena into a highly competitive market and education has lost its real meaning and purpose. Midst of all these Sunday schools are doing everything in their capacity to provide the best Christian Education to our children. With the motto "Come to Jesus, bring every child to Jesus", we are moving forward to achieve the goals set forth by great leaders of our church. Today our aim is to hold on to the ideals and traditions of the founding fathers of our Sunday school and at the same time contain new ideas and visions and bring changes according to the times.

Major steps in our journey

Soon after the formation of Mar Thoma congregations and parishes in North America, Sunday schools started to function as an integral part of it. In the formation, function and growth of Sunday schools the lay initiative is highly remarkable. In the beginning Sunday school activities were limited to parish level. Each Sunday school used the curriculum of their choice. They were mostly local publications. Periodic and annual tests were administered to the children. Competitions were conducted to identify and promote talents of their students. But something was missing and the need for uniformity and organizational structure was felt by all. Everyone realized that greater cooperation will promote growth and strengthen Sunday schools. Steps were taken in 1982 to organize the Sunday schools under one body and thereby bring unity and standardization.

1. **Formation of Sunday school committee.** Today the body is called the Diocesan Sunday school Council with the Diocesan Bishop as its president. The council includes the vice president who is a clergy, secretary, treasurer, a Diocesan Assembly member and six other council members. The Council is the decision making body in matters related to curriculum, administration of diocesan examination and financial matters of the Diocesan Sunday School.
2. **Diocesan Examination.** First Diocesan Examination was conducted in 1989. It was administered to only juniors, grades 5 & 6. Later it was extended to junior high (grade 7&8) and seniors (grades 9 & 10). From 2005 onwards the tests were conducted grade wise. Written guide lines were issued before the announcement of the examination. In early 90's the total number of students taking the test was less than 300. In 2006

a total of 1382 students registered for the examination and approximately 1100 took the test.

3. **Sunday School Curriculum:** In the early stages Sunday schools were choosing a curriculum of their choice. Once the Diocesan Sunday school came into existence, all Sunday schools were brought under one banner and directed to use the same curriculum prescribed by the Sunday School Council. Till then we had no other choice but to use local publications. A curriculum of our own was a long felt need. The dream became a reality in 2006. The curriculum committee under the able leadership of Dr. T. M. Thomas prepared a curriculum in the pattern of the one published by Sunday school Samajam in India. In 2006 the lessons were given to Sunday schools in a CD format. For 2007-2008 academic year, beginning in September 2007, all Sunday schools will be provided with the printed book.
4. **Operational Guidelines and By-Laws:** Diocesan Sunday school drafted and published operational guidelines and by-laws for the smooth and efficient functioning of our Sunday schools. They are consistent with that of the Sunday School Samajam but with necessary changes to accommodate the special needs of this diocese.
5. **Publications:** (i) Mar Thoma Church Order of Worship: Transliterated Malayalam and English Communion Service, Order of Public Worship, Morning and Evening Worships, Prayers for Special Occasions, Hymns and Choruses. (ii) Mar Thoma Church-Our Foundation and Vision: This book serves as a Sunday school curriculum book. Lessons are prepared in a graded manner for the use students from nursery to grade 10. Emphasis is on faith and practices of Mar Thoma Church, sacraments, history and the mission of our church. (iii) Mar Thoma Sunday school Curriculum: A 12 year graded curriculum for the use of students as a text book.

Diocesan Sunday school as today

The Diocesan Sunday School of North America & Europe has 42 active Sunday schools working under one banner. There are more than 4000 students and about 650 teachers in this system. Most of the activities are at the parish level. Regional and Zonal activities are gaining more attention, participation and relevance. Student conferences, regional competitions, world Sunday school Day celebrations are regular annual features. Zonal and regional teachers meetings and staff developments are given more importance. I am happy to record that more and more second generation Marthomites are taking leadership roles such as zonal, regional office bearers and Sunday school superintendents. A good number of our teachers are youngsters born and brought up in this country. Marthomites have the great tradition of supporting mission work and charity. Our forefathers have practiced and taught us to save from what we have and set it apart for the

extension of God's work. Diocesan Sunday school is working on a project, "Mission & Charity", through which our Sunday school students will save and contribute for mission and charity.

Challenges ahead of us

1. We need to develop and implement an effective teacher training and professional development program, on a national level. A Teacher Certification Program may bring more accountability.
2. We need to come out with suitable teacher guides and appropriate student workbooks to supplement the present curriculum.
3. We the Diaspora community is establishing well in this land. We need facilities of our own for our children to gather for public functions and recreation. Facilities like conference centers or camp sites are the needs of the future. North East Region has initiated such a project and is waiting for the approval of the Diocesan Assembly for necessary fund raising.

Time for thanksgiving: The Diocesan Sunday school has come a long way. We achieved a lot in the past 25 to 30 years. Certain things, once only in our dreams, are a reality now. As an organization we owe a lot to a good number of people who worked hard to bring the Sunday schools to its present state. Many worked at the parish level and some took an active role in the Diocesan level. Dr. T. M. Thomas can be rightfully called the Godfather of Mar Thoma Sunday schools in North America. He spent, and still active, a major portion of his time, talents and resources at his disposal in organizing the Sunday schools and attaining unity among the Sunday schools in North America. He traveled length and breadth of America meeting Sunday school

teachers and giving them all the encouragement and motivation to be part of this ministry. The present Sunday school curriculum is his brain child and accomplishment. On behalf of the Diocesan Sunday school, with gratitude and humility, I record the sincere and sacrificial services of Dr. T. M. Thomas. I thank him for all what he had done for the Diocesan Sunday school. There is long list of people who deserve our thanks. It is futile on my part to list all of them. I record the excellent work done by all the former office bearers of the Diocese, the zones and the region. The former Diocesan secretaries, Mr. Daniel Thomas, Mr. P. M. Jacob, Dr. Thomas K. Jose, Mr. T. A. Mathew and Mr. Thomas Koshy, all deserve our thanks and appreciation for a job well done. Not to forget the excellent leadership of our beloved Diocesan Bishops and the aches who served as vice presidents of the Diocesan Sunday school. I consider it as a privilege and a blessing to be part of this ministry.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with one thought. Our children are the heritage from God. (Psalms. 127). They are like arrows. Arrows are meant for a special purpose. It is our responsibility to keep them polished and ready to be sent out. Remember, once sent out it will do its work. Either it will hit the target or miss the target. It will not come back to us. Our children need our time, our love, our attention, acceptance and encouragement. I invite you to be a part of this noble ministry. The partnership will do great things for our children, church and the society. May Almighty God strengthen our hands and bless our efforts so that our Sunday schools will be an effective tool in the extension of God's Kingdom. ■

Strong Faith

Sherry Zachariah (9th Grade), St. Johns Mar Thoma Church, NY

Having full faith we can be able to do anything that we put our mind to. How many of us believe that is true? How many of us put our minds into everything that we do? When Abraham was told that he would be the father of a great multitude he believed and did everything that God told him to do. Can we do the same? Can we leave all the things that are important to us and do what God asks us to do? If we have the firm faith in God then we can do anything. But how many of us have that firm faith in Him?

There are so many things in this world that we want to do but don't do it because we are too scared and don't have the faith that would make it possible. If you were told to do something and it seemed impossible would you put faith in God and try your best to get the task done? Abraham and Sarah were asked to leave their homeland and God also heard their prayer about wanting a child even though it was in their old age. Abraham was told that he would have a son and he would be the father of a great multitude. He knew this was hard and he would have to give up a lot to make this possible. But he believed. Abraham was told to leave his home, family and to go to the land that God had promised him. Abraham believed in God and he left everything that he had and believed that God had a plan for him. Would

you leave your possession and family and go far away to a land that was promised to you?

There are so many things in this world that people want, but are they all willing to work hard to achieve it? Abraham knew that Sarah was old and it would be hard for her to have a baby. But he believed. He put his faith in God and Sarah had a baby and Abraham became the father of a great multitude. There are so many people around us who have great dreams like Abraham's; if they have the faith they will be able to achieve what they want to.

How can you have the same faith as Abraham? All you have to do is pray to God for His help with what ever you need. God is our helper in the time of need. We can only find the true faith if we pray to Him daily and believe in Him. Abraham prayed and he believed that God was there for him and would help him. Abraham left his family and his land and he went and followed God and believed in everything that God had promised him. Abraham was asked to go far away from his homeland and he was willing to do so because of his faith and belief in God. We have to be able to do the same. When God calls us to do something we can not turn away from Him and say no. we have to have firm faith in Him and do what ever He says, no matter how hard it may seem. ■

Looking Back and Looking to the Future

Dr. T. M. Thomas, General, Convener, Diocesan Curriculum Committee

The Mar Thoma Messenger has played a key role in the growth of all diocesan organizations, especially the Sunday School, by communicating significant information everywhere in the diocese. For example, when children and their parents are anxiously waiting for the results of the diocesan examination, Messenger publishes the list at the earliest, with photos of top students. Indeed, that was a special issue of the Messenger, the first of its kind among organizations.

Special Issue of Messenger: It was in January 2002 that the Special Issue on Sunday School was published, summarizing the growth of the Sunday Schools in North America from its beginning to the above date. Though formed at the parish level, Sunday schools grew to regional and diocesan levels within a short time, giving a model structure to other organizations and even to the diocese itself. This organization or structure enabled to initiate several activities including conducting conferences (for teachers and children), competitions, examination, service projects and others. Also, there were several publications in the 1990s: they include Sunday School Operational Guidelines, a book on the Mar Thoma Church written as lessons and a Worship Book which occupies a suitable place in the church pew. Please read the details in the Special Issue of Messenger, January 2002, a publication to be kept as part of important Sunday school documents. Soon after this special issue, Sunday school launched a new project: development of a new curriculum based upon the Samajam books used in all other Sunday Schools of the Mar Thoma Church. I understand that the two secretaries during 2002-2005 and 2005-2008 will write articles about this project and other aspects of growth during this period. Thus, we complete a full history of Sunday schools in North America in a few pages.

Future: Now, let us look to the future. We believe that the God who guided us in the past for our remarkable growth will be with us in our visions and plans for the future. What is the new structure we need? I propose that we should have an office for Sunday school in the diocesan building complex or at a separate location, but under the supervision of the Diocesan Bishop. Now we have a room in the Diocesan Center where we should place important papers related to Sunday schools. However, it has not been done so far. At present, there is an office for a Sunday School Samajam Assistant Secretary located in Mumbai (Bombay). It is time to consider the nature of the structure we need.

What are the functions of a new Sunday school office? Such an office will enable our Sunday school to carry on its work at a central place and initiate new projects and tasks. A resource center adjacent to the office will result in greater research and

developing better teaching aids to improve methods of instruction. Also, research is helpful in framing better questions for tests and examinations that we conduct at parish and diocesan levels. Thus our teachers' meetings will be more rewarding and fruitful at parish, regional and diocesan levels because they can be more scholarly.

The books which are printed now will be distributed in Summer 2007 and be used for about four or five years. However, the work for curriculum modification must begin within about two years. An immediate need is to develop a "student book" separate from the teacher's book, with more room for activities for children in the lower grades. Decisions have already been taken to print a new edition of the book Mar Thoma Church: Our Foundation and Vision.

Since there is a curriculum, we should pay more attention to the improvement of teaching. Any new curriculum can succeed only with the full cooperation and support of teachers. We need better trained teachers. Already we are arranging workshops for teachers at regional, zonal and diocesan levels. But we should have more at the parish level where most teachers will benefit. These and other activities will be efficiently conducted if there is an office for Sunday schools in North America.

Let me point out one more task that we should do without further delay. Sunday schools, along with parishes, are poor in record-keeping. Important papers and other documents are being lost. Now we can find most of them in the basement of previous secretaries and superintendents. Until they are kept at a central place, they will be lost for ever. Sunday Schools may step forward to show a model by collecting previous papers and keeping them in an office. Modern technology such as CD and other space saving devices should be used to maintain them.

Conclusion: Human ability to reflect or looking back to study the past enables a meaningful present and building a future. Such a future assumes thoughtful planning with vision and God's guidance. We have accomplished a lot in this way as mentioned in the two special issues of the Messenger. We need more of it in the future for our changing society. The world is being carried away by materialism, consumerism and such contemporary trends. We need different values for us and our children as Christians. Also, the changing role of our schools in this secular society places new demands on Christian education and we pray that our Sunday school learning will bring our children to Jesus who can provide answers to many questions and challenges that we face in our contemporary world. ■

JESUS CHRIST

Saju David, 4th Grade, St.Johns Mar Thoma Church NY

Jesus forgives our every sin.

Jesus gave us all our needs.

Jesus never sends me alone.

Jesus is nice, you know – this is true.

I have one thing to say to Jesus: "I love you."

Redefining the Mar Thoma Church's Mission Projects

Christina Mathews, MTC Dallas, FB

This past year, I lived and worked in a small village in rural Rajasthan with a local non-governmental organization, spending my days making house visits with the local Sahayogini, (a village-level health counselor) counseling mothers on appropriate feeding practices for their children. Following this, I spent a few months studying the effectiveness of the newly constructed Severe Malnutrition Treatment Centers, housed in the pediatric wards of district hospitals. These two poignant experiences coupled with my visits to various NGO's throughout India provided much insight into the ineffective and destructive ways of much of the "development" funded by international aid. Grand interventions crafted in Geneva or New Delhi by experts are often times lost in translation when brought to the villages for implementation.

These experiences prompted me to reflect critically on the Mar Thoma Church Missions, which essentially is doing development work, and to envision a more creative and collaborative way forward. Although I have only had exposure to the Rajasthan Mission, I have indirectly learned of the work at other mission sites throughout India and North America. For far too long our churches have been involved with piecemeal, charity-type projects where we the people with power and privilege grant donations to the vulnerable and oppressed. During the holidays, we volunteer for a few hours at a soup kitchen, donate our least valuable possessions or send a check to a mission site back in India. As a powerful, resource-rich organization, it is time the Church develop a forward-thinking, social-justice-minded, long-term policy for our mission work. Our haphazard, intermittent charity projects are good for our own peace of mind, but real progress takes much commitment. In undertaking short-term projects, we are only enabling the power structures that exist and doing nothing to truly work towards the liberation of people. As Paulo Freire states in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, "The proliferation of charity contributes to our society's failure to grapple in meaningful ways with poverty. It is damage control, not prevention." As a Church, we must clearly define our role and purpose in this work among the less fortunate. I agree wholeheartedly with Amartya Sen's definition of development as freedom and if the Church is like-minded on this clear goal, then we must re-evaluate the way in which we are undertaking mission work. We have not spent enough time critically analyzing the issues we take on and support. For example, in many churches, there are groups fundraising for dowries for single women in Kerala. This is a seemingly good deed, but the issue is far deeper than the generous, rich Mar Thomites helping the poor. In a country plagued by sex-selective births, female infanticide, and dowry deaths, it is a serious statement to be supporting a traditional practice that furthers gender inequality. These efforts shed light on the goodwill of our Mar Thoma congregations, but good intentions are simply not enough.



There are some who say that social work is not the main role of the Church, but rather its purpose is to enable spiritual growth of its members through communal worship. If the Church is symbolic of the Body of Christ and those who belong to the Body are struggling for survival, then I am certain that the most necessary work the Church can do is to further its social mission. It is difficult to separate mission work from fostering spiritual growth as it is very much interconnected. Personally, my spiritual growth has led me to recognize our common humanity and thus, when my brothers and sisters throughout the world are bound by the chains of

poverty, caste and religious discrimination, and war, I too am bound and must work together towards our collective freedom. In a recent speech, Barack Obama spoke of his faith and how through witnessing the role of the African American Church in the Civil Rights Movement, he was able to experience the far-reaching power of the Church in confronting social issues. "I was able to see faith as more than just a comfort to the weary or a hedge against death, but rather as an active, palpable agent in the world, as a source of hope." The experience of faith should be just that... both active and palpable. Christians should be agents of change and hope in a world of silent injustice.

When we initiate these mission projects, we must begin with a reverence to the people and be quick to build relationships with the community before building structures to house our uninformed ideas of what they may need. I have seen facilities under construction, which are supposedly for the people, but when asked, the community is clueless as to what the structure will be or who is building them. It is highly presumptuous that without engaging with the community, we would know their priorities and needs. In fact, these prescriptive solutions are oppressive and disempowering. The best role we can play is one of facilitator, but the community must have ownership of the problems and solutions for their real and lasting progress.

There are some key steps the Church can take to re-examine and invigorate its Missions.

1. It may be useful to set up a Missions Advisory Board, which would include members who have had experience in international development. During my time in India, I met many Malayalee Mar Thomites who are employed by the development sector as part of NGO's or the Government, but have distanced themselves from the Church's Mission work. It is important to examine the causes of this and try to invite such experts to join this dialogue and be part our Mission Advisory Board.
2. Clergy who are interested to work in Missions should be given extensive training in this field while pursuing their studies in the Seminary. Perhaps there can be a Mission track, which they may pursue. Currently, it seems that clergy

who are appointed to various churches are also responsible for the corresponding mission site and this does not seem to be a successful long-term strategy as you may have Achens involved in this work who are actually not compelled by it.

3. Let us creatively use the resources of our Church in terms of talent and expertise to confront the key issues facing India or our local communities. For example, in South Africa, the Church of Latter Day Saints is involved with conducting Neonatal Resuscitation trainings to the village-level Community Health Workers. In India, there are high rates of neonatal mortalities partially due to the fact that a large majority of deliveries are at home where midwives do not have the training or the simple equipment to resuscitate a child. If we could work with the health professionals in our Church to facilitate training for local health workers relevant to the needs of a community, this could be a potentially useful project.
4. Mar Thoma Church Development Initiative—We could start a program where people from the Church could take part in short-term projects at Church Mission sites in India. For example, an IT professional could spend two weeks conducting computer literacy training for mission staff or local people. A retired couple with a penchant for gardening,

could be involved in working with local children to beautify a community space. Each mission site could outline their needs and then contact the Mission Advisory Board or post their needs on the mission's website. Those interested could contact them directly or apply through some facility. As part of this, we may also want to have a more long-term program for youths who want to spend six months to a year at one of the sites on a focused project.

5. Let us shed the Missionary mentality of doing this work, and embrace each other's histories, cultures and faith practices and work together. Let us work with flexibility, creativity and respect for the people with whom we choose to serve.
6. There is a great need for evaluation of our Missions work. Many of our mission sites have been around for decades and it is important to outline how resources are being used and how progress is being judged. ■

Editor's Note: Christina is born and brought up in Dallas and is an active member of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch. She has completed her Masters in Public Health and is currently involved in an international health project in South Africa. She spent a year as part of an Indicorps fellowship in which she worked in Rajasthan, India and continues to look for ways to stay connected to India. She can be reached at: csmathews@gmail.com

Being Born Again

Bianca David, Sixth Grade, MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch

What does being born again mean? This question is not very often asked, but it is very important. Many people don't think about this phrase in depth, but we should, because being born again is the only way to see the kingdom of God.

Being born again means being in a new state of life, and having a new way of living focused on the Lord. In the Gospel according to St. John 3: 1-8, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, asked Jesus how he could go to heaven. Jesus said, "No one can see the kingdom of heaven unless they are born again."

The aim that we should always try to reach is accepting Jesus as your savior and bringing yourself in a close relationship with the Lord. We can do this in many ways such as praying, reading the Bible and believing in the Lord our God. The values of life that we need to treasure in our hearts are:

- No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and Holy Spirit.
- The word of God purifies us and the Holy Spirit strengthens us.

An example that we should focus on is Christian Barnard. He was the first cardiac surgeon to do a transplant successfully.



He encouraged people who couldn't be treated by donors or medicine, and who were basically hopeless. A donor is a person who is willing to give up an important part of his life in order to help another person live a healthy life. Being born again is the only way for us to lead a healthy and happy life. God has encouraged us to listen to his Word and to do the right thing so that we can lead a better life.

How can we relate to Jesus? How can we be best friends with Him or have a close relationship with Him? We can do this by reading the Bible, going to Sunday school, praying, going to church,

going to prayer meetings, etc. Things that prevent us from doing all these are TV, phone, video games, PSP, laptop, computer, MP3 player, iPod, and all of that fun stuff. I'm not saying you can't have any of these goodies, but don't let it affect your relationship with God. A little key that helps me understand what is 'being born again' is spiritually not literally. This means that we are being born again in the spirit, but not by actual birth.

If we want to lead a better life, we have to drive our way to believing in the Lord. We have to believe in order to live our life in heaven. The Lord has already reminded us on how we can see the kingdom of heaven and Him, so it is up to us to follow His order. ■

I Love God because...

I love God because he made the earth,
and he loved me ever since birth.

-Anjelica Abraham and Jane Koshy

I love God because he made me as a boy,
and gave me lots and lots of toys!

-Justin Koshy and Alvin George

I love God because he gave me a dad,
and he is the bestest friend I ever had.

-Jibin Dani

I love God because he cares for me,
and he always does it very happily.

-Stacy Mathew

I love God because he give me knowledge and good,
and that's how an amazing father would.

-Shannon Joseph

-St. Lukes 2nd and 3rd grade class-

-Teachers: Neeza Abraham and Ansu Koshy-

Do you know your HIJKLMNOP?

M. A. Valliyil

(St. Lukes Marthoma Church of Margate Florida)

Hear when you listen.

Investigate cause.

Judge not and be just.

Knowledge must be shared.

Learning from others mistakes benefits all.

Make the effort to look beyond the obvious.

Nothing will change until you change it.

Opportunities for solutions are lost by blame.

Partner with Sunday School and Bible Studies.

Help Me Lord!!!

Jessica George, Grade 9, St. Johns Marthoma Church, NY

*Sitting in church this early Sunday morning
Trying not to fall asleep on this cold, hard pew
I did not want to get up this early Sunday morning
Because I knew that today
I would not be able to feel you
Dear Lord I know
I was supposed to take communion
But I was out too late to pray
I was going to confess today morning
But I couldn't find the right words to say
You see dear Lord,
I've been going through a lot lately
Much more than words could explain*

*So God I ask you once again, please just show me the way
School has been getting tough you see
And my friends and I have gone our own ways
The one thing that has gotten me through
Is the love and grace I have received from you
I thank you Lord, for all you've done
For your love, your kindness, and your only Son
And dear God, this I pray
That this love between us will never go away
I guess I can take Communion now
I guess I'll stay awake
I hope you'll be with me through the rest of this service
Today, tomorrow, forever and always*

Temptation

Jasmin Varghese, Ascension MTC, Philadelphia

*Lord I call for your help
When daily I am confronted
With temptation to do what is incorrect
Lord I need your loving grace*

*All the power that I need
Your Holy Spirit provides
I need to have complete trust in you
And my flesh I must reject*

*I must have faith in Him everyday
That He'll be with me
So I may bear up under it
And be stronger in the Lord.*

*I feel so incredibly hopeless
And I try to do my best
Why can't I be stronger, God?
And rise above the flesh*

*He knows just how I feel
When temptation comes to me constantly
And provides a way of escape
When I have had enough*

Faith and Deeds

Justin Mathew

Through out the Bible there are people who show faith through deeds. From Genesis to Revelation, you will see examples of people showing faith through deeds. I got this subject and idea from James 2:14-26. "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without cloths and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you your faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that- and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend. You see that a person justified by what he does and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."

Abraham did believe in God, and he did go to Canaan as God told him to, you'll see that "his actions and faith were working together." Then the Twelve tribes of Israel might not exist, Jesus might not even be born! If you do have faith without deeds then you are saying that if you know and believe there is one God but don't follow Him then you will go to heaven. That is not true, because if God only justifies a person only by faith, then what is the point of the Ten Commandments or even

praying, we will surely get every thing. No! Because in James 1: 2-4 it says "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when ever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." Do you know what perseverance means?! It means being firm or being fixed in a position or the ability of working hard. If God just Judges us by our faith then we could just do nothing. We could get A's on our tests without even trying. Well too bad! You are going to have to get to the books and study to get an A. We could get money out of no where without a job. Too bad because in Genesis 3:19 God said "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taking; for dust you are and to dust you will return." All in all I am saying that you should have total faith, but then at the same time don't think that He will give you everything just because you believe in Him. Also to show that you are a true Christian you have to show it through actions not only faith. So if you don't believe what I am saying then imagine the characters of the Bible if they didn't do what God told them to do. Take example of Moses, David, Abraham, Noah, the prophets, and others in the Bible, if they didn't do what God told them to do, then who knows what would have happened. There are just some things you'll have to do on your own. Take this earthly quote "Actions speak louder than words." If you say that you are a Christian, a believer in Jesus Christ, well then prove it by following Him. What is the point of the Bible if you don't follow it? There has been apostles, prophets, and ministers who risked there lives for the Word to be spread and so that people may believe in the Lord! But when you prove yourself that you are a believer, don't do it for your parents, for church, for friends, for fame, or even anything. Only and only do it for the Holy one, the one known as the Son of God!

Holy Land Tours

Israel 8 Ds/7 Ns & Jordan 3 Ds/2 Ns:

May 30 - June 09 - 2007
 July 11 - 21, 2007
 Aug 22 - sept 01, 2007

: Israel & Jordan
 : Israel & Jordan
 : Israel & Jordan

September 12 -22, 2007
 November 03-13, 2007
 Any time smaller groups

: Israel & Jordan
 : Israel & Jordan
 : Israel only or both



വിശുദ്ധ നാടുകളിലൂടെ

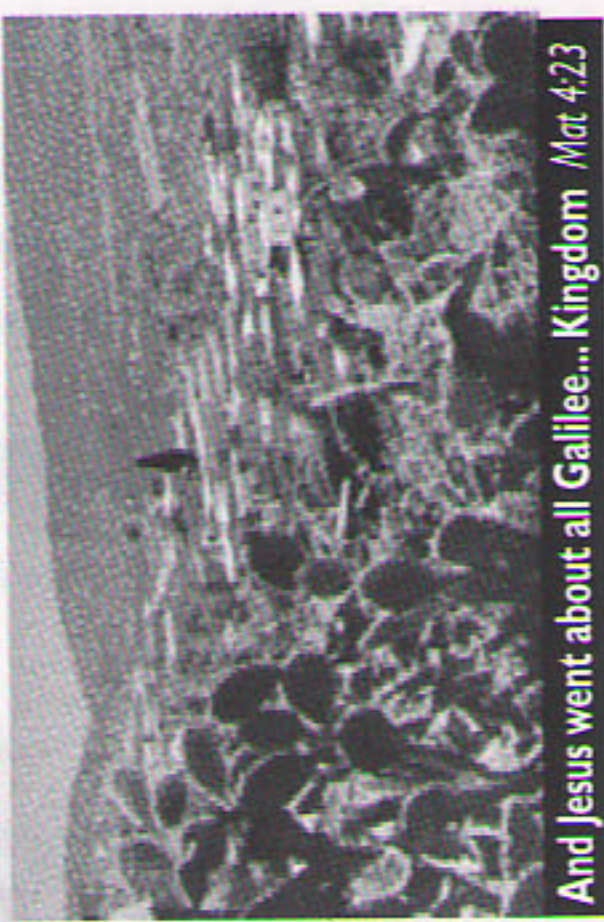
WALK IN HIS FOOTSTEPS
 2000 Years later



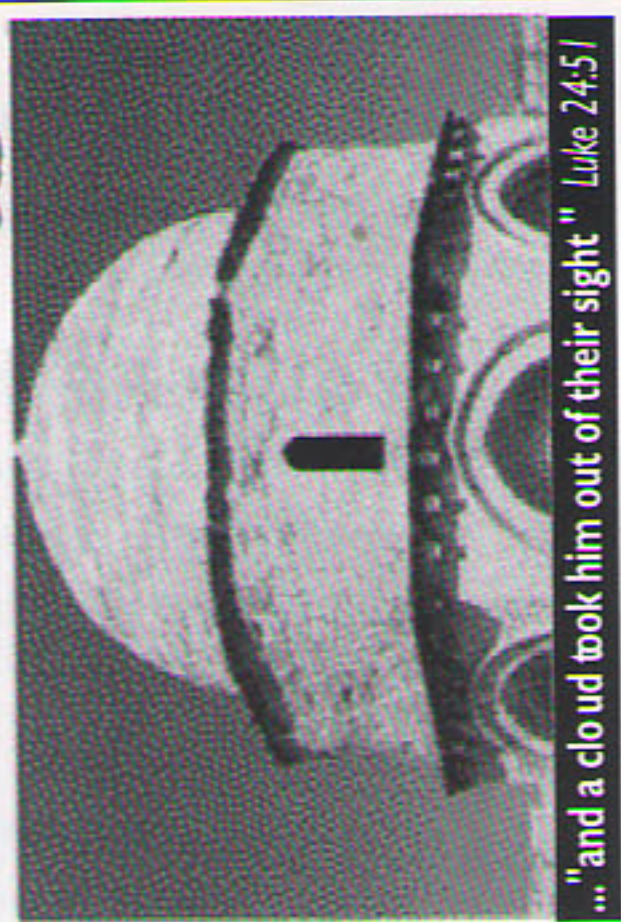
She gave birth... no place for them in the inn. Lk: 2:7



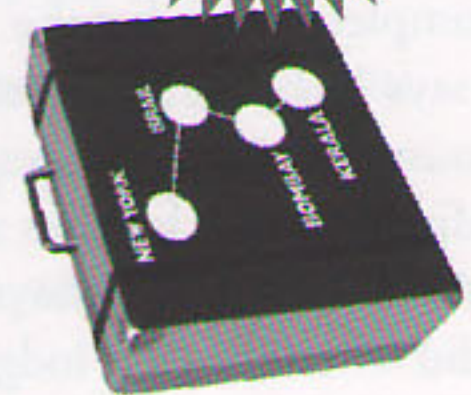
...and was baptized by John in the Jordan Mark 1:9



And Jesus went about all Galilee... Kingdom Mat 4:23



"... and a cloud took him out of their sight " Luke 24:51



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SHILPI US

Guarding our Children from the Pitfalls of Internet, Cell Phones, and Violent Video Games

Palakunnathu Mathew George (Sunday School Diocesan Assembly Member) NY

"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come." Ecclesiastes 12:1

On March 21, 2007 a 13-year-old boy was found handcuffed to a tree and partially clothed at Bradys Pond Park in Staten Island, New York. The initial report is that the boy came in contact with his abductor/molester in a chat room at MySpace.com. This is not an isolated incident and is happening at many places. Parenting is becoming more and more challenging these days. As church leaders, parents, Sunday School teachers, and older siblings we have a greater responsibility to pray for our children and guide them to be good Christians. In addition to the myriads of temptations the children have to deal with, the three villains who can land them into major troubles are: (1) Internet; (2) Cell Phones; (3) Violent Videogames.

INTERNET

More than 80 percent of children have access to the Internet at home, at school, on their cell phones, at a Cybercafe, or in other places. Indeed, Internet access is virtually, ubiquitous, and is capable of bringing rich educational and communication experiences to youngsters that their parents never had access to.

However, there is also the dark side of the Internet that co-exists with all the benefits—like the threats posed by online predators who target children and make initial contacts over the Internet. Gaining access to telephone numbers, these predators strive to make physical contact with children for exploitative purposes. Some have even launched "homework" sites for children that redirect young persons to pornographic sites.

Parents can install commercially available content filters in the task of monitoring how their children are using the Internet. They can also prevent children from visiting dangerous web sites and chat channels. Some filters can also keep children from sending telephone numbers, names, and addresses in e-mails. There is even software that allows parents to go through all of the web sites that their children have visited. Parents should tell their children upfront that they will be actively monitoring Internet activity, in the interest of open, straightforward communications. Parents and children should have open conversations with each other.

CELL PHONES

Last week I was listening to a commercial from Cingular Wireless Company, a mother reprimanding her daughter for overusing the "text messaging" feature and worrying about the bill. The daughter is arguing back saying that she cannot manage without contacting all her friends. Then the voice of an announcer is heard assuring everyone that their calling plan has unlimited text messaging and do not worry about the bill. Cell phone providers are targeting children, especially in the 10-16 year group, which they see as a lucrative market segment for downloads of ring tones, graphics and games. Should your child use a cell phone,

buy a model that is "child-safe" and that does not provide camera, voice mail, or messaging capabilities. The cell phone should also not allow Web downloading or access. Disney, Firefly, LG, and other companies manufacture them.

Recently I happened to read about a very smart girl, who was the teachers' pet and pride of her parents received a "wrong number call" in her cell phone in the middle of night while she was sleeping. She got the "wrong number call" the following night also. Then she started receiving text messages about the dress she wore that day, the color of the bag, quotes from the conversations she had with her friends at school, etc. Initially she was annoyed with the messages and then she started waiting for them. This was followed by phone conversations late into the night. It was one of her classmates on the phone. She waited for his call after everybody was asleep at home and the romantic conversations lasted until early morning. The girl lost interest in her schoolwork, teachers reported that she was sleeping during lessons, and her grades started dropping. Finally her parents discovered that the daughter they thought sleeping comfortably under the blanket was chatting with her lover late in the night. Remember that cell phones can be on a vibrator and does not need a ringer like the land phones.

VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES

Indiana University recently published the results of a research done on the effect of violent videogames on the cognitive skills of children. They found that 30 minutes of slaying enemies on the screen affected the brain for up to an hour afterward. Brain scans of these children showed higher activity in the emotional centers of the brain, and less in the areas for concentration and inhibition. The implication is that people in that state of mind "make impulsive bad choices," says Brad Bushman, a psychology professor at the University of Michigan. "In general, violent media increases aggressive thoughts and there is good reason to believe that participating in violent videogames have a stronger effect than violent TV programs or films."

Before buying any video game for your children, please do a research on the content of the game. Buy games that are age appropriate for your children and do not yield to the pressure from them to buy violent video games. I know children who play videogames until 4:00 AM, develop sleep disorders, and fall asleep during instruction at school.

QUICK TIPS FOR KEEPING KIDS SAFE

- **Know the dangers.** Parents should be aware of dangers from on line sexual predators, financial scams, Internet addictions, and cyber-bullying.
- **Talk to your child.** Open communications between parents and children is one of the best ways to keep your children

safe. Make sure that they can talk to you about anything on the Web that makes them uncomfortable. And just as in the real world: Don't talk to strangers.

- **Monitor your children.** Check the browser's history to see what sites have been visited. For cell phones, check the details of calls received and made to others.

- **Control access to the Internet.** One of the simplest techniques is to keep the computer in a common room, where you can see and discuss the sites they visit.
- **Be good role models to your children.**
- **Above all pray for your children to receive the heavenly wisdom that will keep them out of trouble.**

Would you take the place of this man?

Ashley Karakal, 5th Grade, St James M.T. Sunday School, NY

*Love is to help, love is to care. Only one man showed us true love, which I will tell you and share.
"A king is born, a king is born," said the wise men with glee.
But Herod wanted to be the only king, he was filled with jealousy.
King Herod told the men go tell, me where this king is so I can praise him as well.
The men left as they followed the king's plan, but an angel told them do not tell Herod for he is an evil man.
The men followed the angel's instructions as spoken. And our king was safe and never taken.
But as he grew up the closer he was to being crucified. Let's hope that he justified.
Jesus had twelve disciples and one was going to betray. Since he knew his fate started now he went to go pray.
The Pharisees wanted Jesus to die. So they asked Judas to go and lie.
The Pharisees said "kiss the one who calls himself the king!" Judas kissed him and that night, trust he did not bring.
The soldiers grabbed Jesus in disgust. Unfortunately they misjudged.
The time had come when our king, Jesus Christ was to sacrifice. So we can love, forgive and compromise.
Jesus told Peter "Before the rooster crows you will deny me three times." As Jesus said, he committed this crime.
The Pharisees didn't know what to do so they gave him to Pilate's judgment.
For Jesus there is no turning back now it is way too late he made a commitment.
Pilate asked him "Are you the king of Jews?" Since Jesus answered "yes" the Pharisees were amused.
Pilate stated "I will only punish this man for he has done nothing wrong.
But the crowd yelled "Crucify him" "Crucify him," for so long.
Two criminals and Jesus were all nailed to the cross. One of the criminals said "Save us, this is a big loss!"
It was the ninth hour and Jesus said his last words, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit."
Then the world shook and every body could hear it.
The true love of Jesus Christ was sacrifice.
He sacrificed his life to save us from our sins.
I have only one question for you.
WOULD YOU TAKE THE PLACE OF THIS MAN?*

The One Above

Tiffani Mathew, (Grade 3, St. Peters MTC, NJ)

*God loves us
So do not fuss;
We are free
You are you and I am me;
He died for our sins*

*And gave fish fins;
He made night
And the sun that's bright;
Holy is he
For he made me;*

*Jesus, I love
He is above;
Do you love,
The One above?*

Social Justice for the Lost and Found

Sushil Jacob, Carmel Mar Thoma Church, Boston

And what does the Lord require of you? To seek justice and love kindness and walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

We learn from the prophet Micah that God leaves little room for confusion about the purpose of our lives. We are here to do three things: seek justice, love kindness (or mercy) and walk humbly with God. To me all three of these injunctions are critical and cannot be taken separately, lest we risk missing our life's goal.

I have been so blessed to live in the motherland for the past two years, working with tribal communities in India. After I graduated from college in May 2005, I received a fellowship from an organization called Indicorps to do a project with an organization working in central India. In my first year I worked with Adivasi (or tribal) people on creating village level plans for community development. But the relationships I built with people, particularly with the youth, taught me far more than my project. After I finished my first year I decided that I wanted to learn more about India and get more experience doing development work. This year I am working in Bangalore with an organization that is creating an alternative market for poor farmers so that they can directly trade their agricultural products without intermediate brokers or agents. It is such a challenging and fascinating experience that sometimes I don't want to leave here at all!

My two years in India have allowed me to understand that when we speak of helping those in need, those who are much poorer than us, we can understand this work in two ways: in terms of justice and in terms of charity. I believe both are required. However, what I have seen is that we are privileging the latter, at the expense of understanding the former. What I am trying to say is that unless we understand justice and its role in society (social justice), we will be confined to seeking out narrow goals of charity work.

Charity work is not a bad thing. It is a beautiful thing. When a disaster occurs, it is charity that is immediately needed. Just as Hurricane Katrina wreaked destruction all across its trail, and the Asian tsunami destroyed millions of lives, natural disasters do not discriminate between the rich and the poor, the good and the bad. In situations like those it is our duty as human beings to respond with charity. And so many of us did, sending donations and volunteering our time in reconstruction and relief work.

However, it is after the disaster has occurred that the questions of justice start to arise. Where should the refugees be resettled? Will they be given access to new homes, new schools, and a chance of building new lives? Whose interests will be served when it comes to rebuilding the city of New Orleans or the South Indian coastline? What we have witnessed here in India is that the government has been forcing many fishermen to move far away from the coastline in the name of "safety", while selling their village lands to the tourism industry who have their sights set on this newly-created "prime property". Do we side with the government and facilitate the removal of these fishermen from their traditional villages, their occupations, and access to their traditional livelihoods? If we take a mere charity approach to our work, we will completely misunderstand the social justice aspect of the situation, and thus miss an opportunity to truly serve. Not

only this, but by failing to recognize the power dynamics at play, we could actually be hurting those we are claiming to help.

It was this terrible realization—that I may in fact be doing more damage through my presence—that led me to question the charity approach towards development. I realized that without a critical evaluation of society and the history and context of this place, I may actually be harming people. This is what led me to realize that my desire to do "development" work needs to be rooted in an understanding of social justice.

What is social justice? It is an understanding of justice that is focused on the structures of society. Do these structures promote equality and fairness amongst people or do they do the opposite? Do they concentrate wealth and resources in the hands of a few or do they result in wider distribution and abundance for all?

Every country has a history of injustice. The history of Western nations has rested on the exploitation of third world countries for their resources and slave labor. Britain had its colonies, from whom it plundered natural resources. The U.S. had its share of slavery, which built up its economy with free labor. Oppression is true of India also, except that rather than invade other countries, it is currently involved in subjugating its own people, particularly those from marginalized communities. The 'Dalits' or untouchables have remained at the bottom of the Indian caste hierarchy for thousands of years. Despite the creation of the Indian constitution and the outlawing of untouchability, there are still one million Indians who are banished to a life of human scavenging, which includes carrying human feces on their heads. These people work as sanitation services for others not out of choice, but as a result of exclusion from any other societal role.

The same is true of Adivasis, or tribal people, whose entire history has involved resisting one ruler after another, whether it was the Mughals, the British, or the Indian state. All of these conquerors have sought their lands, forests and natural resources. All have pushed them to the brink of extinction. Some have reached such a point of desperation that they have joined the Naxalites, a group of insurgents who are fighting to overthrow the Indian state.

So when I speak of a justice-approach to development work I am speaking of these issues. I mean that when we try to understand poverty and figure out a solution to it, we must first look at its causes. It is not sufficient to uncritically accept the idea that these are "backwards" or "lost" people who need our help. First, we must see how society has destroyed their communities and is still choking their ability to exist, before we can consider "helping" them. We must first recognize the extreme exploitation that exists in society, whether it is the Adivasi man who is bonded labor because of a debt his grandfather owed to a landlord, or whether it is the African-American man who is forced to cash his checks everyday at the liquor store because he cannot open a bank account. When we understand these conditions as exploitative and the main cause of poverty, we can begin to formulate solutions and work with people, rather than merely for them. It is then that we will understand that it is not only "they" or the poor who need to change, but that the structures and trajectory of society itself, or "we", that must change. This is the meaning of social justice.

And this brings up the last and most important point of the exhortation of Micah: that we must walk humbly with our God.

You see, when we start working with people rather than for them, we realize that there is no such thing as "lost" and "found" people. We realize that all of us are in need of salvation. We are all in need of God's redeeming grace and we all carry the potential for Christ's healing love. Then, with humility, we will truly understand Jesus' command, "that they all may be one".

If you have come here to help me, please leave. If you have

come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together (Attributed to an Aboriginal woman).

Editor's Note: Sushil Jacob, a member of the Boston Carmel Mar Thoma Church, has been working in India for the past two years, first as an 'Indicorps' fellow, and presently with 'Just Change', an organization working to create an alternative market for poor producers in Bangalore. Sushil graduated magna cum laude in May 2005 in International Relations from Brown University. Sushil can be reached at: sushil.jacob@gmail.com

Importance of Youth in Sunday School

Roshan Punnoose, Baltimore Mar Thoma Church, Maryland

It seems like common sense that kids need to go to Sunday School and learn the Word of God; however, it is not uncommon for many people to not feel this way. Many people believe that learning the Word of God is not required to being a Christian, and that there is no need to foster that knowledge. The first statement is true, being a Christian is based on faith and grace and not on our qualifications. However, the second statement is completely false. The Word of God is required to grow in faith, fight temptation, and love God more, all of which is definitely required for a Christian living in this world.

Now that everyone believes in the requirement to learn the Word of God, then how is this related to Sunday School? It is a proven fact that kids learn better, learn quicker, and can retain knowledge longer than adults, and learning the Word of God is the most important study a person can have in the life, because it applies not only to this world, but the next as well. By opening the door to the wonderful truths of the Word of God, not only do we allow children to learn the text at an age more suited for learning, but we also give them the tools to survive in the world as a Christian. During the temptations in the desert, Jesus did not use his human wisdom to combat Satan and fend temptation, he pulled directly from the Word of God. His sword and shield against temptation were passages directly from the Word.

It has been established: Sunday School is important and its teaching is irreplaceable. So, is that the end, by reciting verses to kids and having them memorize the Book, are we done? No, by no means are we even close to done. Take it from any middle school and high school teacher, you have to make the material interesting, applicable, and worthwhile for children to listen to it. Now here comes the crux of this entire article, what is the best way to make the material interesting to a child... relate to the children. If little Bobby can take the example of David and apply it to the school playground, then suddenly the Word of God really means something to him. However, anyone can tell you that relating anything to a teenager is not the easiest task in the world. They are under the constant impression that no one understands what they are going through and that the world is out to "get them". Suddenly, when a child turns 13 and bears the title of being a teenager, adults have become old relics that are not worthwhile to listen to or be around and the world has suddenly all become about the opposite sex and friends. Everything else is suddenly thrown out the door.

So, if teenagers don't listen to adults, and we are not, in our right mind, ever going to let a 13 year old lead a Sunday School class of his/her peers, do we give up? No! Absolutely not! We cannot ever give up. During those turbulent years, is when a child truly finds himself and defines his character and who he will be,

what his priorities are going to be, and what his future path entails. If we give up, there is a very good chance that the future for these kids will not hold Christ in it, which is not an option for us. As bearers of the truth, the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are called to spread the Word to whomever we can and bring the light of Christ into the world, especially our church. So, how do we combat this trend and problem?

Well... why not have the Youth teach Sunday School, especially for the older students/teenagers. Youth are not much older than most of these kids, and sometimes have the same interests. Whether it is sports, or TV, or MTV, it seems that the Youth have a lot in common with the children of this generation, because they were just children themselves not too long ago. In addition, by God's grace and strong leadership in our church, many Youth of this church have devoted their lives to Christ and His ministry, and are willing to work for Him. In our church, once the Sunday School Superintendent opened the door for Youth to become teachers and assistant teachers, the sudden influx of Youth willing to set apart time for the children was astounding.

There is a major issue with this though, the Youth are sometimes very eager to lead a Sunday School class, but are not ready spiritually and mentally for the task. Most times, even though being a Christian since baptism, a Youth might have only truly realized what the Christian faith is about and devoted their lives. Just like Timothy, who was Paul's apprentice, in the early years of his ministry, he was not capable enough to go to a city and preach on his own, which is why he accompanied Paul and learned from Paul. That is why it is still very important for the current teachers to take in and mentor the interested Youth and watch their steps as they grow, so that these "Timothys" of the church may one day turn into "Pauls".

This article is in no way trying to demean or discourage the adult teachers in our Sunday School, honestly, it is completely the other way around. I myself was taught by some very amazing adult teachers in our Sunday School that I believe to this day were very crucial to my faith being where it is. It is a complete miracle of God that I received the teachers that I did at the times in my life when I needed it. This article is more encouraging that Youth join Sunday School because even though they are newer to the faith and younger in years and experience, they have a great advantage at reaching the kids of our generation, and as a Christian, we must embrace and advantage and any chance we get to proclaim the good news and get our kids back from Satan and this world.

I hope that God has used this article only for his glory, and has embedded in you a great urgency to really reach our children and bring them to Christ at an early age. ■

Thomas: My Favorite Apostle

Nigil Thaimuriyil, MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch

Jesus chose twelve people at the beginning of His public ministry. He chose these people to help Him do His work as envisioned by God. He gave them the authority to drive out demons and heal the sick. Jesus appointed them as his Apostles. Apostle means 'One who is sent.' Thomas was one of the Apostles. He was also known as Didymus. Even though I like all the disciples, Thomas is my favorite disciple for many reasons. Each of the disciples had a different personality. I prefer Thomas' personality since it attracted me more than any other disciple's.

Thomas was a courageous man. When Jesus was crucified, the disciples were all terrified. They were all scared and they stayed in a locked room. They were afraid that the same Jews who killed Jesus would kill them too. They were worried that the Jewish authorities would catch them because they were with Jesus. While the disciples sat locked up in the room, Jesus appeared to them. Thomas was not present with the other disciples at that time. Thomas was the only disciple who dared to go outside. While all of the other disciples did not know what to do, Thomas was very practical. He was a man who took on any kind of challenge. Thomas was also able to handle any type of situation.

In our daily lives, when we go through trials, tribulations, stressful experiences, peer pressure, and other struggles, we can use Thomas as our model. Thomas had a significant and daring faith. His unique faith makes him different from others. He did not believe that Jesus had appeared to the disciples. He said that he would only believe if he saw the scars and marks on Jesus' body and put his hand into Jesus' side. He is daring enough to tell Jesus that he wants to see and feel that it is Jesus himself. Thomas was a person who had to see it before believing it. He tried to get all the facts before arriving at a conclusion. Theologians often refer to Thomas as the 'Sincere Doubter.' His doubts were very sincere and reasonable. When his doubts were cleared, Thomas became a strong believer.

We live in a world where there are lots of misunderstandings and misleading information that question our belief and faith.

We may tend to question the existence of God itself because of these false information and teachings. I believe that a daring faith like Thomas' will help us to build a strong, stable Christian life deep rooted in faith. When the resurrected Jesus came to the disciples again, Jesus personally interacted with Thomas. Thomas got a chance to put his finger on Jesus' hand where the nails were thrust. He had a personal experience with Jesus and grew stronger in his faith. Then Thomas said, 'My Lord and my God!' from the bottom of his heart. Like Thomas we must also have a personal relationship with Jesus.

As I have already mentioned, I have a lot of reasons that make Thomas my favorite disciple. But the most important reason is that Thomas is the 'Apostle of India.' According to our belief and tradition, St. Thomas came to India in A. D. 52. I believe God chose Thomas to go to India to spread the Gospel because of his courageous nature. He spread the Gospel and many were converted. He established seven churches on the Malabar Coast which is present Kerala. The churches he established were at Cranganore, Paravur, Palayoor, Kokkamangalam, Thiruvancode, Niranam, and Quilon. The Apostle Thomas is the founder of our church in Kerala. Because of him, our church is called the 'Mar Thoma Church', which means, 'St. Thomas Church.' He was later killed by some Hindu fundamentalists in Chennai (Madras), India. He died a martyr for Jesus Christ.

I am proud to be a member of a church that was founded by St. Thomas. He was one of the disciples who was with Jesus Christ when he ascended into heaven. Being sent as an Apostle, Thomas set out to India. Thomas was a courageous, daring man whom we can use as our role model. I personally prefer his daring faith, which is the basis for his personal relationship with Jesus. Let us overcome all obstacles in our faith journey and be followers of Jesus. Like Thomas, we should also be able to meet challenges and continue to share the Good News and make disciples from all nations.

Jesus the Good Shepherd

Nicole Thomas, 9th grade, St. Johns Mar Thoma Church, NY

Many times when people ask children who Jesus is, their most common responses are: our Savior, the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Good Shepherd. These statements are completely correct, but what is the true meaning behind them? Jesus is our Savior and Messiah because God sent him down to earth, to save us from our sinful ways. Jesus is the Son of God, because Mary was told that she would be giving birth to the Son of God and in John 3:16 it says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son." When we think of Jesus being the Good Shepherd we automatically picture Jesus with a staff leading a flock of sheep. There are many paintings that portray this scene. But, what exactly does it mean to be the Good Shepherd?

A shepherd is a person that watches, tends, guides and protects his sheep. Jesus does the exact same thing but for His people, us. Jesus is always watching us, where ever we go, what ever we do and what ever we say. As children, we are constantly told by our parents that God is always watching our every move and so we should be careful of what we do.

Jesus is always tending and caring for us. Whenever we go through hard troubles, and problems in life, He is always there for us. All we have to do is pray to Him and He is always there to listen and do the needful. Jesus is not concerned over the whole flock, but each and every individual sheep. We all know the story of "The Lost Sheep." When the shepherd lost one of his sheep, he left the others to find the missing one. He took out his time and effort to make sure that nothing happened to that sheep. In the same way, each individual is precious to Jesus.

A Shepherd always leads their sheep to the right path, and never brings them to danger. He leads them to the green pastures and gives them a place to rest, just as mentioned in Psalms 23:2. Likewise, Jesus guides us and shows us the right way in life. If we ever do walk away or go astray, Jesus will come and bring us back in the paths of righteousness. Whenever we have trouble in life, not knowing which is the right or wrong way, sit quietly and pray, and he will guide you through.

Shepherds constantly protect their sheep from dangers of life, other animals and other surroundings that can hurt them like

rocks, thorns, or rivers. Jesus does the same thing for us. He laid down his life, to save us. In John 10:11, it says, "I am the good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Jesus will never abandon us when we go through troubles but will help us overcome them without fear.

He will Himself come and be His people's shepherd. In His care, His people will be safe and they will be content. Life has

many troubles and sufferings. When we go through school, we may have trouble in keeping up with our grades, keeping our friends, going through peer pressure, going through troubles at home and keeping our Christian values. Through all of this, we should always remember the Good Shepherd. Jesus is there for us to watch, care, guide and protect us through each and every day of our lives. ■

Parents and their Roles on Family Culture

Shobi Mathew, Grade 7, Detroit Mar Thoma Church

"Teach a child how he should live and he will remember it all his life" (Proverbs 22:6). Parents have an important role in creating a good culture and an environment for their children. It is vital to know the different aspects of creating a family-controlled civilization with your children. It is superior to know and understand that your children are growing well and in excellent quality in the eyes of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone including parents and children overlook the role of completing the position they have in taking care of their children. Every family has a culture, and you have the power to retain and create a positive family way of life. Parents in other words are not just shown as leaders but as stewards of God to take care and give His children a positive outlook within life. Each household has its way of looking at things and doing things, including the habits, expectations, standards, traditions, world views, and symbols of life and giving it to their children to learn.

There are diverse questions you should ask yourself when you want to make a statement upon your own family. What is the smell of the household? Is it sweet and tender and draws people's attention or is it an awful stench that drives people away? The answers to these questions will help to give you the knowledge to know what your family and your role is like. Also, how do you and the members of your family communicate? Is it in a peaceful and calm way or is it an unworthy chat? These words help you better understand and if you keep asking yourself these questions you will know what your role in your family is.

There are three aspects to construct a positive family environment. The first one is truth. Keeping your word is an important thing to do when you want to be a leader. Honesty is giving a good background when you practice it over and over again especially in front of other younger people (kids). If you demonstrate these things of honesty and truth your children will be attracted to you and see what kind of leader, you are, teaching them the right thing to do. The other two aspects are goodness and beauty. Goodness is more demonstrated than taught. You have to be a role model and demonstrate what capability you have and what kind of person you are trying to be. Beauty is treasured within the heart, you have to treasure beauty like no other. Beauty does not come from outward appearance, it comes from the heart. These are God's own words. Also He said, "Beauty means grace, suggestive of God's abundant grace or favor." (Psalm 90:17) No one should think that fads and other things that attract kids are good, they are worse especially when you are trying to be a role model. Over time people won't care how you looked, what you wore, and how you lived, that's why you have role models to help you make decisions, not to make them for you but to help you make them.

Role models need to take apart the old ways and make new ones. For this you need the grace and wisdom of Christ Jesus. We follow Him so that He may guide us and not just follow what our first intentions are but what comes from the heart. We have to

take this out on our family, friends, and other individuals. Also groups such as a church, work, or other authorities. This whole world is a culture as a whole.

A family is the smallest unit of humanity created by God. Parents have the responsibility to take care of children and make them do right in the eyes of the Lord. The main task of parents is to teach children the Word of God. They must teach them the Ten Commandments and all of God's laws. Parents also have the duty to give their kids discipline with love and somber. They should always have in mind what is good for the child. Always pray for your children. A family that prays together stays together and prayer is the cornerstone of a Christian family.

Parents give life to all children and without parents there would be no life. In the beginning God made Adam and Eve and they had children Cain and Abel. Unfortunately they sinned and now we have the fate of sinning also, but Jesus Christ died for our sins and gave us a new life where we repent the sins we have done and give Him our respect to the fullest remembering His death on the cross when He didn't do one sin. This is why parents have to be stewards or servants of God.

Education is a key word when it comes to achieving your dream. Any job requires education. Without parents there would be no school, all your dream jobs would be over. Parents give up their time of sleep just to help you after they come back from a long day at work. If you listen to them and act good about studying you will thank them when you are older. Your parents are duty bound to teach you in the ways of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Word of God your parents teach you give you the wisdom which leads to salvation through Jesus.

History is also an important part about leadership. We are descendants of Abraham and he built an altar to God and worshipped Him wherever he went. Our grandparents and great-grandparents may have come from different churches and different denominations. Some people don't even believe in Christ. Can you believe that! Parents give the children an explanation of what church is and what it is used for. It is important for parents to take children and attend church service regularly; if you are not attending church you are not a role model in the eyes of the Lord.

Role models give you something to think about, you never forget role models and you love them or like them very much because they did something important for you. The definition of a role model is carrying out a role demonstrating values, ways of thinking and acting, which are considered good in that role. Others hopefully will follow the example. The Christian definition of a role model is a parent who demonstrates different values (reading the bible, praying regularly, and attending worship frequently), that are good and their kids will follow it. If you don't have a role model get rely on your parents or someone you really trust to guide you and help you throughout your life, not to live it for you but to give you assistance. ■

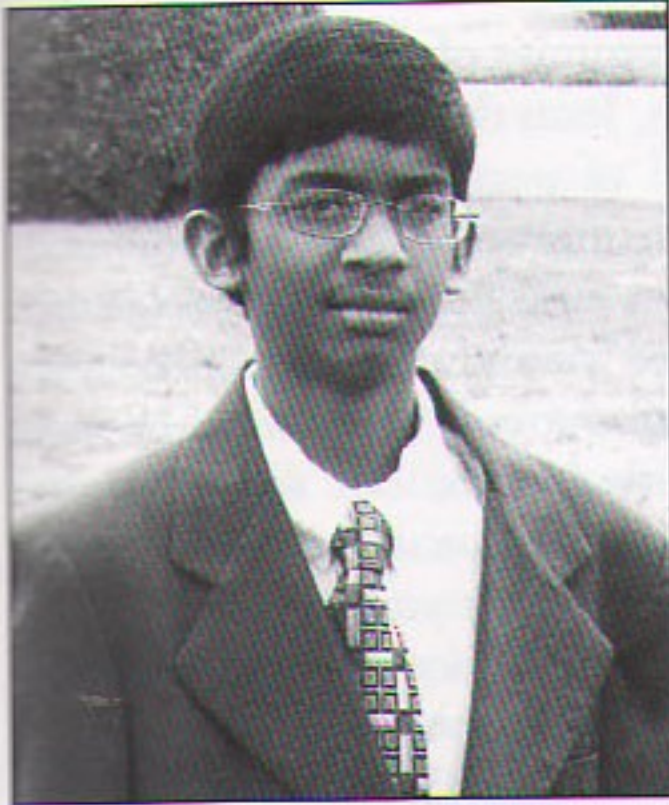
Who do you say that I am?

Youth fellowship, New Jersey Mar Thoma Church

Who Do You Say That I am? [Mathew 16:15] Jesus Christ asked this question to His disciples. Simon Peter responded by saying "You are the Messiah and the Son of the Living God". The titles, "The Messiah" and "The Son of the Living God" carry a variety of roles of Jesus in our life. Let us look at Jesus as the Son of God, our Savior, Prince of Peace, Everlasting King, the Good Shepherd, the Great Teacher and the Just Judge.

JESUS, Son Of God and My Savior

Abraham Jacob, Grade 9



What does it mean that Jesus is the Son of God and our Savior? As Christians, we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, part of the Trinity. What this means to us is that God came to this earth in the form of a man, in order to die on a cross and take our punishment. Jesus is often referred to as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world because of His death on the cross. It is important to our faith that we believe in Jesus'

death and resurrection, because if not for that sacrifice we would still be lost in our sin.

Luke 1:35 says, "The angel answered, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." So the "Holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." How important is the Son of God? In 1 John 5:7 it states, "There are three who were present in the beginning: The Father, Jesus the Son, and The Holy Spirit; and these three are one God. This means Jesus was with God when God created Earth, and humankind, and he came to earth to save human beings from their sins. God himself says that Jesus is His son in the Bible. In Matthew 3:17, during the time of Jesus' baptism we got the affirmation from the Heavenly father. "Then a voice from heaven said, 'This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him'." Jesus came down from heaven to be our Savior, and eliminate the power of sin. Sin began when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Romans 5:12 declares, "When Adam sinned by disobeying God, death passed to all men." We as Christians believe that because of one man, Adam, sin came into this world, and the result of that sin is death. We may not like the idea, but each generation after Adam, up to and including ours, was born into sin. Even though we are no longer under the dominion of sin because of Jesus' death on the cross, we are still under the influence of sin. This is why Son of God, Jesus, had to come to take our punishment on the cross. Jesus was chosen to be the Savior of man. "God sent his Son Jesus from heaven to earth to save the world from sin" (John 12:47). He chose to die on the cross for the sin of humankind, even though he was sinless. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." His ministry turned multitudes of people into repentance, and true worship of God. Jesus is our Savior, and only through Him we attain eternal life in heaven. In Galatians 2:16 it says, "A man is not justified by doing the works of the law

but by faith in Jesus Christ. For by the works of the law no man shall be justified." This is what Jesus, "the Son of God, and our Savior" means to me.

The Bible says that salvation can be found in no one else and not by works, lest any man boast. This means we must, have faith and belief in our hearts of what Jesus did for us, confess our sins to Christ and offer to Him our lives as living sacrifices, and then we are forgiven and enter into an eternal relationship with Christ. This is the only way to salvation. This is the uniqueness of Christian Faith, while all other religions in the world focus on one's own personal achievements and deeds for eternal life. As we know, no human being can lead a perfect life, a life worthy of eternal life. So let me ask you, my friends a question from the Bible itself. "What good will it be for you if you gain the whole world, and lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

JESUS: the Great Teacher, the Good Shepherd, and the Just Judge

Jerin Karingattil, Grade 11

An occupation is known to be one's regular work or an activity to which one regularly devotes oneself to. Whether you're a student, a nurse, or a financial assistant, you have an occupation with responsibilities that require effort and hard work. Jesus had many occupations. As the Bible says, Jesus was a Teacher, a Good Shepherd, and a Just Judge. Jesus consistently worked hard to accomplish His one aspiration. He used these three professions to carry out God's plan and bring us all closer to God.

"...On the Sabbath, Jesus began to teach the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority" (Luke 4:31-32). Whether it was to a crowd or to a single person, Jesus was always teaching. This occupation required Jesus to instruct and teach lessons on topics such as prayer and forgiveness. According to the Bible, Jesus taught officials, his disciples, and even children. He taught His disciples prayer, the officials he taught revival, and the children he taught faithfulness. Point being, Jesus instructed everyone and anyone. Exactly where would we be without Jesus as our Teacher? Most likely we'd be lost because we wouldn't have directions, we'd be confused because we wouldn't have explanations, and we'd fail to learn because we wouldn't have instructions. Jesus' occupation as a teacher should be beneficial to all of us as Christians. All his teachings should help us grow in faith and answer any bit of doubt or question we may face in our journey through life. Jesus is always ready to teach, as long as we stay amazed at his teachings and are willing to learn.

"He tends his flock like a shepherd, he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart, he gently leads those that have young" (Isaiah 40:11). Aside from being a teacher,

another familiar occupation of Jesus was being the Good Shepherd. Being the shepherd, Jesus took on duties to care for all of us, his people, His sheep. "I myself will tend my sheep, and make them lie down...I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak..." (Ezekiel 34: 15-16). The Bible reassures us saying, that if we falter or go astray Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will be there to comfort us with his rod and staff. With his guidance only would we be able to walk through the valleys of shadow of death, without fear. Without Jesus as our Good Shepherd, we'd be vulnerable, disoriented, and would have great turmoil. Like sheep, we need the care and guidance of the shepherd because we are too incapable to depend upon ourselves. With this occupation Jesus offers security, assistance, and care. As long as we stand by him, he'll save us from all wrong. If there are times we grow weak, he'll take us in his arms and will carry us along. "For he is our God, and we are his people of his pasture, the flock under his care." (Psalms 95:11)

In contrast to the other two occupations of Jesus, the third gives Him a bit more authority. Jesus as the Just Judge has a different tone to it, contrasting the gentle and meek tone of Jesus as the Good Shepherd or Teacher. "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father." (John 5:22-23). Jesus, with this profession, should keep us from judging others. Making judgments ourselves has no meaning. All that would matter in the end is the decision and just judgment Jesus Christ makes. With this responsibility off our shoulders, God calls us, as Christians, to honor and respect Jesus as judge and obey and follow his just ways. By trusting Him and being faithful, on Judgment Day, Jesus' occupation would call Him to make decisions based on our actions. "For we must all appear before the Judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). It is best we focus on ourselves and our relationship with God, and leave Jesus to judging the good and bad.

Although all three of Jesus' occupations give Him many different tasks, all three illustrate how devoted He is to carrying out God's plans and caring for us, His people. With instructions, guidance, and just judgment, Jesus is helping us with our own relationship with Him and the Heavenly Father, above. Christians everywhere should be grateful for such an opportunity, and should embrace it with open arms. Having Jesus as our Teacher, Good Shepherd, and Judge is the ultimate gift from God.

JESUS, Our Prince of Peace and Our Everlasting King

Samantha George, Grade 10



In the beginning, God created the world and it was perfect and peaceful because it was free from sin. Adam and Eve through their disobedience to God's instructions introduced sin into the world and destroyed the peace. Since that time man has known chaos and continued to long for peace, even today. What is peace? The Webster's dictionary defines peace as the state of tranquility, quietness, calmness; of being

secure, free from conflict and oppression.

In the Old Testament, we see the promises of God made through prophets like Isaiah. In Isaiah 48:17, 18 it says, "This is what the Lord says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea." This clearly shows us that God promises peace "like a river" to those who obey His commandments. Psalm 119:165 also promises peace, "Great peace have they who love your law and nothing can make them stumble." The assurance of peace is so strong, but we must do our part and obey God. Isaiah predicted the coming of the Prince of Peace, the Messiah in Isaiah 9:6, "For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

In the New Testament, God's promise of peace to His people begins with the birth of our Messiah, Jesus the Prince of Peace. The shepherds were given the message of peace by the angels who announced the Savior's birth. The heavenly hosts proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests," (Luke 2:14). In Jesus' life and ministry on earth we see many situations where Jesus spoke about His peace. Our lives will not be free from trials and tribulations, but we know and believe that Jesus has the power to calm all the storms. As recorded in John 14:27, Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." Therefore, we have the assurance that we have peace in Jesus because He is the Prince of Peace.

JESUS as Everlasting King

Psalm 24 written by David talks about the King of Glory. "Lift up your heads, O you gates be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." David prophesies about God's great plan for the redemption of mankind. Jesus has been victorious over death and after His resurrection ascended into heaven in glory where the gates of heaven were wide open to receive the King of Glory.

The New Testament refers to Jesus as King from the time of the announcement of His birth. The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and informed her of the Savior's birth. "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." (Luke 1:32, 33). Therefore, we see that Jesus as King was promised the throne of David and eternal and everlasting kingdom where he will be King forever. The magi who came to Jerusalem were looking for the "King of the Jews". Throughout Jesus' life on earth he was referred to as "King of Israel". When Jesus rode through the streets of Jerusalem on a donkey, the people hailed him shouting "Blessed is the King of Israel" (John 12:12). This was in fulfillment of the prophecy, "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion: See your King coming seated on a donkey's colt." (John 12:15). We also see just prior to Jesus' crucifixion when Jesus was presented to Pilate, the people accused him saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a King". When questioned by Pilate, Jesus acknowledges himself as "king of the Jews." (Luke 23:2). On the cross where Jesus was crucified, above was a written notice that read, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Luke 23:38).

Therefore, we see that from the manger to the eternal throne, Jesus was born King, died King and ascended into Heaven as King and He will return as King. God's kingdom is not of this

world, and as believers we are also commanded not to be of this world. So let us prepare ourselves spiritually for the everlasting kingdom and the hope that God has promised us to be with the Everlasting King.

The following is a poem of my personal experience with the prince of Peace and the Everlasting King.

*Jesus you are my Prince of Peace, my Everlasting King
Since I was young you were with me so of your glory I sing
In Sunday school the stories were told of your miraculous birth
I recall how you touched the lives of so many during your time on earth
I remember how little and afraid I was during Sunday School Competitions*

*In singing and storytelling you helped me get rid of my inhibitions
When I stood before the congregation and opened my mouth
You gave me the courage to praise you out loud*

*As I grew up and went to school I met kids who didn't know you
It was different than church, I was alone to represent you
Then you made me realize I had decisions and choices to make
I had to stay true to you, O Lord, with a faith no one could break*

*Now I'm in high school, the years have gone by
My faith has grown stronger, on you solely I rely
When challenges face me and my worries to you I bring
I look up to you, my Prince of Peace, my Everlasting King!*

How should we pray?

Ravena Sosa Jacob, Trinity MTC, Houston

When we were young, may be at the age of 3-7 most of us started praying to Jesus. We prayed like Daddy-e kaakken-e, mommy-e kaakken-e, ellarem kaakken-e and amen. Our parents never tried to correct us (may be they were so proud and happy that we think about them only). After we became little older, we added more words, sentences and our prayers become more structured. We started putting other people including cousins, relatives and friends to our prayer list (I remember my little brother praying for every body in the whole wide world). Does God like our prayer to be structured? I have heard several older adults including my grandpa, praying to God, as if he is talking to his close friend. I also heard other prayers with a beginning, middle part and an end, like a good story.



If our prayers are less structured then it will be like conversations (casual talks) with our close friend, like these following letters that little kids wrote to God (adapted from: <http://www.slibe.com>). They wrote, "Dear GOD, Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?" Another one, "Did you really mean 'do unto others as they do unto you?' Because if you did, then I'm going to fix my brother." "Thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy. Please send me a pony." "I never asked for anything before, you can look it up." "Maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they had their own rooms." "It works with my brother." "I think about you sometimes even when I'm not praying."

Is it wrong to ask these seemingly funny, yet straight forward questions? How should we change our prayer or its style as we grow up? Or is there any particular style or pattern that one should follow in our prayers? To my knowledge, after the initial years of learning at home I copied others in my prayers. I prayed like my

brother with some minor modifications. He some times even called me copy cat for this reason. As he grew older, he started using more strong words in his prayer, which I don't even understand. Again, does God care about the style, the pompous words? I would like to share what I think the answer is. Before I start, I should emphasize that it is not up to the humans to suggest what God think about our action. It is His decision to like it or not. Let me elaborate in the following two important aspects.

The most important factor in prayer is sincerity. God looks at our hearts. When we pray are we praying sincerely or not is the issue more than the style, the language, the grammar and syntax. If we are experiencing difficulty with a situation God like to hear it from us, even though He is aware of it. Therefore we shouldn't generalize the prayer, rather specifically ask in our daily prayer. Our prayer should not only be about our needs, but about other people's too. Think about how our parents pray for us. So we should do the same. Like our aunts and uncles pray for the poor because they care about them.

The second aspect of prayer is faith and trust. Faithful prayer does not always look for obtaining some thing from God always. Even if the prayer is not answered, the person who pray faithfully to God, find a way to explain why the prayer is not answered as the person's faith and trust is beyond his needs. There may be occasions that the need was granted and your faith was increased. However, expecting an answer for our prayers in the way we think may not be real faith. So if we are sincere in our prayers and faith is the motivator for prayer, then our prayers become more meaningful to ourselves. To conclude, God looks at the innermost part of us where sincerity and faith dwells. ■

My God and Me

Jerin Varghese (1st grade, Chicago Mar Thoma Church)

*I love my world, I love my world
Because I live in this world
God made this world
And God says, "It's good".*

*My house is cool, my life is cool!
Because God is with me!
God is always cool!
Meet God and you will be cool too!*

*God loves everybody
God bless everybody
God made my friends
And I love them too!*

Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship

Diocese of North America and Europe

<http://www.mtcyouth.org>

Hostel Land and Construction



Hosea 10:12 Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.

Support the mission!

Financial Support:

Working youth should contact the DYFC Treasurer in order to donate towards the purchase of the land and construction of the hostels. Receipts will be issued by the DYFC Treasurer for all donations received. Each Youth Fellowship should establish a Mexico Mission Fund in order to collect funds towards the ongoing maintenance of the hostels.

Mission Support:

If you are interested in participating in the mission planning efforts, trips, etc... please contact the DYF Mexico Mission Leadership Advisory Team at mission@mtcyouth.org

Please join us in our weekly conference call prayers and keep our commitments to the Mexico Mission in your prayers: Check the DYF website (<http://www.mtcyouth.org>) for updates.

For additional information, please contact:

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WAKE UP

THE JOURNEY TO CHRIST THROUGH SUNDAY SCHOOL

Anju Thomas, 6th Grade, ST. James MTC, New York

Every Sunday morning the first thing I hear is the loud voices of my parents. It was close to 8 o'clock in the morning when I heard them saying, "Anju! Get up, get up, don't you know that you have to go to Sunday school today? Every Sunday you're late for Sunday school. Wake up!" At that point all I was doing was questioning the purpose of going to Sunday school. Why am I waking up this early to go to Sunday school? Don't I already go to school five days a week and wake up at six o'clock in the morning? Why can't I just sleep late today? I eventually confronted my parents with these questions. The reply that they gave me was, "Then how else are you going to know who your Lord and Savior is? The Sunday school is one of the most important places in your life as a Christian." That statement just put more questions in my mind. Why was Sunday school so important in my life? What does the Sunday school provide me with that can increase my faith in the risen Christ? It did take me some time to get the answers to these questions but after I received them I was able to understand its significance in my life as well as in others.

The Sunday school plays a very important role in our daily lives even though Sunday School itself is only on Sundays. It provides us with things that we are not able to obtain from anywhere else. Such as: Christian values, the word of God, activities that help us to understand what God needs from us, and discipline.

Christian Values: The Sunday school teaches young children the aspects of a true Christian. The Bible tells us that the only thing you have to do to receive eternal life and reach heaven is to believe in Christ and that he died for our sins. The Sunday school is the one place in which the little children as well as people in many grades come to learn about Christ's birth, death, and resurrection. Through the Sunday school, children begin to learn how they can show Christ's love through our actions such as kindness to others and understanding. Christ has shown kindness, love and understanding towards our everyday existence. It is our goal to show Christ's love to everyone whether it is from our words or from our actions. The Sunday school shows us how to follow the right path towards God and to keep an unwavering faith so that we may not be led astray. The Sunday school makes it a top priority to present young children with Christian values so that they can walk with God throughout their lives.

The Word of God: The Sunday school takes it very seriously to teach the children the Bible and what it is trying to tell us. The foundation of our faith comes from the Bible. Only by truly understanding what God is trying to tell us will we know



what we are supposed to do in our lives. The Sunday school teaches us the importance to place a time in our day to meditate on the Word of God and for family prayer. By placing time to study the Word of God we can be able to understand God's Word and also show the importance of Christ in our lives. In Sunday school we learn that the Words of God are guide lines that we as Christians should follow in order to stay fixed in the path of righteousness.

Activities that direct our focus towards God: The Sunday school is not just about serious

tests and Diocesan exams. It provides us with many activities that anyone can participate in. Every year Sunday schools place competitions that broaden the views of Christ in the children's eyes. Singing, Bible reading, memorization, and elocutions all help children to learn more and more about God. In the summer the Sunday school has students go to Vacation Bible School (VBS). Activities within VBS are very likeable as well as informative. Also in the summer there are various conferences held that has multiple churches participating. These conferences such as the Junior-Senior conferences provide a place in which many people come together in unity to learn more about God while having fun at the same time. For our church the Sunday school starts off by holding early morning worship, songs, and music. These activities play a major part in people's lives by providing them with God's word more effectively and with more impact.

Discipline: The Sunday school provides us with discipline and helps us to become true Christians. The classes' make students memorize important verses from the Bible, which serves the same purpose as homework. When we are faced with tough and trying times we will be able to use these memory verses for our comfort and strength. Exams, believe it or not, provide us with discipline also. Sunday school exams like every other exam that we take in our lives require serious preparation and understanding. These exams test your knowledge of the Bible and what you have learned through your classes. The fact that we have to wake up early to go to Sunday school also helps us practice discipline.

Without Sunday school how would we grow in faith and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? How will we be able to stay in that sacred path of righteousness? The teachings that we learn from Sunday school will always stay in our minds where ever we go or how much older we become. As it states in Proverbs 22:6, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn away from it." All God requires us to do is to wake up and open our minds so that he may enter and change our lives. ■

Learn from the Ants

Jessica Jacob, 5th Grade, St Peters, NJ

“Go to the ant, you sluggard, consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man (Proverbs chapter 6:6-11)

As you all can tell, this passage is talking about ants. Some of you may be asking why there are ants written in the Bible. Why are they? Well, the Bible teaches many lessons from nature and God’s creation. This is just one of many lessons in which God has used nature as an example of how we are to live in our daily lives.

In this story, the ant teaches us three basic lessons: performance, participation, and perseverance. The first lesson it teaches us is performance. Does anyone know how ants act? Are they lazy, or are they hard workers? Yes that’s right, they are hard workers. Ants are always busy, never lazy, and never make excuses. We can learn performance from ants. In our own lives, can we say that we slack off sometimes, and perhaps not spend enough time working, or spending time doing things that are necessary or good for us? We should not slack off from doing God’s work because of our own personal activities or wants. No excuse is acceptable for Christians to not work for God. God’s fields are ready for harvest, and we must labor in them today.

The second lesson we can learn from an ant is the lesson of participation. Ants seem to have no difficulty participating in tasks to be done. They work together in harmony, accomplishing their assignments. Do you ever get into arguments with other people? I



think everyone has, and needless to say, this is not right. Christians often fail to cooperate in accomplishing God’s work, but sit with folded hands and criticize other people when they can also be helping too. Instead of sitting back and watching and criticizing, we should be correcting and helping anything and everything for the glory of God. God’s love should make all of us work together in unity.

The third lesson we can learn from this is that we should have perseverance. Have you ever been sad or depressed about something that happened, and you don’t feel like moving on in life? Well, for an ant, when it loses its home or possessions because of rain or something else, they begin to

rebuild immediately. They persevere in what they do. Sometimes, the winds may blow on us, and storms may leave us stranded or sad. Even when troubles and trials come and strike us, Christians should not despair because there is an Almighty God who is watching over us, and cares for us, to provide for us our every need. We must always persevere, in everything, including whether our problems be personal or having to do with the work of God. As Christians, our greatest hope lies not in the world and its worldly desires, but afterwards, in heaven, and eternal glory. Jesus tells John in Revelation 2:10, “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you a crown of life.” God will reward us in heaven, to spend the rest of eternity with Him.

So, when I leave here today, I want you to remember the three life lessons that the ant teaches us. It teaches us how we should perform for God’s work, participate in accomplishing this work, and persevere in this work to spend eternity with our Father in heaven. May God help us all to live these things out in our lives so that we may be a blessing to those around us. ■

Trust and Believe

Betsy Thomas, Ascension Mar Thoma Church

*When you are troubled with a problem
Ask the Lord to fill your need,
Know that he empowers you
And that His love will intercede.*

*If heartaches overwhelm you
Trust that they can be resolved,
For God will ease and comfort you;
Any problem can be solved.*

*Let His loving arms embrace you;
He will bless you and anoint you.
Reach out with all your faith and trust;
God will never disappoint you.*



*Read His promises in scripture;
All His words are true,
Believe with all your heart and soul
God is near – He’s at your side.*

*Trust and believe when you are weary
That the Lord will take control,
He is almighty – He is the master
Of both your body and soul.*



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"When one door of happiness closes, another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one that has been opened for us".

Helen Keller

HOME & GARDEN TIPS

MRS. SHIRLEY CHACKALAMANNIL, NEW JERSEY MTC

Gardening—A Biblical Perspective

Do you ever wonder why God put Adam and Eve in a garden, The Garden of Eden? We see that Adam and Eve were in a perfect setting, physically, emotionally and spiritually. We see quite a few gardens mentioned in the Bible, such as Ahab's garden of herbs (1 Kings 21:2), The royal garden (2 Kings 21:18), The royal garden at Susa (Esther 1:5) The garden of Joseph of Arimathea (John 19: 41), Garden of Gethsemane (John 18: 1) are some of them. Also we see that as sin entered the world the Garden lost its perfection. Not only that Adam and Eve had to struggle to survive in the world but also they had to work hard to maintain the beauty of the earth that God had created for them. The problems that we often come across in maintaining a garden are growth of weeds, shortage of water, over abundance of water and the presence of a variety of pests—all of which of course demand a lot of labor.

Manual labor in bringing up a graceful garden contributes to one's physical health, because activities such as digging, planting, weeding, watering and harvesting are all part of the three types of physical activities: endurance, flexibility and strength. Researchers estimate that gardening burns an average of 400 to 500 calories per hour. Spending time in a garden is not only good for your health but also it has emotional healing effects. According to the experts, beyond physical exertion, gardening also offers a level of serenity that aids a person's mental health. American Horticultural Therapy Association, through many years of research, proved that gardening benefits people who are recovering from physical illness by retraining their muscles and improving muscle coordination, balance and strength. Furthermore just spending time in nature reduces stress, lowers blood pressure and relieves muscle tension. The "benefits of gardening" is proven by case studies in USA where horticultural therapy is a well established field with its own journal since 1986. (The Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture)

Remember, God's promise to His children "The Lord will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and strengthen your frame. You will be like a well watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail" (Isaiah 58: 11).
Seven easy care perennials (Continuation from the January issue)

1. **Black-eyed Susan.** This plant with its cheery bright yellow-orange flowers with a dark hue in the middle will bring a garden alive even in a cloudy day. Cold hardy to up to zone 4, this is a plant that is resistant to many of the pests and diseases. They prefer a sunny garden with at least 5 hours of sunlight. (Available as a climber or as a bush)
2. **Coneflower.** This is a lovely native American plant that usually survives in any kind of soil. This plant is also known as Echinacea which became very popular for its immune building properties. They are available in maroon, pink and white

flowers. These plants are hardy to zone 3 to 9 and are drought resistant with an affinity to longer hours of sunlight.

3. **Coreopsis.** If you are looking for a flowering plant that can take adverse growing conditions and still bloom steadily all summer long, this plant is your answer. They produce yellow-orange daisy like flowers and will grow in zones 4 to 9. A very good choice as a border plant.
4. **Garden Phlox.** Garden phlox (not creeping phlox) is a tall, elegant plant that is perfect in gardens where height is needed. These are floriferous and fragrant and can be used for defining a border or as the background for shorter plants. Flowers are massed in a showy pyramid-shaped clusters of 12 to 18 inches long and they come in an array of colors. Thrive in zones 4 to 8.
5. **Hosta.** These plants come in anywhere from 18 inches to all the way up to 5 feet depending on the cultivar. They are very durable and can thrive for about 20 years with no special care. These plants are more noted for its foliage than the flowers.
6. **Stonecrop.** (sedum). For a late season blooming plant this is a good bet. They are drought resistant and rarely bothered by diseases or pests. Good for mass planting and the flowers can be used in dried arrangements.
7. **Butterfly Bush.** This plant grows up to 6 feet tall with a flowering period of June to late September. They are resistant to many of the pests and diseases and can be used as a focal point for your garden. They are available in flower colors of white, blue, purple, pink and yellow.

The above plants are chosen for a care-free garden. They still need weeding, occasional watering and two or three times fertilizing with miracle grow according to the direction during the flowering season.

All of the above plants are available in garden centers or you could order it through the internet from <http://www.burpee.com>

Transplanting to the Garden—Nursery Plants: Dig the ground (Perennial bed—see January issue messenger) one and a half times the width of the nursery pot. The depth of the hole should be same as the depth of the nursery pot. Water the soil in the pot well, then gently pull the plant from the pot. After you plant it water them well.

Mail Order Plants: Many of the mail order plants are shipped bare root without soil. The plants are shipped when they are still dormant and should be planted immediately. If you are not able to plant them for a few days, do not disturb their protective packaging material but do water them just to keep the roots moist and keep them in a cool, dry, dark location. Do not over water them which can cause root decay. When you are ready to plant them, do it in the same way as the nursery plants.

In the July issue of Messenger the Living Home will focus on ideas on how to spruce up a room with limited amount of time, labor and money.

2007 Diocesan Leadership Conference

Ashley George, DYFC Secretary



The 2007 Diocesan Leadership Conference was conducted from Thursday, January 4 to Sunday, January 7, 2007 hosted by the Baltimore Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship, Baltimore, MD. This year's conference marked the 10th anniversary of the Diocesan Leadership Conference. The purpose of the Diocesan Leadership Conference is to train, encourage, and foster the growth of youth leaders of the Mar Thoma Church in the principles of the Christian discipleship, servant hood, and leadership. This year, the conference delegates studied the theme "Not to Conform, but to be Transformed" based on Romans 12:2, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will."

The conference was inaugurated by our Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos. During his Presidential Address, Coorilos Thirumeni challenged the delegates to live their lives as servant leaders for Jesus Christ through a life of service, sacrifice, and suffering. The main talks were delivered by Rev. Kemper Krabb of the St. John the Divine Episcopal Church, Houston, TX. Kemper Achen used his unique and in-depth knowledge of our culture and the Mar Thoma faith and practices to deliver challenging talks on the theme. The Bible Study sessions were led by Rev. Manoj Zachariah, Vicar of the Staten Island Mar Thoma Church, NY. Manoj Achen took the delegates through several passages in the Old and New Testaments to illustrate how God transformed people to be instruments of His love and work towards the extension of His kingdom.

This year's conference offered delegates an in-depth study in the following topics: Worship, Mentoring and Discipleship, Missions, and Bible Study (Hermeneutics). Rev. Skariah John (Youth Chaplain, Southwest B Region) and Rev. Kemper Krabb

led the Worship track, Rev. Biju S. Cherian (Youth Chaplain, Northeast Region) and Mr. John C. Thomas (St. Thomas Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship, NY) led the Mentoring and Discipleship track, Rev. Ninu Chandy (Youth Chaplain, Southwest A Region) and Mr. Sam George (Chicago Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship, IL) led the Missions track, and Rev. Mathew Skariah (Youth Chaplain, Southeast A Region) and Mr. Alex Kolath (Dallas Farmers Branch Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship, Dallas, TX) led the Bible Study track. Over 8 hours spread across 4 sessions were spent in the study and discussion of these important topics. It is our hope and prayer that the conference delegates were able to gain a better understanding in these areas in order to continue the dialogue and provide leadership in these areas at their local Youth Fellowships.

The conference was not only a time of learning, study, and discussions, but also a time of praise and worship. The Baltimore Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship provided leadership in all the Praise and Worship sessions and composed a theme song entitled "Transform Me" for this year's conference. Morning and evening worship services were conducted by youths representing the different regions of the Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship in this Diocese. These praise and worship sessions were a unique time when the youths from across the Diocese came together with one voice and sang praise and offered glory and worship to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for His grace and mercy upon us.

In addition to the main talks, Bible Studies, track sessions, conference delegates were able to attend two additional sessions. Manoj Achen led a presentation and discussion on the concept of "Servant Leadership". During this session, Achen presented the Biblical basis on servant hood and leadership and delegates had an opportunity to discuss this and other leadership concerns. Sam George led a presentation on his book "Coconut Generation"

(<http://www.coconutgeneration.com>) and highlighted the research and findings that led to the creation of this book and need for a concentrated ministry among the second generation.

During the conference, the Diocesan Youth Fellowship Council presented the mission activities of the Diocese. Under the leadership of our Diocesan Bishop and the Mission Board, the Native American and Mexico Mission projects have continued to move forward. The Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship has increased its role in these mission projects by providing more participation and leadership. During this session, all delegates were provided specific information about these missions and encouraged to become more active in them. The DYFC also presented the financial commitment that the Youth Fellowship has made to support the growth and development of the Mexico Mission.

The DYFC unveiled a new version of its website <http://www.mtcyouth.org> during the conference. Rev. Joseph Oommen, Diocesan Secretary, inaugurated the website and offered a few words of felicitation. The new website provides

organized content and information that will enhance the ability for the Youth Fellowship to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to all its visitors.

The delegates were blessed to have the presence of Rev. George Mathew at this year's conference. Achen celebrated his 80th birthday with the conference delegates and made a special donation to the Youth Fellowship's Mexico Mission Fund in commemoration of this milestone. During the closing session of the conference, the delegates were treated to a special musical performance by our "Youth Chaplain Quartet" which included a harmonic vocal display with Sam Achen accompanying on the guitar.

By the grace of God, this year's conference was a blessed event. Special thanks to Rev. Saji P. Thomas, Vicar of the Baltimore Mar Thoma Church, Ms. Ruby Thomas, Convener, and the Baltimore Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship for all their hard work, dedication, and support in making this conference a success. ■

God...visible or invisible

Jerryl Abraham, Grade: 5 St. John's Marthoma Church. NY

Have you ever wondered if God is real? Have you ever doubted Him? To all of us the answer should be no. The real question is why? Why do we blame God for all our troubles? ... Why?

Psalms 121:5 says: "The lord is the shade at your right hand, the sun will not harm you by day or the moon by night." When was the last you were in deep trouble? You would feel sad, angry, and alone in despair. You think that God is doing it. But right then you should turn to Him. He is the key to the house of joy. We know He is there for us. This story proves it. Once there was a man and he went to the barber shop to get a haircut. The barber told the man

that he didn't believe that God was real. The man wanted to prove that God is real. So he went outside and saw a man with an overgrown beard and long hair. He ran back and told the barber that he didn't believe that there were barbers. "But I'm a barber! he exclaimed. Then why is there a man with overgrown hair and a long beard outside? This referred to the barber's testimony about God. This story tells us that seeing is not believing... believing is seeing.

In the book of John, Jesus says: 'Blessed are those who don't see but yet believe. In the book of Luke he says: Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. This is so if you believe. ■

Arise

Ancy George

*Arise my soul, for I must see,
The love that has drawn me closer to thee.
Arise my soul, arise and feel,
The love that has cleansed and set you free.
Arise my soul, Arise*

*Arise my soul and look around,
There is no love so pure and fine.
Arise my soul and share this love,
The love that made Him die for me.*

*Arise my soul and look to the cross,
The nails, the thorns He bore for me.
Arise my soul and realize,
For my sake, He prayed in Gethsemane.*



*Arise my soul and never forget
The promise of the empty tomb,
Arise my soul and humble your heart,
For He shed his blood with you in mind.
Arise my soul, Arise.*

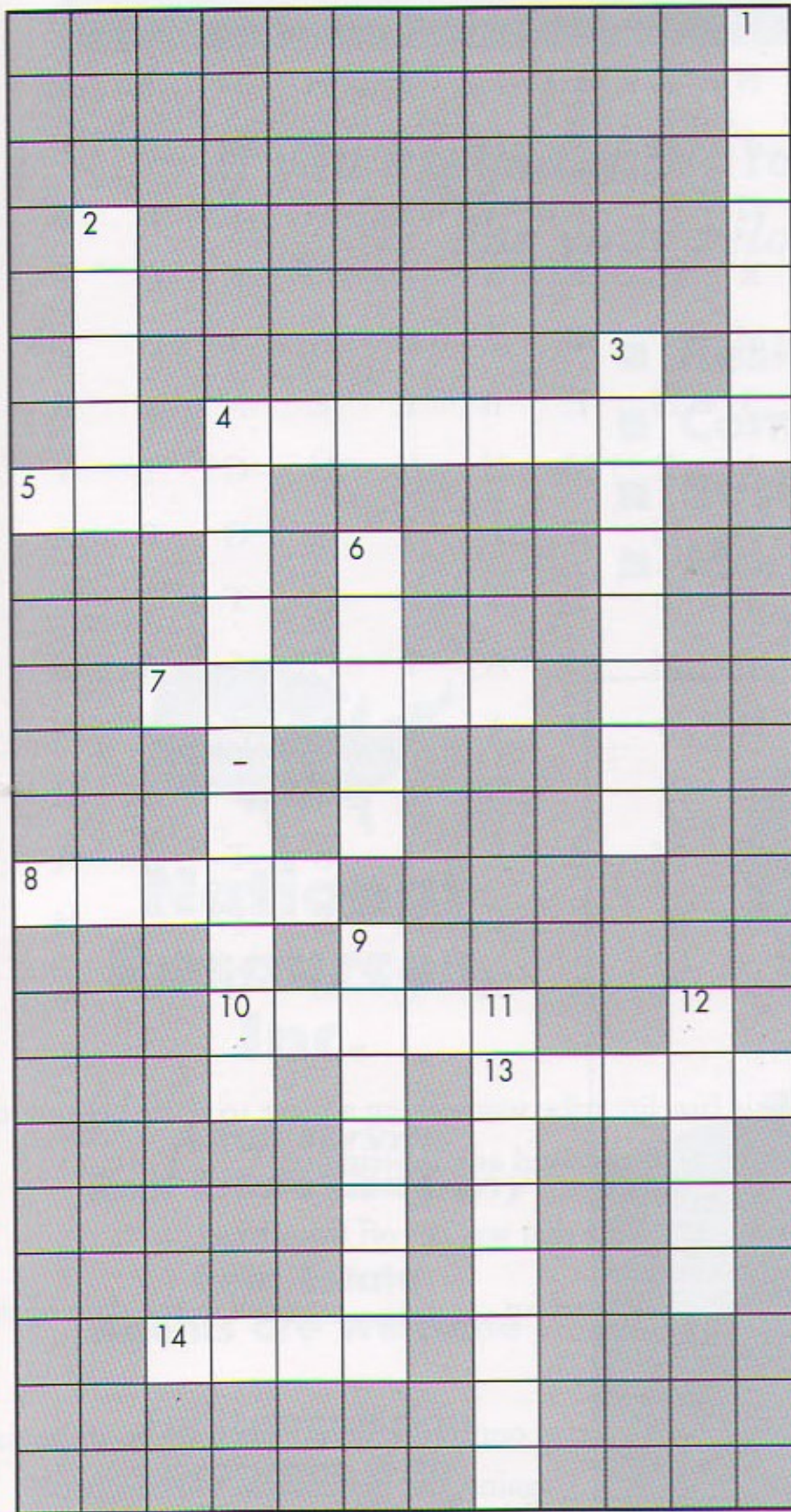
*Look no further weary soul of mine,
Arise for your Savior is here.
Arise my soul and worship Him,
For He freed you from your sins and fears
Arise my soul, Arise.*

*There is nothing greater than His love
It's the hope of what's here and beyond,
Eternity with my Father, a love for all times
Arise my soul, Arise.*

BIBLE CROSS WORD PUZZLE

AS IN TODAY'S NIV
BOOK OF JUDGES: CHAPTERS 1-11

Mrs. Joel M. Zacharia (Toronto, Canada)



Down

1. _____, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophetess and a woman judge of Israel.
2. After the death of Joshua, the Lord commanded _____ to fight against the Caananites.
3. In return for triumph, this judge made a vow to the Lord to sacrifice whatever greets him first at the door of his house.
4. This man cried out, "Now God has paid me back for what I did to them." [hyphenated word]
6. Gideon overheard a Midianite man's dream of how a round loaf of _____ struck their camp and collapsed it.
9. This judge struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad.
11. Jephthah's _____ was the first to greet him at his return after defeating the Ammonites.
12. Deborah and _____ sang a song to celebrate their victory over the Caananites.

Across

4. _____ was a wicked ruler whose skull was cracked by a woman with a millstone.
5. The left handed judge who defeated the Moabites.
7. Name this judge who asked the Lord to show him signs and saw the angel of the Lord face to face.
8. Jotham, the youngest son of Jerub-Baal, drew the analogy of how the _____ went out to anoint a king for themselves.
10. Gideon made a golden _____ in Ophrah which the Israelites worshipped.
13. Caleb gave his daughter _____ in marriage to Othniel.
14. Name the judge who had 30 sons and who rode 30 donkeys.

BIBLE CROSS WORD PUZZLE AND WORD SEARCH WINNERS (January 2007)

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1. Achamma Chacko | Trinity MTC, Houston, TX |
| 2. Anie Varghese | St. James MTC, New York |
| 3. Baby George Thomas | Epiphany MTC, New York |
| 4. Ginu Easow | Tabore MTC, Staten Island, NY |
| 5. Jason Abraham | Detroit MTC, Detroit, MI |
| 6. Jeevan Mathew | Carmel MTC, Boston, MA |
| 7. Jibin Abraham | Horeb MTC, Colorado, CO |
| 8. Koshy & Sara Abraham | Immanuel MTC, Houston, TX |
| 9. Kunjumon Jose | Chicago MTC, Chicago, IL |
| 10. Leela Chacko | Long Island MTC, Merrick, NY |
| 11. Mariamma Ninan | St. James MTC, New York |
| 12. Nevin Mathai | Illinois |
| 13. Nigil Thaimuriyil | MTC Dallas FB, Dallas, TX |
| 14. Nithin and Navin John | St. James MTC, New York |
| 15. Omana Rajee | The MTC Staten Island, Staten Island, NY |
| 16. Pawan Mathew | Carmel MTC, Boston, MA |
| 17. Roshni Cherian | New Hyde Park, NY |

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 18. Saramma Poikayil | MTC Greater Washington, Washington, D.C. |
| 19. Sherin Vaidian | St. Thomas MTC, New York |
| 20. Shobi Mathew | Detroit MTC, Detroit, MI |
| 21. Stacy Varghese | Sehion MTC, Dallas, TX |
| 22. Steffi Mathew | MTC Dallas FB, Dallas, TX |
| 23. Valsamma Jose | St. James MTC, New York |

BIBLE CROSS WORD PUZZLE WINNERS

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Divya Mathew | Carmel MTC, Boston, MA |
| 2. Feba K. Jones | St. Thomas MTC, Chicago, IL |
| 3. Kochumol Reji Varghese | Immanuel MTC, Houston, TX |
| 4. Lilly Abraham | Horeb MTC, Colorado, CO |
| 5. Sicily Skariah | MTC Dallas FB, Dallas, TX |

BIBLE WORD SEARCH WINNERS

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Bency Abraham | Horeb MTC, Colorado, CO |
| 2. Febin P. Jones | St. Thomas MTC, Chicago, IL |
| 3. Valsa Philip | Salem MTC, Long Island, NY |

BIBLE WORD SEARCH

AS IN TODAY'S NIV
BOOK OF JUDGES: CHAPTERS 12-21

Mrs. Joel M. Zacharia (Toronto, Canada)

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

- _____ was the father of Samson.
- Name the man who made a young Levite his priest_____.
- This woman had Samson's head shaved and left him as weak as any other ordinary man.
- _____, son of Eleazar ministered before the Ark of the covenant of God.
- Name the place from where the Levite took a concubine.
- Name the judge who killed a lion with his bare hands.
- Six hundred men turned and fled into the desert to the rock of _____ where they stayed for months.

- This Israelite tribe was seeking a place to settle because they had not yet received any inheritance.
- Name the tribe that was cut off from Israel.
- Samson led Israel for _____ years in the days of the Philistines.
- The Israelites cried out to the Lord, "Shall we go up again to _____ against the Benjamites, our brothers?"
- During the time of the judges, Israel did not have a _____.
- At _____, the men of Israel took an oath not to give their daughters in marriage to a Benjamite.

ATTENTION PLEASE!

MAILING ADDRESS CHANGE!

Because Mrs. Joel M. Zacharia (Joel Kochamma) moved to Toronto, Canada, please mail your answers to:

James T. Philip, 175 Sheraden Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10314

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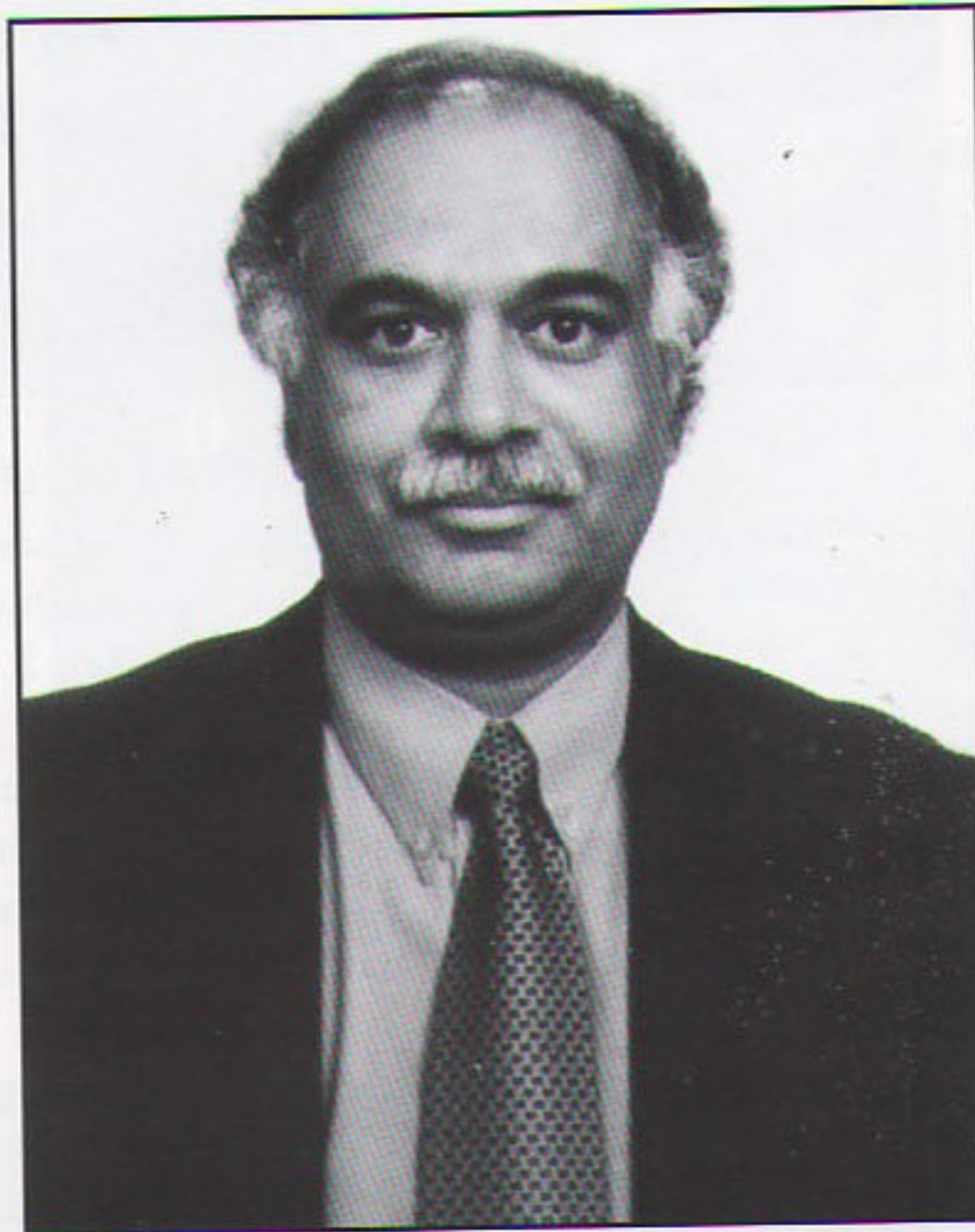


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Thank you for having "Georgia on your mind..."

DIOCESAN/PARISH NEWS

St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church of Chicago was dedicated on October 21st

St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church of Chicago opened a new era in the history of the Mar Thoma Syrian church in North America. The new parish was formed and a glorious sanctuary was constructed in the most amicable ambience by the Marthomites in Chicagoland. The newly built St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church was consecrated by Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Tirumeni on Saturday, 21st October 2006.

It is indeed the answer to ardent prayers of the true believers who had a vision about the new church in the Chicagoland area and worked diligently to fulfill their vision. It was a dream that came true through the grace of Almighty God. St. Thomas MTC of Chicago was formed as a result of the conviction that a new church is needed to accommodate the tremendous growth of Chicago Mar Thoma Church. The one hundred and seven families from the mother parish expressed their willingness to come together and form a new parish. They requested the Episcopal Synod for its approval. The Synod that met on December 5, 2003 accepted the request, and 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 first Holy Communion at St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church of Chicago. Even before the



official formation of this new Parish, significant work had been made as a single parish at Chicago Mar Thoma Church under the dynamic leadership of Rev. V.T. Josen, Rev. David Daniel, Rev. Roy Thomas, Rev. S. George and Rev. P. L. Joseprakash. Support from mother parish and well wishers, the untiring effort of the Building Committee, the ardent prayers and unconditional financial support of the parish members were really admirable.

The newly erected church building is of traditional design featuring brick exterior, gothic windows and heavy timber interior finish. The Madbaha Alter is accented with lectern and pulpit is constructed of red oak and flanked with an in wall video projection system. The interior sanctuary will accommodate approximately 450 parishioners. A 1400 square feet balcony is located on the west end of the sanctuary. There is an attached parking lot that will accommodate 150 spaces. This beautiful 8,000 square foot Church facility built on a 2.5 acre site at the intersection of North Avenue and Main Street in Lombard, Illinois is the new home for the 130 families of the growing St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church of Chicago.

Dedication ceremony of this beautiful church building began at 3:00 PM with colorful church procession lead by Sunday school children, followed by the Choir and

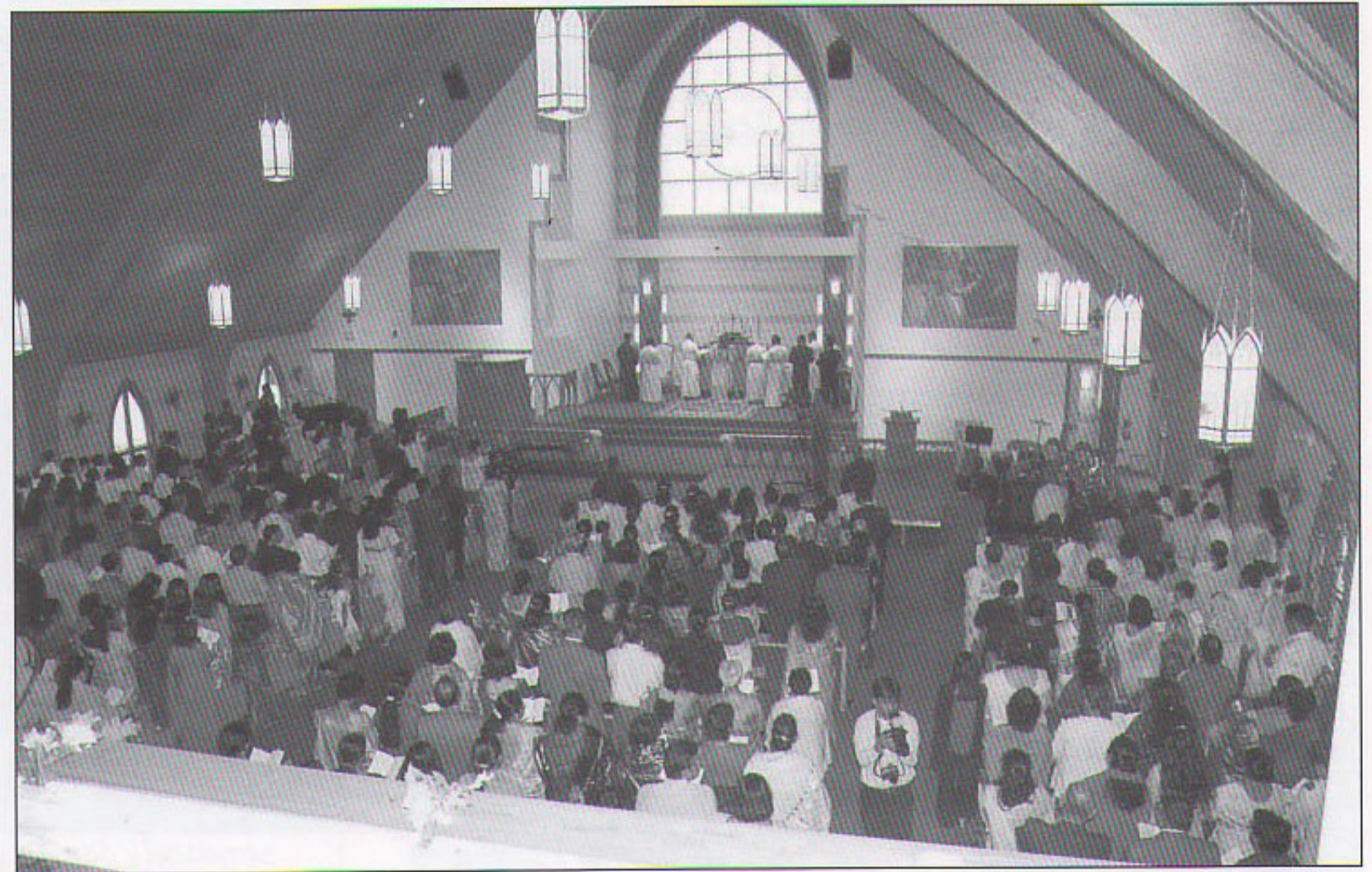




different religious, political and social organizations were present to celebrate this joyous occasion. The meeting opened with dedication song by Church Choir and prayer by Vice President Mr. V. N. Ninan. Building Committee Convener Mr. Jacob Chacko welcomed everyone to the meeting. Secretary, Mr. Johnson Mathai was the master of ceremony. In his message Coorilose Tirumeni, reminded every one that the people from India are indebted to the Western World starting with translation of Bible into Malayalam, to opening hospitals, schools and colleges in India. Now when churches in America are losing its influence on their people, it's our responsibility to pay back the debt by showing the values of the Kingdom by witnessing the Lord. We are called to be a

other organizations. Members of different parishes and well wishers also took part in the procession. On behalf of members of St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church of Chicago, the Trustee Mr. Jacob George read the affidavit requesting Metropolitan to dedicate the church building and the Diocesan Bishop officially opened the church building for worshippers. Sanctuary and closed circuit TV equipped basement were packed with believers and well wishers during the ceremony. In the presence of about eleven hundred people from all walks of life, Bishop dedicated the church building.

Following the church dedication, there was a public meeting presided over by the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa. Dignitaries from



witness of the Lord by serving the community around us. If members of this parish are willing to do that, it will be an asset for the community and His name will be glorified. Thirumeni challenged the members of the new parish to serve the community in and around Lombard by witnessing the Lord in truth and spirit.

Among the many who felicitated during the meeting included but not limited to the Chicago Episcopal Diocese Church Rector, Rev. Suzan V. Holding, our former vicar, now the Director of Hoskote Mission in Bangalore, Rev. V. T. Josen, President of Ecumenical Council of Kerala Churches in Chicago Rev. Fr. Daniel George, Chicago Mar Thoma Church vicar Rev. Daniel Varghese and construction attorney and



John through Tirumeni to "Edavakamission" treasurer Mr. Zacharia Kurian. Consecration souvenir was released by Tirumeni by accepting a copy from convener Mr. Mathew Varghese.

Variety of entertainment programs by Sunday School children, Youth Group members and solo by Chicago symphony chorus member Ms. Beena David made the occasion sweet and memorable. Dr. Jacob Samuel former vice president thanked all dignitaries.

Shaji Thomas, Publicity Convener

Wood Dale city mayor Mr. Kenneth P. Johnson. Due to unavoidable situations Rev. P. L. Joseprakash who was the first vicar of the parish, and the Lombard city mayor Mr. William J. Mueller could not attend the meeting. However their messages were read by their representatives at the meeting.

Mementoes were presented to Mr. Jacob Chacko, the Building Committee Convener and Mr. George Varghese, Finance Committee Convener for their outstanding leaderships. Mr. Varghese V. David and Mr. Mathew Abraham were also presented with mementos for providing technical expertise.

A check for Andaman mission work was released by accountant Mr. Sansom



ST. THOMAS MAR THOMA YOUTH FELLOWSHIP (CHICAGO)

Since the dedication of our new parish in October of last year, we have been working hard to build a strong community of Mar Thoma youth who love to serve the Lord. With a permanent structure now in place, the Lord has blessed us with many opportunities to gather in His name. Once a month, we conduct a prayer meeting called T.G.I.S. (Thank God It's Saturday) in which Rev. Johnson Philip Achen and some of the older youth delve into the Bible and teach practical applications of the Word. In addition, these meetings facilitate the younger youth to share and discuss any questions about their faith. With the growing number of youth and Sunday School children in our church, our Achen has allowed us to conduct youth-led praise and worship sessions before English service. Recently, we were able to reach out to the local community by handing out Easter Baskets that were put together by our youth fellowship. Upholding the Mar Thoma mission, "Lighted to Lighten", we are planning to host a

community barbeque in which the neighborhood can hopefully see God working through us. Other activities that we have planned for the year include a ping-pong tournament, a game day, car washes, bake sales, a one-day conference, a praise night, and so-forth. Through all these activities, we hope to bring glory to God and show the world how Great He truly is. As a Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship, we want to further God's Kingdom by being his faithful servants. We look forward to this upcoming year so that we may grow closer to God.

Best wishes to all other Mar Thoma youth fellowships in the Diocese of North America and Europe as our prayers are with you.

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve."—1 Peter 5:2.

Jacob Philip, Co-Vice-President

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

World Day of Prayer services took place in many settings within the Diocese in the month of March. Many Parishes held it at the local level. Some others worked with the ecumenical churches in their cities. The idea of combining prayers in Malayalam and English as well as incorporating many generations of women added new dimension to the worship.

Sevika Sanghom committees worked diligently to make the 2007 World Day of Prayer services a blessing to many this year.

Following is a brief overview of World Day of Prayer with special emphasis on the writing country, Paraguay.

In addition, a short report on some of the World Day of Prayer Services held in the Diocese is included:

What is World Day of Prayer?

The World Day of Prayer is a worldwide movement of many faith traditions who come together to observe a common day of prayer each year on the first Friday of March. Throughout the day, from sunrise to sunset, around the globe in more than 172 countries and regions, people gather to participate in the World Day of Prayer.

Each year a different country serves as the writer of the World Day of Prayer worship service. For 2007, a committee of women wrote the World Day Prayer worship from several ecumenical denominations in Paraguay, a country in the heart of South America. Through preparation and participation in the worship service, we learn about people in other countries, languages and cultures. We also begin to understand biblical passages in their context. We can hear their concerns and needs and feel ourselves in solidarity with them. In this way, it is possible to experience the richness of the Christian faith as it grows deeper and broader in an International, ecumenical expression.

People in Paraguay have many challenges facing them to-day. There is a large gap between rich and poor, with 20% of the population surviving on less than a dollar a day. Health care is limited in rural areas. Tuberculosis, diarrhea, anemia, parasites, and dengue is common. There are 130,000 children outside the school system. Housing is scarce.

The theme for 2007 was "United under God's Tent". The theme from the book of Genesis, chapter 18, verses 1-15, shows Abraham, as a sign of hospitality, inviting others to come into his tent. The World Day of prayer ecumenical outreach calls us to enlarge the site of our tent, not to hold back but to exalt the unity of the spirit.

The Paraguayan committee chose the Annuity, a traditional lace tablecloth woven by the local women, as a logo for the 2007 worship. It is delicate handwork, requiring concentration and practice. It involves weaving many designs together using one thread. It is a symbol of unity within diversity.

The Nanduiti is in a background of red earth, green plants and blue skies. The Earth speaks of passion and strength, like that of the Paraguayan people. An abundance of green plants reminds us of positive change reaching towards the heavens. The blue sky covers us all in an embrace, like the quiet presence of God, constantly protecting us, as though it were a tent.

Mrs. Nirmala Abraham, Philadelphia

NY Area

On Friday, March 2, 2007, we celebrated World Day of Prayer. The St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Ebenezer Mar Thoma

Church and St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church joined with the Hudson Valley C.S.I. Church at 200 Columbus Avenue, Westchester County NY for this pleasant occasion.

The theme of this year's World Day of Prayer was "United Under God's Tent" and we spent much of the day praying for the women of Paraguay. About 60 people braved heavy rains and attended this event.

We were blessed to have C.S.I. Vicar Rev. Mathew P. George, Rev. Johnson C. Jacob, Vicar of St. Andrews and Ebenezer Mar Thoma Church in attendance. Rev. Jojan M. John, Vicar of St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church (New York), presided over this day of prayer.

We were treated to short messages about the awesome power of prayer by Rev. Mathew P. George and Rev. Jojan Mathews John. Rev. Johnson C. Jacob provided us with an inspirational message from the book of Esther. All of the aforementioned churches participated in the day's worship service and prayers. Fellowship lunch was served by the members of the Hudson Valley C.S.I. Church.

Even though the sky was cloudy and the weather inclement, all who attended would agree that it was a blessed day of prayer. Our Father in Heaven safeguarded us from the heavy rains and flood warnings and kept us safe under his watchful eye.

Sosamma Abraham

Dallas Area

The Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch (FB) Sevika Sanghom hosted the Dallas region 5th World Day of Prayer on March 3, 2007. World Day of Prayer is a worldwide ecumenical



movement of women from various faith traditions who come together to observe a common day of prayer, every year in March to pray for a particular nation. This year we focused on Paraguay.

The theme for this year was "United Under God's Tent". About 200 women from 16 different parishes, including all Mar Thoma parishes in the Dallas area of the ecumenical movement, participated in this year's event to pray for the people of Paraguay and support women's ecumenical ministries that strive for peace and justice. Several priests from the participating parishes, including those of all four Mar Thoma parishes, attended the prayer celebration which added a divine touch to the whole event. The Ecumenical Choir under the leadership of Mrs. Elizabeth V. Mathew of MTC Dallas, FB led the singing sessions. Mrs. Alice George and Mrs. Elizabeth Andrews of MTC Dallas, FB were the

coordinators for this year's celebration of the World Day of Prayer. The main speaker was Mrs. Jessy Anil George, and the convener was Mrs. Dolly Paul from the CSI congregation of Dallas. Rev. Anil George, Vicar of MTC Dallas, FB provided leadership and guidance for successfully conducting the Word Day of Prayer.

Mrs. Alice George, MTC Dallas FB

Chicago Area

Chicago Mar Thoma Church celebrated the World Day of Prayer on Saturday, March 3, 2007. This special day is a call to pray together for people in need all over the world and we witness everyday the power of prayer.

We followed the theme 'United Under God's Tent' from the 2007 Worship Bulletin written by the WDP Women of Paraguay. The theme was a way of imagining how God acts and God's promise to us. It was an interactive service with attendees for Bible Reading and responses. Rev. Daniel Varghese led this service and concluded with the message emphasizing the importance of family prayer and being a role model to our children. More than 55 church members attended.

Along with the World Day of Prayer, Sevika Sanghom also arranged a Seminar under Achen's leadership for all mothers. The theme of the seminar was "Challenges Of Being A Godly Mother In The Present Context". Saleena Kuruvilla led the Seminar and provided guidance for today's challenges and also raised a lot of awareness on the dangers that modern-world teens face. She stressed on strengthening our relationship with Jesus, which will reflect positively on our children and others. She provided three steps—Prepare, Prioritize and Pray. Prepare by being proactive while raising teens; Prioritize your relationship with Christ, husband and children; and the importance of mothers' Persistent prayers in spite of unfavorable circumstances. Rev. Daniel Varghese responded on this topic as well. He prayed and concluded the seminar. Fellowship continued through lunch afterwards.

Sujatha Abraham, Chicago Mar Thoma Church

New Jersey Area

The ecumenical fellowship of North Jersey Indian Churches observed WDP on March 3, 2007 at the St. Thomas Orthodox



Church of India, Dover with an afternoon of prayers, worship and informational and devotional messages. The meeting was presided by Rev. Binu John, Vicar of New Jersey Mar Thomas Church. Various denominations from New Jersey area participated the event. The meeting started with worship songs by a com-

bined Choir of Mar Thoma and Orthodox Churches. The worship service led by different churches was a spiritually uplifting experience.

A power point presentation by Dr. Betsey Alias of Orthodox Church and Mrs. Bina Jacob of Mar Thoma Church were very informative relating to the life style of Paraguay. Mr. Jacob George of New Jersey Mar Thoma Church was the Keynote Speaker. In his powerful message he challenged every body with a pertinent question: Anything too hard for Jesus? Mrs. Geetha Cherian of New Jersey Mar Thoma Church spoke on the important roles of women, illustrating the story of Mary and Martha. Mr. Mathew David of St. Thomas Orthodox Church explained the critical role of Family and how that will be beneficial for a community.

Dr. Sonia Abraham served as the MC for the function. Mr. George Thumpail, Editor of Malayalam Pathram welcomed the attendees and Mrs. Ponnamma Alexander of St. Thomas Orthodox Church did the vote of thanks. The meeting ended with prayer and benediction by Rev K. K. John (Vicar of St. Thomas Orthodox Church), followed by refreshments.

Grace Alexander, New Jersey Mar Thoma Church

Philadelphia Area

The World Day of Prayer Service was conducted on Saturday, March 3, 2007 at St. Thomas Orthodox church, Philadelphia



under the leadership of the Ecumenical Fellowship of Indian Churches in Philadelphia.

Rev. Susieal Verghese, chairman of the Religious Services of the Ecumenical Fellowship and the vicar of Bethel Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia led the worship service. Twenty-five women from several denominations assisted in conducting this glorious worship service. Combining both Malayalam and English in the liturgy provided a forum for many different individuals to participate.

An actual tent erected on the stage with a wooden cross, palm trees and the figure of a Paraguayan child in traditional outfit and a big banner with the theme "United under God's Tent", provided a fitting background.

Mrs. Johanna Stahl delivered the message. The title of the message was "United Under God's Tent" with the women and children of Paraguay. Mrs. Johanna Stahl, a mission Representative for the Mission Society has conducted several short mission trips to Paraguay. She gave an inspiring talk on the mission work with the indigent women and children in Paraguay. She extended her invitation to the audience to join her in the upcoming short-term mission trips to Paraguay.

Rev. Fr. Jose Daniel ,chairman, Ecumenical Fellowship welcomed the participants, Mrs. Nirmala Abraham gave an overview of World Day of Prayer and a PowerPoint presentation on Paraguay. The meeting was enriched by a solo sung by Mrs. Jamcy Philip, vote of thanks by Sheela Daniel and benediction by Rev. Shaji .M. Thomas. About 130 persons from different parishes and denominations were in attendance. Mr. Abraham Mathew from the Malayalam Vartha covered the event.

Sheela Daniel , Bethel Mar Thoma Church

San Francisco Area

Members of the San Francisco Mar Thoma Parish joined with Christian women of many traditions who came together to

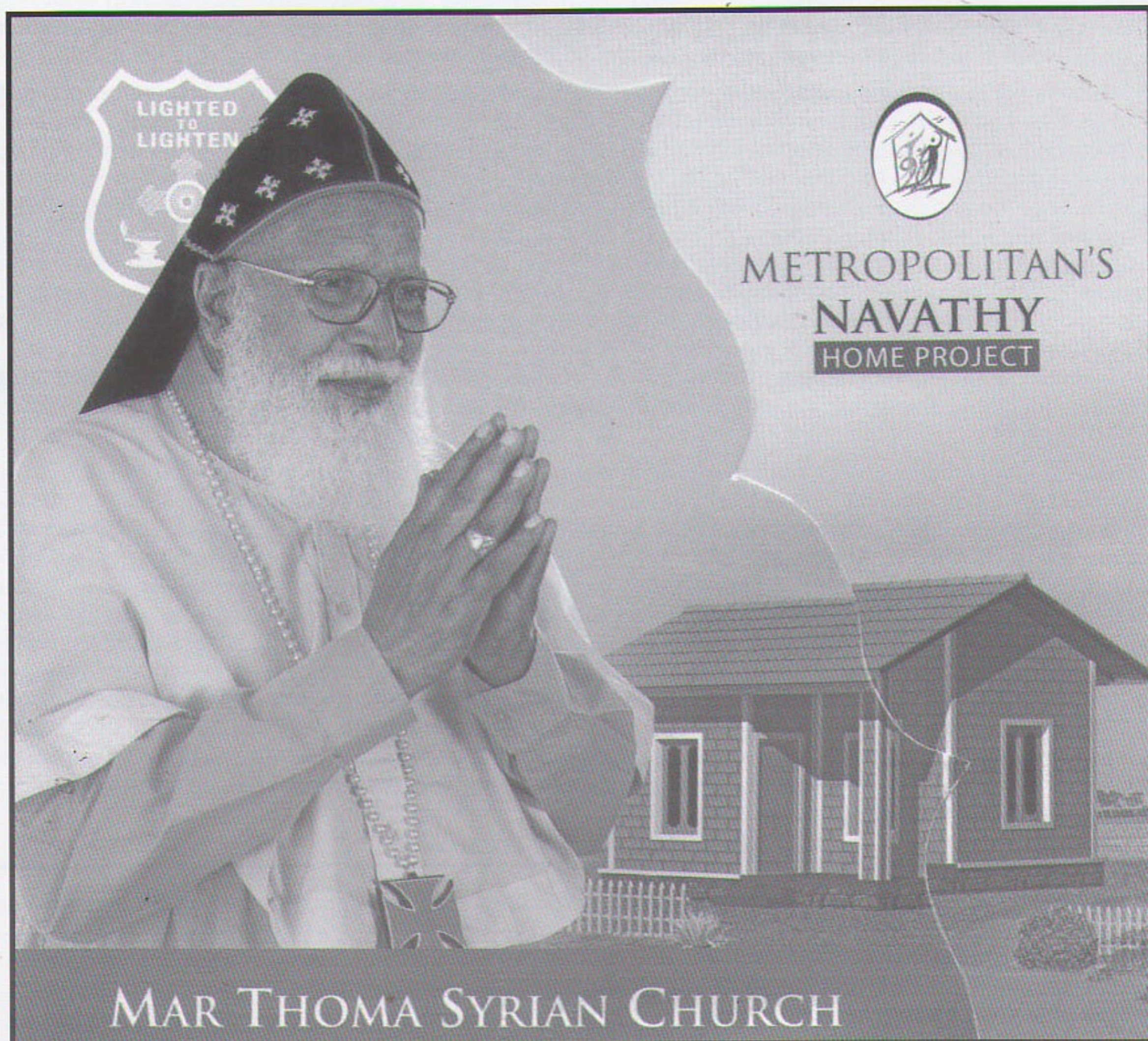
observe the World Prayer Day. The service was conducted as part of the Sunday Service so that many of the members were able to participate. Sumeetha Mathew, Sindhu Reji, Sheela Chandy, Bincy Philip, Anne Zachariah and Anita Sujit led the specially arranged worship. Ponnamma Ninan and Mary George also gave leadership to other areas of service. Women of different age groups participated. Mrs. Mini James gave the message. An offertory was taken and it was sent to the World Day of Prayer Committee. It was a time to affirm the faith in Jesus Christ and share the hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, opportunities and needs of women around the world. Through World Day of Prayer, we affirmed that prayer and action are inseparable and that both have immeasurable influence in the world.

Rev. James Veeramala, Vicar, San Francisco MTC

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നവതി- ഭവനനിർമ്മാണവും, ദൈവരാജ്യനിർമ്മിതിയും

ഡോ. സഖറിയാസ് മാർ തിയോഫിലസ് സഫ്രഗൻ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്ത.

തൊണ്ണൂറാം വയസ്സിലേക്ക് ഊർജ്ജസ്വലതയോടും കർമ്മകുശലതയോടും പ്രവേശിക്കുന്ന മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്താ തിരുമേനിക്കു സഭാമക്കളോടു ചേർന്ന് സർവ്വ ഭാവുകങ്ങളും അർപ്പിക്കട്ടെ. ഒരു മേലധ്യക്ഷൻ എന്ന നിലയിൽ അര നൂറ്റാണ്ടിലേറെ മാർത്തോമ്മാ സഭയ്ക്ക് നേതൃത്വം നൽകുവാൻ തിരുമേനിയെ ദൈവം വിനിയോഗിച്ചതോർത്ത് സ്തോത്രം ചെയ്യാം. സഭയ്ക്കും സമൂഹത്തിനും അർത്ഥവത്തും ഫലപ്രദവുമായ ശുശ്രൂഷ തുടർന്നും നിറവേറ്റു വാൻ ദൈവം തമ്പുരാൻ കൃപ ചെയ്യട്ടെ എന്ന് പ്രാർഥിക്കാം.

തിരുമേനിയുടെ നവതി എല്ലാ തലങ്ങളിലുള്ള ജനങ്ങളിലും എന്തെന്നില്ലാത്ത ഒരു ആനന്ദവും, ആവേശവും ഉണർത്തിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഏപ്രിൽ 27-നായി അനേകരും ഉറ്റുനോക്കിയിരിക്കുകയാണ്. അവിസ്മരണീയമായ ആ ചരിത്ര മുഹൂർത്തത്തിൽ എങ്ങനെ സന്തോഷം രേഖപ്പെടുത്തണം, ദൈവത്തോടുള്ള നന്ദി അറിയിക്കണം? നവതി ഭവന ദാന പദ്ധതി അതിനുകുന്ന ഏറ്റവും മഹത്തായ ഒരു മുഖാന്തരം ആയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഭാരതത്തിൽ കിടപ്പാടം ഇല്ലാത്തവർ കോടിക്കണക്കിനുണ്ട്. കേരളത്തിൽ അങ്ങനെയുള്ള ജനലക്ഷങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടെന്നതാണ് യാഥാർത്ഥ്യം. കുറെ പേരെയെങ്കിലും ഒരു ചെറിയ കുരക്കുള്ളിൽ സമാധാനത്തോടും, സന്തോഷത്തോടും സുരക്ഷിതരായി പാർപ്പിക്കുന്നതിനുള്ള ഒരു പദ്ധതിയാണ് നവതിയോടനുബന്ധിച്ച് ആസൂത്രണം ചെയ്തിരിക്കുന്നത്. സകല ചരാചരങ്ങളും പരസ്പരം ബന്ധപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. പാരസ്പരികത പ്രപഞ്ച രഹസ്യമാണ്. അധീശത്വവും വിധേയത്വവും ദൈവഹിതത്തിനെതിരാണ്. സമത്വവും സാഹോദര്യവുമാണ് സന്തോഷവും, സമാധാനവും ഉളവാക്കുന്നത്. നവതിയുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട് വീട് നിർമ്മിച്ച് കൊടുക്കുവാനുള്ള പരിശ്രമം ഈ ദർശനത്തിന്റെ പ്രകാശനം ആണ്.

സഭയുടെ ആഭിമുഖ്യത്തിൽ താമസമെന്നേ ഭാരതത്തിൽ വിവിധ സ്ഥലങ്ങളിലായി 1500 വീടുകൾ നിർമ്മിച്ച് ജാതിമത ഭേദമെന്നേ നൽകുന്നതിനുള്ള യജ്ഞത്തിലാണ് 'Navathy Home Project Committee'. 9 കോടി രൂപ ഇതിനായി സമാഹരിക്കേണ്ടിയിരിക്കുന്നു. 90-ാം ജന്മദിനത്തിൽ 90 വീടുകളുടെ താക്കോൽ ദാനം നിർവ്വഹിക്കണമെന്നാണ് ആഗ്രഹിച്ചത്. എന്നാൽ ജനങ്ങളുടെ ആവേശവും പങ്കാളിത്തവും പ്രതീക്ഷയെ കവച്ച് വെക്കുന്നതാകയാൽ 170 ലധികം വീടുകളുടെ നിർമ്മാണം പൂർത്തീകരണത്തിലേക്ക് നീങ്ങുകയാണ്. ഒരു വീടിന് 60000/- രൂപയാണ് സഭയിൽ നിന്ന് നൽകുന്നതെങ്കിലും പലയിടങ്ങളിലും ഇടവക ജനങ്ങൾ മുൻകൈ എടുത്ത് കൂടുതൽ തുക സംഭാവന ചെയ്ത് കുറെക്കൂടെ മെച്ചപ്പെട്ട വീടുകളാണ് പണിതുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നത്.

വരുമാനമുള്ള എല്ലാ സഭാംഗങ്ങളുടേയും സഹായസഹകരണങ്ങൾ ഈ സംരംഭത്തിനുണ്ടാകണം. ഒരു ടാർജ്ജ് മുൻപിൽ കണ്ടുകൊണ്ടാണ് ധനശേഖരണത്തിനൊരുങ്ങിയത് എന്നാൽ ഭവനരഹിതരുടെ എണ്ണവും ആവശ്യവും ക്രമാതീതമായി വർദ്ധിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നതിനാൽ പരിധി കൂടാതെ സംഭാവന ലഭിക്കേണ്ടിയിരിക്കുന്നു. ഒരു ദളിത് ഇടവകാംഗത്തിൽ നിന്നും 1000/- രൂപയും ശ്രീ. സണ്ണി വർക്കിയിൽ നിന്നും 40 ലക്ഷം രൂപയും ലഭിച്ചത് ഒരുപോലെ സന്തോഷകരവും അഭിനന്ദനീയവുമാണ്. ഒരു തുകയും ചെറുതല്ല ഒരു തുകയും വലുതുമല്ല. പങ്കിടൽ ക്രിസ്തീയ ജീവിതശൈലിയും ഭാവവും ആക്കുന്നതിന്റെ പ്രഥമ ചവിട്ടിപ്പടയാകട്ടെ നവതി പദ്ധതിയിലെ പങ്കാളിത്തം. പങ്കുവെക്കലിന്റെ കർമ്മകാണ്ഡം ഇവിടെ രചിക്കപ്പെടുകയാണ്. പുതിയ ഒരു ജീവിതശൈലി സ്വായത്തമാക്കുകയാണ്. "ദൈവത്തിൽ നിന്ന് പ്രാപിക്കുന്നു, ദൈവജനവുമായി പങ്കിടുന്നു". ഒരിക്കലോ ഒരു കാര്യത്തിലോ മാത്രമല്ല ജീവിതാന്ത്യം വരെയുള്ള സ്വഭാവമായി സ്വീകരിക്കുകയാണ്. നവതി ആഘോഷം നമ്മെ വെല്ലുവിളിക്കുന്നത് ഒരു പുതിയ ക്രൈസ്തവ ജീവിതക്രമത്തിലേക്കാണ്. ത്യാഗത്തിനും, സമർപ്പണത്തിനും, പ്രവർത്തനത്തിനും ആണ്. ഓരോ കൂടും ബവും പ്രാർഥനാകൂട്ടവും, സംഘടനയും ഓരോ വീട് നൽകിയാൽ തന്നെ എത്രയോ ആയിരങ്ങൾ ഭവനങ്ങളുടെ ഉടമകൾ ആകും. ഒന്നു പങ്കെടുത്ത് നോക്കൂ. കൊടുക്കുന്നതിന്റെ ആനന്ദവും അനുഗ്രഹവും അനുഭവിക്കുവാൻ കഴിയും.

ആഗോള ക്രൈസ്തവ സഭയിലെ തലമുതിർന്നതും തലയെടുപ്പുള്ളതുമായ ഒരു അതുല്യ പ്രതിഭാസമാണ് ക്രിസോസ്റ്റം തിരുമേനി. ആകാശ സൗഷ്ഠവും പോലെതന്നെ ആശ്രയസംപുഷ്ടിയുടേയും ഉടമയാണ് അദ്ദേഹം. കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങൾ, യുവജനങ്ങൾ, വനിതകൾ, വയോജനങ്ങൾ, ഇതര സഭാസമുദായ അംഗങ്ങൾ എന്നിവരോടൊക്കെ ഒരുപോലെ ഇഴുകിച്ചേരുവാൻ എല്ലാവരുടേയും സ്നേഹാദരവുകൾ പിടിച്ച് പറ്റാനും തിരുമേനിക്കുള്ള കഴിവ് അനന്യസാധാരണമാണ്. ഒന്നാംതരം ഒരു ചിന്തകനും, സംഭാഷകനും, സംവേദകനും, ധീരനാശാലിയും കർമ്മബുദ്ധിയും, വാഗ്മിയും, താർക്കികനും, നർമ്മ സമ്രാട്ടും ആയ തിരുമേനി ആർദ്രതയുടേയും, അനുകമ്പയുടേയും കരുതലിന്റേയും ആൾരൂപം കൂടിയാണ്. അതി ഗൗരവമായ വിഷയങ്ങളെ നർമ്മത്തിൽ ചാലിച്ച് വളരെ ലളിതമായി വിളമ്പുന്ന തിരുമേനി കേരളത്തിലെ മികച്ച ഒരു 'Crowd Puller' ആണ്. പ്രഭാഷണചതുരനായ അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ ശ്രോതാക്കളും, ആരാധകരും ജാതി മത രാഷ്ട്രീയ വിശ്വാസങ്ങൾക്ക് അതീതരാണ്. മാർത്തോമ്മാ സഭയുടെ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്ത ആണെങ്കിലും കേരളീയരുടെ മുഴുവൻ ആത്മീക ആചാര്യനും ആദരണീയനായ പിതാവുമായി അദ്ദേഹം മാറിയിരിക്കുന്നു. ആ വിശാല വീക്ഷണം കൂടുതൽ വിശ്രുതമാകട്ടെ. ആ നർമ്മം ഏറെ കുറിക്ക് കൊള്ളുന്നതാകട്ടെ. ആ ചിന്താധാര ഒരിക്കലും വറ്റാതിരിക്കട്ടെ. ആവേശമുണർത്തുന്ന അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ നവതി ജനലക്ഷങ്ങൾക്ക് ആശ്വാസം പകരട്ടെ, അനുഗ്രഹം ചൊരിയട്ടെ.

We are sorry to inform you that some of the pictures submitted for publication in this issue were not good enough for printing. RGB pictures (72 DPI) look great on the screen, but not good for printing, unless it is in bigger size (in width and depth), minimum 18 inches width and up are ok for resizing and res up.

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Please adjust your camera's digital settings to the above requirement. Thanks.

Mar Thoma Messenger

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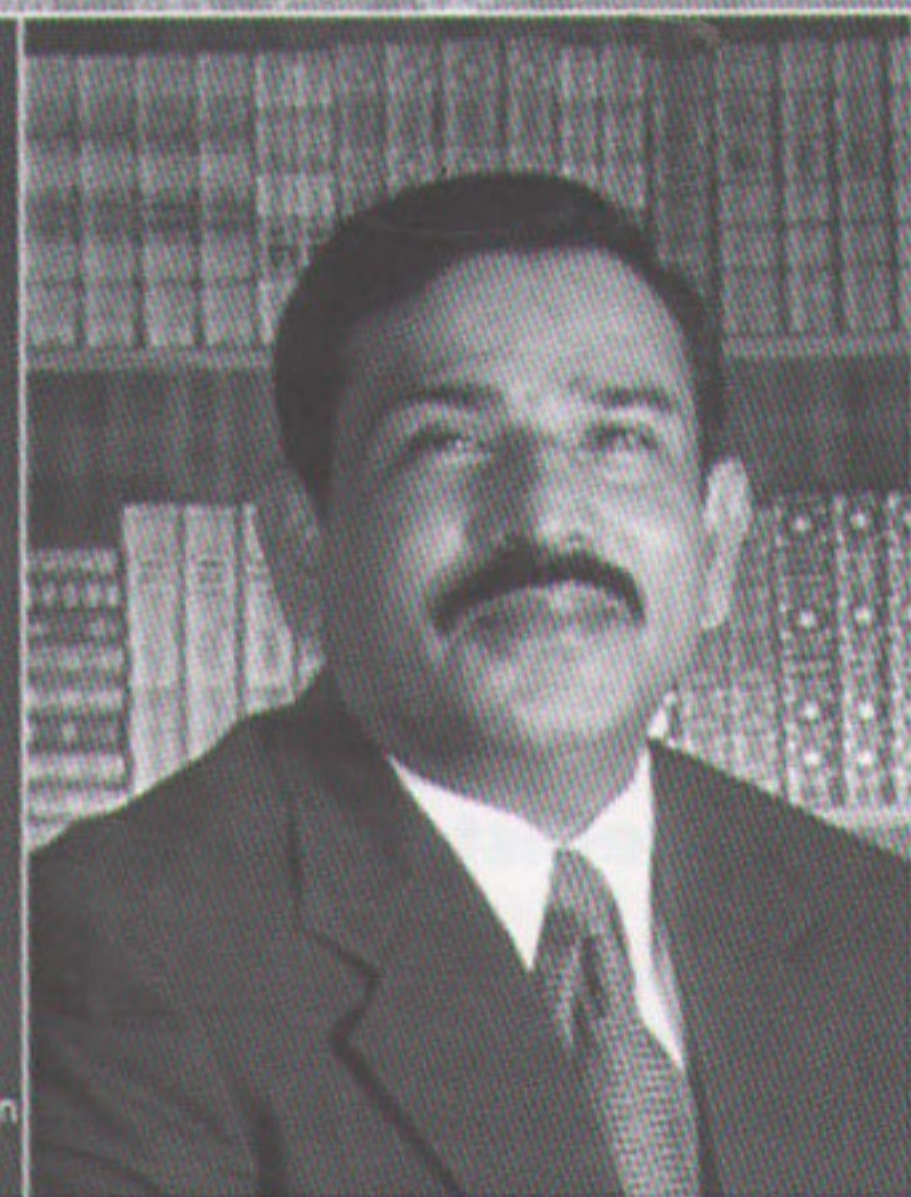
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XXVIII National Mar Thoma Youth Conference

Diocese of North America & Europe

Hosted by Trinity Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship, Houston, TX

Date: Thursday, August 2nd to Sunday, August 5th 2007

Venue: University of Houston

Theme: "Carpe Diem Coram Deo" -
Seize each day before the face of God
Based on Colossians 3: 23-24

Leaders: Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos
Rt. Rev. Dr. Abraham Mar Paulos
Pastor Ben Young
Rev. Dr. M. V. Abraham
Youth Chaplains
And many youth leaders from around the Diocese

Trinity Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship, Houston, invites you to the XXVIII National Youth Conference to discover the real motivation for life...

When examining the church as a whole, we find a rampant disease spreading among God's people—a disease known as apathy. Why don't we truly want to give up our life of sin? Why haven't we taken up the cross? What is our real motivation in serving our Lord?

At this year's conference, we will explore the answers to these questions and much more. Learn how you can find the greatest joy in life by seizing each day before the face of God.

Carpe Diem – a familiar phrase. Coram Deo – with a new twist!

For registration and additional conference information, please visit:

<http://www.mtcyouth.org/national2007>

YOUTH CHAPLAIN'S RETREAT

One day retreat for the youth chaplains of our diocese was held on January 7th 2007 at the Princeton Theological Seminary. The retreat was an intentional theological reflection about the ministry to our youths. It was led by Mr. Sam George, who was the author of Coconut Generation and the Director of Parivar International. The day was spent to reflect on the challenges of youth ministry, sharing concerns, and intercessory prayer. One of the outcomes is the discovery of helping our youngsters to

overcome the identity crisis of being Indian American, by appreciating the values and cultures of each country. As stipulated in the book 'Coconut Generation', a stage of High American High Indian attitude (HIHA) is existent. It was an enriching time to be together reflecting upon the ministry and getting prepared for the challenges ahead.

**Rev. Ninu Chandy, Youth Chaplain of Dallas
Diocesan Youth Vice President**

RELEASE OF AUDIO AND VIDEO CD OF MTC DALLAS, FB CHOIR



Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa. The release of CD was part of the 30th anniversary project of the parish. The Asianet TV also telecasted a program for thirty minutes containing the songs by the combined Choir. Choir Director Mr. M. J. Andrews and Assistant Choir Director Mrs. Lila Alexander coordinated both the production of the audio and video CD and the telecast on Asianet TV with the assistance of the Choir committee and Choir members of the parish.

Shaji Mathew, Secretary, Choir

An audio and video CD containing songs produced by the MTC Dallas, FB Adult and Youth Choir was released by our Diocesan

MAR THOMA CHURCH OF DALLAS, FARMERS BRANCH, SUNDAY SCHOOL



ST. MATHEW'S MAR THOMA YOUTH FELLOWSHIP, TORONTO, CANADA

This year AWAKE youth, as we have come to call ourselves, are highly motivated and excited in continuing events such as Youth picnic, Lenten retreat and various activities. It is our responsibility this year to convene the Regional Youth conference, and the conference committee has been working hard and diligently to accomplish this goal in May. We are also planning to attend the Mexico Mission trip, which will be conducted in August of this year. These two major events are the most significant to our youth this year.

AWAKE youth has grown in numbers and there are a lot more active youth members, we have fellowships together with

prayer meetings every month usually with a fun filled activity such as bowling, games night, retreats etc... and cover a variety of topics pertaining to youth lives in today's day and age.

Our youth also have taken the initiative to bring Praise and Worship Session to the regular services we have on Sunday, On occasion we also lead an entire Divine service with praise and worship in regular intervals of the service, these Sundays are dedicated towards Praise and Worship alone.

Andrew Abraham, Youth Secretary

PLEASE HELP ASHA BHAVAN with your prayers and generous donations

For more details, please contact:

Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Irenaeus Suffragan Metropolitan
Hermon Aramana, Adoor, Kerala - 691523

Rev. John Mathai, Director

Asha Bhavan Mar Thoma Care Centre, Pidavoor P.O, Pathanapuram, Kollam Dr. Kerala - 691 625

India. Phone: 0475-2353487, 3207920, 9447203578(M)

e-mail: ashabhavan2005@yahoo.co.in, achenjohnmathai@yahoo.com

BETHEL MAR THOMA CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA



The annual convention (English) of Bethel MTC, Philadelphia was held from Dec. 28th to 31st, 2006. Dr. M. G. Wesley, the founder & Director of M. G. Wesley Evangelistic association, was the main speaker. The youths from different parishes of Philadelphia attended this spiritual conference. A choir led by Mr. Shaju M. Peter of Sharon Voice, New York led the singing sessions on the final day.

Rev Susieal Verghese, Vicar

HOREB MAR THOMA CHURCH, COLORADO

The Mile High city of Denver, Colorado is home to Colorado Horeb Mar Thoma Church. Our church consists of approximately 25 families, and our youth fellowship has about 20 members. Our youth members have been active participants in Southwest Region and National Leadership Conferences, as well as the Mexico Mission Outreach. We have also been active in local community activities such as holiday food drives and holiday gift giving to needy children. Although our parish is small in total members, we were able to purchase our own worship facility in January 2006. The Horeb Youth Fellowship played an active role in preparing the church for the official dedication on July 29, 2006 with our diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar

Coorilos in attendance. It was at this time when Thirumeni recommended that we host the 2008 Diocesan National Leadership Conference, which we graciously accepted. We are very honored and excited to host the Leadership Conference and to share our great city and state to all who are able to attend. Our Parish is under the Leadership of Rev. James Thomas, who comes to us monthly from Sehion MTC in Dallas, Texas. We also receive regular visits from Rev. Skariah John, Youth Chaplain from Southwest Region based in Houston, Texas. We humbly ask for your prayers and support for the 2008 Leadership Conference and invite all to visit us and enjoy the beauty of Colorado.

Joseph Daniel

WEST COAST YF REGIONAL CONFERENCE 2007

“The Live I Now Live.” That is this year’s theme for the West Coast Regional Conference hosted by the Seattle Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship on June 21-24, 2007. The main speaker, Martin Alphonze, is no stranger to youth conferences. He was also the main speaker at the 2006 Leadership Conference in Seattle.

The youth have been working hard planning the conference and promoting all along the coast. In the past this conference has consisted of attendees mostly from the Seattle, L.A. and San Francisco Mar Thoma churches, but this year the invitation has been extended to the youth at Calgary, Vancouver, Phoenix and Portland parishes. A small group of Seattle youth recently drove down to California to promote the conference to the Los Angeles and San Francisco churches. The Seattle Youth Fellowship as a whole will be visiting the Vancouver and Portland parishes at the end of April.

“Going to these churches reassures the parents that their kids will be safe, and the youth are assured they will have a good time

as well as have fellowship with other Malayalee youth while growing spiritually,” says conference’s secretary Neetha Ann Daniyel.

Along with the visits, the Seattle Y.F. has created a myspace profile for the conference as another means of communicating to the youth about conference updates, registration information, and to see who is attending. You can visit the site at www.myspace.com/westcoastconference. They also created a short video showing the conference facility, and includes verbal invitations from the Seattle Youth Fellowship President Roy Thomas Achen and Vice President Jeena Titus. This video was shown during the visits to the churches and is also available upon request.

Youth can register online at www.seattlemtc.org. The registration fee is \$90 and can also be paid via the website. The Seattle Youth Fellowship is very excited about this year’s conference. They expect a good turnout and are continually praying that it will be a spiritually fulfilling experience for all who attend.

ZACHARIAS THIRUMENI VISITING THE POPE AT VATICAN



COORIOS THIRUMENI VISITING THE INDIAN PRESIDENT



MEMORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF THE MAR THOMA CHURCH IN LONDON

50 Years of Mar Thoma Church Service in London

Mr O. V. Alexander was appointed as the General Secretary of the Indian YMCA and Hostel, London in 1957. It was a small, happy and excited group which set sail for England from India in April of that year. Accompanying Mr. and Mrs. O. V. Alexander and their three children were, Mrs. M. G. Abraham (Sushilla), Mrs. C. M. Mathews (Ponnama), and Miss Molly Thariyan. After 3 weeks of sailing on the SS Carthage they landed at Genoa and after an overland trip by train arrived in Dover. The almost month long journey had been full of fun, laughter and camaraderie. On arrival in London, Sushilla and Ponnama were welcomed by their husbands who had come there for higher studies. Everyone went their separate ways to live in different parts of London and joined the local churches.

Within a short time of his arrival in England Mr. Alexander had the good fortune to meet Rev. V. V. Alexander from the Mar Thoma Church who had come to England to study counselling and psychiatry. He was staying on, in order to gain some practical experience in his field. God had His plans and we could see in hindsight the mysterious ways God brings people together for His Glory. And so it was that when the need was felt to have a Marthoma service, there was an Achen at hand.

There were several other cousins of the Alexanders already in residence in London. Among them were Dr. Verghese Chacko, Mr. Verghese Kooror, Mr. T. K. Chacko and some good friends. So there was a nucleus of families that wanted to attend a Malayalam service. Everyone tried to meet as often as time permitted, which was not too often. The ladies especially missed the close bonds that had formed over the weeks of travel from India and were happy at the prospect of coming to church service and meeting with fellow Malayalees.

Once the possibility of having a Mar Thoma service in London was mooted, letters were sent to the Metropolitan seeking his approval and permission. Rev V. V. Alexander was requested to conduct the Mar Thoma service once a month.

As General Secretary of the Indian YMCA at Fitzroy Square, London, Mr. O. V. Alexander was given quarters on the uppermost (third) floor of the YMCA building. There was a large terrace attached to the flat and a small prayer room was situated adjacent to the apartment. The doors of the prayer room were kept open round the clock to enable people to worship any time they wished. There was no furniture in the room but there was wall-to-wall carpeting, which gave a chance for worshippers to sit on the floor and meditate in true Indian fashion. There was no cross or altar in the room. Mr. Alexander offered the use of this room. It was in this prayer room that the first Mar Thoma service was held.

Service began to be held at regular intervals. Soon, word of the Mar Thoma service spread far and wide and a handful of people gathered there for the Sunday service. Prayer books were procured from India in due course of time and any Malayalee who was passing through London was welcome to join the Service. So we sometimes had persons from the Orthodox and CSI church attending the service. Even worshippers who lived in remote places away from London would occasionally take the long journey to participate in the Mar Thoma service. The congregation also comprised of students who had come to study at various universities, and two or three married couples who were working as doctors in nearby hospitals.

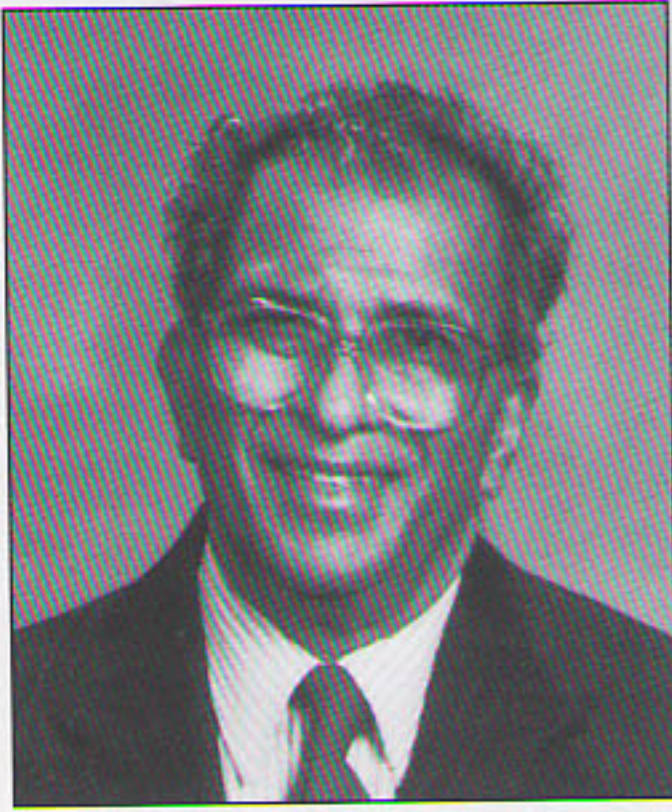
More than anything else Sunday service at the YMCA was a place where you met and reinforced bonds which made living in England less strange and lonely. Church service was followed by cups of hot coffee, cakes and biscuits lovingly passed around by Mrs. Anna Alexander. It was a time of talking, laughing and sharing your experience in a strange land.

Mr. O. V. Alexander returned to India in January 1960. However, the seed that was planted there during Mr. Alexander's tenure and through his initiative, continued to grow from strength to strength and we praise the Lord for that.

This recollection was provided by Mrs. Sowmini Thomas of Kochi, Kerala (sowmini@md4.vsnl.net.in), and Mrs Mary Abraham of Bangalore (marykabraham@gmail.com), daughters of Mr. O. V. Alexander, who at the time lived in London with their parents.

OBITUARIES

MR. THOMAS MODIYIL MATHAI (Podikunju) was called to his eternal rest on March 28th, 2007. He is survived by his wife



THOMAS M. MATHAI
1936 - 2007

Annamma (Ammini), son and daughter-in-law, Mathew and Merry Thomas, and daughter Reena Thomas. Podikunju was born on April 2, 1936 in Edayaranmula, Kerala to Chacko (Modiyil House) and Annamma Mathai. Podikunju's home parish was the Laka Mar Thoma Church, Edayaranmula. He worked in Bhopal and Madras before emigrating to the U.S. in 1977. He raised his family with Christian values as a member of the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church in Yonkers, NY for over twenty years. Podikunju worked for the NYC-Metropolitan Transportation

Authority before he retired in 2001. He then moved with his wife and daughter to Fort Worth, TX where the family joined the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas at Grand Prairie. In 2003 he was diagnosed with Progressive Supranuclear Palsy. On March 5th of this year, he and Ammini had moved to Cypress, CA to live with his son and daughter-in-law, both members of the Los Angeles Mar Thoma Church. The burial took place on Saturday, March 31st at the Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Cypress, CA.

Podikunju was a devoted husband and a caring father who had a deep respect for education. His interests included reading books on history and tending to his vegetable garden. His family's well-being was always foremost on his mind. Those he left behind loved him immensely and will miss him deeply.

MR. JAMES CHERIAN was born on December 12, 1952 in Kidangannur, Kerala, India. He was born and brought up in a prayerful family in the tradition of the Mar Thoma Church. He was the youngest of five children born to the late Mathai Cherman and the late Aleyamma Cherman at Thekkumkara House, Kidangannur, Kerala, India.

James immigrated to the U.S. in 1980 to join his spouse to start their new life together. He started his career in the U.S. with John Hancock as an Insurance Agent. Thereafter, he joined Century 21 as a Real Estate Agent. In 1994, James joined Jamuna Travels in Upper Darby and served as its President.

James was an active and dedicated member of the Mar Thoma Church from his early childhood. While he was in India, he served as YMCA secretary, Sunday School teacher, Tutorial College teacher, Yuvajana Sakhyam secretary, and Kalalaya Arts and Sports Club secretary. In addition, he was also actively associated with various religious and political organizations in leadership capacities.



JAMES CHERIAN
1952 - 2007

After migrating to the U.S., he continued to be an active member of The Mar Thoma Church Philadelphia for twenty-seven years and served in various official positions such as a Lay Leader, Treasurer, Vice President, Diocesan Assembly Member, and Sunday School Teacher.

James was a prayerful man of God, an ideal husband to Laly (Rachel) and an awesome father of three children - Joel, Elsa, and Lisa. His spirit will reign in our hearts forever.

MRS. MARIYAMMA MATHAI, wife of late T. T. Mathai, Kaleeckal, Chunakara, Kerala, India was immigrated to the



MARIAMMA MATHAI
1933 - 2007

United States to reunite with her children and siblings. She was a member of the St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church, Yonkers, NY. She was a good mother, sister and friend to everyone. She was a true believer who found Jesus Christ as her Savior from her childhood onwards and lead a life of true faith and affection. God called her to His side on March 12, 2007, after a sudden heart collapse. She is survived by three sons Benny Mathew, Babu Mathew, Biju Mathew and daughter Betty Joseph, 3 daughters-in-law and 1 son-in-law and four grand-

children, three brothers and two sisters.

Her sons, Benny Mathew and Biju Mathew very effectively serve the Mar Thoma Messenger. The Mar Thoma Messenger family extends our sympathy and prayers to the bereaved family.

MRS. SOSAMMA GEORGE, was born on February 28, 1925, to the (Late) Mr. & Mrs. Mathunny and Annamma Geevarughese



SOSAMMA GEORGE
1925 - 2007

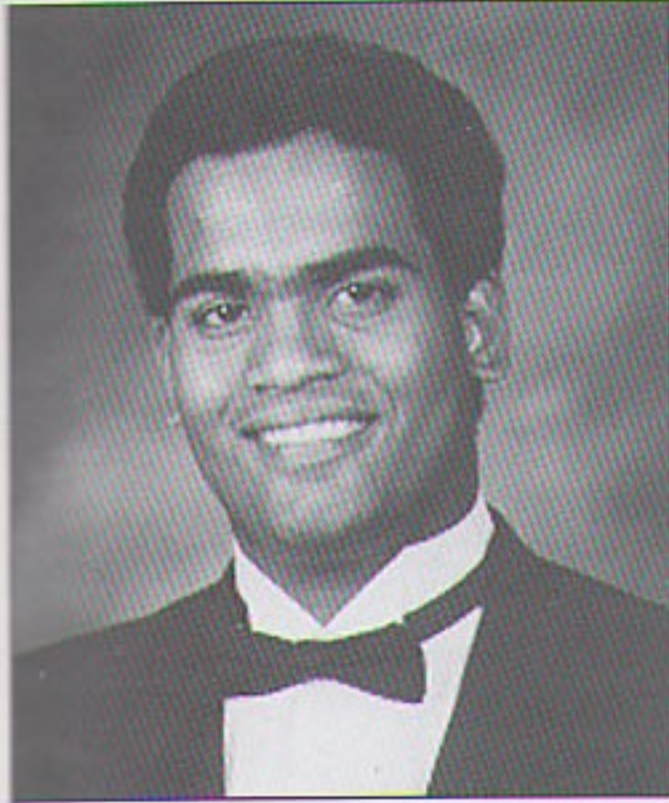
of Mazhavancheril House, Poovanmala, Ranny. She was married to the late Mr. Geevarughese George of Puliyilethu House, Mannamaruthy, Ranny in 1940. She came to the United States in 1980 and was an active member of St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church or Yonkers, NY. She was a devout Christian and was loved by all parish members and to all whose lives she touched.

Her endearing smile, loving personality and warm hugs and kisses will always be in our memories.

She is survived by daughters Marykutty Thomas, Annamma Thomas, Saramma John, Ammini Abraham, (Late) Valsa Raju, Susan Mukkadan and sons Sunny George and Sagil George and her 6 sons-in-law and 2 daughters-in-law and 15 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren.

ST. PAUL'S MAR THOMA CHURCH, DALLAS, TEXAS

ORDINATION TO THE HOLY DIACONATE OF BIJU PULIKOTTIL SIMON, HELD ON MARCH 03, 2007



It is a time of great blessing for St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Texas and the Diocese of North America and Europe. On Saturday, March 03, 2007, Mr. Biju Pulikottil Simon was ordained to the Holy Diaconate with the gracious consent of The Most Rt. Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan and through the laying on of hands by Rt. Rev.

Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa. The Holy ordination liturgy was celebrated in the midst of the Holy Qurbana held at Thrissur Ebenezer Mar Thoma Church, Kerala. Many priests, lay leaders, and hundreds of faithful followers attended the

ordination service. Deacon Biju P. Simon will be the 5th person to enter into the Holy Order of Priesthood from the Diocese of North America and Europe. The Deacon's ordination to the Holy Order of Priesthood (Kaseesa) will be in Dallas, Texas on May 5th, 2007 at 8:00 A.M. Your family's prayers and presence are kindly requested on this Holy and solemn celebration.

DEACON BIJU P SIMON GETTING ORDAINED AS THE KASSEESSA OF THE MAR THOMA CHURCH

Dn. Biju P Simon (S/O Mr. P. P. Simon and Ms. Alice Simon) of the St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church – Dallas, is approved to be ordained to the order of Priesthood (Kasseessa) of the Mar Thoma Church. The Holy Ordination Service is scheduled for Saturday May 05, 2007 at 8am at the Mar Thoma Church – Dallas, Farmers Branch.

Dn. Biju P Simon has graduated in Theology from the Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago and had undergone training at the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam, India.

P. P. Cherian

MATRIMONIAL

US settled parents invite proposals for their son, born & brought up and educated in India and UAE (B' Tech Computer Eng) now in United States working on H1B as a Software Engineer. He is 28 years old, 5'7" and handsome. We are seeking a God fearing girl with good moral and spiritual values as well as good family background. If interested, contact at weddingproposal2007@gmail.com

Marthomite parents invite marriage proposals for their daughter, 5'5", 27, born in USA and working as a Pharmacist. Looking for a professionally qualified boy in the medical field, engineer, or MBA from Marthomite, CSI or Orthodox family. Interested parties please respond with details and a recent photograph at: sunisuja@sbeglobal.net.

Marthomite parents invite marriage proposals for 23-year-old daughter brought up and educated in the United States. In third year of MD program. She is a committed Christian with strong moral, spiritual, and family values. Seeking a suitable match from boys with compatible qualities, interests, qualifications and background. Marthomite/CSI/Jacobite, age 24-28 and US citizen preferred. If interested please contact us with details and recent picture. Email: kerala310@yahoo.com

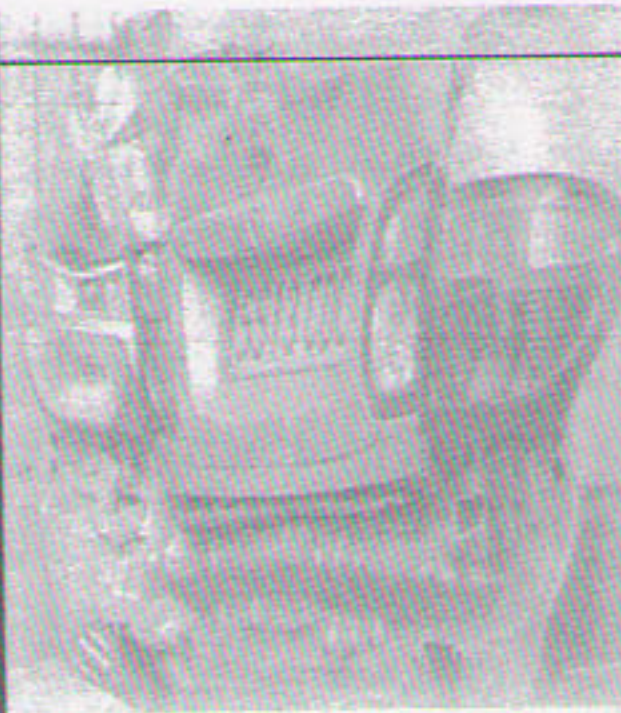
Brother, settled with family in Bahrain, invite matrimonial proposals for his 31 year old brother, 160 cms tall, Physiotherapist, employed in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Parents are settled in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu and are members of the Marthoma Church. We are looking for proposals from Marthomite/CSI/Jacobite girls, preferably healthcare background. Interested parents may respond with details to binuissac@yahoo.com.

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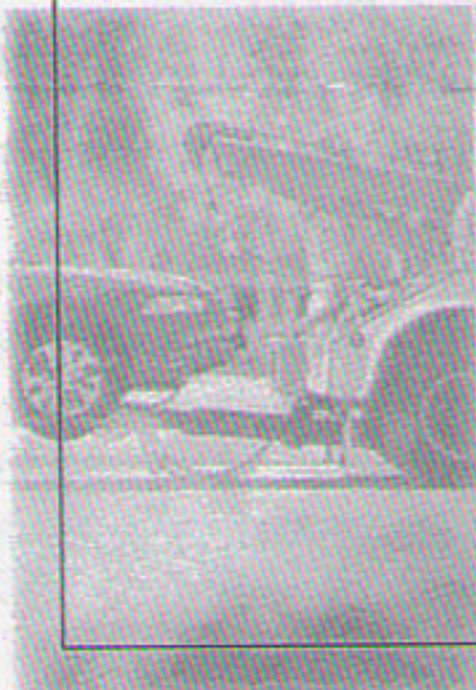
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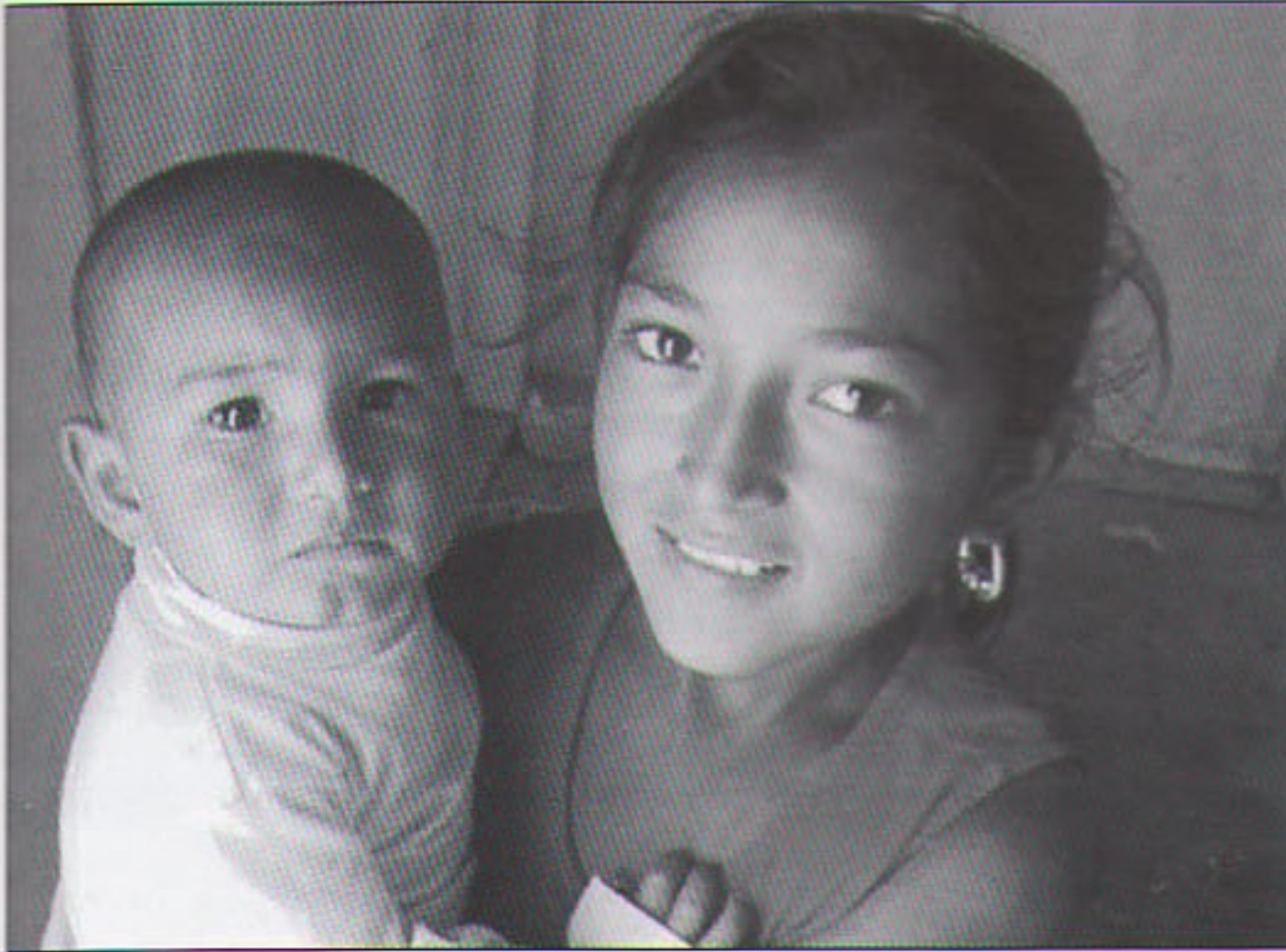
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The Mar Thoma Youth Fellowship conducted a "Census Gathering Trip" from Thursday, March 22 to Sunday, March 25, 2007. The purpose of this trip was to interview every family on the islands in the Mexico Mission field, Fantasia and Puntilla Norte Islands, and gather specific and detailed information about them and their needs. The information collected would then be used to make appropriate decisions when planning upcoming summer mission trips and also assist in the planning and development of the mission field (i.e. construction of homes and hostels). The Mexico Mission Planning Team of the Diocesan Youth Fellowship, which consists of youth volunteers from around the Diocese, created a questionnaire that would be used during this trip. The questionnaire included biographical information questions, medical history and needs, personal and spiritual needs, and housing and other assistance requests. On Thursday, March 22, 2007 after meeting at the parsonage of Rev. Skariah John

(Youth Chaplain, Southwest B Region), a team consisting of Rev. Skariah John, Kochumma, and children (Christy and Abel), Mrs. Valsa Abraham (Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston, TX), Mr. Ashley George (DYFC Secretary), Mr. Anoop George (DYFC Treasurer), Mr. Jorge Wilson (St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church, Dallas, TX) and Ms. Betty Vattakunnel (Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston, TX), set out to gather the information. After making the 6 hour drive from Houston to Matamoros, Mexico, the team arrived at our normal place of residence during the Mexico Mission trips, the Fontana Inn.

On Friday, March 23, 2007, along with Mr. George Kurien (Baby Uncle) and an employee from the Fontana Inn (Mercy) who served as our Spanish translator, we set out for Fantasia Island. After making a stop to the local grocery store to pickup food and other items needed to feed the islanders during our visit, we were on our way to island (which is approximately an hour drive and a short boat ride). After arriving on the island we started gathering the people together to explain what we would like to accomplish and after a word of prayer, we all started working to get the necessary things done for a full day of census gathering! On Saturday, March 24, 2007 we made the same arrangements for our trip to the Puntilla Norte Island.

This trip was a wonderful opportunity to interact with the local people and really find out their needs and how we, as the Mar Thoma Church, can assist in their spiritual and social development. We hope and pray that the information that we gathered during this trip will help the church make the right decisions in planning the next steps in the development of this mission project. We thank our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for giving us the opportunity to be part of the mission and pray that He continues to the lead and guide the Mar Thoma Church in making this mission a blessing for the people of this community!

I CAN SEE GOD, CAN YOU?

Devin Abraham, 9th Grade, St. Johns Mar Thoma Church NY

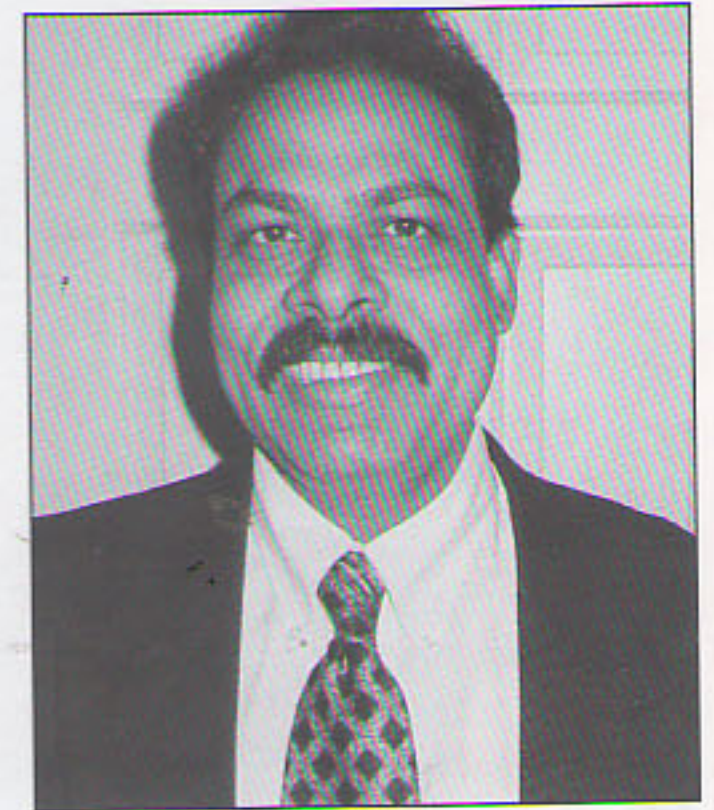
*There are those that would say,
Show me proof of this God you speak,
For I cannot see Him, and I say to you;*

*Can you see the air that fills your lungs?
Can you see the perfumed scent of flowers that pleasures you so?
Can you see the love you feel for another?*

*Can you see the wonderment within you, as you hold your newborn child?
And what of the joy that fills your heart or the sorrow you feel but cannot see?
Now do you say, they are not, for I cannot see them?*

*God is revealed unto us in all that is good.
He is love, compassion, forgiveness and understanding.
It is in these gifts from Him, that we were born unto His likeness.
It is by using those gifts that we shall be returned to Him.*

Our church retreats, regional conferences and conventions appear to attract lesser crowds compared to the past. While attending a recent zonal conference in the North-East, where the number of attendees was less than expected, one delegate asked me, "Are we placing God in secondary mode with first priorities given to self interests... many of us gave first priority to God when we were struggling to get established on this land. Now that we have all the comforts, are we forgetting God"? It is human nature to seek the Lord when we are in distress. When surroundings and life conditions are good, we rely on self judgments rather than the words of the Almighty. As we see around us, during most tragedies and catastrophes, people turn to God and gradually lose the vigor as things get better. This type of social behavior existed in the Old Testament times too. In many instances, the Lord himself has announced the consequences of undesired human behaviors. As we read in prophetic books, human acts that are not in line with the Lord's requirements deserve God's wrath. In Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, it is mentioned that the love for the Lord has grown cold and the Jewish people became careless in honoring the God. So God is warning the people; "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:5-6).



Our interests in building mansions and acquiring costly items has spiked while our quest for spirituality and acts of mercy have diminished. This is true of individuals, communities and even churches. Are we building towers in our lives for self glorification? " According to Genesis 11:1-7, the main aim of the people who built the Tower of Babel was to build their own proud city and a tower that reaches into heaven. "And they said, come let us build ourselves a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name." They were motivated by self pride and the result was utter confusion (that is Babylon -Babel in Hebrew means-confusion). God diffused their language, so that one will not understand the other. Can that happen again?

We live in a world of confusion and conformities. Youngsters try to find their identity through many self trials. Numerous external factors such as family support, parental discipline and monitoring, financial circumstances, congenial school environments, music, surrounding community etc. play major roles in the character formation of a child. Recent incident at the Virginia Tech University has shaken many minds across the nation and abroad. "One student set out from the dorm on his way to kill 32 students and teachers and then himself in the bloodiest mass murder by a lone gunman in American history.....A somber group of Virginia Tech students stood silently as bells across the campus tolled 32 times and a bouquet of 32 orange and maroon balloons was set free, disappearing into the clouds" (Washington Post, Monday April 23rd, 2007). This was a tragedy caused by a mind that got tangled with unseen pressures, a soul that was silently seeking answers. Statistics shows that the number of such loners is increasing. Who is to comfort and mend those souls—parents, school staff, church, or social structures? Isolation is not good for any soul. Human mind is like a plant whose growth depends on proper lighting, water, plant food, condition of soil, and support structures. It is the responsibility of the gardener to assure appropriate conditions and keep the environment devoid of weeds. Are we taking care of our younger generations as expected by the Lord? Are the children developing and acquiring characters that are expected of a true Christian?

I want to thank the Diocesan Youth Fellowship office bearers, Diocesan Sunday school officials and the parish level YF and SS members for their valuable contributions to this special issue of Messenger. I am excited about the Navathy project initiated by the Mar Thoma Church in commemoration of the 90th birthday of our Metropolitan Most Rev. Dr. Philoipose Mar Chrysostom. Through this project Mar Thoma church will build and donate 1500 homes for the homeless, mainly in Kerala, regardless of religion or caste. Hope and pray that many individuals from our Diocese will support this project and contribute to this great event.

Eapen Daniel

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Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos	Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos
Rt. Rev. Thomas Mar Timotheos	Rt. Rev. Dr. Abraham Mar Paulos
Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham	Rev. Canon Andrew Knowels
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