



MAR THOMA
MESSENGER

A PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

APRIL 2009

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Message from the Metropolitan



Dearly beloved in the Lord,

Let us all praise God for His grace that we experienced in the Maramon convention. Following the call for prayer, 'Lord, by Thy grace transform the world,' by WCC, the Maramon convention's main topic of thought was 'Renewal of the household of God.' Bishop Dantalle's inaugural address was very noteworthy. We too have to experience the glory of our Lord's Cross as Simon of Cyrene. In the midst of crises the solace the Cross offers is unfathomable. Simon did not choose the Cross. The Cross chose Simon. But through apportioning Simon was finding out the glory and truth of the cross that was entrusted to him. The cross gave blessedness to the transformation. The callings that followed it reflect God's instruction to go out into the world, thereby entrusting the mission to His servants. Our Lord who says, 'Go forth,' walks with us to strengthen us to overcome the crises. Let us pray that this calling becomes the cause for the renewal of God's household through the meditations of this year's convention.

We peacefully passed couple of months of the year. During these times we have witnessed various Churches sharing the Word of God with sincere hearts. We have now entered into the Lenten season. Lent is a period for active responses. In the first phase of Lenten days we meditate the new responses we got from different situations. A Jewish leper sees Jesus as the remedy for all his needs. The gentile centurion finds the Lord as the remedy for the needs of his family. Four young men, seeing Jesus as the remedy for their helpless friend, came near the Lord after overcoming the obstacles with faith. Observing their faith, the Lord responded actively. Thus we need to show in the Lenten season, active responses. Let us prayerfully enter into active responses for the calls of life at various phases, giving importance to true faith.

When we enter into the financial year, what I want to remind first of all is about the Housing Project we started this year for the needy members of the Mar Thoma Church. Those who are interested must submit their applications within the stipulated time limit.

Many teachers who were working in our educational institutions are retiring from active service on the 31st of March. Two Vicar Generals and nine clergymen retired from active service. We value and appreciate their longtime services and dedication. At the same time we pray for the abundant presence of God's grace in their retired life.

India is preparing to face a general election. When political polarizations occur, thrust must not be given for the idea of who will defeat whom. Importance should be given to the idea of how they can form a government that stands for the prosperity of the nation and its people. Let us pray for change that may strengthen the prevailing of goodness.

We pay our respect and homage to the brave soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the defense of the nation's safety. We pray for the bereaved families of those heroes.

During the 18th century, the forefathers of the Mar Thoma Church were called out and separated from society. They became the models of meaningful Christian life. Those who were called out entered into the society and fulfilled their responsibilities. They, like Abraham, moved to the area where God entrusted them to go. This journey had the luminance of God's grace. God is with us today too. Nothing is impossible for God. He is with us till the end of the world. God has spoken once, that power belongs to Him. We heard again. Along with David, let us say, "Trust in Him at all times, you people, pour out your hearts in Him. God is our refuge" (Psalms 62:8).

Grace be with you all.

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan

Translated and Reprinted from Sabha Tharaka

Message from the Diocesan Bishop



"May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." – John 17:23

Dear friends in Christ,

Greetings to all in the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

By the time this issue of the Mar Thoma Messenger reaches your hand, Holy week and Easter celebrations will be over. The fifty days of Lent gave us enough opportunity to examine our lives, confess our sins and to have mastery over all the worldly and earthly things. I believe it also gave us time to study the Bible, renew our mind to live a life that is good and acceptable in the sight of God.

The Holy Week helped us to meditate on Jesus' entry to Jerusalem and all that happened following this event. We see Jesus not only as the King of kings but also as One cleansing the temple and driving away all who were interested in trading and making wealth. The Maundy Thursday reminded us of the Last Supper, how Jesus transformed the Passover festival, internalized it, and indicated His death on the cross. His exhortation "Do this in remembrance of me," is carried out everytime the church celebrates the Holy Qurbana. The meaning and relevance of this sacrament can be understood only in the context of what we usually meditate on Good Friday: the cross of Christ. It is when the great love of God revealed on the cross of Christ meets the living sacrifices of the members of the Church, Holy Communion becomes a reality. Easter is not only the celebration of the resurrection of Christ but also the jubilation of the body of Christ in experiencing the power of Christ's resurrection. On one hand we see the mercies of God and on the other, it leads us to present ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

What is Church? **It is the redeemed community of the people of God**, redeemed by the blood of Jesus. God in Jesus Christ paid the price for our redemption and now we belong to Him. This is experienced by our faith-response, total commitment and willingness to obey God and abide in His Kingdom instead of falling into sin, obeying the Evil one and engaging oneself in the pleasures of this world. Hence the Church is the Holy Church, sanctified by the blood of Jesus.

Church is a gathered community. The early disciples were scattered when Jesus was crucified. They were afraid of the Jews. Apostle Thomas doubted and wandered wanting to see the resurrected Jesus. Peter and his group decided to go back to fishing in the Sea of Galilee. Jesus brought them all together. They were men of different talents, temperments and tastes. Yet they all came together. Even when the persecutions took place, though the early Christians were scattered, they maintained the unity in spirit and resolved their differences. Today, the Church is one, not in the sense of uniformity but in celebrating the unity while recognizing the plurality. St. Paul in his epistle (1 Cor. 12) says that we are the body (of Christ) with many parts. And he reminds us how important it is to stick on to the body and maintain the spirit of mutuality and uphold one-ness. Community formation and community living are very much part of the ministry of the Church.

Church is Apostolic. Church history tells us how many of the Church denominations are keen to maintain the apostolic succession. We are also proud of the Apostle Thomas who preached to us the Good News in 52 AD. The Church becomes apostolic in recognizing that the gathered community is sent out with a mission to preach the Gospel and also to carry out the servant ministry. The symbol of the basin and towel taken out of John 13 where Jesus washed the feet of the disciples and asked them to continue doing it marks the servant ministry and therefore the apostolic nature of the Church. "Whatever you have done to the least of these my brethren, you have done unto me," said our Lord Jesus as we read in Matthew 25. **Our Church is a missionary church.** Our diocese has mission work at Mexico, among the Native Americans and in the neighborhood of our parishes. Our special concern for the last, the least

and the lost are important in all these spheres of mission. And this is not the vocation of a few, but the ministry of all the members of the Church.

The Nicene Creed reminds us of our belief in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The word "catholic" indicates universal. Our Church exercises this belief by participating in the ecumenical bodies. In today's globalized world, this has greater significance. The Church is to be global and at the same time local. The universal nature has to be manifested in all our local parishes. The wider ecumenism speaks about seeing the whole inhabited world with all its organic and inorganic things as the arena of Church's ministry. The spirit is not to bring the Christian denominations to look at each other, but to help them to look together at the points of common interest and concern. This is to be reflected in the nature of the local parishes. The high-priestly prayer of Jesus teaches us that we shall be one as the God-head is One. (John 17)

Are we open to the working of the Holy Spirit? The Acts of the Apostles clearly guide the Church to wait upon in the spirit of unity (one-ness of mind and with one accord) so that the Holy Spirit will empower us (Day of Pentecost – Acts 2) for the mission and ministry to which we are called. We are tempted to be complacent when we have a place of worship of our own and/or we have a priest to minister. The Church is the sign and sacrament of the Kingdom of God. The whole world is the arena of God's ministry. As members of the Church, we are called to participate in this ministry of God. Therefore, "Being the Church" is a growing process in the life of the local parish, diocese and the whole church where you experience the gift and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I am trying to visit all the parishes and congregations (85 in all) of this diocese. It is not easy to complete it within the year 2009. I will cover 21 parishes by the end of April. Though I am trying to coordinate activities of the diocese in these days, it can be done effectively only by the end of 2009. The ministry is to be done by the total church and by the total members.

We are grateful to the 18 Achens who are going on transfer by the end of April. Particularly we are grateful to Rev. Biju S. Cherian who served this diocese, first as Youth Chaplain for three years and now as the Diocesan Secretary. We are expecting new Achens to join us on the first week of May. Much prayer is needed as their visa is processed. Let us hope in the Lord that the transfer takes place in God's time smoothly.

The Diocesan Assembly is meeting on the third week of April, along with the Diocesan Clergy Conference. The Family Conference and the conferences of the various organizations will take place in the summer. The convention meetings will also be organized at different places. The dates and their details will be published through the Diocesan website. Let us prayerfully prepare to participate in these events, meant for our spiritual nourishment.

America is passing through an economic recession. This is a global problem and has mounted up through the years and has now become a very complex situation. People are losing jobs. There are families where both, the husband and wife, have lost their sources of income. This is very painful. I expect that the local parish fellowship will rise to the occasion to extend help, wherever necessary. In general, let us hold on to the faith with hope. Let us feel assured that God is in control. He guides history. There is a silver lining in every cloud. Morning follows every evening. The resurrected Lord gives us the power of resurrection to move on. He is faithful in His promise: "Lo! I am with you Always... to the very end of the age" (Mt. 28.20)

May God Bless You!

Yours in His Service,

s/d

Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius
Diocesan Bishop

Making A Difference in God's Way

Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham, MT Seminary, Kottayam

Genesis 12:1-4 is very often understood in the light of the 'doctrine of Election' which is always associated with nationalistic pride, privileges, authority, ethnic and patriarchal hegemony. The development of the theme is found in Deut. 7:6-11, Gen. 17:5-6, says "I will make nations of thee". Abraham was not called the father of an ethnic group or nation or religion. The culmination of the theme is found in the 'Suffering Servant song' in Isaiah. Through Abraham, the community of Israel was chosen as God's alternative community and suffering servant in history.

The basic nature of God as revealed in the call Abraham is as world-oriented God who wants human beings as his partners on earth. Here the call is to be with God and God's purposes in the world. It should be noticed here that God's agenda is the world and not merely the community of Israel or the church. In the call of Abraham, we also find a radical departure from polytheism to monotheism.

Dimensions of the Call

A call to be the harbinger of God's wider family: What does it mean when God says "Leave your native land, your kindred and your father's house; and go to a country that I am going to show you". (Gen. 12:1) God wants Abraham to begin a journey of faith. This also means the basic preparedness to have a new set of values, life style, culture and so on. What is of great importance is to transcend one's narrow family framework, mindset, and values in order to be within the wider family of God. This is for new priorities in life. The call is not necessarily from one place to another but from one state of life to another; from what we are to what we ought to be. God wants all of us to be with him on earth.

A call to march towards an unknown future: The call is not to make one's life safe and secure but to make it authentic and worth living. This is basically a vocation which has to do with the sacredness of life; a vision-oriented life, a purpose-driven life. Here faith becomes a journey into the uncertainties of life with God. According to C. S. Lewis, "Faith is the power to see the vision of tomorrow in the darkness of today... Faith is the living power that enables us to maintain our sanity in this maddening world of threats, torture and solitary confinement. Faith is the energy that makes it possible for us to maintain the balance of the spirit in this age of change and insecurity. Faith is the grace given to you by God, enabling you to reach out for life when confronted with death" (Theology from the womb of Asia).



A call to form an alternative community: Abraham is considered as the father of the faithful in three major religious traditions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These communities are also known as 'Abrahamic communities'. The task given to Abraham is to initiate a peoples' movement with God in Jer. 29:4-7 the challenge is to be such a Diaspora community. "Seek the peace of the city. If the city has peace, you also will have peace". The challenge here is to become real historical human beings and to stand for God's 'shalom' which means peace with justice.

The faith response of Abraham

At the core of the faith response of Abraham is obedience and faith in the faithfulness of God.

A new Tradition of faith: Pelican, an Eastern thinker makes a distinction between 'Tradition' and 'Traditionalism'. As he puts it, "Tradition means, the living faith of the dead and traditionalism means the dead faith of the living". Jesus underscores this 'Tradition of faith' when he declares Zachaeus as the 'Son of Abraham'. (Luke 19:1-10) and the crippled woman as the 'daughter of Abraham'. (Luke 13:10-17) We have two insights here: (i) Zachaeus embraces a new set of values and a new scale of loyalties. He had a radical conversion in life: a conversion from sin to God, from pride to humility, from accumulation to sharing and from injustice to justice; and (ii) Liberation of women: By underscoring the liberation of the woman, Jesus points out that patriarchy is alien to Abrahamic tradition.

Abrahamic pattern of faith

Faith is that which enables us to be in tune with God's purposes for this world. Here faith and faithfulness are heavily interwoven. Abraham sets a new pattern of faith as 'ultimate obedience'. The climax of this is found in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 2:1-8) Bonhoeffer calls it as 'costly obedience' According to Alan Bosak of the South African Black church, "Obedience to the will of God could be the denial of the will of man" (Walking on Thorns). This obedience is possible only when we have the basic convictions in life and also when we have the preparedness to pay the price for our convictions. Obedience to God doesn't mean that our free will is given up. God would never impose His will on us. Rather, he sets two ways before us: the way of life and the way of death. It is for us to choose the way of life (Deut. 30:19) so that our lives would be for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God at all levels.

(Continued on page 10)

The Church—A Called Out Community

Rev. Dr. Martin Alphonse

Introduction

Albert Einstein was once traveling by train, and the conductor came in to check the tickets of the passengers. The conductor was glad to recognize the great scientist on board, welcomed him warmly and asked to see his ticket. Einstein reached out to his coat pocket, but the ticket was not there. He searched all the other side-pockets, his brief case, and all the possible places where he could have stored the ticket. But it was found nowhere. The conductor waited patiently for a few minutes, and then seeing Einstein was getting terribly embarrassed by the incident, gently told him: "Sir, don't worry about it. We all know who you are." Saying so, he proceeded on to check the tickets of the other passengers on board. About ten minutes later, as the conductor walked by Einstein, he saw something that moved his heart. Einstein, that great scientist of the 20th century was on his knees on the floor, and gymnastically manipulating his fragile body, he was still searching for the lost ticket under the seats around him. Concerned by the strain Einstein might be going through, the conductor reiterated, even more emphatically this time saying: "Sir, please don't worry about the lost ticket. We all know who you are." At that point, Einstein lifted his head and responded: "I know who I am. But I don't know where I am going."

A sudden panic attack triggered by a misplaced train ticket momentarily paralyzed the memory power of a great scientist. He knew who he was. It was just that for a moment he forgot where he was going. He knew his personal identity, but just forgot his destiny. There are millions of so-called Christians around the world, who neither seems to know the nature of identity, nor do they understand their destiny. In this article I would like to briefly explore the nature of the identity of the church as a "Called out Community". There are several passages of the Holy Scripture which discuss this vital topic of the nature or characteristics of the church as *Ecclesia*, a called out community. One of them is 1 Peter in which the Apostle articulates various characteristics and functions of our call as a community.

A Study of 1 Peter

There are four key and direct references in 1 Peter to the church's nature and function as a called out community. I believe the pivotal verse is 1 Peter 2:9 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness in to his wonderful light." There are three parts to this one verse which point out to: a) the nature of our identity; b) the nature of our call; and c) the functions of our call.



The Nature of Our Identity

The first part says, "you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..!" We have a fourfold identity namely:

i) **We are a "chosen" people.** This means that our membership in the church is neither casual, nor accidental. We have been "called out" by God's deliberate will from the world to be members of His body. When did God chose us? Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 1:4 that God "chose us in him (Christ) before the creation of the world." Chosen before even the creation of the world! That means we were in the mind of God for thousands of years prior to our actual admission into the membership of the church. That is a marvelous fact!

ii) **We are a royal "priesthood".** The most important function of the priest in the biblical times was to be an intercessor in the holy presence of God on behalf of the people. Today it means God has called us to intercede on behalf of both fellow Christians and the billions of non-Christians. This is a serious responsibility!

iii) **We are a holy "nation".** This means we are a nation within a nation, not as a geo-political entity but as a moral and spiritual constituency within the Kingdom of God on earth. The adjective "holy" denotes uniqueness, namely we are a distinct, exclusive community separated from the rest of the communities of the world. This is an incredible honor!

iv) **We are a people "belonging" to God.** The word belonging suggest ownership. Of course, God is the rightful owner of all that He has created. While all the rest of the people of the world irrespective of their race, culture, ethnicity and nationality belong to God by "creation", the church belongs to God both by "creation" and "redemption". A beautiful Eucharistic (Holy Communion) Song of the Roman Catholic Church puts the dual ownership of God on the church as follows:

*"O God whose love eternal, in wondrous ways is shown,
Creation and redemption, have made us twice Thine own.
And now to us Thou comest, in form of bread and wine,
To make us one with Thee, as branches of one vine."*

This is a breathtaking phenomenon!

The Nature of Our Call

The second part says God has "called you out of darkness in to his wonderful light." What kind of darkness is this out of which we as a church has been called out into God's marvelous light? I live in Portland, Oregon where it rains quite a lot throughout the year. We don't get to see the sunlight for a long while during fall and winter.

Consequently, we long for sunny and bright days. We cannot wait until spring when the sun brightens the sky and we feel as if we have entered into a new world altogether. In fact, as I type this article, we have a bright sunny day today, and a lot of people are outdoors enjoying this brilliant and long awaited gift of God! But, for a well informed Christian, for a true disciple of Jesus Christ, everyday is a sunny day. Of course, we don't say it in a physical sense, but from a spiritual perspective.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4 we read: *"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."* Today's world is full of brilliant people. We live at a time of "knowledge explosion" as powerfully evidenced by the booming industry of information technology which has revolutionized every aspect of human life both individually and corporately; both locally and globally. Although the people of the whole world today are ubiquitously surrounded by and deeply immersed in an environment of scientific brilliance, the Bible says that the minds of billions of people around the globe are still completely blacked out or blinded or darkened by the god of this age! Their darkened minds cannot see the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But, we by God's great mercy have been called out of this dangerous spiritual darkness of the world, not only to see or "discern" the gospel, but also to "declare" it to others.

Now the third part of the verse points to the purpose why God has called us out. It says: *"that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness in to his wonderful light."* Our call is both a relational and a functional call. Including in this verse, Apostle Peter in his epistle emphatically reminds the members of the church the several functions God has called them to perform.

The Four Functions of Our Call

1. Called for Perfection

1 Peter 1:15-16 *"But just as he who called us is holy, so be holy in all you do. For it is written, 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"* Holiness has been an unpopular word among millions of Christians in the modern world. Tragically it has become even more unpopular in the post-Christian ethos in which we live today. It has become a subject of ridicule in the media, and unacceptable in many political circles. People blatantly deny the moral standards God has set for humanity in His Word, and want to redefine the concept of holiness according to their own taste and comfort zones in which they live. Speaking of moral and spiritual values, being "politically correct" is more important for most people to day than to becoming theologically sound. It is from this anti-theistic, absolutely secular, and raising-your fist-against-God culture, that God has "called us out" to be holy.

The call to holiness came to the people of Israel in the Old testament itself. In fact Peter seems to reiterate that same call God have His people repeatedly in Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2 and 20:7. In His Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus also commanded His disciples in Matthew 5:48 *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect."* The

question and challenges are, is it truly possible for anyone to be absolutely holy as God Himself is? Of course, considered from a solely human perspective, it may seem impossible for anyone to become as holy as our heavenly father is. But we must ask ourselves, "Will God ever command us to do something which He knows is absolutely impossible to do?" Of course not. Then think about it! Yes, by our own strength, this is an impossible journey to undertake and an unrealistic destiny to reach. But by the aid of Holy Spirit, nothing becomes impossible. Holiness and perfection are not a matter of human efforts. They are gifts of God bestowed upon all willing hearts. Are you willing to receive this gift from God?

2. Called for Proclamation

Again getting back to 1 Peter 2:9 we read: *"that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness in to his wonderful light."* Jesus told his disciples in Acts 1:8 "you will be my witnesses." It is the same concept and call peter repeats here. To be a witness of Jesus includes our acts of declaring or proclaiming the gospel of Christ that has called us out of moral darkness to His marvelous light. In a broad, but true sense, this means the act of evangelism. Proclamation of the gospel does not mean only the formal and professional way in which evangelists present it in a mass crusade. Proclamation also includes sharing the gospel with one another in a friendly relational manner. Dr. D. T. Niles, a prominent leader of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka defined it: "Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where bread can be found." Dr. E. Stanley Jones used to say that in his evangelism he would not simply "speak to Hindus and Muslims, but just tell them how Christ meets their needs. He has met my needs; He will meet their needs too." We are called to proclaim to others how He called us out of our own regions of darkness, whatever that might have been, into His marvelous light. This is also called giving your own testimony to others! Are you a testifying Christian?

3. Called for Persecution

In 1 Peter 2:18-21 Peter discusses how we have been "called out for persecution". Called out for persecution? That is a scary thought. Isn't it? Of course, persecution takes place in various forms and with varied degrees of intensity. The early church was persecuted in alarming proportions, and millions of Christians including women and youth courageously laid down their life for the sake of the gospel. They lived by the maxim, "A cause that is not worth not dying for is not worth living for." The phenomenon of Christian persecution in many parts of the world has perpetuated its gruesome acts through many generations spilling over even into the 21st century. Even now we keep hearing atrocities committed against Christians in several parts of the world including in some northern states of India.

But not all Christians undergo persecution in the same form or intensity. Peter here talks about a form of social persecution, namely suffering for doing good in our work place. It is not a persecution which results in martyrdom.

He talks about Christian slaves being ill-treated by their masters and are made to suffer pain for some wrong they never committed. He sums it up in verses 20-21 by saying: "... if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. **To this you were called**, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps." Note the emphases on several aspects of our call to persecution: a) We are called to suffer for doing good; b) We are called to endure it; c) Such suffering is commendable before God; d) Christ suffered unjustly and left an example for us; e) We are called to follow His foot steps. This may be happening right now to some of you in your work place, in your relationships, and unfortunately even in your family. Remember Jesus Christ. Seek his help. He will sustain you, surround you with his power and love, and deliver you.

4. Called for Pardoning

I Peter 3:8-12 discuss our call to forgive one another. v9: "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this **you were called** so that you may inherit a blessing." God commands us to forgive one another. Jesus made it a key requirement of our discipleship in the prayer he taught us in Matthew 6:9-13. V13 "Forgive our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." Have you noticed what Jesus reinforced in v14-15? After teaching the short prayer he repeated one more time just that one aspect of the prayer in v14-15 saying: "For, if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men for their sins, your father will not forgive your sins." Why did Jesus repeat it? Because, I believe, this is real serious! For, our forgiveness by God is reciprocal. God forgives us "as" we forgive others. That means:

If we forgive others more, He will forgive us more.
If we forgive others less, He will forgive us less.
If we forgive others of everything, He will forgive us of everything.
If we forgive others of nothing, He will forgive us of nothing.

Voluntary forgiveness is central to Christian spirituality. Often people say "I am willing to forgive if the person who offended me first apologizes to me." But that is not what Jesus taught us. Dying on the cross, He voluntarily forgave all of His offenders, when He prayed "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." There is no evidence whatsoever, that any one of His offenders ever apologized to Him. Yet He forgave them all. We have been called out to be His disciples. As was the Master, so must His disciple be! As did the Master, so must the disciple do. Otherwise, we cannot be His disciples. ■

Editor's Note: Rev. Dr. Martin Alphonse is a native of India, an ordained minister of the United Methodist Church. He has served the Lord, by beginning his ministry in India, including as a missionary to Singapore, and as a pastor in several churches in USA. He currently teaches mission and evangelism at Multnomah Bible College at Portland, Oregon, USA. Of special interest to the members of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, since 1978 Dr. Alphonse has been a frequent speaker in several of Mar Thoma Church conventions, family conferences, youth conferences both in India and North America including his preaching every alternate year at the Maramon Convention; Kerala since 1998. He is one of the speakers of the Maramon Convention in February 2010. He can be reached at (503) 653-8838 (H), (503) 255-0332 (Cell) or at e-mail: malphonse@yahoo.com.



MAR THOMA MESSENGER UPCOMING ISSUES

July 2009: "From the Cross, Through the Church, to the World"
(2009 Family Conference theme [Articles, News etc. due by June 15, 2009])

October 2009: "Church's Outreach Ministry, Global Vision"
[Articles, News etc. due by September 15, 2009]

Messenger Month 2009

May 2009 will be celebrated as "**Messenger Month**" to promote messenger in all the parishes and congregations of this diocese. We request the wholehearted support of our Achens, Diocesan Council & Assembly Members, Parish & Area Promoters, and Parish Office bearers.

Messenger Recognition Award

Messenger is planning to recognize the Promoter and Parish who achieves the highest percentage of subscription on an yearly basis. Parishes with less than 50 families are exempt from this award. The selected Promoter and Parish will be recognized at the Family Conference in July.

Bible Study

Rev. Jaisen A. Thomas, Dallas Area Youth Chaplain

Introduction

Mike and Tim had been the best of friends since kindergarten and they were both excited about going to high school in the fall. They kept hearing stories of how everything was so different in high school and were thrilled that they would no longer have to be identified according to their grade but, will receive the title of "freshman". During the first week of school, they quickly came to realize that life in high school many times seemed more like a culture or an independent society than anything else. The various cliques, social taboos and norms were obvious and encouraged. Although, Mike and Tim were not initially very enthusiastic about the whole "high school scene", they slowly started making other friends. It was soon after, that their friendship started to change. Gradually, as Mike had been welcomed into one of the more "popular" cliques he started to dress, act and even talk differently distancing himself from Tim. Tim, devastated, realized that the only way to maintain his friendship with Mike was to change and become more like the friend Mike would want. Soon, he found himself doing things that he had never thought he would.

Peer pressure is one of the greatest struggles we face in our lives. It really doesn't matter how faithful or devout we may be, there are always going to be people who try to negatively pressure or influence us in different ways. So, does that mean we have to give in? Of course not! Overcoming peer pressure may be difficult and painful (it may mean losing a "friend" or popularity) but, remember, it's one of the building blocks toward personal integrity and Christian witness. Now, think about the last time you experienced negative peer pressure. How did you react? Could you have handled it differently? How does the Bible teach us to react in such a situation?

Read DANIEL 1

Key Verse: v.17, "To these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom..."

Peer Pressure, an experience allowed by God (1-2)

Often times when faced with pressures and temptations it is easy to feel that perhaps God is absent in our experiences. In Daniel 1:2, we read that "The Lord let King Jehoiakim of Judah fall into his [King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon] power..." Clearly, this passage suggests that the suffering,



slavery and exile the Israelites experienced was of the will, knowledge and even plan of God.

Additionally, it is important to note the use of the title "Lord" for God which is more general as compared to the term, "Yahweh", which would be more specific to the nation and people of Israel. According to the context of the passage, it was typical for nations to have their own "national" god(s). In fact, victory in war would reassert the supremacy of the god of the victor over the god of the defeated (expressed in the removal of the

Temple vessels which were placed in the treasury of the Babylonian gods, verse 2). Yet, in this first chapter of Daniel the title "Lord" is ethnically nonspecific emphasizing the limitless breadth of God's power even through other nations and kings. That is, this passage reaffirms the omnipotent (all powerful) presence and work of God that is not confined by any social or political border. Thus, it is the revelation that in all trials and difficult experiences God is simply not a passive observer but, an active presence in and through others in different situations and settings.

As such, peer pressure may be understood as the next step towards better understanding the purposes of God.

Peer Pressure, as imposing of an alternative identity (3-7)

Identity is the most sacred and essential element of any person or community. According to the Bible, we understand that our identity is grounded in the image of God and in the call to follow Jesus Christ as children of God. However, peer pressure is often manipulative in that it seeks to impose an alternative and new identity on the individual.

In verses 3-7, we read of the ingenious method by which King Nebuchadnezzar exercises his control over the Israelite nobles. He does not torture, harm or even threaten them. Yet, he selects young men of royalty and nobility who are handsome and mentally acute and begins to teach and train them in the language, literature and culture of the Babylonians. Furthermore, King Nebuchadnezzar assigns them new Babylonian names by which they are from now on to be identified. This method of subtle cultural assimilation is one of the most effective means of establishing control over an individual or community.

Gradually, the specific intentions of this approach were to:

1. *Prompt a cultural disintegration (breakdown) in the Israelite community.* As a result, they would lose their sense of ethnic nationalism, as well as, their sense of independent identity and national integrity.

2. *Discourage the people of Israel from rebellion.* That is, with the royalty gone (or the absence of leadership) the people would feel demoralized and lose hope in a unified and independent nation.
3. *"Babylonize" their leadership.* The three year process of "re-education" (vs.5) was essentially an intense immersion into the Babylonian world. As such, the Israelites were trained to emerge from this process with a new and alternative perspective and value system founded on Babylonian religious and cultural systems.
4. *Impose a new spiritual identity and purpose (6-7).* The Hebrew names all had specific religious and faith meaning:
 - **Daniel:** "God is my judge"
 - **Mishael:** "Who is what God is"
 - **Hananiah:** "Yahweh has been gracious"
 - **Azariah:** "Yahweh has helped"

Therefore, giving them new names especially with reference to the Babylonian gods as in the case of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego the king demanded that they deny their faith and loyalty to God. In so doing, they were to assume a new identity and destiny.

As such, in a most efficient manner King Nebuchadnezzar had intended to further his political and personal aims by shaping the physical, mental and spiritual character of the young and impressionable Israelite elite. Likewise, peer pressure is often not a forceful attack; rather, it is a clever and effective means of control by undermining our physical, mental and spiritual character.

Peer Pressure, Opportunity for witness (8-21)

Although, most of us don't welcome peer pressure it may provide us an opportunity to experience the grace and power of God. However, that essentially depends on how we react to peer pressure in our lives.

In verse 6, we read "among them" indicating that Daniel and his three friends were just a few among the other Israelites who had been brought before the palace

master. However, in verse 8-10, we understand that Daniel's decision to avoid the royal rations of food and wine was firm and unwavering amidst the many Israelites who had succumbed to the King's dietary demands. Quite simply, the avoidance of certain foods and activities generally expresses or symbolizes holiness. In Daniel's case, we may additionally understand it to be a more subtle approach of resistance to the whole process of assimilation demanded by King Nebuchadnezzar. Regardless, it conveys the clear message that Daniel and his three friends chose to be different (even under a foreign control at the risk of death) and depended on God for their health and security.

In verse 12, Daniel pleads with the palace master to test them for ten days upon which their appearance may be evaluated. To his obvious surprise, he notes that they "appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations". In such an unlikely predicament of foreign control and exile, Daniel and his three friends become witnesses to God by their actions and determination. Initially, perhaps only a few (the palace master, guard and maybe a couple of others) knew of their decision, yet, as they progress in their faith and commitment, God uses them more powerfully. In verse 17, we read that "to these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom". In verse 20, King Nebuchadnezzar testifies that "he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom". Clearly, when these young men chose God above fear, temptation, peer pressure and the authority of the King they chose victory and became the instruments of God's work within the palace and in the land of Babylon.

The foods we eat and the substances we drink, the clothes we wear and words we speak generally express our self-identity and commitments. Therefore, peer pressure can provide us the greatest opportunity to witness the presence and work of God in our lives. We may only overcome when we understand that God is above all. And so, if we chose to remain committed in our faith and spiritual identity, no matter the predicament, he will strengthen us beyond measure. ■

Making A Difference in God's Way *(Cont'd from pg. 5)*

Abrahamic journey of faith was not a smooth one. Abraham had ups and downs; achievements and failures. This clearly shows that even at the heights of ones spirituality, there is the propensity to sin and one can succumb to temptations. The biblical tradition doesn't absolutize Abraham. Gen. 12:10-20 and 20:17 narrate the degeneration of Abraham. This is not to give Biblical basis to our predicaments on earth. But rather it points out the

fact that the Bible talks about the actual, historical human being and not an ideal, ahistorical one. It means that God doesn't make us sinless. He gives us victory over the powers of sin; restores us and goes along with us as our guide, motivator and supreme mentor. The unpredictability of Abraham's call and the inevitability of the response should always be echoed in our journey of faith in contemporary times. ■



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A Theological Critique of and Pastoral Implications for New Wave Spirituality

Rev. Thomas John, Washington D. C.

It is indeed difficult to give a proper definition for **charismatic renewal**. It has to be experienced according to the person's needs and context. But it is and should be for the benefit of others. It is something great worked by the Spirit expressed in different ways. It is the change and new experience felt and the endowment given in one's heart.

The term charismatic is derived from the Greek *charisma*. It is the combination of two words *charis* and *pneuma* meaning gift and spirit; they combine to give the meaning gift of the spirit or the gift of grace. The gift of the spirit is the experience of the Holy Spirit as well as the gift of faith. The term is also used to express the experience of Holy Spirit endowed to a person or community. A charismatic community is a community of faith (believers) under the control of the Holy Spirit.

In this article, the term 'new wave spirituality' refers to the spirituality of charismatic groups offering charismatic renewal. The author intends to present the church as charismatic and the responsibility of the pastors of a charismatic church. The gift of the Spirit or charisma was the energizing fuel for the mission of the church and that was reflected in the activities of the first century church. In other words, the charisma was the substituting factor for Jesus Christ. The empowered, authoritative, authentic visions of the church were the continuing mission of Christ and continue to this day.

John McArthur, in his book *Charismatic Chaos* throws light in on the vicious chaotic influences of new wave spirituality intoxicating the modern world which yearns for painless sophistication.

What do we wish to have and experience in our life? Is it not a panacea for all our desires, needs and sicknesses? May be true, but we should remember there is no gain without pain. It is believed that we live in a world come of age with generous bestowal of God's grace—Age of Grace—through Jesus Christ. Hence we witness the rapid spread of charismatic movement all over the world. Now we cannot deny this reality as a farce. But care should be taken while dealing with the various charismatic experiences, people, groups and movements. The Bible gives ample evidences on the eschatological work of the Holy Spirit. The gospel writers as well as Paul have given ample examples of spiritual empowering and also their own theological reflections. According to the life situations of the first century church the spirit was active for the



believers and they interpreted it according to their background. Today how much we need the empowering of the Holy Spirit in our pluralistic, crisis filled, sophisticated, exploitative and male-dominated world!

We all act charismatically sometimes. Charisma is not limited to the list given in 1 Corinthians 12. Charismata are the manifestations of God's grace. Charismatic teaching emphasizes material prosperity to those who attend the meetings regularly or else the leaders prescribe attending meetings for 21 weeks or 12 weeks. These teachings endanger the whole attitude to spiritual worthiness. When people achieve their aspirations, they return to their former lives. When a problem recurs, they again feel disappointed. Life is filled with agony as well as joy. One should learn to understand the meaning of life through undergoing diverse experiences. Jesus never offered a problem-free life to those who followed Him. Jesus called people to follow Him carrying their own crosses. There is no victory without pain. There is no resurrection without crucifixion. There is no plenitude without the experience of being broken.

Most charismatic groups uphold Biblical inerrancy. They believe that each and every word of the Bible is dictated by God Himself. Each word is dictated by God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, otherwise known as verbal inspiration theory. Since God is involved directly, it is infallible and each word and punctuation is significant. The Bible is the inspired word of God through men of God. Many men of God inspired by the Holy Spirit wrote these books based on their background, culture and language.

Charismatic renewal which is of the spirit should lead one to the struggles in terms of personal, social, political and economic realities which the individual confront daily. Those struggles should be their main focus. The focus on the new struggles must be highlighted even when it is a 'fire-brand'. Now, the fire brands (emotional) lack focus and those with 'focuses negate expressions of fire, which are essential and more applicable to the development of the community. The more important points must be encouraged for the development. And also a theological nurturing is needed for these persons with different gifts of charisma so that they can respect others with similar gifts.

Renewal gives a renewed awareness of Jesus Christ. Since we live in a world where crisis and sin prevail, it is an encouraging factor to have a renewed awareness to be holy. Renewal within the church must be facilitated and charismatic

groups outside that are organized by members of the church must be discouraged by proper guidance to them.

Worship

Worship is the response to God's revelation in creation. In worship, man is responding to God. Worship is the pivot around which spirituality moves. It influences people to reach the sublimity of spirituality. Cerebral worship does not do any good to ordinary laymen. From worship, the worshiper should receive visions, hope and insight. Confessions, reconciliations, new schemes, programs and endeavors must be grown out of worship. In worship one must get consoled, healed, delivered, and renewed and in return one must be able to respond to God.

The classical worship pattern is highly criticized on grounds that it does not give its fuller meaning and sense to the worshipper. A liturgical education must be introduced in order to create awareness among the people. Traditional churches have sound worship order with cerebral and mental appeal. The liturgy may be lengthy. It comprises components such as praise, adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, intercession, doxology and so on. But charismatic worship is spontaneous, individualistic and emotional, feeling the immediate presence of the Holy Spirit. The personification of the Holy Spirit gives the feeling of the presence of the Holy Spirit moving among the people and it makes them to have a lively experience. Besides, the emotions and feelings are brought in touch with the presence of God. Many testify their experiences of liberation from guilt, emotional hurt and bad memories of the past. Thus A.W. Tozer comments about worship, "Worship is to feel God in your heart", to feel the presence of God, 'Immanuel'—God with us during and after the worship.

The worship order of sacraments could be revised with the charismatic experiences. Making the congregation aware of the sacrament being performed, and preparing them to participate in the endowment of the Holy Spirit with utmost dedication and fervor would bring them renewal and revival. The presence of the Holy Spirit should clearly be experienced during the process of sacraments. The sanctity of the sacraments is affected by the interruption of unwanted elements during the service. It should be appreciated if the photographers and videographers are asked to remain outside during the sacrament. And they may be allowed to record the episodes in sequence on film at a session arranged by the priest immediately after the sacrament. The occasion of sacraments should become a medium to change the people into the likeness of Christ. Charismatic renewal groups enjoy much freedom and joy in their worship. They praise God spontaneously and sincerely. They are free to respond to God. But remember, as Paul says, "...but all things should be done decently and in order" [1 Cori. 14:40].

Spirituality and society

Charismatic people contend that there are two types of Christians: those who are baptized in spirit and those who are not. Those who are baptized in Spirit enjoy the gifts and glossolalia (tongues), prophecy and so on. They may tend to feel a spiritual aristocracy or elitism. They think and express that they are an elite class in spiritual circles. They condemn others as "lukewarm" and glorify themselves as on fire or separated people. Such judgmental reactions lead to tension among believers.

Any spirituality which negates the aspect of social responsibility is superficial. We must find modern gifts of the Spirit, the gifts of service to society and science. Social involvement will not impede a person's holiness in life. Cardinal Leon Joseph Suenens of Belgium explains holiness as complete surrender to God. "Christians need eyes to see, ears to hear, a face full of love, hands to reach out, heart to embrace. And feel to go forth and spread the good news". Charisma should have dynamism of love. It should be centrifugal neighbors to grow and bloom and at the same time be communicative to the world. The biblical claim for charismatic spirituality is not based on spirituality of Jesus. Jesus never spoke in tongues nor did he make any special claim to charismata. His spirituality as we see in the gospel is different. But in charismatic groups the general trend, with a few exceptions, is that in order to have a spiritual life, it is better not to get involved in the church and other social activities.

Faith-healing and miracles

Medicine, psychology and religion have inter-dependent roles in the healing process. When scientific healing and faith healing are integrated in our lives we are made whole. Extra-sensory knowledge which is ethical and experiential is perceived by those who hear God's call.

Experiments have proved that those who were asked to watch video cassettes of Mother Teresa and a losing and winning battle had consequently altered their immunoglobulin level. Mother Teresa's selfless love facilitated increasing their immunoglobulin level. Medicine and psychology need to recognize that spiritual aspects could also help people.

Faith healing and miracles could occur in a spiritual context. But we cannot predict when it would happen or whether it would happen. It must not be commercialized. The following excerpt is typical example of the frustrations and guilt feeling of the attendants.

Dr. Osborne says "God does not want you to be sick, God can heal you right now, you must just believe". Commenting on the issue Klaus Shiafor observes that the sight of many people who try to pull their lame relatives on their feet, or out of the wheel chair and the tears of despair shed by people with whom it does not work evoke our sympathy.

Miracle healing was a significant feature in Jesus' ministry, the disciples of Jesus were charged with the task to heal the sick while they were sent out to preach the imminence of the Kingdom of God [Mat. 10:7; Mark 16:8]. The Apostle Paul also confirms that members of the church have been given the charisma of working miracles and healing [Corinthians 12:28].

Jesus' emphasis was not miracles rather, the miracles accompanied the proclamation of the nearness of the Kingdom of God. Jesus often silenced the demons and those who got healed, recognized Him. Jesus did not want to be misunderstood as a mere miracle worker.

Spirituality and Emotion

The personality of an individual is not distinct from the holistic being with physical, emotional and spiritual endowments. God claims the whole being with his intellect, emotions and actions. We cannot neglect emotion as superficial. Emotion is vital in spirituality. It is a response to an inability to cope with situations on the part of many Christians, a new discovery of hope at a time of disillusionment, fear and failure. There is evidence of escapism, sentimentalism and Gnostic trends. A charismatic experience is preceded usually by a personal crisis. It could be financial problems, ill health, feelings of depression, inexpressible mental agonies about spiritual values, sense of guilt, quest for the purpose of life and so on. There is no outlet for suppressed feelings and emotions. Those who are naturally inclined to emotional expressions rather than volition tend to enjoy the charismatic expressions extensively. Also they give less importance to traditional intellectual capabilities of men; instead emphasis is given to effective faculties of an intuitive experience.

Persons with emotional traits are more prone to enjoy the atmosphere of charismatic meetings, praising God in loud voices, singing and clapping hands, announcing testimonies and listening to emotional outbreaks and the stimulating speeches of the leaders are the attractive features of such meetings. People with tender emotional variations must be given special pastoral care to prevent them from being driven to such groups.

Emotion plays an important role in the charismatic phenomenon. Emotional instability and need for a protective atmosphere against the impact of the events make them look for a security outside their own fold. They need to feel happy amidst their problems.

Prosperity Theology

Material gains are frequently promised to those who join charismatic groups. "God prospers people who are committed to Him". Is it only financial and material prosperity? The extravaganza found in the arrangements of meetings and in their lifestyle induces common people to yearn for the same. Their stress on their worldliness contradicts with their lust for money and power. A

speculative academic alienation of western theology and capitalist system has considerable influence on this type of spirituality. Money is mammon, so care should be given while giving emphasis to prosperity.

The Role of the Family

The family is the place where theological education starts. Parents are the first teachers. Proper Christian education must be given to the children directly or indirectly in the home itself. Children with proper traditional, loyal and ecclesiastical training will not become emotionally abusive. Those who do not get proper education become estranged. The parents with charismatic allegiance influence their children also in that direction. Though in their childhood they do not express themselves, in due course they would also turn to the same path. Compulsory Christian education must be given to all according to their age and qualification. So my conclusion is that the leaders with special qualities of leadership and baptism in Spirit are those who hail from spiritually strong families. On the other hand, the majority of others does not have adequate spiritual influence from their families.

Pastoral Care

Proper pastoral care keeps the spiritual relationship strong and stable. People should feel that their pastor is with them. In addition, proper coaching must be given to edify them in accordance with the needs of their situation. The people under study are in a typical state of mind. Their psychosocial, economic and spiritual life must be analyzed in order to understand them specifically. Such a study should be able to satisfy the expectations of this flock. Their cultural background and present situation should be analyzed to understand the person so that he/she may develop a brotherly relationship.

In charismatic circles the word evangelism is meant for proclaiming the necessity of a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord plus the subsequent baptism in Spirit. The pastor must be able to explain what evangelism is and that Baptism in Spirit means not to renew the hierarchical system but to encourage lay leadership to obtain maximum involvement in the church affairs. A conscious effort must be taken to involve people in day-to-day concerns.

The pastor should frequently visit the families in his parish and ensure that members are loyal to the church and Christ. For their spiritual education, suitable books for prayer and devotion should be introduced. Proper method of Christian education must be suggested to the family and individuals.

As the sick need treatment and medical care of a doctor, a mentally broken person also deserves the care of the pastor. Just as refusal of medical care to an ailing person is criminal, denial of pastoral care is unpardonable. Proper and timely pastoral care would yield positive results. ■

Called Out Community—North Indian Context: Introducing Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth Seminary of The Mar Thoma Church

Rev. Dr. P. G. George, Principal, Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth, Faridabad

The Birth of a Vision

The Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth in Faridabad is founded in the year 2000 by the Mar Thoma Syrian Church with the vision of shaping the future leaders of the church, especially for North India, rooted in the Christian faith and with strong theological and ministerial understanding. It is also important to note that this Seminary is founded in commemoration of the legacy of the late Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma, an advocate of ecumenism and indigenous mission strategies, who served the Mar Thoma church as the Metropolitan for twenty three years and as a bishop for forty five years.

On the 28th of July 2000, the Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth was formally inaugurated by Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma, the Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church in presence of Dr. Joseph Mar Irenaeus, Suffragan Metropolitan, Dr. K. Rajaratnam (Master of the Senate of Serampore University), Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa, and a large number of dignitaries and members of the church.

The National Capital Region (NCR) of India, which comprises of Delhi and its surrounding satellite cities and townships has been well known for its reputed educational institutions attracting students not only from India but globally. The institutions offered quality education in diverse fields, but there was a long standing vacuum in the area of theological education due to lack of recognized theological institutions. Moreover, the large number of churches irrespective of denominations in north India has continuously felt the need for trained Christian ministers to cater to the spiritual needs of multitudes of people. In realization of this need, the Mar Thoma Church after series of consultations and discussions within the church and in the ecumenical fraternity, took the initiative to set up a Theological Seminary in Faridabad within the National Capital Region of India, to assist the churches especially



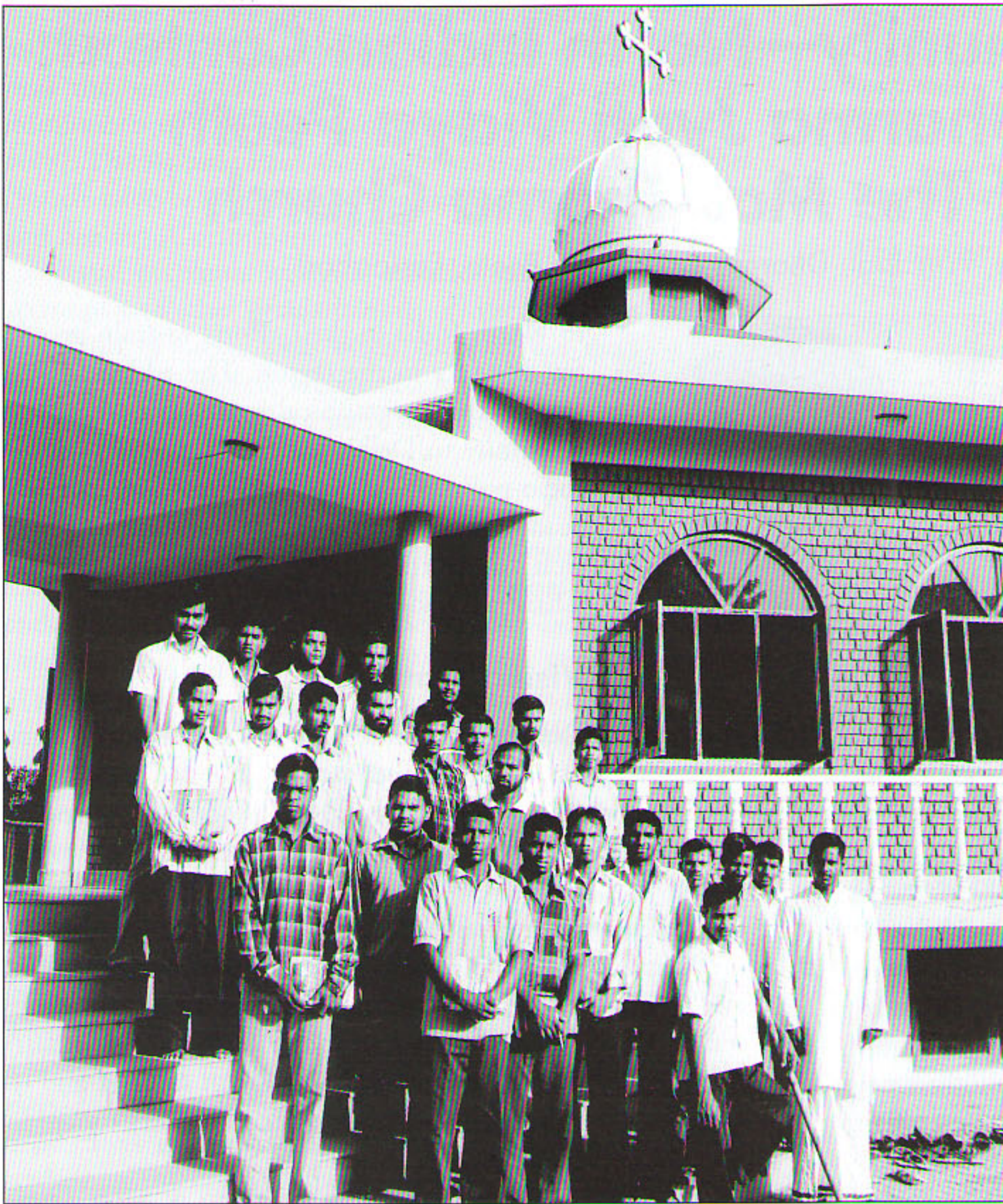
in North India in their efforts to train people for ministry in the region. The added advantage of the geographical setting was the close proximity to Delhi, the center stage of Indian socio-political, religio-cultural and the secular academic fraternity which would provide a rich platform for grooming the future Christian leaders in this pluralistic milieu.

Vision Statement

Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth envisions to carry out systematic and in-depth study on the pattern of Christian witness amidst the rural and pluralistic context of India by actively proclaiming the 'good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed and preaches the year of the Lord.' Thus, the aim of Dharma Jyoti is to expose students prima-facie to rural and urban realities and thereby be challenged by those socio-religious, politico-economic and aesthetic particularities they encounter, in the rural and urban settings and to engage in the process of building up a community rooted in the Kingdom values.

Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth attempts to develop a new vision of theological education with emphasis on method





and curriculum that suits to the Indian ethos through active involvement in the lives of the people and participate with them in their developmental and liberating activity. The emphasis is on training of missionaries and evangelists both lay and ordained to work as servants of God equipped with modern community developmental skills and techniques that enable them for effective and praxis oriented translation of the Word of God. Moreover, it helps them to witness the meaning and message of the Gospel through participation with people in their struggles to build a better human community, rooted in Christ experience and authentic expressions of life. This is carried out through active involvement in the socio-religious life of the community by encountering their cultural idioms and initiating a dialogical relationship with them.

Dharma Jyoti Campus

The Dharma Jyoti campus is located in an idyllic, rural setting in Fazipur Khader, Faridabad, fifty kilometers away from the city center of Delhi. The setting provides an ideal atmosphere for the scholastics, a rare opportunity to prepare the mind to acquire wisdom and knowledge in the

context of rural India. The campus has a main building, staff quarters for four and a chapel. Four students are put in one room. We need more infrastructure facilities. The roads were dreary and narrow and it was very difficult especially in the rainy season. The electricity supply is primarily for agricultural use and the timings are odd and limited. If we get five hours of power supply in a day it is a luxury. We thought of solar power as an alternative. If we do not get three phase power supply we cannot pump water from the tube well. There are unfavorable and difficult conditions, but the presence of peacocks and 'blue bull' is beautiful and enchanting.

A Gram Jyoti School is functioning in the campus drawing nearly 50 students from the nearby villages who are less privileged and poor. We have classes from Nursery to Standard VI in Hindi medium and following the Haryana Board syllabus. Gram Jyoti Tailoring School is also conducted in villages and certificates are given.

The institute has a library comprising of over 7000 books and documents, which forms a rich resource of knowledge for the students studying at Dharma Jyoti. We are using the basement of the Chapel as the Library. The library has to be developed to facilitate research and in-depth study on various topics.

Development and Growth of Dharma Jyoti

The Seminary grew under the leadership of the Metropolitan and Diocesan Bishops and the Principals from time to time. The Rev. Dr. K. V. Mathew served as the first Principal. The Rev. Dr. V. S. Varughese served Dharma Jyoti as Principal for the last six years. Soon after his graduation from Princeton University with a Ph.D. in religion, the church called on him to serve in this rural environment. His dedication and conscientious work will reap great dividends for the Kingdom in the days to come. Many Aghens of the Mar Thoma church gave their services to this Seminary and the support given by parishes of the now Delhi and Mumbai Dioceses is admirable.

The medium of instruction is English, but we have to use Hindi. This Seminary started as Hindi medium. In North India there are a lot of non-Hindi speaking places and communities. Soon we changed to English medium and affiliated to the Serampore University. The Seminary is in the process of being up-graded to a B.D. level college. Practical training is significant part of theological and missionary training. We send the seminarians to parishes in



Faridabad and Delhi for Sunday practical work. During the summer months we send our students to different mission fields for practical training and exposure.

Dharma Jyoti Student Community

Dharma Jyoti is proud to have an ecumenical student body representing different ecclesiastical, cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. They are from the Syrian Orthodox, Mar Thoma, CNI, Baptist and independent churches. Most of our students come from very remote villages of North India. They are tribal and from economically backward areas. Some of them are the children of the believers from the mission fields of the Mar Thoma Church. We train them and send them back to their own communities. We have now 27 students from eight different states, speaking ten different languages. So far three batches of students completed Diploma in Christian Studies and one batch completed their B.Th. degree and they are now working as evangelists in mission centres of the Mar Thoma Church in Jammu, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Orissa, Karnataka, Chattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Utter Pradesh.

Sudhakar Ganata is from Rayagada district of Orissa. He was not the type who would give a listening ear to anyone. He was rebellious! He was met with the love of Jesus through Adv. Cyrus who works in Orissa and Sudhakar was transformed into a God fearing and people loving person. He learned the basic tenets of Christian faith from the local Christian missionary community. He was sent to Dharma Jyoti to study Bible and get some missionary training. He has successfully completed his Bachelor of Theology (B.Th.) Degree from Serampore University and he received the Degree Certificate at the Serampore Convocation this year. He is now back in Orissa and runs a small Bible School for the local community.

Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth is very proud of one of our students who stood first in the Bachelor of Theology

(B.Th.) of the Serampore University. He did his Higher Secondary School (Plus Two) and wanted to serve the Lord in the Mission of the Church. He was directed by the Achen to Dharma Jyoti. He has come to Dharma Jyoti four years ago from Majappara of the South Travancore Mission of the Mar Thoma Church. He was hard working and studious. With God's grace he has secured First Rank and received four Senate Prizes for excellence: George Howell in Christian Theology; C. E. Abraham Prize in Church History; Dr. T. Sither Prize for highest grade in University examined papers and Rev. C. C. Pandey Memorial Prize for overall high marks. He is at present serving the Lord as an Evangelist in the Itrasi Mission of the Delhi Diocese in Madhya Pradesh.

Dharma Jyoti is not a human agenda for the Mar Thoma Church. In the pluralistic context of India, the missionary work of the Mar Thoma church is moving on well in the providence of God. It is the faithfulness of God to our fore-fathers and mothers who prayed earnestly for the missionary endeavors of the church and contributed generously from their meager income: pidiyari, nullari, aadhyabhalam and so on. When one door for mission closes, God in His love will surely open another door. We need to capture the vision and move forward with the one who is the Leader and the Master. The story of Dharma Jyoti is worth pondering.

Persecution in Orissa and challenges to Mission work

Dharma Jyoti has more students from the State of Orissa than any other State in India. The violence that was unleashed on the Christian community was a shock to all of us, especially for students in training. We have kept 'Prayer Vigil' and continued to pray for the suffering community in different parts of Orissa and other places in the rest of India. On the day of the vigil, four people walked away to the darkness of the night with the light (diya) and kept them there and after offering prayers returned to the community who are in prayer in all the languages represented in the community. The students were challenged to see persecution as an opportunity to do more for the Lord and not something to be fearful of. It is the history of the church that the persecuted church is more vibrant in faith and witness. Orissa is no exception. Our students are getting ready to give leadership in the emerging church there.

Thomas Raika is a final year B.Th. student from the Gajpathi district of Orissa. He is now thirty one years old and at the age of two he was stricken with polio. He moves along using a bamboo pole. He even visited the Maramon Convention 2009. His commitment to the Lord who makes him able is very strong and wants to serve Him with his life. His witness is challenging and he is now ready to go back to serve the Lord in Orissa.

Srikakulam Mission and Dharma Jyoti: Missionary Training

Srikakulam is a tribal area at the border of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. There are many small Christian fellowship groups under local pastors. Twenty four such groups with their pastors expressed their desire to join the Mar Thoma fellowship. Barnabas Thirumeni, then Diocesan Bishop, took some bold steps to train their pastors in Bible and the discipline of the Mar Thoma Church. They use different languages such as Thelungu and Dhom and two other tribal languages: Sora and Jathapu. Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth in association with The Delhi diocese organized a training program for the evangelists from the Srikakulam Mission. The course was designed to have three modules. The first session was held at Srethampetta (A.P.). The second session was held at Bhilai. The last session was held at Dharma Jyoti for ten days. They were awarded a Certificate in Christian Studies at the Commencement Service. Twenty four Evangelists participated in the program. Three students from Srikakulam are undergoing studies at Dharma Jyoti.

Easow Mar Timotheos Chair for Mission Research & Annual Mission Lecture

In order to commemorate the legacy of the late Easow Mar Timotheos Episcopa; an evangelist with rare caliber, we established a Chair in Mission studies to foster research in the area of mission and development. There is an annual lecture conducted to further the cause of mission in the North Indian milieu. We need to build up funds for this Chair.

Dharma Jyoti looks forward

Dharma Jyoti wants to spread its ministry in at least two-fold manner. It has to be relevant for the immigrant community of the Mar Thoma Church and at the same time to the people at large in the mission of the Church through preaching and witnessing. The ecumenical nature of the Seminary will be maintained and will focus on the evangelization through relevant methods. The context of mission in India is changing and facing great challenges, the young believers who come here should be charged with the Word of God and skill for development to build up a community of faith, hope and love.

Rajesh is from the district of Sihora. In his testimony he recollects a day when his father returning from the market handed over to him a gospel tract to read. It was just in the passing. Years passed and he accepted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour. He started living a life of faith in the midst of opposition. He wanted to study Bible and acquire skills to serve the Lord as a missionary. He was directed to Dharma Jyoti and now doing his second year. When he came, no body in his village knew the fact that he went to study

Bible. His parents are still 'seeker' of faith and have not committed their lives to Jesus. In the mean time he took baptism and now growing in grace and knowledge of the Lord.

There are many 'Rajeshes' out there in the rural villages of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and so on, who need a chance to become a missionary. They have the language. They know the culture and cultural idioms. They need to be trained and equipped with tools 'to reach out to places and people with the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christian communities, like 'Srikakulam', need their leaders who call themselves Pastors to be trained and equipped. Who will do it? Call is coming from the Maharashtra Region to equip the missionaries with a one year long Missionary training program. The task is great! We should be excited in our generation too. Just as our fore-fathers and mothers have dreamed of mission as their responsibility, let us echo the missionary song that was sung long time ago:

Padam, padam urachu naam, krushmenthi pokanam

(Let us march on bearing the Cross)

jeevan enkil jeevan vachu Bahratam nedeedanam.

(even at the cost of lives to claim the land of India for Jesus)

How can you help?

Your prayers and support is needed for this great venture. You can adopt this Seminary! We need more teaching Faculty to come and serve in this rural setting. You can sponsor a Faculty Chair, or one or more students. We need hostel facilities and some basic furniture for them to sit and study. We need alternate source of energy since we cannot fully depend on the electricity. Solar power could be an alternative since the sunlight is freely available throughout the year. We need to have one more tube well and a hand-pump well.

We need to develop our Library. We need a new library building with modern facilities. You can sponsor books and a few computers. You can sponsor some Journal and give their subscriptions in foreign funds.

Conclusion

God has blessed the Mar Thoma church with a missionary vision. Let us rekindle the same and show forth its light to brighten our world. As the Diocese of North America has grown from its humble beginnings to a dynamic force, may God give grace for the coming generations to be found in the faith of their fathers and mothers. Let them be more fired up for the Lord and His church. My best wishes and prayers are there for the Diocese, its Organizations, for the Parishes and especially the Annual Conferences. Let us pray 'Maranatha' and thus expedite His coming. "We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work." (John 9:4) ■

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Kerala Christian's Call for Identity in North America, in Ecumenical, Cultural and Social Perspective

Aswathi Varughese, St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Lombard, IL

Have you observed the dance of the gorgeous peacock? The turquoise-green and gold feathers spread out majestically scintillating and shimmering in the sunlight. The royal head held high as he dances to music unheard by observers. I would like to extend the analogy of the peacock to the subject—Kerala Christian's call for identity in North America, in ecumenical, cultural and social perspective. So, for the moment—envision the peacock while I review some facts.

In the last decade, the influx of Indians migrating to North America has been steadily increasing. According to the American Community Survey of the U.S. Census Bureau, the Asian Indian population in the United States grew from almost 1,679,000 in 2000 to 2,570,000 in 2007: a growth rate of 53%, the highest for any Asian American community, and among the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States. The FOKANA (Federation of Kerala Associations in North America) estimates that there are over three lakh Malayalis in the U.S. and Canada which is about one per cent of Kerala's population. A sizable section of the Keralites is from the Mar Thoma Christian community.

Like an enigmatic painting awaiting study in the crucible of Christianity over the past years the Marthomite Community within North America has slowly but firmly evolved into a presence that is beginning to have an impact hitherto unacknowledged.

Hebrews 10:25: *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."*

Wikipedia definition of Ecumenism now mainly refers to initiatives aimed at greater religious unity or cooperation. In its broadest sense, this unity or cooperation may refer to a worldwide religious unity; by the advocating of a greater sense of shared spirituality across the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Most commonly, however, ecumenism is used in a narrower meaning—referring to a greater cooperation among different religious denominations of a single one of these faiths.

Christ founded one Church, not many churches and that serves as the cornerstone for Ecumenism.

In the book of Acts Paul exhorted the disciples "to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood"—(Acts 20:28). Paul's ministry exemplifies Ecumenism. Paul does not limit the church of God to be any one church, rather baselines the preaching of the gospel as the aspiration of all churches.

A brief synopsis regarding the origin of Ecumenism among the Kerala churches: The six Oriental Orthodox churches: Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Ethiopian, Eritrean and the (Indian) Malankara—are in communion with each other and are also called ancient Oriental, lesser Eastern, and pre- or ante-Chalcedonian churches. They are the churches of the first three ecumenical councils (Nicea, Constantinople and Ephesus). The Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Church has always cherished the tradition of St. Thomas as the founding father of Christianity in India. The Indian church, now divided into Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox families, has suffered from Western colonial missions.

The same authority defines Culture (from the Latin *cultura* stemming from *colere*, meaning "to cultivate") generally refers to patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activities significance and importance. Culture has been called "the way of life for an entire society."

Social refers to a characteristic of living organisms, humans in particular. Social among other things, refers to Attitudes, Common Characteristics, Relations between people (social relations), Interactions between people (social action), Membership of a group of people or inclusion or belonging to a community of people, etc.

Now, let us go back to the peacock. The peacock was chosen as my analogy for different reasons which I will try to co-relate to the Social and Cultural perspective of Ecumenism among the Kerala Churches.

The peacock is unique in that it is considered the national bird of India similar to Kerala Christians in the USA, proud of their Indian heritage and sustaining their individuality and identity. In past years, one of the social events of the Christmas season in Chicago was the 'Ecumenical Christmas program' which featured songs by different choirs representing the sixteen churches, members of the Ecumenical council. Today, the program has evolved to include cultural presentations where the heritage of 'Kerala—God's own country' is depicted by song, dance and skits. Despite the wintry weather, traditional Indian garb seems to prevail and under heavy woolen coats, resplendent silk saris and 'Kasavu Kerala saris' dominate. Widely attended by members of the respective parishes yet constrained by the very churches that strove to foster a relationship of 'oneness', limited the extent to which

'ecumenism' was understood and practiced in the society during the early days.

The dance of the peacock is inimitable—comparable with the values and traditions passed down from generation to generation by Kerala Christians. As examples, observance of lent (though the rigorous boundaries have been relaxed), the customary lengthy services on Good Friday and the exuberant celebration of Easter. Each of the Kerala churches in different services throughout the country observes Jesus' victory over temptation, His death, burial and resurrection. No matter what church you belong to, this common factor calibrates individual denominations of the Kerala Churches, yet distinguishes the Kerala Churches from other churches in USA. The parameters around the observance of lent, the traditional simple meals of gruel and lentil and the lengthy, yet symbolic services urging repentance, paving the way for the joyous, early dawn celebration of Easter all serve to reinforce their inimitable identity in North America.

Now, let me come to my favorite part of this analogy—recall the tail feathers of the peacock—each of the brilliantly hued feathers form differing 'eye patterns', coming together to design the splendid plumage of the peacock. Today, the Kerala churches are like the different 'eyes' of the peacock's tail—coming together in harmony to orchestrate a symphony for the Creator. The words of a symbolic worship song by Michael W. Smith aptly describe the change movement evolving today.

*"Can you hear, there's a new song
Breaking out from the children of freedom
Every race and every nation
Sing it out sing a new Hallelujah
Let us sing love to the nations
Bringing hope of the grace that has freed us
Make Him known and make Him famous
Sing it out sing to the new Hallelujah
Arise let the church Arise"*

Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another ..."

Today, the resilient underlying threads of Cultural and Social accord are weaving a tapestry that is rich with Kerala traditions transcending individualism, fostering a sense of common Christian heritage, fellowship and above all honoring the Christian culture. Examples are in the decisions to raise funds to donate homes to the needy in Kerala; key is the fact that the funds are being raised jointly by all churches. Like the 'eyes' in the plumage of the peacock, the Ecumenical council of churches now 'see' the greater need and advantage in terms of serving together.

1 Corinthians 12:12: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ."

Another example of this fostering of oneness is the upcoming basket-ball tournament.

Change—Movement has been initiated!

Headlines vie for our attention and action—atrocities in Orissa, starvation in North Korea, violence in Darfur, the list is endless. The passion of the Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos, Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church for Mission work among the islanders in Mexico sets the stage to work beyond the boundaries of India. As the Ecumenical Council celebrates its jubilee year, let us challenge ourselves—what can we accomplish together, today, here and now?

*Now let the peacock dance
To his Creator's song
Dancing to One Melody
For Unity
For Reformation
For Revival*

Psalms 104:31: "The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever: the LORD shall rejoice in his works."

Bibliography: www.wikipedia

Lyrics: Arise, let the church Arise by Michael W Smith from the album New Hallelujah



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LIVING HOME

“There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because his conscience tells him it is right” Martin Luther

HOME & GARDEN TIPS

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Etiquettes to be taught in a family

Etiquette in dealing with members within a family and how a family behaves within a society are equally important. This can be perceived as part of the expression of one's family values. Even though once in a while we let our guard down when dealing with family members, it is necessary to have etiquettes that will enable us to handle each situation with grace and courtesy. Especially it is important for the parents to understand that we are the guardians of our children and we are responsible for setting the right example for them. So how we deal with our children and what we teach our children about dealing with others will enhance their spiritual and social identity. This article will be focusing on teaching our children the proper way to treat a person with disability. Physically challenged people want and deserve to live their lives with independence and with dignity. For some children it may be difficult to have a conversation with a person with disability because they do not know how to. Disabled people are entitled to the same courtesies that we would extend to anyone, including respecting their personal privacy. Hence it is important for us parents to teach our children that they deserve the same respect as someone without disability because all human beings are created by God in His own image. Some of the common sense rules to follow when you meet a person with disability are as follows.

- **Watch your vocabulary:** 'A person with disability' or a 'disabled person' is the more preferred term than 'the disabled'. Never call a person with disability 'crippled', 'invalid' or 'handicapped'. Never refer to a person as 'the blind' or 'the deaf'. It is better to say 'visually impaired person' or 'blind person' and 'hearing impaired person' or 'deaf person'.
- Greet the person with disability just the way you greet anyone else, (shaking hand or a friendly kissing).
- When you talk to a person in a wheelchair make eye contact. Just as we do not lean on or hang on to people, you are not allowed to touch or lean on against the wheelchair without his/her consent. Wheelchair is considered to be an extension of a disabled person's personal space.
- Do not pet or feed guide dogs without the owner's permission because it may distract the guide dogs from their duty that is to protect the disabled person.
- If you meet someone with speech impairment, be very patient and concentrate on what they are trying to communicate with you. If you did not understand him/her, do not pretend that you do. Try to repeat what you understood and let the speech impaired person finish the rest.
- If you are in a predicament where you do not know how a specific situation will affect a person with disability, it is always

wise to ask the disabled person himself/herself about how you could be of any assistance and try to follow their directions.

- We need to instruct our children not to stare at wasted muscle mass or missing limbs of a disabled person. It is very inappropriate and disrespectful.
- Do not ask personal questions like "were you born blind" or "how long have you been in the wheelchair?" You are free to ask him/her if you think they are close enough to you.

Following recommendations about how to treat people with disabilities are from the organization of National Easter Seal*.

- Talk to the person with disability rather than talking to the care taker or companion who may be along.
- If you happened to use phrases like "see you later" to a blind person or "it is nice seeing you", do not be embarrassed. You may feel strange for saying it but it is very possible that the disabled person did not mind it at all. So no need to say sorry. On the other hand saying sorry may embarrass the person.
- In order to get the attention of a hearing impaired person, tap on his/her shoulders gently or wave your hand. Look directly at the person clearly and slowly with appropriate facial expression. Shouting would not help but writing notes would be a good idea.
- When introducing yourself to a person with vision loss, always identify yourself and others who are with you as who is on your right and who is over you left. When you are finished with the conversation, make known that you are leaving.
- When you are talking to a person with speech impairment, do not try to correct the person but be patient and encouraging. When it is needed to ask questions so that you will be able to understand the person correctly.
- Help a disabled person according to his/her instruction. So ask the person if he/she needs help from you.
- If a person in a wheelchair is asking you for directions, please consider the distance, weather conditions, or obstructions in the way such as stairs, curbs or steep hills.
- If you are planning to have a conversation (more than a simple hello) with this person, stand back or sit so that you both are on the same eye level so that it will be less stressful for person in the wheelchair.
- It is better to give direction to a visually impaired person using specifics such as "to the left hundred feet or one yard to the right"
- Be patient and willing to give extra time for a disabled person to get things done.
- If you are planning for events involving persons with disability, please be considerate of their needs ahead of time.

* Courtesy of National Easter Seals

Next issue of Living Home will focus on "etiquettes to follow within the family"

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 Apr 19 - 28, 09: Jordan & Israel
 May 03 - 10, 09: Israel only
 Sep 06 - 15, 09: Jordan & Israel
 Oct 25 - 07 Nov, 09: Jordan/Israel & Egypt
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"... and a cloud took him out of their sight" Luke 24:51

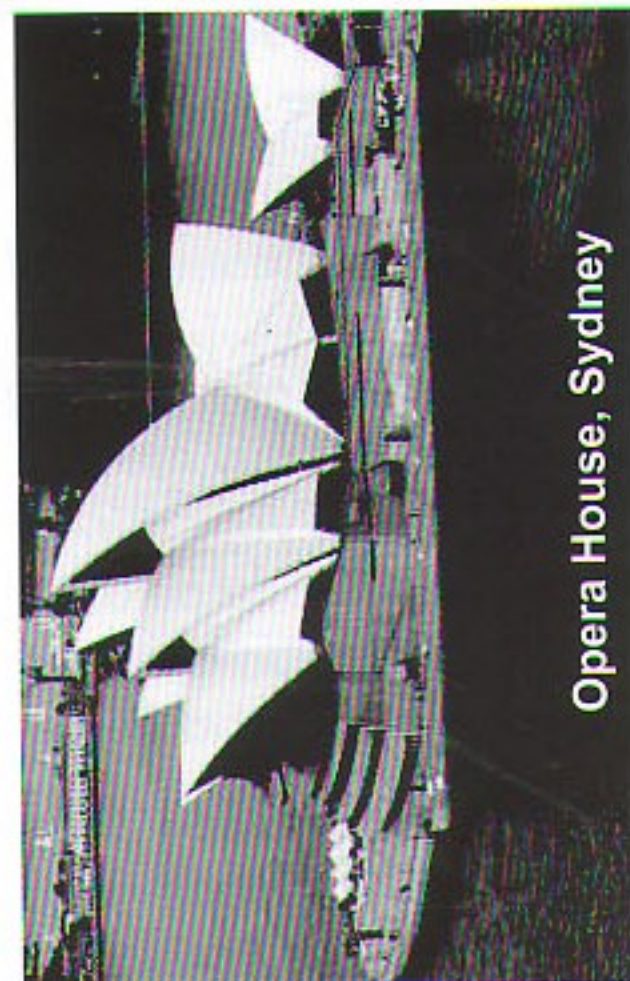
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HEALTH TIPS

A DOZEN HEALTH TIPS FOR ALL AGES

EAPEN DANIEL

1. At least one serving of fresh vegetables & fruits must be included in your daily meal. This boosts your immunity as well as keeps your skin intact. A well balanced diet must always include acidic and alkaline fruits and vegs. Watermelon is an alkaline fruit that will balance acid producing fried food items.
2. Best to use Honey in place of granulated sugar, since honey is naturally antibacterial and antifungal. Honey helps skin texture too. Molasses is better than more processed white sugars since it is closer to natural sweetness.
3. Daily meditation of at least 20 minutes can add healthy years to your life. Meditate in a quiet area.
4. Out of all the forms of exercises, practicing Yoga have proven to be the best (evolved through thousands of years). Routine physical exercises help your total body and muscles while Yoga helps total body, muscles and your internal organs. Always use a good resource to start practicing yoga to achieve best results. Wrong postures can add to bad health conditions.
5. If you are involved in a job that require sitting down over 75% of the time during the day, make sure to use the best postures to avoid back pains and headaches in the evening and night. Continued use of computer key boards, cushioned chairs, benches, etc. must be evaluated to make sure; you are not ignoring the natural positions of your body and its organs. Those who walk or stand for prolonged periods during work hours should pay special attention to the shoes they wear. Try to sit upright. Expose to sunlight at least 2 or three times a week, preferably early morning or in the evening.
6. Avoid eating heavy meals after 6 PM. It is also best to avoid extra large portions of meat products with the evening meal. Avoid too much snacking on fried foods, baked sweets, and foods with fat content over 10 percent. Diabetic individuals may try to eat 5 or six smaller meals, rather than 2 or 3 bigger meals, to better stabilize blood sugar. Eat plenty of nuts. This will help reduce cholesterol.
7. Keep your teeth and mouth clean. Any form of teeth or gum decay can negatively affect your memory, hearing, heart function, eye sight, thyroids, body balance etc. Make it a habit to clean your teeth after each meal and especially before bedtime.
8. Socialization is very important. Get together with people you like and spend time unwinding with light snacks, healthy drinks, and a few laughs.
9. Avoid drinking water that is too cold. Remember that your body temperature is constant and you do not need to consume products that are comparatively very cold or very hot.
10. During warm summer months, it is good to use hot peppers, since it controls your body temperature and helps reduce cholesterol. (This is the reason why, traditionally, people living near the equator use more hot peppers than those living in colder regions).
11. Avoid using worn out mattresses or beds which can cause major damages to your body. Hard surfaces with light cushioning are preferable to soft spring mattresses. Soft spring mattresses, most of the time, will not support your body contour. Remember that you spend a minimum of 6 hours on the bed, and that has a lot of impact on your health.
12. Avoid containing anger within, since this can only hurt your own health. Learn to forget and forgive. Keep your faith alive!

*The true measure of our wealth
is the treasure we have in heaven.*

Chrysostom Thirumeni: A Model of Retired Life

Prof. Dr. Zac Varghese, London

Chrysostom Valiya Metropolitan's active retirement ministry prompted me to write for his ninety-second birthday celebrations. Valiya Thirumeni's retired life is an amazing model; he is forging a path in old age that no other bishop of our church has ever entered. Jesus is indeed a man who lived for others and Valiya Thirumeni has been emulating Him all his life. People say, 'We have added years to life and not life to years.' It can only be done by breaking ego barriers and letting other people into our lives. Friendship is really living within the life of another. Counting friends is a game we play in old age.

It is usually lazy people who complain they cannot find time to do things they like to do. "If only I had the time." In fact, it is not really lack of time but the commitment that is wanting. Ask a busy man who has the discipline to find the time for another person's need. One of the advantages of retired life is that we can choose our own work; we keep our diaries, our diaries do not keep us.

There are three kinds of retirements: voluntary, forced, and mandatory. Chrysostom Thirumeni's is a voluntary

retired life. Swedenborg imagined that angels reverse their life cycle and return to their youth, so that the oldest angel is the youngest; we see this in the retired life of our Chrysostom Valiya Metropolitan. I am told that Thirumeni is very active for his age, involved in speaking engagements several times a week and meeting visitors.

Chrysostom Thirumeni is showing a model of retired ministry without the straitjacket of constitutional restrictions. He is enjoying his freedom and so can retired priests. If blessed with health in old age, we should regard it as a gift which needs to be continually shared with the needy. Everything we are able to do after a certain age may seem to be a miracle through the amazing grace of God.

Chrysostom Thirumeni finds support and strength in his old age because his gift is to obtain goodness from everything, which is indeed an amazing gift. May God help us to enjoy the blessings of Valiya Thirumeni's retirement ministry for many more years and may God continue to bless him with the comfort of good health and happiness. ■

Matrimonial

Marthomite parents settled in USA invites marriage proposals for their daughter, 24 years old, 5'5", brought up and educated in USA, currently finishing her Doctorate in Pharmacy. She is slim, very fair, God fearing, family oriented with traditional cultural values. We are seeking proposals from a God fearing and traditional family, with a Medical or Engineering background. Interested parties may please email us with details and recent picture to georgekutty55@gmail.com

Marthomite parents settled in USA, invite marriage proposals for their US born son, 28 years, 6' tall, medium complexion, very family oriented and God fearing, working currently as an administrator and also perusing his post Masters. We are looking for a very family oriented girl with high moral values from any Christian denomination, with a college education and working in USA. Kindly respond with a brief bio-data and a recent picture to: philabr123@yahoo.com

Parents currently well settled and working in Bahrain invite marriage proposal for their daughter, 26 years old 5' tall fair, God fearing and family oriented, practicing Dentistry after completing BDS., from parents of boys with professional background, residing the US or Canada. Contact Susan at sqvc56@hotmail.com

SEEKING BRIDE and GROOM: Marthomite parents invite Proposals for girl, 24 year old, 5'5", slim and good looking, God fearing, family oriented. She is finishing M-tech (Computer science) in May 2009. Seeking proposals from professionally employed boys (26-30) in the United States. Also proposal invited for boy 27 year old 5'10" (ENGINEERING, MBA) currently working in USA as a software engineer in a top US company. Seeking proposals from girls in US, professionally qualified, family oriented with good Christian family background. Interested parties please respond with brief biodata and most recent picture to mbmm2009@gmail.com or call 713-530-8665

അപരനെ സ്വീകരിക്കുവാൻ ഭവന കവാടങ്ങൾ തുറന്നിടുക.....

റെറ്റ്. റവ. ഡോ. ഗീവർഗീസ് മാർ തിയഡോഷ്യസ്

കർത്താവിൽ പ്രിയരെ, നിങ്ങൾക്കെല്ലാവർക്കും എന്റെ സ്നേഹ വന്ദനം. ദൈവഭവനത്തിന്റെ പുതുക്കലും എന്നു ഉള്ളതാണല്ലോ ഈ വർഷത്തെ ചിന്താവിഷയം. സഭ എന്നത് കൂടുംബങ്ങളുടെ പുതുക്കലാണ്. സഭ ജീവിക്കുന്നത് ഈ ലോകത്തിലാണ്. സഭയുടെ പുതുക്കലും ലോകവുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ടതാണ്. അതു കൊണ്ടുതന്നെ സഭ ലോകത്തെ അറിയണം. സർവ്വസൃഷ്ടിയെയും രൂപാന്തരപ്പെടുത്തുന്ന, പുതുക്കുന്ന ദൈവസാന്നിദ്ധ്യത്തെ അന്വേഷിക്കുവാൻ സഭ വിളിക്കപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു.



ലോകമിന്ന് മാറ്റത്തിന്റെ പാതയിലാണ്. ലോകചരിത്രത്തിൽ, വ്യവസായിക വിപ്ലവത്തിനുശേഷം മാനവസമൂഹത്തെ ഏറ്റവും കൂടുതൽ മാറ്റിമറിച്ച പ്രതിഭാസമാണ് വിവര സാങ്കേതിക വിദ്യ. ഇന്ന് അറിവിന്റെ ശാസ്ത്രത്തിന് വളരെയേറെ കുതിപ്പുകൾ ഉണ്ടായിട്ടുണ്ട്. എന്നാൽ, അറിവുകേടുകളും ധാരാളമുണ്ട്. Not only ignorance, but also misuse of information. അത് നാം തിരിച്ചറിയണം.

ലൂക്കോസിന്റെ സുവിശേഷത്തിൽ 19-ാം അദ്ധ്യായം 1 മുതൽ 10 വരെയുള്ള വാക്യത്തിൽ അവതരിക്കപ്പെടുന്ന സങ്കായി ധനവാദവും ചുങ്കക്കാരിൽ പ്രധാനിയുമാണ്. സാമ്പത്തിക നേട്ടം കാംക്ഷിച്ചു കഴിയുന്ന മനുഷ്യരാണ് ഏറെയും; അത് അതിൽ തന്നെ തെറ്റല്ല. എന്നാൽ ഭൗതികമായി സുരക്ഷിതരാകുവാൻ ശ്രമിക്കുന്നവർ ജീവിതം സാമ്പത്തിക നേട്ടത്തിനായി ബലികഴിക്കുന്നവരാണ്. ഈ പ്രക്രിയയുടെ തലതൊട്ടപ്പനാണ് ആഗോളവൽക്കരണം(Globalisation). കമ്പോളത്തിന്റെ സംസ്കാരം കച്ചവടത്തിന്റേതാണ്. ഒരു വശത്ത് വിലപേശൽ നടത്തുമ്പോൾ മറുവശത്ത് ലാഭം കൊയ്യുവാൻ സഹജരൂപം ചെയ്യുന്നു. എന്തും, പണം കൊടുത്തു വിലയ്ക്കു വാങ്ങാമെന്ന് കരുതുന്ന കച്ചവട മനോഭാവമാണ് ഇന്നുള്ളത്.

ഒരിക്കൽ ഒരു ഡോക്ടറെ കൺസൾട്ട് ചെയ്യുവാനായി പോയ ഒരു യുവ ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥനെക്കുറിച്ച് ഓർമ്മ വരുന്നു. മുൻകൂർ അപ്പോയിന്റ്മെന്റ് വാങ്ങി, വന്നിട്ടുള്ള മറ്റു രോഗികളെ പിന്തള്ളി സമയക്രമം തെറ്റിച്ചുകൊണ്ട് അയാൾ തിടുകത്തോടെ ഡോക്ടറിന്റെ കാബിനിലേക്ക് തള്ളിക്കയറി. എന്നിട്ട് ആയിരം രൂപയെടുത്ത് ഡോക്ടറുടെ മുമ്പിലേക്ക് നീട്ടിക്കൊണ്ട് അയാൾ പറഞ്ഞു, ഈ ആയിരം രൂപ വാങ്ങിയിട്ട് എന്നെ ആദ്യം പരിശോധിക്കൂ. അതിന് മറുപടിയായി ഡോക്ടർ പറഞ്ഞത്; ഇതാ രണ്ടായിരം രൂപയുണ്ട് ഇനിമേൽ എന്നെ ശല്യപ്പെടുത്തരുത്. സ്വന്തം ലാഭം മാത്രം നോക്കുന്ന തലമുറയുടെ പ്രതിനിധിയാണ് ആ ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥൻ.

ഇന്ന് ശാസ്ത്രലോകം അതിദ്രുതം വളർന്നുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുകയാണ്. നോട്ടുബുക്കുകൾ നെറ്റുബുക്കുകൾക്ക് വഴിമാറിയിരിക്കുന്നു. ഓഫീസിൽ പോകാതെയും ഇന്നു ജോലിചെയ്യാം. കടയിൽപോകാതെയും സാധനങ്ങൾ വാങ്ങാം. പണം കൈകൊണ്ടു തൊടാതെയും സാമ്പത്തിക ഇടപാടുകൾ നടത്താം. ആശുപത്രിയിൽ പോകാതെയും ചെക്കപ്പു നടത്താം. അങ്ങനെ എല്ലാമെല്ലാം നമ്മുടെ വിരൽതുമ്പിൽ എത്തിയിരിക്കുന്നു. എന്നാൽ ശാസ്ത്രത്തിന്റെ മറുവശം കാണാതെ പോകുന്നുണ്ടോ? മനുഷ്യമൂലം വികൃതമാകുന്നത് ശ്രദ്ധിക്കുന്നുണ്ടോ? ന്യൂക്ലിയർ ആഭിമുഖ്യമുള്ള ലോകം ന്യൂക്ലിയർ വേസ്റ്റിനെയാണ് ഉൽപ്പാദിപ്പിക്കുന്നത്. ശാസ്ത്ര സാങ്കേതികതയ്ക്ക് അമിതമായ പ്രാധാന്യം നൽകപ്പെടുന്ന ഈ കാലഘട്ടത്തിൽ മനുഷ്യജീവിതത്തിന് യാന്ത്രികത വർദ്ധിക്കുകയും മനുഷ്യമൂലം നഷ്ടപ്പെടുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നത് ശ്രദ്ധിക്കുന്നുണ്ടോ? മനുഷ്യജീവിതത്തിന്റെ മൂല്യഭാവങ്ങൾ നഷ്ടപ്പെടുന്നതും ജീവൽ ബന്ധങ്ങൾ പ്രണിതമാകുന്നതും നാം അറിയാതെപോകുന്നുണ്ടോ? വി. ലൂക്കോസ് നമ്മുടെ ശ്രദ്ധ സങ്കായിലേക്ക് നയിക്കുകയാണ്. പുരുഷാരം നിമിത്തം അവൻ യേശുവിനെ കാണുവാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞില്ലായെന്ന് മൂന്നാമത്തെ വാക്യത്തിൽ വായിക്കുന്നു. പുരുഷാരം ഇവിടെ പ്രതിസന്ധി സൃഷ്ടിക്കുകയാണ്. പുരുഷാരത്തിന്റെ മദ്ധ്യനിൽക്കുവാൻ ഇടമില്ലാതെ പുറന്തള്ളപ്പെട്ടവനായി കാണപ്പെടുകയാണ് സങ്കായി.

ആൾക്കൂട്ടത്തിനിടയിൽ ഇടം നഷ്ടപ്പെട്ടവരുടെ പ്രതിനിധിയാണ് സങ്കായി. കാട്ടത്തി വൃക്ഷത്തിലാണ് അവൻ ബദൽ ഇടം കണ്ടെത്തുവാൻ ശ്രമിക്കുന്നത്. ചെങ്ങറയിൽ ഭൂമിക്കായി സമരം ചെയ്യുന്നവർ നമ്മുടെ സമൂഹത്തിൽ ജീവിക്കുവാൻ ഇടമില്ലാതെ പോകുന്നവരുടെ പ്രതിനിധികളാണ്.

അണുകൂടുംബങ്ങളിൽ പാരസ്പരികതയ്ക്ക് ഇടമില്ലാതെയാകുന്നു. സമൂഹത്തിന്റെ പിന്നാമ്പുറങ്ങളിലേക്ക്, ചേരികളിലേക്ക് ദുർബലർ തള്ളിമാറ്റപ്പെടുന്നു. എങ്ങും മതിലുകൾ മാത്രം. ചിലർ മതിലുകൾക്കുള്ളിൽ സുരക്ഷിതത്വം കണ്ടെത്തുമ്പോൾ മറ്റു ചിലർ ജീവിക്കാൻ ഇടമില്ലാതെ വലയുന്നു. യേശു സങ്കായിയോട് നിങ്ങൾക്ക് ഇവിടെ ഇടമുണ്ടെന്ന് പറയുന്നു. യേശു അവനു വേണ്ടി സാഹോദര്യത്തിന്റെ ഒരിടം ഒരുക്കിയിരിക്കുന്നു.

രണ്ടാമതായി സങ്കായിയെക്കുറിച്ച് പറയുന്നത് പാപിയായ മനുഷ്യൻ എന്നാണ്. തിരസ്കരിക്കപ്പെട്ടവരുടെ പ്രതിനിധിയാണവൻ. ഉപയോഗമില്ലാത്തവരെന്നും കഴിവില്ലാത്തവരെന്നും ആവശ്യമില്ലാത്തവരെന്നും പറഞ്ഞ് സമൂഹം തള്ളുന്ന മനുഷ്യരുണ്ട്. വാസതവത്തിൽ അവർ ഉപയോഗമില്ലാത്തവരല്ല. ഉപയോഗിക്കപ്പെടാത്തവരാണ്(less used). കഴിവില്ലാത്തവരുമല്ല, മറിച്ച് വ്യത്യസ്ത തരത്തിൽ കഴിവുള്ളവരാണ്(differently abled). ആവശ്യമില്ലാത്തവരല്ല, ആവശ്യം തിരിച്ചറിയപ്പെടാത്തവരാണ്. എയ്ഡ്സ് രോഗികളും കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങളും സ്ത്രീകളും ദുർബലരും എല്ലാം ഇക്കൂട്ടത്തിൽപ്പെടും. യേശു സങ്കായിയോടു പറഞ്ഞു നീ എന്നിക്ക് അന്യനല്ല. നിന്റെ ഭവനം എന്റേയും ഭവനമാണ്, നീ അബ്രഹാമിന്റെ മകനാണ്. മാറ്റിനിർത്തപ്പെടേണ്ടവനല്ല.

എന്താണ് ഭവനം? പഴയനിയമത്തിൽ വിശാലമായ അർത്ഥത്തിലാണ് ഭവനം അല്ലെങ്കിൽ കൂടുംബം എന്ന സങ്കല്പം ഉപയോഗിക്കപ്പെടുന്നത്. സാഹോദര്യബന്ധങ്ങളും ആടുമാടുകളും ഭൂമിയും അദ്ധ്യാനവും എല്ലാം ഉൾപ്പെടുന്ന അർത്ഥത്തിലാണ് അത് പ്രയോഗിക്കപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നത്. യാക്കോബും ഏശാവും ഉദാഹരണമാണ്. സാഹോദര്യബന്ധത്തിന്റേയും അവർക്കുള്ള ആടു മാടുകളുടെയും ഭൂസ്വത്തിന്റേയും ഒക്കെ പങ്കിടൽ സക്ഷാത്കരിക്കുന്ന സമയത്താണ് കൂടുംബം എന്ന സങ്കല്പം യാഥാർത്ഥ്യമാകുന്നത്. പുതിയനിയമത്തിലാകട്ടെ ദൈവരാജ്യമെന്ന അതിവിശാലമായ ദൈവിക കൂടുംബത്തെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള സ്വപ്നമാണ് യേശു പങ്കുവെക്കുന്നത്. എന്നാൽ മനുഷ്യപുത്രൻ തലചായ്ക്കുവാൻ ഇടമില്ലായെന്നാണ് യേശു പറയുന്നത്. വിവേചനത്തിന്റെ ലോകത്തിൽ ഇടമില്ലാത്തവരായി തീരുന്നവർക്ക് ഇടം ലഭ്യമാകുന്ന അനുഭവമാണ് ദൈവരാജ്യം. നമ്മുടെ ഭവനങ്ങൾ ദൈവരാജ്യത്തിന്റെ കൊച്ചുപതിപ്പുകൾ ആകണമെങ്കിൽ അപരനെ സ്വീകരിക്കുവാനായ് വാതായനങ്ങൾ തുറന്നു കൊടുക്കേണ്ടതുണ്ട്. ബന്ധങ്ങളിലാണ് ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ അർത്ഥം. ഡോമിനിക്കിന്റെ ലാപ്പിയറിന്റെ The city of Joy എന്ന പുസ്തകം ഇവിടെ ശ്രദ്ധേയമാണ്. മനോഹരമായ മറ്റൊരു കഥയുണ്ട്. ധനികനായ തോട്ടം ഉടമ പണിക്കാരനായ ജോണിയോടു ചോദിക്കുന്നു. നീ എങ്ങനെയാണ് ഇത്രയും അധികം സന്തോഷവാനായിരിക്കുന്നത്. അവൻ പറഞ്ഞു. എന്റെ ഭവനം സ്നേഹത്തിന്റേയും പങ്കുവെയ്ക്കലിന്റേയും ഇടമാണ്. അതുകൊണ്ടാണ് ഞാൻ ഇത്രയും അധികം സന്തോഷവാനായിരിക്കുന്നത്. തോട്ടം ഉടമ പറഞ്ഞു; എന്നാൽ എന്റെ ഭവനത്തിൽ ഉള്ളതോ സ്വത്തുകാംക്ഷിച്ചു കഴുകന്മാരെപ്പോലെ എന്റെ മരണത്തിനായി കാത്തിരിക്കുന്നവരാണ്. ലാമേല്ല, യേശുവാണ് നമ്മുടെ ഭവനത്തെ സന്തോഷത്തിന്റേയും സമാധാനത്തിന്റേയും ഇടമാക്കിത്തീർക്കുന്നത്.

ദൈവഭവനത്തിന്റെ പുതുക്കലും നമ്മുടെ ഭവനത്തിന്റെ പുതുക്കലിലൂടെ
നമ്മുടെ ഭവനം പുതുക്കപ്പെടുന്നത് യേശു വസിക്കുന്നതിലൂടെയാണ്. ആരാണ് യേശുക്രിസ്തു? കാണാതെ പോയതിനെ തിരഞ്ഞു രക്ഷിക്കുവാൻ വന്നവനാണ്(വാ.10). മാറിയിരിക്കുന്ന ദൈവമല്ല. തിരഞ്ഞു കണ്ടെത്തുന്ന ദൈവമാണ്.

ഇറങ്ങിവരുന്ന ദൈവമാണ്. തിരസ്കരിക്കപ്പെട്ടവരുടെ ഇടങ്ങളിൽ ഭവനം അന്വേഷിക്കുന്നവനാണ് യേശു. സക്കായി യേശുവിനെ കാണുവാൻ ആഗ്രഹിച്ചു(വാ.3). യോഹന്നാന്റെ സുവിശേഷത്തിൽ ഒന്നാം അദ്ധ്യായത്തിൽ 39-ാമത്തെ വാക്യത്തിൽ യേശുവിനെ കാണുവാൻ ശ്രമിക്കുന്ന യോഹന്നാൻ സ്നാപകന്റെ ശിഷ്യന്മാരെക്കുറിച്ച് പറയുന്നു. വന്നു കാൺമീൻ എന്നാണ് യേശു മറുപടി പറയുന്നത്. പന്ത്രണ്ടാം അദ്ധ്യായത്തിൽ 20-ാമത്തെ വാക്യത്തിൽ യെരൂശലേമിൽ നിന്നു വന്ന യവനന്മാർ യേശുവിനെ കാണുവാൻ ശ്രമിക്കുമ്പോൾ കോതമ്പുമണി നിലത്തുവീണ് ചാകുന്നതിനെക്കുറിച്ചാണ് യേശു സംസാരിക്കുന്നത്. ലൂക്കോസ് 18-ാം അദ്ധ്യായത്തിൽ ബർത്തിമായിയെക്കുറിച്ച് പറയുന്ന ഭാഗത്ത് അവനെ തടയരുത് എന്നാണ് യേശു പ്രതികരിക്കുന്നത്. Jesus revealed a new way of looking at things. ഇവിടെ സക്കായിയുടെ ഭവനത്തിലേക്ക് യേശു സക്കായിയെ ക്ഷണിക്കുകയാണ്. ആതിഥേയൻ അതിഥിയാക്കപ്പെടുന്നു. പാരസ്പരികതയുടെ പുതിയ ഭാവങ്ങൾ. ഭവനമെന്നു പറയുന്നത് സ്നേഹത്തിന്റെയും, ദുഃഖത്തിന്റെയും, നന്മകളുടെയും എല്ലാം പങ്കിടലിന്റെ സ്ഥലമാണ്.

ഇന്ന് ചരിത്രത്തിൽ മനുഷ്യൻ വളരെയേറെ നേട്ടങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടായിട്ടുണ്ട്; എന്നാൽ ഏറെ കോട്ടങ്ങളും ഉണ്ടാകുന്നു. സാമ്പത്തികമാന്ദ്യം കാര്യങ്ങളെ പുതിയതരത്തിൽ കാണുവാൻ നിർബന്ധിക്കുന്നു. ഒരുവശത്ത് ശാസ്ത്രത്തിന്റെ പുരോഗമനം ഇന്ത്യയുടെ കുതിപ്പിന് അടയാളപ്പെടുത്തുമ്പോൾ, മുംബൈയുടെ പ്രദേശങ്ങളിൽ ഉണ്ടായ ഭീകരാക്രമണങ്ങൾ മറ്റൊരു യാഥാർത്ഥ്യത്തെയാണ് ചൂണ്ടിക്കാണിക്കുന്നത്. മാറ്റങ്ങൾ ഏറെയുണ്ടാകുമ്പോൾ മുല്ലൂങ്ങളുടെ കുഴമറിപ്പിൽ ഉണ്ടാകുന്നു. ഒരു കാര്യം മനുഷ്യൻ ഓർമ്മിക്കുന്നത് നന്ന്. ദൈവം ചരിത്രത്തെ മുഴുവൻ മനുഷ്യനെ ഏൽപ്പിച്ചിട്ടില്ല. ദൈവം ഇന്നും ചരിത്രത്തിന്റെ കർത്താവാണ്. ദൈവമാണ് പുതൂക്കം നൽകുന്നത്. ഒരുവൻ ക്രിസ്തുവിലായാൽ പുതിയ സൃഷ്ടിയാണ്.

പുതൂക്കത്തിന്റെ സവിശേഷതകൾ

യേശുവുമായിട്ടുള്ള സംഭാഷണമദ്ധ്യേ തന്റെ സമ്പത്ത് ദരിദ്രരുമായി പങ്കുവെക്കുമെന്ന് സക്കായി പ്രസ്താവിക്കുന്നു. സാമ്പത്തിക പ്രതിസന്ധിയുടെ മുഖത്ത് സമ്പത്ത് പങ്കുവെക്കുവാനുള്ള ആഹ്വാനമാണ് സുവിശേഷം നൽകുന്നത്. ദാരിദ്ര്യം ദൈവം സൃഷ്ടിച്ചതല്ല. നോബൽ സമ്മാന ജേതാവായ മുഹമ്മദ് യൂനിസ് പറയുന്നത്; ദാരിദ്ര്യം ദരിദ്രർ സൃഷ്ടിച്ചതല്ലയെന്നാണ്. 2008-ൽ ഇംഗ്ലണ്ടിൽ വെച്ചുനടന്ന ലാമ്പത്ത് കോൺഫ്രൻസ് ഉറക്കെ പ്രസ്താവിക്കുന്നു; ദാരിദ്ര്യം തുടച്ചുനീക്കുവാൻ ലോകരാഷ്ട്രങ്ങൾക്കൊക്കണമെന്ന്! മേധാവിത്വത്തിൽ നിന്നും പങ്കാളിത്തത്തിലേക്കുള്ള ഒരു സാമൂഹ്യക്രമത്തിനായിട്ടാണ് ലോകസഭ നിലനിൽക്കുന്നത്. ഞാനും എന്റെ സമൂഹത്തിലെ ദാരിദ്ര്യത്തിന്റെ പങ്കാളിയാണ് എന്ന മനോഭാവമാണ് മദർ തെരേസായെ ദരിദ്രരുടെ ശുശ്രൂഷക്കാരിയായി മാറ്റിയത്. ജീവനെ സംരക്ഷിക്കുകയെന്നത് മനുഷ്യന്റെ ജൈവ ചോദനയാണ്. സമൂഹ സൃഷ്ടിയിൽ നാം തല്പരരായിരിക്കണം. അതാണ് ദൈവജനത്തിന്റെ സാക്ഷ്യം.

ചതിവായി വാങ്ങിയിട്ടുള്ളത് മടക്കിക്കൊടുക്കുന്നുവെന്നാണ് സക്കായി ഇവിടെ പറയുന്നത്. ഇതൊരു പുതിയ തിരിച്ചറിവാണ്. ഓസ്കാർ അവാർഡിന് നിർദ്ദേശിക്കപ്പെട്ട സ്റ്റേഡോൾ മില്യനയർ എന്ന ചിത്രത്തിൽ മുംബൈ

ചേരിയിലെ ഒരു ചെറുപ്പക്കാരൻ കോടിപതിയാകുന്ന കഥയുണ്ട്. അതേ സമയം തന്നെ രണ്ടുമാർക്ക് കുറഞ്ഞുപോയതിന്റെ പേരിൽ ആത്മഹത്യ ചെയ്ത ഒരു കുട്ടിയുടേയും കഥയുണ്ട് മറുവശത്ത്. ചുറ്റുപാടുകളിലെല്ലാം പരാജയപ്പെട്ടവരുടെ മുഖങ്ങളാണ്. അതിന്റെ രൂപാന്തര പ്രക്രിയയിലുള്ള പങ്കാളിത്തമാണ് ദൈവം നമ്മോട് ആവശ്യപ്പെടുന്നത്.

ദൈവഭവനത്തിന്റെ പുതൂക്കം എങ്ങനെ സാധ്യമാകും?

സഭ ദൈവരാജ്യത്തിന്റെ അടയാളമാണ്. അതിന്റെ പ്രാദേശിക രൂപമായ ഇടവക പുതൂക്കത്തിന്റെ പ്രാദേശിക മാധ്യമമാണ്. ദൈവരാജ്യ വീക്ഷണത്തിൽ ചുറ്റുപാടുകളെ തിരിച്ചറിഞ്ഞ് രൂപാന്തരപ്പെടുത്തുവാൻ നിയോഗം ലഭിച്ച ബദൽ സമൂഹമാണ് പ്രാദേശിക ഇടവക. തോമസ് ഫ്രീഡ്മാൻ Hot, Flat and Crowded എന്ന പുസ്തകത്തിൽ ചോദിക്കുന്നു, How can we renew our global future? അദ്ദേഹം പറയുന്നു, We want regeneration, a cleanup and a step forward...

1. സഭ ആതിഥേയ സമൂഹം

ഒരു ഇടവക എല്ലാവരെയും സ്വീകരിക്കുന്ന ഇടമാണ്. തങ്ങൾക്കുള്ളത് പങ്കുവെക്കുന്നവരുടെ കൂട്ടായ്മയാണ്. സ്വാർത്ഥതയും ലാഭവും അന്വേഷിക്കുന്നവരെ രൂപാന്തരപ്പെടുത്തുന്ന ഇടമാണ് ഇടവക. ലോകത്തെ തന്നെ കൂടുംബമായി കാണുവാൻ പരിശീലനം ലഭിക്കുന്ന ഇടമാണ് ഇടവക.

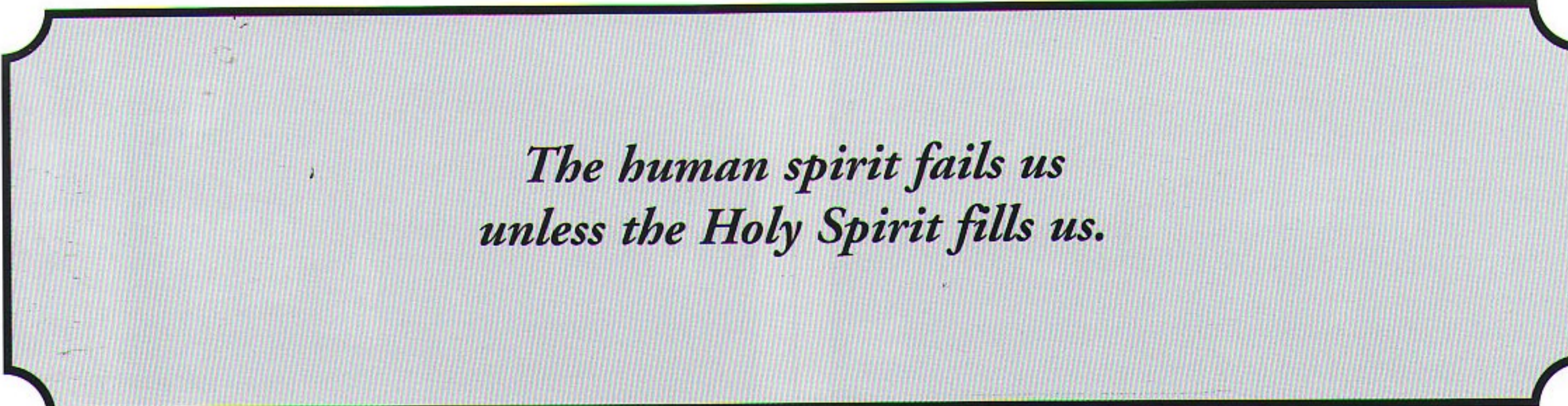
2. സഭ നിരപ്പിന്റെ ശുശ്രൂഷക്കാർ

അനുരഞ്ജനത്തിന്റെ ശുശ്രൂഷ ജാഗ്രതയോടുകൂടെ ചെയ്യേണ്ട ഒന്നാണ്. അനുരഞ്ജനത്തിനായി സാഹസികമായ ചുവടുകൾ വെയ്ക്കേണ്ടതുണ്ട്. ക്രൂശമെടുത്ത് തന്നെ അനുഗമിക്കുകയെന്ന് യേശു പറയുമ്പോൾ ഏറ്റവും നൊമ്പരമേറിയ ഒരു ശുശ്രൂഷയുടെ പങ്കാളിത്തത്തിനായിട്ടാണ് അവൻ വിളിക്കുന്നതെന്നോർക്കുക. ഇവിടെ സക്കായി വ്യക്തമായ അനുതാപത്തിലേക്ക് പ്രവേശിക്കുകയാണ്. നാലുമടങ്ങു ദരിദ്രർക്കായി മടക്കിക്കൊടുക്കുകയാണ്. സ്വയംകേന്ദ്രീകൃതയിൽ നിന്ന് അയാൾ വിമോചിപ്പിക്കപ്പെടുകയാണ്. പരസ്പരം പങ്കുവെക്കുകയും നൂറുകൊടുക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്ന അനുഭവത്തെ പ്രതീകവൽക്കരിക്കുന്ന കുദാശയാണ് വി. കുർബ്ബാന.

3. സഭ കരുതുന്ന സമൂഹം

കരുതുക എന്നത് ഒരു നിയോഗമാണ്. വഴിയാത്രക്കാരുടെ മുറുവുകളെ കെട്ടുക മാത്രമല്ല ശമര്യക്കാരുടെ ചെയ്യുന്നത്; തുടർന്നും അയാളെ സംരക്ഷിക്കുവാനായി ശ്രമിക്കുകയാണ്. കരുതുന്ന പ്രക്രിയ ഒരു ചുരുങ്ങിയ കാലത്തേക്കുള്ള പ്രവർത്തനമല്ല. ഇത് എല്ലാ കാലത്തേക്കും ചെയ്യുവാനുള്ള നിയോഗമാണ് സഭയ്ക്കുള്ളത്.

നമ്മുടെ ഭവനങ്ങൾ/പ്രാദേശിക ഇടവകകൾ പുതൂക്കപ്പെടണം. പുതൂക്കം യേശുക്രിസ്തുവിലാണ് ലഭിക്കുന്നത്. സമ്പത്ത് പങ്കിടുന്നതിലൂടെയാണ് ദൈവരാജ്യ അനുഭവക്കാരാകുവാൻ സാധിക്കുക. വിശ്വാസ സമൂഹമേ, അനുതാപ ഹൃദയത്തോടെ വിശ്വാസ ചുവടുകൾ വെയ്ക്കുക. ഇന്ന് ഈ വീടിന് രക്ഷ വന്നുവെന്നുള്ള വചനം കേൾക്കുവാൻ നമ്മുടെ ഭവനങ്ങളും പ്രാദേശിക ഇടവകകളും സമൂഹവും ഉണരട്ടെ. ആമേൻ.



മിഷൻ ഫീൽഡുകളിലൂടെ ഒരു യാത്ര

ഐപ്പ് ഫിലിപ്പ് & അന്നമ്മ ഫിലിപ്പ്, എപ്പിഫനി മാർത്തോമ്മ ചർച്ച് - ന്യൂയോർക്ക്

മാർത്തോമ്മാ സഭ ഇന്ത്യയുടെ പലഭാഗങ്ങളിലായി സുവിശേഷ പ്രസ്ഥാനങ്ങളും മിഷൻ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളും ആരംഭിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഈ മിഷൻ ഫീൽഡുകളിലൂടെ യാത്ര ചെയ്യുവാനും സഭയിലെ സമർപ്പിതരായ പട്ടക്കാരുടേയും സുവിശേഷകരുടേയും ആത്മാർത്ഥമായ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾ നേരിട്ടു കാണുവാനും വിനീതരായ ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് ലഭിച്ച അവസരം മാർത്തോമ്മാ സഭാംഗങ്ങളെന്ന നിലയിൽ അഭിമാനിക്കാവുന്നതാണ്.

(Visakmission - Andra Pradesh)



പട്ടിണി പാവങ്ങൾക്കും രോഗികൾക്കും ആവശ്യമായ സഹായമെത്തിക്കുകയും അതിലൂടെ നമുക്ക് ലഭിച്ച അനുഗ്രഹങ്ങളും നാം അനുഭവിക്കുന്ന ദൈവസ്നേഹവും അവരുമായി പങ്കുവെക്കുന്നതും സുവിശേഷ ധർമ്മവും ദൗത്യവുമാണ്.

(Devanahally Missi on - Karnataka)



ലഭിച്ചതിൽ നിന്നും ഒരു വീതം മാറ്റിവെച്ച് സുവിശേഷ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾക്കായി നാം കൊടുക്കുന്നതുകൊണ്ട് സഭയുടെ സുവിശേഷ ദൗത്യം ഭംഗിയായി നിർവ്വഹിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു സുവിശേഷ പ്രസ്ഥാനങ്ങൾ വളരുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു.

(Chinthamani Mission - Karnataka)



'നിന്റെ വഴി യെഹോവയെ ഭരമേല്പിക്ക അവനിൽ തന്നെ ആശ്രയിക്ക.....' എന്ന മാറ്റമില്ലാത്ത വചനം ഉൾക്കൊണ്ടുകൊണ്ട് ഇന്ത്യയിലുള്ള മാർത്തോമ്മാ സഭയുടെ മിഷൻ ഫീൽഡുകൾ സന്ദർശിക്കുകയും അവിടെ കാണുകയും കേൾക്കുകയും അനുഭവിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്ന ആത്മീയ സത്യങ്ങളേയും പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളേയുംകുറിച്ച് മറ്റുള്ളവരുമായി പങ്കുവെച്ച്, മിഷൻ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളിൽ അവരേയും പങ്കാളികളാക്കണം എന്ന അടങ്ങാത്ത ആഗ്രഹമാണ് വിനീതരായ ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് മിഷൻ ഫീൽഡിലൂടെ യാത്രചെയ്യുവാൻ ഉത്തേജനം നല്കിയത്.

(Bhopal Mission)



2008 സെപ്റ്റംബർ 18 മുതൽ ഒക്ടോബർ 23 വരെയുള്ള ദിവസങ്ങളിൽ 18 മിഷൻ ഫീൽഡുകളും അതിനോടു ചേർന്നുള്ള ഗ്രാമങ്ങളും സന്ദർശിക്കുവാൻ സാധിച്ചതിൽ ദൈവത്തിന് സ്തുതികരേറ്റുന്നു.

(Jaiypur Mission - Rajasthan)



സന്ദർശിക്കുവാൻ സാധിച്ച എല്ലാ മിഷൻ ഫീൽഡുകളിലും താമസ സൗകര്യവും ഭക്ഷണവും ക്രമീകരിച്ച് പട്ടക്കാരും സുവിശേഷകരും ഊഷ്മളമായ സ്വീകരണമാണ് ഞങ്ങൾക്കു നൽകിയത്.

(Shivana Pura Mission - Karnataka)



Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andra Pradesh, Karnataka എന്നീ സ്ഥലങ്ങളിലൂടെ മുപ്പത്തഞ്ചു ദിവസങ്ങളോളം യാതൊരു ശാരീരിക പ്രശ്നങ്ങളും ക്ലേശവും കൂടാതെ യാത്ര ചെയ്യാൻ സാധിച്ചു എന്നത് ദൈവകൃപയാണ്.

(Hoskote Mission - Karnataka)



ഓരോ മിഷൻ ഫീൽഡിലും പത്തു മുതൽ മുപ്പതു വരെ ഗ്രാമങ്ങൾ ഉൾപ്പെടുത്തിയിരിക്കുന്നതിനാൽ ഒരു സുവിശേഷകൻ ഒന്നിലധികം ഗ്രാമങ്ങളിൽ പോയി സുവിശേഷ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾ നടത്തുന്നു.

(Nandial Mission - Andra Pradesh)



ഓരോ ഗ്രാമങ്ങളും വളരെ ദൂരത്തിലാണ്. കൂണ്ടും കുഴിയും നിറഞ്ഞ സ്ഥലങ്ങളാണ് പലയിടത്തും ആയതിനാൽ ഗതാഗത സൗകര്യവും പരിമിതമാണ്. സുവിശേഷകർ കാൽനടയായി യാത്രചെയ്താണ് ഈ ഗ്രാമങ്ങളിൽ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നത്.

(1st Church of Nandial Mission - Andra Pradesh)



ഇവിടെയെല്ലാം സ്കൂൾ, ചാപ്പൽ, ബാലവാടി, ഹോസ്റ്റൽ എന്നിവ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നു. അതോടൊപ്പം ഭവന സന്ദർശനം, സണ്ടേസ്കൂൾ, വി.ബി.എസ്സ്, ആരാധന, പ്രാർത്ഥന കൂട്ടങ്ങൾ എന്നിവയോടൊപ്പം ക്രിസ്തുമസ്സ് പരിപാടികൾ മറ്റ് സാംസ്കാരിക പരിപാടികളും പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളിൽ ഉൾപ്പെടുന്നു.

ആഴ്ചയിൽ ഒരു ദിവസം ഉപവാസ പ്രാർത്ഥനയും മാസത്തിൽ രൊഴ്ച പ്രാദേശിക ഭാഷയിൽ വിശുദ്ധ കുർബ്ബാനയും നടത്തപ്പെടുന്നു.

(Changala Mari Mission - Andra Pradesh)



ഇവിടുത്തെ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾ സാമ്പത്തിക ബുദ്ധിമുട്ടിലൂടെയാണ് കടന്നുപോകുന്നത്. പട്ടക്കാർക്കും സുവിശേഷകർക്കും സഭയിൽ നിന്നോ സുവിശേഷ സംഘത്തിൽ നിന്നോ ശമ്പളം നൽകുന്നു. എന്നാൽ സ്കൂളിന്റെ ചിലവുകൾ അധ്യാപകരുടേയും അനധ്യാപകരുടേയും ശമ്പളം മുതലായവ അവർ തന്നെ കണ്ടത്തേണ്ട സ്ഥിതിയാണ് ഇവിടെയുള്ളത്. സ്കൂളിൽ കൂട്ടികളുടെ യാത്രാ സൗകര്യത്തിനായി ഒരു മാസം ജീപ്പ് വാടകയിനത്തിൽ തന്നെ പതിനായിരത്തോളം രൂപ ആവശ്യമാണ്.

(Sihora Christa Panthi Ashram)



കൂടാതെ കൂട്ടികളുടെ യൂണിഫോം, ഭക്ഷണം, രോഗികളായവരെ ആശുപത്രിയിൽ ചികിത്സിക്കുന്ന ചിലവുകൾ ഇതിനെല്ലാം നല്ല വരുമാനം ആവശ്യമാണ്. കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങളിൽ പലരും പോഷക ആഹാര കുറവുകൊണ്ട് ആരോഗ്യപ്രശ്നങ്ങൾ ഉള്ളവരും വസ്ത്രം തന്നെ ധരിക്കാൻ ഇല്ലാത്തവരുമാണ്. ഡോക്ടർമാരുടെ സേവനം ഇവിടെ പരിമിതമാണ്.

(Jangamakote Mission - Karnataka)



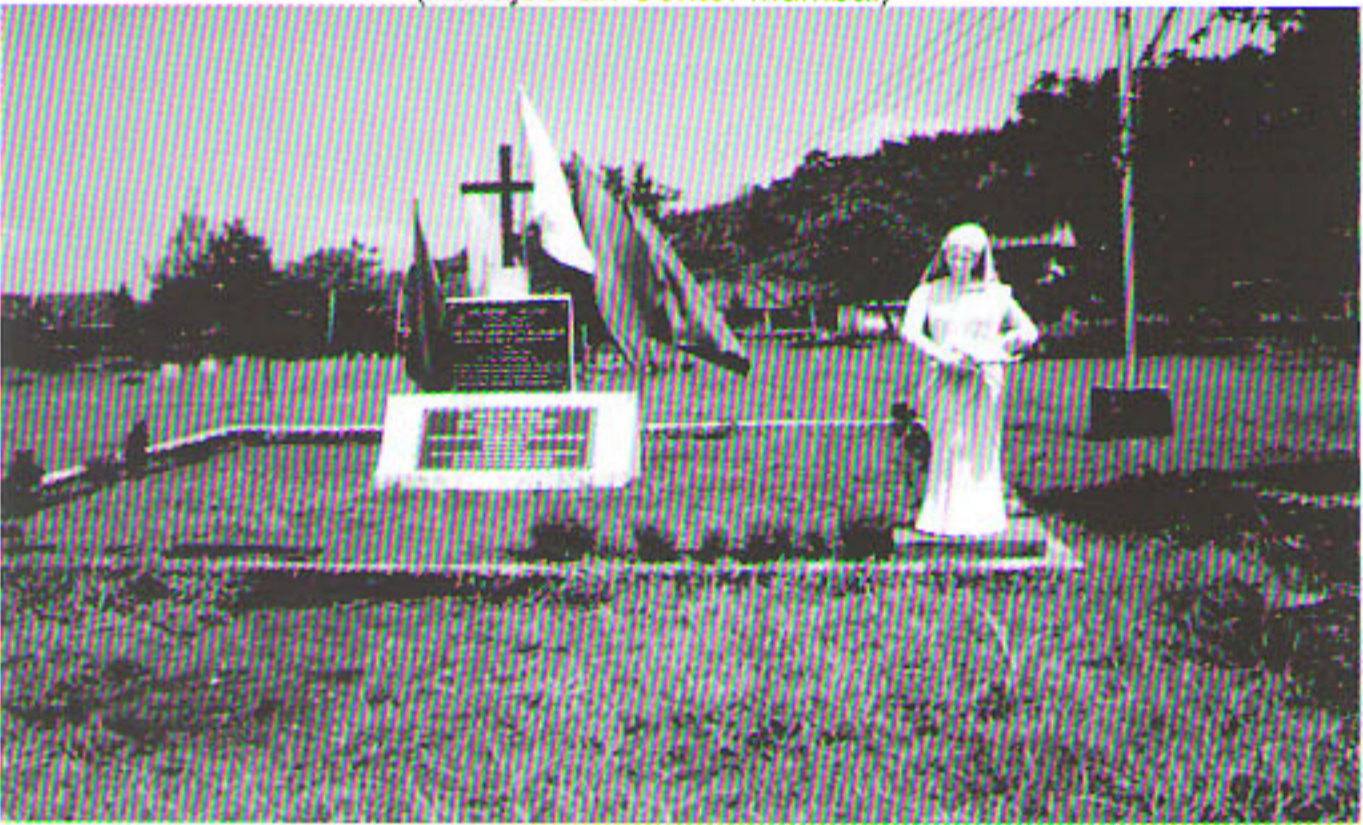
ഈ മിഷൻഫീൽഡുകളിൽ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്ന സുവിശേഷകർക്ക് താമസിക്കുന്നതിന് വാടകയ്ക്ക് ഭവനങ്ങൾ ലഭിക്കുന്നില്ല ആയതിനാൽ സ്വന്തമായി ഭവനങ്ങൾ നിർമ്മിക്കേണ്ട ആവശ്യകതയുണ്ട്.

(Secunderabad Ghatkessar Mission)



നന്ദിയാൽ ഉമാപതി ഗ്രാമത്തിൽ ആമല്ലൂർ സെഹിയോൻ ഇടവക ഒരു ചാപ്പലും മിഷൻ ഭവനവും നിർമ്മിക്കുന്നു. അതോടൊപ്പം കുറ്റപ്പുഴ മാർത്തോമ്മ ഇടവക 100 പെൺകുട്ടികൾക്ക് താസിക്കാനുള്ള ഹോസ്റ്റൽ, ഒരു ചാപ്പൽ എന്നിവയുടെ നിർമ്മാണവും ആരംഭിച്ചു കഴിഞ്ഞു. ഇവിടെ ഒരു പാഴ്സനേജും നിർമ്മിക്കേണ്ടതുണ്ട്.

(Navajeevan Center Mumbai)



ഗ്രാമവാസികളിൽ പലരും ദാരിദ്ര്യത്തിലും പട്ടിണിയിലുമാണ് എന്നാൽ സത്യസന്ധരും വിശ്വാസികളും നിഷ്കളങ്കരും ആത്മാർത്ഥതയുള്ളവരുമാണ്. ഗ്രാമീണർ കൃഷിക്കാരും കുലിപ്പണിക്കാരുമാണ്. പ്രധാനമായും പശു, ആട്, എരുമ, പട്ടു നൂൽപ്പുഴു എന്നിവയെ വളർത്തിയും ചോളം, കടല, പഞ്ഞിപ്പുല്ല്, വെണ്ട എന്നിവ കൃഷി ചെയ്തും ഉപജീവനം നടത്തുന്നു.

(Chakkan Mission)



ഗ്രാമീണർ ചെറുകുടിലുകളിൽ 7-8 പേർ വീതം താമസിക്കുന്നു. അവരോടൊപ്പം തന്നെ ഒരുവശത്തായി ആടുമാടുകളും വെള്ളവും വൈദ്യുതിയും പലപ്പോഴും ലഭ്യമല്ല. ഉപ്പുവെള്ളമാണ് പലയിടത്തും ലഭിക്കുന്നത്.

(Lonavalla Mission)



കുഴൽ കിണറുകളുടേയും മറ്റും ആവശ്യകതയുണ്ടിവിടെ. സിഹോറ, സറ്റ്ന, ഹോസ്കോട്ട് എന്നിവിടങ്ങളിൽ കൃഷി, കാലിവളർത്തൽ, സ്കൂൾ, ആശുപത്രി എന്നിവ ഉള്ളതിനാൽ ദൈനദിന കാര്യങ്ങൾ നടന്നുപോകുന്നു. ഈ പ്രദേശങ്ങളിൽ വിശ്വാസത്തിലേക്ക് വന്നവരെ മൂന്നാലു വർഷം കഴിഞ്ഞേ സഭ സ്നാനപ്പെടുത്താറുള്ളൂ, ആരെയും നിർബന്ധിച്ച് സ്നാനപ്പെടുത്തുന്നില്ല. വിശ്വാസത്തിലേക്കു വന്നവർ സ്നാനപ്പെടണമെന്ന് സ്വയം ആവശ്യവുമായ് എത്തുകയാണ് പതിവ്.

(Visak Mission)



കുട്ടികളോടൊത്തുള്ള പാട്ട്-പ്രാർത്ഥന-ആരാധന ഇവ വളരെ ആത്മീയ ആവേശം ഞങ്ങൾക്കു പകർന്നു. ജംശ കോട്ടയിലെ ഒരു ഗ്രാമത്തിലെ ഭവനത്തിൽ ഉച്ചയ്ക്കു നടന്ന പ്രാർത്ഥനയിൽ ഞങ്ങൾ പങ്കെടുത്തപ്പോൾ, ശ്രീയേശുനാഥം അതിശയ നാഥം, കരുണാനിധിയേ കാരുണ്യ അൻപേ, കരുതുന്നവൻ ഞാനല്ലയോ എന്നീ പാട്ടുകൾ അവിടുത്തെ പ്രാദേശിക ഭാഷയിലും, ദൈവത്തിന് സ്തോത്രം എന്ന പാട്ട് മലയാളത്തിലും പാടുകയുണ്ടായി.

(Lona Valla Mission)



പ്രാർത്ഥനക്ക് ശേഷം പങ്കെടുത്തവർ ഓരോരുത്തരും വന്ന് കൈതരുകയും, അവരുടെ തലയിൽ കൈവെച്ചു പ്രാർത്ഥിക്കുവാനായി ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് മുൻപിൽ തലവണക്കി നിന്നതും അവിസ്തമരണീയമായ അനുഭവമായിരുന്നു. പ്രാർത്ഥനയിൽ ആഴമാർന്ന വിശ്വാസമുള്ള ആ സമൂഹത്തോടൊപ്പം സ്നേഹ വിരൂന്ദിലും ഞങ്ങൾ പങ്കുകൊണ്ടു.

(Chakkan Mission)



Nandilal Mission-ൽ എത്തിയ ഞങ്ങളെ അവടെയുള്ളവർ പൂമാലയണിയിച്ചാണ് സ്വീകരിച്ചത്. വിശാഖപട്ടണത്ത് നിന്നും 150km ദൂരെയുള്ള Sapariguda എന്ന ഗ്രാമത്തിൽ അവിടെയുള്ളവർ ഞങ്ങളുടെ കാലുകൾ കഴുകി തുടച്ചാണ് പ്രാർത്ഥനാമുറിയിലേക്ക് സ്വീകരിച്ചത്. ആ മലമുകളിൽ ആദ്യമായെത്തുന്ന മാർത്തോമ്മാക്കാർ ഞങ്ങളാണെന്നും, അമേരിക്കയിൽ നീണ്ടവർഷങ്ങളായി താമസിക്കുന്ന ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് ഈ സാഹസത്തിന് എങ്ങനെ സാധിച്ചു എന്നും അവിടുത്തെ അച്ചൻ ചോദിച്ചപ്പോൾ ഞങ്ങൾ വിനയാനന്ദിതരായി ദൈവത്തിന് നന്ദി പറഞ്ഞു.

(Jangamakote Mission - Karnataka)



Srikakulamത്ത് രണ്ട് ഗ്രാമങ്ങളിൽ ഡെൽഫി ഭദ്രാസനം നൽകിയ ഓരോലക്ഷം രൂപ ചിലവിട്ട് റവ. ഫിലിപ്പ് ബേബിയുടെ നേതൃത്വത്തിൽ രണ്ടു ചാപ്പലുകൾ നിർമ്മിച്ച് ഞെ. ഞെ. ഉ. ഗീവർഗ്ഗീസ് മാർ തിയഡോഷ്യസ് എപ്പിസ്കോപ്പ കുദാശ നിർവ്വഹിച്ചു. കാടുപിടിച്ച് ശുചിത്വം ഇല്ലാത്ത വാഹനങ്ങൾ കടന്നുചെല്ലാത്ത സ്ഥലത്ത് നിർമ്മാണത്തിന് ആവശ്യമായ കല്ലും മണ്ണും മറ്റു സാധനങ്ങളും ജനങ്ങൾ തലയിൽ ചുമന്നാണ് മലമുകളിൽ എത്തിച്ചത്. അവരുടെ കഠിനാധ്വാനത്തിന് അർഹമായ വേതനം ലഭിച്ചില്ലായെങ്കിലും അവർ സംതൃപ്തരാണ്. ഇവർ തങ്ങളുടെ കൂലിവേലയിൽ നിന്നും ലഭിക്കുന്നതിന്റെ ദശാംശം മാറ്റിവെച്ചാണ് ഈ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾക്ക് സംഭാവനകൾ നൽകുന്നത്. ഈ പ്രദേശങ്ങളിൽ നടക്കുന്ന ആത്മാർത്ഥമായ മിഷൻ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളുടെ ഫലമായി അനേകർ ക്രിസ്തീയ വിശ്വാസത്തിലേക്ക് വരികയും ഒരു നല്ല വിശ്വാസ സമൂഹം ഇവിടെ രൂപപ്പെടുകയും ചെയ്തിട്ടുണ്ട്.

ഈ മിഷൻ പ്രദേശങ്ങളിൽ പോകുവാനും ഇവിടെ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നവരെ നേരിൽ കാണുവാനും അവരോടൊത്ത് ക്രിസ്തീയ സന്തോഷം പങ്കുവെക്കാനും അവരെ സഹായിക്കാനും മറ്റും ലഭിച്ച അവസരം ജീവിതത്തിലെ ധന്യമാർന്ന നിമിഷങ്ങളാണ്. ഈ വേലസ്ഥലങ്ങൾ സന്ദർശിക്കുകയും, സുവിശേഷരേയും അവർ ചെയ്യുന്ന പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളും നേരിട്ട് കാണുന്നത് അവർക്ക് ആത്മീയ ആവേശം പകരും എന്നതിൽ സംശയമില്ല.

(Sihora Christa Panthi Ashram)



എല്ലാവർക്കും എല്ലാം ചെയ്യാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞില്ലെങ്കിൽ പോലും ചിലകാര്യങ്ങൾ ചെയ്യാനാകും a)മിഷൻ ഫീൽഡുകളെ ഓർത്തു പ്രാർത്ഥിക്കുക b)മിഷൻ ഫീൽഡുകൾ കഴിവതും സന്ദർശിക്കുക c)സാമ്പത്തികമായി മിഷൻ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളെ സഹായിക്കുക.

(Visak Mission)



നിന്റെ വഴി യെഹോവയിൽ ഭരമേല്പിക്ക അവൻ നിന്നെ പുലർത്തും.... എന്ന ഉറപ്പോടെ ദൈവരാജ്യ കെട്ടുപണിക്കായി നമ്മെ സജ്ജരാക്കാം കുറികിപോകാത്ത കരങ്ങളിൽ നമ്മെയും നമുക്കുള്ളവയും സമർപ്പിക്കാം. സന്ദർശിച്ച എല്ലാ മിഷൻ ഫീൽഡുകളിലും ഞങ്ങളെ ഹൃദയപൂർവ്വം സ്വീകരിക്കുകയും കരുതുകയും സ്നേഹിക്കുകയും ചെയ്ത മിഷൻ പ്രവർത്തകർക്കും പട്ടക്കാർക്കും ഒത്തിരി...ഒത്തിരി....നന്ദി...

സന്ദർശിച്ച മിഷൻ ഫീൽഡുകൾ:

1. Rajasthan - Jaipur Mission- Rev. John Mathew
2. Bhopal Mission- Sehatgang Ashram - Rev. George Cherian
3. Satna-Christakula Mission Rev. C. A. Varghese
4. Lonavalla Mission- Rev. C. Thomas
5. Chakkan Mission-Rev. C. Thomas
6. Sihora- Christapathi Ashram- Rev. James Idicula
7. Navajeevan Center, Bombay- Rev. Monsi Mathew
8. Secanderabad Mission- Ghatgeshwar Mission- Rev. Serin Oommen Varghese
9. Visakhapattanam - Visak Mission- Rev. T. Babu
10. Srikakula- Rev. Philip Baby
11. Changalamari- Rev. Sabu K. Samuel
12. Nandial Mission- Rev. Devadas (Telugu)
13. Jumgamakotta- Rev. Chinnadore (Kannada)
14. Chinthamani Mission- Rev. Unnithan
15. Hoskote- Rev. James Veeraamala
16. Maidakur Mission- Rev. Baiju Markos
17. Shivanapura Mission- Rev. Sabu Thomas
18. Devanahally Mission- Rev. K. P. Johnson

The Prodigal Christian

Mrs. Sharon Nishanth Thomas, New Jersey

You did everything to bring me back home
With trickling blood drops and flakes of flesh
To remove humanity's sin that roams
And slowly kills, I received life afresh

You chose not to summon all the angels
Or command the earth to swallow mankind
You're the only Hero, my God Who's able
Man's sins, curses, and demons You now bind

You thought of me when You sent your elect
Anointed these appointed to inspire
And share the Good News of the Kingdom perfect
As the Holy Spirit convicts with fire

But your death turned to cliché in my head
As I grew indifferent just like the rest
I faked piety, but my soul was dead
I passionately refused to be blessed

Though I shut the door on Your smiling face,
You kept knocking, never stopped, never left
No hatred or vengeance lived, not one trace
You simply wanted to fill a large cleft

That huge gap between You and me was far
Deeper than any ocean, dark as death
But you suffered with every blow and scar
And kept forgiving me till Your last breath

I backstabbed You by loving the world more
More than I ever bothered to love you
I stopped worshipping the God I once adored
And again, proven my heart to be untrue

"Oh Merciful God, save me from myself!
I am such a fool for turning away"
In desperation, I reach for my shelf
To read the Words my King has to say

"Rejoice with Me; I have found my lost sheep."
And I saw the prodigal son was me
I went on my knees and began to weep
And I sought for forgiveness in my plea.

Being lukewarm in faith ruined my life
My heart was just a spiritual vacuum
But when You took me back, I faced no strife
My dream of the Great Commission bloomed

Religious rituals can't trade this bond
And there is no ministry without prayer
Every choice, every answer is beyond
My wisdom, but through Your counsel of care

So Lord, refresh me with Your sacred love
Give me desire to win souls for Your fame
Disciple me with blessings from above
I promise to bring glory to Your Name

സമർപ്പിക്കുന്നേഴകളേ തിരുസവിയേ നാഥാ

സാം പെണ്ണുക്കര - സുജിത്ത് എബ്രഹാം

അരുളുക ദേവാ ആത്മീയവരങ്ങൾ
ചൊരിയുക വൻകൃപ ആശിഷമാരിയായ്
അണയുമീയേഴകൾ തിരുസവിയെയൊന്നായ്
എഴുന്നള്ളുകിനേരം ശാലേമിതിൽ

ശ്ലീഹയാം പത്രോസിൻ പാവനനാമത്തിൽ
ശോഭിക്കുമീ ദേവാലയം
മാർത്തോമ്മാ സഭതൻ അഭിമാനബിന്ദുവായ്
ന്യൂജേഴ്സിയിൽ ടീനക്കിൻ ഹൃദയ ഭാഗേ
അരുളുക ദേവാ.....

ഞങ്ങളീ ആലയേ രണ്ടുപതിറ്റാണ്ട്
പിന്നിട്ടു നാഥാ നിൻകൃപയാൽ
അനവധി നന്മകൾ അനുദിനം നൽകി നീ
നന്ദിയാൽ പാടുന്നു സ്തോത്രഗാനം

അരുളുക ദേവാ.....

ആഴികൾ കടന്ന് എത്തിയീകരയിൽ
ഭാരതമക്കൾ പ്രവാസികളായ്
നിൻമുൻപിൽ പൂർണ്ണമായ് സമർപ്പിക്കുന്നീ ദിനം
ആശീർവദിക്കേണം തലമുറയായ്

അരുളുക ദേവാ.....

A song dedicated to the 20th Anniversary Celebration of
St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church Teaneck, NJ

Church and Community

Elizabeth (Suja) George, New Jersey Mar Thoma Church, Randolph, NJ

“The work of Jesus was not a new set of ideals or principles for reforming or even revolutionizing society, but the establishment of a new community, people that embodied forgiveness, sharing and self-sacrificing love in its rituals and discipline. In that sense, the visible church is not to be the bearer of Christ’s message, but to be the message.”—Stanley Hauerwas

Christianity does not mean that you live in a secluded world. Instead, Christianity urges you to be a part of a larger community. True Christians should serve as role models to the rest of society. We need churches that represent the community; we need leaders who stand up for the needy. The Church was called to serve the community in order to fulfill Jesus Christ’s sermons.

If we listen and learn from the teachings of Jesus Christ, He always symbolized the community. He was a great social reformer. He encouraged people to get involved with their community. The following Bible verse was a great example to this. “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’”. Matthew: 25:45

In order to do service as Christian or Church, we need the power of the Holy Spirit. We have to witness God’s power. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,” Acts 1:8. These words should be echoing in our ears.

In early centuries, churches took an important role in the community, now it is a different world. Churches face numerous challenges and responsibilities. Now, most of the violence around the world takes place because of religion. People fight and kill each other in the name of God. What can we, as a church, do here? We may think we do not have many options—but we do have one great option, the power of prayer. We have to come as a group and pray for the violence to end. We have to repent for these people, we have to confess for these people, we have to fast for these people.

“We can reach our world, if we will. The greatest lack today is not people or funds. The greatest need is prayer.”—Wesley Duetel.

Church has a great responsibility to the community. When it comes to the community service, the first thing that comes to our mind is charity, financial support. However, this is not the only service that we should do as a church. Indeed, we need to provide financial help to the needy. Nevertheless, there is a greater responsibility on church for community. Church and its members should be a witness to Community. As a church, we have to provide love. We need to demonstrate how Jesus Christ loves each of us.

As a church, we have to stand for Justice. We had great leaders in the past who stood for justice. The Church should raise its voice when we see injustice.

We, the members of the Mar Thoma Church, should be proud of our Metropolitan leaders. They stood for the democratic rights of the people.

Dr. Yuhanon Marthoma Metropolitan had a great vision. He started Bhoobhavanadana Prasthanam—“Home for homeless”. Later the Kerala government adopted his vision. It was the most valuable service of our church to the community. In addition, the Yuhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan was the only church leader in India to exhibit the courage to write a letter to Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi during the national emergency on the country, requesting the emergency should be lifted in the interest of democracy.

We, as a church, have a great responsibility to share our happiness with those who lack it. We live in a society where we can find many people who may have lost jobs, lost loved ones, who are sick and those who are in depression. We can do many things, as an individual and as an organization. We have to witness God’s love.

Church should have a vision for the community. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Yuakim Mar Koorilos Metropolitan who took the big initiative for the Mexican Mission, with a great intention to spread the love of Jesus Christ to less privileged communities in Mexico.

We, as a church have to undertake mission fields. We have to promote the awareness of the need for missionaries in the countries which never had the opportunities to hear about Jesus.

“The supreme task of the church is the evangelization of the world. No one has the right to hear the gospel twice until everyone has had an opportunity to hear it at least once.” (J. Oswald Smith, Vital Christianity, June 1979.)

In conclusion, the church should have the following responsibilities to the community:

- Be a part of the community—share happiness and sorrows.
- Be a carrier for God’s love to the people around.
- Be a witness to community.
- Be a voice that stands up for justice.
- Be courageous to spread the gospel.
- Be a Prayer Tower in the community

The power of prayer will fulfill the above vision of the church. ■

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YOUTH CORNER

Recovery and Relief Mission Louisiana-2008

Mrs. Nirmala Abraham, Mission Coordinator

Imagine with me, a clean rental car filled with six people and five seatbelts. Imagine nine strangers flying into the "Deep South" ready to rebuild a Native American's home. Imagine eight unskilled workers who have never held a texture gun, paint sprayer or staple gun. Imagine that the volunteers for this mission trip were Malayalee youths and seniors, ranging from the age of 28 to 80 years old, who took time out from their busy, professional lives to serve a Native American family, broken apart by the tragedy of numerous hurricanes, without a permanent home to live in. Stop imagining.

During the days of November 5-9, 2008, a mission team of nine individuals left the comforts of their homes from across the North American continent to help rebuild a small home for a Native American family in Dulac, Louisiana.

Dulac is approximately 65 miles south-west of New Orleans. The United Methodist Church in Louisiana made a commitment to rebuild approximately 350 homes destroyed by the hurricanes: Katrina, Rita, Ike and Gustav. Under the infrastructure provided by the Louisiana United Methodist Church Disaster Recovery Ministry, O. C. Abraham Uncle (Philadelphia Mar Thoma Church) brought teams of volunteers, either once or twice a year, since 2006, to this recovery and relief mission to help undertake the rebuilding efforts under the guidance of the Native American Mission of the Mar Thoma Church.

Greater than ninety percent of the people in Dulac are Native American Houma Indians. Although the people in the local area suffered greatly, their spirits are warm, caring and welcoming to the many volunteers who come to help. The hospitality of the local Indians provided our mission team with a sense of gratitude for the work we were doing.

The facility we lived in was very simple and not extravagant. It was a community center with staple food items for breakfast and lunch, a series of bunk beds lined-up in the sleeping quarters, separate male and female bathrooms with multiple showers and sinks and no television in the entire living quarters. All of this simple living added to our rich fellowship between different workgroups and within our own mission team. All of us came with different expectations and different skills. Yet, many of our expectations were completely shattered and our skills were utilized and developed in different ways. The team bonded instantly, almost from the time we entered the car at the airport and any potential barriers melted away.

Not only did we work hard on the house we were rebuilding; but also we fellowshiped like we had never did it before. We prayed for the project individually and together as a group. We also cherished the moments when we prayed for each other's personal needs. We realized that a life of prayer was the key to success in all we undertook. Although all of us came to work on a house, it was the work of God in our spiritual lives during this mission trip that impacted our growth as individuals.



There were many practical things learned during our trip. We learned how to paint, mud drywall, texture walls, use and then unclog a spray paint gun, lay down sub-floors, how to cook for large groups and more importantly how to serve and meet the needs of others in the community at large and each other, as sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus.

We crossed cultural, professional and age gaps. Inside the community living centre, there was a quote that said, "God Does Not Call The Equipped. He Equips The Called." That was the motto for our mission trip in Louisiana. Only one of the mission team members, Ashby Mathews from Los Angeles Mar Thoma Church, California, was an experienced tradesman. Ashby knew exactly what had to be done to complete the task before us; and how to properly utilize the equipment for this project. Yet, God in His infinite wisdom equipped the rest of the team with different skill sets and interests for this project. K. A. George Uncle at 80 years old demonstrated that life doesn't end at retirement and that an impact for God's kingdom can be made no matter what age you are. O. C. Abraham Uncle constantly looked out for his "children." O. C. Uncle's sense of responsibility for our safety and well-being was evident in all he did. His leadership and desire to make an impact in the lives of Native Americans during his retirement resulted in this team forming and traveling to Louisiana. One of our Marthomite mission team volunteers, Tini Thomas of St. Stephens Mar Thoma Church, Fords, New Jersey, was full of energy and encouragement. Tini's excitement in the morning, sense of hospitality and care for the team meant we were always well-fed, taken care of, and looked after. Our ecumenical friend, Betsy Luka from the Kanaya Catholic Church in New York, joined us on this trip and cracked jokes while working diligently without complaining on any given task. A beginner home improvement tool woman, Inez Johnson, from the Canadian Mar Thoma Church in Toronto, Canada, showed all the guys up, by teaching us how to properly texture walls, quickly and with quality. A fellow

leader and missionary from the Canadian Mar Thoma Church, Charles Philip, was the peaceful and strong Christian brother that everyone loved and respected. Charles helped out in every task and considered none remedial. When Ashby needed a break from all the novices, Charles filled in as the task master and led our team on. From the Baltimore Mar Thoma Church, another construction nubbie extraordinaire, Deby Thomas, exhibited a quiet, humble character. Deby quickly acknowledged instructions and implemented them on this project. Deby Thomas' painting skill was excellent, making the rest of our team's tasks easier. Stanley John from Philadelphia Mar Thoma Church provided comical relief with a ton of Malayalam jokes. Stanley, a husband and father, became a wise older counsel for us in our personal lives. Lastly our fearless leader, Ashby Mathews, our Marthomite brother from California, was blessed with incredible patience. Ashby manages a team of professional construction workers half the size of our mission team and with double our skills. Ashby single-handedly taught each of us the skills we needed and guided each of us on our various tasks. It amazes us how God brought people from different parts of the continent with little to no relevant skills and created a team whose combined efforts allowed us to do the work of a professional construction team. The work we did would normally have taken a construction team of our same size and skill set five days; but with God's grace, the Mar Thoma Mission Team of 2008 brought recovery and relief to the Native Indians of Houma and took only four days to accomplish the task set before them.

We realize the mission of our diocese cannot function without prayer, funds and volunteers. Please consider volunteering your time and resources on our next trip. The team requires different skills from different individuals. We need people to help prepare food and clean up, as well as, those who want to work on building a house. No skill set will be turned down because all are relevant. As you can also tell age is not a barrier. As long as you bring a willing and yielded heart to work with those less fortunate, God will equip you.

Imagine with me what a team of volunteers through the Mar Thoma Mission can do in the lives of the less fortunate. Imagine how satisfied you'll feel when you roll up to the airport in a dirty, muddy rental car that was used to impact the lives of the poor and needy. Imagine what you can do for God's kingdom if you are willing to respond to His call.

Stop Imagining!

Join us for the next Native American Mission Trip to Louisiana organized by the Mar Thoma Church. Kindly contact Mrs. Nirmala Abraham, Convenor Native American Mission at ocnirmala@aol.com. God will transform your life—that's guaranteed!

The authors of this article wish for the focus of this mission trip to remain wholeheartedly on Christ. As such, we have chosen to remain anonymous and simply say that this article was approved by all the members of the November 2008 Native American Recovery and Relief Mission Team of the Mar Thoma Church. ■

Volunteers Wanted: Native American Mission-2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

By God's grace, the Mission Board of the Diocese of North America and Europe has arranged the following mission activities. All youths from around our Diocese are encouraged to participate in these mission activities of the church.

I. Folsom Camp, Broken Bow, Oklahoma (June 1-5 Monday to Friday)

This is a family over night camp/VBS materials are used for teaching during the sessions

We will need teachers for all age groups, worship leaders, art/craft leaders, music leaders, recreation leaders. Work includes directing and providing leadership for Church Bible School- Plus, some evangelism/visitation/witnessing in the community. We could also do some medical service, depending on the medical professionals that come. We could use 8-10 Volunteers.

Great opportunity for some interactive experiences with Choctaw Indians.

Age of the volunteers should be age 18 and over. Younger children can join if accompanied by their parents

Expenses: Diocese will provide assistance from Diocese for food and boarding. Volunteers are responsible for transportation.

Nearest Airport is Dallas, Texas. Travel to Broken Bow is about 3 hours in a car from Dallas.

Please submit the Registration Form by April 15, 2009

Call **Nirmala Abraham 302-239-7119** or send an email to: ocnirmala@aol.com for details.

II. Vacation Bible School, Mount Vernon, Alabama (Sunday June 13- to Saturday 20, 2009)

Location: Aldergate Methodist Church, Mt. Vernon, Alabama

Events: Vacation Bible School for Children and adults, Evangelism, Music festival, Witness Meetings, Medical mission, Participating in Native Americans Pow Wow, sharing faith and cultures. Learning more about Native Americans and their struggles.

This year we require a team of 20-24 members Nature of work include: directing and providing leadership for Church Bible School-teaching, Music ministry, devotional messages, sports and games, operating electronic equipments for audio visual aides. About 150 students—age ranging 5-18 years old and about 25 adults are expected in the program.

Age of the youth should be 18 and over. Volunteers must be committed Christians with ability to communicate the love of God well through teaching, leadership in music, sports, cooking etc.

Diocesan funds will be available for food and lodging. Volunteers must be responsible for travel expenses.

Nearest Airport is Pensacola, Florida. Please try to come on Sunday June 13 for orientation.

For more information contact: **Nirmala Abraham**

Convenor: Native American Mission Tel **302-239-7119** or Email: ocnirmala@aol.com.

Our Calling

Soniya Keerikattu, Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Houston

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to bear the fruit that will last." (John 5:16) What exactly is the church? Uniting every Sunday, the church represents a fellowship of Christians. But, as a 'called out community' with a sole purpose, does that fellowship and worship only linger around only on that beautiful SUNDAY morning? Indeed a 'called out community,' the church, is a representational body of believers in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. However, our mission, as ardent believers in Christ, is to not lose our flame on Sunday but rather keep it burning. I am once again reminded of our **Mar Thoma motto: Lighted to Lighten**. The calling of the church is to evangelize—to shed light on darkness through our faith. What are we? We are evangelists; we are disciples for Christ! It reads in Matthew 28:19, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them all I have commanded you." In a society of worldliness and the devil's temptation, it is indeed our calling as Christians to spread the Word through evangelism. This is most certainly observed in the bible, especially in the work of the disciples themselves. The most striking words regarding our great Christian mission are stated by Jesus in John 20:21, "As the father has sent me, I am sending you." As the apostles spread the Word in Acts, we witness the power of evangelism. Though persecuted and scattered, the apostles held strong in their mission to be witnesses of the Father. Consider the unfailing faith of Stephen.



A "man full of God's grace and power," Stephen was not only seized by the Sanhedrin but was stoned for his faith in Christ. Upon observing Stephen, I come to reflect our faith as a youthful generation of believers. We too, as a chosen people, must stand firm in our faith and make a stand for the name of Christ alone. Regardless of age, young or old, every single one of us has a purpose to fulfill and that is to be witnesses of His name in our every deed. Despite our contrasting personalities and identities, we must not fail to realize that our true identity should parallel with Christ. We are images of the Creator himself. Just as the face of an angel was seen through Stephen, may the Lord be seen in every one of us. Whether it may be a simple smile or a deed of kindness, Christ should be seen in all what we do. In a world of darkness, the understanding of God's amazing power and love are hidden. As a "holy nation," we are called upon today, not tomorrow or a year from now, but this very moment. Let us not be stagnant believers. With Christ, may we be enlightened. Beacons of light, let us as a worshipping community, liberate those stuck in darkness so that they "may see our good deeds and glorify" our father (Matthew 5:16). Hence, I call upon all of us to join together and make a stand for His name. Let us not be a people fearful of hatred and persecution, but rather a people willing to live and act on the name of Jesus. As ambassadors of Christ, I pray that in any situation, we may act as lamps of God, dispelling darkness and spreading His word to all ends of the universe. ■

Church—The Called Out Community

Benjamin Abraham (Grade 11), St. Mathew's Mar Thoma Church, Toronto

We as a church have many responsibilities in today's world; but do we truly know what a church is, or what it means to be a church? Let me share a joke I came across recently. One day in a church, a preacher was about to give the message, when suddenly two men walked in from the back. One walked toward the center of the sanctuary and the other remains at the door. Both pull out guns; the one in the center yells over the commotion "Anyone willing to take a bullet for Jesus remains seated!" Half of the congregation, the majority of the choir and the deacons all ran out the door. The man with the gun in the middle turns to the preacher and says, "Now you may speak, all the hypocrites have left." Those few that remained seated, I would say were the called out community. That is what the church should be in today's world. The word "church" is defined as "the whole body of Christian believers; Christendom." In the Bible it says that we, as the body of believers, are a called out community. I interpret that to mean that we as a body of believers are separated or segregated from the rest of the world's population. As we are separated we must strive to our fullest ability to

completely eradicate all the influence the world has on us. Once that is complete we may move on to greater things; things that would spread our belief and hope, and better mankind from what we now know it.

The first key step for us to take is the task of segregation of our congregations. We as individuals and as a community on a whole must separate ourselves from the world. We should be boasting; saying as Paul did in 2 Corinthians 1:12 "Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace." It is our calling to be changed (transformed not conformed) after we accept Christ. We should be in the world not of it. Our worldly identity that we created for ourselves should have been removed after our spiritual transformation. Once this metamorphosis has been completed in all those who consider themselves as part of the church, then we may begin our work in the world as a "called out community".

The church as a “called out community” has many duties that need to be fulfilled. Jesus told his apostles to go out into the world to spread the gospel. If we truly are the believers and followers of Jesus, and consider ourselves to be called out, then this is one of our top most priorities. We must spread the word of Jesus and His message of salvation. There is an order in which the spreading of the word must be done. The order is so: family, friends, peers, community and country. We as Christians are called to spread the message where we are placed. It matters not if we bring one or one hundred to Christ’s house; it matters if we truly try or not because on judgment day we will be accountable to God. Even before we begin to work in others we must constantly renew our commitment to Christ and God and then only can we go out into the world to spread the gospel.

As a “called out community,” everything we do must be for only one purpose; for the Glory of God. If we do not do this we are going to be of no use to Christ’s work and desires.

Our personal quiet times are crucial because it gives us the mental and spiritual muscle we need to go through the day before us the way ought to. Imagine you went without food or drink for an entire day; what use would you be as the course of that day progressed. That is the similarity between food and the quiet time. In fact if we miss a meal it is okay because we will not die; but if we miss the quiet time it is as if you are on the brink of spiritual death. This is why it is important to keep ourselves spiritually nourished as a “called out community”. What would it mean to for our church community to “have everything in common” as the early church did during the time of the apostles? Would we grow in faith or regress in our spiritual walk?

The church as a “called out community” is not only supposed to care for the community outside, as is the common misconception, it must first cater to the individuals in the church itself; and once the people within are spiritually able, only then can the church begin its work in the outside community. ■

The Body of Christ—Call to Partake

Ashley Abraham, Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Houston

The hands, voice, and heartbeat of Christ reside within the church. The church is not merely stone blocks measured in members or space, but a body of believers standing on the foundation that is Christ Jesus. Each member of this body is designed for a specific purpose, created with God’s full blueprint in mind. Just as our own bodies do not remain asleep or catatonic, so should we actively acknowledge our roles as the eyes, hands, and feet of God.

When Christ ascended into heaven he left the Apostles with both His Holy Spirit as well as The Great Commission. This same commission, to “go and make disciples of all nations”, remains the drive and force behind the Church (Mathew 28:19). We as Christians have two reasons for living, to have a relationship with God and to open blind eyes. Luke 10: 2 says that “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few”. We are the workers that God has called out to make a difference in a blind and ignorant world. God has given us authority to bring the lost to Him and through the strength He gives us the light that we are able to show others the narrow path.

Christ’s parable of the Ten Virgins reveals why it is so important for our Church to expose the light that has been offered to us. The Ten Virgins were separated into five who were foolish and five who were wise. “Those who were foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps” (Mathew 25:3). When the Bridegroom came unannounced only those who were prepared were able to enter the wedding banquet with him. The main idea of the parable is to show firm emphasis on the need to be ready at a moments notice. “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief” (2 Peter 3:10). We, as the five virgins who were prepared and



ready for the bridegroom, have a burden to share this knowledge with those who have fallen asleep without oil in their lamps. This burden should not only be assumed for one, but shared within the Church as a whole.

The Seven Churches mentioned in the second and third chapters of Revelation all describe flaws and encouragement still applicable for our church today. The book of Revelation, written by John the Apostle, was addressed to these seven churches who needed certain improvements to actively be a community for God. The church of Ephesus, who left its first love, the Secular church of Pergamum, The church of Thyatira, who leads a double life, the catatonic church of Sardis, and the lukewarm church of Laodicea are all examples to show the present church the hindrances which prevent us from successfully harvesting for God.

Out of the seven churches only two, the church in Smyrna and Philadelphia, show us how to follow the path God truly wants us to concentrate on. The church in Smyrna was heavily persecuted but suffered for the name of Jesus; because of this they are rich in the promise of God. The church in Philadelphia, who patiently waited for God, was also rewarded for not turning back when their vulnerability was hard to overcome. These two churches serve as the prime example as to how God wants his churches to act within the community.

God has given us authority, the weapon of His word, and the Holy Spirit to help and guide us as we embark on the mission to spread his Gospel. Through our actions, words, and love God will qualify those who have a submissive and willing heart. Like the churches of Philadelphia and Smyrna, we have to keep our eyes on God and not be swayed by the distractions of this world. ■

Jesus My King

Crystal Philip, Hermon MTC, Atlanta



*My king walked on water
He calmed the sea
He is also the potter
Who molded me*

*He was born in a manger
With father and mother
He was seen by stranger
And had no brothers*

*He called his apostles one by one
First Peter, then Andrew, then James and John
Were taught during the morning sun*

*He changed water to wine
And healed the lame
He cured the blind
Jesus was his name*

*My lord was then crucified
With nails in hand and feet
And side*

*Three days later
He left the Earth
To live with God
In heaven not Earth*

*He will return
To judge us soon
The living and dead will rise
At the sight of him
Our father above*

Lent, what does it mean?

Alison John 6th grade, Detroit Mar Thoma Church

*Lent,
What does it mean?
The time that has been spent,
To give up something that you are addicted to,
Something to pursue,
What are you giving up?
Candy, a habit or meat,
The aim is not to cheat,
We are giving it all up for the Lord,
And what's the reward?
Why do we even celebrate lent?
Jesus went to the desert for forty days,
Underneath the desert blaze.
He gave up everything,
The Devil tried to tempt the Lord,
With his evil sword,
He never gave in though,
Because he did know,
That the Lord was with him,
He knew that that the Lord was there,
And that is why we should care.
We give up something we care about,*

*And try not to pout,
Because Jesus never did,
So try to forbid,
Temptation that could come,
For us to become,
Better and have more trust in God more,
And try not to look at it as a chore,
Try to look at it as growing,
Growing your faith in God,
We should try to fight temptation,
And to accept God's creation,
We should try to accept what God gave us,
And to accept what God did to bless,
All of what we do,
We are going to pursue,
What we were going to do for Lent.
Our goal is to persevere,
And to success in what we think is severe,
Because we should keep going,
We should continue knowing,
That God will appreciate what we do,
What we do for lent.*



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DIOCESAN/PARISH NEWS

DEDICATION OF SEHION MAR THOMA CHURCH, DALLAS



The dedication of Sehion Mar Thoma Church's new church building in Dallas was an excellent example of the strong faith, teamwork, and support that exists within the Mar Thoma community. The new church was the dream of Sehion members, and God's grace was evident throughout each step of the construction process. Despite all the uncertainties, it is a miracle that God worked through the sacrifice, prayer, and unity of members to establish its own worshiping place for another Mar Thoma parish in our diocese.

Sehion Mar Thoma Church was founded in July 2004 as a result of a strategically-organized plan to establish a Mar Thoma church in the northeast region of Dallas. With our former Vicar Rev. V. J. Mathewachen's leadership and guidance and the prayerful support of members, we were able to purchase 4.16 acres of land in Plano, Texas on November 18, 2005. God's faithfulness was clearly evident in all phases of the project, from obtaining a construction

loan and throughout the steady progress of construction. The project included a parsonage also in addition to the church facility, classrooms and fellowship hall.

The parsonage dedication was held on November 23, 2008 by Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos, Episcopa, former Diocesan Episcopa. On January 17, 2009, the Holy Dedication service of the church building was conducted by our Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese MarTheodosius, Episcopa. A public meeting attended by Theodosius Thirumeni and many dignitaries, including Plano City Mayor Pro Tem Ms. Sally Magnus was held thereafter. Numerous clergy and believers attended the meeting from various denominations in the Dallas metroplex and nearby places. Attendees were impressed by the progress of Sehion church and praised the hard work of everyone involved. On January 18, 2009, Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Episcopa, who stressed the



importance of the cross in our life and the great providence of God, celebrated the first Holy Qurbana service. Five children were blessed as first communicants during this service.

As we look back, we have many people to thank for their support and encouragement of this project. Sehion members are grateful to all and committed to being good stewards of God. As a vicar, I am very thankful to have been



a part of this great endeavor. We have nothing to boast about other than God's grace, so we may always continue to proclaim the amazing grace of God who has blessed us so very much beyond our expectations in all our efforts.

Rev. James Thomas, Vicar

EASTERN CANADA REGIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOLS RETREAT, TORONTO



Eastern Canada Regional Sunday Schools organized a one-day retreat on March 14, 2009 on the theme, "**God's promise: My promise,**" a day of discovering our covenant with God and our community. Rev. A. Abraham, vicar of Canadian Mar Thoma Church, Rev. Alex P. John, vicar of

St. Mathews Mar Thoma Church, students from KG to Grade XII, teachers and volunteers from both the churches participated in the retreat led by Rev. Jean Leckie and hosted by St. Mathews Mar Thoma Church, Toronto.

Mary S. Thomson, ECRSS coordinator

SOUTHEAST REGION SEVIKA SANGHOM



A one-day Sevika Sanghom conference for the Southeast Region was conducted on March 14th, 2009 at St. Thomas



Mar Thoma Church of Delaware Valley, 130-Grubb Road, Malvern, PA 19355. Rev. Shaji M. Thomas, the president of the Southeast Region Sevika Sanghom, delivered the

opening address. Rev. Mathew Skaria, Southeast Region Youth Chaplain, delivered the main talk based on the theme, **“Rooted and Connected in Christ for a Transforming Womanhood”** based on Luke 10:38-42 and Colossians 2:7. Mrs. Beena Cherian, St. Stephen’s Mar Thoma Church [Kochamma], delivered the devotional talk. The speech was based on Luke 7:36-50.

A short slideshow presentation was done in dedication to the World Day of Prayer. The Sanghom conducted a farewell meeting for the outgoing vicars: Rev. Thomas John (Washington Mar Thoma Church), Rev. Binu John (New Jersey Mar Thoma Church), Rev. Shaji M. Thomas (St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church of Delaware Valley), and Rev. Mathew Skaria (Youth Chaplain of the Southeast Region). Almost 250 participants attended this blessed conference.

Lissy Baby, Sevika Sanghom Regional Secretary

MELVIN THAMPY—WINNER OF NATIONAL MUSICAL THEATRE AWARD



Twelve Year old Melvin Thampy, a prodigy of Universal Academy of Theater Arts, Irving, TX, has won the 1st place in the Junior High/ Middle School Solo for the National Musical Theatre Arts competitions of America held in Los Angeles on February 14th, 2009.

Melvin Thampy is the eldest son of Thampy Abraham and Mini of Irving, who hails from Punnakkad, Karamvely, Meleparampil, in Kerala. He has won several musical Awards at various competitions in the past and is a member of the Dallas Farmers Branch Marthoma Church Youth Choir. He also has a younger sibling, Sherin Thampy.

Lal Varghese

FIFTH ST. JOHN'S MAR THOMA CHURCH, U.K. FAMILY RETREAT



The 5th St. John's Parish Family retreat took place on Saturday 7th March 2009 through divine guidance under the leadership of Rt. Rev. John Fenwick of Free Church of England and Rev. Jose Varughese. About 50 people including children participated and it was a very blessed occasion to find answers to questions about the significance of things we do in our worship using our ancient St. James liturgy.

After Kauma, prayer, and welcome speech, Jose Varughese achen talked about worship, the kind of worship originating from fear, thanksgiving and love to please and praise God. He also talked about why, where, when, and how to worship and discipline in worship.

Bishop Fenwick then traced the history of Christian worship from its Jewish and historical roots and showed how various elements of worship is beautifully linked in a way similar to Jacob's ladder to the throne of God. Each step of the ladder is carefully and reverentially molded to create awesome wonder and beauty in creating a sense of holiness and presence of God through worship. He encouraged those present to examine large numbers of both Old Testament and New Testament texts to discover the source of Mar Thoma worship and to emphasize that our worship is not just an archaic tradition, but it is entirely scriptural. In the Jewish Temple and Synagogues when people met on Sabbath to worship they were greeted and they greeted each other, they read the books of the Law and the Prophets, the scriptures were then interpreted by a Rabbi followed by intercessory prayers and blessings. Animal sacrifices were also important part of the Temple worship; they had special times, festivals, rules and regulations relating to various kinds of animal sacrifices. The whole idea of worship was to trace the salvation and liberation history of 'God's people' from bondage to freedom and communicate this great truth to the next generation in an act of thanksgiving. As worship is not natural, it needs to be practised and grown into it,

and hence families worshipped together handing over the legacy and traditions from one generation to another.

Christian worships started in Synagogues and had basically the same structure; from Synagogues, worship moved to house groups and then to churches. Jesus Christ's once for all sacrifice on the Cross removed the need for animal sacrifices. Greetings, Scripture reading, sermons, intercessory prayers, blessings, kiss of peace, taking, thanksgiving, breaking the bread, eating the main meal such as lamb, blessing of the wine and sharing the wine and final blessings and all such parts of the liturgy is based on the scripture and scripture alone. The misuse of fellowship meal and gluttony removed the eating of lamb from the Christian worship format of after breaking the bread and before drinking the wine. Thus, the St. James liturgy that we use has a very strict scriptural basis. We in our tradition for the Holy Communion follow the four basic steps of taking, thanking, breaking and giving the Holy Elements as instructed in the scripture and followed by Apostles and Church Fathers.

This exposition of our liturgy was an amazing learning experience and bishop Fenwick then used our liturgy for the Holy Communion Service on Sunday morning. It was indeed a great experience. Mrs. Saji Joseph representing the choir talked brilliantly about the contribution and the involvement of choir in worship following the heavenly traditions of Cherubim's and Seraphim's. She reminded us that the choir represents all age groups and all sections of the parish; they bring their God-given talents to praise God and to give guidance in responding and chanting during the worship. Being a member of the parish choir is important in developing discipline and supporting each other for developing a melodious harmony to enrich every aspect of our worship.

Sunday school children, as usual, contributed well for the retreat: Miss Grace Varghese and Miss Shruti Varghese gave brief talks about their understanding of the worship; Master Subin Varghese read a poem; the song entitled 'Gift to you' was led by Master James Cherian and Miss Mannah Thalikalukal. We are grateful to Subin for masterfully compering the children's programme. After discussions, questions and answers and summing up, Mr. Abraham Mathews (Renny) led the intercessory prayer, Mr. Jacob Thalikalumkal (Suresh) gave vote of thanks and the retreat finished with prayers, benediction and kaimuthu of the bishop.

It became evident during the retreat that the question one person is willing to ask is often the question many other people would like an answer to. It needed an English Bishop to tell us that we have been carrying with us a very precious jewel all along in the form of our liturgy. May God help us to enjoy it and use it to praise, worship and glorify His precious name.

Dr. Zac Varghese, Convenor

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER 2009

World Day of Prayer (WDP) is an international, ecumenical event that is celebrated in 170 countries on the first Friday of March, each year. From sunrise to sunset, prayers follow the sun's path around the globe. WDP, initiated eighty two years ago by the Christian women of the United States and Canada, proposed to support women's involvement in mission at home and around the world. The pioneers declared that prayer and action are inseparable.

Each year, The International Committee of WDP assigns women from a specific country to write the worship service and choose a theme. The women of Papua New Guinea created the worship service for this year. The theme, **'In Christ there are many members, yet one body'** reflects the call for unity in diversity.

Papua New Guinea is located in the South Pacific, near Australia. The greatest problem facing this country is HIV/AIDS. It is of epidemic proportion, especially among women and children.

Sevika Sanghom has spearheaded the coordination of WDP worship services in various locations of this Diocese, in conjunction with local Indian Ecumenical forums. These ecumenical worship services have drawn good participation from Christians of all faiths. Following are some of the WDP reports and photographs received from various Mar Thoma Parishes.

PHILADELPHIA

The Ecumenical Fellowship of Indian Churches in Philadelphia hosted the WDP worship service on Saturday, March 7, 2009 from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon at St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church in Philadelphia. Members of the clergy from the Mar Thoma, Orthodox, Jacobite, and

Cananite Churches led the event. Tables were set up in the auditorium with display of curios from Papua New Guinea.

Highlights of the events included: Welcome address by Rev. Father K. K. John and an overview of the WDP service were followed by the lighting of the lamp by clergy and guest speaker. Bible readings and hymns in English and Malayalam, by an interdenominational worship team of thirty two women, were seamlessly incorporated in the worship service. This provided a unique experience of unity in diversity. Rev. Fr. Jose Daniel, Religious Activities Coordinator of the Ecumenical Fellowship of Indian Churches in Philadelphia and Mr. Varghese Abraham, Choir Director deserve special acknowledgement for making the worship an uplifting experience.

A guest speaker, Carolyn Nicosia, a missionary who had lived six years in Papua New Guinea, spoke about her experiences. A skit based on the Bible study, the story of baby Moses was performed by the women of the Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia. An inspirational message by Mrs. Susan Mathew of the St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church, Philadelphia reflected on the courage and faith of the five women who saved Moses' life.

A melodious song in Malayalam was performed by Mrs. Sobha Mary Shaji of the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church of Delaware Valley.

Power Point presentation, **'Faces of Papua New Guinea'** was given by Mrs. Nirmala Abraham. A discussion followed, on the history and challenges faced by HIV/AIDS.

An extensive coverage was done by the Media—Asianet, Kerala Express, and Malayalam Vartha. Concluding remarks and prayer by Rev. Fr. Kuriakose of



St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church followed by benediction by Very Rev. Fr. Mathai Cor-Episcopa of St. Gregorios Malankara Orthodox Church. Lunch followed the worship service and program.

Philadelphia Mar Thoma Church Sunday School also celebrated WDP on Sunday March 8th with special prayers and theme talks.

**Mrs. Nirmala Abraham, Philadelphia Mar Thoma Church
(Board member, WDP USA Committee)**

DALLAS, TEXAS

The World Day of Prayer was celebrated on March 7th 2009 in Dallas at St. Gregorious Orthodox Church, Garland, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. As a part of Kerala Ecumenical Christian Fellowship, Women from 19 churches participated in this event. The meeting started with the



opening hymn "Ashisha Mari" lead by the Ecumenical Choir. The opening prayer was conducted by Rev. Fr. M. S. Cherian of St. Thomas Syrian Orthodox Knanaya Church and call to worship lead by Rev. C. K. Koshy of St. Paul Mar Thoma Church. Rev. Raju Daniel, President of Ecumenical Clergy fellowship welcomed all the members

who were present in the meeting. Mrs. Saramma Raju, (Convener 2009) explained the relevance and importance of the World Day of Prayer. Mrs. Elizabeth John gave introduction of the representing country, PAPUA NEW GUINEA by emphasizing the true nature of Christian Unity, which binds all who have faith in Christ. Following the worship, Mrs. Amminikutty Jeevan, Professor of Texas A&M University, Houston gave the message based on the theme "In Christ there are many members, yet one body". She mentioned how can Christians who form the body of Christ become visible in the world today and identify situations in our context that need God's love, healing, comfort and caring. What strategies can we use to reach out and help people who are in need socially, spiritually, physically and mentally and how can members in the body of Christ experience God's love and Grace and pass it on to others. Mrs. Mariamma James, 2008 convener and wife of Rev. James Thomas of Sehion Mar Thoma Church, Dallas gave vote of thanks. Mrs. Susan Johnson, wife of Rev. Johnson George, Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Carrollton is nominated as the 2010 World Day of Prayer convener. The meeting is ended with the prayer by Rev. Vinoy Daniel of Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, farmers Branch and benediction by Rev. Joji Kaniyampadi of St. Thomas Catholic Church. It was a real blessing for all those who attended.

**For World Day of Prayer Committee - 2009
Mrs. Saramma Raju/Mrs. Elizabeth John**

LUBBOCK, TEXAS

Emmanuel Mar Thoma Church of Lubbock Texas is delighted that we were able to celebrate the World Day of Prayer on March 7th Saturday in an ecumenical way. On March 6th, Friday I joined the Church Women United

local chapter to celebrate the same. Some of the women who have attended the Friday celebration joined our celebration at Emmanuel Mar Thoma Church on Saturday. I was blessed to give a small message and the history of World



Day of Prayer, the work of Church Women United, and the role that our church was able to play in this celebration. We have collected \$100.00 dollars in contributions/as offertory, towards helping the people of New Guinea.

Annie Lincoln M.D.

DETROIT, MI

Over 200 Christian women of Indian origin gathered at the Detroit Mar Thoma Church on Saturday, March 14, 2009 to mark this year's World Day of Prayer. Among those in attendance were women representing the CSI Congregation

Syrian Orthodox Church, and the Detroit Mar Thoma Church. Rev. Philip Varghese delivered the invocation for this event. Rev. Shaji K. Thomas, vicar of the Detroit Mar Thoma Church welcomed the participants. The meeting was inaugurated by lighting of the lamp by Rev. Philip Varghese, Rev. Sam Johnson, Rev. Itty Mathew and Rev. Shaji K. Thomas.

Mrs. Sara Philip introduced the theme and explained the significance of observing the World Day of Prayer. WDP's motto, "Informed prayer leads to powerful action," affirms that prayer and action are inseparable and both have immeasurable influence. The worship service consisted of hymns, Bible readings, prayers led by various churches, dramatization of the life of women from Papua New Guinea, and a skit. The skit highlighted as to how God had preserved the Israelites by utilizing five courageous women in His divine plan to protect Moses from the Pharaoh's evil scheme. Mrs. Elsy Varghese was the keynote speaker for the event. Mrs. Thankamma Chacko concluded the sermon with a prayer.

An offertory in the amount of \$1,234.00 was collected during the service and was sent to the WDPUSA Committee to support the women of Papua New Guinea and few other projects that sustain women around the world. The slide presentation by Mrs. Daisy Thomas was quite informative. This ecumenical gathering truly imparted a deeper insight and sensitivity towards women of Papua New Guinea and inspired the participants to pray with and for them as one body in Christ. The poignant worship service was an empowering experience for all the participants.



of Great Lakes, St. Thomas Orthodox Church of India, St. Mary's Orthodox Church, St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India, First CSI Congregation of Michigan, St. Mary's

We aspire to celebrate the World Day of Prayer as an ecumenical body each year.

Lilykutty Samuel, Detroit MTC Sevika Sanghom Secretary



MARTHOMA CHURCH OF SAN FRANCISCO

The Sevika Sanghom and Edavaka Mission held World Day of Prayer jointly on March 7, 2009 at the Mar Thoma Church. The order of Worship was received from the Women of Papua New Guinea. Sevika Sanghom members led the Service after singing and the opening prayer by Rev. K. A. Abraham. Susan Deepak delivered the Message quoting Romans 12:5—we are all one in Christ. Her message focused on the following points: basis of the unity of the members of the body of Christ (Church), dedication required for the continual transformation, spiritual gifts

given for the development of the Church and the unifying factor—the divine love that binds the members of the body of Christ. After the closing prayer, we grouped into five members each and prayed individually. Prayer Subjects for the country of Papua New Guinea were peace from Civil War, Global warming, Disease like Aids and the discrimination against women and children. About 50 members have participated in the prayer meeting. Special Offertory was collected during the service.

Baby Jacob, Sevika Sangham Secretary



NEW JERSEY MTC, RANDOLPH

The Ecumenical Christian Fellowship of New Jersey (ECFNJ) observed the World Day of Prayer on March 7, 2009 at Our Lady of Sorrow Catholic Church, Garfield, New Jersey with an afternoon of prayers, worship, and informational and devotional messages. The meeting that commenced at 1:00 p.m. was presided over by Rev. Fr. David Cheruththil Cor Episcopa, Assistant Vicar of St. George Malankara Orthodox Church, Carteret. Rev. Joy Allapat, vicar of Syro Malabar Catholic Mission extended a warm welcome to the guests and audience. All the Orthodox, Mar Thoma, CSI and Catholic Churches in New Jersey area participated in the event. Rev. Binu John, President of ECFNJ (Vicar of New Jersey Mar Thoma Church, Randolph), Rev. K. V. Thomas (Vicar of St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church, Teaneck) Rev. Abraham Cherian (Vicar of St. Stephen's Mar Thoma Church, Fords) Rev. Sunny Joseph (Vicar of St. Thomas Orthodox Church, Dover) Rev. Babu Mathew (Vicar of St. Stephen's Malankara Orthodox Church, Bergenfield) and Deacon Benny John (Drew University, Madison) were present on the occasion.

The meeting started with the worship songs by the newly organized Ecumenical Choir under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Jacob David Vicar of St. Paul's and Resurrection Church, Wood-Ridge, New Jersey. The Worship service lead by different denominations of Indian Churches in the area was a spiritually uplifting experience.

The Bible study conducted by Rev. Dr. A. P. George, Vicar of St. Georges Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, Carteret was very appropriate and beneficial. A power point presentation by Mrs. Rezin Joseph of Syro-Malabar Catholic Mission of Garfield enabled the audience to understand the social and Economical environment of the Country of focus Papua New Guinea. Rt. Rev. Dr. George Ninan, Bishop of Church of North India was the Chief Guest on this occasion. In his speech he mentioned the importance of Prayer and the importance of the unity between Churches by being focused on what united us as Christians rather than what our differences may be.

Rev. Dr. Kiran Sebastian, the Keynote Speaker, emphasized the importance of spreading gospel around the World. He made the audience aware of the problems facing the Christian world and the importance of focusing on what unites all the denominations in overcoming them. The entire message was powerful, spiritually uplifting and motivational.

Miss. Tina Thomas, Esq. of St. Stephen's Mar Thoma Church and Mrs. Susan John of St. George's Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church were the MC's for the function. Mrs. Grace Alexander, Convener of the event, proposed the Vote of thanks. The meeting ended with prayer by Rev. Abraham Cherian, Vicar of St. Stephen's Mar Thoma Church and Benediction by Rt. Rev. George Ninan. Refreshments were served to all attendees.

Grace Alexander, Convener

TAMPA, FLORIDA

World Day of Prayer was celebrated at the St Mark's Mar Thoma Church on Friday March 6, 2009. The Sevika



Sanghom of St. Mark's MTC under the leadership of our vicar Rev. T. Johnson, reached out to the community and invited the sister churches in the Tampa Bay area to join us in celebrating this auspicious occasion with the women of Papua New Guinea.

The following sister churches participated in the celebration: St. Gregorious Orthodox Church; C.S.I. Church of Tampa; St. Mary's Knanaya Orthodox Church; St. Mary's Orthodox Church.

Highlights of the program included theme introduction via a slide show with narration, depicting the history, culture, lifestyle etc. of the people of Papua New Guinea, prepared by Rev. T. Johnson.

Worship started with an opening prayer by Rev. Fr. Zachariah Mathew, Vicar of the St. Mary's Orthodox Church. Worship service was graciously mingled with confession, thanksgiving, and intercession. All the churches participated in leading the worship. Offertory prayer was led by Rev. Fr. Mathews Thykoottathil.

The skit based on the story of baby Moses and the united effort of women who took care of him, presented by St. Mary's Knanaya Orthodox Church was very attractive.

Around 120 individuals attended the service from different churches. Rev. T. Johnson, welcomed everyone and gave a brief introduction. \$250 collected via offertory is being directed towards helping people of Papua New Guinea.

It is worth mentioning that this is the first time such an event is taking place in Tampa with full participation of all denominations.

GREATER WASHINGTON MTC, WASHINGTON DC.

Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa was the chief guest for the World Day of Prayer Service in Washington DC. on March 7, 2009. This year's prayer and fund-raising was focused on addressing the needs of the residents of the island of Papua New Guinea. A special worship service was led by the Women and children from Sunday school, Youth Fellowship and Sevika Sanghom of the Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington. Attendees

included leaders of the Indian Orthodox Church of Baltimore, and The Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America. Mar Theodosius delivered a powerful message based on 1 Cor. 12, and challenged the community to greater involvement in meeting the needs of the impoverished and marginalized while maintaining the spirit of unity.

EPIPHANY MTC, NEW YORK

The Epiphany MTC celebrated the WDP along with the Sevika Sanghom members of Long Island MTC on 20th of March. The program began with the singing followed by prayer and introduction by Rev. P. J. Varghese. The power

NORTH CAROLINA

The World Day of Prayer was observed on Saturday 7th March at the Chapel of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Cary, North Carolina, where the Mar Thoma Church members gathered for worship. Rev. Biju S. Cheiran (Diocesan Secretary) and Rev. Samuel Santhosham led the service along with Sevika Sanghom representatives.

Rev. Biju S. Cheria led the Holy Communion Service and gave message in connection with World Day of Prayer. There were about 40 participants in the service.

Rev. Samuel Santhosham, Vicar



point presentation of the slides prepared by the WDP Committee of Papua New Guinea (PNG) helped the participants to get informed about that country, its geography and history, cultural richness, natural beauty, socio-economic conditions of the women etc. The story of the 5 women from different backgrounds who joined together in saving baby Moses was presented as a drama by Sevika Sanghom members. There was also a skit in which Sanghom members dressed up in the traditional native dresses and 'bilums' (the traditional bags) from PNG. The message based on the theme and prescribed Biblical texts was given by Mrs. Shanthi Mathai.

The Epiphany Sunday School participated in the WDP children's service on 22nd March. The slide show and worship order provided them with a great amount of information on the country of PNG, about which they did not have heard of before. Students and teachers remembered this land of problems, in their prayers during and after church communion services.

STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

The 2009 World Day of Payer was celebrated in Staten Island on March 7, at the St Mary's Orthodox Church, Staten Island. The meeting began with worship at 10 a.m. Special prayers were offered to the people in need around the world. A documentary depicting the life and situation of the people of Papua New Guinea was presented. Prayers and worship was conducted for the people of this land who overcame many hurdles in the near past. This developing country still faces a lot of humanitarian issues, which require God's intervention with the heartfelt prayers of the concerned Christians around the world.

Rev. Fr. T. A. Thomas, Vicar of St Mary's Orthodox Church, Rev. Sabu Thomas, Vicar of Staten Island Mar Thoma Church, Rev. Fr. Alex K. Joy, Vicar of St. George Malankara Orthodox Church. Rev. Jobi Varghese, Vicar of Tabor Mar Thoma Church and Rev. Fr. Cheria Mundakkal, Vicar of St. Gregorious Orthodox Syrian Church gave leadership to the worship.

STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK



This worship was specially designed with the participation and leadership of the women. Mrs. Accamma Oommen, Mrs. Elsy Skaria, Mrs. Elizebth Varghese, Mrs. Pushpa Varghese and Mrs. Saramma Varghese led the worship representing corresponding Churches. Messages during the service was given by Ms. Asha Thomas, Mrs. Kunjamma Siomon, Mrs. Aleyamma Varghese and Mrs. Moni Sabu. The ecumenical choir and the Staten Island Mar Thoma Chrch Choir led the singing during the worship, under the leadership of Mrs. Moni Sabu. This blessed gathering was well attended by women from various area churches.

Rev. Jobi Varghese, Vicar, Tabor MTC, Staten Island

LOS ANGELES

World Day of Prayer in Los Angeles was celebrated on March 7th 2009 in Mar Thoma Church of LA under the guidance of vicar Rev. Varghese Ninan. About 40 members participated on this day of world day of prayer to pray for PAPUA NEW GUINEA from different churches including St. Thomas Malankara Orthodox church, St. Thomas Malabar Catholic church in Santa Ana, and St. Andrew's Marthoma church in Valley.

Women of LA joined women of PNG with unity in Christ where love is genuine, where good overcomes evil and where we are of one heart and soul in praying for others. Meeting started with opening prayer by Rev. Varghese

Ninan, welcome speech by Rachel mathew, slides presentation by Annie Varghese, theme talk by Mrs. Ammini Samuel and concluding speech by Rev. Varghese Ninan. Bible reading and order of worship by members of various churches. Solo by Mrs. Vinu Roy followed by intercessory prayer for PNG by Annamma Mathew. Achen's message was focused on the relation between creator and creatures. We are just ashes. Mrs. Ammini Samuel emphasized on 1st John 2:15. *"Do not love the world or anything in the world, if anyone loves the world, the love of father is not in him."*

Sherly Saji, Savika Sanghom Secretary

LOS ANGELES, CA



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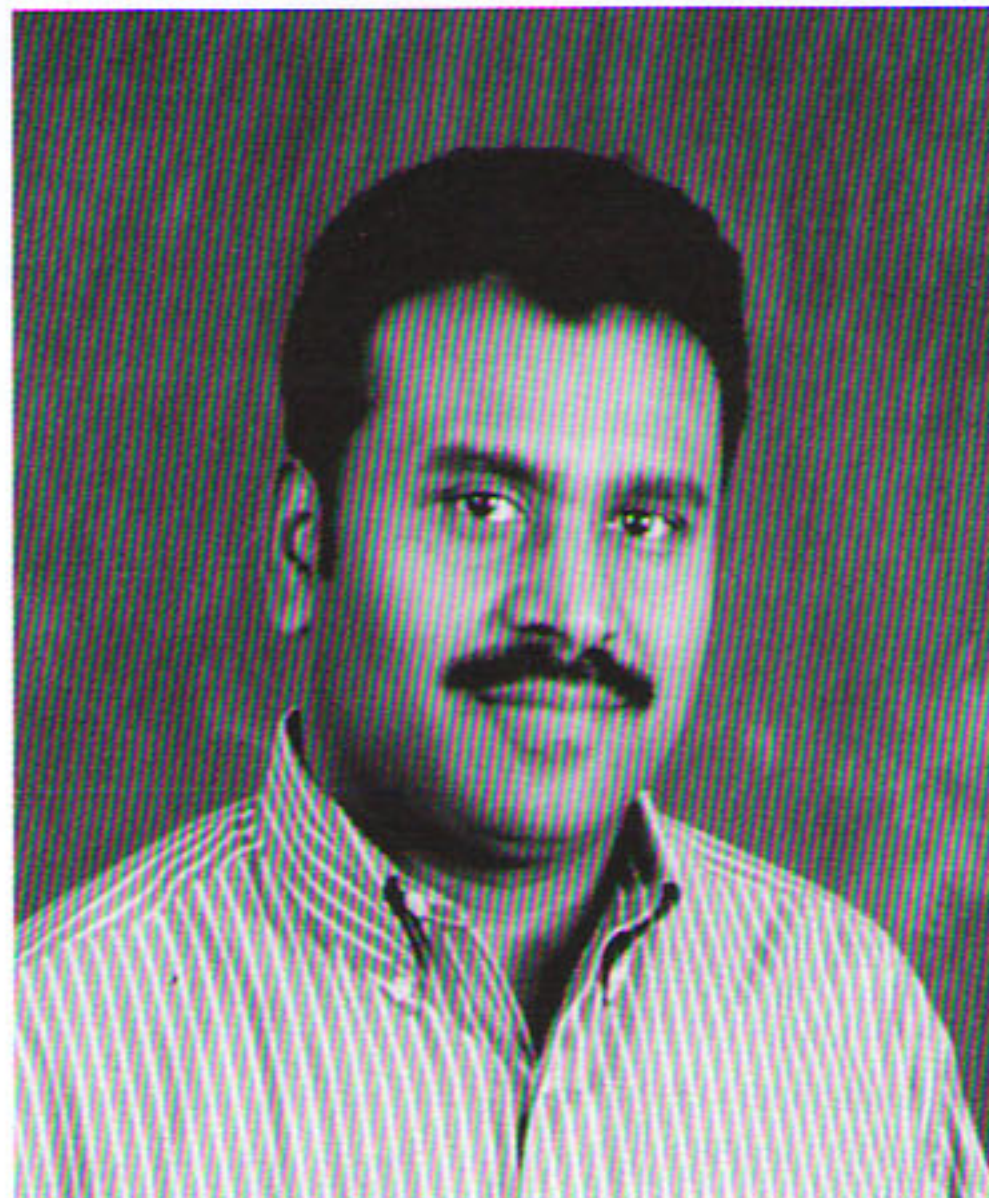
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ST. ANDREWS MAR THOMA CHURCH, LOS ANGELES, CA



"GOD be merciful to us and bless us and cause His face to shine upon us" Psalms 67:1

FORMATION OF NEW PARISH: The Episcopal Synod of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar met on 12th and 13th of September 2008 has decided to accept us as a Parish with effect from 1st November, 2008 and named the parish; "St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church, Los Angeles".

A Kalpana was issued by the Metropolitan dated September 18, 2008 accepting us as a parish. We, the members of the St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church, Los Angeles are thankful to His Grace the Metropolitan and Episcopal Synod for their acceptance and encouragement.

Rev. Varghese A. Ninan was appointed as the first Vicar of the St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church, Los Angeles.

Pre-formation History: The Mar Thoma Church of Los Angeles is the mother parish of St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church, Los Angeles. The new parish is located in the North West area of the Los Angeles City which is also known as San Fernando Valley. We were an area prayer group of the Mar Thoma Church of Los Angeles under the name "North Area".

The area had a humble beginning with starting of a Sunday school under the guidance of Rev. David Daniel in September, 2001. Sunday school was a blessing and an opportunity for the members to come together. In 2003, Holy Communion service was started in the area, once in a month. We fondly remember with gratitude the encouragement and support received

from Rev. Sunni E. Mathew for the worship services. The Sunday school and the worship services gracefully prompted the members to come together towards the formation of this parish. We also remember the services of Rev. Noble V. Jacob as Vicar of the parish.

The First general body meeting of the St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church was convened by the Vicar, Rev. Varghese A. Ninan on Saturday, November 8, 2008. The general body unanimously elected the office bearers for a 14 month period from November 1, 2008 to December 31, 2009.

Inaugural Worship Service: The inaugural Holy Communion Service of the St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church was held on Sunday November 16, 2008 at 5:30 p.m. and His



Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos was the celebrant assisted by the Vicar, Rev. Varghese A. Ninan. We thank Thirumeni for leading us in the historic occasion of the inaugural Holy Communion service of the Parish. Representatives from the mother parish, sister Churches



and Rev. Philip Abraham of St. Mary's Orthodox Church were also present.

Parish has Sunday school at 4:30 p.m. and worship services from 6:00 p.m. on all Sundays at Chatsworth West United Methodist Church, 10824 Topanga Cyn. Blvd., Chatsworth, CA 91311. The Parish has organized Sunday school, Edvaka Mission, Sevika Sangam, Youth Fellowship & Yuvajana Sakhyam, Choir, and Area Prayer Group. All the organizations are actively functioning. The Parish took membership in the KCFCA the ecumenical fellowship of California.

We thank Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa for His Lordship's advice, guidance and encouragement as Diocesan Bishop for the last seven years. We also thank our Vicar, Rev. Varghese A. Ninan for the help and guidance in the formation of the Parish.

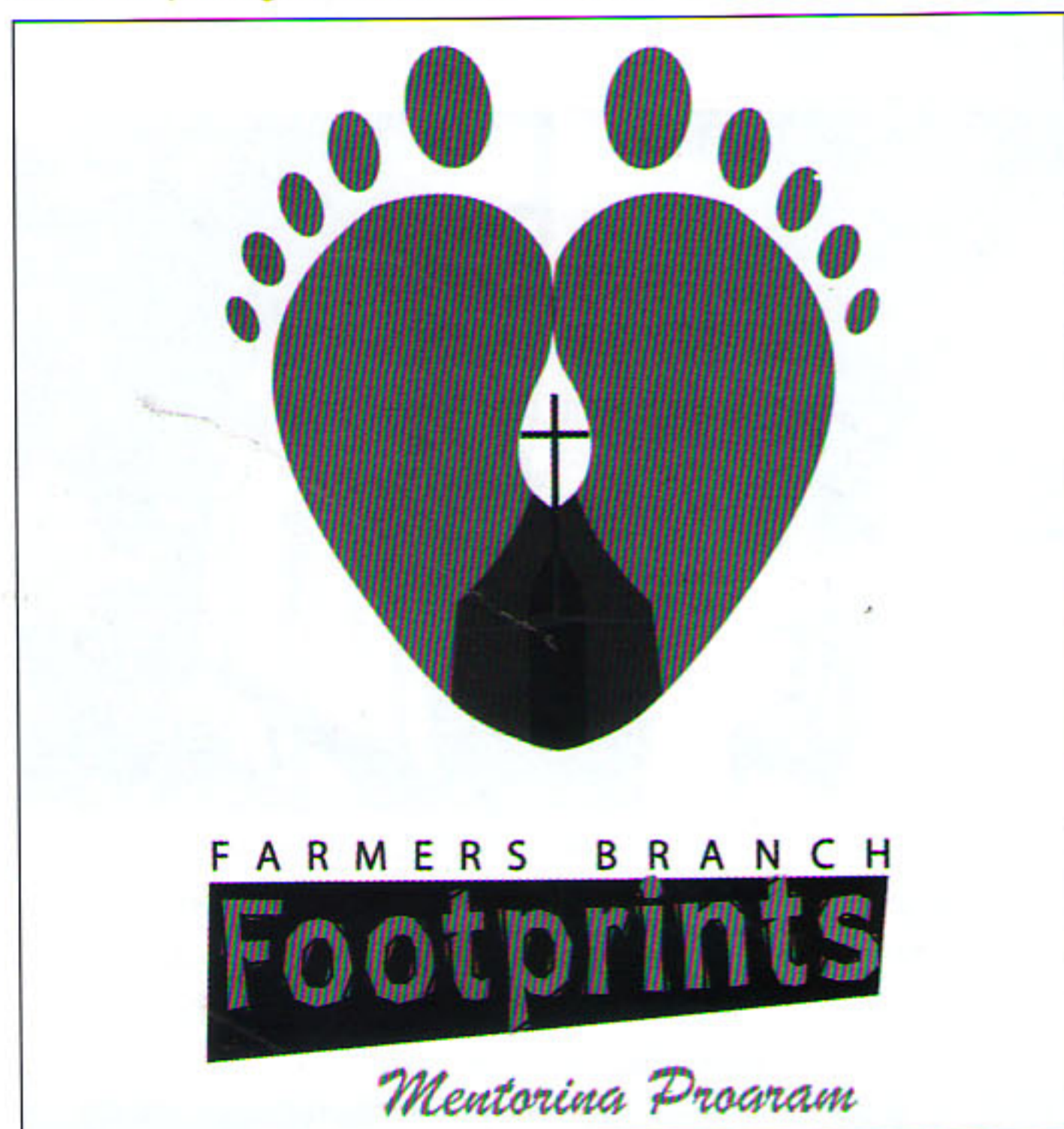
The members of the Parish have shown commendable courage, enthusiasm, determination and dedication in the formation of St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church, Los Angeles.

Rev. Varghese A. Ninan, Vicar
Oommen Easow, Vice President
Biju Varghese, Secretary

MAR THOMA CHURCH OF DALLAS, FARMERS BRANCH

THE FOOTPRINTS: THE GENESIS OF FOOTPRINTS

The need for a mentoring program for the youth of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas—Farmers Branch was initially as a need seen by a few youth members of the parish while attending the leadership track at the 2007 National Youth Conference. With a desire to act on what they heard, a band of young leaders came back to Dallas with a heart to



initiate a program that would offer the Biblical guidance and Christ-like love desperately needed for a generation that is seeking to be heard and accepted. With this vision, the name 'Footprints' was taken from the inspirational poem that highlights the intentions of the program.

Mission Statement: The mission of the footprints program and those of the mentors is to enrich the lives of the youth of today in a spiritual and intentional manner so they are helping to build up the youth of tomorrow. This can be achieved by being deliberate in how we encourage a youth when they need it most, hold them accountable

with their walk with Christ, rebuke the sin and not the sinner in a loving & gentle manner, and most importantly to show Christ by how we conduct ourselves in this fallen world.

Mentor Requirements:

1. Believer of the Lord Jesus Christ;
2. Minimum age—20 years;
3. Minimum commitment—1 year;
4. Active member of MTC Dallas Farmers Branch;
5. Successful completion of all required mentor training;
6. Strong Christian Leadership Skills;
7. Strong relationship with the parents of the mentee.

Mentee Requirement:

1. Member of the MTC Dallas Farmers Branch;
2. Minimum commitment —1 year;
3. A willingness to meet in person with the mentor once a month;
4. A willingness to listen, be open, honest, and allow God to impact your life.

Mentor Training:

1. A one day mandatory training for all mentors;
2. All mentors will be given a mentor training manual as a part of the required training;
3. At the end of the training session, each trainee will have the opportunity to decide if they wish to continue as a mentor.

The Objective

Each mentor and mentee will go through an interview process. Based on the information gathered, a profile will be created for future use or reference by the Program Director. Our hope and prayer is that during the one year commitment, a drastic heart change is evident in the life of the mentee. This program is only planned for the youth of the MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch. We are not at a point, to cater to the needs of the youth from outside or from other Mar Thoma parishes. This is something we're considering as a possibility in the unforeseen future.

Sam John, Program Director 214-454-8835 (cell)
fbfootprints@yahoo.com

GLOWING RECEPTION AND HAPPY 60TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS TO THEODOSIUS THIRUMENI AT ASCENSION MTC PHILADELPHIA



From Left to Right: Mr. Chacko Mathew, Diocesan Treasurer; Rev. K. George, Vicar, St. James and Bethany MTC's, NY; Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa, Diocesan Bishop; Rev. Dr. James F. Kaye, Professor, Princeton Theological Seminary; Rev. P. J. Varghese, Diocesan Council Member and Vicar, Epiphany MTC, New York; and Rev. Biju S. Cherian, Diocesan Secretary.

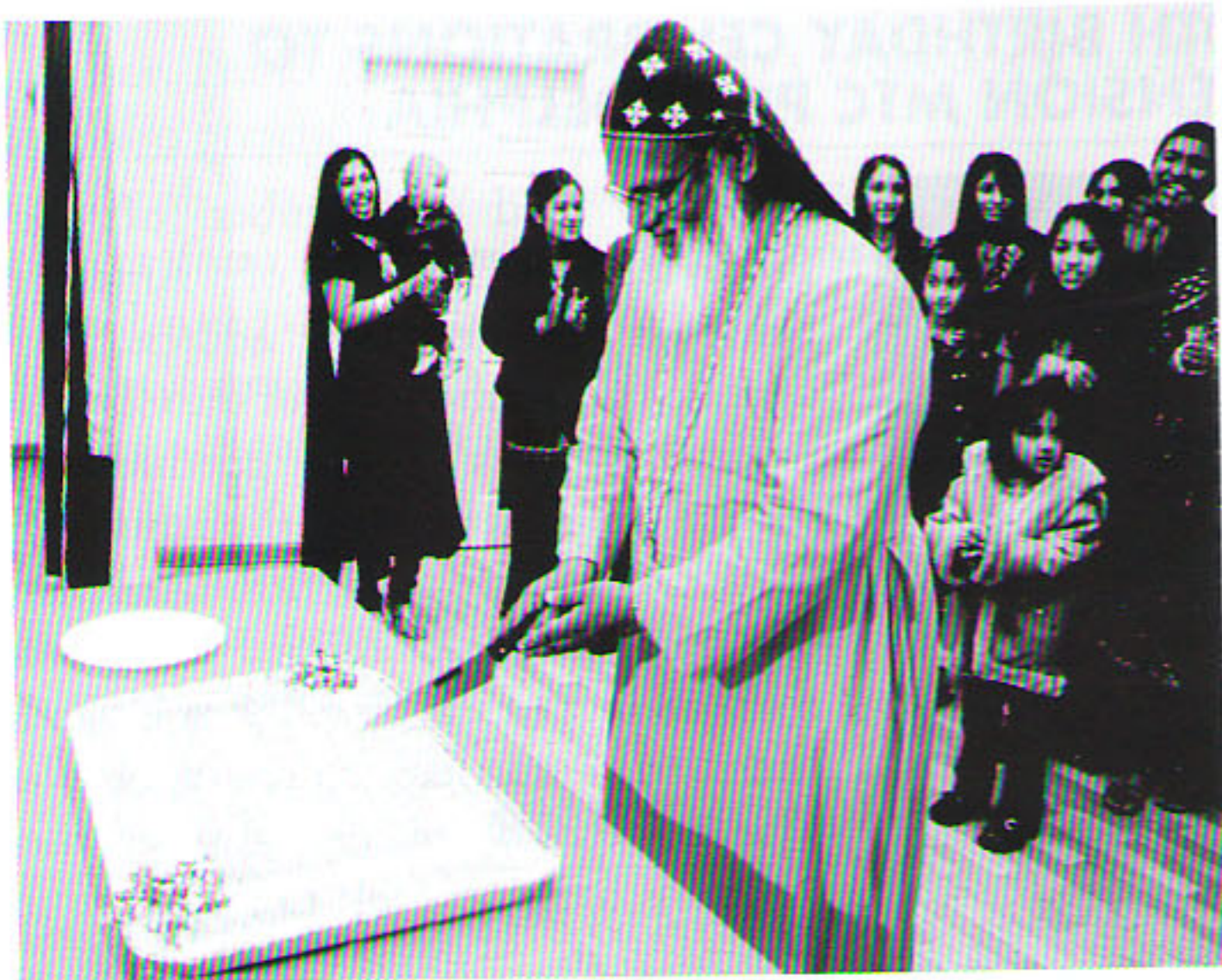
The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa who took charge of the North America & Europe Diocese of the Mar Thoma Church, was given a splendorous and warm welcome on Saturday, the 7th of February, 2009 at the Ascension Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia, with a grand procession making the reception the most colorful and memorable. In the formal meeting that followed, Rev. Dr. James F. Kaye, a professor at Princeton Theological

Seminary and a member of the Presbyterian Church of America delivered the key note address. He appealed to the members of the Church to actively work for the goodness in society, assimilating their thoughts in a global context, and through that becoming more determined to spread the workings of the Holy Spirit far and wide. To more than thousand people who gathered there, he conveyed the joy and happiness of the Princeton Seminary in enabling many priests, including four Bishops, of the Mar Thoma Church to get their degree from there since 1950.

Rev. K. George (representing the Clergy), Betty Vattakunnel, member of the Diocesan Council, and representing the different Diocesan organizations, Reena John: Youth Fellowship, Varghese K. Joseph: Edavaka Mission, Checha John: Sevika Sangham, Santhosh Abraham: Yuvajana Sakhyam, and Aswathy Mathew: Sunday School, felicitated Thirumeni in the Reception-Birthday meeting. The meeting's grandiosity reached its zenith through the melodious songs sung by the choir groups of the



View of the audience at Ascension MTC Philadelphia.



Theodosius Thirumeni cutting his 60th birthday cake as part of the reception and celebration at Ascension MTC Philadelphia.

Philadelphia Mar Thoma Church, Bethel Mar Thoma Church, Ascension Mar Thoma Church, and the Delaware valley Mar Thoma Church.

The 60th Birthday of Thirumeni who is completing 20 years of Episcopal Ministry, also was celebrated. The birthday greetings were offered by Abraham C. Thadathil who represented the diocesan council. The blue print of the projects to be undertaken by the Diocese as a gift to Thirumeni on his 60th birthday was submitted by Rev. P. Varghese. During the meeting the Diocesan Secretary Rev. Biju S. Cherian, Diocesan Treasurer Mr. Chacko Mathew and Diocesan Council member Mr. Varghese P. Varghese together presented to Thirumeni the check that is intended to be donated to 60 individuals to continue their studies.

A brief Background: The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, our Diocesan Bishop was born as Mr. George Jacob, the son of Dr. K. J. Chacko and Mrs. Mary Chacko, Kizhakke Chakkaalayil, Ashtamudi. He obtained his degree from the Mar Thoma College, Tiruvalla and Baselius College, Kottayam and completed his Theological Degree from Leonard Theological Seminary. He achieved his Masters Degree from Viswa Bharathi University in 1980 for the subject, 'A comparative study of Religions.' In 1986 he received his Doctorate from the McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada. He became a priest in the Mar Thoma Church in the year 1973, and was raised to the title of the Episcopa in 1989.

In his reply speech, Thirumeni invoked the cooperation and prayers of all the members of the Diocese

for successfully completing the mission he has undertaken. While we continue to proclaim how permanent are our relationships, and how glorious are the values, a kind of 'break down' occurs in those areas. This slackening tendency, now visible in the individual, social, and national relationships is tragic indeed, and Thirumeni asserted that the liberation will come only through deriving a new inspiration for Christian values. Rev. Biju S. Cherian, the Diocesan Secretary, welcomed the guests and the gathering. Chacko Mathew, the diocesan treasurer, gave the vote of thanks. Dr. Mathew T. Thomas and Mr. Gigi Tom (diocesan council members), acted as the Masters of Ceremony.

The arrangements to make the reception successful were organized by Rev. Biju S. Cherian, Diocesan Secretary; Chacko Mathew, treasurer; and Council Members, Rev. P. J. Varghese, Gigi Tom, Varghese P. Varghese, Abraham C. Thadathil, Ashley George, Betty Vattakunnel, Dr. Mathew T. Thomas, Ipe C. Varghese, Annamma Mathew, Aswathy Mathew, Elizabeth John, Mathew Koshy, and Samuel T. Thomas. Rev. Mathew Skariah, the South East Region Youth Chaplain and the parish committee under the leadership of Rev. M. C. Skariah, the Vicar, also contributed a lot in making this event a memorable one.

Mar Theodosius who took charge of the Diocese of North America and Europe from January, 2009, is a reputed orator, theologian, and author of many books.



Theodosius Thirumeni celebrating his 60th birthday with children at Ascension MTC Philadelphia.

Thirumeni has taken charge of the Diocese as the successor of Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Valiya Metropolitan, Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Suffragan Metropolitan, and Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa.

Gigi Tom/Elias Abraham

SPECIAL EVENTS FROM DIOCESAN EPISCOPA'S ITINERARY

(Details at: www.martheodosius.com)

January 8-11: The XII Diocesan Youth Fellowship Leadership Conference at Ascension Mar Thoma Church Philadelphia, hosted by The Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia.

January 17-18: The consecration of the newly built sanctuary of the Sehion Mar Thoma Church, Dallas was held on Saturday Jan. 17, 2008 at 02:00 pm. A public meeting followed the consecration service which was also presided by the Diocesan Episcopa Mar Theodosius. The distinguished leaders from sister churches and dignitaries from civil organizations/institutions graced the occasion. On Jan 18, 2009 Mar Theodosius celebrated the Holy Communion service in the newly consecrated altar and blessed the First Communicants.

January 19: A fellowship of the clergy and their families of the North East and The South East regions was held on Monday, January 19, 2009 at the Bethany Mar Thoma Church, NY. Nineteen achens and their families attended the meeting. The meeting was blessed with the abundance of snow in New York. A book review on the Book The Wrath of Jonah was done by Rev. P. J. Varghese. The clergies participated in the discussion.

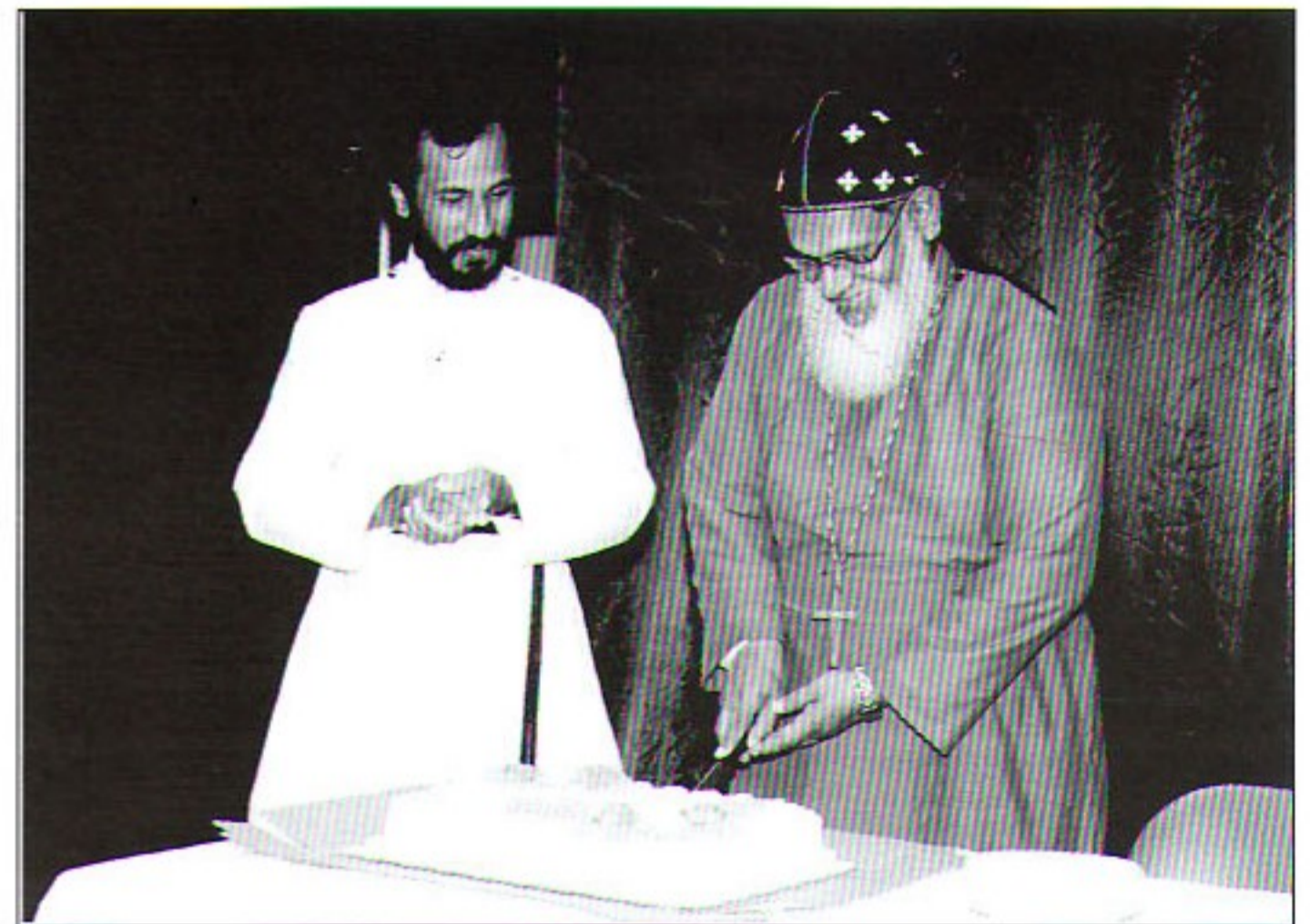
January 22-25: Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa visited the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Yonkers. Various meetings were organized with different organizations within the parish. On Jan. 25, 2009 the parish celebrated its Anniversary. Thirumeni celebrated Holy communion service and blessed the First Communicants. A total of 21 children took part in the First Communion. This was followed by a public meeting presided by Thirumeni. Miss Andrea Stewart Cousins, New York State Senator was the chief guest. She commended the parish on behalf of the state for the services rendered to the community in the neighborhood.

January 30 to February 2: Thirumeni visited Dallas St Paul's Mar Thoma Church. Special meetings were arranged for organizations within the parish.

On Saturday Jan. 31, 2009 Dallas (Texas) Area Clergy Meeting was organized. All the Achens of that center attended the meeting. It was a very blessed time for all the Achens and families to have a closer interaction with Thirumeni. Holy Qurbana was celebrated on February 1, 2009 at St. Paul's MTC, Dallas, during which Thirumeni blessed the First Communicants. A total of 12 children took the First communion. A felicitation meeting was arranged after the Holy Qurbana and the parishners joined in celebrating the birthday of Thirumeni by cutting cake.



First Communicants with Vicar and Theodosius Thirumeni.



St. Paul's MTC, Dallas, TX celebrating Thirumeni's birthday.

On the evening of Sunday His Lordship Mar Theodosius left for Harlingen to visit the Mexico Mission field. On Monday Thirumeni visited *Colonia Mar Thoma* and also spent time with the islanders and gave valuable insights on the future growth of the mission in Mexico.

February 7-8: Thirumeni visited the Ascension Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia. Though Thirumeni was suffering with fever because of flu, His Lordship made it a point to attend all the meetings that had already been scheduled. On Saturday, the Diocesan Council Meeting took place at Ascension Mar Thoma Church, followed by a grant reception for Thirumeni, on Diocesan level. Holy Qurbana was celebrated on February 8, 2009. Another felicitation meeting was arranged after the Holy Qurbana.

February 15-22: Maramon Convention. Mar Theodosius spoke on Tuesday morning.

March 6-8: Visit to Greater Washington MTC & DC Area. During this visit Thirumeni met with the Indian Ambassador Honorable Ronen Sen. Theodosius Thirumeni



The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius with Hon. Indian Ambassador Ronen Sen at Washington, D.C.

and Ambassador Sen exchanged greetings and shared ideas on a variety of topics. Ambassador Sen offered his ideas on ways to expedite the US Visas for clergy who are transferred in May 2009 to take charge of various parishes in the US, and expressed his willingness to use his office to represent the Mar Thoma Church's need to the concerned US authorities. Thirumeni congratulated Ambassador Sen for his efforts in leading and negotiating the US-India Nuclear Agreement.

Meeting with Bishop James K. Mathews and his wife Eunice Jones Mathews (daughter of the late Stanley E. Jones—Methodist Missionary). Meeting with Bishop Mathews (96 years old) and his wife Eunice (94 years old) was a splendid occasion for Thirumeni as they recalled their

visits to India and their interactions with the Mar Thoma Church. Mrs. Mathews showed Theodosius Thirumeni a gift that was presented by the Mar Thoma Church to Rev. Dr. Stanley Jones on the occasion of his 60th birthday in 1964. The gift—an ivory box—was hand painted with a scene of the Maramon Convention showing the large gathering of people, the pandals, the river bed lined with coconut trees and also the speaker-systems that were used



Theodosius Thirumeni with James K. Mathews and his wife Eunice Jones Mathews (daughter of the late Stanley E. Jones—Methodist Missionary) [From L to R:] Rev. Thomas John, Rev. Biju S. Cherian, Bishop James K. Mathews, Eunice Jones Mathews, Theodosius Thirumeni and Dr. George Zachariah.

those days to amplify the messages. The gift included a felicitation message that was presented to Rev. Stanley Jones, which was signed by the (late) Metropolitan Yuhannon Mar Thoma on February 22, 1964.

VALEDICTORIAN AWARD—2009

Diocese is inviting nominations for 2009 Valedictorian Awards. Students who graduated as high school class valedictorians and who are members of Mar Thoma parishes or congregations and who attend worship services and participate in parish activities are eligible for this award. The awards will be presented during the 27th Mar Thoma Family Conference to be held at Houston, Texas from July 2-5, 2009. To submit your information, please contact:

Mrs. Aswathi Mathew, 1416 Currant Way, Flower Mound, TX 75028

Ph: (972) 539-7198 or email: aswathim@msn.com

**THE RT. REV. DR. GEEVARGHESE MAR THEODOSIUS EPISCOPA
WITH DIOCESAN COUNCIL MEMBERS AT PHILADELPHIA**



PRAVASI AWARD 2009



Prof. Philip Koshi (Florida) has been honored with the "Pravasi Award" 2009 for his contributions to Literature. This prestigious award, instituted by the World Malayali Foundation, was given to Prof. Koshi for his book 'A World Without Frontiers', which depicts very powerfully, yet in a simple manner, the life and society in Kerala. The Award Committee that selected this book comprised of Mr. Paul Manalil (Chairman), Dr. C. J. Roy, and Dr. Alexander Karackal.

The Award was presented to Prof. Philip Koshi on February 21, 2009 at a glittering function held at the Press Club Hall, Thiruvananthapuram, in the presence of

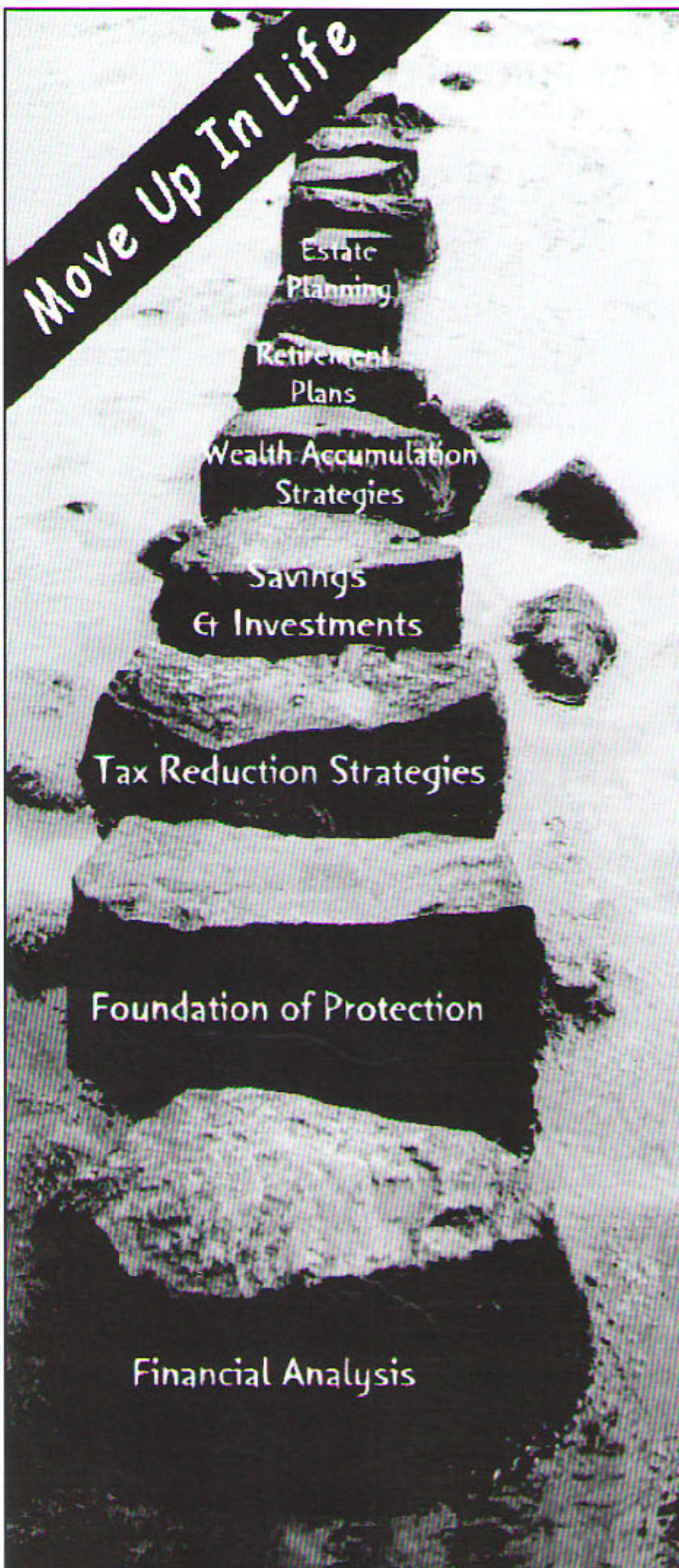
high level government officials, media reps and many special guests.

The Award winning book is a collection of Prof. Koshi's twenty-five published articles and All-India Radio broadcasts, touching on topics such as secularism, democracy, adventure, humor, biography, language, literature etc. The focus of the book is on areas of human interest and is filled with intense human values.

Prof. Philip Koshi's parents hail from East Kallada in Kollam district. He was born in Malaysia where his parents were employed. Later when the family moved to Kerala, Prof. Koshi attended the St. Thomas Residential School and Mar Ivanios College in Thiruvananthapuram. Thereafter, he served for 24 years as a Professor of English Literature and Language at Mar Ivanios College. During this period he served with distinction as a Radio Broadcaster (All India Radio), Freelance Journalist, Quiz Master and Resource person.

Prof. Philip Koshi moved to the United States in 2004, and currently lives in Weston, Florida with his wife Shirley and children, Priya, Christy, Sneha, Kripa and Cyril. They are active members of South Florida Mar Thoma Church in Davie, Florida.

Mathew Verghese, Florida



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OBITUARY



1988-2009

TOBY YOHANNAN was born in Nyack, New York on February 14, 1988 to Rev. Philip Yohannan and Mrs. Susamma Yohannan. Toby was the elder brother of Timmy. He graduated from Nyack High School in 2006 and from the Universal Technical Institute in Houston, Texas in 2007, specializing in collision repair technology. He successfully completed the Mercedes

Benz Elite Training Program in 2008 and worked for Norris Cadillac in Nanuet, NY. Toby was an active youth member of St. James Mar Thoma Church in Hillburn, NY and played varsity football for Nyack High School. Toby was a bright, mature, and talented young man who loved Jesus, his family, and friends. He had a humble spirit, always sacrificed to help those around him, and was a genuine friend to many. Toby was a great listener and always offered advice to those struggling. His interests also included cars, music, basketball, and football. Toby was especially gifted with playing the drums from an early age. He passionately played in Sunday church services, youth retreats, and Vacation Bible School. He always practiced, worked hard, and volunteered at every opportunity. With his gift of drumming he rallied people in worshipping the Lord. His Christian band named, "Never Enough," performed at many conferences and concerts. Toby knew Jesus as his Lord and Savior and has left with us his legacy and witness. Toby's viewing was on Tuesday, February 24, 2009 at India Pentecostal Fellowship Hall, Nyack, New York, and his internment was on February 25, 2009 at Brick Church Cemetery, Spring Valley, New York. Toby will be missed by his parents, brother, grandparents, uncles, aunts, many cousins, and friends. We mourn his passing, but we rejoice knowing that he is walking with his Savior. "Toby is with Christ now, his drum will forever beat in our hearts."

Toby Yohannan Memorial Fund

In honor of Toby, the St. James Mar Thoma Church has created a memorial fund. The family requests that in lieu of gifts or flowers, contributions be made to the memorial fund. Please make checks payable to the St. James Mar Thoma Church A/c Toby Yohannan Memorial Fund, 526 Route 306, Wesley Hills, NY 10901.

PHILIP V. PHILIPS (also lovingly known as Kunjumon) was born in Kerala, on December 18, 1942. He was the eldest child and only son of the (late) K. P. Philip and Annamma Thomas of Edalil House in Kurianoor. After School he joined the Indian Air Force where he served for 9 years. In 1972 he married Rachel Thomas of Manacheril house in Kurianoor and migrated to the United States in

1974. They lived in Bronx, NY and eventually the family settled in Bergenfield, NJ in 1982.

Philip was an active member in the religious, social and political community. He was a founding member of St. Peter's MTC, Teaneck, NJ, where he devoted much of his time in various positions. Philip also was involved with local organizations within Bergenfield.

He was appointed by the Mayor to be on the Bergenfield Planning Board Committee, a role he relished serving in. His passion for people really came through in his 26 years as a life insurance agent and financial planner for New York Life.

Philip was a kind, compassionate and giving person, always willing to go out of his way to help others.

Philip is survived by his wife, Rachel, his daughters Sheena and Liza and son-in-law Shaji and two grandchildren Sarah and Caleb.

SHIBU MATHEW ABRAHAM was born on August 25, 1987 to Mr. P. M. Abraham and Rosamma Abraham. He was the youngest of three children. Currently, he was a medical student at New York College of Osteopathic Medicine. He successfully completed a Bachelors degree in life sciences from the New York Institute of Technology, and was expected to graduate in May 2009.



1987-2009



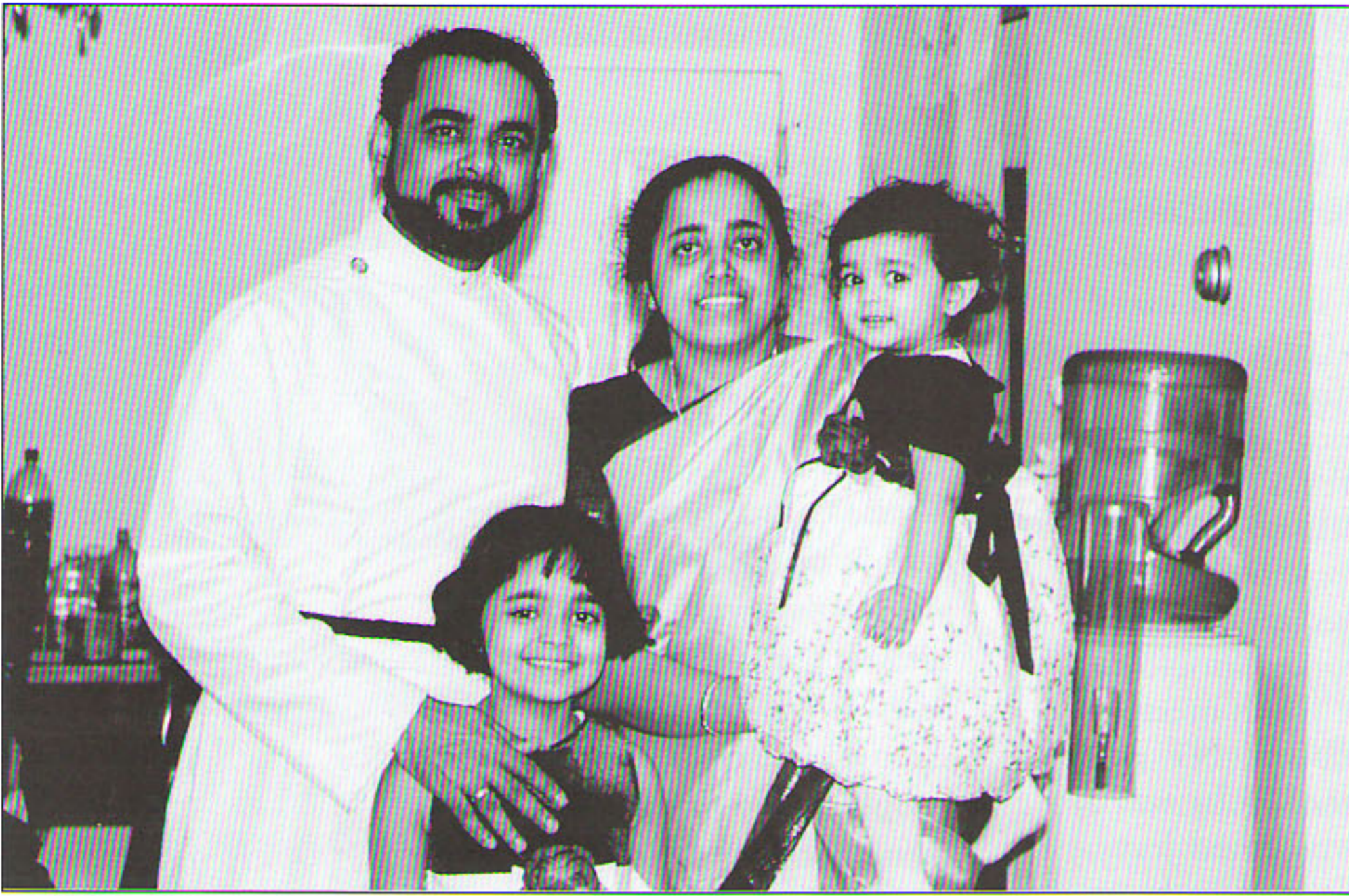
1942-2009

As an active member of St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church, he served faithfully in various capacities; from the secretary of the youth fellowship to the lay minister for services. As a beloved son and brother, he was an outstanding individual who glorified God, and honored his family.

He was always there for any one in their time of need and you could depend on him for anything. Shibu's greatest quality was his caring and selfless character. Shibu was a firm believer in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and has left with us his legacy and witness.

Shibu will be greatly missed by his parents, his two sisters; Sheeba and Shiby, their spouses Manoj, Trigy, his nephew Sahil, his uncles, aunts, many cousins and friends.

FAREWELL AND BEST WISHES TO BIJU ACHEN AND FAMILY



The time has come to Biju Achen and family to return to India to take up a new role after serving The Diocese of North America & Europe for the past four years. With deep gratitude we appreciate the challenging and successful role he has played as the Diocesan/Bishop's Secretary during his service by adorning the robes of Secretary, Telephone Operator, Public Relations Officer, Special Assistant, Confidential Secretary, Gracious Host, and the list never

ends. Teena Kochamma equally deserves our gratitude for her supporting role in the success of Biju Achen.

Before becoming the Diocesan Secretary, Biju Achen served the Diocese as our Youth Chaplain of the Northeast Region. With his compassion, care and love for our younger generation, Achen has won the hearts of our youngsters and still they consider him as their own Achen rather than the Diocesan Secretary.

To the Messenger Family, you were a source of inspiration, guidance and help. We extend a special "Thank You" for your dedicated and unselfish support provided to the Mar Thoma Messenger. We specially thank Kochamma for her untiring hospitality during each mailing session of the

Messenger at the Diocesan Center.

We will certainly miss you, Biju Achen, Teena Kochamma and your loving children Angela and Alicia. We as Messenger Family wish you a very bright and fruitful future with abundance of God's grace and blessings. Thank you and may the Almighty support you in all your future endeavors.

Saying Goodbye

Nina Varghese, Ebenezer MTC, NY

4 years gone
4 years long
He was a good Shepard for God's vineyard.
He came from the east to the west
He is among one of the best
He took us each one by one
Oh the times we had fun
He's helped many find their way
"How great is this servant of God"
they must say!
He has helped us understand more
about God's grace.

Because of him we are one step
closer to seeing the Almighty
Lord's face. He has helped
many go far.
He is a shining star.
Try talking to him,
and he'll help you keep away from sin.
This wonderful preachers name is
Rev. Biju S. Cherian.

Goodbye & Good luck to you.

*Instead of giving up on a person,
give that person to God.*

XXVII MAR THOMA FAMILY CONFERENCE

Date: July 2 through July 5, 2009
Venue: Westchase Marriott Hotel in Houston



Hosted By:
THE IMMANUEL MAR THOMA CHURCH, HOUSTON, TEXAS

Theme: From the Cross, Through the Church, To the World

Speakers



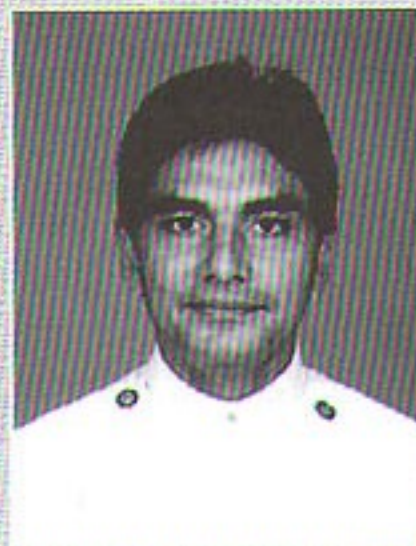
**Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese
Mar Theodosius Episcopa**
(Bishop of the North America & Europe Diocese)



**Rt. Rev. Dr. Abraham
Mar Paulos Episcopa**
(Bishop of the Delhi-Mumbai Diocese)



Very Rev. Dr. Douglas Travis
*Dean and President of the
Episcopal Theological Seminary of the
Southwest*



Rev. Abraham Scaria P
*Lecturer and Counselor at the
TMA Institute, Kottayam*



Rev. Biju P. Simon
*Youth Chaplain,
North East Region*

Conference Website: www.mtfc2009.org
Registration Deadline: May 31, 2009

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*You are cordially invited to come and join us for
study, prayer, fellowship, and renewal*

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Historically, religion and political authorities influenced and shaped human behaviors. Ethical standards were set by both sides that clashed at various points. When religion becomes more powerful than its own principles and basic teachings, it leads to fanaticism. Such fanaticism can propagate martyrdom for wrong reasons, as we currently see among some religious groups. Nations and community groups that has mingled religion and political ruling has always created unnecessary tensions for its citizens, its neighboring countries or even at global levels. Sadly, this trend is on the rise. Religion is even used as a weapon to gain political power in many nations. Constantine, the emperor who gave privileged positions for Christians in his empire for the first time, expected them to practice clear separation in being faithful witnesses of Christ and in the proper utilization of political power. Ethics established in Christianity do not observe social reforms by dependance on ending of certain social practices, but rather by ones own conviction that will result in changes within and outside. Eternal faith is common for all religions, but it differs in its application during earthly dwelling. When I look at today's religious teachings, it tend to follow materialistic ups and downs of the community and the world. Recessions, wars, and financial hardships could generate false interpretations of faithwalk, while Biblical affirmation of security and protection are evarlasting for its followers. As Christians, we are a called out community, clearly responsible to propagate Biblical virtues that will uplift integrity, honesty, loyalty, gracefulness, and reforming faith in conjunction with heightened concern for the fellow humans.



As Arun Gandhi has once expressed, it is the wasteful mind that try to acquire more than you need and then waste the materials that others can only dream of. A self-centered life is very similar to a stagnant pool, where the accumulation of matters makes it unhealthy and undeserving. We must apply caution at family, parish, and community levels, not to become such stagnant pools or resources with no proper outlet and no self cleaning. Lent season was expected to be a time of self purification and faith affirmation. As we move on with our lives that are congested and corrupted with fears and surviyal thoughts, it is important not to forget our calling. We all have goals that vary much from each other and the means in attaining the goals also differ. In the struggle of achieving these goals, wellness and happiness become intangible. Paul's statement is relevant in all life situations "Rejoice in the Lord—at all times". One life to live is one life to rejoice. Let us build our homes on rocks of salvation, not on sandy dunes. As a called out community, we have a lot more responsibilities to fulfill. Opening our eyes to see the need of others is devotion rather than a simple act. As a Diaspora community in the western hemisphere, we have resources to offer the outside world and the community surrounding us. Coordinating and utilizing these resources in an ethical and faith oriented fashion requires self-conviction.

Messenger is obliged to the services rendered by the out-going Achens of this Diocese. Let the Lord continue to provide them the guidance and strength that will enlighten the parishes and the community that they are expected to serve. We are especially grateful to Rev. Biju S Cherian for his dedicated and loyal services and wish him God's blessings in abundance. Messenger likes to welcome the newly appointed Achens to this Diocese and wish them God's grace in their pastoral responsibilities.

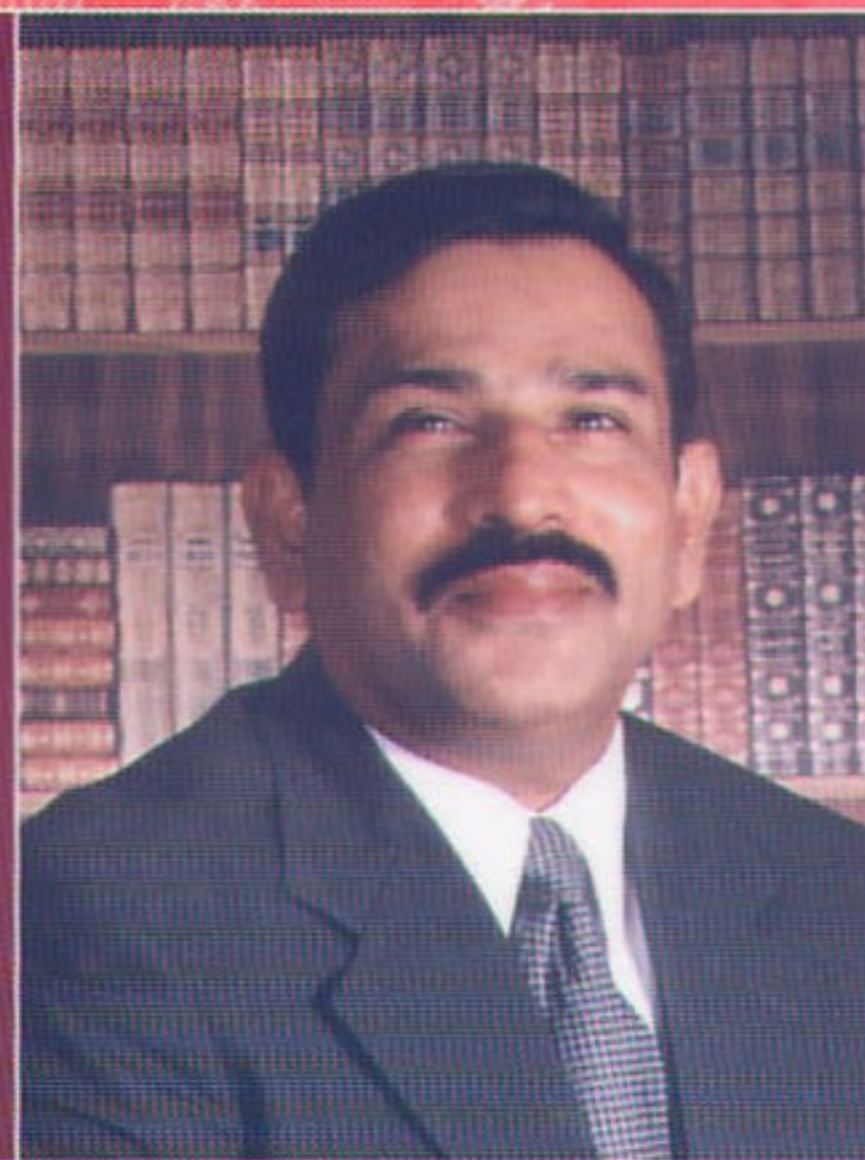
Eapen Daniel

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is being
served,
to the
Asian
Community**

Lal Varghese

.....
Attorney at Law

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