



MAR THOMA

MESSENGER

A PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

JULY 2009



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Message from the Metropolitan



Dearly beloved in the Lord,

The month of June arrived with plenty of hearty experiences that really added flavor and novelty in human life. Thousands of children in Kerala start their school life in this month. The little children walk the steps of the school along with their parents, happily carrying with them many a dream. They are welcomed wholeheartedly by the teachers and the school authorities. Let us pray for these little ones. Best wishes to every child!

The present days have made human life more anxious because of the drastic changes that occur in climatic conditions around the globe. Be it rain or draught, we have to be very much alert about the preservation of nature. We must keenly observe the preservation of the environment that we dwell in, and assure cleanliness as spiritual engagement. No body has the right to distort this world created by God. On the other hand everybody should strive to make this world more beautiful and lively. For the healthy survival of society we need to have educational seminars for environmental preservation, cleanliness, and the planting of saplings.

We got permission to worship in Qatar, along with 28 Church denominations. Qatar had been, once, considered an inaccessible land for believers. But by God's grace we were able to build a multistoried church and other buildings adjacent to the church in Qatar. The Suffragan Metropolitan and I gave leadership for the dedication of the church and the building complex on June 12, 2009. I specially congratulate our believers in Qatar. The festival mood created by the members of the Qatar Mar Thoma Church reminds us of the church entry of King Solomon, after the completion of the Jerusalem Temple. We praise the Lord for the grace we derived from Him. I convey my gratitude to the authorities of the State of Qatar.

Let us also pray for obtaining a plot of land to build a church in Bahrain. When I visited Bahrain recently, I was able to meet some of the officials in the government and talk on our needs. The procedures for acquiring land are in progress. Hope we would be able to materialize our dream in the near future.

In June we paid off Rs 33.5 million to the bank which we borrowed from them for the construction of the Geriatric Center at the Kumbanad Fellowship Hospital. I express my thanks to all those who generously gave money as donations and interest free loans. I counsel the members of the Church to contribute money to repay the interest free loans in the earliest possible.

In addition to the B.Sc. Nursing Course we started at the Kattanam St. Thomas Mission Hospital, we got sanction to begin B. Sc. Medical Laboratory Technology Course and B. Sc. Optometry & Ophthalmology Course. Please note that admission is possible for these courses also.

We began our meditations for the month of June with the vision that education is the journey towards real knowledge. Then, along with that, we declared, environment related topics as part of our faith. We shared the thoughts about God's call and His mission. Nowadays, the instigations and attractions of today's acquired culture are seen playing the upper hand. It seems the concept of what one can offer to the Church and Society has become obsolete. It is unfortunate that the bad results of such a change are observed today, in the Church and Society, and especially among the Clergy. It is to be noted, in this context, with great attentiveness the words of our Lord that, 'no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'

We observed the last Sunday in June, as the Second Millennium Jubilee of the Conversion of St. Paul. Born in a noble family as a Roman citizen who derived superior education and had many other ennobling qualities, Paul, counting every thing a loss for Christ through the vision of the cross, dedicated himself on this day, to follow Jesus literally each moment in all walks of his life. God transformed Apostle St. Paul as the artisan and the architect of the Church.

I, on June 27th, entered the age of 79 and on June 29th, into the 53rd year of my ministry. I praise the Lord for God's grace I had all these days.

It is written, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17)

Grace be with you all.

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan

Translated and Reprinted from Sabha Tharaka

Message from the Diocesan Bishop



Dear friends in Christ,

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

I pin down these lines soon after the conferences in Houston. We had the 27th Mar Thoma Family conference of the Diocese of North America & Europe in Marriot Hotel, July 2 - 5, 2009 hosted by the Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Houston. This is considered as the family get together of the Diocese where members come from far and wide for a greater fellowship and spiritual renewal. We had about 240 families from America & Canada. All the members of the Immanuel Mar Thoma church, especially Rev. T. S. Philip and members of the Conference Committee worked day and night and months together to ensure that all the delegates were well taken care of and the conference would become a blessing. We praise God for all those who worked hard. We praise God that the Conference was a blessing and God guided the conference throughout.

The theme of the conference was "From the Cross, through the Church, to the World". There are articles, news and photographs related to this, elsewhere in this issue of the messenger for the readers to get a glimpse of the study the conference had during the four days. We were immensely blessed by the presence and leadership of our Dr. Abraham Mar Paulos Thirumeni and Rev. Abraham Scariah. This was the maiden visit of our beloved Abraham Mar Paulos Thirumeni. The family conference was an occasion to welcome our bishop and wish him well in his ministry both in the Church and Society. Thirumeni is shepherding now in the Bombay and Delhi Dioceses and giving leadership as the President of the Kerala Christian Council of Churches. Our Diocese is supporting the mission work of the Delhi Diocese at Ittarsi in M.P. (More details are given in our website.)

The Clergy family Conference of the Diocese took place soon after the Diocesan Family Conference, July 5 -7, 2009, hosted by Trinity Mar Thoma Church Houston. Community in Mission was the theme and five papers were presented by our achen. This conference also had the leadership of our Dr. Abraham Mar Paulos Thirumeni and Abraham Scariah Achen. This conference had the experience of each clergy-family staying with the family members of the parish and coming together at the parish for worship, prayer, study, discussions and fellowship. The Vicar, office bearers and selected members of the parish took keen interest in caring the delegates and making the conference a memorable one. Rev. Abraham Scariah, being a counselor at our TMAM Counseling Center Kottayam, took a study class on Pastor and Counselor. (Please see the website for the details on the center.)

The workshop of the youth Chaplains of the Diocese was first in its kind and included an open forum for members of the Diocese to speak on its aims and objectives. The workshop was conducted with the help of both the parishes in Houston and with the guidance of our leaders. It was a refreshing and enriching experience for all who attended it. The Diocese is grateful to all concerned, particularly to both Immanuel Mar Thoma Church and Trinity Mar Thoma Church Houston for their hard labor, commitment and co-operation in organizing all these conferences.

The Church in the 21st century is perplexed by the phenomenon of a rapid deconstruction of the traditional family structure. Change is inevitable, but how do we understand and translate changes to our living context? There is a diversity of perspectives on contemporary family issues that are influenced by media, trade, encounters, migration and the like. The process of globalization with its merits and demerits cannot be ignored. On the one hand these changes enrich us and on the other hand they challenge all humans irrespective of gender, age, race and culture. The challenge before the church is to take on a new model of responsible leadership and servanthood that would be appropriate for the various experiences of humanhood. It is important, therefore, for us to re-read the Bible and to understand specifically the divine will for each of us. It will help us to re-view, re-think and re-act (response in action).

It is my prayer and hope that the conferences now empower our Diocese, parishes and families to have the right vision and the value systems, take seriously the mission and ministry of the Church and give responsible Christian leadership both in the global and contextual world.

May God bless us all.

Yours in Christ's Ministry,

s/d

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius
Diocesan Bishop

Messenger **Strengthening the Family Values** Messenger

Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa

(Summary of the talk [first part] made at the Family Conference held in Houston from July 2-5, 2009)

Family is one of the oldest institutions of society and is as old as humanity itself. Family is the basic unit of the church and society; as a matter of fact, church is the family of families. It is also the basic community from where we understand the global world. In all centuries, family has faced the stresses and strains of life. Lifestyles (of each family) are tailored according to these experiences within a given culture and situation. As we tend to classify the human society of the East and the West, we are also conscious of the varieties of lifestyles that human families have in different continents. Today we live in a multicultural society, which is the melting pot of cultures from around the world. Travel and migration have become very common.

So, in a given geographical area, there is plurality of lifestyles; embraced and exchanged according to one's taste and need. The rapid changes that are taking place around families are shaking the close-knit relationships within the family. It is observed that a number of families end up in broken relationships including divorces and become dysfunctional. The families will have strong foundations only when they rest on the eternal values of the Kingdom of God like Justice, Love, Reconciliation, Peace and the like.

The role of family in the church and society is so deep and strong that it becomes the crucible point where the future generations are molded. The interrelationship of family members and a healthy atmosphere within the family has far reaching consequences for the lives of its members. Children born and brought up in a family will grow up with what they see and experience in their family. Family life nurtures and rests on the relationships maintained between the members. A group of people living under the same roof will not comprise a family. The family setup becomes real when members are related to each other and they play different roles as it is determined and given to them by God.

a. God is the Creator

God designs every family and He must be at the center of each human family. Unity within the family crumbles when God is removed from the center of the family and different spheres of life. The very Godhead is understood as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This concept should be the role model for all human families. Jesus Christ lived amongst humanity, always in communion with the Heavenly Father and obeying Him. Every family finds the end and meaning of family life by living in communion with God through prayer, study of the Word of God and meditation. This value of the family is being diminished as families tend to become more and



more nuclear families in a fast changing world. Personal meditation and family worship are to be encouraged in order to keep up the unity and integrity of all families.

b. God Gives Relationships

Relationships are the cradle into which each child is born. There are only male and female in humankind/created beings. It is the relationship that gives dignity and respect for each person in the family and also for the person to play the different roles. All relationships are God given, therefore they are divine. It is to be respected as sacred by each member of the family. They are to be maintained as it is, since it is the relationships that human life grows and carries out its purposes. Love is the binding factor in family relationship. Reconciliation between members brings peace and harmony. Justice is maintained by mutual respect. Everyone is considered precious and attributed with dignity.

The Holy Bible presents families as venues where interpersonal relationships are kept and respected. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament speak about God-ordained responsibilities within the family circle. The Old Testament speaks of families that take care of not only direct members of the family but also servants, dependents, animals and nature. Today the sanctity of all these relationships are forgotten and the freedom loving new generation tend to ignore the God given relationships.

Marriage Today

How do we understand marriage today in America? Following are some of the concerns:

1. It is said that in America, true or false, people spend 95% of the time planning for the wedding and 5% time planning for the married life. Is this true?
2. How can one balance career with responsibilities of Christian family (especially when your job is demanding in terms of time and stress)
3. How can Christian families deal with financial issues in a marriage? (The number one reason for divorce in the U.S. is financial related issue)
4. How can you become a good Christian model to your spouse and children?
5. How should one adjust to the new extended family (i.e. relationships with in-laws and associated family members)
6. In a closed patriarchal society, have we prepared ourselves and our children for changing the necessary traditional gender roles or "What is the change and

continuity in the roles of husbands and wives—Past vs. Present” (especially in the Malayalee context)

7. Can we seek help in times of trouble and not sweep them under the rug. This necessitates trust and faith.
8. Who wants to get married these days? Is there anything wrong with living together (without marriage)?

The following is some of the contemporary answers of this age:

Some would say: “We want to see how compatible we are by living together; if everything goes well we will proceed to have a proper marriage, if not, we will go on our separate ways.”

‘Living together’ is an issue that is much debated in North America & Europe, if not in other places, for the last few decades. It is pleasure seeking and has no obligation to each other. Some people co-habituate for the benefits of marriage without the risk of divorce or cost of commitment. They do not have to seek legal or religious permission to dissolve the union. This development has serious consequences.

Living together before marriage creates distrust about the institution of marriage and increases the risk of divorce. In situations like this, women suffer more than men and commitment levels are very low. The happiness and prosperity expected from each other are momentary. It increases the risk of domestic violence as the commitment is not deep. Children born out of wedlock endure greater risk of physical and sexual abuse thereby perpetuating the cycle of co-habitations. These are all detrimental to the sanctity of marriage and its stability. Convenience and economics should not be the only parameters when people decide about marriage.

So what is marriage?

Marriage is a divine provision; sanctified by the Creator. It is a sacrament—*Koodasa*. We turn to the Word of God to

understand marriage. (Mathew 19:4-6) It is the commitment and sacrifice living together at the same time dealing with incompatibilities. Marriage is to be approached in such a way that it should remain permanent. It is the question of taking a vow; to be there for each other as long as breath lasts. In marriage, you need unconditional love and commitment. Studies have proven that men and women live longer, happier, healthier and wealthier lives when they are properly married.

Choosing a life partner is important and needs divine grace. The process of leaving, cleaving and becoming one in marriage is a blessed one and at the same time a painful and hard experience which has to be properly understood and handled for building up a smooth married life. Both verbal and non-verbal communication in marriage is very important to maintain the balance of a healthy relationship. Communication of love and hate, approval and disapproval, desire and dislike, hope and disappointment, must be understood properly for a successful family life. Both failure to communicate and wrong communication can destroy family life.

How do we understand and value inter cultural marriage?

Marriage is a relationship meant for a lifetime. When two people marry, it involves the merging of separate patterns of living into a shared life. It is there that a family becomes the sanctuary of life, a sacred place dedicated to God. Parenting is a great responsibility for both spouses and it remains a common challenge to both partners. The distinctive roles of a mother and a father must be clearly understood and effectively discharged along with the common roles involved in parenting. In Christian families, it is vital for the parents to understand that they are the first biblical teachers and sex educators. (Summary: Love is the greatest virtue. We understand it from God. We live it as a sacrament.) ■

FAMILY

Rebecca Jacob (Grade 3), The New Jersey Mar Thoma Church

*Family is awesome
Oh yes it's very true
They take care of you and comfort you
Whenever you are down or blue.*

*They're there when you need them
They sparkle like a gem*

*You can always count on them
My family is awesome.*

*A place where I can be just me
A place where love and laughter be
A place where God's peace you can see
My family is awesome.*

From the Cross, through the Church, to the World

Rt. Rev. Dr. Abraham Mar Paulos, Diocesan Bishop—Diocese of Mumbai and Delhi
[The summary of three main talks delivered at Family Conference 2009 held in Houston, Texas]

TOUCH JESUS THROUGH THE CROSS

The Church needs to embrace the concept of a Cross centered spirituality and to be a Christian witness in the world. How do we touch Jesus? Jesus told Thomas, “stretch out your hand and touch me.” This is the only incident when Jesus asked someone to touch Him. Otherwise, it was He who touched others. It is only through the Cross that we can experience and come to God in Jesus. A Cross centered spirituality is what we are called to experience and share in this world.

What led Jesus to the Cross? What is the message of the Cross? Jesus was crucified because of His passion for God and God’s people. Jesus had no other intention other than to fulfill His father’s will. Even sacrificing His own life did not come in between Him and His commitment to His Father. Jesus loved God more than His own life. “How much do you love me?” this is the question Jesus asked Simon Peter in John 21:15. How much do we love God in Christ? Do you love Jesus more than you love others? Is Jesus more important in our lives than the relations and resources which keep us to thrive in this world?

This love and trust is what we hear even in His last words from the Cross. It is out of love for the world that He prayed for the forgiveness of those who crucified Him and it is out of His trust and love for the Father that, He committed His spirit unto Him, in spite of feeling that the Father had forsaken Him. Cross calls for a suffering love, sacrificial love, and a sustaining love and shows what love is. He was life and light, living water and the true bread. He was love incarnate.

Whatever happens in our lives, we need to let God’s love in us. We must let our resentments, our anger, our prejudices, our ambitions, and selfish motives go, and let the love of God fill us to the brim of our hearts. God’s love holds us when we are breaking, comforts us in our sorrows. God’s love is not soft or sloppy. It sometimes hurts us because it demands more from us. It is strong enough to take us to the lion’s cage. It is always there with purpose, power and direction to guard our lives in trials and tribulations.

Jesus was crucified because He lived the life of the Kingdom of God which was against the prevailing social systems, customs and value systems of His time. He was the greatest encourager, especially for those who were pushed to the peripherals of the society. He saw goodness where no one else could see. He made greedy people generous. He put a child in the centre of things. He talked to beggars. He touched people with leprosy—touching the untouchable. He let a prostitute to wash His feet. He treated women as equal with men. He treated love above law and humans over Sabbath/religious laws.

In effect, it was His counter cultural stand points and practices that angered the powerful and vested interest groups of His day. They crucified Him to put an end to the new life to



the world He ushered in. Cross is a place where the love for God and a commitment to the Kingdom of God come together. Cross centered spirituality is unwavering relation to God and unfaltering commitment to the values of the Kingdom of God.

What are the values of the Kingdom of God that we need to uphold today to the point of giving up our lives for the sake of it? Cross centered spirituality is an antidote to miracle oriented spirituality. Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, ‘Thy will be done.’ This is what Jesus taught His disciples to pray in the Lord’s Prayer. Today’s spir-

ituality for at least some people is to command Jesus and God to do what they want God to do for them. What is God’s will for me, for my family, church and society today is the question that we need to ponder upon.

Cross centered spirituality is that of Kenosis - that is self emptying. Jesus emptied Himself of His position in Heaven, His status as equal to God for the sake of God’s people and the world. This is against the self-glorification and accumulation syndrome of today. Jesus’ spirituality on the Cross is that of faithfulness to God rather than His victory. Success is today’s catchword in all spheres of life. But Cross centered spirituality calls to be faithful to God rather than be successful. It is not a ‘crusading spirit but a crucified mind’ that comes from the Cross to the world. Is the spirit of the crucified mind that flows through the Church to the world today? Cross suggests that, it is not the results that matter, but the relationships. Cross centered spirituality is not reward oriented.

Cross proclaims a life devoted to God and dedicated to God’s world. Jesus on the Cross shows a suffering God and a powerless God. God is availing Himself and vulnerable on the Cross so that people have the opportunity to experience the love and sacrifice of the Cross. God the Powerful One, revealed himself as the powerless on the Cross. God does not identify with the mighty and glorious, wealthy and glamorous of this world. God has a preferential empathy for the poor, vulnerable and the marginalized. The so called ruler’s and religious leader’s unwillingness or inability to understand God’s love and Jesus’ love brought Him to the Cross.

Cross denotes the element of suffering by Jesus Christ at the will of God. Cross centered spirituality proclaims a God who suffers for the mankind and was rejected by the world. God suffers with us when people suffer grief due to the death of a life partner. God suffers with us when we feel total emptiness in our lives due to utter depression. God suffers with us when unyielding physical pain and debilitating and wasting disease confronts us. God suffers with us when fear, violence, poverty and injustice prevail in the society.

The powerlessness of God can be seen in the act of giving us freedom. He surrendered His power so that we may become powerful. God in Christ suffers and dies for us and with us.

God in Christ endured the outrage of human dying and death itself. God in Christ endures us with His deathless love and His unending kindness. God invites us to live with Him and to express love with Him and to take risk with Him. The burdens you carry, the problems you live with, the sufferings you shoulder, the neglect and betrayal you bear, temptations you face, always reminds that God is with us. Jesus on the Cross is the touching place. Who is Jesus Christ for you? How do we abide in Him without sharing the Cross and experiencing the Cross-centered spirituality?

TOUCH CHURCH THROUGH COMMUNION LIFE

Church is the body of the Christ and the body is united in the crucified and risen Christ. Church is formed as a result of God's communication to the world through Jesus Christ. Church is called to continue that communication of God's message in Jesus Christ to the world. So Church is the result of God's call and has the responsibility to continue God's call in the world. Church as the body of Christ has a major message in this world. It is not what the Church says, it is what the Church is, that matters more in expressing Jesus' spirituality. The body as such communicates in expressing the message of God.

What is meant to be a Church or what it should be the Church? Church is a refuge, a place of security, peace, safety and asylum. Church should be a safe haven in a storm, somewhere to curl up and to hide, somewhere to allow you to be fragile, a place to be vulnerable and to be different. Church is a community of people who follows the message of the Cross. A house of prayer can be a den of robbers at times, but remember, Church is the broken body of Christ so that Salvation may come to the world.

Let us reflect on the characteristics of the Church formed at the margins of the society in a pagan or gentile world. This is a Church formed by insignificant people but with great meaning and relevance. A reflection on the Antiochian church is essential to understand Church and Church ministry today. Church is a called out community. Let us examine the marks of the Church to understand the Church life in the U.S. context. (Acts 11:19-30, 13:1-3)

The Church in Antioch was founded by lay people. The migrants scattered and run away Christians were the cause of the Church in Antioch. The Apostles of Jerusalem had no part in the formation of Church in Antioch. It is surprising to note that, in spite of being scattered because of their faith, they never thought of stopping to live out their faith. The message of this Church to the world may be this: 'You can scatter us, persecute us and can try to do away with us. But you cannot destroy our faith and witness.'

In today's context, many are persecuted for their faith as in Kandhamal in India. Church is not of the Bishop or of the Achen but that of the Faith Community. Mar Thoma community is growing through mission and migration. How is the sense of belonging of our youngsters in the migrant and mission contexts? Does the church own them so that they feel that they belong to the Church and vice versa?

It is God in Christ who is the builder of the Church. Jesus and Church have a unique relationship even though the Holy Trinity is involved in the building up of the Church. For exam-

ple it is Jesus who is the Redeemer and Savior. Jesus invites people to the Church. (Roman 1:7) Jesus is the one who gives life. (John 5:21) Jesus entrusts others to participate in the building up of the Church and its ministry. In His own time and in His own ways Jesus builds the Church and we should not FORCE the building up of the Church and its ministry.

He chooses often the uneven and roughest stones and fits them into an excellent work of creation. It is not the missionary, ministers or committee that builds, but Jesus. There need not be any strategy to build up the Church or its ministry, only the selfless service for the glory of God is needed. Antiochian Church had both conservatives and radicals as members. They had Apostles and religious teachers too. Religious teachers are usually the conveyers of the tradition and tend to be conservatives in their approach. Apostles take radical position vis-à-vis the life and ministry of the Church. In other words, the Antiochian Church was willing to uphold the good of the past and embrace the challenges of the present. What does it tell us in the present context of the diocese in U.S.? How do we understand the Syrian culture and American culture in the Mar Thoma parishes in the U.S.?

Church is a caring and sharing community for those who live on the periphery of the society. The Antiochian Church shared their resources with the Jerusalem Church when there was a famine in Jerusalem. It was not a debating society but a deciding and acting society to the needs of the Church in Jerusalem. It is not that the Antiochian church had plenty, but they were sensitive to the need of the others and they gave from their limited resources and with sacrifice. They did not give conditionally or expecting anything in return. To be a true Christian, one needs to be sensitized to the needs of others and thereby acting upon with sacrifice and without expecting anything in return.

What does caring and sharing mean for us in this context? How do we recapture the earlier 'prayer group' model in our parishes today, where members of the prayer group was the primary support group in the physical, social and spiritual need of each family. The church in Antioch was an inclusive community. It was a classless society with no fences built around them based on race, culture, position or wealth. (Acts 13:1-3) Simeon was black whereas Manean was from the court of Herod. There were people from different social class but without much discrimination against each other. There were two groups of people in the Antiochian Church—Christians from Jerusalem who came and preached the Good News to the Jews and the second group came from Cyprus, Cyrene (North Africa) who preached Good News to Jews and Gentiles. Both groups remained part of the same community while taking part in the mission of the Church. Simeon was among those who placed their hands on Paul and Barnabas before they were sent for missionary journey.

Galatians 3:28 and Col. 3:11 show that in Christ there is no racial (Greek or Jew), cultural (barbarian or Scythia), social and economic (bond or free), religious (circumcised or uncircumcised), sexual (male or female) differentiations or discriminations. How is it in our Church today? There was no linguistic imposition of one culture either in Antioch, unlike in our context, where Malayalam and Syrian chants are the predominant features of our Church. It was a community where

people of different cultures and opinions lived together. There were differences of opinions as happened in between Paul and Barnabas over the inclusion of Mark in the missionary journey. But differences never lead them in to breaking points unlike what we see in our parishes today. They were active co-workers and not passive conformers. It was a community which believed that people can change and can be redemptive. (2 Tim. 4:11) After years of the confrontation between Paul and Barnabas, Paul requested to bring Mark to him. Paul here acted in a redemptive way, reconciling with Mark. The mandate of the Church today is mending the broken hearts, broken relationships, and broken homes, both inside and outside the Church.

This was a Church which believed in people and kept the relationships. Barnabas believed in Mark and was willing to give him a second chance. A Church which created an environment for its members to become leaders is also a learning Church in the faith journey. The Church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to learn what is happening there, in a community formed by the laity without strictly following the pattern of Jerusalem Church. Yet when Barnabas visited there he rejoiced in seeing the community of faith and learning from the experience by the grace of God. It was also a community which brought others to leadership to be witnesses of the Church. (Acts 11:25) Barnabas brought Paul to the Church, went again to search for him and ultimately became second to Paul. On the other hand, our Churches are creating anonymous people, where as the Church in Antioch created new leaders both young and old to witness Jesus Christ.

The Antiochian Church was one that listened to God and followed His Word. (Acts 13:2) We as a Church need to be a worshipping community which would listen to the Word of God in order to entrust people with the task of continuing the mission in the local context where we are placed. The term 'neighborhood ministry' should become relevant and meaningful in our parishes today. We cannot be an inclusive Church any more and we need to spread the Good News in places we are planted. Antiochian Church was a community which proclaimed the Lord Jesus in spite of persecution and the resultant scattering to distant places. (Acts 11:19-21) The life style of the Church was an example of the communion life. The sharing of the communion bread and wine was not just a symbolic act for the early Church; but it was the life style of the Church. It was by carrying the Cross of Jesus Christ and living in the crucified way of life that they were able to be in touch with the crucified Christ. What should the Church need to do today? Is Mar Thoma Church is in the business of spreading the Good News or just being an inclusive community? What should the Church to do in order to become the genuine body of Christ in the twenty-first century?

TOUCH THE WORLD IN MISSION

We are called to be the bearers of the Cross, that is, to stay to be close with Jesus, abide in Him and to go out into the world to be His witnesses by taking up the challenges in order to propagate the mission entrusted to us by God. (John 20:19) The crucified Jesus encountered His disciples after He has risen and that encounter gives us a paradigm for mission. The

crucified Christ sent them out into the world to proclaim the Good News. They are to offer the love, forgiveness and peace that overflowed from the Cross to the world. Church as the body of Christ has to experience the meaning of the Cross and to share the same to the world. Today, the Church unfortunately maintains a closed-door mentality in its dealings with others. Closed-door mentality indicates exclusivism, frightened state and hopelessness, which the disciples had experienced after crucifixion. But, the risen Christ transforms the frightened and insecure people to those of fearless ones. He showed them His wound, asked Thomas to touch the same so that he can recognize Him and then to go and share the world with his experience of touching the risen Jesus.

Closed door attitude means a self centered existence without any thought or concern for others. External pressures, powers and systems can also create a closed-door mentality in us. In the case of the disciples, it was the fear of the Jews and Romans that forced them to confine behind the closed doors. What are the external forces that force us to the closed-door mentality today? Economic and social structures force people to be in a state of closed doors. Caste systems are socially created closed-doors where people like Dalits experience a sense of being separated from the main fold of the society. Risen Christ breaks open the socially and culturally created closed-doors and the Church has entrusted with the task of breaking these closed-doors.

Closed-door attitude also means having a thought of self-righteousness, or self-satisfied ego. Paul mentions about 'always right' people and 'self-sufficient' people. Self-enclosed existence that does not recognize the 'other' the weak, the stranger, and those who are different is living in a 'closed door' experience. Modern life is built on the fear and suspicion of the surroundings in which we are living. Muslims are targeted as potential terrorists now a days. Resurrection of Jesus Christ breaks our self-enclosed existence. Risen Lord confronts and thereby opens the closed doors. Church can maintain a closed-door attitude to several challenges the world is facing today. It can maintain itself in a comfort zone and not to be disturbed by the problems and needs of the people outside of the sanctuary walls.

In order to do this mission, we need to have complete surrender before our Lord Jesus Christ. Salt and Light differ in their function but both fulfill its own separate missions. They melt away in the process of their entrusted task. Church is called to complete its task entrusted by God, whereby it will become a movement rather than a monument. We need to identify the traditional practices and structures that are found in our situations that deny life to others. How will you respond by taking up the life-giving tasks God entrusted to us in concrete ways to serve others? When we see Jesus in the face of the victimized, how does it affect our spirituality and mission? Christian witnessing is the sharing of the love, peace and forgiveness of God to bear witness to the Kingdom of God that Jesus brought into our midst.

The commissioning Christ, has entrusted us is to go out into the world to be salt and light in order to exhibit Christian character and Christian life style. Life style is not the style of dress or food or music to which we adapt. It is a commitment to the values and principles that Jesus taught us to follow. The Kingdom of God comes with an alternative vision of life and

(Continued on page 28)



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From the Cross

Rev. Biju P. Simon, Youth Chaplain, North East Region, New York
(Talk given at the Youth session of the Family Conference 2009 at Houston, TX)

The theme of this year's family conference is "*From the Cross, Through the Church, To the World*". In order to understand the meaning of this aspect, we need to ask the question "what is Cross?" The root word for "Cross" is the Latin word "*Crux*", which is an instrument of execution that the Romans used to torture to death those who would not submit to their way of governing.

Today, the Cross is sometimes viewed merely as a symbol or idol. As a symbol it is an object of cultural significance as we see in Christian book stores, on top of the church building, or as an ornamental piece in the living room. As an idol, Abraham wrote, "an idol is that which blocks our ultimate loyalty to God. Cross-should not be seen as something with magical power or an object of worship rather it must be a living reality." An Indian theologian Kappan says, "the ritualisation of the Cross is a deliberate attempt to do away with the cause of Christ in our life."

In Christian world Cross is a powerful symbol of Faith, Cross being central to the theology of Christianity. Christian faith sees the Cross as means of salvation through the death of Jesus Christ on Cross; Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:23 writes, "we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness." Cross is also a term used by Jesus to indicate discipleship in following Him; Jesus said in Matthew 10:38, "and anyone who does not take his Cross and follow me is not worthy of me." Because there are many biblical meanings to "Cross," we need to ask ourselves what "Cross" means in our 21st century world? So let us look at the meaning of "Cross."

To begin with, Cross reminds us that Jesus suffered, in our place, the ultimate consequence of our sin. In 1 Corinthians 15:3 it says that, "...Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures...." For what kind of sins did Jesus die for us? One way of understanding these sins is by recognizing the causes for which Jesus was crucified. Jesus proclaimed a message of radical graciousness, acceptance, and abundant life that contrasted with a culture of exclusion, oppression, and death. Jesus lived out the message he proclaimed. There were many people and systems that rejected this message. For example, Herod who mocked Jesus after the trial, Pilate who became greedy and did not take any decision, rather washed his hands instead of releasing him, and Caiaphas, Pharisees, and Sadducees who had their own versions of hatred toward Jesus and His message; all of them assumed that this inclusivity would diminish their power and influence over the society.

Jesus preached the message of unconditional love and He invited all to join Him at the table fellowship. Jesus Christ invited the excluded for His table fellowship. He not only included the prostitutes, tax collectors, and ritually impure people but also crossed cultural boundaries when He healed the Canaanite woman's daughter and told the parables of the



Samaritan who helped the wounded and 1 foreigner out of the 10 He healed who came to thank Him.

Our society is not so different from the one in those days. Don't we discriminate people based on their skin color? Don't we often box and label people by calling some "religious" and others "not religious", U.S. born Malayalee and Indian born American Malayalee, Republican vs. Democrat, conservative vs. liberal? In so many ways people are discriminated and excluded. Christ died for us even for these sins of exclusion. Jesus had not sinned but He bore the ultimate consequence of our sins. Jesus suffered in our place to save us

from experiencing the ultimate consequence of our sins.

Further more, through the Cross God offers us forgiveness. At the Cross God experienced most excruciating pain. God's own Son became crucified through the most humiliating form of execution. Yet, on the Cross, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). When Jesus forgave those who crucified Him, He forgave them not just for the specific act of crucifixion but also for the attitudes and behaviors that led to the Cross.

Jesus' forgiveness led God to respond to the Cross with restorative forgiveness bringing people back into right relationships. Incidents after the resurrection of Jesus testify to that end. During the trial and execution all his disciples were scattered due to fear for their lives, including Peter who told Jesus "even if I have to die I will not betray you." The resurrected Jesus is, "intent, not on scolding, or seeking revenge for their betrayal and desertation, but on reaching out in love and restoring relationships."

In today's world, many of us betray and reject Jesus in our day to day living. We are quick to profess with our mouth that we are followers of Christ, yet we forget that we are not fulfilling His commandments of loving our own neighbors. For us young people there are so many ways we are tempted, tempted with our own selfish desires to accumulate without ethics, exploit without repentance, and ignore the warnings even with the full knowledge of the consequences. Jesus, even today, is willing to forgive us from our guilt if our confession is sincere, then we can experience God's restorative forgiveness in our lives.

Moreover, Cross frees us from shame. How can we define shame? Shame is relational. It is a feeling of being inferior to others or not meeting expected standards, and thereby feel disapproved, ridiculed, rejected, and often excluded. Jesus suffered the most shameful death on the Cross. "Although crucifixion was physically painful, in the Roman era, people dreaded crucifixion first and foremost because of its shameful character. It was designed to be an instrument of contempt and public ridicule. Romans reserved crucifixion for insurrectionists, foreigners, and slaves. They did not crucify Roman Citizens because it was considered too dishonorable."

This shameful crucifixion is what Jesus suffered for us. In the gospels we see Jesus freeing people from the shame of being labeled unworthy; for example, Zacchaeus the tax collector and the woman who got caught in adultery. Jesus embraced and included the excluded; Jesus can free those who are dishonored by shame and liberate them to honor and new identity.

A Christian writer, Baker, reminds us that, "the objective consequences of an act of disobedience are accusation and punishment or retaliation; the objective consequences of failing to meet expectations and being inferior are disapproval and ridicule, rejection and often exclusion", this is also known as shame. Who are those people shamed among us? They include people who are shamed as a result of a failed relationship like divorce, abuse and addictions, sexual permissiveness, violence on the streets, broken or violent homes, alcoholism, unemployment, discrimination in all forms, rejection, and loneliness.

Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported that sexual violence is a public health problem today, "In the United States, 1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 men reported experiencing an attempted or completed rape at some time in their lives. These numbers underestimate the problem. Many cases are not reported because victims are afraid to tell the police, friends, or family about the abuse. Victims also think that their stories of abuse will not be believed and that police cannot help them. They may be ashamed or embarrassed. ..." Victims who are ashamed by the fact that their rights had been violated feel lonely and show symptoms of withdrawal from the mainstream of society. The Cross exposes false shame and breaks its power to instill fear. On the Cross Jesus was inappropriately shamed, and the Cross and resurrection exposed the powers and the lies they used to falsely shame Jesus. Cross can liberate us from dehumanizing shame and frees us into a new humanity.

Finally, Cross gives us the freedom to live as authentic human beings. In the Nicene Creed, we profess that Jesus is fully

human and fully divine, yet we give more importance to the divinity of Christ than humanity. However, according to 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, Jesus' weakness, nakedness, and humiliation on the Cross reveal to us the full humanity of God. Through the resurrection and the Cross God says to us, "this is the life to imitate." "It is an invitation to live in freedom from the voices and powers that tell us we must mask our true humanity." Many of our young people seem to be forced to wear masks to live their lives in full freedom that Christ intends them to live. Jesus said in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." In the midst of masks such as coping with different identities like American in School and Malayalee at Home, good Christian in the Church and 'cool' person under peer pressure, Cross is giving us freedom to do anything and everything in life subject to the lifestyle of Christ.

In conclusion, Cross frees us from sin and death, Cross offers us forgiveness, Cross frees us from shame, and Cross gives us freedom to live as authentic human beings. May God almighty help us to live out the true meaning of the Cross in our lives. Amen. ■

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MATRIMONIAL

Mar Thoma parents invite proposal for their 24 year old daughter. She is fair, working as a civil engineer, born and brought up in USA with strong spritual and family values. Looking for educated, employed, family oriented boys with similar back grounds. Please respond with recent photograph and bio-data to: kismet951@gmail.com

Marthomite parents settled in USA invites marriage proposals for their daughter, 27 years old, born and brought up in USA. She has BS in Nursing and currently working as a Registered Nurse in a reputable hospital. She is family oriented and has high christian and moral values. She is very active in the Church and still values her eastern values from India. Please respond with a brief bio-data and a recent photograph to: 832-755-2863 (Cell) or e-mail: mullaveli@hotmail.com

Marthomite parents invite proposals for their daughter 26 yrs old, 5'4", brought up and educated in USA. She is slim, fair and God fearing with traditional values. She graduated in 2006 with Doctorate in Pharmacy (summa cum laude) and working in retail. Looking for God fearing and professionally qualified boy in the medical field or engineering. Interested parties please respond with bio-data and a recent photograph to: philip7179@aol.com or call 215-934-6528

Mar Thoma parents well settled in U.S.A. invite marriage proposals for their daughter, age 28, 5' 8", very fair, family oriented and God fearing. She is a medical doctor, MD, born and brought up in U.S.A., currently doing third year residency. We are seeking proposals from family oriented boys of good Christian background with advanced education, preferably doctors, Ph.Ds, engineers, pharmacists, CPAs. Interested parties may respond with details and a recent photograph to: c702@verizon.net

Marthomite parents invite marriage proposals for their daughter, 26 years old, God fearing and family oriented. She is a U.S. citizen, currently working as pharmacist. We are seeking proposals from God fearing and family oriented professional boys with Christian values and good family background. Interested parties may please respond with bio-data and recent photograph to: varugheses@gmail.com

XXVII Mar Thoma Family Conference-2009



Lighted to Lighten—Theodosius Thirumeni lighting the Lamp.

The 27th Mar Thoma Family Conference of the Diocese of North America and Europe, hosted by the Immanuel Mar Thoma Church of Houston, was held at the Westchase Marriott Hotel in Houston from July 2-5, 2009. The theme of the conference was *“From the Cross, Through the Church, To the World.”* An array of eminent leaders and speakers deliberated on this thought provoking theme of contemporary significance. Enthusiastic partici-



Family Conference Leaders at the inaugural meeting.

ipation of 230 families from all across the Diocese made this conference a truly blessed and spiritually satisfying experience for everyone. The 27th Mar Thoma Family Conference of the Diocese of North America and Europe, hosted by the Immanuel Mar Thoma Church of Houston, was held at the Westchase Marriott Hotel in Houston from July 2-5, 2009. The theme of the conference was *“From the Cross, Through the Church, To the World.”* An array of eminent leaders and speakers deliberated on this thought provoking theme of contemporary significance. Enthusiastic partici-

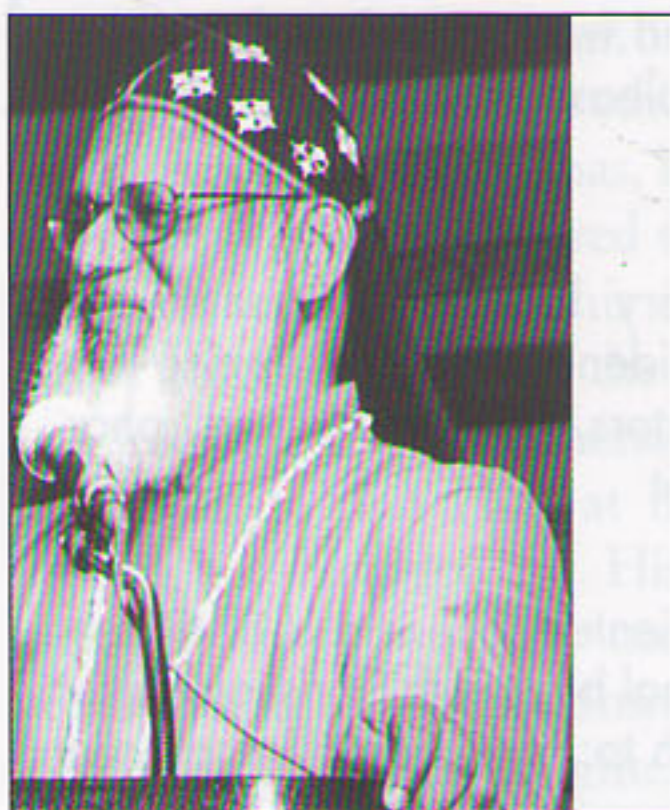


tion of 230 families from all across the Diocese made this conference a truly blessed and spiritually satisfying experience for everyone.

The conference commenced on Thursday, July 2nd, with a colorful inaugural program. The program started with a procession led by the children, the youth choir, praise and worship team, conference choir, diocesan council members, conference executive committee, clergy, invited guests and Bishops. A short

Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Houston, welcomed the leaders, guests and delegates. After the inaugural address by the patron Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa and the ceremonial lighting of the lamp, the conference was formally declared open.

Present at the inaugural session were the main leaders of the conference Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa, Rt. Rev. Dr. Abraham Mar





Family Conference Choir.

Paulos Episcopa, Bishop of the Delhi-Mumbai Diocese; The Very Rev. Dr. Douglas Travis, Dean and President of the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest, Rev. Abraham Scaria P., Counselor and Lecturer at the TMA Institute of Counseling at Kottayam, and invited guests Rev. Canon Ann Normand, Canon to the Ordinary for the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, and Mr. Sanjeev Arora, Consul General of India in Houston. Selected dignitaries partook in the lamp lighting ceremony and offering of felicitations for the conference.



Family Conference Theme Presentation.

Notable highlights of the evening were a reception in honor of Rt. Rev. Dr. Abraham Mar Paulos Episcopa who was visiting this Diocese for the first time since his consecration as a Bishop, felicitation messages and presentations in appreciation of Mar Paulos, release of a *Festschrift Volume* in honor of Mar Theodosius, and official release of the conference souvenir. The evening ceremony was brought to a close with the vote of thanks by the



Family Conference Youth Choir.



Conference Secretary Mr. P. M. Jacob

Secretary, introduction of participating parishes by the Vice-President, and theme based cultural presentations by the members of the Immanuel Mar Thoma Church.

The morning session on both days started with singing by the praise and worship team followed by morning worship led by Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston on Friday and by Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch on Saturday. The main talks were preceded by inspiring sing-along sessions led by the conference choir. The youth choir added variety with special English songs and hymns. During the Bible study and the various talks, speakers analyzed the theme, its meaning and implications, from all different theological angles and perspectives. Rev. Abraham Scaria in his Bible study emphasized that Koinonia (fellowship) should be the way of life for Christians because God's love breaks all boundaries and embraces all people. Love of Christ that was demonstrated on the Cross must

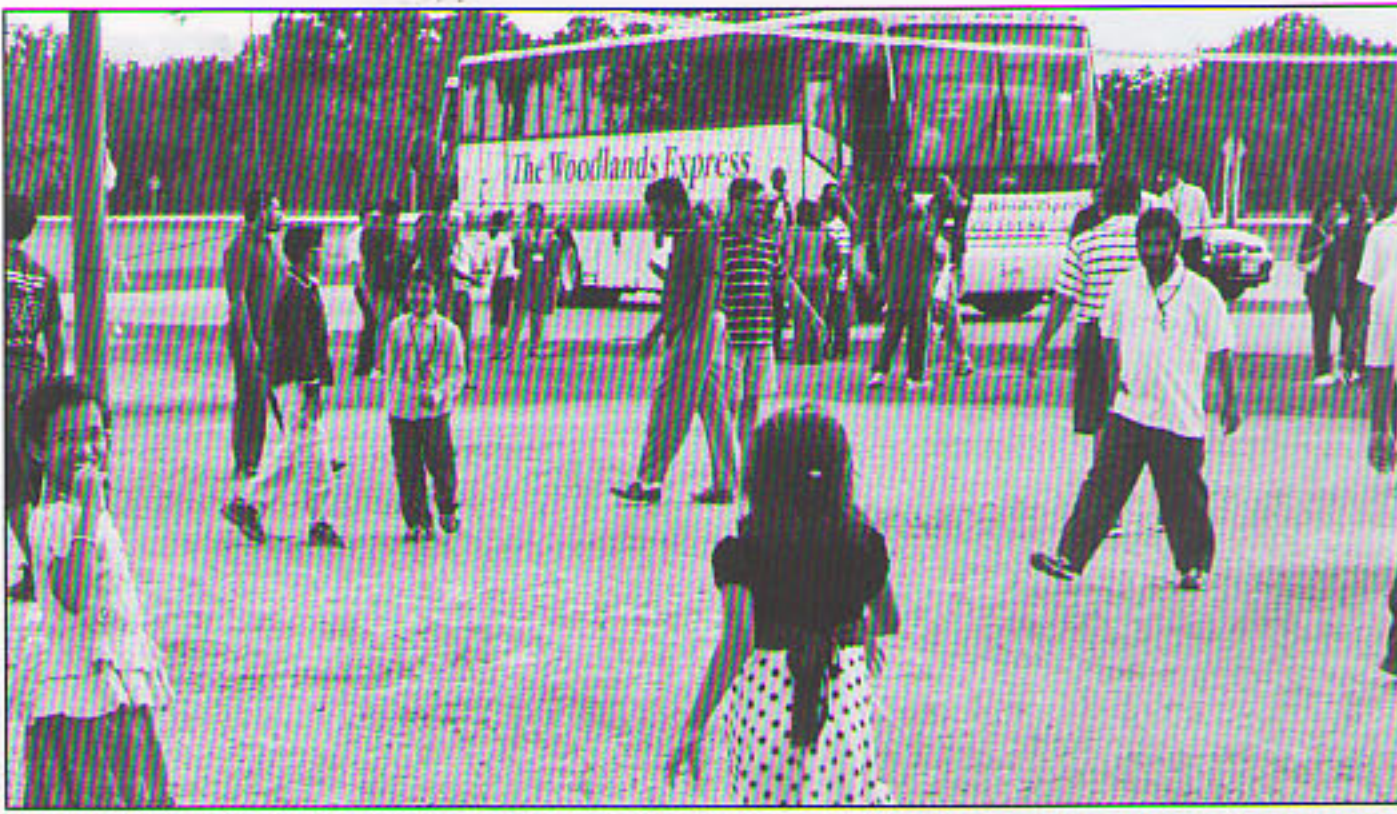


Book Release.

compel us to reach out to the weak and the downtrodden. During his talks, Paulos Thirumeni expounded that in order for Cross centered spirituality to reach the world through the church, we must touch Jesus through the Cross, touch church through communal life, and touch the world through mission. Cross centered spirituality is that of kenosis (self-emptying love). Cross calls for suffering love,



Souvenir Release.



Family Conference Sports and Recreation.

sacrificial love and sustaining love. Thirumeni exhorted everyone to become channels of God's blessings by sharing the love and peace of God. Saturday's session

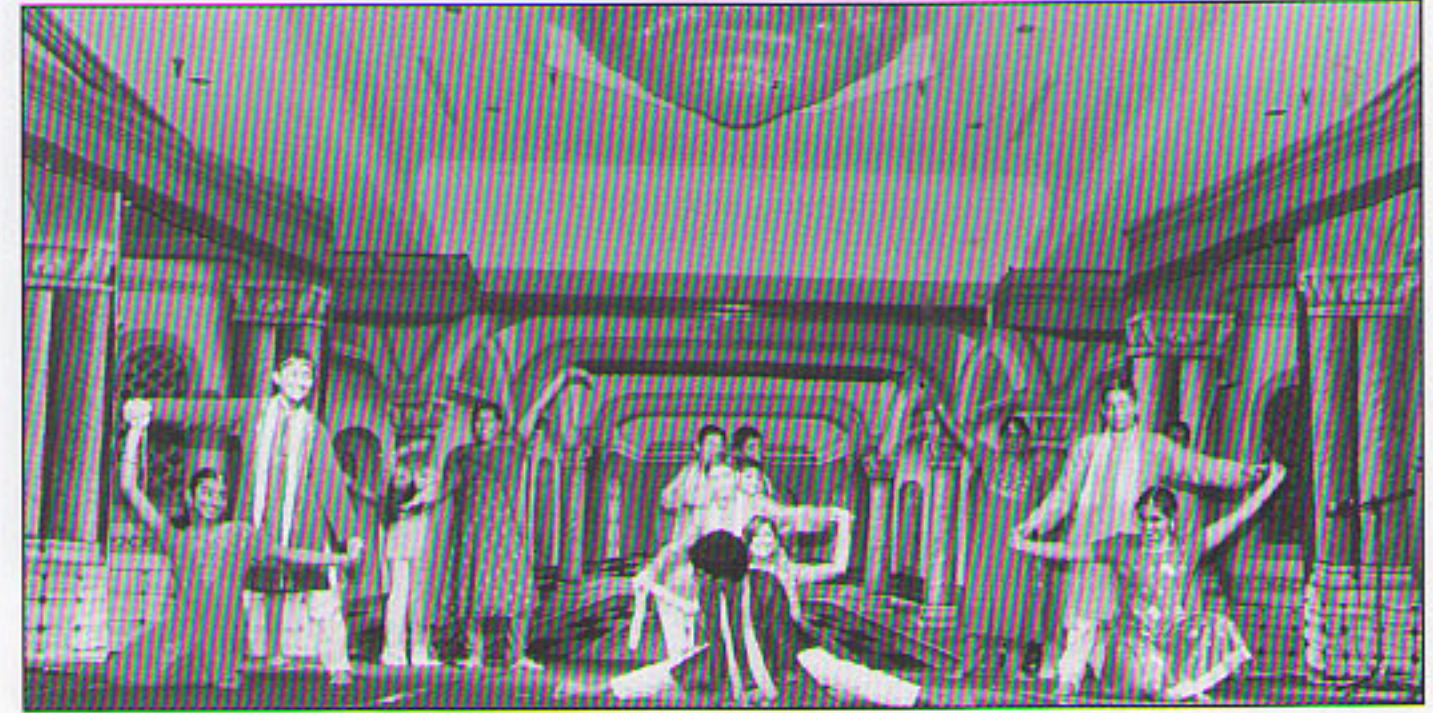


Scene from Talent Night.

also featured an in-depth discussion on 'strengthening of family values' by Theodosius Thirumeni. Group discussions that followed enabled participants to debate relevant questions and issues in a group setting and collectively to find answers. The open forum/ feed back session, presided over by the Bishops, proved to be both informative and enlightening.

Separate sessions were held on Friday and Saturday for youth and children. Around 150 youth and children engaged in discussions and group activities geared to improve their understanding of their role in Church as it relates to spreading the Gospel. Rev. Biju P. Simon, Youth Chaplain for the North East Region of our Diocese gave leadership to the youth and children's programs.

Rev. Shibi Abraham, Youth Chaplain of South West Region (B), also offered spiritual guidance. Both our Bishops and the Very Rev. Dr. Douglas Travis took turns giving motivational talks to the youth and children. Diocesan secretary Rev. Vinoy Daniel gave the devotional message to the youth during their witnessing session.



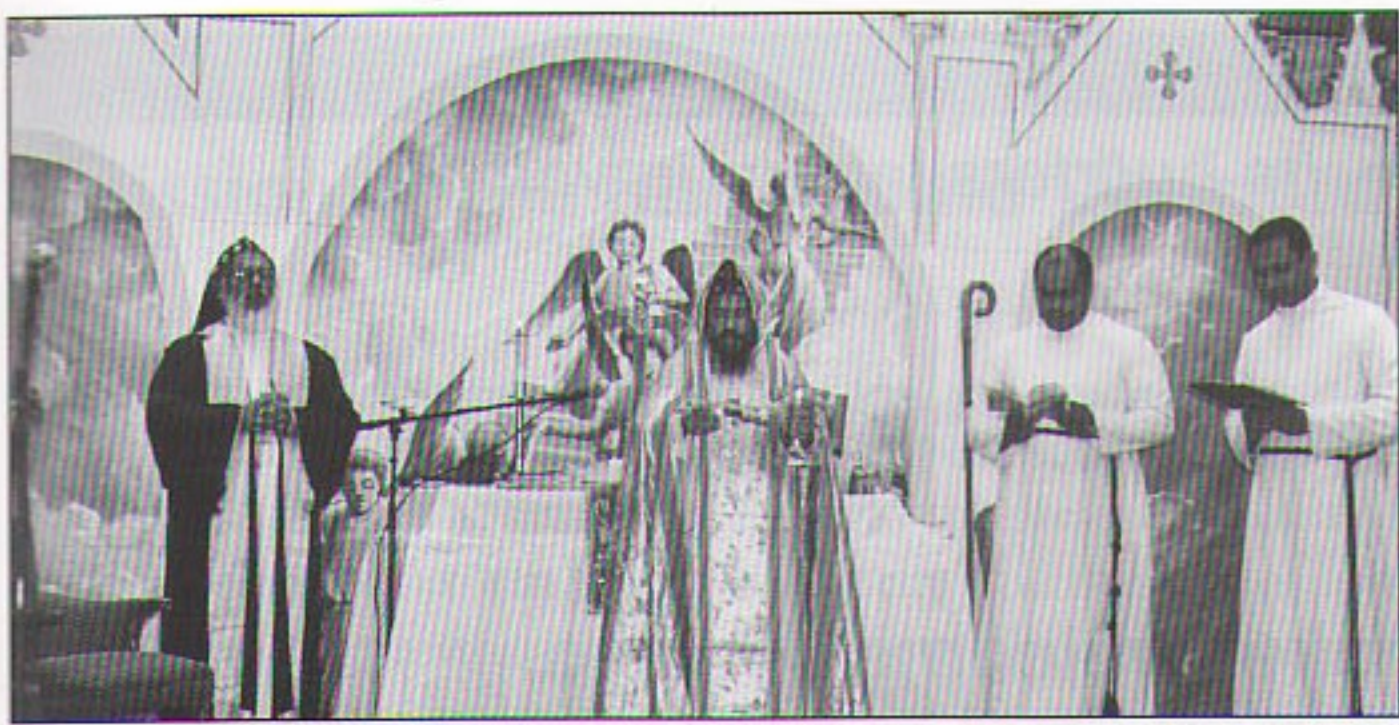
Scene from Talent Night.

A sight seeing trip, sports and recreational activities at a nearby park and serving of TEXAS style BBQ dinner, a health seminar on prevention of cardiovascular diseases, and a seminar on social security benefits added to the uniqueness of this year's conference. A talent night program was conducted on Friday evening. Participants from nearly all the parishes took part in the talent show and showcased their God given talents through a wide array of individual and collective performances. On Saturday evening, various awards distribution including valedictorian, Sunday school, best Parish and best Messenger Promoter were held followed by a power point presentation of the various diocesan activities. A power point presentation introducing the high lights of 2010 Family Conference to be hosted by Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch in Dallas was also held. The Very Rev. A.C. Kurian led the dedication service followed by witnessing by several people on Saturday night. Achen's inspirational message challenged many to re-evaluate their spiritual life and dedicate their lives.

The final day program commenced with praise and worship followed by celebration of Holy Communion by Paulos Thirumeni. Theodosius Thirumeni delivered the homily. The ensuing closing ceremony started with



Scene from Talent Night—All Kochammas of the Diocese.



Paulos Thirumeni Celebrating Holy Qurbana.

the passing of the torch to the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas Farmers Branch, host of the 2010 Family Conference. This was followed by an official vote of thanks by the conference secretary Mr. P. M. Jacob. Diocesan Treasurer Mr. Chacko Mathew expressed thanks to the host parish, committee members and participants on behalf of the Diocese. The 2009 family conference came to a close with a prayer by Paulos Thirumeni and benediction by Theodosius Thirumeni. The conference was a blessed occasion for many families to come together in Christian fellowship, to reflect



Members of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch with Vicar Rev. Minoy N. Kuruvilla after receiving the torch for 2010 Family Conference to be held in Dallas.

upon our faith and heritage, to share our common experiences, and through it all strengthen our relationship with God and each other. All praise and glory belongs to God for His mercies and blessings! May God bless us all.

Rev. T. S. Philip, President & Mr. P. M. Jacob, Secretary



Attending Family Conference Holy Qurbana on Sunday.



Theodosius Thirumeni, Paulos Thirumeni and Vinoy Daniel Achen with Editorial Board, Managing Committee and Advisory Board at the Messenger Booth.



Theodosius Thirumeni, Paulos Thirumeni and Vinoy Daniel Achen with Promoters of Immanuel and Trinity Parishes at the Sabha Tharaka Booth.

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"From the Cross, Through the Church, To the World"

Mission of the Mar Thoma Diaspora Community in the North American Context

Dennis Abraham, Student-MT Theological Seminary, Kottayam

I. Introduction

The theme selected is apt and relevant to the present ecclesiological situation. It also challenges us to bring the message of Jesus Christ into the present context of the North American situation. As a church, we are instruments of the message of God: we receive it and share it with the world. The message of the Cross is not to remain on the Cross or retain itself in the Church. Rather, it is a mission of interaction and dialogue with the world at large. Just as a train travels on tracks to reach its destination, the church provides the tracks on which the Gospel of Christ rides to reach its final destination: that is, the world. Without the cooperation of the church in evangelization, it will be unable to reach the world. The gospel needs to translate into our context and enter our daily situations. Ultimately, the message and the gospel of the Cross are to be translated into the faith community, in a manner that is logical, coherent, and that which coincides with the specific cultural milieu. If not, we are simply creating a gulf between Christian faith and our daily lives.

The Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, originating from the Apostle St. Thomas in A.D. 52, is constantly developing and changing. It is no longer confined to the geographical boundaries of Malankara (Kerala), let alone India. Rather, it is a Globalized and Globalizing Church. Members of the church are settling in new places. Members are settling in areas where people have never seen or interacted with members of the South Asian community. But wherever we go, are we making the effort to become embodiments of the gospel by planting our faith in the fields we are based in? Does the community have anything to say about Christ in their experience and interaction with the Diaspora Community of the Mar Thoma Church? Is our presence in our respective communities a blessing and contributing to the extension of the kingdom of God? These are questions we need to draw attention to, and when necessary, take initiative.

II. Biblical & Historical Aspects of Diaspora

The concept of Diaspora is of importance in the Bible. The word originated from the Greek word for 'sowing [dispersion] of seeds,' hence dispersal. It was the term used for Jews in the Old Testament context, who settled outside of the land of ancient Israel. It began with the Babylonian exile in 587 B.C., in which thousands of Jews were deported to Babylon. Some Jews never returned despite the decree of Cyrus. Many Jews in distant lands were struggling to maintain their identity, and were adjusting to the new ethos of their respective contexts. First century Christians endured hardship and persecution under Emperor Nero, by which many migrated to areas outside of Jerusalem.

The Acts of the Apostles mentions the spread of Christianity around the northern Mediterranean, ultimately reaching Greece and Rome. Acts 1:8 says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (NRSV) Under the guidance and care of the Holy Spirit, the

church surpassed the borders of Israel, and became an international movement. Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire. Furthermore, Jews were migrating to areas within the Roman Empire, and thus new generations were accustomed to the Greco-Roman culture, and spoke Greek. They did not know Hebrew. As a result, a Greek version of the Old Testament was translated for the Jews, known as Septuagint (LXX) in early 3rd century B.C. In the Hellenistic Period, following Alexander's conquest of the Persian Empire, in 331 B.C., Judaism had to incorporate new ways of understanding and explaining itself. Thus, the Diaspora and migration of faith communities was common in the Bible and in history, and these groups struggled to maintain their faith identity, while assimilating to the new cultures.

III. Fusion of Gospel and Culture

The concept of 'Gospel & Culture' or 'Gospel Enculturation' refers to the manifestation and incarnation of the gospel into the society. We may feel comfortable to discuss our faith and practice within our immediate context and comfort zone. But the message of the gospel calls us to transcend the barriers of culture and race, and embrace diversity, as it is a gift from God. At the same time, it is necessary for us to bridge the widening gap between faith and culture. The Gospel should not remain within the four walls of the church or stay within the church compound—it needs to reach the surrounding neighborhood. Our mode of Christian witness should be aimed at meeting people in their lives, and making the gospel a living reality.

As a Diaspora community, we are to embrace the potentials of the western culture, while struggling to maintain our Christian identity. As we live in the cultural melting pot of the world, we are to respect cultural differences. It does not mean that we should lose our culture and succumb to others. There should be a healthy relationship between what we have inherited in our faith, tradition, and culture. We must be aware of where we come from, our roots, and learn how to balance this with our respective cultural framework. It is important that as a faith community, we do communicate the gospel in a way that is closely related to culture. The intersection and convergence of the gospel and culture will hold meaning and significance in the life of the church and society.

IV. Spirituality in a Diaspora Context

Spirituality is an important characteristic in the Diaspora community and in the life of the church. It refers to 'being connected with the human spirit,' or being 'God-conscious.' Faith communities vary in traditions, and each has their own outlook and emphasis within the context of spirituality. The spirituality of any faith community is grounded from its origin. But as many churches have members migrating to various parts of the world, the question of spirituality in relation to the church comes to the floor and demands a concrete answer. People within a context of a faith community differ in their outlook on spirituality. The cul-

ture plays a major role in shaping the way one expresses his spirituality. There are some who prefer to express their faith through liturgy, while others prefer a free-style approach. Some of our students who go away for college or for job-related endeavors may interact with other Christian spiritual traditions (i.e. Non-denominational, Pentecostalism, Charismatic Movements, etc), and may want to incorporate those alternate traditions into their home context.

Though we are in the western context, the identity of our church and spiritual expressions are primarily rooted within the Reformed Eastern Christian tradition. The western culture expresses itself spiritually in a manner distinct from the east. Some of these cultural elements of spirituality tap into human emotion. Western spirituality has a strong focus on the individual and God, thus reflected in many of the contemporary songs. Spirituality in eastern tradition focuses on the faith of the community as a whole. Our spirituality should be an amalgamation of various elements, both from the west and east, which allow our spirituality to be enhanced and rooted in God. Focusing on our personal relationship with God, along with ensuring the welfare of the community's faith is a healthy mix and can foster the sense of belonging in the church. It can strengthen our relationship with God, and also with others. Being part of a faith community, we will find people who have special interests. Some may have evangelistic objectives, while others have social concerns. This involvement in mission in these diversified fronts will allow for our spirituality to be developed so that we can address the individual's specific spiritual needs, and use their talents for the Kingdom of God.

In spirituality, it is important that theological and social notions work hand-in-hand. Otherwise, our spiritual and worldly life may become two diverse entities. Thus, the church's ministry and mission to all the faith community are important: its commitment and addressing the spiritual needs and concerns of all, is necessary. Cultural boundaries may exist, but the effort to transcend this, will in turn help the church to be a spiritual doctor and healer of the faith community. It will help our church to be a shelter to those who seek refuge and strength in the Almighty God.

V. Challenges

As a Diaspora community, many challenges exist and lay ahead in our journey of faith. These challenges are vital in establishing our church's identity in the western context. One of the major struggles of the Diaspora community is in maintaining elements of ethos and devotion from India, while adjusting to a new culture and raising children born and brought up in the American context. Parents' understanding of faith and tradition may vary from their children's. There is a shift in ethos, as a result of a change in pulse of society that has resulted in new transnational dynamics. While the first generation immigrants' mode of relationships is formed by the predominance of family, the second generation's relationships are influenced by Western individualism.

Our faith is continually challenged by contemporary realities, which include: war, violence, terrorism, globalized consumerism, individualism, economic recession, and many others that touch base with the socio-political ground of society. As a faith community, what is our response to society's challenges?

Another challenge that exists is the struggle to bridge faith and secular life. The family and community instill Christian and cultural values to the second generation. But as they go to schools, colleges, workplaces, and move away from home, they are bombarded with a set of cultural norms and values that vary and may conflict with the values of their upbringing. There is a high level of peer pressure, temptations, and a desire to be accepted by all. The second generation faces difficulties that may not have been experienced by their parents. As a church, our mission is to identify and address these issues, and equip our youngsters with the proper tools to maintain their Christian identity and walk by faith, while living in harmony with secular life. The list of challenges is endless. Ultimately, we need to ask ourselves: are we overcoming our challenges, or are our challenges overcoming us? Struggling with our challenges will help us to persevere in faith and enable us to continue Christ's mission.

VI. Evaluation

Being settled in North America, we are afforded immense opportunities to participate in mission. The notion of being a Diaspora community should enable us to realize the great potential we have in being missionaries in a different context. The question is whether we are doing so. Mexico Mission, Native American Mission, Vacation Bible School and other mission work is going on under the leadership of our Diocese, which have marked a great step in rooting our faith in the soil. However, are we stuck in the preconceived notion that mission ends here?

Mission begins when we carry the message of the Cross through the church, and to the world. When talking about 'world', that begins with the home, local community, and then beyond. Though we may feel compelled to begin mission work from a global dimension, our mission to the world should be local to global. Mission begins when we permeate through society and leave a lasting impression. It can be simply as visiting an old age home, volunteering in a soup kitchen, collecting and distributing food to the poor. It could be as simple as talking to a friend in need, and leading them to Christ.

When I was in high school and college, some of my friends would ask me about which denomination I belong to. Most, if not all of them would ask me 'What is Mar Thoma?' This correlates with the impact our church has on the society. We must have a vision and mission to fulfill the actual characteristic of the 'Diaspora' community, that is, to sow the seeds of faith in the ground, so that they can bear new fruit for extension of the kingdom of God.

In addition, the idea of mission is not simply conversion. It requires us to have a significant presence in whatever situation we are in. Our presence in our respective situations, whether it is in our job, school, or other circumstances should be a constant reminder to others of the presence of Christ. Our presence should remain as a constant witness of Christ's love and compassion. Then only, can we say that we have carried the message of the cross to this world. It is when we enter into peoples' life situation and struggles that they are transformed. When others see the love of Christ expressed through us and our good works, and when they are able to give glory to our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16), then can we say that we have participated in the ongoing mission of Christ.

(Continued on page 25)

Challenges That a Keralite Christian Family Faces in the Western Culture

Five Articles depicting the various problems a Keralite Christian Family facing in the Western Culture as an Immigrant

"You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them" Desmond Tutu

A Christian Family—Values, Morals and Ethics

The Right Rev. Dr. George Ninan

I was asked to write on this topic for the Mar Thoma Messenger published for members living in North America, Canada and Europe. I am happy and grateful to the Editorial Board for urging me to contribute this article. It is common knowledge that family is the basic human social unit and it has been so from time immemorial. The Judeo-Christian tradition affirms this through the story of the first family—Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel. The Christian Church refers to the importance of family through Jesus' example, obediently living with his parents and also by His presence and first miracle at the wedding in Cana. So we have a long tradition of keeping the family as an important factor in the life of a person. We also understand that marriage and family life are ordained by God and they are sacred institutions. It is the same in all religions and cultures.

However, we have also seen that the concept and praxis of family have always been challenged and updated as the world changed. So there have been many changes through the centuries in all religions and cultures with regard to the understanding and practice of family. In this ongoing change, there have been many casualties and several became victims of their own actions or at the hand of rigid and unsympathetic legal and value systems as well as even by rigorous religious structures. There have been also many attempts by religions and cultures to define the ongoing process as it affects people. We should be happy that the Christian Church has always been in the forefront of this process, redefining the concepts and extending its borders to include those who are affected by the changes or have become victims of circumstance or their own wrongdoings. This nature of the Church makes the Gospel of Christ a unique force in the struggle against static and stagnant systems and structures.

Nonetheless, there has been an historical tendency in the Church, to succumb to the forces of culture rather than to uphold the Gospel of Christ. This is nothing new as it is a perpetual human weakness. But the tragedy is that we do not realize how much we are influenced by culture and lose sight of the values of the Kingdom Jesus initiated. In fact, in his own life, He became a victim of the hardened Judaist culture. He took sides with the woman caught in adultery, healed on Sabbath, opted for the poor and marginalized, challenged the authority of the religious leaders, stood against the colonial power so on and so forth. These are the signs of a counter culture He was promoting which cost Him His life. The Church has forgotten



that and is riding on the waves of the dominant culture. Most of us try to define family in terms of the dominant cultural values rather than the Gospel teachings. I feel that values and morals ought to emerge as we follow Christ and not be defined in legalistic terms.

A Christian family here and now in the West

Let us confine our discussion to the Christian families in North America, Canada and Europe of Kerala origin. We are organized as close-knit families, denominations with back-home cultural milieu and leadership, economically affluent and we try to keep away from the mainstream for fear of polluting our culture, values and behavior. While this is possible to some extent with first-generation immigrants, this is not fully understood or appreciated by subsequent generations. Naturally this leads to conflict in the home, lack of interest in the church among young people and overall confusion about values and practices. There is a clash of cultures with different expectations resulting in disappointments, loss of mutual respect and tension in the life of the families and in the life of individuals. Some cope with it by accepting it as part of life, some pretend that there is no problem and others long for help and solution. Churches are not competent to deal with this new situation and hence advise people to become more religious, pray and hope for miracles to happen. There is not enough effort to find the causes and attempt possible remedies. Generally speaking, there is no attempt to separate culture and faith, but a tendency to conclude that something which does not resonate with the culture of one's growing up experience back home is bad and we hasten to condemn it as wrong. It often fits with the teaching of the Church on sin. This makes young people feel that there is an alliance of parents and church against them. For example, when I was young, love marriages were frowned upon and judgments were passed against those who go for it as well as their upbringing. Now many frown at interracial marriages, divorce and homosexuality. So it is important for us to seek out real Christian values and morals.

Christian Family: Values, Morals and Ethics

Against this background, let us briefly look at the Biblical examples of family life and the values and morals we learn from them. Let me point to five family scenes and try to understand what those situations hold for us today in terms of values and morals.

Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel: The first family mentioned in the Bible has certain unmistakable characteristics. First and foremost among them is the high degree of competition. Adam and Eve were very ambitious people and they wanted to have the same power as their Creator God had. There started the problem. It was easy for the tempter to suggest the most comfortable way to achieve their goals. It was to eat—to consume—an easy and pleasurable method. This competition led the next generation to a more harmful exercise—kill the competitor. Is it not true even today? How do we motivate our children to do their best? We compare them with others, make them jealous of peers, ignore, bend or even break rules, hate the other and become selfish. If they do not succeed they feel miserable and if they are successful, they forget their responsibilities. In their old age parents who nurtured such a value system find fault with their children and accuse them of not caring or respecting them. What have they taught their children other than to be selfish? Competition is harmful and it produces a culture of self-centeredness, selfishness lacks compassion and ignores social responsibilities. It is quite contrary to the teachings of Jesus and the Bible. God asked Cain, “Where is your brother?” Jesus summed up the commandments into “Love God and love your neighbor”. But we pursue the culture of competition and success. How do we explain our Sunday school and choir competitions? Do we not make the Church a place to show off our wealth, automobiles and sarees? The Christian faith ought to uphold a counter culture of “serve one another” and develop a spirit of cooperation. It is so important to help our children growing up here in North America to at least get an exposure to the values of the Kingdom of God.

Joshua and his family: Joshua and his family had a clear perspective for their life. After many years of unsettled and troublesome nomadic life, the Israelites were settling down in the Promised Land. It was a great transition and the perspectives, hopes and aspirations were diverse. There were new opportunities and no immediate pressure to adhere to their ancestor’s religion or culture. New gods emerged and new life styles challenged the new arrivals. Joshua grieved how people had forgotten the God who brought them out of slavery in Egypt. Of course many who started the journey were dead or had become too old; the new generation born in the desert had not experienced the life of slavery in Egypt and were exposed to new possibilities, opportunities and alternatives. Does this sound familiar to us in North America today? Joshua did not give up hope but made a plea to the people to return to the God of their ancestors. That was a call to reassess their faith in the new context, to judge the new culture in the light of their faith and to reinterpret their understanding and idea of god in the new situation. He knew very well it is the same God who protected them in Egypt, it is the same God who led them through the long journey and now active in their new land. But this same God needs to be worshipped and obeyed in the new situation giving rise to new patterns of worship, a new social order, new value systems, etc. But he underlined the

perspective “But as for me and my household we shall serve our God”. We in North America have a similar situation. We are here to stay and have to interact with the culture, values, systems and structures here. We cannot just live in nostalgia of our motherland and if we do, our next generation will not be a part of it. We have to develop contemporary theology, worship, culture, values so on and so forth, but the perspective for our life remains the same. Joshua challenges us to make that strong affirmation. However, this affirmation is neither to glorify the values and culture back home nor to accept all that is part of the new culture but to make contemporary faith affirmations in a postmodern, scientific and technologically advanced world. What is our perspective in life?

Jesus at the temple: When Jesus was twelve, there was a crisis in His household. The whole family with several members of the clan made a trip to Jerusalem. Young Jesus got lost. Fear gripped the family and they returned to Jerusalem. But He was found engaged in His Father’s business. Mary was delighted like any mother would. We do not know how she felt when Jesus left home at the age of thirty and wandered around with questionable company. But we do not have any record of Joseph or Mary taking issue with Jesus for his engagement in His Father’s business. Of course they were forewarned and it helped. But is it not true that there are tensions, conflicts and disappointments in our homes when our children choose vocations which are not high up in the social ladder or engage in professions which are not financially lucrative? Don’t we try to interfere with their natural instincts and inclinations? Is not financial security our major concern in guiding the career of a child? We pray to God to send more laborers into his harvest but also pray to spare our sons/daughters. Let the children have a say in deciding their future. Parents and guardians should help them to develop capabilities to make right decisions about their lives.

This is your mother; this is your son: This statement of Jesus on the Cross is a remarkable one and is pregnant with many important ideas. Christian families have a lot to learn from this statement of Jesus: *First*, it opens up a relationship for us with fellow human beings. It was Jesus’ mother but Jesus establishes a new relationship for his mother and friend where they could be son and mother transcending filial relationship. The challenge Jesus poses before us is transcending narrow, confining relationships and treating others as members of one’s own family. One of my present daily chores is to drop my granddaughter at her nursery school and collect her in the evening. Now all the children know me as Shania’s grandfather and they shout and greet, “Grandpa, grandpa!!!” I cannot but say a silent prayer for all those lovely kids and give thanks to God for such an experience. It reminds me how we all belong to one human family. The *second* lesson we learn from the incident is that in the midst of terrible pain, suffering and ridicule Jesus never forgot His mother. For Him it was His basic duty and He takes care of it. A *third* lesson is the teaching of the New Testament: that while human relationship is important, the

concern for 'things above' supercedes all other concerns and interests. Jesus spoke strongly about this. "Let the dead bury the dead, you follow me"; "leave your father mother and other relationships to follow me"; and so on. As a family we are called to keep the priorities of the Kingdom of God. This value, if practiced, would make our family life pleasing to God.

The early example: We are familiar with the life of the early church and about its growth in the Book of Acts. We have in the tenth chapter of the Book of Acts a reference to a Roman centurion by the name Cornelius. It is interesting to note the reference about him. "A devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God". What a wonderful family! Not a so-called 'religious' one but one that practiced real faith, a family with Christian values, morals and ethics. How do we assess our families? Many of us pay lip service to God and the values of the Kingdom but our 'heart is where our treasure is'. Such contradiction affects families and their lives and witness.

This is a rather sketchy treatment of the topic. However, I hope we have been able to point to the possibilities for a Christian family for fuller life and stronger witness. The uniqueness of the Christian family is in its life and witness and not just in its well-being. All families want to do well and be happy. But a Christian family, like Jesus, should have a wider perspective. When God called Abraham, He told Abraham that He will make him a great nation so that all families on earth will be blessed through him. We have to be channels of blessings to others and should be able to develop values, morals and ethics to help us to be so. Such values and morals should grow with us and should not be readymade and dogmatic laws, traditions or rituals. ■

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Husband and Wife—A Christian Team

Thomas Philip (Saji), Bethel Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia

A husband and wife make a perfect team and God definitely intended it to be that way. The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him (Gen. 2:18). Here we read that Eve was created for Adam as a suitable helper. The woman was created out of Adam's side. Mathematically, one becomes two. In Mark 10:8 we read, "and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh". Again the two becomes one. This is the basic Christian team of husband and wife.

The husband and wife relationship persist to *complement* each other in all aspects of life, for one is naught without the other. The two are different, but only when they are different, can they complement each other. Let's look at the meaning of the word complement. It means something that completes, attaining perfection, or harmonizes. So without that suitable helper man is not complete, not perfect, or whole. He is missing a piece!

So the first question is: How do you find your perfect match, to be more accurate, *your complement*? Well, first of all, Adam couldn't find his perfect companion by himself. In the same way, man should not attempt to find his complement by his own reasoning and other match defining aspects. If we do, it may not necessarily be a suitable help or the right complement. Young men and women need to pray about finding their pre-ordained spouse. Lack of that prayer may affect a couple's life and their family life together. If you go by worldly standards, you may end up with an unfit partner instead of the one pre-ordained by our Lord. Remember that God alone is the perfect matchmaker!



Secondly, let's talk about the life after you find your complementary spouse. God was with Adam and Eve in the paradise and used to walk with Adam in the cool of the evening until the couple hid themselves from the presence of the Lord after sinning (Gen: 3:8). Thus God instituted family life and He was part of that family union. But sin distanced the perfect couple from the creator. Sin is nothing but alienation from our Lord God. In our spiritual walk, we have to be careful not to be carried away into the worldly track. We should be with

God and seek the ever-abiding presence of the Holy Spirit to be a successful Christian team partnering with our Lord. If the wife is a suitable helper for the husband, the Holy Spirit, the counselor, is the true Helper for both the husband and wife in their spiritual walk with God. St. John 14:16 reads, I will ask the Father to give you another Helper, to be with you always. We cannot transform into a Christian team in our family life unless and until we focus our attention on Christ and Christ-like attitudes in our relationships. Then we can experience paradise in our husband-wife relationship and life in its abundance as promised by Jesus Christ.

Let's look at the roles of the husband and wife in a family. In Ephesians 5:23, we read, "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior". Savior is defined as "A person who rescues someone from dire circumstances." This is applied principally to Christ; but in this text it is also applied to the husband with his wife. The way the husband is the savior of his wife's body is by nourishing, strengthening, comforting her, supporting and upholding her, bearing her burdens,

shouldering the responsibilities of the home and family, and by always standing by to help her. Although women should submit to their husbands, the Bible also tells men several times how they are supposed to treat their wives. The husband is not to take on the role of the dictator, but should show respect for his wife and her opinions. In fact, Ephesians 5:28-29 exhorts men to love their wives in the same way that they love their own bodies, feeding and caring for them. A man's love for his wife should be the same as Christ's love for His Body, the Church.

"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them" (Col. 3:18-19). "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Peter 3:7). From these verses we see that *love* and *respect* characterize the roles of both husbands and wives. If these great principles are adapted to one's life, then authority, headship, love and submission will never be problematic for either partner.

Biblical submission is designed to be between two Spirit-filled believers who mutually yield to each other and to God. Submission is a two-way street. Submission is a position of honor and completeness, and humility. When a wife is loved as the church is loved by Christ, submission is not difficult. Eph 5:24 says, "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." This verse is saying that the wife is to submit to her husband in everything that is right and lawful.

In other words, if man is the head, then woman is the crown, a crown to her husband, the crown of the visible creation. Remember the truth that the woman was made out of Adam's side. "She was not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved." Believers are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21).

But what if one of the spouses is an unbeliever? "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (1 Peter 3:1-2). This

verse shows that love, respect, and actions are stronger than words to win over an unbelieving spouse.

To be a successful Christian team husband and wife should not be just "Sunday-Christians". A husband and wife should consider spending time with God daily in personal prayer (meditation), family prayer, and scripture reading. A Christian family must have a different priority and focus than that of the world. There are various ministries that a Christian couple should get involved with for their spiritual nourishment and growth. Church mentoring programs, Bible study groups, youth mentoring and children's ministry are just a few examples. Additionally, in this day and age we have so many options to listen and study the Word from the comfort of our own home including the Internet, Television, and Radio.

When a true believing husband and wife run into problems in their life, there is no need to get stressed over it as worldly couples do. Why? Because the ever abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, our Helper, Counselor, and Comforter is available to us as promised by Jesus as we believe and seek help from the Holy Spirit. Counselor means someone who gives advice about problems, a person who counsels, etc. As a Christian team, husbands and wives learn to seek that guidance, help, and advice in their daily lives and to experience the comforting presence and peace as promised.

Both husband and wife must start their day with the LORD, the Abba Father, in prayer. If Jesus prayed to the Father, how much more we need to pray to our Father. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father..." Yes; the truth is we do have a highly approachable Father and we must start our day with asking for His permission, guidance, help and wisdom for the day. If you spend a few minutes (I recommend at least 20 minutes), I guarantee that your day will be filled with peace and you will find His presence, wisdom, and strength. You may have problems, but the Helper, the Counselor, will take them over for you and you will be amazed to see the mysterious ways of God's work. Also, remember to end your day once again by proclaiming your trust in Him and thanking Him for His providence.

Let's pray that every Christian husband and wife makes a perfect team (pre-ordained husband and wife) partnering with God and seeking His will in our thoughts, words, and actions! ■

When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.

—Mark Twain

The most important thing that a father can do for his children is to love their mother.

—Theodore M. Hesburgh

A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children.

—Proverb 13:22

Raising Boys to be Men of Faith

Mabel Koshy & Sam George

A child is not likely to find a father in God unless he finds something of God in his father.

Austin L. Sorensen

Parenting is a once-in-a-life-time opportunity to shape a future that we might not see ourselves. It involves both a father and a mother, and is undoubtedly the most demanding assignment we will ever have in life. Yes, it is more stressful than your job and more rewarding than the Wall Street bonuses. Some drift through it, while others are preoccupied with turning their kids into the next spelling bee champions or Ivy League educated doctors.

In this article, we will focus on raising boys, though some of it will be true for girls as well. We have taken a collaborative approach to present some insights we hope would be valuable to your own parenting journey. I (Mabel) am a mother of two adult children (a girl and a boy) and a grandmother of two boys. I (Sam) am a father of two young boys. We serve together with Parivar International and are involved in conducting a variety of parenting seminars and counsels on parenting issues, regularly.

Some child psychologists believe that boys are usually (but not always) tougher to raise than their sisters. Girls can be a challenge to handle too, but there is something especially challenging about boys. Although individual temperaments vary, they are designed to be more assertive, audacious and excitable than girls. Boys will be boys and bringing up boys in the fear of the Lord requires wisdom, grace and lots of focused work.

Indian parents tend to be child-centric. They behave as though their children are the center of their universe and they gratify every whim and fancy of their kids. Immigrant parents see their children as an extension of themselves. Types of toys, attire and extra-curricular activities speak volumes about the parents' outlook and in determining their status in the community. Parents constantly talk about their kids to their peers and it is more than simple parental pride.

Boys are generally treated differently from girls. Indian parents are stricter towards girls than boys. Whether it is curfew times, manners, social behaviors, sexual issues, or allowance, boys generally get the lenient end of the stick. Fear of potential harm that could adversely affect a girl's future prospects and tarnish the family image in a status-conscious community condition the tight leash parents keep on their daughters. Both boys and girls grow up wondering why such disparity exists at home.

Parenting experts tell us that we tend to parent the way we were parented. How parents were raised back in a village in Kerala is not likely to work if applied to parenting kids in



twenty-first century post-modern American suburbia. With the prevailing gender identity confusion, onslaught on masculinity, pervasive peer pressure and sexual temptations, the task of raising boys comes with unimaginable challenges for today's parents. Parents cannot take cover behind 'my parents never told me those things' or 'they will find out about it when they grow up.'

Life & Relationships

It is not easy being boys in America today. With a steady decline in moral and social values, family life and gender distinctions, boys are more confused than ever. Young people are incessantly being seduced into paganism, materialism and promiscuity. American schooling is not ideally suited to how boys learn. Children from ethnic minorities like ours struggle with establishing a sense of identity and an intense longing to belong. Parental pressure on high academic performance, career choices and mate selection further complicates matters for our boys.

While parenting boys, we must strive to model godly character before them. Kids must see a congruence between who we profess to be and who we are when no one is looking. Parents should establish clear lines of authority and an environment of open communication. Boys must learn about hard work, responsibility, delayed gratification and virtuous living from their parents. Parents must be proactive in teaching about career choices, handling money, dealing with people, love, relationship and sexuality.

We believe boys need discipline that is clear and consistent but not harsh. The best discipline is built on the child's love for his parents and his wish to please. Boys need to be encouraged to initiate friendships, maintain them and experience the conflicts that arise in male friendships from different levels of athletic skill, from teasing and from competing for attention from girls.

In every household, fathers will generally have more influence on boys than mothers. The human brain is wired for imitation and boys want to grow up to be like their fathers. Every boy wants to be able to do what his father does; both to honor him and earn his praise, and at the same time to compete with him. Physical or emotional absence of fathers tends to result in adverse lifelong ill-effects.

Fathers must treat their wives with tenderness and respect. Boys learn how to treat women and what it means to be a husband from their fathers. They will struggle to prove their masculinity when many of their friends come from broken homes or have same-sex orientations. Parents must proactively talk about what to do when unsolicited

porn images flood his inboxes or premarital sex is the norm among his friends.

The best thing a dad can do for his boys is love their mother. It will set an example of respect towards females and avoid the need for control and manipulation. Words and deeds that demonstrate your love for your wife provide your children with convincing proof that the foundation of their lives—your marriage commitment—is not going to shake, buckle and split apart. When Dad loves Mom, all is well in the universe.

Faith Transmission: Passing on the baton of faith to the next generation is the most challenging aspect of parenting. Sooner or later every parent comes to realize that they cannot be around forever to protect their 'little ones' or make every decision for them. Children will tread paths that their parents have never walked or cannot provide any guidance for. What they really need is a God who will be their guide, protector and sustainer throughout life. Parents must lead boys to the One who will be with them through every peak and valley of life.

Many parents take a lackadaisical approach to faith training. Some relegate it to the church, the school or special programs. They feel inadequate to engage or teach kids on faith matters. Parents must also realize that children are individuals and will make choices of their own to accept or

reject the faith of their fathers. Parents of prodigal sons and daughters must not pity their failure in proper parenting, but consider it an opportunity to teach and model forgiveness and love. Make your parenting count every day so that you will not have regrets in the future.

Far too often we think of inheritance only in terms of the wealth we leave behind at our death. Christian parents need to take a more long-term view, considering future generations. Life is more than a hundred yard dash; it is a relay in which we pass the baton of our legacy from generation to generation.

Faith is more caught than taught. When children see the vibrant faith of their parents, they are more likely to believe in their God. They can see through superfluous religiosity and when parents fake spiritual issues. They keenly observe how faith matters influence our behaviors, ethics and attitudes and how we relate to them and others.

Finally and most importantly, be diligent in praying fervently for your kids. Pray for wisdom and discernment in raising boys. Pray that God will step in for your lack of focus and understanding. Trust that God will help you make an eternal impact on your kids. Pray with the Psalmist, "Forsake me not, even when I am old and grey haired, till I declare your power to the next generation and your might to all who are to come" (Psalm 71:18). ■

Bringing up Girls in A Christian Home

Fr. M. K. Kuriakose, Philadelphia

In a non-discriminatory community it is not fair to discuss issues related to bringing up children on the basis of gender. Both boys and girls will protest against such discussions because children growing in America feel that they are predominantly Christian children rather than "boys" and "girls". However, there is a slight difference in the Indian approach and attitude towards children based on gender. In the Indian community, like in many other world traditions, the society gives different orientation to boys and girls. In many cultures, men are dominant and women are viewed as the weaker beings. Also, pastorally speaking, girls cannot enjoy all the privileges that a boy can enjoy. Even though some Christian Churches ordain women, it is still anathema in most Christian denominations. In this short essay, I reflect on bringing up girls in the American cultural milieu.

Indian (Malayalee) Social Milieu

Discrimination against girls in India is reflected in the practices of female infanticide, sati (widow burning), dowry system, etc. Women's education has greatly changed the scenario; especially Indian women who went abroad in search of jobs have made a huge impact in rais-



ing women's status and dignity. Back in Kerala, women have maintained high positions in various capacities in politics, religion and society. Great women writers, thinkers, poets, artists and spiritual leaders have emerged from time to time. Socially, women have suffered a lot of discrimination but the western women's liberation movement has influenced all world communities in redeeming the image of women.

Women and the Family

Women have their own position in the family. There are a lot of people who think that women are not supposed to work outside the home. But even those who argue for 'homebound' women take advantage of the income that working women bring. That income has opened new vistas of education and global travel for women and their families. In the home, the working woman still continues to be the "food-maker" while the man, the so-called breadwinner, only deigns to make it in time for dinner. There are indeed exceptions all over the world. Financially, women had no freedom to operate funds or be part of financial decisions made in the family. At the same time, the 'mother figure' continues to wield her prowess in the family.

Women and the Church

Women participate in various Church activities. In the ecumenical field, various women leaders stand out. The Church of South India started ordaining women decades ago even though there was opposition from within the Church. Other mainland Churches in Kerala are still holding on to their guns considering women "not yet fit to be ordained and take part in Church administration". In spite of this, many Churches use the expertise and administrative qualities of women indirectly. More and more women are opting for theological education. Most of the Churches have strong women leaders to run programs for women.

American Milieu

Indian Christians, especially Malayalees, who came to the USA, brought with them almost all the cultural concepts attached to women. Even when women are breadwinners, not many men share the work at home, including childrearing. Indeed there are exceptions. Therefore, bringing up of girls in American cultural milieu has its own challenges.

Women's insecure position as defined by society is a global feature. A boy can go anywhere and do anything and be with anybody but a girl is much more culpable and vulnerable in the minds of many. However, American girls of non-Indian (Malayalee) origin travel on their own, select their profession, and marry whom they like. American Indian girls are inspired by their independent lifestyle. This has often led to rude shocks for Indian parents. Indian parents are now becoming more sensitive to this issue and are increasingly communicating with their girls about decisions affecting their future.

A person traveling in a bus seated next to a stranger of the opposite sex is viewed differently by a Malayalee from Kerala than an American. Children born in America, like

most Americans, do not have any qualms about it either. They socialize well with others, whether in church, school or in a social gathering. Again, parents have to learn to adapt and understand our children's social life.

As parents of girls brought up in the USA, some of these things have been on our minds. However, we learned many positive lessons from our life in USA that has helped our children grow with self-confidence and a sense of identity. Educationally, they are free to choose to follow or reject the guidance they receive. Therefore, they learnt to choose responsibly resulting in better grades and academic achievement. At the same time, our cultural and spiritual values were maintained.

The social life of an Indian child in America is generally attached with a lot of stigma. Many parents are very insecure, mainly because they see a lot of premarital problems including pregnancy in this land. Indian parents are opposed to their children, especially girls, dating and socializing with the opposite sex. Even in their own parishes they are afraid to see girls and boys mingling. Much of this fear is out of place. Parents know that once their children leave home for school they have no control over them; but they cannot keep them from attending school. However, they believe they can keep their children from attending spiritual programs. This adversely affects the spiritual growth of children. In fact the Church is one of the healthiest places to train our children to have a successful social and spiritual life. It is unfortunate that some successful parents are unwilling to support their own parish, which can become a place of solace for their children. Also, parents must keep in mind that their good, creative, decent and positive participation in Church will benefit their children.

In conclusion I would say that a meaningful and exemplary participation in the local parish will help our children grow in a healthy way—physically and spiritually. At the same time, bringing up girls in America is not a worry because the laws of this country grant women a lot of protection. ■

"From the Cross, Through the Church, To the World" *(Cont'd from page 18)*

Today, society provides many opportunities and media that facilitate communication faster, and with mobility and ease. These communication tools can be used for mission. Electronic mail, e-mail lists, discussion blogs, Orkut, Facebook, Instant Messaging, and other ways of communicating are available at our disposal. We can share our mission experiences; let others know about upcoming activities, and work we are involved in, through these media. This may encourage others to take up similar mission tasks. These are constructive ways in which we can spread the gospel in a frequency that complements the contemporary culture, and maintains the Christian ethos and identity.

Finally, it is important to note the importance of the upbringing and leadership of the second generation of the Diaspora community. The future of our church is in the hands of the youth and children. If they don't take up the responsibilities to carry the church forward in its mission, who will? The awareness of the situation's graveness is vital in taking initiative in leading the church. The second generation needs to take a more active role in the church, and work towards making the church

the path by which the message of Christ is carried from the Cross, to the world.

VII. Conclusion

The message of Jesus Christ does not remain on the Cross. It uses the church as its vehicle to reach the world. How can we, as a Diaspora community make significant contributions to the Western society? How can we maintain our identity and continue our mission as Mar Thoma Christians, while adjusting to a pluralistic context? It is important that we seek ways to leave footprints in our society, and firmly plant seeds in the soil, so that future generations can be blessed by the yielded harvest, all for the extension of the kingdom of God in this land. As the children of God, we need to retrospect, and see if we have made earnest efforts in participating in mission work, and in sharing the Good News of Christ with others. If not, let us make this a reality, and translate the message of the Cross through the Church, so that it gives life and meaning to the World. May God bless us all! ■

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Honoring Our Aging Parents

Alex Thomas M.D., Mar Thoma Church of New Jersey, Randolph

How can we honor our parents? By giving them high regards, respect, reverence, recognition and acknowledgement that they deserve. Parents brought us into this world and raised us by sacrificing everything and giving us their best, and offering us the best education they can afford. All the parents hope for the best for their children at any cost and most of them live for their children. They want the children to be well accomplished in their professional lives, want to see them get married, have children and pass on the torch of faith and continue the family traditions. Nurturing the children with love, care and discipline in the Christian household and teaching them to obey their parents as the children grow up, they begin to respect and will eventually care for them and honor them.

The Bible gives specific instruction to the parents to train a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6). Family prayer, church attendance, Sunday School and prayer meetings are all important means by which the parents can train the children to grow up in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. We can instill our cultural values and form strong emotional bonds and give them proper discipline and nurture at our homes.

Once the children leave home for college by age 18, they are going away and will try to learn to become independent and that is the way of the world. They come home on holidays and special occasions and during summer vacations and they do need to enjoy the warmth and love from their parents once again. They should feel free to keep open the lines of communication as they will need our support and guidance in all their daily struggles, especially as they face cultural clashes and immense peer pressure to conform to the society despite knowing that several accepted practices in western culture like premarital sex and experimentation with drugs and alcohol are all against our Eastern culture and traditions.

Children may idolize their parents believing they are the best parents, hate them blaming them for all their troubles, lean on them by asking for their help and advice productively, or they may humanize them admitting that they are also humans and are not perfect and may have their own faults as well. Respect for the parents depends on what stage they are in. Children grow watching their parents and their continued involvement with them in later years depends on how strong the emotional bonds they had with them. They will look upon their parents to see how they treat their own parents whether they are living with them, nearby or far away.

Traditionally, in Kerala and in India at large, the youngest child, usually the youngest son, takes care of his parents and lets them live with him. The children are to care for the total needs of their elderly parents including their medical needs till they die. It is common practice for elderly parents to die in their children's homes eventually. A few may live in old age homes but that number is very negligible. The adult children



who are not able to stay with their parents in India, may make alternate arrangements like hiring home nurses, have relatives or privately hired people to care for the parents.

In the western culture, especially in the US, we do not see children letting their elderly parents live with them unless in rare occasions like the mother-daughter households. As the health of the elderly parents deteriorates over the years, they eventually get involved with agencies like "Area Agency on Aging", visiting nursing services, home health aides, meals on wheels etc. as a last resort before placement in assisted living

homes or nursing homes. Children stay detached most of the time as opposed to how we have been taught traditionally in the Indian culture.

Our children do see what is happening in the society around them outside our Indian community, but it is up to us as parents to let them know that they need to get more involved rather than leave us to the mercy of the caregivers. It all depends on the family ties and bonds you have with your children. Taking care of the parents when they can no longer care for themselves is the right thing to do as Christians.

The Bible talks to us in Ephesians 6:1-3 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." "Honor your father and mother" which is the first commandment with a promise—"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Young children are to obey their parents as they are told and as they grow up as adults, they are to show respect and love for their parents rather than complete obedience. Love for your aging parents will definitely translate into action by giving them proper honor, reverence and respect. As the parents age, they are left alone as children move out and they may feel unwanted and as a burden to others especially to their children leading to feelings of low self-worth and loneliness. They may feel lonely and depressed and may not be able to handle the loss of their friends and families. They may become home-bound bored with daily routine, and on top of this their failing health with arthritis and chronic medical conditions. They lose their sense of identity and may be worried about financial problems as well. There are different ways in which adult children can care for their aging parents.

The adult children can provide emotional support to the aging parents, by visiting them during holidays and special occasions and staying in touch with them by calling them up on the phone regularly. Keeping them involved with the grandchildren will definitely keep their spirits up. They can help meet the social needs of their parents to visit their friends and family members by arranging for transportation to get to those places so that they may identify with their peers and not feel lonely. It is very important for parents who have immigrated to a different country or different part of the country to meet with people of same culture so that they feel accepted.

The adult children must try to meet this cultural need so that their elderly parents do not feel like they are exiled to a strange land with a foreign language, customs and culture. Death of spouses and their friends as the parents get older may lead to devastating consequences. The spiritual needs must be met by accepting their religious preferences, taking them to or arranging for transportation to get back and forth from church services, prayer meetings and other fellowship meetings. Staying in touch with God and being accepted in the faith community is a big factor in their total well being.

Our aging parents may be faced with multiple physical illnesses and limitations arising from diabetes, stroke, heart disease that may impact on their ability to ambulate and remain independent. Adult children must take every chance to stay with them, assist in their rehabilitation, facilitate their recovery and arrange for home nurses or other care providers in such circumstances. In the Western culture, particularly in the US, assisting them in finding home health aide services, visiting nurses, meals on wheels assisted living and finally nursing home placement may be options to consider with help from several governmental agencies.

All elderly parents cherish their independence and do want to stay on their own rather than depend completely on their children. Most of them live on fixed pensions and retirement incomes which do not go up with the rate of inflation and may put them in deep financial struggles. The children will have to rise up to the occasion and try to help them out if they can. Death of spouses and their peers is a big stress for our elderly parents and adult children should find ways to help them cope and if necessary find alternate living arrangements. Finding another partner and getting remarried for companionship is an option which is not yet so well accepted in the Indian culture.

Old age is a stage in which they look back on their lives, feel content, have a sense of accomplishment, and the adult children can definitely make them feel wanted by keeping open the bonds of communication. Staying in touch with them and getting them involved with the grandchildren, caring for their total well being financially and emotionally and letting them stay with the adult children are ways to honor our aging parents, which is a direct command from God. ■

From the Cross, through the Church, to the World (Cont'd from page 8)

relationship, so that we live by it. Vision is to accept a set of values ingrained in it. Mission to the world (Touch World Through Mission) is to experience and show how the love, forgiveness and peace we experience from the Cross could be offered to others?

Risen Christ, after appearing to the disciples behind the closed door, showed them His hands and side. The identification mark of Jesus is nothing but the scars of passion. Jesus offers peace by showing them the injury caused by crucifixion. Uttering of peace and showing the marks of crucifixion go together. The crucifixion marks is the cost He paid to show His love for us. Scars of passion are the mark of the risen Lord. What is the identifying marks of the body of Christ today? Scars of passion or signs of abundance?

God sent Jesus into His mission by the anointment of the Holy Spirit. The Nazareth manifesto was proclaimed immediately after the anointment of the Holy Spirit. Here, when Jesus wanted to send His disciples in to the world, He breathed on them the Spirit of God. It is the Cross centered spirituality that prompts and anoints us for mission. Jesus' commission is to continue to fulfill the manifesto He inaugurated in Nazareth...

Risen Jesus appeared to the frightened disciples, offered them His peace, showed them the price of the peace, empowered them by His Spirit and asked them to move out of the boxed existence into the real world. They are challenged to break barriers and cross boundaries. Christian Church began as an exclusive community as it was a Jewish sect to begin with. Acts 10 talks about getting out of the box. The box is formed by cultural ethnic or religious heritage. The temptation is to remain in the security and comfort of the boxes created by ethnicity. Peter broke out of it. Casteism, communalism, regionalism, are the factors that divide lives of people and forcing them to boxed culture. Our challenge is to break it open with the love of Jesus.

Mission is not a project or program to convert others and to bring them to the Church. It is to testify to God's power in our individual lives and in the life of the Church. It is a commitment to the vision of the Kingdom. It is a struggle to transform different areas of life. It is a struggle for justice, human rights, making the world a place to live with peace and hope. It is a Christian response to the poor and marginalized. For mission the disciples have to be prepared to face the world. (John 20:21) They do not have a separate agenda other than that of the Crucified and Risen One. Jesus' mission and His attitude towards the world is the key for their mission too. It is to actively involve in the affairs of humans and in solidarity with the sinful humanity. Thereby mission becomes witnessing to the transforming activity of God.

How far do we show solidarity with the world? In a world torn asunder with hatred, suspicion, and prejudice, can we be complacent? In the midst of anxiety, and hopelessness, what is our mission? How do we become channels of God's peace. We are to be the light of the world. (Matthew 5:13) It is for a new quality of life that we need to be a transformation model. Salt is catalyst, it is unidentifiable but one can taste it. It is about the quality that we bring to situations which matters. What are the Christian qualities? Honesty, sensitivity to truth, fair play, commitment to human rights and justice, and care of the destitute and the disabled. The identify is unmistakable but it is not an imposing identity; it dispels darkness. (Luke 14:12-14). *A Candle light in the night is a protest*; it is a non-conformist; it tells to the darkness; 'Sorry, I beg to differ.' (By Samuel Rayan) As salt we need to preserve the world from corruption, as light we need to promote forces of good. As salt, our personal influence and as light our public posturing should be for the values and lives of the Kingdom of God. As salt, we need to embrace the healing ministry and as light we need to fight against oppressive forces to liberate people from the fears of darkness. ■

LIVING HOME

“A man’s own good breeding is the best security against other people’s ill manners”

Lord Chesterfield

HOME & GARDEN TIPS

MRS. SHIRLEY CHACKALAMANNIL, NEW JERSEY MTC

Family Etiquettes Concerning Children

We, the parents want our children to grow and become successful in their professional life. There are no perfect parents. We all learn how to bring up children, as we go along. We work very hard to provide our children with the best in both material and educational aspects. In order to be successful in life, one ought to be well balanced, that means taking responsibility for their behavior, their values, their lives and also their behavioral impact on others. We live and work within the context of a community; therefore our lives and our behavior are intertwined with our community and the world at large. So as parents it is our responsibility to raise our children where they are able to take ownership of their feelings, attitudes and behavior. As parents we need to start telling our children when they are young, right from wrong and the consequences of their behavior. In other words we need to establish healthy boundaries for our children. This means we need to understand and recognize the issues underlying child behavioral problems and set boundaries. Do not let children place boundaries for you where you become the child and the child becomes the parent. This article of Living Home will focus on etiquettes for children at home and in public areas.

At Home Etiquettes

- **Household chores:** It is what the children learn at home that they display in public. So it is important that we instill the right manners in children in the context of family setting. Making them do chores around the home is the first and best way to make them aware that their help matters. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children of age 8 and above are old enough to do chores around the house. The best way to teach the children the importance of helping out is by being an example. When they see the parents help each other in not only providing for the family but also in the day to day household chores, the children will understand the need of their help in the family.
- **Table manners:** “Don’t talk with your mouthful” is an old saying both in western and eastern cultures. Even a five years old child will be able to abide by this rule. Do not chew with your mouth open. Rather than grabbing food or reaching for food, it is best to ask the person who is close to the dish to pass it to you. Remind them to say please when they need something and thank you whenever they are being served what they needed. Teach the children to keep the negative comments about the food to themselves. It is proper to ask to be excused when they are done with eating.
- **Defining the vocabulary:** In certain families, the curse words that’s used in R rated movies are considered prohibited language. But according to our faith as Christians our words should be “seasoned with salt”. That means we don’t let our children call anyone by such words like “idiot”, “stupid” or “jerk”. They need to know the consequences of such kind of communication that it hurts people and it will cost them their reputation and relationships. Again the best way to teach the children is by the parents being good examples. We need to

mind our vocabulary. It is always good to define bad words to your children so that they will know not to use those words.

- **Being considerate to all:** One way a child act improperly is by pointing out what is wrong with others. For children it may be the way they dress or how they talk with an accent (people who are new to this country). We not only as parents but also as Christians need to teach our children that it is required of us to treat everyone with respect and dignity. There is a great need in our community to teach our children to be respectful of the elders.
- **Dress for the occasion:** Very often our attire along with our style of speech give away the content of our personality. We can distinguish between a rebellious person from a well mannered individual by their style of communication and their attire. As Christian parents, we need to instill in our children the need for modesty. As the new fashions arrive every year the outfits are less modest and more revealing. Our children need to know that we are Christians first, Westerners second. As Marthomites we revere all the sacraments. Holy Communion is a sacrament where our celebrant (Athen or Bishop) wears Kappa, the ceremonial gown after the priest of the Old Testament. It is only appropriate that we the believers participating in the Holy Communion dress appropriately. That means no jeans, shorts, sneakers or nothing too casual. It is acceptable to dress casually for holiday parties.
- **Acceptable etiquette for display of emotions:** It is natural for us to express our negative emotions such as anger or frustration. We need to express them in a polite manner for the sake of our family and community. In Proverb 13:3 it says “He who guards his lips guards his life but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.” Psalm 4:4 says “In your anger do not sin”. Expressing our negative emotions without offending anyone is really a noble character that we all need to acquire. Again the best way to teach our children to tame their negative emotional outburst is by parents being good examples.
- **Parties and gifts:** When you have a get-together at home it is only appropriate that the children are to be present to welcome the guests. Children are to be taught not to interrupt the adults when they are in the middle of a conversation with the guests except for emergency. If both adults and children are invited for a party, make sure that there are enough preparation at your home to keep the children occupied and entertained.
It is important that we teach our children to put the feelings of the person who gave them the gift first. Even if they find the gift less appealing, they need to be gracious. That means they need to tame their facial expression a little bit. Children are innocent and you can see through their face if they like the gift or not. So we need to train them to give compliments such as “Thank you very much for this gift, I appreciate your thoughtfulness” or “thank you for thinking of me”.

Setting boundaries is part of disciplining our children. It requires discipline on our part as parents or else our efforts will be ineffective and the outcome will be more chaotic than before. **Next issue of “Living Home” will focus on the theme “Discipline etiquette for parents”.**

God's Design for Recreating One's Marital and Family Life

Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla



Family life is God's greatest gift to human kind. But this is a life that has to be planned and built according to the commands and the will of God. We live in a time when the worldly values and standards have crept in to the walls of our family life and this has led into the disintegration of family relationship and all the ideals that were built in this holy edifice. Hence it is the need of the hour to see to it that every member of the family takes the initiative and the responsibility to build up their marital life, family and their home. Earlier there was this notion that the home was reared by the parents and I still believe that parents have the greatest role in the building up of home, but along with the role of the parents I would like to emphasize the role of the other members of the family especially grown up children. For this, I would like to first present the objectives that God had in mind which we can find from the Word of God with respect to family life and secondly how the role of family can be reclaimed in a changing world.

Looking at the Bible we find that it is in the Book of Genesis that the beginning and the inception of family life is mentioned. In Genesis 2:18 we find God commanding that "Man is not supposed to live alone and hence He has made a suitable helper for him". In this particular verse we have host of purpose that I believe God had in mind when the concept of marriage and family life was introduced in the Garden of Eden. It is when we put into practice these designs of God that our marital and family life is made fulfilling to all of us in particular and to the society in general.

A. The institution of marriage and family was planned and designed by God for the goodness of human kind. Hence I believe this is an institution that is meant for the welfare and for the goodness of human kind. I have come across a lot of couples and even older parents who have complained that it was a mistake on their part to enter into a marital life and this is basically because of the innumerable bitter experiences that they had to face in their marital life. I would not deny these bitter experiences as false or untrue but the fact is that stress and other bitter experiences can sometimes become a part of our marital life and this may be because of the way both the partners have conceptualized their family life. This is sometime because of the values that we exhibit in our family life. We live in a world where we have innumerable choice when we go out to buy our day to day items for our home or even for our own personal need. If we are not satisfied with one brand of product we go searching for another brand. This type of market values has also entered into our family life too. If there is any bitterness or sorrow or difference of opinion in our marital life, most of the couples try not to solve or find an amicable solution but at the very first

instance think that this relationship is not worth living and that it is better to get out of this institution of marriage. If God has designed marriage for the goodness of humankind I think we need to put our trust and hope in the Lord who instituted this concept of marriage. Hence we need to understand that there may be bitter experiences in a marital life, but it is the imperative of every husband and wife to consentize themselves that their marriage is something best that has happened in their lives and they need to be thankful to God for that.

B. Bible says that with the creation of Eve, God had made the most suitable companion for Adam. It is important at this point to note as to how we understand the word "suitable". I have come across lots of young people who have not entered into marital relationship because they say that they have not been able to find the most suitable person in their life. It is in this context that the word suitability needs to be discussed. When Adam and Eve were joined in marital relationship, it was God's unique design by which Eve and Adam were made suitable to each other. But then suitability was something that Adam and Eve had to build upon. In a marital life the husband and the wife does not become suitable to each other from the very first day of marriage, on the contrary they both get to know each other and live a life daily that makes their life suitable to their spouses. Until and unless every husband and wife do not make themselves suitable to each other, marriage can become very mundane losing all its meaning, leaving both husband and wife bruised because of the martial relationship that they are leading. What is important in marriage is not whether you have found the right person, but what is important in marriage is whether you have become the right person for your partner? Once this is taken care of, the husband and wife learn to understand and take steps so as to make themselves suitable for their partners. To become suitable does not mean that the spouses negate or push under the carpet those idiosyncrasies that can cause harm to a marital relationship; it means that these idiosyncrasies needs to be creatively encountered and solved.

C. We need to understand that the husband and wife can be suitable to each other only when they try to embrace the differences that they both have in their personalities. One of the best parts of God's creation is that He made every person unique. This uniqueness makes our marital life both an asset and also a liability. Asset, if we understand the one whom I married can be entirely different and that is something to be celebrated and be proud about and a liability, if we think that this is one of the weaknesses of ones marital life. There are lots of couples who have got married after having a detailed thought, preparation and prayer and finally when they start

living as husband and wife they complain that their spouse is not someone whom they had dreamt or imagined, since she or he is so different. The world often teaches us that we need to relate with people of our wavelength, our taste and also our ideals. Yes that can be an asset to our relationship, but when we marry we need to have a firm belief that my spouse will have lot of differences in her or him, which can be both an asset and liability, but that depends on the way I view these differences. It is easy to cope up with our spouse when his/her thinking patterns or habits are similar to yours, but when her thinking and habits are slightly different, do you embrace those differences and try to work out your marriage with the help of God or do you rue the day you got married to your spouse who is so different from you?

D. We need to understand the type of role that Eve plays in the life of Adam. Here we can find that the translation in some of the English Bible and Malayalam Bible is somewhat different to the role that Eve plays in the life of Adam. Most of the English Bible writes that God made a suitable helper for Adam in the form of Eve. Hence functionally eve is described as helper to Adam. But observing the Malayalam Bible one finds that the role of Eve is described in a more honourable term. The word used in the Malayalam Bible to describe Eve is "thuna". I think this word "thuna" is more suitable to Eve than the word "helper" because in marriage what a male needs is not a helper but a companion for life and vice versa. But the sad part of today's family history is that one can find that most of the men have the assumption that his wife is a helper and not a companion. This value is instilled in most of the family from the child formative years. If you have a daughter and son in one's home, one can always find that household chores like cleaning the utensils, washing the clothes or cooking job is the duty of the daughter while all outdoor jobs is entrusted to the son. With this unique division of labour, the boy comes to an understanding that he is not supposed to do anything at home with regards to culinary job, the cleaning task and that these task are all the duties of the girl. Finally when he marries he has this understanding that it is the duty of his wife to do all the cooking, washing and cleaning in the house while his role is only limited to the work that he does outside or the earning that he brings home. Thus we find that in most of the homes the wife has to slog for all the domestic chores while the men shrug away from domestic responsibilities. I believe there are still many men who believe it is below their dignity to engage in household chores or to give a helping hand to their wives especially with chores related to home. But there are lot of changes that are happening today in this particular area of marriage. Men are coming forward to lend a helping hand at home so that they communicate the idea to their spouse that running the home is the responsibility of both the spouses and that one need not think about ones dignity when one is engaged in the household chores of one's own home and that they can proudly say that it is dignified to lend a helping hand to their spouse.

E. The Word of God states that human being can find fulfillment and meaning in life through the marital relationship that they share with their spouse. Life can be made mean-

ingful and fulfilling only when we are ready to accept the challenges that the life demands on us. Building a quality marital life takes a lot of patience, understanding and also give and take from both sides. It is here that the Cross stands a supreme paradigm in the building up our marital life. Just as Jesus Christ humbled Himself on the Cross, every husband and wife needs to have the spirit of humility and willing to sacrifice one's interest and happiness so that the family life is made more fulfilling. Both the husband and wife take responsibility upon themselves so as to take the challenges of their martial life with a willing spirit and take every step to make their marital life fulfilling to both of them. We live in a world where everyone is concerned about their rights, but nobody is willing to sacrifice for the sake of another. It is in this context that every Christian husband and wife is bound by the model of the Cross so as to find fulfillment in their life through their marriage.

F. Both the husband and wife take up the role of co-creators with God through marriage. Before marriage all endeavor and goal in life was very individualistic, but by entering in to a marital relationship, a husband and wife is making an allegiance to God who joined them, that they are going to work with Him so as to realize His purpose not only in their lives but also in the world that they live. Here we need to understand that the purpose of God is fulfilled only when both the partners become an instrument in God's hand. It is in this context that the spiritual values and spiritual nurturing that is present in the family gain importance. When there is strong spiritual mooring in each and every family, when the family always looks to the Lord for their nurture and guidance, we are actually becoming God's co-workers where by we witness to others that through the power and the grace of God we are able to fulfill God's purpose in our lives not only individually but also by developing qualitative relationship through our spouse. Here we also need to understand the role of nurturing of the next generation in faith and fear of the Lord. We are co-creators with God so that we are able to witness to His love and power and ways to our children so that later our children are able to affirm the faith that we had transmitted to them. In this way every person through the gift of family life enters into a creative activity with God. By being co-creators with God we are also telling others that marriage is honourable and it is really good and enriching to enter in to a marital life.

God has given to human beings different gifts to enjoy and to make his/her life meaningful and fulfilling. But each of these gifts becomes meaningful to human being only when he/she discerns God's purpose in giving a particular gift. Marital and family life is also a gift that God has given to human being but we can make our life fulfilling only when we discern God's purpose in marriage and family. ■

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Sunday School or School on Sundays?

Our Sunday School Education: It is Time to Change

Thomas Mathew, Mar Thom Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch, Dallas, Texas

About eight Sundays ago, it was "Diocesan Sunday School Examination Day." Our parish was no exception to the examination exercise. All children who normally attend worship service in our church instead participated in the annual intercontinental exercise. As I was talking to some Sunday school teachers and parents, I became more interested in what was going on in our Sunday school. I have been a Sunday school teacher and the head teacher of our Sunday school several years ago, making my observations somewhat relevant. My coffee break discussion with fellow parishioners after service led me to discover interesting aspects of this examination. Our fellowship hall was very well presented for the test with each child to occupy a chair, separated by at least three feet from their neighbors. It was impressive. I was told that the reason why we held the examination at that particular time was that this examination was intercontinental in nature and crosses various time zones, GMT, Pacific, Central, Eastern and Mountain. So what does that mean if the test (question paper as it is called) is opened in England ahead of all others? The response was that the contents of it can be communicated across time zones! Leak out the question paper? I asked my Sunday school teacher friend if this was true, which he confirmed, saying that this sort of cheating has happened before. He went on to say that a teacher is sent as a proctor (external examiner) from another church to oversee the examination in our church to ensure there are no irregularities, such as teachers helping students with answers or students copying from one another! It does not stop there. If a child has to go to the restroom during the examination he or she will be accompanied by a teacher so that no copying can take place in the privacy of the bathroom. Alas, we have a serious problem in our Sunday school, I thought. I have heard about these things happening occasionally in secular school districts where teachers help students on tests, but not in Sunday Schools! If it does happen in Sunday Schools, don't you think something is wrong somewhere?

Therefore, the question I'd like to propose is: "Are we running a school on Sundays or a Sunday school?" Is there a difference between the two? In my simple mind there is a world of difference. Are we teaching our children the essence of the Bible and Jesus Christ, or are we preparing them to be Bible scholars? If we cannot trust the teachers who teach our precious children with administering a test, how can we trust them to reveal the secrets of the Kingdom of God? If



we cannot trust the teachers and students in this small task then we should stop the Sunday school altogether. Utopia? You may think so! But let us ask ourselves what kind of values are we teaching and imparting to the children. If our teachers are not trustworthy, they should not be teaching. If a child cannot be trusted while taking a bathroom break, we have failed in our mission in teaching them very basic core values. And if there is cheating on the test, could it be because of the extreme overemphasis placed on the examination?

Let me give a couple of examples. I have read a newspaper story that the train station in Tokyo has a major problem of storing umbrellas. These umbrellas are forgotten by the passengers, picked up by fellow passengers and brought to the lost and found section of the train station. If an umbrella is forgotten in one of our churches, how confident are you that you will find it again? I have a personal experience of a fellow losing a new pair of brand new shoes while attending a meeting in the parsonage several years ago. Somebody who obviously liked his shoes left with it, leaving an old pair behind. If this was by mistake then the shoes would not have been of different sizes! I also know of a person losing valuable sporting equipment from the church facility, of money stolen from the purse of a kochamma and money disappearing from the Sunday School offering from the church office. These are petty issues, there is no doubt. However, if this is the type of Christians we are, there is a serious problem, right? I do not assign these minor thefts or transgressions to Sunday school children at all, but it can be assured that whoever did this attended our Sunday school once. Our Sunday school is supposed to be a training ground for the basic values of honesty, integrity, love and forgiveness. I have to admit that we have not made any significant impact in this area. This leads to my second question, why do we have these tests and competitions, if there is no positive impact?

Knowledge vs. Application

There are two schools of thought as far as the goal of education is concerned. Education in general terms can serve two purposes, one is to provide or impart knowledge in a subject matter and the second is to provide skills and application for everyday life. All types of educational systems attempt to strike a correct balance between the two. In the case of Christian education, it is no different. If we teach our children the Bible, they become Biblical scholars. There

is no doubt about it. They will memorize all the verses in the Bible and quote verses from cover to cover and answer any trivial questions in it. This makes us happy. We grade them according to their performance in the test. We applaud the winner by awarding trophies and other symbols of success. All these are well and good if we are training children to be good storehouses of knowledge and scholars, similar to grain silos which store grain until it is needed. What we forget is that none of this is to be simply stored. It is meant to be applied in our daily lives, in our behavior, in our interactions with others.

Are We Not Losing Our Mission?

Paradoxically, our mission is not to make another scholar, but a disciple of Jesus. Are we succeeding in this mission? Are we not making our Sunday school a place where we promote hyper-competition between children, teachers and parents? We implant in these children the negative message that you must compete, even on Sundays! The only goal in life is to be number one, by whatever means necessary! End justified the means! It is yet another value of secular world. St. Paul warns us that although we are in the world, we are not of the world. Our values are different from the values of the world. We should teach and promote these values right from the young age. Our teachers painstakingly train the children for the diocesan match. They call children at home, remind them of the tests, and encourage parents to send them. How many of these same teachers call the children on their birthday or when they are sick or when their sibling or their parents are sick or have a death in their family or when the parent has lost job? We might not even think about it. But for a child what matters most is the teacher as a person who cares for him like Jesus—teachers are called to personify Christ to their students. Knowledge for knowledge sake is the medieval approach to learning. Times have changed. One may memorize the entirety of the Bible, but when faced with life experiences they lose ground. Let me cite another incident that a grandfather shared with me just recently. His eight year granddaughter interrupted his conversation on a Saturday afternoon and said that she has to go to the mall. The curious grandfather asked why she was going to the mall, and the young girl said she needed to buy some clothes. The grandfather, who shares a closet with the granddaughter, asked her why she wanted more clothes, when she has a closet full of them. The grandfather asked what Jesus taught us. If you have two, give one to others who do not have them. The smart Granddaughter retorted, "Appacha, these are 2000 year old stories, we cannot live according to that now." Does this open our eyes to the realities of applying Christian core values in our everyday life and how we can train our children? Remember that 'we cannot give what we do not have'. It seems that we fail to show Jesus to our children. Our teaching has no real significant impact.

Cross Pollination

I have visited a few local American Sunday Schools in my town and was greatly impressed by them. The most noticeable differences are their facilities of learning. These halls and rooms are more inviting, welcoming and are made for children. The classroom walls and hallways are covered with pictures and characters of the Bible that children can see, feel and experience. By sharp contrast, our Sunday school classrooms are blank walls with no pictures, uninviting and monotonous for a child. It looks great for an adult, clean and neat, but essentially boring for the child's eyes. Have you looked at the classrooms of your children in regular school when you visit for parent-teacher conferences? How are they decorated? They have the children at the center of learning. By contrast, the teacher is at the center in our system. Local Sunday Schools attempt to teach how children can apply Jesus' teaching in their everyday life. We try to pump as much knowledge as possible into the little mind. A teacher of our Sunday school once shared an interesting story with me. The teacher said one of his children in Sunday school class stood out as an outlier among her classmates. This particular child behaved in a very different dimension in all aspects, opens the door for others, goes and meets older people and treats them with compassion and respect. The child places the other person before her, prays for others etc. So the teacher, out of curiosity asked her why you are doing these things and where did you learn these things from? She said, to the amazement of the teacher, that she learned it from going to a local American Sunday School. Two ingredients of teaching are education and inspiration. We are rich in the former and poor in the latter. My point here is that we need to look at what our local churches are doing.

Teaching with Impact

It seems the local American Sunday Schools try to transform the child to become a better person, when we try to make that person a silo of spiritual knowledge. This is the main difference: one provides the knowledge and attempts to make no difference in the individual, the other attempts to make a difference in the person of the child. Are the local American churches completely successful in their effort? I do not pretend to believe so. However, I believe on the whole, their heart is in the right place. We used to have more interaction with local churches in the past that has been stopped in the past ten to fifteen years. We used to use their curriculum which was more application based, as well as colorful and illustrative. Now we have replaced it with a knowledge based curriculum created by our own resources. It would be beneficial to us to know how local churches teach Christian education. Why? The children go to local schools and learn for five days a week. And if we have to impact them Sundays, we need to know how they do it.

Negative Effects of Competition for A Christian

Have we ever thought about the negative impact of our Sunday school practices? When a new Achen came to our parish years ago, he was surprised to see thin attendance at the annual Sunday school anniversary. He expected a huge gathering based on the size of our parish. But to his surprise, only a few parents and children showed up for the event. Later, he found out that only those who won prizes and their parents came up for the show. There is competition not only between children, but also between parents. Are we supposed to promote this type of negative behavior in the church environment? Can we not find other means to motivate the children to learn if that is why we do the tests and competitions?

We celebrate the accomplished, brilliant, prizewinners. We ignore the one who does not measure up. We might say it encourages children to do better. Better in what? What is the use of doing better? What kind of message do children get from this? The message children get is that if you are not number one, you do not measure up. We have to think in terms of what children think, not what adults think, what message is transmitted to our children in our collective behavior. When we roll the trophies on a cart and call names of children who came first, there are children sitting up on the pew thinking that they do not measure up. Some cry because they do not get a prize. Many of these children grow up to despise the church.

A teacher who I share similar views with once said something interesting about Sunday school competitions. He did a Google search to find what other churches do competition like we do. To his amazement, the most powerful search engine after seconds of search spat the finding and output-competition matches with Mar Thoma Sunday Schools. The only match for competition the teacher found was with Mar Thoma Sunday Schools. A search in Webster's Dictionary on competition reveals the following synonyms: rivalry, contention, war, fight, contest, opposition, struggle, antagonism. A further search to find antonym of competition reveals: cooperation, friendship and the like. Which one as a Sunday school teacher or parent do you want to encourage: competition or cooperation and friendship? Let us ask the question, what would Jesus do (WWJD)?

Knowledge we acquire from Sunday school and the Bible is only a means to get to the end of becoming a better person, a Christian; or simply, a follower of Jesus. Which one would you choose if you are parent or a leader in a church: a person who cooperates or one who is antagonistic? Sunday school education is not intended to be one of academic exercise. Secular institutions are there for imparting knowledge. How the knowledge is applied is the challenge? We can have a good lecture on forgiveness. We can quote all the stories from the Bible on this topic. But as

a teacher, would you be able to share your own experience of forgiving somebody or receiving forgiveness? Can you share that experience from the bottom of your heart? Can you challenge the children to do that? Can you share an example from the daily life, a story from the media, or newspaper? Then that lesson becomes a real meaningful one for the child. It becomes transformational.

A Lost Generation

If you ask these children privately about their opinion of having tests, examinations and competitions what do you think their response would be? They would say "that is what we do on five days a week and come to church to get an escape from the secular world. It seems like we are going from the frying pan directly into the fire... it is even worse." The tests are intense and the competition is more severe. It is painful. Without question, we are overdoing this. Does anybody care? We are losing children from the church. A recent, informal study I did found that at least 30% of our children after high school do not return to the church. Does this reality open our eyes? It is time for introspection.

I know teachers might not agree with what I am saying. Our teachers are all very dedicated individuals and giving their best. God bless each one of them for their commitment and dedication. However, it is high time we changed some of the age old ways of pedagogy. We are trying to copy the Kerala way of teaching and attempt to Indianize the system and teaching methods. We have a mode in our mind that we saw a generation ago. Our model of teaching as a teacher standing up and sharing knowledge and wisdom is probably not very relevant. Children, out of respect and fear listen to the teacher. The age old Indian system of "gurukulam" is far superior to the one above. In the gurukulam system of education the children live with the teacher and learn from him. It is not knowledge that changes lives; it is a life that changes other lives. Life of the Sunday school teacher is a means for changing and shaping the life of the children in his or her discipline. My humble prayer is that we hold very serious discussions at all levels of church and re-think and retool this very important ministry. There is a local saying in Malayalam, "The surgery was successful, but patient died". Let this be not the experience of our Sunday school ministry. If the church does not rise to the occasion and take responsibility, then who will? We are called to be different from the secular ways of doing things. Who will teach very basic values of Christ in a simple way that can be applied in our everyday life? Secular schools do not do that anymore. If our Sunday school education is not transformational and does not create followers of Jesus, we have failed in our mission. I look forward to the Mar Thoma Sunday school to be transformational and a place to create followers of Jesus. ■

When My Husband Passed Away

Saramma Poikail, Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington

It was about 40 days that I had to prepare for the worst—George had fallen down from the staircase to the basement floor and broken the back of his head. He was admitted to the hospital and spent almost 40 days in the ICU. The last 29 days, he was unconscious. He didn't open his eyes, and he wasn't aware of anything. Even my presence almost everyday didn't make a difference.

I had enough time to pray for him, commit him to God and ask forgiveness for all my shortcomings and mistakes. George always appreciated what I did for him and for others. Now when I look back or even when I think of those times, how easy it is to sing, "Dhukkathintey paana paathram Karthavu ente kaiyyil thanaal, santhoshathoodathu vaangi halleluiah paadedum njaan".

These days, I think that God has really given me the chalice of sorrow. I can't say that I am singing "Halleluiah." Instead, every minute and everyday, my eyes have tears and I cry to the Lord. Only I can understand the emptiness and the loneliness that I feel. The person I lived with for almost 50 years is not coming back. At times, I find myself wishing he is at the front door, back door, or even at the garage door. I have to tell myself that George is gone, and I am alone.

This experience makes me think of the thousands of widows who may be feeling the way I am feeling. Hence, I would like to dedicate this article to the widows of our community and share my thoughts, because until I experienced the loss of my husband, I never had such feelings. I had lost my younger brother when I was twelve years old. I lost my father when I was in college, and then lost my mother and two older brothers. Each time I experienced the loss of a loved one the feeling was a bit different. However, the emptiness I am experiencing after my loving husband George's loss is intense and unimaginable.

April 9th would have been our fifty-year wedding anniversary. We loved each other and cared for each other very much. He was a part of me, and that means a part of me was pulled away. He is gone, and he is never going to come back.

I went through stages of grief, shock, denial, anger, depression, and, finally, acceptance. In reality, no one's path through grief is predictable. Your relationship with the person and circumstances of his or her death help shape your unique experience of grief although outwardly you may maintain a calm composure. For survivors who have endured the pain of watching a loved one go through a long-term illness, their death may bring a sense of relief. If you have experienced a number of significant losses over a lifetime, you may develop excellent coping skills. On the other hand, younger people who have experienced multiple losses may suffer from what is called a survivors' guilt and



they may even feel like joining their loved ones in death. In any case, the loss will affect you, and grief is too powerful to be ignored.

My experience leads me to believe that at first you may feel numb when realizing the loss of a loved one. I believe that this is a stage of shock—a natural anesthesia to block-out the full impact of the loss until you are better able to deal with it later. As the fog lifts, over the first weeks or months, you are likely to encounter not only deep sadness but also a wide array of conflicting emotions and behaviors. These may be upsetting, frightening, or confusing. You may have a powerful feeling of separation and longing for the departed person. You may dream or imagine that he or she is still alive. You may not be able to stop thinking about the person or their death. At other times, you may want to avoid reminders of the lost person rather than dwelling on his or her memory. You may experience guilt and "if only" thoughts; blaming yourself could be an attempt to make sense of something that seems senseless. You may envy those who haven't lost someone. You may be angry at the diseased, at the doctors, at those around you, or at God. It is normal to question your faith as you ask yourself, "Why did this happen to me?"

Like death itself, grief is frustrating because we can't prevent or control it, but, with patience and effort, it can be overcome.

The grief experience cannot be made easy, but it can be made better. Learn about your loss and grief. Give yourself permission to grieve. Crying can be cleansing and comforting. It is a sign of strength, not weakness.

I would like to close with a poem by an unknown author, "Remembrance". ■

*You can shed tears that he is gone
Or you can smile because he has lived
You can close your eyes and pray that he will come back.
Or you can open your eyes and see all he has left
Your heart can be empty because you can't see him
Or you can be full of the love that you shared.*

*You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday
You can remember him and only that he is gone
Or you can cherish his memory and let it live on.
You can cry and lose your mind
Be empty and turn your back
Or you can do what he would want
Smile, open your eyes, Love and go on"*

Sharing Our Faith

Lynn Keerikattu

“...I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20)

The theme for this year’s family conference *“From the Cross, Through the Church, To the World”* embodies the importance of having faith and sharing that faith with others. Jesus’ death on the Cross reveals God’s love and compassion on humankind. God sacrificed His Son who had no sin. Jesus’ death and resurrection give us everlasting life. We are saved from our sin and death by believing in Jesus Christ. Faith in God, His Promises, and His Church sustain us in this world.

A young girl went on her first train ride with her mother. She watched as cars and houses passed by. The train approached a river. The young girl became frightened. She told her mother, “The train is going into a river!” A bridge took the train to the other side. Later, the train went towards a mountain. The girl again was afraid and told her mother that the train would run into the mountain ahead of them. A tunnel at the base allowed the train to easily pass through. The young girl came to a realization saying, “Someone must have gone ahead and made a way for us.” Christ has gone ahead and made a way for each of us, lighting our paths and giving us hope for a brighter future. In the same way, it is our job to share our love and faith with others. The theme lays out the story of Christianity- beginning with Christ to the church of believers to the rest of the world. Each Sunday, Marthomites are reminded of this calling to tell others about God when seeing the motto “Lighted to Lighten” around the church.

When thinking about great Biblical leaders such as Abraham, Noah, and Daniel, it is clear that they possess many notable qualities, including faith. Hebrews 1:1 defines faith as “...being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

Abraham was a God fearing man, he loved God so much that he was willing to move from his home and sacrifice his only son to prove his faith. When God told Abraham to leave his home, Abraham obeyed “even though he did not know where he was going.” (Hebrews 11:8) When Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 years old, God blessed them with a son, Isaac. God told Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham waited a long time to have a son with Sarah, but when God asked him to give up Isaac, he did so. In the end, God intervened and Isaac lived. Abraham had faith and obedience that made him one of the most faithful followers in the Bible. His willingness to let go of personal preferences and listen to God shows obedience and faith that our Heavenly Father knows best.

Abraham is known as the “father of the faithful” and his story pushes us to reflect upon ourselves and ask serious questions about faith and the mission of the church. Today we live in a society that is full of issues that if left solely to human comprehension would result in disaster. In our midst lies poverty, crime, war, and darkness, but there is also light from Jesus Christ that shines. If we allow our faith to guide us, there is a calm reassurance that our Heavenly Father is watching over us each second of every day.



There are countless reasons why we need God in our lives. God gives us an answer to the confusion that society throws at us each day. It is easy to forget, but many other people lack the blessings that we take for granted, including knowing a loving Father who waits for us to answer His commands.

Being faithful to God requires that we wholeheartedly trust Him and follow His example of love and care.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed” (Luke 4:18) Jesus spoke these words at the beginning of His ministry. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to carry out that same mission in our day to day lives. We are to exercise faith, compassion, and discipline like our Savior. Jesus walked by faith and led through example, having no sins.

There are many people who do not have a Christian family or a church life, or atmosphere that foster spiritual growth. The significance of a church environment is pervasive in one’s life. Going to church on Sundays translates to going to our Heavenly Father’s house. This should be done not out of routine, but out of love for our God who wakes us up each morning and watches over us. Church provides an atmosphere with other believers to celebrate God’s work in each person’s life. However, going to church is not enough for Christians. God gave each Christian a command to witness to others.

The word, ‘evangelize’ means “to preach, to tell the good news.” Essentially, evangelizing is sharing God’s promises of eternal life, eternal love, and salvation with others so their lives can be transformed for Christ. Matthew 28:19-20 commands us to share God’s love with others. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” The call is evident and the responsibility is on each Christian to tell others about Christ. As followers of Christ, it is our role to be a true witness of Christ.

John R. W. Stott discussed evangelism as a serious order, stating “We engage in evangelism, not necessarily because we want to, or because we choose to, or because we like to; but because we have been told to. The church is under orders. The risen Lord has commanded us to go, to preach, and to make disciples, and that is enough for us.”

The gift of salvation frees sinners from sin and reveals God’s love for each of us. By witnessing to others we open up the possibility of others coming closer to the gift of salvation and teach others about our Heavenly Father who is capable of doing the impossible.

This year’s theme for family conference is a reminder to put our faith into action. Let us rise with greater determination and move in during days of challenge with the goal of following God’s command and holding steadfast onto our faith. ■

A Brief Devotion—Youth

Rev. Jaisen A. Thomas, Dallas [Read Matt. 4:1-11]

Peer pressure manifests itself in different manners throughout the various stages of our life and growth. In fact, peer pressure is a person, time and context specific temptation that in many ways may be distinct. Therefore, when a friend falls victim to a pressure we may feel that we would never falter in such a predicament. However, we may succumb to a different pressure that perhaps our friend would not. In this passage, we observe the pressures Jesus Christ faced right before He began His public ministry. Let us together study the method of pressure that the devil used against Jesus.

Peer Pressure, as a temptation amidst needs

Often times, peer pressure is understood as a move to fulfill our wants and desires. However, in verse 3, we read that the tempter came to Jesus at a time when He was physically famished. In fact, the tempter in this passage is working to deviate Jesus from His intended purpose of prayer and fasting. Although, it was the physical need of His body at the moment, Christ communicated that the spiritual need was greater. Likewise, it must be understood that even in the midst of physical or emotional need or weakness we must choose the fulfillment of our spiritual needs over the pressures of the body.

Peer Pressure, as temptation towards the easy route

We observe the proud statement of Satan, “all these I will give to you if you fall down and worship me” as the final

attempt. Is this possible? Would Jesus be tempted by such material elements? This, was, however, perhaps the greatest temptation placed before Jesus. Satan, in fact, was speaking the truth in that all the nations and peoples were under his control. That is, they were ruled by greed, selfishness, power, etc. which are all contrary to the values of God. As such, Satan essentially is willing to relinquish his authority over the peoples of the world and offer Christ the victory, if He but worships him. This meant that Christ would not have to endure the cross as Satan would cease his efforts. Yet, Christ renounced Satan and accepted His purpose and mission in the divine will of God. We too, are often given the opportunity to take the easy route believing it would get us the same intended result. However, let us be sure that no one deviates us from God’s plan and purpose for us even if we have to take the long and hard road.

Peer pressure cannot be easily avoided. Yet, when we are faced with such situations we are given special opportunities to reveal our true identity in Christ. Let us evaluate our experiences, our needs and weaknesses so that we may be stronger to respond. Jesus Christ responded to Satan with the Scripture. Similarly, the Scripture must be our strength and weapon against pressures. Satan used the readily available materials to tempt Christ. So, we must be mindful that there is much to tempt and pressure even in our midst. We can overcome and with Christ we will overcome!

LOUISIANA MISSIONS TRIP—APRIL 2009

During the week of March 29–April 5, approximately 25 individuals, from multiple parishes across North America, convened in Dula, LA, to volunteer their time in rebuilding homes for victims of hurricanes. Apart from two members, the majority of the team came relatively unskilled but with a heart to learn, serve, and grow. Under the direction of Mr. Ashby Mathews from the Los Angeles Mar Thoma Church, the team split into various work projects and rebuilt a bathroom, painted a house, tore down a damaged home and grouted and tiled a portion of the floor of the local church. The team as usual bonded in a new and wholesome way. The partnership with the United Methodist church introduced us to a Methodist church team from Georgia. These retired teammates in their 60s and 70s worked alongside us with joy and laughter. The wisdom of their years combined with our youth resulted in much learning, teaching, fellowship and work being accomplished. For many, the highlight was a combined service on Thursday evening where our team sang in

Malayalam and their team washed the feet of some of our members in a symbol of Christ’s love and sacrifice.

This missions project is different from the other Native American Mission projects. This project is about putting Christ’s love into action through service. Although members of our team may be unskilled; their enthusiasm, energy and ability to do hard manual labour resulted in much work being accomplished. The highlight for veterans of the trip was re-visiting the home that we have reconstructed in November of 2008 and to see it finished and a family occupying it. Although we are going out to serve the local community we as members of the Mar Thoma Church are enjoying each other’s company through friendship, kind words and encouragement. I have much gratitude and thanks to Mr. and Mrs. O. C. and Nirmala Abraham for gearing up this project. Their enthusiasm and leadership during their retirement years is a true inspiration.

Charles Philip, Canadian Mar Thoma Church



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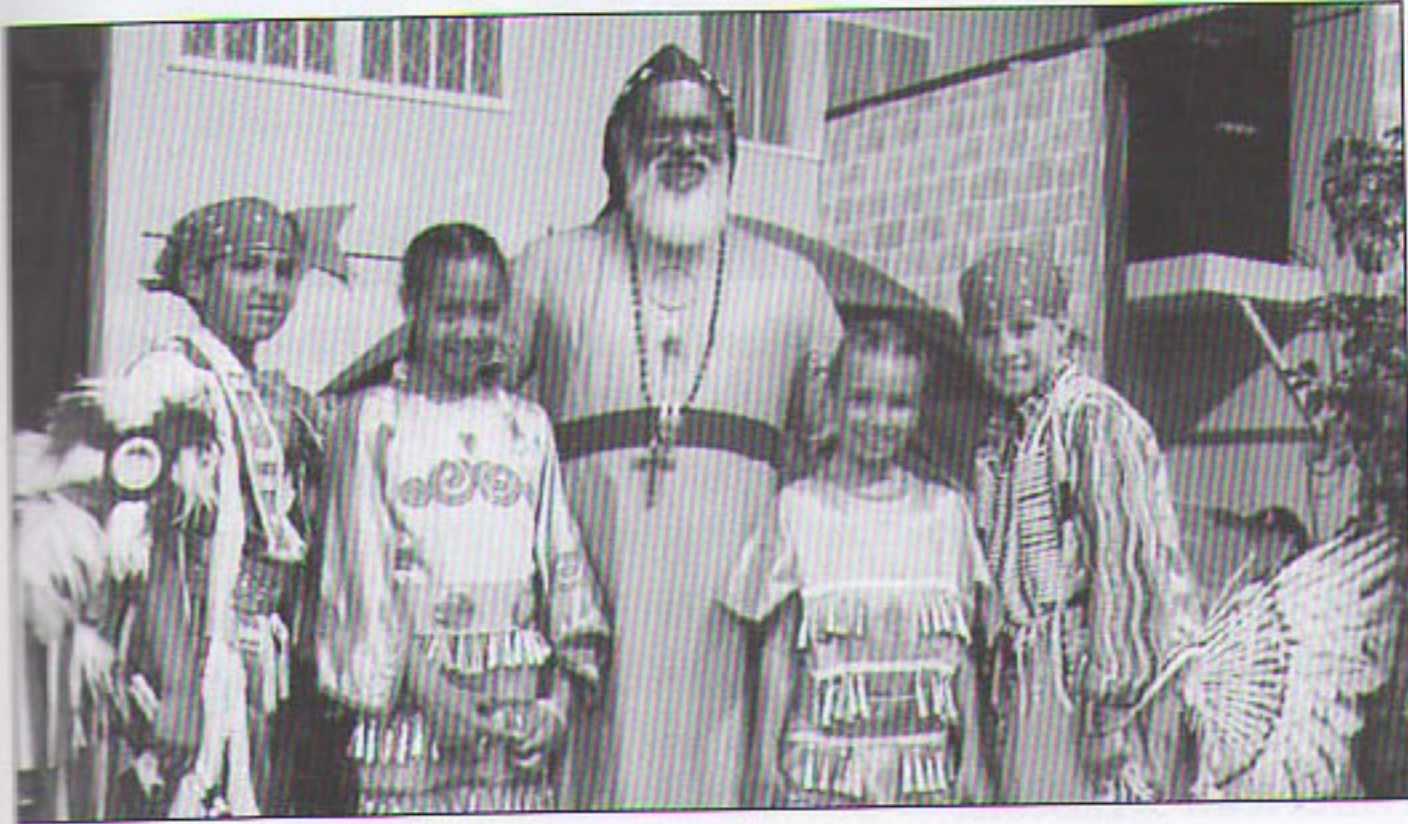
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NATIVE AMERICAN MISSION TRIP—MT. VERNON, ALABAMA (JUNE 15 - 19 2009)

WELCOME TO OUR VBS FAMILY

"Welcome home to our VBS family!" read the sign posted on the tree outside Aldersgate United Methodist Church as we were greeted with smiling faces and bear hugs. It was my first time volunteering for the Native American Mission Trip in



Mount Vernon, Alabama and I was already accepted as a member of the family. Approximately 24 youths from Atlanta MTC, Hermon MTC, Philadelphia MTC, Ascension MTC, Delaware Valley MTC, Washington MTC, and Los Angeles MTC were involved in this year's mission trip. Nirmala aunty, O. C. Abraham uncle, (Philadelphia); Dr. Suresh Mathews uncle, Anny Varghese, Susan Abraham (Atlanta); as well as several volunteers from Aldersgate, under the leadership of June Waver, the director of VBS, diligently contributed their time, efforts, and prayers for the success of this mission. During my stay in Alabama, I experienced the endless love of Christ through the Choctaw Indian community as well as through the volunteers. This community was very supportive and enthusiastic about our mission work and even opened up their homes for the volunteers to stay in for the week.

This year's VBS theme was Camp E.D.G.E: Experience and Discover God Everywhere. During the week of June 15th, we covered four lessons: Joshua leading the Israelites to the Promised Land after crossing the Jordan River, Jesus visiting the Pharisee's house, Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, and



Jesus visiting Mary and the disciples after his resurrection. God is with me—I will stay close to God, God Guides me—I will follow, God teaches me—I will learn, God loves me—I will love God and others, God sends me—I will go; were the messages the students have learnt.

The VBS consisted of classes, music, crafts, games, Bible adventures in which Bible stories were reenacted in a skit, and discovery time where children were taught about Jesus through science. A major component of the VBS included memorizing scripture in which children were rewarded with prizes if they were able to memorize the Bible verse of the day. The children also raised over \$300.00 to support a housing project of a Choctaw missionary and his family in Oklahoma. The older youth in the community were given leadership roles during the VBS so that they may be able to be an active part of the church. Approximately 144 Choctaw children attended this blessed event.

We were blessed with the presence of Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius and Rev. Jai Varghese, Vicar of Atlanta MTC on Monday. Thirumeni reminded us that with every call of Christ, there is a mission and that the Mar Thoma youth should continue to expand our mission with our Native American brothers and sisters. This year, we organized evening programs including a drug awareness night seen from a biblical perspective for children ages 11 and up. Since many of the children in the Choctaw community struggle with the pressures of drug abuse and premarital sex, the program allowed the children to openly discuss their stories and feelings and allowed the volunteers to explain Christ's view on these issues.

The last day of VBS was family fun day. This included a program by the children for their parents, food for all the



church family including Kerala delicacies like, biriyani, beef curry and payasam. A parade with a VBS float, and a pow-wow that involves traditional Native American singing and dancing were other interesting events. It was amazing to experience and become a part of the rich Native American culture while sharing the love of Christ.

For me, this mission trip will never be forgotten. I have a new found passion for mission work and I learnt the importance of being a living testimony of Christ's love. I will always remember the great love of the Choctaw community and the unity that I felt working with my new family. As Romans 12:5 says: "so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another". Christ gave the Mar Thoma Church the opportunity to extend the kingdom of God through the Native Americans. I know that Christ is active in Mt. Vernon, Alabama and will always be with the Choctaw Indian community.

Stacey Abraham, Ascension MTC, Philadelphia

NATIVE AMERICAN MISSION BUILDING PROJECT, OKLAHOMA

On June 3, 2009, a team of Marthomites participated in the Groundbreaking for the Youth minister's house at Camp Folsom. The participants were Rev. Jason Thomas, Rev. Shibi Abraham, Mrs. Betty Jacob, (Choctaw Folsom Camp Director) Mr. Abraham Mathew, Mrs. Leelamma Issac, Mr. P. T. Issac, Mr. Mathew T. George, and Mr. O. C. Abraham.

The purpose of the project is to add rooms as well as a kitchen and a bathroom to an existing one-room cabin to accommodate a new Choctaw Youth minister and his family. They have recently moved into Broken Bow to help the Choctaw community.

Both the Choctaw community and Volunteers from the Mar Thoma Churches will assist in this building project.

We are still in the process of collecting funds as well as volunteers to help the construction. Many of our organizations and individuals have helped so far.

We hope to conduct two work camps: One is on September 19th and 20th and the second one is from



October 10-12th at Camp Folsom, Broken Bow, Oklahoma. Please come and help.

We appreciate assistance in donation of money or labor towards this project.

This is the first attempt at providing housing for a needy family through our Diocesan mission programs in the USA. Thanks for your support of the Native American Mission.

Nirmala Abraham, Convener, Native American Mission

OKLAHOMA NATIVE AMERICAN MISSION

"Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God"

— William Carey

On June 1st, 2009, the Lord called 11 of our youth and 7 adults from the Texas, Oklahoma, and Philadelphia regions into His Native American mission field in Folsom Camp, Broken Bow, Oklahoma. (Ammu, Tina, Abey, Chris, Ben from Carrollton, Jane, Sharon, Nivin, Rev. Jason Thomas, Mr. Abraham Mathew, Mathew, George, Mr. & Mrs. P. T. Issac, from Farmers Branch, Patrick from St. Paul's, Rev. Shibi Abraham from Houston, Jeremy from Oklahoma, Sheeba and Rima and O. C. Abraham from Philadelphia). We had the opportunity to conduct Vacation Bible School program for everyone at the Choctaw Camp. This five-day program included, singing, campfires, bible classes and so much more.

For a few of the youth including myself, it was our first time taking part in the Oklahoma mission field. Most of us were quite nervous going into it since we had no idea what to expect or what exactly would be required of us. As soon as we arrived, our mission was very clear to us at that point. Majority of the children and teenagers that attended came from broken families and poor living conditions. It was very evident that these kids basically needed our time, attention, and most importantly love.

Each day's routine started off with meeting in the camp's church and having a singing session as well as a message delivered by either Rev. Jaisen Thomas, Rev. Shibi



Abraham, or Pastor Randy of the Choctaw camp. After this the kids would disperse into their classes, which were taught by our youth that attended. After classes, meals were served, followed by outdoor activities, and then another session of class. The evenings were revolved around experiencing the cultural aspect of the Choctaw Indians. We were educated on Choctaw legends and religious chants. We even had the chance to learn a few of their ritual dances. "It was so moving to see that their culture is still alive and embraced even today" (Abey Mathew, 19 Dallas, TX)

This trip truly left a spiritual impact on each and every one of us. "God's love is vast and deep. It knows no boundaries. The amount of love these kids hold within them is something that is completely above us. A love so deep should be spread among any and every nation—it's our duty and responsibility to share it." (Tina Simon, 19, Dallas TX) I encourage anyone and everyone to attend this mission project. God calls on us through various forms and He is calling each of us now to lend a helping hand to our brothers and sisters in these mission fields. We experience God's Love every day, it is now our turn to pass it on.

Ammu Varghese, Dallas, TX



The Mission Project to the Choctaw Indians is more than just a community service project. Rather, the work has become a blessing for both sides. Together, we have grown in our relationship with Christ and in our bonds with each other. Together, we have learned much about ourselves, about our future, and have even developed common goals that benefit both communities.

Since 2003, the Mar Thoma Church of Oklahoma and the Mar Thoma Churches in Dallas have participated in Vacation Bible Schools, Youth Rallies, Youth Camps, Various Building Projects, and other Fellowship type events that have bonded us closer in the family of Christ. The goal of these projects is to help increase youth participation in the Choctaw Events; to increase a sense of community and fellowship for all members of their church and ours; and also to grow spiritually in our faith walk with Christ.

Short History of the Choctaw Nation

- 1818** Elk Presbytery sent Reverends Samuel King and William Moore to the Tombigbee River area, the area where the Choctaws and the Chickasaws made their home.
- 1820** The Choctaws were very receptive to the message of Christ and they were moved to the Christian Faith.
- 1831** The Choctaws along with many of the other American Indian tribes were forced to move to the Indian Territory that was assigned to them. The Trail of Tears represents the march to the new land and memorializes those who died along the way.
- 1847** Israel Folsom along with two other Choctaws was ordained by the Red River Presbytery and formed the new Choctaw Presbytery.
- 1906** The United States officially closed the Indian Territory and renamed it the state of Oklahoma. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church however continued its work among the Choctaws.
- 1914** The McGee Chapel Church was the first Church among the Choctaw Nation.
- 2003** Mar Thoma Church on the invitation of Rev. Eugene Wilson of the Choctaw Presbytery started the mission with the Choctaw Native Americans and provided leadership for VBS and Medical Mission at Smithville churches.

Previous Events

God has richly blessed us so far this year with a number of fellowship activities between our two churches. The Mar Thoma Church of Oklahoma has conducted a Fellowship Picnic in February and a Youth Rally in March. Both events were held at the McGee Chapel in Broken Bow, OK. The major event was a 3 on 3 Basketball Tournament in April that was held at Coalgate, Oklahoma with the help of the Coal Creek Church. All events were very successful and

involved many youths from both the Mar Thoma and the Choctaw Churches. In addition to having fellowship with the youths through events like Bowling, basketball, barbecue, and water rides at the Beavers Bend State Park, we also had biblical devotionals and a time of worship provided by our youth volunteers. We had a chance to grow in our opportunities to interact with each other and to share in our common faith walks with God. In addition, we were very fortunate to have one of our own youth spend two months in Broken Bow. He conducted weekly bible study classes and worship programs for the youths and adults of the McGee Chapel and it was a blessing for both sides.

On June 1-5, 2009, the Choctaw Presbytery Church hosted their annual weeklong camp. It was held at Camp Israel Folsom near Bethel, Oklahoma. Over 60 children and youth participated in this year's camp. Almost twenty members from Dallas, Philadelphia, and Oklahoma City volunteered their time and efforts to make this camp a success. Our volunteers were teachers, music leaders, camp counselors, recreation leaders, and even cooks and servers for meals. Rev. Jaisen Thomas and Rev. Shibi Abraham, youth chaplains for the Southwest Region, provided the youth with able leadership and gave inspiring devotionals throughout the week. This year's theme was 'Camp E.D.G.E.: Experience and Discover God Everywhere'. It focused on living through your faith to experience and encounter God wherever you may be. By studying the stories of Joshua and Jesus, campers were able to discover that they could seek and know God in various places, not only at church.

UPCOMING MISSION PROJECTS

August 29-30 (Sat./Sun.) – The Mar Thoma Church of Oklahoma will be participating in a Choctaw Youth Rally to be held in Honobia, Oklahoma.

September 19-20 (Sat./Sun.) – Building Project to add rooms to an existing cabin to accommodate a new Youth Minister's family that has moved into Broken Bow to help the Choctaw Presbytery.

October 10-11 (Sat./Sun.) – Continuation of the above mentioned Building Project.

November 21-22 (Sat./Sun.) – Mar Thoma Church of Oklahoma will be conducting a Thanksgiving Retreat for the Choctaw Youths.

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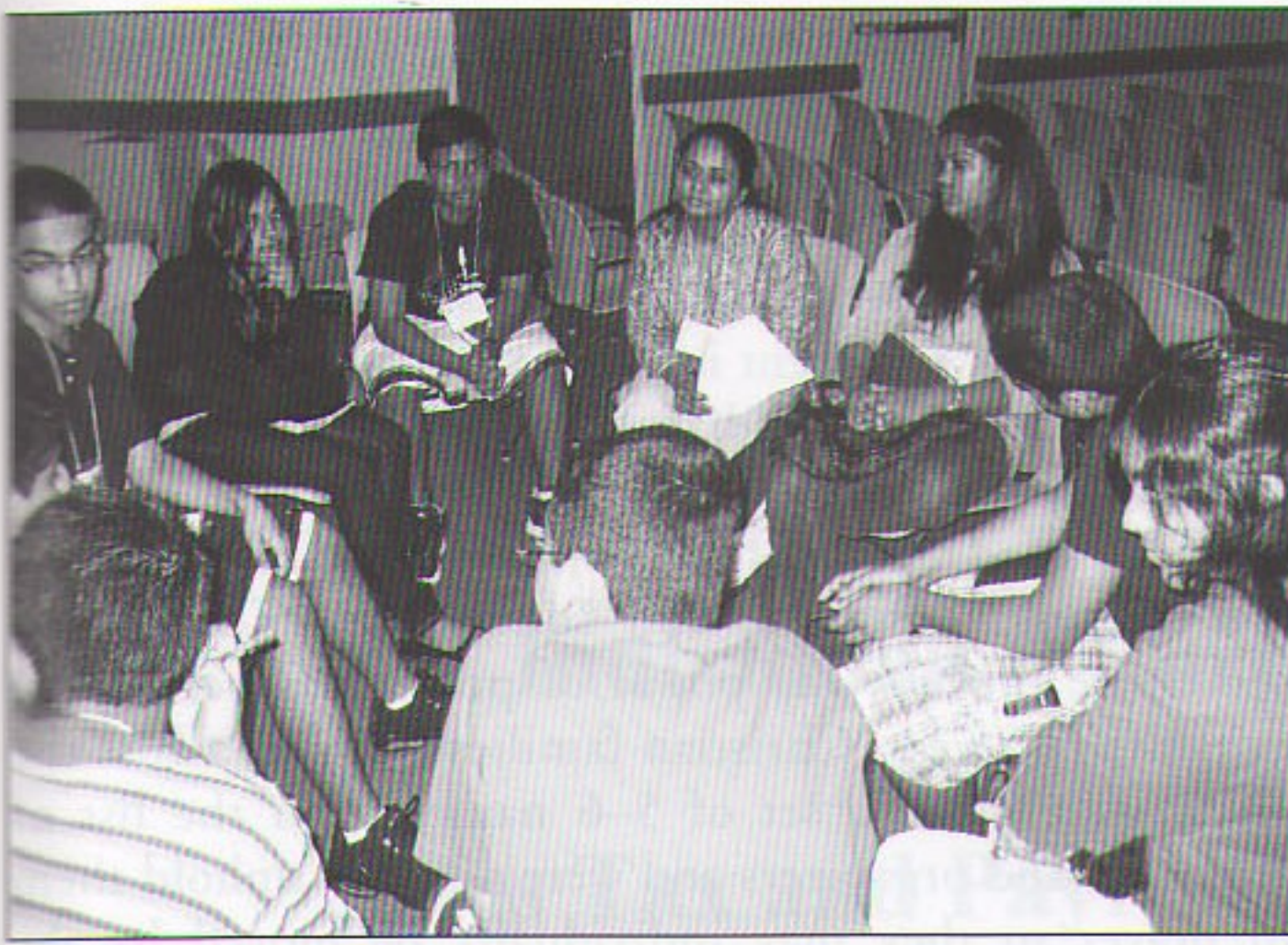


Junior/Senior Students Conference of the Eastern Zone (Southeast and Northeast Region) Sunday Schools was held at Ramapo College, New Jersey, from July 16th through 19th 2009. This year's conference was hosted by the Southeast regional Sunday Schools. Over 300 students attended this four-day conference. The theme for the conference was **"Got Christ?"** Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius gave the inaugural address and Rt. Rev. Dr. Abraham Mar Paulos gave the theme message. Using AV media Thirumeni introduced several biblical characters including Joseph and Mary, the blind man, Zacheus, the disciples, the centurion and so on who "Got Christ" in their lives and left a thought provoking question, "What about YOU"? Theme presentation by students of

Bethel Mar Thoma Sunday School was commendable. Southeast regional president Rev. George M. Kuruvilla welcomed the leaders and dignitaries to the conference and secretary Mr. Thomas Philip did the vote of thanks.

Along with our Bishops and youth chaplains, Mark and Rachelle Ayala from the Youth for Christ (YFC) ministries led the main talks. Mrs, Rachelle is the director of Friday Night Live program for the Long Island chapter of YFC ministry. Rev. Roy A. Thomas and Rev. Biju P. Simon, the youth chaplains of the Southeast and Northeast regions led the Bible study sessions on Friday and Saturday. Theodosius thirumeni addressed the Juniors and Seniors separately on Thursday morning. The highlights of the conference includes, "Ask the Bishops", Symposium on "Temptations





and Addictions”, Group discussions, Praise & Worship, Christian Band, Talent Night etc. The Witnessing and Dedication session on Saturday was the climax of the

conference. More than 100 children witnessed and dedicated/rededicated their lives to Christ. The witnessing session for the Seniors was extended till 1:00 am on Sunday morning.

On Sunday, parents from various parishes joined the Holy Communion service with their children. Rev. Biju P. Simon conducted the Holy Communion service and Rev. Roy A. Thomas shared the Word of God. Followed by the Holy Communion was the closing ceremony program. In the closing program, a slide show depicting the highlights of the conference was shown. Reflections on the conference were heard from the students and teachers. Everyone held their hands together in unity as the Junior Senior conference 2009 ended with a melodious song from the Praise and Worship team followed by prayer and benediction.

Thomas Philip, Secretary, South-East Region SS

CANADIAN REGIONAL MAR THOMA YOUTH CONFERENCE-2009



“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

This verse was the bedrock behind the theme of the 2009 Canadian Regional Mar Thoma Youth Conference — **“Extreme Makeover: Christ Edition.”** It was held at Camp Medeba (<http://www.medeba.com>), located in West Guilford, Ontario, on May 16-18, 2009.

Although the Canadian Regional Youth Conference is an annual event taking place on the Victoria Day long weekend, there were several new aspects that made this

conference unique from its predecessors. For the past 10 years, it has been a junior youth (ages 13-21) event with the senior youth playing various leadership roles throughout the weekend. However, in order to fulfill the spiritual needs of those very senior youth, an idea was proposed and approved to make the 2009 Conference for both the junior and senior youth members.

A record breaking attendance of 156 participants from the St. Mathew’s Mar Thoma Church and the Canadian Mar Thoma Church were blessed to have both of their respective vicars, Rev. Alex P. John and Rev. A. Abraham, present with them. This year’s conference also had two guest

speakers who each gave 3 thought provoking talks related to this year's theme. Rev. Jaisen A. Thomas, who is the Youth Chaplain in Dallas, led the junior youth, while John Thomas, a profound and active member of the Mar Thoma Church in New York graciously accepted to guide our senior youth with their spiritual walk. After each of these talks, the junior delegation would separate into their discussion groups led by their discussion leaders while John Thomas would lead the senior group in meaningful and fruitful discussions to bring about effective leadership in their respective churches. Both speakers also provided the youth with an open forum after each daily program had concluded, where delegates could come and informally have their concerns addressed.

The weekend was also richly blessed by the incredible Awake Youth Praise and Worship band that led the entire delegation in Praise and Worship throughout their stay at the camp. Another exceptional part of the weekend were the inspiring witness skits performed by St. Mathews' very own drama group, The PRAY—Parable Renditions of Awake Youth. Workshop sessions this year provided us with some memorable moments as delegates were split into 4 groups and were able to participate in workshop stations designed by workshop leaders from the St. Mathew's youth as well as extra curricular activities provided by Camp Medeba.

This year marked the first ever Talent Concert followed by a very moving and spiritually uplifting dedication service

led by John Thomas and Liju Mathew. Over 20 leaders were assigned as "Prayer Warriors" and would lead various youth into prayer after they had dedicated themselves to Christ. This service was without a doubt, the most powerful night of the conference, and a true testament to the prayer and hard work that went into the entire weekend. On the final day, the Holy Qurbana Worship Service was held, followed by brunch

The road to conference was long in terms of constructing, designing and fundraising. Throughout the entire process, the power of prayer has been quite evident. This year, Christian families from all across the globe were given a set of 5-6 names from the list of attendees and organizers and were asked to uphold them in prayer so they may individually be moved by the Spirit. The program for this year's conference had been altered from previous years to accommodate both speakers and both delegations. While this was the first attempt at such an endeavour, His blessings ensured the conference went smoothly. The culmination of the 2009 Canadian Regional Mar Thoma Youth Conference left its delegates with an inspiration to rekindle a fire within their churches and there is no doubt that God's work will be greatly manifested around the Toronto area in the near future.

Jonathan Vadaketh, Youth Conference Convener

INDIA MISSION TOUR-2009

October 1-21, 2009 (tentative)

**Visiting Delhi Diocese Mission Fields
(Itarsi, Sihora, Bhopal, etc.)**

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DIOCESAN SUNDAY SCHOOL EXAMINATION RANK LIST

We are glad to publish the rank list of the Diocesan Examination conducted on May 03, 2009. We have 51 students who scored A+ rank and they will be receiving plaques and 463 students will receive certificates for their achievement. There were 1300 students who took the examination from 46 Sunday schools under this Diocese. St. John's Mar Thoma Sunday school in London, England also participated in this year's examination, thus expanding the scope of the Diocesan Sunday School to the Europe Region.

We hope that more Sunday Schools in England and Ireland will participate next year.

We, as Sunday School Council, appreciate the efforts of aches, superintendents/headmasters, teachers, parents and students in the preparation, coaching and execution of the Diocesan Examination. (Please see the Rank List published on our diocesan website at: www.marthomanae.org under organization—Sunday School.)

Cherian Alexander, Diocesan Secretary of Sunday School

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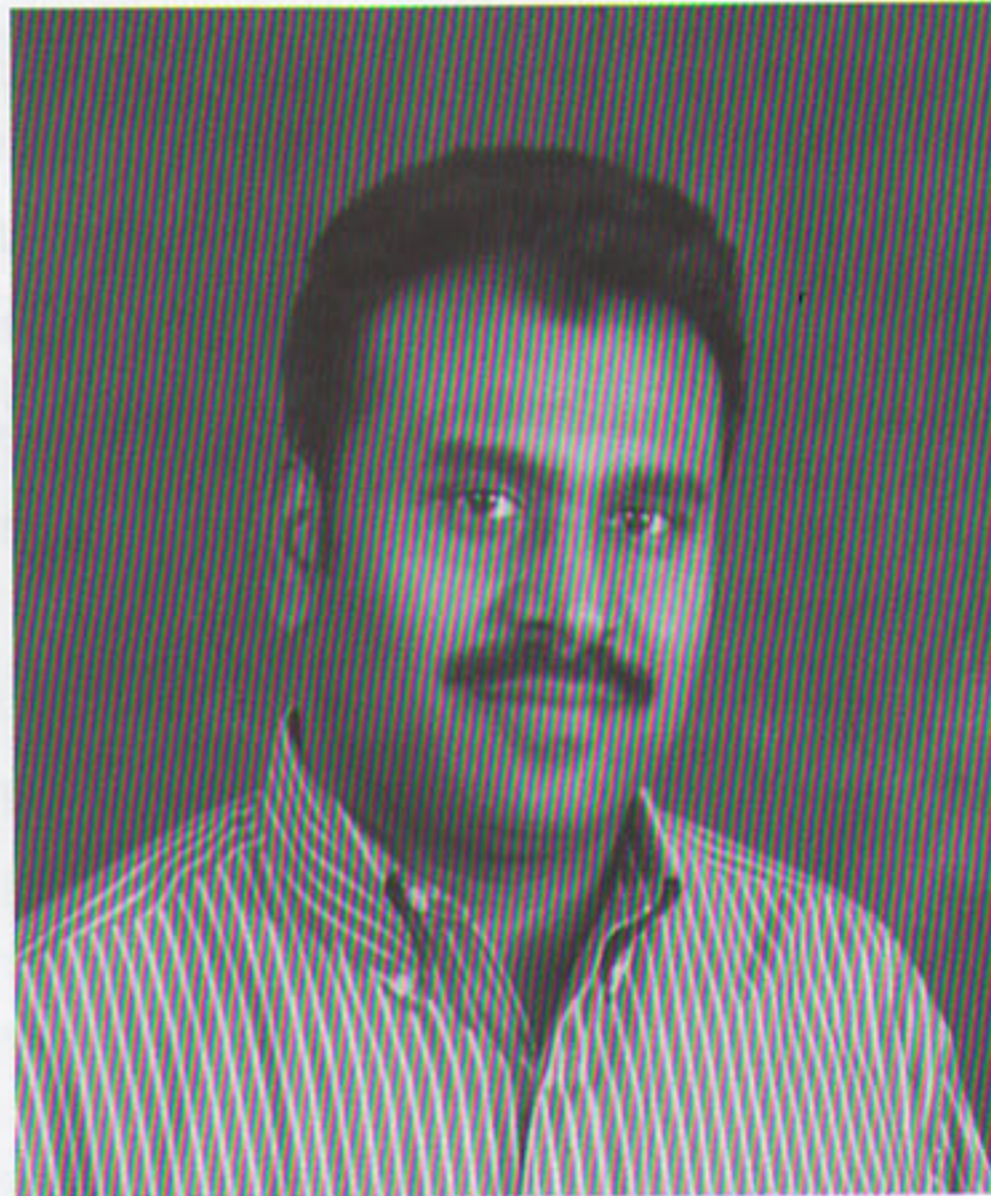
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Shibu M. Abraham

(08/25/1987–04/01/2009)

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, You are mine” (Isaiah 43:1)

Dedicated to: My Beloved Brother Shibu M. Abraham

Forever you'll be loved

Shiby Trigy

*I wish this was a dream and I'd wake to see you alive again,
Knowing that you're gone gives me so much grief and pain.
Every morning I wonder how I will make through each day;
I pray day and night that God will make a way;
I cannot understand why God took you away so young:
No pain in my life compares to the way your death has stung,
I'll always cherish your precious laugh and smile;
Why did you leave, couldn't you stay for awhile?
You were more than a brother, raised like my son
Loving you in this lifetime, I was not done.
I remember our childhood, how I held you in my arms
Always protecting my baby brother from all harm;
I feel so sad I couldn't help you that night,
I am just waiting for the day we will reunite.
Here on earth forever you'll be adored,
Above in heaven, safe with our Lord,
I know you watching over us from above
I miss you so much, forever you'll be loved.*

I love you so much!! – **Shiby Chechi**

Shibu Abraham Memorial Fund

Shibu was notably passionate of two worthy causes: “Mexico Medical Missions” & “Doctors without Borders”.

If you would like to make a donation to either of these organizations, please send a check, paid to the order of:

St. Andrews MTC Youth Fellowship • 58 Crescent Place, Yonkers, NY 10704

With *“Memorial Fund”* as the memo

Defender of Faith—Book Review

Prof. Dr. Zac Varghese, London

I am grateful to Rev Dr. M. J. Joseph for asking me to write a review on the book, "*Defender of Faith*", which was recently published by Mar Thoma Theological College as a birth centenary tribute to late Rev. C. V. John. M. J. Joseph achen, as the editor in chief, was able to influence 42 eminent contributors for this commemorative volume from different spheres of life, which included bishops, clergy, theologians, lay leaders, journalists, administrators, judges and academicians. The three word title: '*Defender of Faith*' sums up so eloquently the amazing life and mission of a unique priest of the Mar Thoma Church who lived out his life so valiantly and faithfully for defending the reformation principles and the catholicity of the Apostolically-established Mar Thoma Church at a critical and turbulent time. God in His providence gave us vintage leadership through those testing times for us to enjoy a rich harvest; it was indeed the golden period of the Mar Thoma Church. It is an important book for all Mar Thoma Christians and others who would love to trace the history of the Christianity in India in the twentieth century.

'Defender of the Faith' is a title given to the monarchs of England ever since this title was bestowed on Henry VIII by the Pope Leo X in 1521 in recognition of King's treaties against the early stages of protestant reformation. Therefore, the title of the book itself is a long over due posthumous medal of honour conferred on C. V. John achen. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan most sincerely highlights this in his introduction. Achen was indeed a prince among our clergy and deserves this title not only for defending our faith in the high court of India as a co-defendant with late Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan but also for walking the faith and walking the talk all his life. We should be grateful to the editors for feeling the pulse of our people in offering this crown of distinction upon late C. V. John achen. I encourage readers to critically analyse each and every chapter of this book and find out for themselves how achen became the '*Defender of Faith*.' Those who do not know the turbulent history of the Mar Thoma Church during the middle part of the twentieth century should certainly read

this book to find out how achen has earned the title. Achen's other roles in building the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary at Kottayam is also highlighted. It is worth studying how achen, as the diocesan secretary, co-ordinated and directed the activities of the vast northern diocese when the Church only had two bishops, after the sudden death of Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan. Chrysostom Valiya Metropolitan who knew C. V. John achen more than most described him as a man of vision, focused, disciplined, and willing the things God willed for his life and mission. Achen was thoroughly equipped with all the necessary skills as a pastor, listener, communicator, scholar, teacher, and mentor. It was indeed an amazing life!

Many years ago several millions of television viewers watched a world famous magician, Tommy Cooper, dying on the stage; most people thought it was one of his magical acts and did not realize that he died on the stage while doing the one thing that he loved most. C. V. John achen also was called to heavenly abode while he was praying the initial prayers for the Holy Communion service at Salem Mar Thoma Church at Ernakulam. It is often said that the manner of a person's death is a sure sign of the dignity, commitment and character of that individual; this is certainly true of achen's death. Is there any other way for a true servant of God to say good bye to his people? Achen was indeed a defender of faith until his last breath; such is the measure of the person that the Mar Thoma Church is honouring through this book. Achen was indeed a God-sent role model for all of us to protect our heritage, legacy, and traditions and particularly for our clergy to emulate. Achen's life was indeed a faithful response to God-given delegation, a calling. This book took shape because of the devotion and love of achen's eldest son, Georgie, which in itself is a blessing achen endowed on the church. For all these and many other reasons I enthusiastically recommend this book and congratulate Rev Dr. M. J. Joseph and others for accomplishing a task so well. This book can be obtained from the Mar Thoma Theological College, Kottayam, India.

BOOK REVIEW:

In Search of Christian Identity in Global Community

(Festschrift Volume containing essays and tributes in honor of Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa)

Chief Editor for First Edition: Rev. Dr. M. J. Joseph, Former Professor and Principal of Mar Thoma Seminary, Kottayam, Former Director of Ecumenical Christian Center, Bangalore, Convener Ecological Commission of Mar Thoma Church, Bangalore.

Chief Editor for Second Edition: Dr. Mathew T. Thomas, Diocesan Council Member, MTC of Greater Washington.

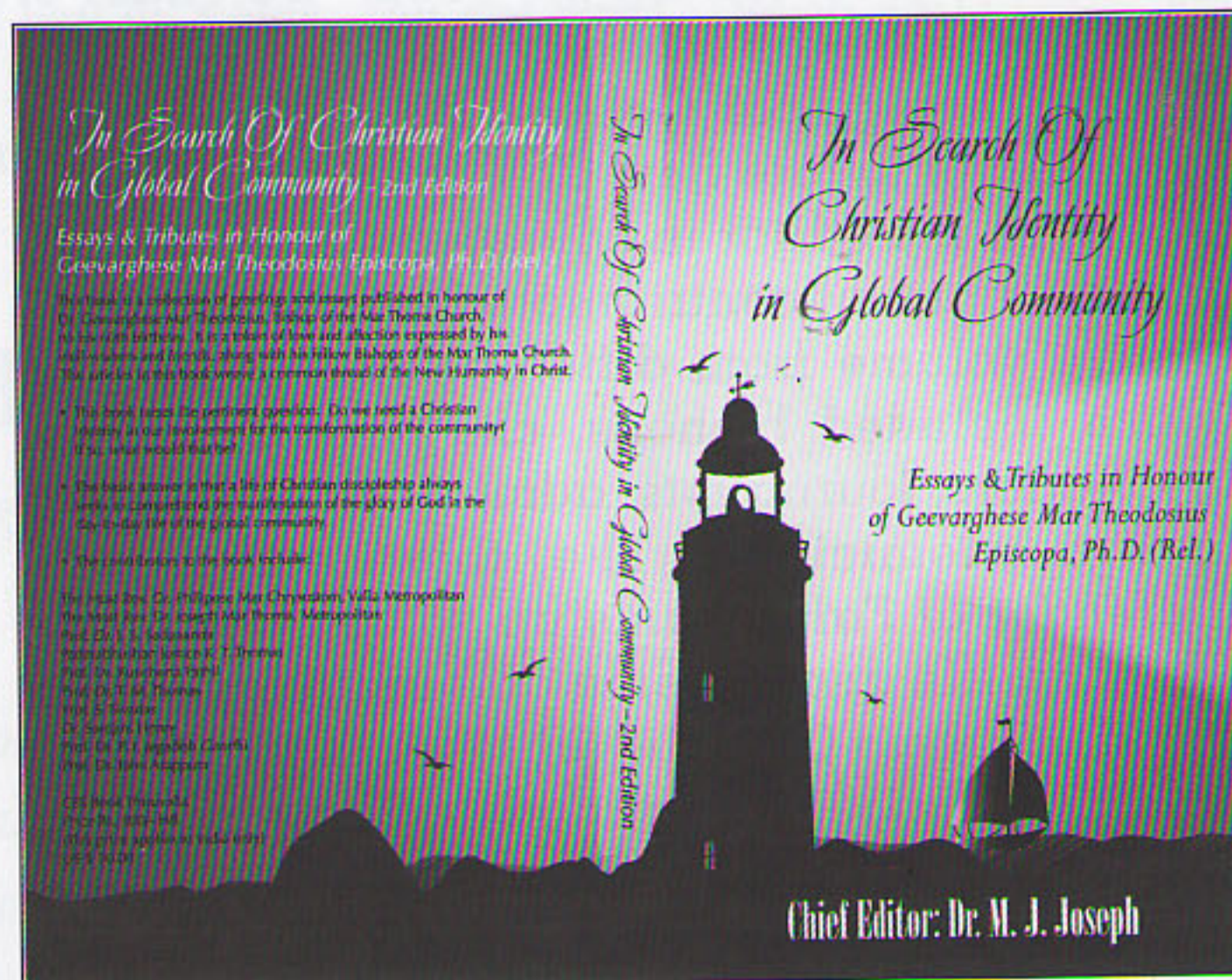
Second Edition Jointly Published By: The Diocese of North America and Europe and Christava Sahitya Samithy, Thiruvalla.

First Edition Published in 2008 in Thiruvalla and Second Edition Published in 2009 in New York.

Distributed By: C. S. S. Bookshop, Tiruvalla-1, Kerala, S. India. Price in India: Rs. 300/- U. S. \$30.00 (on Sale for \$20.00) Also available at Mar Thoma Literature Society, Diocese of North America & Europe, 2320 S. Merrick Avenue, Merrick, NY 11566 Tel: (516) 377-3311 E-Mail: marthomadiocese@gmail.com. It is also available at the local parishes of the diocese. Please contact your Vicar, Assembly members or Diocesan Council members.

‘There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered.’ - Nelson Mandela. This book reminds us to go back to the roots of our rich heritage and retrieve our true Christian identity. It also challenges us to be witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ by sharing our true Christian identity in the community where we are planted by God. This Festschrift Volume, published in honor of Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa on the occasion his 60th birthday and 20th anniversary of consecration as an Episcopa of the Mar Thoma Church, speaks in itself about the need to search for one’s Christian identity in global community in a multicultural context. Mar Theodosius was consecrated as a Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church on December 9, 1989 along with Geevarghese Mar Athanasius and Euyakim Mar Coorilos. The articles in the book remind us that a life of Christian discipleship always seeks to comprehend the manifestation of the glory of God in the day to day life of the global community. In this Festschrift Volume, the contributors celebrate the basic pastoral and prophetic concern of Mar Theodosius in the context of the general theme ‘In Search of Christian Identity in Global Community.’

The book gives an insight into the personality of Mar Theodosius, his vision and mission for glorifying God as he experiences God in the faith journey of the Church. Thirumeni’s dissertation for his Ph.D. ‘Change and continuity in the religious life of Ezhavas in the South Travancore’ is an expression of his academic discipline. Chrysostom Valiya Metropolitan says in this Festschrift Volume: ‘Christian identity formation is a process where the Christian community chooses the way initiated by Jesus Christ to establish kingdom relations in a society at a particular time.’ Joseph Mar Thoma writes in Festschrift Volume ‘Mar Theodosius is committed to reformation principle and devotion to our Lord; He is much interested to have the Christian



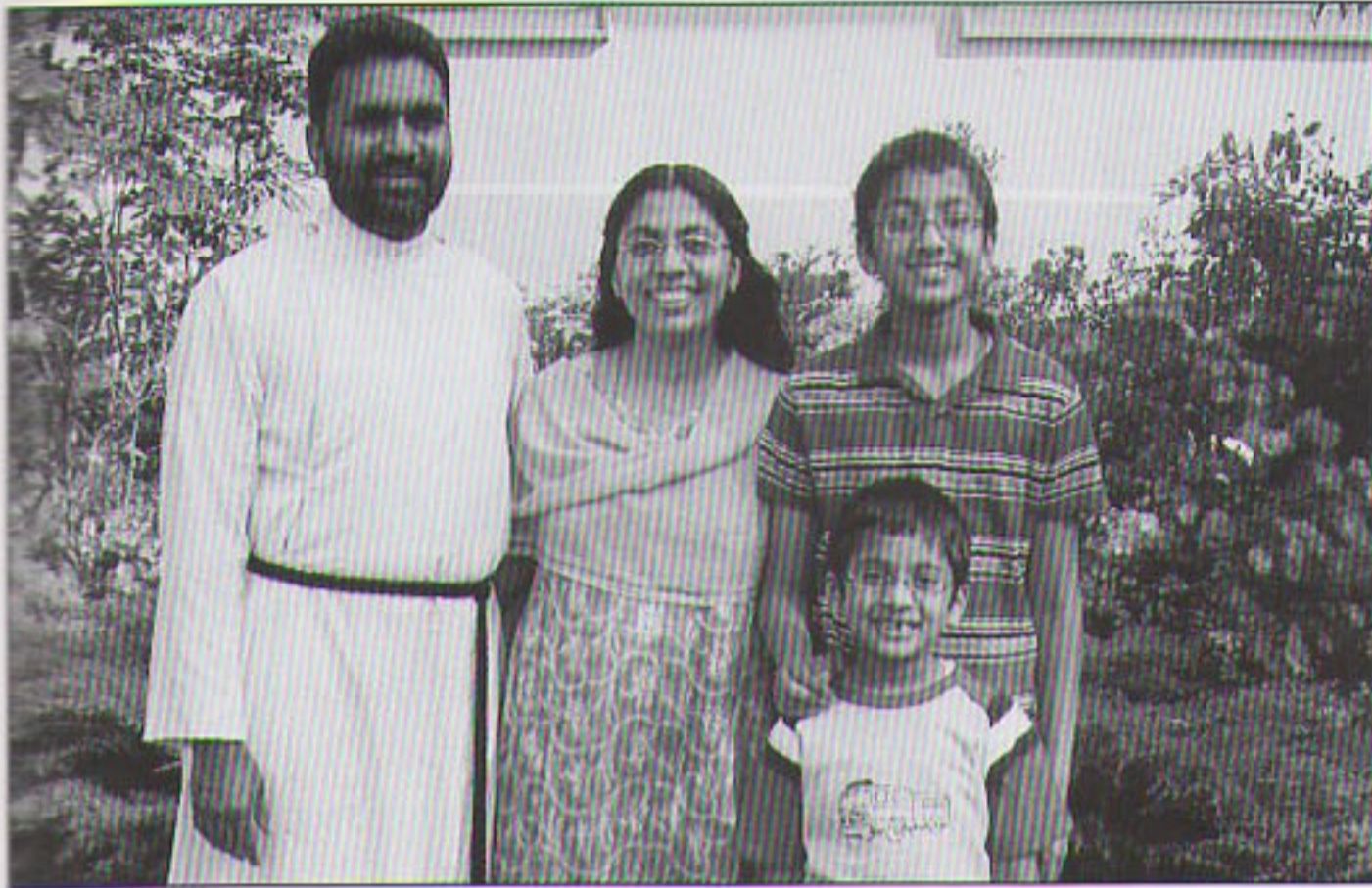
witness in a multiracial and multicultural religious society and he paid attention to the faith of the people in the neighborhood who live by a different religious ideology.’ Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Suffragan Metropolitan, writes in the book: ‘Mar Theodosius carries the torch of legacy with greater care and he is leaving his own foot prints in each area of work undertaken in each diocese.’

The Festschrift Volume is divided into seven parts: Part I include the greetings and messages from all Bishops of the Mar Thoma Church and brief bio-graphical sketch of Mar Theodosius. Part II contains the theme exposition by various contributors. Part III includes six selected articles of Mar Theodosius concentrating on the revitalization of local congregations, building peace and reconciliation through interfaith approach, and a close quarter approach about the interfaith concerns and ministry and mission of Mar Theodosius. Part IV deals with articles relating to Christian identity in North American context. The Festschrift Volume contains Mar Theodosius’s responses to questions posed by our Diocesan Council members, which highlights his thoughts on several aspects pertinent to the Diaspora community and his vision for the future of our diocese. It concludes with a photo gallery of the faith journey of Mar Theodosius, list of articles written by Mar Theodosius, names and details of the contributors of the book. This Festschrift Volume is a valuable reading by both adults and youths of this diocese and it will be a meaningful addition in your home library. The proceeds from the sale of the book are intended to provide scholarships to needy students in India as per the decision of the diocesan council. I recommend that each family in this diocese should have a copy of this book and be part of the mission of the diocese. I wish and pray that God may keep Thirumeni in His providence in the continued faith journey of the Church and enable him to be a true witness carrying the Christian identity in this multicultural society.

Lal Varghese Esq., Dallas

DIOCESAN/PARISH NEWS

CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES TO OUR NEW DIOCESAN/BISHOP'S SECRETARY



Rev. Vinoy Daniel, Neena Kochamma, Vineeth and Evin.

REV. VINOY DANIEL, DIOCESAN SECRETARY AND BISHOP'S SECRETARY: Rev. Vinoy Daniel is the son of Mr. T. M. Daniel and Mrs. Kunjamma Daniel of Tharayathu House, Pallikuth, Nilambur. His mother parish is Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Panamannu, Nilambur. Achen has completed a Masters Degree in Commerce. He studied at Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam, Kerala from where he completed his bachelor's degree in Theology. Later Achen earned a Masters Degree in Theology from Serampore University, Calcutta. He was ordained as a deacon of the Mar Thoma Church on June

20, 1995 at St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Thiruvalla, Kerala. He was ordained as a priest of the Mar Thoma Church on July 20, 1995 at Chungathara Salem Mar Thoma Church. Thereafter he served at various Mar Thoma parishes in Delhi, Mumbai, Gujarat, and Calcutta in India. He served as Superintendent of Navjeevan Center Half Way Home, Vapi and Secretary and Administrator of the Vapi Mission Hospital, Vapi, Gujarat. He also served as Vicar of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch from May 2007 – April 2009.

Vinoy Achen specialized in New Testament theology for his Masters Degree. His Bible classes are rich in doctrine with in depth Biblical knowledge, but simple enough to be understood by the laity. He married Neena Vinoy, daughter of Mr. T. K. Kuruvilla and Mrs. Saramma Kuruvilla of Thekkumkudiyil House, Ayakkad, in Ernakulam. They are blessed with two boys Vineeth and Evin, aged 11 years and 6 years respectively. He has been appointed as the Diocesan Secretary and Bishop's secretary with effect from May 1, 2009 in the Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church. The Editorial Committee, Managing Committee and Advisory Board of the Messenger wish him all success in his new endeavor and pray that God may continue to keep Achen and family in His providence and shower him with abundant blessings to continue in the faith journey of the Church.

PRISON MINISTRY AWARENESS MEETING IN DETROIT

Prison Ministry awareness meeting was held on Sunday, July 12, 2009 at the Detroit Mar Thoma Church. The guest speaker for this meeting was Denise Harris, the Field Director for the South Eastern Michigan Prison Fellowship. She has recruited and trained hundreds of volunteers for prison ministry, resulting in the transformation of prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families. Prior to our meeting, Denise attended our worship service and explained the purpose and activities of the Prison Ministry. She shared a moving personal testimony of how she has become involved with the prison ministry for the past ten years. Denise concluded by challenging the congregation to minister to men and women who are in prison and who are transitioning into our community.

Also Denise Harris briefly summarized the following areas of need:

- Volunteering to conduct in prison Bible studies
- Volunteering to mentor in-mates in preparation for re-entry
- Writing letters of encouragement to prisoners and their families
- Mentoring a youth whose parents are in prison

After her presentation to the congregation, about 60 people remained in the sanctuary for the question and answer session. The question and answer session appeared to clarify several concerns within the congregation. Many people are now excited to

attend the training sessions for Prison Ministry. Several Youth Fellowship members of our parish are particularly interested in participation in the Angel Tree Christmas Ministry, a program that delivers a Christmas gift and a life-changing message of Christ to children of prisoners. This year, Prison Fellowship is hoping to partner with the local churches nationwide in order to deliver Christmas gifts to the children of 400,000 prisoners. Please join with Prison Fellowship in prayer that God will bless these efforts.

We're getting ready to launch a 12-hour training sessions on July 31, August 14 and 21, 2009 for those who are interested in volunteering to serve with Prison Ministry team. The trainings will cover all the rules and regulations for volunteering within the Correction System as well as practical strategies for effective ministry. Attendees will have the opportunity to network with other Prison Ministry teams in the diocese.

The Detroit Mar Thoma Church Edavaka Mission would like to thank everyone who attended the Prison Ministry awareness meeting as well as those who are planning to aid the Prison Ministry through their time, talents and monetary aid. Edavaka Mission expresses special thanks to vicar Rev. Shaji K. Thomas and the entire congregation for their support and encouragement in conducting this Prison Ministry awareness meeting.

Georgey Mathews, Detroit MTC Edavaka Mission Secretary

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER—EPIPHANY MAR THOMA CHURCH OF NEW YORK



The St. Thomas Ecumenical Federation of New York observed the world day of prayer on April 25th, 2009 at the Epiphany Mar Thoma Church, Ozone Park New York, with an afternoon of prayers, worship, and devotional messages. The meeting that commenced at 4:30 p.m. was presided over by Rev. Santhosh Thomas, the vicar of Long Island Mar Thoma Church and president of the St. Thomas Ecumenical Federation. The theme of the world day of prayer was “in Christ there are many members, yet one body.” Lay vice president, Mr. Sabu Lukose extended a warm welcome to the audience. Most of the Mar Thoma, Catholic, CSI, and Orthodox churches in New York participated in the event.

Most Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Coorilose (Sero Malabar Arch Bishop of Thiruvella), Rev. P. J. Varughese (Vicar of Epiphany Mar Thoma Church), Rev. Fr. George Matthew (Vicar of St. Baselius Orthodox Church), Rev. Fr. Jobson Kottupurathil (Vicar of St. Gregorius Orthodox Church), Rev. Biju P. Simon (Mar Thoma youth chaplain), Fr. Joseph Neduman Kuzhy (Priest of Malankara Catholic Church) and around two hundred members of various denominations also participated in the prayer meeting.

The meeting started with an opening prayer by Rev. P. J. Varughese (Epiphany Mar Thoma Church), followed with worship songs by the newly organized Ecumenical Choir under the leadership of Mr. George Thomas (Choir Coordinator) and Mr. Saji Jacob (Choir Leader). The worship service was led by priests, children and women representatives of the different Indian Churches in the area. It was a spiritually uplifting experience. Bible readings and hymns in English and Malyalam by an interdenominational worship theme were seamlessly incorporated in the worship service. This provided a unique experience of unity and diversity.

Rev. Santhosh Thomas, in his presidential address, mentioned the importance of prayer, and the importance of seeing Christ as the role model for our lives. He also mentioned, how Christians who form the body of Christ can become visible in the world today and identify the situations in our lives that need God’s love, healing and comfort.

A power point presentation by Mrs. Mariamma Abraham (World Day of Prayer Coordinator and the Regional Sevika Sanghom Secretary) enabled the audience to understand the social and economical environment of the country of Papa New Guinea.

Rev. Jobson Kottupurathu, the key note speaker emphasized what strategies can be used to reach out to people who are in need of spiritual, social and economic help as well as how members in the body of Christ can experience God’s love and pass it on to others.

The Bible study conducted by Mrs. Shanthi Mathai (Epiphany Mar Thoma Church), based on the Bible portion Romans 12:1-4 was beneficial to those who attended.

The skit based on the story of baby Moses was performed by the women of the Mar Thoma Church of Long Island. The skit highlighted how God had preserved the Israelites by utilizing five courageous women in His divine plan to protect Moses from Pharaoh’s evil scheme.

The Ecumenical choir was one of the highlights of the program. The offertory collected on that day being directed towards helping the people of Papua New Guinea. Extensive coverage of the program was done by, Asianet, Malyalam Pathram, Sanghamam, Kairali and Malyalam Vartha.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks by Mr. Shibu Jacob and a prayer and benediction by Rev. Santhosh Thomas. Refreshments were served to all who attended.

Mariamma Abraham, Regional Sevika Sanghom Secretary

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER—SOUTH FLORIDA MAR THOMA CHURCH



The World Day of Prayer movement of the women was observed by South Florida Mar Thoma Church Sevika Sanghom on Saturday, February 28, 2009 from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. at the church led by Rev. Jose Abraham, the vicar. The meeting started with the devotional song followed

by the intercessory prayer and worship using the special worship order obtained for the occasion. Members from the Sevika Sanghom, Ms. Shobha Jacob and Mrs. Aleyamma Mathew assisted Rev. Jose Abraham in conducting the worship and Ms. Reshma Thomas and Mrs. Sosamma Thomas read the first and second Bible portions respectively. Based on Matthew 7:21 and Ruth 1:10-14 Rev. Jose Abraham delivered a timely message about God's will through our lives and emphasizing that what matters for His blessings in our lives are our acts of love and attitude rather than our vain words of love. Mrs. Aleykutty Thomas, Secretary gave the vote of thanks. Meeting was concluded with prayer and benediction. About 22 women attended the prayer meeting and \$210.00 offertory collected was sent to help out the women in Papua New Guinea.

Rev. Jose Abraham, Vicar & Aleykutty Thomas, Secretary

TRINITY MAR THOMA CHURCH, HOUSTON, TEXAS



Senior Citizens Honored: Theodosius Thirumeni with senior Citizen members during his parish visit in June. During the 35th Parish Day celebrations the parish recognized seniors 70 years and above with *Ponnaada*.

EDAVAKA MISSION 6TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE REGISTRATION KICK-OFF



Edavaka Mission 6th National Conference Registration Kickoff was done at Sinai Mar Thoma Center Long Island by the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius by giving the first form to Mr. K Varghese.

NEW JERSEY MAR THOMA CHURCH, RANDOLPH, NEW JERSEY



Reception to our new Diocesan Bishop. Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa with the Executive committee of the New Jersey Mar Thoma Church.

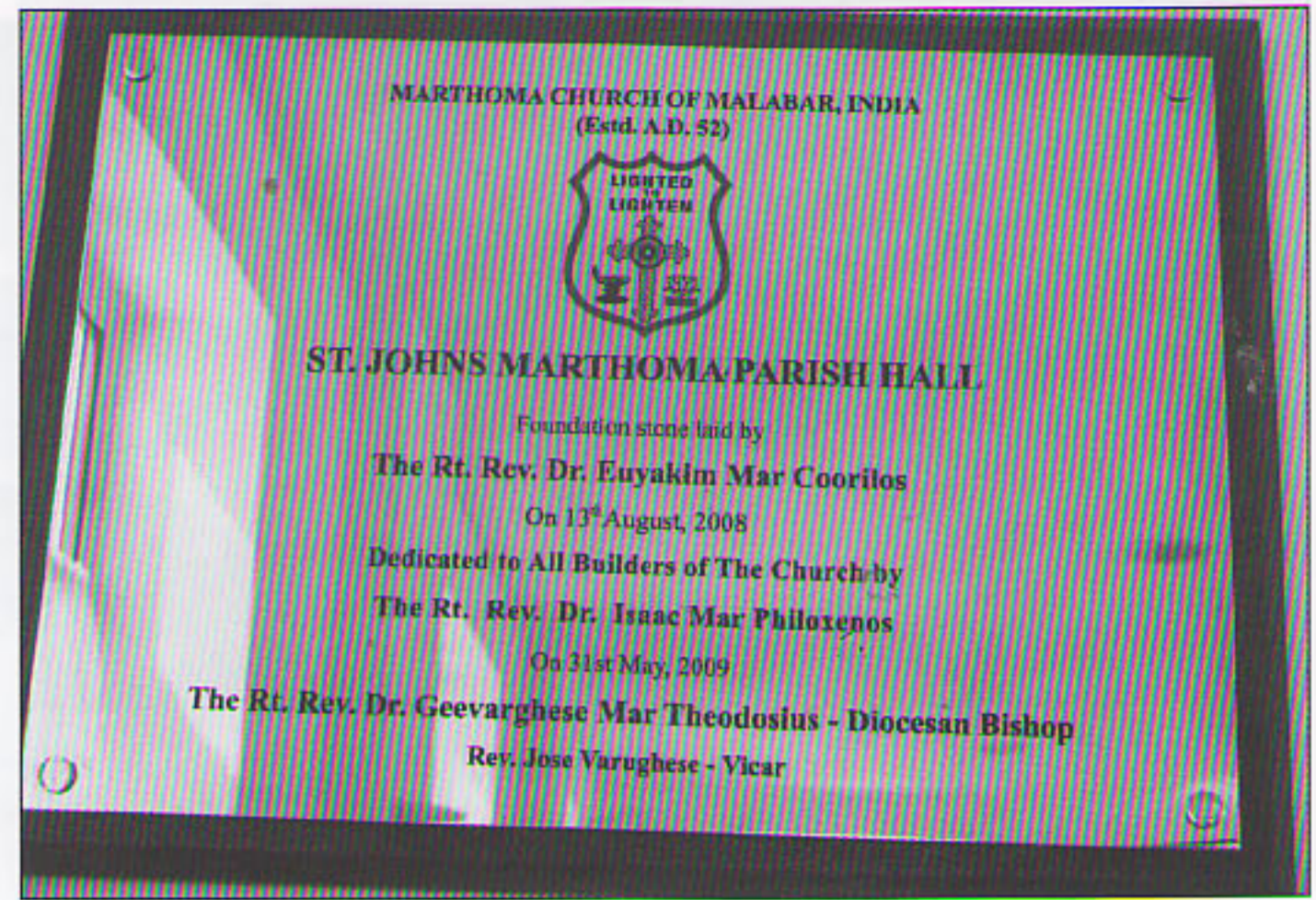


Earth Day celebration at the New Jersey Mar Thoma Church.

ST. JOHNS MAR THOMA PARISH HALL (LONDON) DEDICATION SERVICE



The Rt. Rev Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos conducted the dedication service in the presence of Rev Jose Varughese, Rev Abraham Mathew, over 300 parishioners and distinguished guests. Mr. P.K. Edison, vice president of St. James Parish, conveyed felicitations and offered the opening prayer. Mr. Abraham Mathews (convener) welcomed the audience; Rev Jose Varughese (Vicar) gave detailed account the circumstances under which the idea of a parish hall evolved and how God blessed the community in finding people and resource for completing the project. Mr. P. M. Mathew (convener) presented a detailed report and what the very first newly built parish hall for the Mar Thoma Community in Europe meant and its spiritual significance. Thirumeni highlighted the importance of developing our identity, involvement with the community, the meaning of Pentecost in daily living by sharing God-given power to empower others around us. Many members from all sister parishes in the United Kingdom participated in the function. Dr. Zac Varghese, vice president, proposed the vote of thanks. Rev. Jose Varghese, the vicar of the parish, was congratulated for his leadership, mobilizing resources, and pastoral care. Mr. P. M. Mathew and Mr. Abraham Mathews were the conveners of this project and they were given 'St. Johns Mar Thoma Award of Honor' for their distinguished services to the parish over many years. Mrs. Shali Mathew and Mrs. Annie Mathews were also congratulated for their significant contributions to their husbands' amazing ministry to the parish and the community. Mr. R. K. Sidhu, the builder, was also congratulated for the excellent work and was given an award. Rev. Abraham Mathews (Bristol) offered the concluding prayer. After the benediction from Thirumeni everyone participated in a celebratory dinner. The following message was sent by His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius on the occasion of the dedication service of 'St. Johns Mar Thoma Parish Hall London' on 31 May 2009.



(Felicitation Letter from the Diocesan Bishop)

"My dear Achen and members of the St. Johns Parish London,

Greetings from Sinai Mar Thoma Center, New York. I am very pleased to learn that St. Johns MT Parish has completed the construction of the parish hall and that you are waiting for its dedication service at an opportune moment. I am happy to learn that our Philoxenos Thirumeni will be visiting the parish shortly; I will be happy if Philoxenos Thirumeni could find the time to conduct the dedication service and open the facility for all.

When we look around, we find that God has blessed our community with innumerable resources, talents, conveniences and comforts and yet we are not satisfied, we want to run away from a God-given blessedness to a God-less wilderness of our own design. However, the presence of a local parish church and a Christian community around provide amazing opportunities to interact with others in the locality. I very much hope that the new parish hall will provide our people many occasions for opening its doors for social and spiritual interaction with our own members and others in the community to share the gospel. We need to become sensitive to the notion that God-given resources are there for us to share with others.

I congratulate the vicar, the committee, and all the members of the parish for their dedication to a task well done. I particularly want to thank, highlight and comment on the contributions of Mr. P. M. Mathew and Abraham Mathews who managed this project as conveners with special skills and efficiency for the benefit of everyone and I congratulate them. I pray for God's blessings upon all in the parish.

Prayerful regards,
Mar Theodosius"

Dedication Statement

"St. Paul's Church Hall' was built and dedicated for the use of the community in November, 1907, by the Anglican Church. God in His providence prepared this place for our worship and Mar Thoma Christians in the UK purchased

this property for worship in 1992 and consecrated St. Paul's Hall as a parish church, St. Johns Mar Thoma Church, UK, by late Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan in 1994 in the presence of Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Suffragan Metropolitan.

Usually Parish halls are built and dedicated to the memory of a particular person or persons that we respect and venerate, but by God's amazing grace this new parish hall is built and we are dedicating it to 'all builders of the Church', the Church visible and invisible, the Church with a Capital 'C'. This day, on 31st May 2009, when the moon is its waxing phase of half of its fullness, we thank God for filling our glasses in his amazing mercy and grace from emptiness to its present measure. We are grateful to God for using us to build another parish hall in this place a hundred years later for His Glory. Therefore, it is in utter humility

that we dedicate this place to an endless procession of the builders of God's kingdom from the ages past, to the present age, and ages to come. In that sense, it is a unique place where one could meditate and gratefully remember all our founding fathers, Abraham Malpan, our Metropolitans, bishops and priests, our parents, teachers, fellow Christians, and such people who shaped our thoughts and helped us to build a Mar Thoma Community in the United Kingdom. Therefore, it is our God-given desire that this place should be a meeting place for our past, present, and future. It is our legacy for the future generations of people who may worship and make use of this place for building God's Kingdom on earth. In all humility, this day, we dedicate this place to 'all builder's of the Church' and for the glory of God.

Rev. Jose Varughese, Vicar

THE 27TH MAR THOMA FAMILY CONFERENCE UK & EUROPE

Theme: God's Design Triumphs over World Disorders

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." Psalms 119:105

Dates: 14th, 15th and 16th August, 2009 Venue: High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon

Hosted by: St. John's Mar Thoma Church, Hounslow, U.K.

THE MAR THOMA CHURCH STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK



Theodosius Thirumeni and Sabu Achen with the first Communicants.

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa visited the Parish on June 26-28, 2009, for the first time as the Diocesan Bishop of North America and Europe. The visit began with a Parish Retreat on 26th June. At its conclusion Thirumeni met with the Executive Committee and representatives of all Organizations of the Parish and could get an indepth details of their activities with special stress on Charity works.

On 27th June, in a public meeting, the Parish formally welcomed and felicitated Theodosius Thirumeni in his new role as our Diocesan Bishop. During the meeting Thirumeni formally unveiled a "Memorial Plaque" of Donors who sponsored several valuable items for the completion of our church built at a cost of 2.3 million



Theodosius Thirumeni and Sabu Achen with the Church Executive Committee.

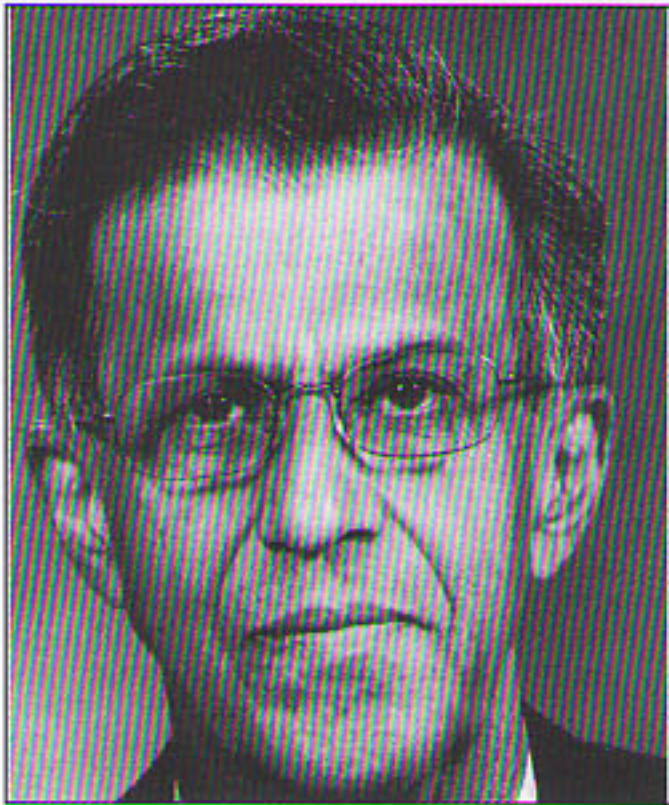
dollors. Thirumeni has also officially switched on our new parish web site, www.mtcsi.org. This was followed by the Sunday School Anniversary with a well orchestrated program presented by our children. Thirumeni talked to the children in their tongue and passion and distributed various awards and prizes.

On 28th June, the Parish celebrated its 28th anniversary. It was also a unique occassion for the 14 children who received the First Holy Communion. Thirumeni formally welcomed the new communicants to the full communion of the Church and requested the parishners to support them for their sustenance in the faith of the Church.

Jacob Chacko, Vice President

OBITUARY

M. A. MATHAI of Montreal Marthoma Church was born on October 11, 1935 in Valakuzhy, Kerala to Kuruvilla and Saramma Abraham, Mudeelathu house. He was the 4th of nine children.



1935-2009

Baby, as he was affectionately called by many, obtained his bachelors degree from Union Christian College Alwaye and a masters from St. Johns College in Agra India. He taught at Christian Mission School in Malaysia 1966-69. During this period he married his wife of 41 years Sosakutty daughter of Rev. C. T.

Oommen and Mary of Chiramannil house Kuzhikala.

He accepted a teaching position in Kampala, Uganda and continued until 1972. Later the family immigrated to Canada and took teaching career in Montreal. He was

enjoying his retirement years and involved with many community activities.

On may 28, 2009 he was called to eternity. Funeral was conducted by vicar Rev. Manoj M. Zacharia on June 1, 2009, and was attended by orthodox and anglican priests and many friends and family from far and near.

Baby was a man of principle, a pillar of the community. He was kind and compassionate. He was one of the founding members of the Montreal Mar Thoma Church. His commitment to his faith, family and community was his enduring source of strength and purpose.

He will be sadly missed by his wife Sosakutty, children Sajiv, Sumod and Serina (Stuart) grandson Nathaniel, many siblings and his loving extended family.

Mr. M. A. Mathai served as the Mar Thoma Messenger promoter from Montreal. The Messenger Family gratefully remembers his services and extend our heartfelt condolences and comforting thoughts to the bereaved family. He will be dearly missed.

ST. JOHN'S MAR THOMA CHURCH, QUEENS VILLAGE, NEW YORK

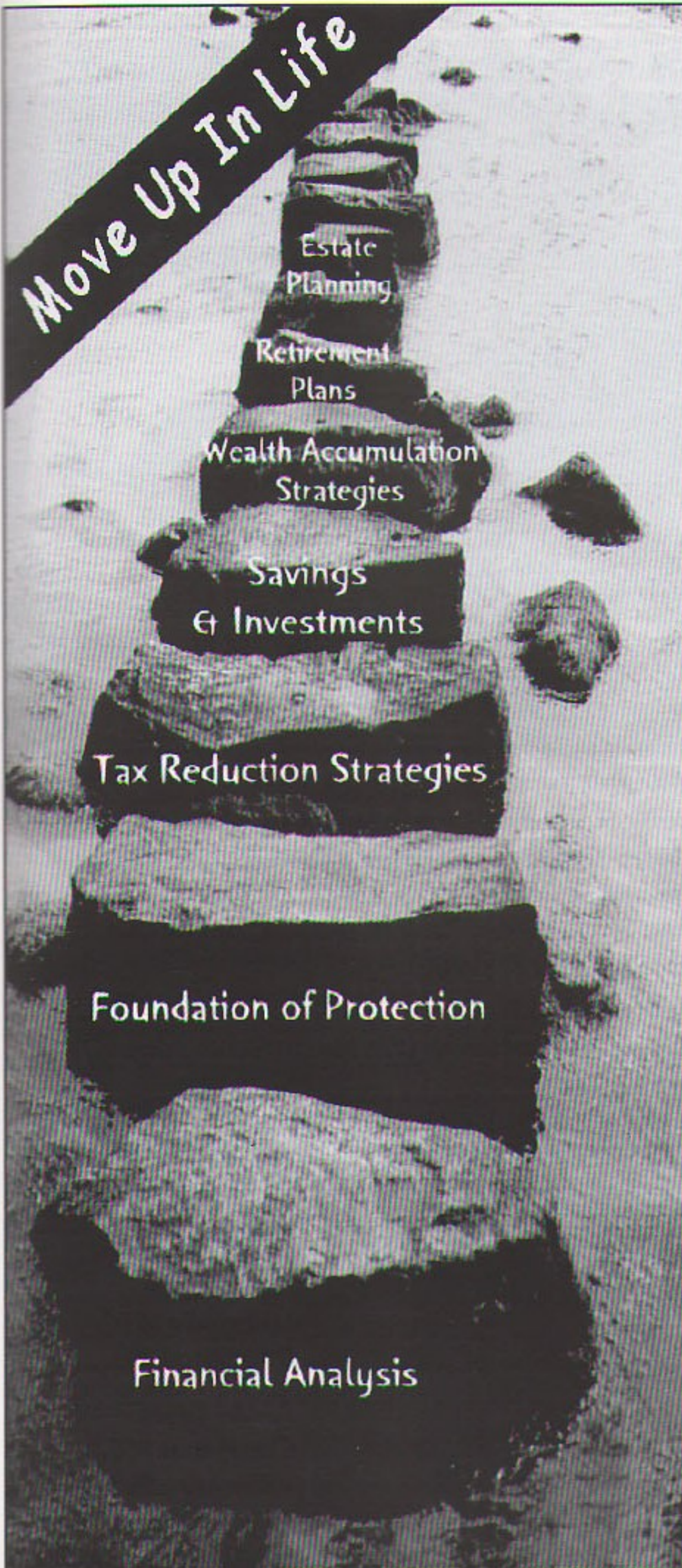


First Communicants with Abraham Mar Paulos Thirumeni and Vicar Rev. Jacob Verghese on July 12, 2009.

Regional Kalamela overall championship for **FIFTH YEAR IN A ROW** by St. John's Mar Thoma Sevika Sanghom.



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Let Us Guide Your Steps



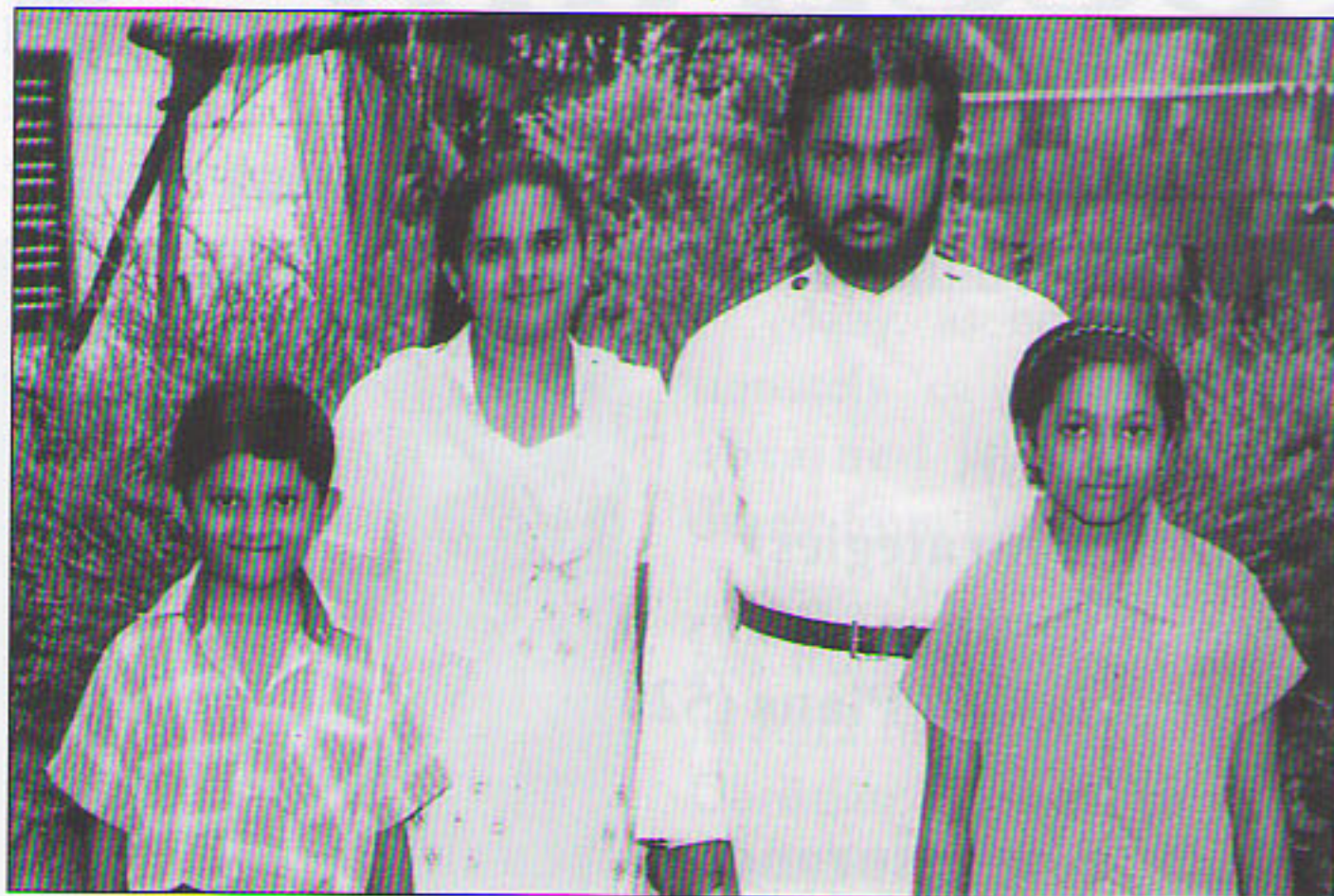
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OUR NEW ACHENS

REV. A. P. NOBLE, St. Paul's MTC, Dallas



Educational Qualifications: B.Sc, BD

Mother Parish: All Saints MTC, Kampamcodu

Parishes Served: Chengannur Valiyapally, Thulappally, Muttappally, Elanthoor Pariyaram Pazhayapally, Karamvely Jerusalem, Valiyavettom St. Paul's, Lucknow, Kanpur, Keekozhoor East, Mothiravayal, Puthukulam, Mundackal.

Date of Ordination: January 12, 1996.

Wife: Reny Noble

Children: Sneha Noble (11); Vineeth Noble (10)

Contact: 972-226-0976 (Parsonage) 469-964-7494 (Cell)

Email: revnobleap@yahoo.com

REV. ABRAHAM MATHEW, St. Thomas MTC of Delaware Valley, PA



Educational Qualifications: B.Th, BD

Mother Parish: Kochukoyikkal Trinity MTC

Parishes Served: St. Thomas MTC, Nilambur; Sehion MTC, Kattumunda; St. Thomas MTC, Puliyoor; Jhancy MTC; Padinjarekara MTC, Thalavady; Salem MTC, Narakathany; St. Paul's MTC, Karthamankal.

Ordination: August 10, 1991.

Special Positions: Santhimandiram Mission Field Secunderabad; Gramjyothi School's Co-ordinator (Bombay-Delhi Diocese).

Wife: Sudha Abraham

Children: Sachin K. Abraham (17); Sharon K. Abraham (13)

Contact: 610-644-3044 (Parsonage) 610-888-7955 (Cell)

Email: abrahammathewkochukoikal@yahoo.com

REV. BENCHAMEN GEORGE, St. Andrew's & Ebenezer MTC, NY



Educational Qualifications: BD

Mother Parish: St. Thomas MTC, Podiyattuville, Valakom

Parishes Served: St. Paul's, Chandakkunnu, Nilambur; St. Thomas, Perinthalmanna; St. Paul's, Malappuram; St. Andrews, Kalyan East; St. Jobs, Thane; St. John's, Misa Road; St. John's MTC, Tharapur.

Ordination: September 17, 1999.

Wife: Suja Benchamen

Children: Kripa Ann Benchamen (12); Madhu G. Benchamen (7)

Contact: 914-207-0011

REV. BINU VARGHESE, Greater Seattle MTC, Washington



Educational Qualifications: B.Com, BD

Mother Parish: Mallappally MTC (Maruthoothara).

Parishes Served: Chengannur MT Valiyapally; St. Johns MTC, Kaipuzha; Karakkad Revival MTC; Chirayirambu Immanuel, Maramon; Pularicadu St. Marks MTC Pullad; MTC Mannady and St.

Thomas MTC Mannady; St. Peters MTC Thuvayoor.

Ordination: July 1, 1998.

Special Positions: Bishop's secretary of Adoor Diocese 05/08 to 04/09. (May 08 to Dec 08: served as the secretary to the Metropolitan Most Rev. Joseph Mar Thoma).

Managing Committee Member: MT Evangelistic Association (2005 - '08) and MT Yuvajanasakhyam.

Missionary: Peringala Mission, Chengannur (2000-2001).

Contact: 253-813-1840 (Parsonage) 206-370-1173 (Cell)

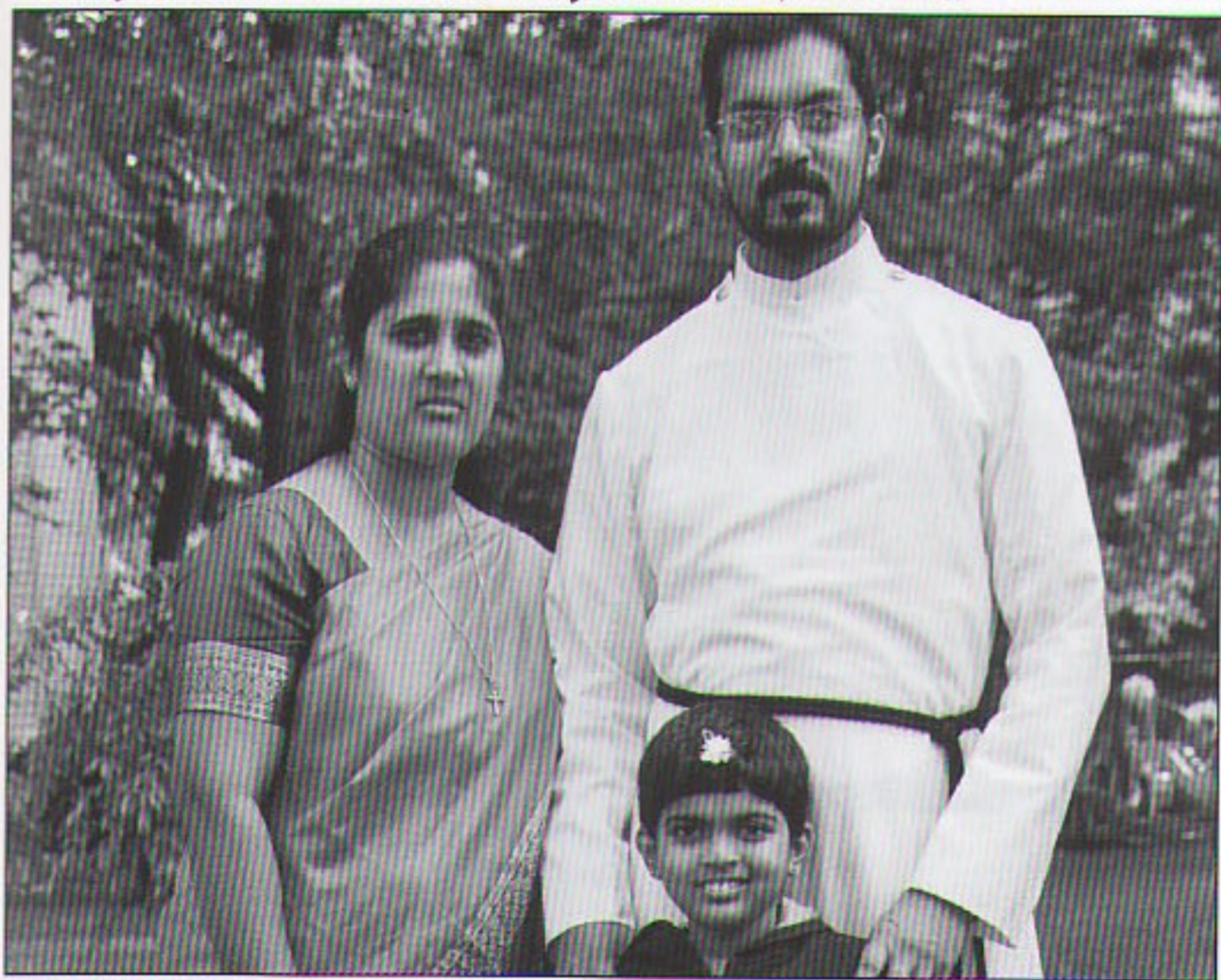
Email: revbinuvarghese@yahoo.com

REV. GEORGE VARGHESE, Sehion MTC, Dallas



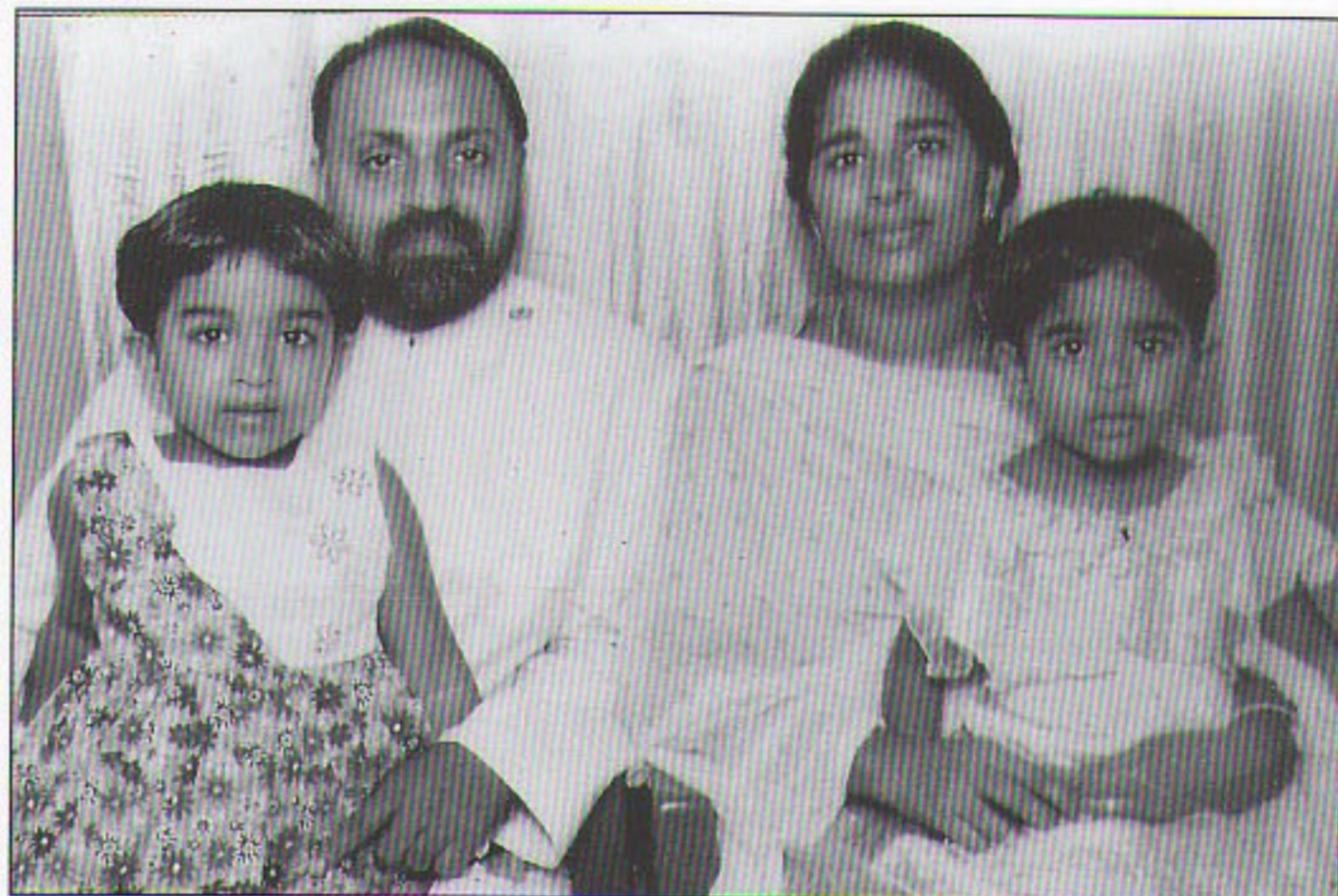
Educational Qualifications: B.Com, BD
Mother Parish: Ebenezer MTC, Urukunnu
Parishes Served: Pullenchery MTC, Chokkad MTC, Perinthalmanna & Karunechi NTC, Thaluvar Naduthery, Pandithitta & Pattazhy, Manipal, Hyderabad, Ramachandrapuram, Hubli.
Ordination: October 3, 1997
Special Positions: Secretary to Bishop, Adoor Diocese
Wife: Geetha George
Daughters: Denaha (9); Diya (8); Dauthya (4)
Contact: 972-423-4866 (Parsonage) 469-274-2683 (Cell)
Email: revgeevee@gmail.com

REV. JACOB VERGHESE, St. John's MTC, New York



Educational Qualifications: B. Com, BD, MA
Mother Parish: Maria MTC, Edamon, Punalur
Parishes Served: Mangalore MTC; Ichilampady Immanuel; Trinity MTC Bangalore West; Tumkur St. Johns; St. Thomas MTC Marthahalli, Bangalore; Ludhiana MTC; Chandigarh MTC; Ambala MTC; Jalandhar MT Congregation; Payyannur Bethel; Cherupuzha Jerusalem.
Ordination: April 14, 1999
Special Positions Held: Diocesan Council Member Delhi Diocese.
Wife: Jicks Ann Jacob Mother Parish: Salem MTC, Edanadu, Chengannur
Daughter: Jyothis Jacob (8).
Contact: 718-465-2358 (Parsonage) 516-474-2975 (Cell)
Email: revjacobverghese@yahoo.co.uk

REV. JAI VARGHESE, Atlanta MTC



Educational Qualifications: MA, BD
Mother Parish: Bethel MTC, Kizhakkupuram, Enathu
Parishes Served: Rajahara, Rajahanandagoan, Edamury, Keekozhur, Kavuvila, Kulathorr, and Poovar.
Ordination: July 10, 1999
Special Positions Held: MTYS Vice President, Ranny-NilackalDiocese; Manager, Marthoma Working Women's Hostel, Vazhoor.
Wife: Majulet Jai Varghese, Bangalore East
Children: Christa Ann Jai (6) and Cerenilla Mariam Jai (4).
Contact: 770-979-1160 (P) 770-885-7880 (Cell)
Email: Jaiachen@yahoo.com

REV. JOSE ABRAHAM T., New Jersey MTC



Educational Qualifications: BA, BD
Mother Parish: Umayattukara MTC.
Parishes Served: Edamon MTC (Punalur); Urukunnu MTC; Nagamala MTC; Kuravanthavalam MTC; Chanthavilla St. Paul's MTC (TVM); Kazhakkootam Bethel MTC; Mukkda Bethel MTC (TVM); Student Chaplain, Nagarcoil Student's Centre; Thane MTC.
Date of Ordination: July 22, 1999
Wife: Vincy Jose
Children: Stephin J. Abraham (7 yrs); Shelin P. Abraham (4 yrs)
Telephone: 973-328-7386 (Parsonage) Cell: 973-534-5893
Email: josetachen@yahoo.com

REV. K. C. VARUGHESE, Carmel MTC, Boston



Educational Qualifications: B.Sc., BD. M.Th

Mother Parish: Koorthamala MTC.

Parishes Served: Guwahatti; Shillong; Noida; Ghaziabad; Nagpur; Bhandara; Salem MTC, Chungathara; Bethel MTC Kaippini; Karuvatta; Madurai.

Date of Ordination: June 1, 1991

Wife: Rubeena

Children: Ashly (14 yrs); Arshia (7 yrs)

Telephone: 978-567-1015 (Parsonage) *Cell:* 978-618-7284

Email: kcachen@yahoo.com

REV. M. M. JOHN, MTC of Greater Washington, Washington, D.C.



Educational Qualifications: BA, BD

Mother Parish: Kadampanadu Immanuel.

Parishes Served: Salem MTC, Kundara; Perinadu Inchavila; Mulavana; Channapetta; Chengamanadu Immanuel; Chennai Avadi St. Andrews.

Special Positions: Maramon Choir Committee Member; Kottarakkara Convention Choir President and Convenor; Chair person of the Diocesan Lay Training.

Date of Ordination: July 25, 1995

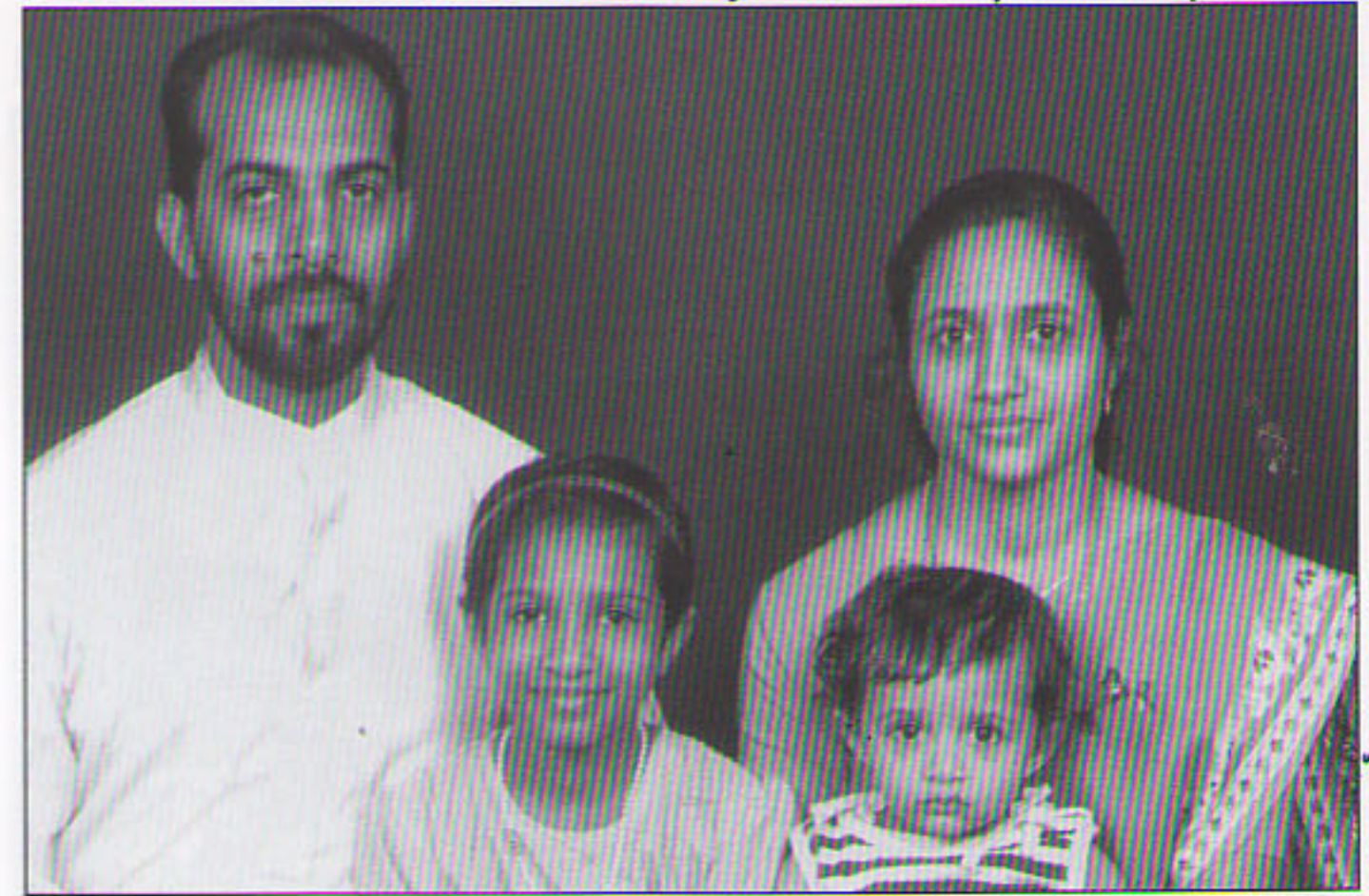
Wife: Sunitha John

Children: Anugraha Mary John (12 yrs); Anpin Mary John (8 yrs)

Telephone: 301-891-3511 (Parsonage) *Cell:* 301-655-9080

Email: revmmjohn@gmail.com

REV. MATHEW VARUGHESE, St. James, Bethany & Albany MTC



Educational Qualifications: B.Th, BD

Mother Parish: Sehion Mar Thoma Church, Amalloor, Tiruvella.

Parishes Served: Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Panomon/Horeb Mar Thoma Church, Palankara/Ebenezer Mar Thoma Church, Kootapady, Nilambur; Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Auvaneeswarm/Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Manjakala, Kottarakara; Ambasamudhram Mission, Tamil Nadu; Bethel Mar Thoma Church, Bhopal/Mar Thoma Church and Mission Itarsi/St.Thomas Congregation, Sarani, Madhyapradesh; Mar Thoma Syrian Church, Mumbai-Dadar.

Date of Ordination: June 17, 1998

Wife: Jeena Varughese Mathew

Children: Sneha Hanna Mathew (9 yrs); Sandra Susan Mathew (2 yrs)

Telephone: 845-362-8158 *Email:* priest.mathew@gmail.com

REV. MINOY N. KURUVILLA, The MTC of Dallas, Farmers Branch



Educational Qualifications: BA (Hons.), BD

Mother Parish: Varicadu Sehion MTC, Paipadu

Parishes Served: Vechoochira St. Thomas Colony MTC; Venmony Sehion MTC; Pune Vishranthwadi Immanuel MTC; Kolkata MTC.

Special Positions: Principal of Immanuel MT School, Pune; Administrator of Janata Medical Centre, Kolkata; Missionary Maharashtra Mission; Chaken Jagadal Mission, Kolkata.

Date of Ordination: July 13, 1999

Wife: Merin Minoy *Mother Parish:* Chemmarappally Bethel MTC, Kottayam

Children: Moneta Minoy (9 yrs); Maris Kuruvilla Minoy (2 yrs)

Telephone: 972-939-0699 (Parsonage) *Cell:* 214-412-7951

Email: minoyatchen@yahoo.com



Educational Qualifications: M.Sc. Ed., BD

Mother Parish: Gudalur St. Thomas MTC

Parishes Served: Prayar Sehion; Nakkada St. Thomas; Pollachi Mission; Mar Thoma Valiyapalli, Chengannur; Poovathoor Podimala; Poovathoor St. Paul's; Dewas Immanuel; Mar Thoma Higher Secondary School, Indore (Principal).

Special Positions: Translated Malayalam Qurbana Liturgy to Tamil; Started a New School "Mar Thoma Public School" with classes Kindergarten to XII in Indore.

Date of Ordination: July 13, 1998

Wife: Annamma Jacob

Children: Ron Regii Zacharia (9 yrs); Ronia Ann Zacharia (7 yrs)

Telephone: 303-953-0880 *Email:* regizachariaachen@yahoo.com

REV. REJI JOHN, Trinity MTC, Edmonton, Canada



Educational Qualifications: B.Com, MA, BD

Mother Parish: Hebron MTC, Thevalakara

Ordination: July 17, 1994

Parishes Served: Gujrat – (Anand & Bharuk), Elanthoor Valiyapally, Thyruthikara, Perinadu, Ashtamudi, Thrikannamangal, and Vilayanthoor.

Wife: Janny R. John, Mavelikara

Son: Noel M Jones (11 years)

Contact: 780-450-9261 *Email:* Johnreji@gmail.com



Educational Qualifications: B.Sc., BD

Mother Parish: St. Thomas MTC, Kulathupuzha

Ordination: July 18, 1995

Parishes Served: Kumily St. Peter's MTC; Vandiperiyar, Pampanar, Peerumedu, Kattappana, Kambammettu, Kocherra [Idukki], Shahdol, Dhanpuri, Kotma, Chirmiry (MP); Vapi, Valsad (Gujarat), Thalachira, Kokkadu (Kottarakkara).

Special Positions: Kottayam-Kochi Diocesan Council Member; Shahdol Missionary; Vapi Mission Hospital Administrator; Mumbai Diocesan Council Member.

Wife: Asha Isaac Roy

Daughters: Ponnu (8 years); Minnu (5 years)

Contact: 847-803-4933 (Parsonage) 847-321-5464 (Cell)

Email: revroythomas@gmail.com

REV. SABU THOMAS [Mylapra], St. Thomas MTC, Chicago



Educational Qualifications: B.Com, BD

Mother Parish: Salem MTC, Mylapra

Parishes Served: Dandeli; Belguam; Sankeswar; Yellapur; Ankola; Karwar; Kaiga; Kathira; Kumta; Honawar; Alally; Shrivaniapura; Naswapura.

Ordination: March 7, 1998

Special Positions: Missionary of MTEA—Dandeli, Ankola, Kumta, Shivanapura, Alally

Wife: Suja Sabu

Children: Shema Susan Sabur (14); Shexal Tom Sabu (9)

Contact: 630-268-1441 (Parsonage) 630-802-2766 (Cell)

Email: sabuachenmylapra@yahoo.com

REV. THOMAS MATHEW, St. Luke's MTC, FL/Hermon MTC, Atlanta



Educational Qualifications: MA, BD
Mother Parish: Christose MTC, Muthukulam
Parishes Served: Horeb MTC, Karara; Karmel MTC, Pakkulam; Bethel MTC, Chooriyod; Jerusalem MTC, Mannarghat; Bethel MTC, Ponda; St. Peter's MTC, Madgao; Emmanuel MTC Udaipur; St. Thomas MTC, Bhilwara.
Date of Ordination: June 29, 1999
Wife: Biby George, Thabore MTC, Thottakadu
Children: Reba (7 yrs.) and Raina (5 months).
Contact: 954-510-7187
Email: revthomasmathew2003@yahoo.com

REV. VARGHESE MATHAI, Salem & Tabor MTC, NY



Educational Qualifications: BA, BD
Mother Parish: St. Thomas MTC, Mulakuzha
Parishes Served: Immanuel MTC Eraviperoor; St. Luke's, Vallamkulam; Raipur MTC; St. Johns, Tatibandh.
Ordination: June 22, 1994
Special Positions: Chaplain to Metropolitan Alexander Mar Thoma
Missionary: Karanai Mission, Chennai, and Chennapara Mission
Director: Sneha Jyothy Slum Development Project, Raipur.
Director: Youth Transit Center, Nagarcoil (Compassion International)
Wife: Ruby Varghese, Palarivattom.
Children: Christina Sara Varghese (11); Feba Susan varghese (7)
Contact: 516-390-7092(Parsonage) 516-587-4429 (Cell)
Email: varghesemathaiachen@yahoo.com

REV. VARUGHESE MATHEW P., Oklahoma MTC



Educational Qualification: B.Com; BD
Mother Parish: St. Pauls MTC, Valiyakunnam, Vellayil
Parishes Served: Panamannu; Palankara; Koottapady; Patna; Nedumkandam; Kallar; Puliyanmala; Keezhvaipur St. Thomas; West Kallada; Sooranad; Poruvazhy; Mathra Immanuel; Vattamon; Thalavoor Naduthery; Pandithitta; Pattazhy.
Wife: Mariam Varughese
Children: Angel Merina Varughese (19); Anjaly Mary Varughese (15); Anjana Merin Varughese (10)
Contact Information: Tel: 405 789 8841
Email: kunjumonachen@yahoo.co.in

CONGRATULATIONS TO PROF. ELIAS ABRAHAM OF BALTIMORE MAR THOMA CHURCH



Prof. Elias Abraham receiving the award from Very Rev. A. C. Kurian (Ret.)

Prof. Elias Abraham, formerly of the Chengannur Christian College teaching faculty, received the Best Promoter Award for the year 2008 from the Diocese of North America & Europe for promoting the Mar Thoma Messenger at the Baltimore Mar Thoma Church. Because of his hard work, the parish also received the Award for the highest percentage of subscription in the Diocese. He is also the Associate Editor of the Mar Thoma Messenger. Prof. Elias is very active in the Baltimore Mar Thoma Church and currently serving as its Lay Leader and Sunday School Teacher.

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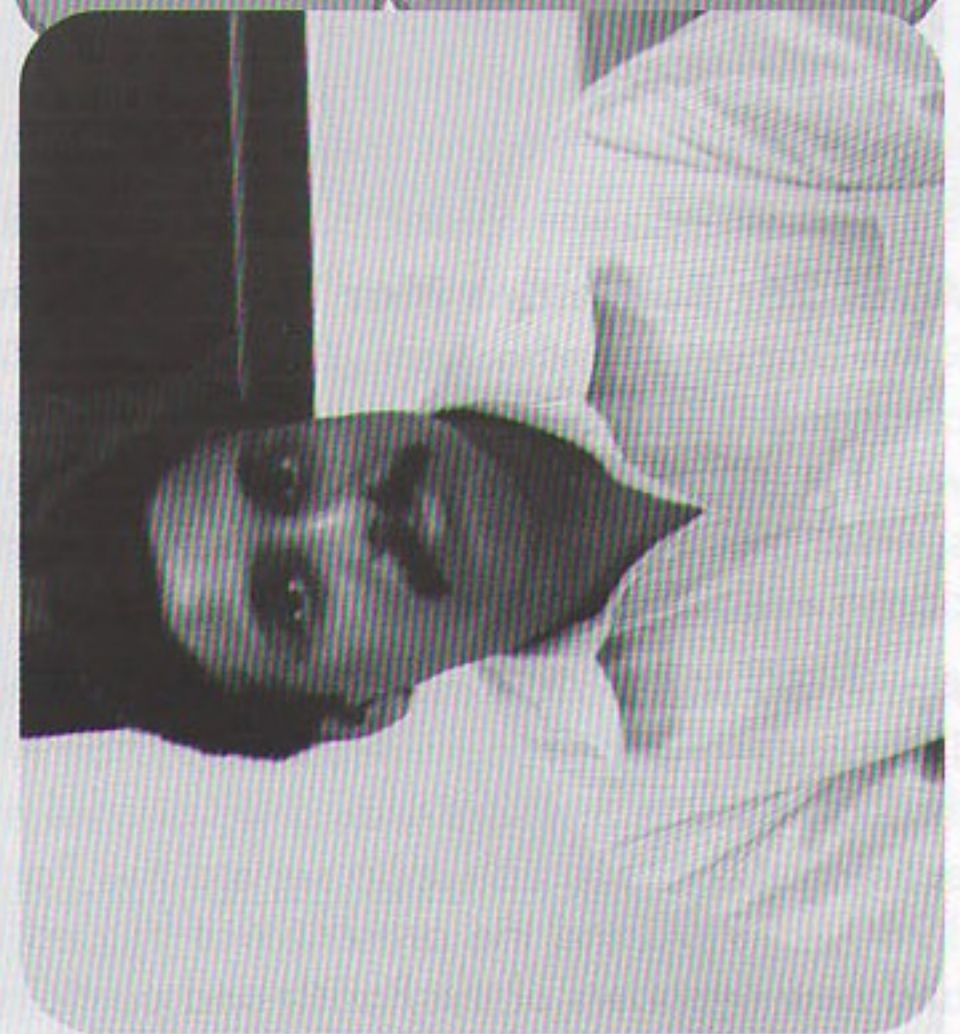
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SPECIAL EVENTS FROM DIOCESAN EPISCOPA'S ITINERARY

(Details at: www.martheodosius.com)

April 10-12: Episcopal Visit to St. Stephen's Mar Thoma Church, New Jersey

The Visit to St. Stephen's Mar Thoma Church started with a class for the First Communicants on Friday. There was a devotional meeting on Saturday morning and the Parish Day celebration in the afternoon. The Sunday school children and the teachers made the Parish Day an occasion to celebrate their Anniversary as well as putting up programs by each class. Rev. Roy A. Thomas, the youth Chaplain of the area gave a devotional talk to the children while the Diocesan Episcopa gave the Parish Day message. There was a Holy Qurbana on Sunday where all the first communicants and the congregation members and their family and friends participated in the communion and joined the fellowship lunch. Dedication of the First Communicants was a special event. The Parish Choir with drum set and African drum chose special numbers to accommodate all age and language groups and to get the whole hearted cooperation of all members. Rev. Abraham Cherian now serves as the Vicar.

April 16-17: Diocesan Clergy Conference

The Annual Diocesan Clergy Conference was held on April 16th and 17th at the Bethel Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia. Thirty-Eight Achens of the Diocese attended the Conference. The Theme was **"RELEVANT ECCLESIOLOGY"**. Thirumeni in his inaugural address exhorted the clergy to be in the ministry trusting on the Grace of God, experienced in the life of Christ and in the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit.

April 18: Diocesan assembly 2009

The annual meeting of the Diocesan Assembly was held on April 18, 2009 at St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Delaware Valley, PA. Eighty-Four Assembly Members of the Diocese attended the meeting. The meeting was presided by Mar Theodosius Episcopa. The meeting started with worship. Rev. M. P. Yohannan gave the devotional talk. The meeting considered and approved the report and accounts of 2008. The budget for 2009 was discussed and passed. St. Thomas MTC of Delaware Valley made all arrangements for this meeting.

April 19: St. Thomas MTC, Delaware Valley, PA, (after Diocesan Assembly)

The Episcopal visit to the parish was coupled with the Diocesan Assembly meeting of the year. The parish hosted the Assembly and the members took interest to make all necessary arrangements. It gave an occasion to meet the representatives of various parishes in the Diocese and plan the program for the year. The Holy Qurbana service of the parish was well attended. The dedication service of the first communicants was a blessed one. The Sunday school children gave a special song during the service.

April 26: Baltimore Mar Thoma Church

Rev. Samuel Santhosham the present Vicar of the parish arranged a welcome meeting for the Diocesan Episcopa along with the devotional meeting, Holy Qurbana for the members and special meetings for the members of the youth fellowship and parish executive committee.

April: 30-May 03: Canadian Mar Thoma church, Toronto

The Diocesan Episcopa visited Canadian MTC from April 30th through May 3rd. There was a devotional meeting on Thursday evening. Diocesan Episcopa served this Parish as its Vicar from 1980 - 1984 and the present visit helped him to meet the old and new members of the Parish and participate in the Parish fellowship. It was also the occasion of the Parish Day. All the mem-

bers came together for worship and fellowship lunch. The place of worship, bought at the time of Late Rev. M. S. Varghese, is inadequate as the number of families increased from 90 to 210 since 1980. Though a plot of land is bought by the Parish, due to the financial crisis, the Parish is finding it difficult to invest more funds and to help the Parish to have a new structure. The Diocesan Episcopa devoted his time to meet the members and to listen to their concerns.

May 26: X1 National Yuvajana Sakhyam conference Website Launch

X1 National Yuvajana Sakhyam conference Website Launching was held at the Sinai Mar Thoma Center, Merrick, NY 11566 on May 26 2009 at 7pm. The conference will be hosted by the Long Island Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam from October 9-11, 2009 at Holiday Inn, Ronkonkamma NY 11779. The conference committee conveners, conference committee members and the Diocesan Yuvajana Sakhyam office bearers attended this gracious occasion.

May 26: Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam Souvenir Inauguration



The souvenir inauguration was held on May 26, 2009 at 8pm. Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa receiving the first compliment from the grand sponsor Varughese P. Varughese.

May 28: Visit to His Eminence Mar Cyril Aphrem Karim



On Thursday, 28 of May at 4:00 pm Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius visited the Archdiocese headquarters in

Teaneck, NJ. He was warmly welcomed by His Eminence Mar Cyril Aphrem Karim and Very Rev. Fr. John Meno. He was accompanied by Rev. Dr. K. V. Thomas and Mr. M. K. Thomas, of St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church, Teaneck, NJ.

May 28-31: Episcopal visit—St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church, New Jersey

The St. Peter's Mar Thoma Parish, New Jersey was blessed with Thirumeni's First visit as the Diocesan Episcopa from May 28 to 31, 2009. Thursday and Friday Thirumeni visited the aged and sick members of the Parish. Meetings were arranged separately for all organizations of the Parish. Thirumeni interacted with the members and gave messages in all meetings. Saturday a Holy Baptism was conducted.

On 31st Sunday Thirumeni celebrated Holy Qurbana in English. Dedication Service for the First Communicants was conducted. Fourteen youths received First Communion and entered into full fellowship of the Church. In the public meeting Thirumeni released the Parish Picture Directory which is published to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Parish. This was the fulfillment of the long cherished dream.

June 6: Prison Ministry

The Diocesan bishop during his visit to Trinity Mar Thoma Church Houston on June 06, 2009 met with Ms. Hazel Crivelli and Ms. Mariamma Thomas and discussed the possibility of Mar Thoma Docese joining hands with prison fellowship for an effective ministry to those who are in prison and their relatives. The Prison coordinator promised that they will conduct an awareness program if 50 (approx) people can gather together for a meeting. The prison fellowship is also willing to conduct a training program lasting for a day, if there are sufficient volunteers to help in the ministry.

June 12-14: Tampa and Orlando parishes



Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, the Diocesan bishop of North America and Europe visited St. Mark's Mar Thoma parish in Tampa, Florida from the 12th to the 14th of June, 2009. This was



Thirumeni's first visit to Tampa. During this visit Thirumeni visited the congregation in Orlando and conducted Holy Communion

on Saturday, June 13, 2009. The highlights of Thirumeni's visit to Tampa included a public reception, honoring the senior citizens of the parish and celebrating the Earth Sunday. On Saturday, June 13, 2009, Thirumeni was accorded a public reception, attended by the clergy and members of the Malayalee churches of Tampa Bay region. A large gathering attended the reception. On Sunday, June 14, 2009, Thirumeni lead the Holy Communion service in the St. Mark's Mar Thoma Church. A large number of people attended the Service. After the Service, Thirumeni honored ten members of the parish who completed 70 years of age.

July 7-8: Youth Chaplain's Conference

Rt. Rev. Dr. GeeVarghese Mar Theodosius will convene a "Youth Chaplain's Conference" in Houston, TX from July 7-July 8, 2009. On July 7, 2009 there will be an open forum on "Laity Expectation of Youth Chaplaincy" from 8pm to 10pm at the Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, 10212 Fountain Gate, Stafford, TX.

Thirumeni visiting Princeton University Campus



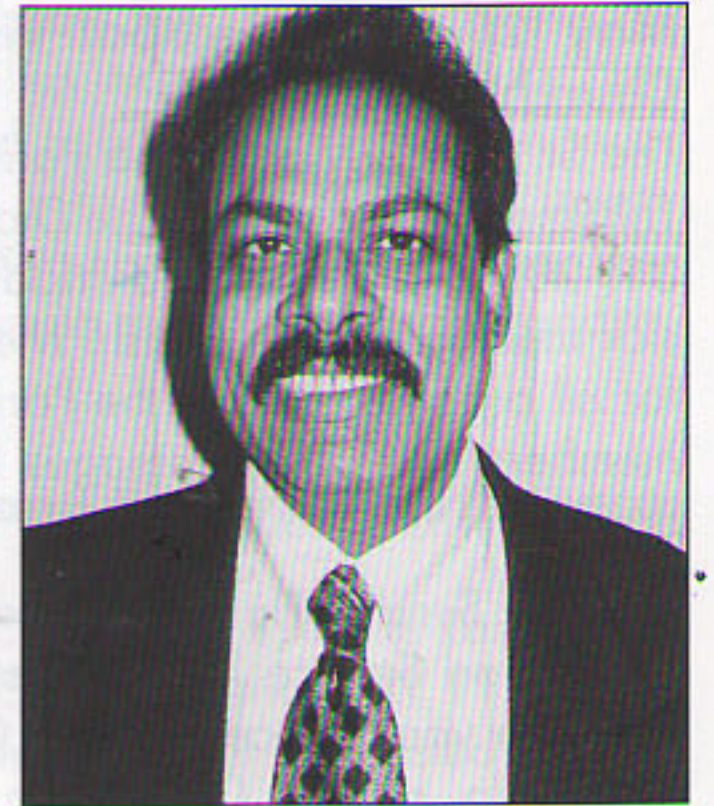
Going Green at Sinai Center



Curios Child



Human life is an ongoing journey that encounters favorable and unfavorable situations, regardless of caste or creed. Hardships felt by a homeless person on the street is incomparable with those faced by a hardworking healthy individual who leads a family life. To the most part, we are set in rhythms that are confined to work, home, school, community, and family matters. Drastic and unexpected changes in these routines can throw us off-guard. One of my family friends was diagnosed with a terminal disease that drowned her in negativity and distress. It takes a lot of strength and emotional balance for one to come in terms with such white water experiences. Lost love, lost friendships, financial hardships, adverse health conditions, emotional distress within family relations, feeling of unworthiness, depression caused by strong unfavorable situations, and natural displacements or catastrophes can all impact on one's serenity and sanity. Recovery from such human predicaments could be slow and overwhelming. Christian faith adds another dimension to this complex dynamics, providing a soothing emotionality with added perseverance for the tasks at hand. Christ encountered many such individuals who lived at that time and brought them back to the state of well-being, by providing them the needed up lift. Traditional church, the entity that is expected to care for such un-illuminated humans, appears to have drifted from its original mission and is converged into a worldly pattern of social establishments. As the social norms of community living have gradually eroded away, so did the close knit-nest of church goers and religious leaders. We have the responsibility to educate and equip the next generation, as our Christian parents did to us. In today's complex community relations, the faith talk and faith walk appear parallel rather than being one single lane. Faith walk seems harder for those who like to cling on to family values and cultural purity. We tend to blame some one else for our own shortcomings. When Paul wrote to Romans "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on some one else, for at what ever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things" (Romans 2:1). Although, it seems easy to blame individuals or society for human issues, we have an indirect contribution in all aspects of communal dwelling. Family, parish, and community relations are the backbone of human race and when breaches occur, it weakens the whole structure.



I have received few emails concerning the health hazards associated with the traditional way of using same cup and spoon for mouth-feeding the wine during our communion services. I am aware that this matter was discussed in the last Sabha Mandalam meeting and our Metropolitan is expected to provide explanations at a later point. Suggestions are to observe and follow practices of other western denominations that use different methods of sharing the Eucharist elements.

I take this opportunity to extend our warm welcome to Rev. Vinoy Daniel, our new Diocesan & Bishop's secretary. Sinai Mar Thoma Diocesan Center is buzzing with activities and Achen's job is not any simple task anymore. Less sleep and more work became the norm for such appointees. With an energetic, mission oriented and dynamic Diocesan Bishop as Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius is, we may need further help in the completion of certain tasks at hand. But, am sure the Lord will provide timely guidance for all our activities.

Messenger family also welcomes the new Achens and families who arrived in this Diocese in the month of May 2009. Our Achens are vital to the fruitful functioning of our parishes and congregations and we wish them God's abundant mercy and guidance in all endures.

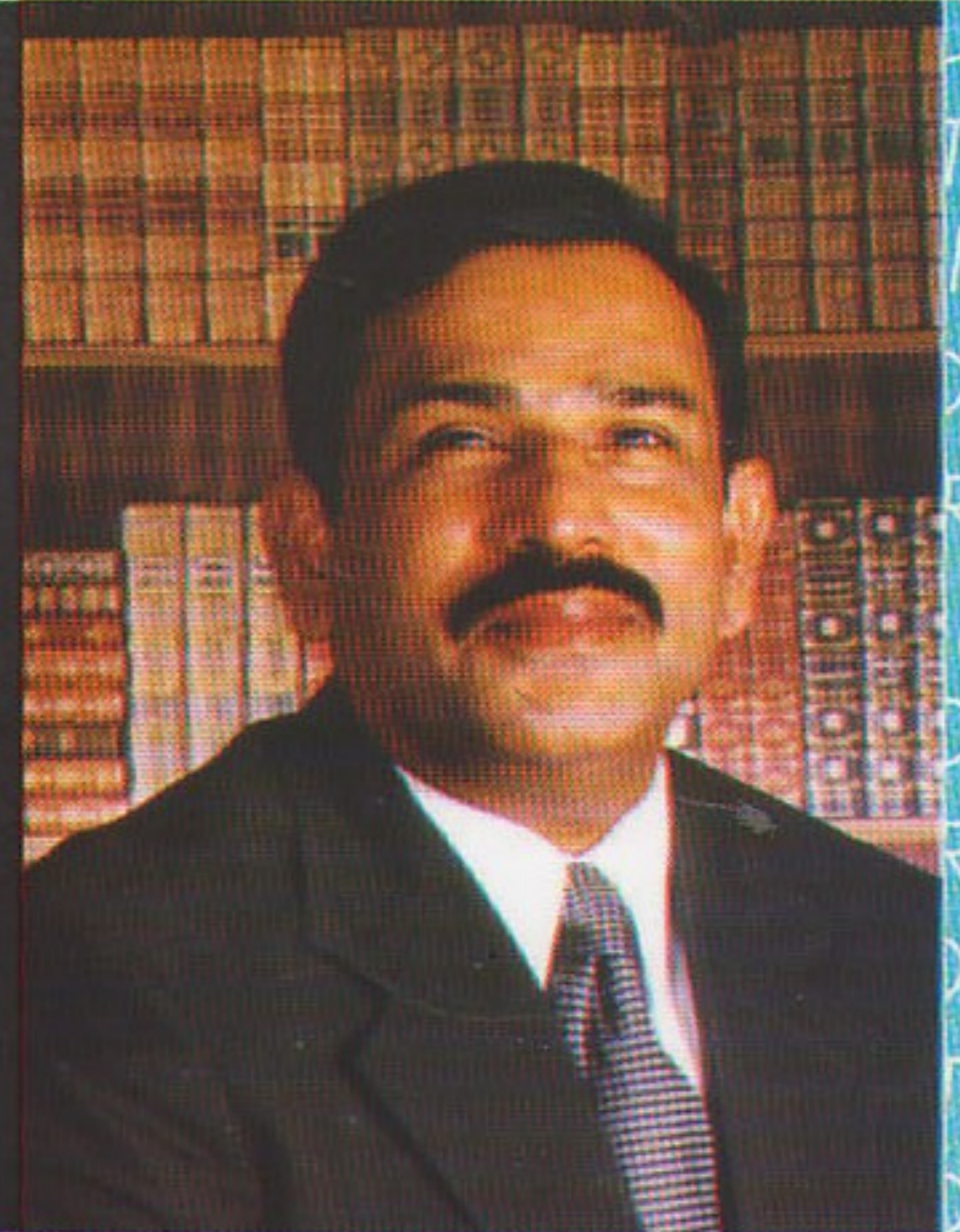
Eapen Daniel

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Lal Varghese

Attorney at Law

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