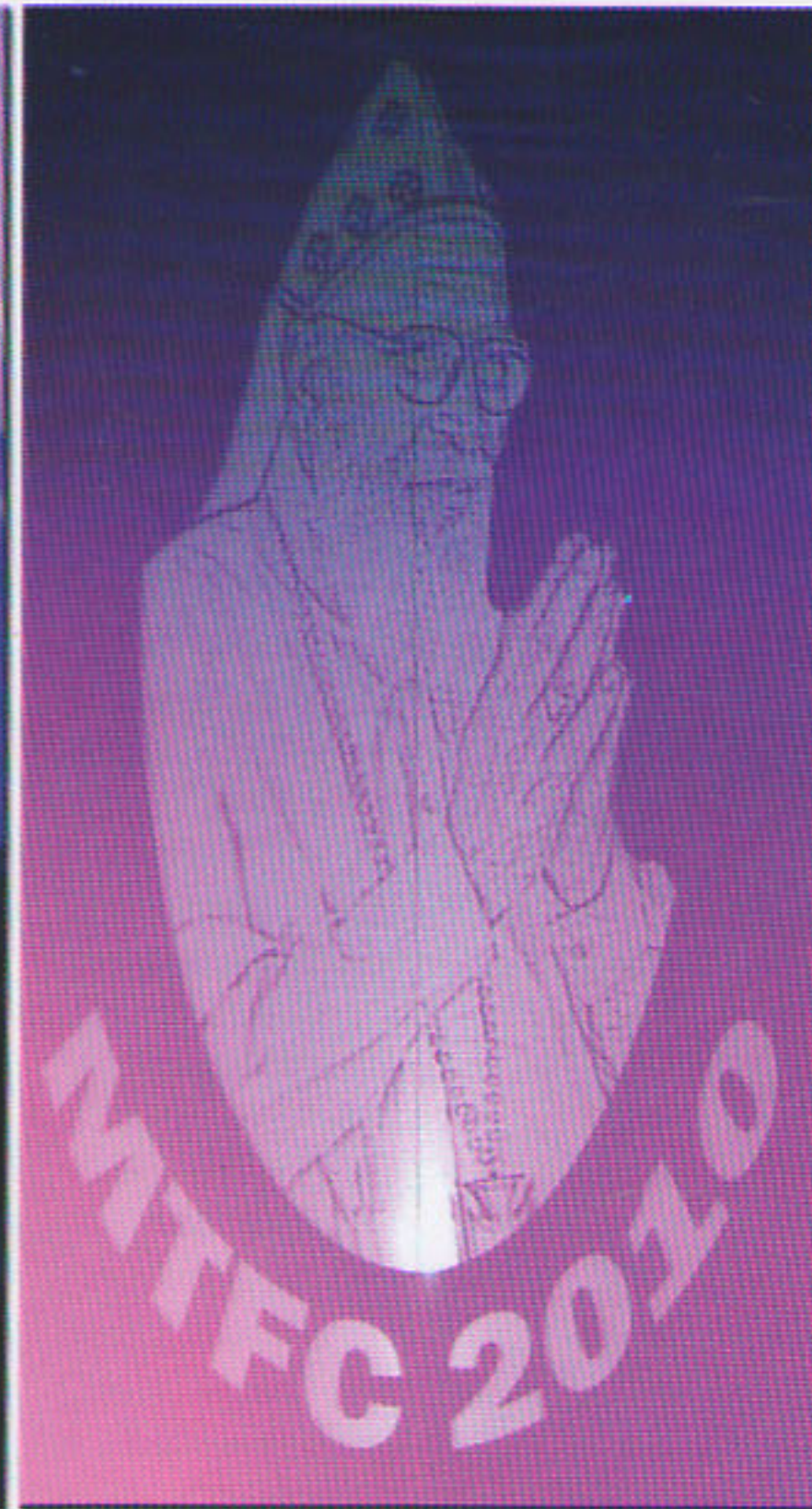




# MAR THOMA MESSENGER

A PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

OCTOBER 2010



**Lay Leadership  
in the Church**

**Diaspora  
Issue**





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# Mar Thoma Messenger



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# Message from the Metropolitan



Dearly beloved in the Lord,  
After passing through an apprehensive month of July, we can, with confidence, say that God's grace remains unfathomable. The volcanic eruption in Iceland and the huge oil leak in the Mexican peninsula has created frightful situations. The world, already torn of economic recession, was shocked and

stunned. Anyhow, now we can have some comfort as these two tragic events are now under control.

During the Onam season, our thoughts must be centered in peace and prosperity, not destruction and annihilation. Thousands of years ago, through prophet Micah, the Almighty had expressed what He expects of man. "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). If it be so, we may expect in these festival days of Onam, a new society which does not consider civility a demerit and humility a weakness.

Concerning our Church, we are making preparations for the Sabha Mandalam meetings. This is the last usual meeting of the existing Mandalam. It is satisfying to note that we achieved certain creative goals during the term of this Mandalam. We have yet to finish some more matters, before we elect the new Mandalam members. I invoke every member of the Mar Thoma Church to pray deeply for this.

This year 33 candidates are being ordained as priests. Twenty six of them are being directed to various Theological Seminaries. Thirteen persons, who completed their theological studies themselves, are being sent for practical training. Sabha Tharaka has published the criteria approved by the Sabha Council, for the selection of theological students from next year on. All are welcome to make notable and fruitful suggestions in this regard. It is desirable that the parish priests and the members of the Church encourage and introduce to the Church leadership, our youth who are committed to the Lord, and the Church, so that they can serve in various areas of the Church. Those who come forward thus to serve the Church, should be obedient to God and must hold high ideals and ennobling visions. John F. Kennedy, when he became the president, said to the youth of the nation, "It is not what you get from the nation, but what you can offer to the nation."

We have completed Reformation's 175th year on August 15th, which marked the beginning of a great spiritual

upheaval in Kerala. For one year, from August 15th 2010 to August 15th of 2011, we, as Church, are going to involve in serious discussions and studies connected with reformation and the impact it had brought in the Church and society. Let us, like the early Christian Church, move prayerfully to get the blessings from above.

When we enter into the meditative thoughts during these months, we must be aware that this is a period of time where we see the glory of Jesus in the context of the experience of the three disciples on the mount of transfiguration. In the presence of a heavenly cloud which proclaimed the presence of God, Peter, James, and John saw the glory of Jesus. It is recorded that they engaged in a discussion about the great redemption that had to occur in Jerusalem. Then a cloud enveloped them, and the vision was hidden. They only saw Jesus wearing the heavenly magnificence. The covenant and the prophecy became immaterial. The redemption of the human race was declared. The price of this redemption was the Cross that was raised on the Calvary. Mankind was freed. This strengthening freedom that is the grace of God, invites us to take part in the feast of heaven. The Lord who waits with the delicious food of supreme quality invites the disciples with the loving words, "Come, and eat the breakfast." The question that the Lord asked Peter after the breakfast, is actually a question that He asks each and every one of us. "Do you truly love me?" By our word and deed we must be able to give love's satiating answer to the Lord as He desires.

We did celebrate one more Independence Day of our country, India, on August 15th. Freedom is the foundation of Democracy. It is man's selfishness and ego that compels him to believe that freedom is to do whatever he likes. Thus freedom and democracy move to dangerous points. Rights and responsibilities are two sides of the same coin. When the populace becomes more aware of its responsibilities, the more it will produce the good results of freedom. We should not, for a moment, forget that eternal vigilance is the price that we have to give for preserving this priceless freedom. Onam brings forth in our memory the sweet fragrance of a social condition that reflected equality, justice, and brotherhood among all people. Wish you all a grand Onam season, which may evolve golden experiences of unity, brotherhood, and goodness.

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

Grace be with you all.

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan

Translated and Reprinted from Sabha Tharaka



# Message from the Diocesan Bishop



Dearly Beloved in Christ,

We are publishing this October issue of the Mar Thoma Messenger after a series of conferences in our Diocese including the Family Conferences that took place in USA and UK since the first week of July 2010. There will be a few more conferences in the

month of October. The Family Conference 2011 will be at Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. What are these conferences for? These are not simply celebrations, but occasions where members of the Church come together to sit at the feet of Jesus, to be spiritually nourished and renewed in life. I am happy that a good number of people took interest in participating in the various conferences; increasing the fellowship with fellow members, and learning from the Word of God. It is my earnest desire that every member takes interest and finds the time to participate in at least one of the conferences each year. It is important to be spiritually fed and periodically renewed for a healthy and dynamic Spiritual life while we live in a fast changing world.

This Mar Thoma Messenger also comes to you after the meeting of our Sabha Mandalam. By the Grace of God, all the meetings went smoothly and the Sabha Mandalam transacted all the items listed on the agenda. By now, you might have received the official information of the Sabha Mandalam decisions through a circular Kalpana from our Metropolitan. A number of our Mandalam representatives belonging to this Diocese attended the Mandalam meetings. I am hoping that they also have given individual reports in their respective parishes.

Our Metropolitan emphasized the 175th anniversary of Reformation that took place in the Malankara Church. I urge all our members in the Diocese to read our Metropolitan's presidential address when it appears in our Sabha Tharaka, which is the official publication of the Church. Every member of our Church should subscribe to get the Sabha Tharaka and read it regularly.

The study theme of the Sabha Mandalam was 'Reformation in the Malankara Church: Living the Gospel'. This theme is also chosen for a yearlong study in our parishes and church organizations. All our Aghens and lay leaders are requested to make use of this theme in our various study sessions. Such a study is relevant in the context of the 175th

anniversary celebrations of the reformation within our Church. May the year 2010-2011 be a year of reformation for our Diocese as well. Let us remember that the substance of the reformation is 'Back to the Word of God'. We, as the present generation of the reformed Church, have to study diligently upon the Word of God and Live the Gospel.

Some of you might have also read the notification from the Sabha Secretary, in the August issue of the Sabha Tharaka, regarding the revision of the Sabha Constitution. If you wish to propose some suggestions or amendments to the Sabha Constitution, you should send the same to the Convener of Constitutional Revision at the Sabha office.

This issue of the Mar Thoma Messenger will also be published prior to the Institute on Liturgy, which is planned by the Diocese at four centers: Chicago, Dallas, Philadelphia and New York. Rev. Dr. George Mathew, a scholar in the field of Liturgy, will be leading all Study sessions. Details and reading materials are available at the website of our Diocese. Liturgy is the work of the people of God articulating the worship of God as a gathered community. However, the liturgy is not the last word. That means that there is a great need to study and to understand how the liturgy can be renewed and restructured without losing its core values. As far as the Mar Thoma Church is concerned, it is through the liturgy that the faith of the Church is experienced. Thereby, our religious practices also carry meaning. I urge all the members to find time to attend the institute and to study, clarify doubts and find ways and means of making our liturgy relevant and meaningful.

The Mar Thoma Messenger contains very good articles. These are not simply to be read, but to be studied. It will also be good to discuss some of these articles in our seminars or meetings of the church organizations. Community learning is always good for community living. I am happy that more and more people are subscribing to the Messenger. I appreciate the interest shown by parishes to motivate the members to subscribe to the Messenger. I also appreciate the work of the coordinators in distributing the Messenger in their local area.

Recently, our Metropolitan and Suffragan Metropolitan visited our Diocese. We were blessed by their presence at the Sinai Mar Thoma Centre and at some of our parishes. Both of our Thirumenis took the time to be part of the life of our Diocese and to look into our concerns. The visit of our Metropolitan Thirumeni to U.K., Canada and USA in 2010 will continue to have a lasting effect as we plan the future of our Diocese in the midst of the changes taking



place around us, particularly the immigration laws and economic recession. We had the opportunity to join our Church in celebrating the 80th birthday of our Metropolitan at the Sinai Mar Thoma Centre and several other cities. Let us remember our Church in our prayers as we look forward to having three more Bishops in the Church.

The structure of our Diocese is now reorganized with the formation of centers and regions. Accordingly, we have revised the existing by-laws. We will inform all the parishes about the revisions after we receive the approval of the same from our Metropolitan. For the smooth administration of Diocesan activities, we request everyone to note the revised by-laws. These by-laws are to be followed while conducting elections for the next term and for pertinent administrative matters beginning January 1, 2011. All the organizations and their committees are asked to close their accounts as of December 31, 2010 and report to the Diocesan office.

I had informed all the parishes and congregations about the April 2010 Diocesan Assembly decision to publish a Souvenir of the Diocese to raise up to 1.5 million dollars for developmental activities. Using the generated funds, we

intend to pay-off some of our existing debts/mortgages and expand our office facilities. Thereby, we will be able to meet the increased demand for services in our 85 parishes and congregations, and initiate new projects for the future and welfare of our members. Ten percent (10%) of the funds raised will also be set apart for the mission work of the Diocese. Rev. M. P. Yohannan (Detroit) and Mr. Varghese P. Varghese (Staten Island MTC) have been appointed as the General Convener, Co- Convener, respectively, to lead the committee in fulfilling this responsibility. I request the wholehearted support and co-operation of all our Achan, the members of the church, the business community, and well-wishers to reach our target through your generous contributions and advertisements.

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of us as we move on with the activities of the Diocese. God bless us all.

Yours in Christ's Ministry,

Mar Theodosius

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# Mar Thoma Church—A Diaspora Church and its Mission

Rev. Abraham Mathew (Trinity College), Vicar St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Bristol

**T**he Mar Thoma Church in the U.K. has grown numerically during the last couple of decades, owing to the surge in immigration from India and the Middle East. As a mission oriented Church from the East, it has the responsibility to be active as partners of God's mission in this country and this faith imperative necessitates a fresh look at the Mar Thoma Diaspora thus bringing forth meaningful expressions of faith. This article is an attempt to locate the Mar Thoma migrant community and its mission logic in the wider spectrum of the discussion of multiculturalism, Diaspora and Christian mission in a post-modern era.

## Britain as a Multi Cultural Society

Historically, Britain has always been culturally and ethnically diverse. The British regard themselves to be descendents of Celtic, Romans (who came in the 1st Century), Anglo-Saxon (5th Century) and Vikings (8th century). In 1066, the Normans successfully took control of England and, in subsequent years, there was some immigration from France. There have been Jewish communities and black communities in some of the major cities of this Island for many years. In the 17th century, immigration from the Indian subcontinent commenced, mainly as the employees of the East India Company among whom many were sailors and army men. The presence of a small number of students and other professionals were also recognized, but most of them returned after their missions were accomplished. In the 1950's the British Government invited people from the Caribbean countries to assist with post-war economic recovery and the same repeated during 1960's when people from Indian subcontinent were invited. It is significant to note that Indian migration to Britain was an after effect of European initiated contact with India which began with trade and later the colonization through which the Europeans were also in India as immigrants. In 1939 the Indian population of the City of Birmingham was estimated at 100 (one hundred). The total number of both Indians and Pakistanis in Britain in 1955 was 10,700. The 1991 Census put the number of those with Indian origin as 840,255 and in 2001 it rose to 1,053,411 constituting 1.8% of the total population.

## Migration—A Closer Look

Migration is commonly understood as movement of people from one place to another. All of human history has seen such movement across the world. The description of this movement as 'border crossing' or emigration is relatively recent. The word migration is widely used based on the concept of modern idea of nation-state which sets its premises within a geographical entity with territorial boundaries. Today, international migration is a restricted movement where the host country can dictate the quality

and the quantity of migrants. The early attempt to address the issue of migration brought out many theories which mainly centered on economic aspect of migration. Ernest Ravenstein, a German-English geographer, who is regarded as one of the earliest migration theorists developed his "Laws of Migration" in 1889 seeing the movement of the people across the terrain as part of a single phenomenon of movement from country to town and from poorer to richer. For him "Migration means life and progress; a sedentary population stagnation." His theory has eventually been developed affirming migration as a process governed by a "push-pull" phenomenon that is, unfavorable conditions in one place (oppressive laws, heavy taxation, etc.) "push" people out, and favorable conditions in an external location "pull" them out. The later developed segmented labor-market theory explains another nature of migration affirming migration as a required process for maintaining the structured nature of the first world economy. This theory primarily emerged as part of a critical stance to human capital theory. This analysis brings out the fact that migration is a necessary process by which the receiving nation and its economy will also benefit. Though these theories reduce migrant man as an 'economic man,' these two early views still influence both the migrants and the people of host countries in their value judgment of the other.

The recruitment of large numbers of skilled personnel from India in IT and Banking sectors is an example of market sponsored immigration. The market is managed from a few urban cities in which banking, finance, professional service and high tech productions are concentrated. These urban cities are considered as global cities where there is a huge demand for both educated highly skilled workers and unskilled workers. This situation attracts people to leave their home country to the globalized urban cities for more than one reason. Along with monetary benefits they seek better opportunities to excel in their career. Modern living associated with endless supply of new goods coupled with a grater emphasis of 'personality' and presentation of self, attracts many to relocate themselves from their own country of origin. For some, an ambition to keep their children, who they consider as capital, in pace with the 'standard of global community,' functions as a motivating factor of migration. The ideological and cultural connectivity which is already established as part of marketing process through mass communication net working gives enormous confidence to people even from remote villages to take the risk of leaving their homeland as part of constructing their own new identities. This process of dismantling one's own identity in the process of assembling new identities is observed by Zygmunt Bauman, a social thinker, as a characteristic of 'liquid society.'



## Liquid Life and Migrants

According to Bauman the present day society is as 'liquid like'. It cannot stay on course because the modern society cannot keep its shape for long. It is consuming life by objectifying the world and all its animate and inanimate fragments. By giving a false hope of satisfaction through consumption, consumer society manages to render permanent 'non-satisfaction.' An innate urge of the 'liquid society' to continue dismantling their old identity to construct another, leads people to consume more goods through which they become part of a particular 'status group.' A feeling of 'I shop therefore I am' compels people to consume more and more. Since the consumer society offers multiple identities the choice to change identities depend upon the purchasing power of individuals. Many of the immigrants are caught up with this trend and hence try to achieve purchasing power to demonstrate their new identity in their home land or in their common gathering place mostly in their churches. While the first generation of migrants can be included in this category the identity of second generation is shaped in the dualistic culture matrix of family and society. In the family they are forced to follow the ethnic cultural values, in the society they are engaging with the values of hybrid culture. In such a context they find it easier to follow the values of consumerism which is shared by both.

The globalized market as transnational in nature predicted the demise of nation state viewing the past as static and the present as fluid; the past contained homogenous cultures while we now live in a world of hybridity and complexity. Contrary to the prediction, we are witnessing the growing tendency to be more 'ethno centric national' in the wake of the failures of globalization proposals for better future. One of its expressions can be seen in the slogan of 'British jobs for the British people.' After September 11, 2001 immigrants are described as potential security risks. The recent recession and job losses have caused a fear psychosis among the British, especially among the working class that they are in crisis mainly due to the immigrants. The Conservative decision to implement a cap on immigration can be seen in this back ground. Only if one senses that he or she can contribute to the continuation of some narratives of a social system or otherwise have a part to play within the given situation, then the innate human desire for significance can be satisfied. If that will not happen then we may continue to live within the given situation with grumbling, pampering our 'nostalgic homesickness'. This tension between being significant in the given situation and frustration with the situation shapes the identity of a migrant.

### Mar Thoma Community in the UK—A Diaspora explained

The arrival of Mar Thoma members in the UK can be traced to as early as 1950s. Majority of them were students who came for higher studies and a few others came in search of

employment. Indian YMCA became a shelter for them to meet for worship. As there was no other worship in Malayalam, the service conducted once a month by the Marthomites became an ecumenical gathering. The 1970's witnessed more Marthomites coming to the UK from Malaysia, Singapore, Uganda, Zambia, India and many other countries in East Africa. In 1979 the venue of worship was shifted to St. Mary's Parish Church in Newington in Kensington. Although there were services once or twice a month, most of the Mar Thoma members took membership in the local parishes of the Church of England, with whom the Mar Thoma Church had full communion. Later in 1989 with a congregational status, worship service was conducted at St. Katharine Cree Church in Central London. From there we see the growth of Mar Thoma community to the present day 8 parishes and two congregations in the UK.

The ancient Kerala (Malankara) Church received an ethnic identity due to the incarnation of gospel in the Indian soil. While validating the positive aspects of ethnicity, the reformists within the Malankara church confronted with the dominant tendency in the church to formulate a closed church in the name of ethnic tradition. The reformists' Anglican contacts resulted in having dialogue with other churches in the process of locating her mission and thus making the Church more open. Partnership with the Anglican Church in mission did not tempt the reformists to minimize the micro cultural narratives of people and so they insisted the distinctive identity of Malankara Church which validates certain values of ethnicity. The mission manifesto of the Mar Thoma Church can be explored through the slogan, 'every Mar Thomite is a missionary'. In that sense, mission is a significant element of the Mar Thoma identity which makes the Church vibrant and alive and hence can be called a 'mission shaped church.' The present day Mar Thoma Church has native Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Hindi speaking communities as its members.

### The Churches in the UK and the Mar Thoma Church

Kirsteen Kim, a British theologian and a missiologist, has explained the ways to bridge migrant churches and the so called 'settled' churches in the U.K. in her recent book 'Joining in with the Spirit-connecting World Church and Local Mission'. Her assessment based on Korean Churches in the U.K. highlights that the local Government and Churches tend to approach migrant communities from a need based perspective whereas the Korean community detests being perceived as needy or as asking for help. Kim identifies different streams within Korean community as either a little like Israelites in Babylon or as in a 'promised land', which complicates the mission process of Korean Churches. According to her, the migrant churches' understanding of the indigenous British Churches as 'valley of dry bones waiting for the intervention of a prophet to tell them to listen the word of God' (Ezekiel:37) and the British Church's understanding of migrants as needy, brings a situation where each acts as a missionary to the other



complicating the mission understanding further. In such a dialectical engagement there is a tendency to claim authenticity at the cost of the other which brings more division, placing each against the other. In this situation the proposal of Kim to have a fresh understanding of Catholicity based on world wide fellowship of the Spirit is significant. She also proposes an effort to be taken together in placing the local in the global mission of God. Her explanation of *missio Dei* (Mission of God) as universal, which crosses the boundaries by the wind of the Spirit without having a single origin or direction but comes and goes as the Spirit wills. This lays the foundation for such a mutual engagement between the migrant churches and the British origin churches.

Kim's observation paves way for an introspection about the Mar Thoma church in the U.K. Though the Mar Thoma Church has good historical relationship with the Church of England we have failed to renew this relationship by entering into a partnership in witnessing Christ. As we accept the cultural and identity issues underlying as the hindrances for such a joint witness it remains the necessity of the hour. While a large section of immigrants keep the 'captive attitude of Israelites while in Babylon' they show the tendency to make value judgements on the cultural ethos of Britain and its Churches, mistakenly mixing it up with the modern trend of 'liquid life' and its culture. They have a tendency to place 'Kerala culture' and 'Mar Thoma culture' as a perfect alternative. However another fraction accepts Britain as a promised land and hence attempt to identify with the dominant values that they see as British, condemning the Mar Thoma ethos as 'traditional' and embarrassing in the British culture. Mar Thoma Church has the dual mission of enabling her congregations to engage with British origin Churches without any cultural bias convincing them that there is a common mission in this land with the migrant churches. This is an effort to re- draw our boundaries. We need to gratefully acknowledge the role of the Church of England in providing their church buildings in many places to organize our own congregations, charging a nominal rent. The time has come to get into the common mission process for which an openness to understand each other is the basic factor. Instead of judging each other, do we have something to learn from the other is the question that we need to address in our faith journey.

### **Re-drawing Boundaries: Mar Thoma Church and It's Mission in the UK**

The Biblical church is a migrant church which spreads from one place to another expanding its scope from Jews to gentiles, men to women and Jerusalem to Judea and to the entire nation. This understanding does not minimize the reality that there are local cultures and their ethos influence the shape and nature of the church. Unless and until it reflects the local particular cultures there is a tendency to subdue the emotions of local people in the meta-narrative of globalism. Hence the Mar Thoma church which is constituted predominantly of the migrant community in the

UK has the responsibility of expressing the emotions of their members and has to address the identity crisis which has occurred due the over influence of consumer culture. Apart from the general trend of immigrants to accuse the Western culture in general as the breeding ground of consumer culture and hence the cause of all the problems in the world, the church has the responsibility to go beyond such assumptions. As Giddens, a British sociologist noted, consumerism dislocates people from tradition and history. Philip Cushman reminds us confirming E. E. Sampson's idea that our current era has constructed a self that is, fundamentally, a disappointment to itself. This realization burdens many in the Western countries making them hope for a change. This present day situation brings out a common ground where we can work together to counter the consumer culture which fragments individuals and communities, depending on the transforming presence of God.

Analyzing Hindu fundamentalism, Indian scholar Ashis Nandy proposes primordial (its simplistic version can be 'traditional') values as a counter force for encroaching market values of this time. If we consider this opinion seriously, we need to validate the role of ethnicity, its myths and its symbols as a counter force to the culture of consumerism. The Eastern liturgical tradition always functions in its own symbolic world and it is yet to be explored the power of the liturgy in transforming people giving new meaning to life. The ethos being created as part of liturgical community and its rituals, symbols may influence people significantly in their becoming process. A dichotomy between reason and myth is always been an under current of the Western cultural history and so stress on logos (logic) over the ethos (communitarian ethics) lay the basic foundation of Western perspective. While in Eastern traditions religion and its spirituality are shaped as part of their community ethos, the Western emphasis is on freedom of choice and hence religion remains one's own choice. It doesn't mean that the Eastern religions and its spirituality are free from neo colonial consumerism values but the understanding is that ethos can be used as a powerful weapon against consumer tactics of today's world. There are dehumanizing elements attached to the ethos of traditionalism and so the Western humanism traditions can be functioned as a checking force to that. This kind of dialectic engagement between both what we call 'traditional' and 'modern' and hence the spirituality of East and West may bring more meaning to our life. This situation brings the necessity of having engagement between the Mar Thoma Church being part of Eastern tradition and the Anglican Church as part of Western traditions. Being a Church which emerged in a pluralistic context of India the experiences of the Mar Thoma community with other faith groups can be shared with the British origin Churches who prepare to face the multiculturalism which is a reality now. By identifying common agendas and burdens by sharing their experiences, the Churches can enter into a partnership in their mission, re-drawing their boundaries. The local congregations of the Mar Thoma church need to give priority for the neighborhood mission proposed by our Diocesan Episcopacy as part of our search to participate in the mission of God. ■



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# Revitalizing Lay Leadership in a Diaspora Church

Rev. Dr. Ipe Joseph, Secunderabad

It brings to me great pleasure and privilege to be asked to write an article for the Mar Thoma Messenger. First of all let me thank God for the Mar Thoma Church in North America and Europe especially the laity and clergy who worked hard for establishing parishes over there. As we grow old, we like to tell stories, especially our own stories. Some of the readers like it, some others may not. I hope the laity in North America & Europe is in the first group. So let me reflect up on my early years in North America as a priest and student for doctoral studies. These reflections will help me to connect with the Diaspora laity in the North American Diocese and a few of you to me also.



## Through the Memory Lane

My first visit to North America was in the summer of 1972 to attend the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago. More than 300 persons representing various denominations from North America and 3 from India met together and went through a unique spiritual experience for three months. We took time to celebrate life through worship and singing songs mostly written to the tunes of the then popular songs such as 'When the saints go marching in', 'Guantanamera', and 'Yellow Submarine.' We did intensive study of famous theologians like Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, Tillich, Neibuhr, Bonhoeffer and Ortega. For a week we secluded ourselves from the outside world without knowing the passage of the time or day and night. We wore a jacket of sack cloth and ate a monk's bowl of porridge, 'Kichadi.' For three hours we read Kazantzak's book 'Saviors of God.' Then for three hours we cleaned with soap and brush a space 6ft x 3ft which was allotted as each one's 'grave space.' Then we slept for six hours and continued the process for a week. It was not a cult experience, but it was training for a purpose driven life. The leaders were people like Bishop Joe Mathews, brother-in-law of the great missionary Stanley Jones. The motto of this Ecumenical Institute was: "Your past is accepted, present is good and future is open."

During that time, we learned a great lesson of life: "There is nothing known as problem in our life but only situations!" I got opportunity to travel to areas like New York, New Jersey, Washington, Galveston in Texas, Toronto and Montreal and was able to celebrate Holy Communion for the small groups of laity in those places. The Marthomites in and around New York and New Jersey met and prepared a request to the Metropolitan Juhanon Mar Thoma to recognize them as congregations. I carried the letter with me to Kerala on my return to be delivered to Thirumeni. But Thirumeni replied that it is not necessary to begin Mar Thoma congregations in USA but encouraged the Marthomites to join the Episcopal Churches in USA. That was the Church's stance at that time about the Diaspora Marthomites' request to be part of the Parent Church and their wish to continue in the faith and practice of the Church and also to nurture their children in the faith of the Mar Thoma Church.

I returned to Chicago in the fall of 1977 for higher studies sponsored by the Mar Thoma Church and also to minister to the Mar Thoma Diaspora in the Mid-West and whole of Canada. During that time, there were no parishes and congregations in North America. Regular worship services and prayer groups led by lay leaders were taking place in major cities of USA and Canada. There was only four Mar Thoma Aghens in North America—all of them were students. The large scale migration to North America began from Kerala in the early 80s. The Mar Thoma community in North America was approved as

congregations and later as Parishes since late seventies. The parishes and congregations also began functioning in Europe. For me to complete two Doctoral degrees in Chicago, it took six years, five at a stretch when I stayed in Chicago with my family and later one year when I went alone to complete Doctorate in Theology. It has been a great joy to watch the growth of the Mar Thoma community in North America and Europe from 1972. As a student of Sociology I had the unique opportunity to use sociological instruments to research into the complex situations of the immigrant community and to analyze the changes taking place in their attitudes, motivations, life style and spirituality.

## A Church Come of Age

Mar Thoma Church in North America and Europe has come of age. We should be thankful to God for our growth and history and the opportunity God is giving us to be missionaries in North America and Europe. Coming of age places before us limitless opportunities to appropriate the gift of freedom which God has given us. We cannot be mute spectators of life situations presented before us. We are called upon to respond relevantly as Jesus did so that our decisions and actions will touch and transform the lives of individuals and the community around us. That is the mission of the Church and the quality of a missional church. Now, let me go to the second part of this article which is a thematic presentation.

## Lay Leadership in a Diaspora Church

We will look at this theme from four perspectives:

- Church as a Lay Movement: a Biblical examination;
- Present status of the Laity in the Mar Thoma Church;
- Great needs and increasing challenges of Diaspora Church;
- Building up and Equipping lay Leadership: Some Practical Proposals;

## Church as a Lay Movement

In the beginning there were only lay people or simply people of God. When Jesus began ministry all His disciples were ordinary



laypeople and not with any theological education or expertise. It was a laity group—a carpenter with a bunch of fishermen, tax collectors and even a zealot. Jesus had only one agenda: “I have come that they may have life and life in its fullness” (John 10:10) Paul, Barnabas, Mark, Silas, Aquilla, Priscilla—all were lay people who gave great leadership in the early Church.

History tells us that as the Church grew through centuries, it gained royal support and also high political and social recognition. Church developed its hierarchy of Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons and many sub-divisions. Originally the hierarchy which started with diaconate was meant to be servants of the servants of God i.e., the laity. However, the Church polity provided much power to the hierarchy and as a result the dichotomy of the ordained and laity emerged. The hierarchy became the controlling power and the laity naturally took a subdued position and corresponding attitudes. The lay people forgot their immense value as “God’s holy priests, who offer the spiritual sacrifices that please him because of Jesus Christ.” (I Peter 2:5)

### **Present Status of the Laity in the Church**

Mar Thoma church is a model Church in the sense that its constitution gives well balanced participation for laity and hierarchy in the decision making of the Church. It is both Episcopal and laity-oriented in this fine balance. In the Prathinidhi Mandalam (the general assembly of the Church) only one third of its members are the clergy. Hence, no decision including the selection of the Bishops can be done without the combined power of the laity. But that is not the whole story. Of late, the laity has developed an attitude of apathy in taking up the reigns of the Church. They have abdicated their responsibilities to the clergy. We are inclined to think that this attitude naturally has made the clergy feel that they are inevitable for everything in the life of the laity. In short, the laity has withdrawn from the effective leadership responsibilities in the Church. This is a disappointing and dangerous trend. In some cases the “clergy radiation” has crossed the red-zone and endangered the very existence of many parishes!

While the above mentioned observations are related to the general situations, it would be inappropriate if we do not acknowledge the efficient leadership rendered by lay people in the Diaspora communities, be it in the life of the parishes or in the activities of mega events like the family and youth conferences. In these areas the commitment of the younger Diaspora generation is also very commendable and need to be appreciated. It is also commendable that more young people committing themselves for the ordained ministry of the Church from Diaspora parishes.

### **Needs and Challenges Before the Diaspora Parishes**

The numerically largest Mar Thoma parish is not in India but outside in a Gulf country. Imagine one Achen along with an assistant Achen, if available, ministering to the needs of two thousand families, leave alone serving communion to the believers every Sunday. How effectively even the most dedicated Achens can respond and fulfill the spiritual needs and pastoral

care for the people? Simply impossible! Everything may look good when large gatherings come together. It gives a Macho feeling. But how spiritually strong is each member, each family, and each prayer group? How many lives have been touched and transformed? The only solution is developing the leadership of the laity. Laity can give equally efficient services as the clergy do in many areas of the life of a parish and its members. Leading cottage prayer meetings, women’s meeting, youth meeting, Sunday school, counseling and career guidance, systematic house visits with the help of teams, are some examples where laity leadership can support the ministry of Achens. Above all, networking of families can be best done by laity through social contacts and family contacts.

### **Building up and Equipping Lay Leadership**

There is no use in complaining that “there is no bread in the pantry!” The best response is to find some way and get some bread from somewhere. So let us look at some practical solutions.

- **Preparing the minds of the laity:** Two things need to be done. First, affirm the dignity of the laity as chosen people duty-bound to be co-workers with God in transforming life. The laity is not at any level lower in the faith journey of the church. The laity has the same status and responsibility as that of the clergy. Our people are not yet ready to fully accept the leadership of the laity. Therefore, awareness building and affirmation of the dignity of laity are necessary. What is required is a radical change in our attitude towards each other. An attitude of mutual respect is needed. No need to say that this is possible only if we live a life worthy of respect.
- **Motivate and encourage the young generation to take up leadership positions:** They can develop leadership under the supervision of the experienced elders. Diaspora churches are blessed with the abundance of young people. All we need to do is to recognize them and bring them closer within our fold.
- **Training the laity:** Training is needed for specialized ministry in each parish. It is high time that we establish a permanent Laity Training Institutes in North America and Europe as well as in the Gulf. Unfortunately, we have not taken laity training seriously. Systematic training programs can be arranged using good facilities available in the Diaspora areas. People are working day and night and their available time will be limited. If some conscious effort is made, tailor-made training courses can be arranged. This has to be done after carefully looking at the local situations and needs.

Following are some of the area where training is needed for laity:

- Leading cottage prayer meetings
- Leading Bible study groups
- Training in the basics of Mar Thoma faith
- Effective participation in committee meetings
- Teenage ministry
- Student chaplaincy
- Leading fellowship of professionals such as Nurses, Teachers, Doctors, and Technicians
- Dealing with cross-cultural situations
- Training as effective Sunday school teachers
- Career guidance



- Family counseling
- Training to be Church stewards
- Ministry to the sick and terminally ill
- Intercessory prayer ministry
- Ministry to the economically marginalized in the community

Training should include academic, professional and spiritual elements. Well prepared modules have to be made and used with the help of modern media and technology.

### Family Based Ministry

In order to understand the main idea, we need to go back to the basics. Each member needs to know the heritage, doctrine and faith elements of Mar Thoma Church. Children should learn also the Lord's Prayer, the Nicene Creed, and 23rd Psalm at least. Reintroduce the habit of personal and family prayer and study of the Bible on a regular basis in a nuclear family set up. It is here that the laity can give leadership in the family oriented micro-praxis. Each lay leader can take the responsibility of 10 families and ensure that the children in those families learn the basics within a year and prayer habit and Bible study are introduced in those families. We may think that this is a wishful thinking. We may have many reasons which would make this impossible. Yet if you have the commitment, we can do it. All we need is to put in some hard work to get the data about those families, visit them or call them and address each member of the family in your interaction. After all only families that pray together stay together and build strong and faithful parishes and communities.

### Self Examination and Assessment

It is a major part of spiritual training for laity. The famous sociologist Ogburn spoke about 'cultural lag.' That is, when some parts of a culture advance faster and some other parts lag behind. Let us take a simple example from Kerala context. Every day, the number of cars is increasing on the roads in Kerala, but the roads remain the same, which causes severe traffic problems and accidents. The roads should have been widened to accommodate the increasing number of vehicles on the road. When we translate it into our Church life, it may give us an

unpleasant feeling. North American and European parishes considered to be very rich when compared to other parishes in India. We have built big Church buildings, but our loyalty to the church and its faith and our attitude towards mission had grown smaller and smaller. How many of us take time to thank God every day morning? How many of us study Bible regularly? How many of us have family prayer regularly? How many of us share our resources in a just way? How many of us hugged our children instead of finding fault with them? How many of us support the ministry of the priests and our Bishops in the faith journey of the Church? What is required of us is a holistic life which is a well balanced life, leading us to a purpose driven life. We need to engage ourselves with God and others in a meaningful way.

### Ministry of Accompaniment

This is a ministry that lay leadership can do effectively because they will be staying in communities for long periods unlike the Achens who go to serve for three years. We need constant accompaniment in our spiritual journey. It is the companions that make our pilgrimage enriching. Senior generation might have had the great privilege of their parents, grand parents, teachers, elders, Sunday school teachers and the neighbors accompanying them in their journey of life. Some people in the Diaspora may still enjoy similar privileges. However, most people in the Diaspora, especially the members of the young generation, are looking up to companions to accompany them, guide them, help them to make decisions, share their problems and most of all, listen to them with understanding. They need some tender loving care when they feel, "I am nobody's child". Will you accompany them?! ■

**Editor's Note:** Rev. Dr. Ipe Joseph is the General Secretary of All India Sunday School Association (AISSA) in Secunderabad, India. He was the first Vicar of several North American parishes such as Chicago, Detroit, Florida and Toronto. He served 9 years as the General Secretary of the Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam, and 10 years as the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). He was the moderator of the Advisory Group of World Council of Churches (WCC) for Inter-religious Relations and Dialogue. He can be reached at e-mail: ipejoseph@rediffmail.com or sundayschoolindia@yahoo.co.in.

## CANADIAN MAR THOMA CHURCH, TORONTO, CANADA

Canadian Mar Thoma Church, Toronto, Canada is proud to announce the award recipients and their respective teachers for their outstanding and exemplary performance at the Diocesan Level Examination held on May 2, 2010.

Canadian Mar Thoma Church is proud to state that 4 of their students have scored above 96% and 11 of them have attained above 76%. Congratulations to all students for their excellent performance.

We would like to express our gratitude & appreciation to our Vicar, Rev. A. Abraham and the following members of our parish for their leadership, tireless efforts, hard work, dedication, support and prayers to ensure that all students were given equal opportunity and guidance to complete the examination successfully. Sunday School Superintendent—Susan Samuel, Sunday School Secretary—Sunita Alexander,



Eastern Regional Sunday School Rep.—Susan Thomson, Diocesan Proctor—Suja John, Sunday School Teachers 2009 2010.



# Live the Gospel—Wherever You Are Planted—Diaspora Outlook

Rev. Dr. Martin Alphonse

## Introduction

The legendary missionary-evangelist to India, Dr. E. Stanley Jones, in one of his books observed the following challenge some missionaries faced when they tried to share the gospel in India. Studying the Indian culture closely, the missionaries were impressed by a number of similarities they saw between the religious culture of India and the culture of the Israelites in the time of Jesus Christ. So, they concluded that India would more readily embrace the gospel than any other nation in the world. But the more they labored in proclaiming the gospel in India, the more uninterested the Hindu intelligentsia seemed in the gospel. Puzzled, they decided to discuss the situation with some of their educated Hindu friends. They asked: "India is one nation which is hungry and thirsty for God. If there is just one element which can satisfy your hunger and thirst for God, it is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then why don't you accept the gospel?" To their great surprise, the Hindus responded: "We don't accept your gospel, because your gospel is *not true*." Challenged by that claim, the missionaries went into an in-depth comparative study of the teachings of Hinduism and Christianity on the aspect of truth, brought out numerous passages in the Bible which deal with the truth about God and placed them before the Hindus as overwhelming evidence. The Hindus said nothing in response. A few weeks passed, but the Hindus still didn't show any interest in the gospel. So, the missionaries went back to them and said: "You claimed the gospel is not true. But we proved it is true. Why do you still resist it?" This time the Hindus said: "Your gospel may be true. But it is *not new*. Whatever your gospel teaches, our scriptures also teaches. There is nothing new in your gospel." Challenged again, this time the missionaries did another in-depth study on all the new aspects in Christianity which are not found in Hinduism and presented them as indisputable evidence to the Hindus. The Hindus were quiet. Again a few more weeks went by, but without any visible interest in the gospel among the Hindus. So, for a third time the missionaries went back to discuss the matter with the Hindus and asked: "First you said, the gospel is not true. We proved it is true. Then you said, it is not new. We proved it is new. Why don't you accept it now?" To the great shock of the missionaries, the Hindus responded: "We are not interested in your gospel because, although it may be true, and may be new, it is *not (in) you*."

The message is loud and clear. Unless and until our non-Christian neighbors see how we as Christians live the gospel visibly in our daily lives, the gospel we try to preach will only be seen as theoretical to them. Of course, many Christian groups are very "theatrical" in presenting the gospel to the public with dramatic sound and music. But the non-Christian world doesn't seem to be impressed by our theatrical presentation of the gospel on stage. They are looking for conspicuous expressions of a life changing gospel lived out practically in our

lives. Mere proclamation of the gospel without practicing it in our daily life will project the gospel as an elegant but empty philosophy only.

But the gospel is not an elegant but empty philosophy. It is the essential reality. It can be and must be put into practice. Several centuries ago, this mandate was powerfully demonstrated by Francis of Assisi who said: "*I always preach the gospel, but I use words only when necessary.*" This does not mean that Francis of Assisi was against the verbal proclamation of the gospel. I believe what he meant was, the gospel is not just matter of "verbal giving away" to people, but essentially a matter of "practical living out" among the people. For, if we only preach the gospel to others and do not live it out ourselves, then we will be rightly criticized as hypocrites. The Bible contains four gospels written by the apostles Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. But we are designated to be the fifth gospel! To that effect apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 "*You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody.*"

By implication, therefore, we as Christians are being known and read by everybody around us. We ourselves can become a gospel to others, only if we live the gospel in our daily life. How do non-Christians read the gospel in us? They do so by seriously listening to our conversation, the way we talk; by keenly observing our behaviors, the ways in which we act and react; by critically evaluating our spirituality; and decisively drawing their own conclusions about us. Their conclusion, contingent upon what they have observed in us, is that they either tell us: "Yes, the gospel is you" or, "No, the gospel is not you."

The question is, how do we live the gospel? There are several exhortations in the scripture on how to live the gospel. For instance, we read in Colossians 1:10: "*And we pray in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.*" There is only one way by which we can live the gospel, namely, by pleasing God in every way. Of course, there are numerous ways by which we can please God. Let me briefly share with you just two of them here.

## 1. Pleasing God by Sharing an Intimate Fellowship with Him

In the entire Bible, just two persons have been specially mentioned as those who pleased God in their life. One is Jesus.

**Jesus:** In two significant events of His life, the Heavenly Father publicly announced as to how pleased He was with His Son Jesus. First, at His baptism as recorded by Mark 1:11: "And a voice came from heaven: "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*" Second, at His transfiguration as recorded in Matthew 17:5: "*...and a voice from the cloud said: "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen*



to Him." Jesus our Lord always practiced the gospel He passionately preached to others. And the Father was always pleased with Him. As our Master lived, so must His disciples.

You might say, "Well, Jesus was the Son of God. As divine incarnation, He was an extraordinary man. But I am an ordinary human-being, born with so much weakness and vulnerability. How can I ever do what Jesus did? That is just impossible!" But there was another man also mentioned in the Bible as one who pleased God. He was an ordinary man like us. His name was Enoch.

**Enoch:** We read about the God-pleasing lifestyle of Enoch in Hebrew 11:5-6: "*before he was taken he was commended as one who pleased God.*" Enoch was an ordinary man, a family man, a hard working man. He was a married man, a husband, a father and a grandfather. He was like any one of us today. Like every family man today, Enoch had to provide for his family. He had to work hard every day and raise his children responsibly. Like every working man today, Enoch was a busy man. But he was never too busy to please God. How did he please God?

Genesis 5:21-23 says that Enoch pleased God by "walking with God". He lived for 365 years. He began to walk with God when he was 65 years old. That is, 65 divided by 365 and multiplied by 100 = 17. This means Enoch began to walk with God at the 17th % of his life which is equal to being a youth today. And he walked with God for 300 years that is for 83% of his life. In other words, suppose Enoch lived for 100 years, then he began his walk with God as a 17 year old, and continued to walk with God for the next 83 years until he was taken up to heaven. As such, it is very evident that as a youth he walked with God; as a married, family man, he walked with God; and in his ripe old age, he walked with God. And God was pleased with him.

But we live in a time and age in which a lot of people complain about not having enough time for God. They have become workaholics. Sometimes I wonder what will happen to them if God were to tell them, "I don't have time for you either." Just imagine that.

## 2. Pleasing God by a Sacrificial Investment in the Church

In Philippians 4:14-19, apostle Paul enthusiastically comments on how the offertory of that particular church was "... a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." Why was it so pleasing to God? Because, according to 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, financially speaking that particular church was a poor church. Besides, it was also a persecuted church. Yet, the church gave overwhelmingly for God's work. We read in 2 Corinthians 8:2-3 "*Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.*" Some Christians make a big fuss about giving tithes. But, when we give to God's work with a cheerful heart and a sacrificial disposition, Apostle Paul assures us, in Philippians 4:19 that "*My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*"

I once read the story of a poor girl who went to a church in Philadelphia in shabby clothes ([\[tion.com/rumors/h/hattiemaywiatt.htm\]\(http://www.truthorfic-tion.com/rumors/h/hattiemaywiatt.htm\)\). Because of her obvious poverty, she was hesitant to go to Sunday school which she loved so much. Seeing her reluctance, the pastor himself personally led her to a crowded class room. From then on she regularly attended the Sunday school at that church. A few months later, the little girl got sick and passed away. Next to her body was a crumpled envelope with a handwritten letter in it. When the pastor opened it, he also discovered 57 cents inside the envelope. As he began to read the letter, he cried. The letter said: "Pastor, this money I have saved for two years. I want to give this to the church to build a bigger building so that more children like me can come to the Sunday school." The next Sunday, the pastor read that letter from the pulpit. A local News Paper published the story. In response, a wealthy man donated a large sum of money for the building project. Today, that church, the Temple Baptist Church houses 3,500 people. In addition, it also started the Temple University which trains hundreds of young people. All of that came about as a result of one poor little girl who pleased God by her sacrificial giving.](http://www.truthorfic-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

## Conclusion

In the parable of the Good Samaritan as described in Luke 10:25-37, we see an interesting dialogue between Jesus and an expert lawyer. The lawyer asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Instead of directly answering the question, Jesus replied with a question asking the lawyer what he had himself discovered in the Mosaic Law about it. The lawyer said: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with your entire mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.*" (10:27) Jesus was impressed by the lawyer's answer. He said: "*You have answered correctly... Do this and you will live.*" (10:28)

Just note what Jesus said. In fact, He told the man, "You have given the correct answer. Good, but not enough. It is not enough to "give" the right answer; you must learn to "live" the right answer."

In the summer of 1972, Dr. Stanley Jones, who was 89 years old at that time and confined to a wheelchair because of his stroke, was preaching at the International Christian Ashram in Jerusalem. Every day at breakfast time it was customary for the participants to share what the Lord had spoken to them during their morning personal devotion time with one another. One morning at the breakfast table, a colleague asked Dr. Jones: "Brother Stanley, what did the Lord tell you this morning?" Dr. Jones responded saying: "The Lord told me this morning: Stanley, you have been preaching the gospel for 65 years. Why don't you go and live the gospel today?!" When he said that, a great and Spirit-inspired silence fell on the entire dining room. Six months later in January 1973, Dr. Stanley Jones went to be with the Lord.

Living the gospel means living a life worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work. Jesus Christ our Lord did it; Enoch, an ordinary man like us did it; E. Stanley Jones, an outstanding Christian servant leader of our times did it. Now God is calling you to do it. What is your response to the society that God has chosen to place you? ■



# Salient Features of the Mar Thoma Liturgy

Rev. Dr. George Mathew Kuttiyil, Thiruvalla

Liturgy is the very expression of our faith through words and actions. It is significant in our faith journey and in imparting Christian belief. In this article we are dealing the Liturgy as a subject of our living and experiencing faith. The major features or what is expected from the Liturgy and worship is elaborated here. These salient features may vary from one liturgical tradition to the other and from one particular theological position to the other.

**The Term Liturgy:** "In the singular word 'Liturgy' denotes an act of worship more specially the Eucharist. Derived from the Greek word *'Leitourgia'*, it was used in Hellenistic Greek of an act of public service. In the New Testament it is employed of an act of service or ministry (Phil. 2:30). In time it was confined in Christian usage to the idea of 'Service to God' and finally worship was regarded as the supreme service to God it was applied to the Eucharist."<sup>1</sup> Liturgy can be interpreted as any service rendered by the people to God or society. At present Liturgy has several meanings such as the liturgical service of the Church, the Eucharistic Celebration or any particular liturgical function.

**Christological Nature of Liturgy:** The most significant characteristic of the Liturgy is its Christological nature, as part of the Trinitarian Theology. In the Christian Liturgy, we can experience a living God the Father who reveals His intimate relation with Jesus Christ. The Liturgy unfolds the plan of salvation through Christ. In every Eucharistic celebration, the Church commemorates the redeeming action of God in Christ and gives thanks (Eucharista) to the salvation that has been achieved through Christ.

**Pneumotogical Dimension of Liturgy:** According to Eastern thinkers, Holy Spirit is the source of life and work. Life and energy are considered as the economy of the Holy Spirit by the Church Fathers. The Holy Spirit has the primary place in the life of the Church though He operates within and outside the Church. Holy Spirit participates in the creation, redemption and sanctification of the human beings and cosmos (1 Cor. 6:11; Ps. 104:30). We understand the Holy Spirit who is operative in the entire salvation history, in and through our liturgical prayers.<sup>2</sup>

**Epiclisis-Invocation of the Holy Spirit:** Invocation of the Holy Spirit during the worship and each sacrament is an important prayer of the Church. Epiclisis is the prayer, which expresses the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the prayer addressed to God the Father, the first person of the Trinity to send, descend the Holy Spirit. It is the collective prayer and wish of the worshippers—the Church, to descend and sanctify the Holy elements offered in the Eucharistic and faithful believers. Epiclisis during sacraments especially in the Eucharist is the time of daily experiencing the Holy Spirit who once descended upon the believers. It is the common prayer of the Church to keep her continuously in the Pentecostal experience. It is the sign of the continuous experience of divine life through the sacraments. St. Ephrem says, "It is through the sacraments that the Church renews the gift of the



Holy Spirit given to her. Church through her liturgical prayers and rites lives in an extended Pentecost. Epiclisis expresses the Pentecostal nature of the church". Participation in the Liturgy leads us to communion with the Holy Spirit. It is within the context of worship, that the spirit bestows the knowledge of God.

**Trinitarian Dimension of Liturgy:** The function of Liturgy is to express the divine experience that has been revealed in Trinity and deepens that experience. In the Eastern Liturgy, especially the Liturgy of St. James is centered around Trinitarian dimension. The role of the Trinity in the Divine Salvation

(Economy of salvation) is beautifully and profoundly presented in the ante-communion and communion service of the Liturgy of St. James. All the liturgical prayers end by glorifying the Father, Son and Holy Spirit like: "We will ascribe glory to you and to the Father and to the Holy Spirit". Life in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit through Christ to God the Father is the real life. In the liturgical prayer of the Eastern Churches, the reference to the Trinity is well emphasized.

**Soteriological Aspect of the Liturgy:** Liturgy is the celebration of God's redemptive action which is also known as economy or plan of salvation. This is true especially in the Eucharistic celebration of the Church. In every Eucharistic celebration the Church commemorates the redeeming action of God in Christ and give thanks to the salvation that has been achieved through Christ. Soteriological themes are well reflected in the early Eucharistic Liturgy, especially in the Anaphora (Liturgy) of St. James. So it is more close to the New Testament faith and preaching, that Jesus is Lord and Savior. In the writings of the early Fathers this idea is dominant. Thus the faith of the early Church is well contained in the Liturgy of the Church.

**Scriptural Basis of the Liturgy:** Proclaiming the Word of God and administering the sacraments are the very foundation of Christian worship and mission. Bible and Liturgy equip the people for this purpose. They are intrinsically related to each other. Bible has influenced the Liturgy and Liturgy has influenced the formation of the scriptures. So they are mutually complimentary and not contradictory. It can be said that Bible itself was a creedal statement or Liturgy of the people of God. It was on the basis of the Old Testament that Christian Liturgy was born. Lucian Deiss says, "Jewish Liturgy was the womb from which Christian Liturgy was born."

**Place of Lectionary in Worship:** It is in the midst of believers gathered for worship, the Scripture is read out and expounded. The Scripture is developed for the worshipping community or liturgical gatherings. The scripture is read out and expounded by an authorized person of a Church. 'The Ministry of the Word' which has been adapted from the Jewish tradition is still continued in the Christian worship. The reading of the Scripture and its exposition in the midst of worship especially during the Eucharist and other sacraments is a continued practice even today. The first



part of the Eucharist itself is known as the Ministry of the Word. The Homily (Sermon) in the Liturgy is a usual feature of worship. The Word of God was read out and expounded right from the Apostolic time in the Christian Church. The practice of reading the Scripture in a cycle based on the salvation event had developed during the fifth century. This arrangement is known as the 'Lectionary System'. "Thus the Liturgy of the Church is very much scripture centered and the Word of God gives validity and authenticity to the worship and sacraments of the Church."<sup>4</sup>

**Ecclesial Nature of the Liturgy:** The Liturgy is an action of the Church and that has its origin in Christ who has endowed his powers to the Church. It is the community of believers that can legitimately and meaningfully celebrate the liturgy of the Eucharist. All sacraments are the acts of the Church. Here Church herself becomes the means of Grace. The sacramentality of the Church is revealed here. Liturgy and sacraments are ecclesial acts. That is why the second century Church Father Irenaeus commented "For where the Church is, there the Spirit of God and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of Grace."<sup>5</sup> It doesn't mean that there is no Holy Spirit outside the Church. This statement reveals the ecclesial nature of the Church.<sup>6</sup>

The model of the Church as the worshipping and praising congregation or as a liturgical assembly is rediscovered and emphasized by the Second Vatican Council. It says, "The Liturgy is, thus the outstanding means by which the faithful can express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church (SC-2). The role of the Church is that all who are made sons/daughters of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church (SC-10). It also could be said that the Liturgy convenes the Church, teaches and transforms the Church through her worship and sacraments. So Liturgy has major ecclesial role to play in the life and witness of the Church."

**Penitential Nature of Liturgy:** The acknowledgement by the believer of his/her sin is known as Confession. There can be different ways in a Liturgy to express their sorrow for sin and receive forgiveness from God through the redeeming act of God. The Confession can occur in a general, personal or a sacramental form. Through the Confession of sin the faithful receive divine forgiveness. It is the Holy Spirit who convince us about sin and enables us to confess to God. The Confession and Declaration of Absolution are channels to participate in the mission of God. 'The proclamation of forgiveness' is the assurance of divine forgiveness and mercy. To proclaim the Divine Grace and Forgiveness is the call and mission of the Church. The Liturgy of the Eastern Church is more penitential in nature.

The Sacrament of Confession in the Church enables the believers to come out from their sin and guilt and live in peace and reconciliation within one self, fellow being and with God. This sacrament is a means of grace for the broken hearted and sinner. It evokes hope and confidence by participating and confessing their short coming through the worship of the Church.

**Healing (Therapeutic) Aspect of Liturgy:** In the Liturgy of the Church, there is healing and reconciliation to the faithful. It is possible through the two sacraments of healing viz, the Confession and the Anointing of the Sick. Confession is the established sacrament which will help the believer to get complete

deliverance from sin. The acceptance of guilt of sin and repentance and the willingness to confess them are the prerequisites for forgiveness of sin. Confession is made to God and forgiveness of sin is done by God. The minister representing the Church declares the Absolution. The Holy Communion is celebrated by the reconciled community who has reconciled to one self, to each other and to God. It is a sacrament of inner healing. So there is healing and inner peace to the believers through the liturgical prayers and the Sacrament of Healing of the Church.

The sick gets physical and, spiritual comfort through the Sacrament of Healing or Anointing. Forgiveness of sin and deliverance from the disease are attributed to the Sacrament of Healing. When the anointing the sick is conducted the Church is announcing to the sick that the whole Christian community is with him/her. It is the faith of the Church and its prayer that imparts healing the sick. This service depicts the care and mission of the Church. Through anointing, God touches a person in his totality. The sick people experience the Grace of God through the service of healing, which was in vogue from the time of Jesus. The Church has the responsibility to retrieve the physical, spiritual and mental health of the sick people through the Sacrament of Healing.<sup>7</sup>

**The Pedagogic Aspect of Liturgy:** The purpose of Liturgy is to equip the people to live according to the knowledge and grace they receive from God. Christian education is imparted and transmitted through the Liturgy of the Church. It is not just the written prayers or liturgical text alone, but the whole act of worship and prayer is the means of Christian education. It is said that the Liturgy forms the Church, informs the Church and transforms the Church. Since the Liturgy is the source of theology and deposit of the faith it has to be handed over to the worshippers through the act of Christian worship. The pedagogic nature of Liturgy cannot be overlooked. It is still the means of Christian education.

**Ecological Dimension of Liturgy:** In the Eastern Liturgy there are some traces of ecological concern such as God as the creator. For example in Eucharistic Liturgy of St. James the prayer is given as follows.

"Let us give thanks to the Lord in awe ... Truly it is need and right to thank, worship and praise the creator of the whole world. He whom the heavenly hosts, corporeal and incorporeal, glorify, the sun, moon and all the stars, the earth, seas and the angels and archangels... crying and saying holy"<sup>8</sup> The stewardship of the creation and nature is emphasized in the Liturgy. Human beings look upon the nature as boundless source for their use and abuse. This attitude towards nature is out of greed. We have neglected all elements of nature-creatures of this world and creation is the possession of God (Ps. 24:1). It has been entrusted to our keeping. Only recently the Church began to realize that we are given the nature and earth to preserve and keep it and not to exploit or destroy it. The re-reading and re-interpreting of the Scriptures call us to be stewards of the entire created order. A proper vision of the nature and ecological concerns has to be reflected in the teaching and Liturgy of the Universal Church.<sup>9</sup>

**Toward an Inclusive Liturgy:** An authentic Liturgy should address the realities of life and day today problems of the worshippers. It must be contextual, accommodating and equipping the youth, women, Dalits, people with HIV/AIDS, physically and mentally impaired etc. Liturgy must be evolved from the local

*(Continued on page 22)*



# Breaking the Silence: Towards a Shift in Development Thought

Rev. Benu John, Baltimore MTC

**D**evelopment signifies growth of human civilization from humble beginnings. In this tech-oriented world the theme 'development' cuts against opposition at all levels of human society. Economic and industrial development and its agencies (both state and private) stand as high priests and their policies are regarded as infallible. No part of human society can escape being called insane if it speaks against developmental activities. But the world overlooks the fact that development comes with the social and ecological cost, including pollution. This article tries to highlight the flip side of human development from an 'animal' point of view. In this process I risk being called insane if it's worth a cause. A sane world perceives everything as normal and may be blind to reality.

The word 'animal' is not usually used in a polite sense rather it stands for uncivilized and brutal to a certain extent. So naturally an animal face of development may seem to be an antithesis of the human face of development. Here I will argue for an animal face of development from an ecological dimension. It argues for a paradigm shift in human thought. An animal face of development argues for thinking beyond the human face of development.

God gifted humanity with immense powers to 'conquer the earth and subdue it'. The scriptures have been used so powerfully for the profit of human wants. Even theology supported the scientific revolution of the renaissance and industrial eras for a 'Kingdom of God on earth' designed according to the human mind. We have bulldozed the earth and its beauty with powerful machines, just for the sake of curiosity and for redesigning the earth. We are guilty of deforming the fabric of the universe. For us the earth and God's entire creation have price tags determined by power brokers. In fact everything under the sun has come under the auction hammer ready to go on sale. Day by day our earth's resources are mercilessly plundered, killed and thereby made extinct.

We have finished everything and now we are looking towards outer space to plunder. Some power brokers may even bid for the sun and its beams. Its rays may one day be patented and sold to the highest bidder. Rivers and even countries are shamelessly being bought and sold to private agencies under the guise of efficiency and transparency. Let alone the animal world, we too are at risk of being tagged one day as the private property of MNC powers. Our money-oriented and power-oriented governments may



barter our bodies to gain 'nuclear status. Don't laugh at this crude joke! One day you may see it happen if we continue to remain silent. The silence of it's inhabitants could prove deadly for our precious planet.

In the development and expansion scenario, rivers are simply mega dams and the earth is simply the property of power brokers. It is eyed not as the abode of millions of creatures (which includes humans too) but as a blueprint for 'smart cities'. The sheep are too silent to raise a voice of protest. Human voice of protest can at

least be heard even if it is very faint. But who will represent the non-human community when thousands of hectares of forest vanish in the name of development? Isn't this cold-blooded murder for the sake of human prosperity? Rivers are turned dry or poisonous overnight for the sake of human development. In the end, who benefits from this murder?

In the midst of this human arrogance we should introspect ourselves. Who gave us authority to deface the entire world habitat in the name of development? Do human regulations and concerns genuinely hear the cry of the non-human world? Even Christian spirituality arrogantly claims that God created everything for the sake of humanity alone and humanity owns everything. The financial and political power brokers therefore have the strong unholy support of the church to privatize the planet and its creatures for their own profit. But does anyone other than humanity endorse this half-baked truth? God has created millions of beings and the strongest and the best in creation (by human standards) may be humans but certainly the world is not made exclusively for the exploits of humanity.

In the later part of this debate development 'Gurus' introduced the word 'human or humane face' of development. It was meant to understand the human loss of life and property involved in development and to evaluate 'who' actually benefits from development. Therefore it focussed on analysing the impact of development projects on the earth and the people. This also led to concerns that development works are not eco-friendly but destructive. So, phrases like eco-development and eco-friendly projects emerged in response. I argue that there is rarely anything that can be genuinely tagged as an eco-friendly mega project. Any development project investing solely for human wants or profit is bound to have a deep impact on the people and the entire ecological system.

It has to be understood that it is almost impossible to stop the indiscriminate assault on earth by a few isolated acts



of mercy by agencies of development. Actually all these attempts are simply human attempts to assuage its conscience when they plunder without shame. Humanity has to pay a very heavy price for this shameful act. Generation that follow will certainly curse us for denying them the luxury of fresh air.

Indian president boasts of a vision of India among the developed nations by 2020. But can the President say that who benefits from this mad race as the foundation stone of each development project is filled with countless corpses of innocent animals, plants and nature and human lives? Who will benefit from this mad race towards self-destruction? What will happen if all the countries of the world follow the example of developed nations? Then we need the resources of at least three to four planets to power this plan. The Narmada river project is the best example of this violent development that has ripped the very fabric of peaceful human-nature community.

There is a serious need to reconsider the focus of the cost of development from the point of view of nature. Nature cannot be an appendix of human projects. So here there is a basis for a paradigm shift in development matters. An animal model of development is one of the alternative answers to crisis. An animal face of development is not only sensitive to the needs of the non-human category but it looks at the world and its future from a different dimension. It calls for focussing mainly on the majority of those seriously affected by these projects. An invisible majority that is not visible in human development reports.

Therefore it calls for dismantling all such activities that destroy the balance of the ecosystem. It voices the concerns of the weaker community (including humans) that have been silenced by the politics of human needs. It actually questions the validity of considering human needs over and above the needs of all other beings on earth.

Why is there silence when it is understood clearly that each construction work or project kills or displaces all beings in that region permanently? This model strives to break the silence of the Lambs (non-human world) who have been slaughtered mercilessly for centuries as if humans have exclusive rights over the planet. It questions this open licence and power of humanity to destroy the earth. If we as humans cannot answer this question we need to strip ourselves of this power unless we can be answerable.

So an animal face of development seeks for a change in the human attitude of arrogance and selfishness. It seeks to counter the claims that human needs are primary. If we include the ecosystem and its population then human population is a very small minority. When we discount the poor and helpless majority of humanity, it is only a fraction that holds the entire earth at ransom. Unfortunately, this

minority rules over the mind and thought of the world and thereby its resources.

Is there no one who can stand up and say "STOP this aggressive behavior of looting the earth"? Who can remove this false mask of raping the earth in the guise of human needs? The need of the hour is not an eco-friendly sympathy or romantic vision but a change of life styles. The need is to recognize that each animal or being however big or small has the right to live. The legal right to live is not only for humans but has to be extended to all beings living or non-living. So any violence to the earth has to be treated as plain murder.

But how is this possible in this world where the elimination of the non-human world is regarded as natural and legitimate for humans? It is only possible if we as humans become aware that we have to change our values. The human hierarchy of values, which gives top marks to the best, the most economic and the strongest, has made life miserable for the weak.

We have to make the world aware that we are accountable to God who has not only created us but the whole world. Our God is the God of the Least, the Lost and the Last. It's only in relation to the creator that we can become responsible to the world. Animal rights cannot be and should not be just issues of academic interest or limited to government files. It is only a deep and selfless love of God and His creation that can save the planet from destruction. Our hands are smeared with blood; the blood of countless beings both living and non-living that have been sacrificed on the altar of human arrogance. Look around you. Everything we use or discard is taken from the non-human world.

This subject may seem to be out of touch with human problems and be tagged as impractical along with other deep ecologist views. This interpretation may even be dubbed as aristocratic and against Christian theology but we should clearly see the writing on the wall. The world is already facing catastrophic results due to sympathy for humanity alone. Future generations may not even live as normal humans as we have. The drastic climatic change, the pollution of our land, water and air, and the destruction of our forests and wildlife day by day warn us that we are going towards a point of no return. The future may not be lucky enough to enjoy the world's beauty, as it will all disappear down our throats.

The need of the hour is to save the earth from extinction. We need this planet and all its beings as fellow beings to co-exist. So let us open our hearts and minds to include all beings as partners in the development process. Let us ensure that human development will no longer eliminate the life of God's creation. This will promote our search for renewable resources—a development process that is based on God's abundant love for all beings. ■

*God's plan always leads to victory.*



# A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Reformation in the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Malankara Mar Thoma Church

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Is Reformation an outcome of a systematic, theological and liturgical study? What is the reason for reforming a liturgical tradition within the Malankara church? Is it the theology, practice or the situation that led to the formation of a new church? All these questions are relevant when one enquires about the formation of Mar Thoma Church and authenticity of Reformation in the Malankara Church especially when we celebrate the 175th anniversary of Reformation Movement.

If one analyses the Reformation process in the Malankara church, it is very evident that Reformation was a response to the living situation, of theology, practice and actions in the Malankara Church. Any theology is relevant when it has connection with the life experience of people with God. The context is an important component. If theology is not contextual it is irrelevant and it cannot challenge the life of the people. In one sense the Reformation Movement in the Malankara Church was a reaction to the living situations of the people and the circumstances of the Church. In order to understand this factor one needs to grapple with the socio-religious conditions of the Malankara Church during the period of 18th century. During that period the Malankara people were so concerned about the practices of their Church. The Pre Reformation Church was satisfied with observance of certain rite' and ceremonies. It is believed that by praying to the saints and by celebrating special festival connected with them, benefits could be derived and evil could be avoided. This was very much like the festivals observed by the non Christian community around them. They had no message behind this to the world. The lack of sound theological training and teaching, the overemphasis of the rituals, the Church centered life of the leaders etc... were the realities of the time. Majority of the people were not in a position to distinguish or grasp the real meaning of it according to the context. In reality the Church was at the height of its corruption. A reformatory movement within the Malankara Church was a vital factor for the spiritual awakening of the people and a kind of change in their practices and ritualistic profusions of the Church. In one sense Reformation was not a movement against the Church but against the decadence of its practices. So, one can say that, Abraham Malpan's Reformation Movement was not primarily based on any concrete theological thinking on the liturgy but it is a protest that emerged in the context of certain practical and spiritual problems in the Church.

Till Reformation, in the Malankara Church, Liturgy was the basis of their faith and theology and that was also interpreted only by the ordained people, because, that was in a foreign language, Syriac. The common believers were far away from the mainstream of the Church. They had no

access to the Liturgy and there was no scriptural school work and edification. The clergy was the center of the Church and their words were authoritarian and they took decisions according to their own interest and will. All these conditions of the Malankara Church challenged Abraham Malpan and he decided to initiate changes in the life of the Malankara Church and in its members. He approached the Liturgy with the open Bible and carefully studied the existing liturgy and detected many futile prayers and practices like praying for the dead and of the dead, adoration of saints, meditation of Virgin Mary and saints, the practice of bowing down before the statues etc...which has no biblical support. Mainly Abraham Malpan's Reformation ideas emerged from three streams: because of his study of the Word of God, because of his association with the missionaries and because of the decadence of the practices of the Malankara Church. But he had many limitations in his reformation venture. The main limitation was that he did not have the infrastructure for a systematic analysis of the situation and a proper response to it, and neither did he have able assistance. Even though he was professor, his associates did not have the privilege of a refined academic background. Thus the Reformation was not an outcome of a systematic theological enquiry on liturgy but due to the situations of the period. Actually Abraham Malpan initiated a theological investigation in the Church and his followers upheld that and tried to explore more. So in that sense the theological exploration of the Church on its various prayers and practices were continuing after the formation of the Church also. It is an ongoing process and still exploration on various prayers continues.

In the case of practices the reformers preferred to avoid the dramatization of the Holy Qurbana. Their intention was to make the worship more easy and attractive and for that they avoided the excessive use of ritualistic elements from the original Liturgy. There is no such theology behind this removal. The removal of procession, the kissing of the alter, the removal of *marvahuza*, the continuous act of veiling and unveiling of curtain etc...are some examples for this. The motive behind this was to make the communion service simple and uncomplicated.

In the Eastern tradition clear-cut formulation of doctrines was not common. Doctrines were expressed through prayers and meditations in the Liturgy. Therefore there was no attempt to define doctrinal statements clearly. The Liturgy used in the Malankara Church was the combination of both Scripture and teaching of the Church Fathers (traditions). But because of the influence of the missionaries and the thorough study of the Bible in later years, the reformers were forced to find a theological position on its prayers and practices. During the period of Reformation the contact with foreign missionaries influenced





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the Reformation leaders and the theology of the missionaries attracted them. In the initial stages of Reformation the Church was influenced by the Anglicans like Walker and later on by Presbyterian and Baptist evangelical preachers like Wordsworth and others. The impetus for the reformatory activities of Abraham Malpan was essentially from his contact with these missionaries. His interaction with them gave fuel for his reformatory ideas. For the missionaries, preaching was more important than Liturgy. They gave much importance to the scripture and from scripture they tried to interpret the context and the liturgy. They gave much importance to personal salvation than communitarian salvation. The study of the Word of God led many in the Malankara Church to see the need for Reformation in the Church. They understood that the Christian Church as the body of Christ must witness to Jesus Christ and present the light of the Gospel to others. The Malankara Church lacked this and therefore there was need to go back to the study of the Word of God. So the reformers gave much importance to the Bible study.

The missionary teachings influenced the reformers and they tried to interpret the Liturgy on the basis of the Bible. Because of the thorough study of the Bible with the missionaries they made significant changes in the Liturgy. As a result they removed non scriptural practices like praying for the dead, adoration of saints and Virgin Mary, mediation etc...and their emphasis was on the Word of God and the exposition of the Bible. On the basis of this, they tried to interpret and find out their theological stand. In line with the reformed ideas they corrected the Liturgy, sending out an indirect message that Liturgy is not as static and sacrosanct as it was ones thought to be, but that, based on new theological insights, there is need to revise the Liturgy. This was a revolutionary step in the Eastern tradition. Because altering Liturgy would be considered as blasphemy, as serious a crime as attempting to correct the Bible. It is very clear that reformation ideas influence the Eucharistic concept of the Mar Thoma Church; because, the Reformation leads to the renewal of the Liturgy, which express their faith and theology. But it is a difficult task and still the Church moves in the same stream for more theological exploration on her context and tradition. This is an ongoing process for a new understanding and perspective.

Abraham Malpan's Reformation was a protest against the practices in his own Church; he did not discard the Eastern theology to adopt a Protestant theology. The liturgical theology of the Mar Thoma Church is different from the Orthodox Churches. The Mar Thoma Church has not completely identified itself with the Protestant theology either. It is a blending of the Eastern and Protestant theologies. The Mar Thoma Church upholds the Malankara tradition and at the same time it considers the Bible as the foundation of their spiritual life. To certain extend, the Church follows the tradition received largely through her ancient Church Fathers. Both, the Bible and tradition is part and parcel of the Mar Thoma Eucharistic Theology. Both are two sides of the same coin. The Reformation paved the way for the interpretation of Liturgy on the basis of Scripture, which caused the removal of many unbiblical prayers from

the old Liturgy and still this continues. So in this sense one can call the Mar Thoma Church as a Reformed Church and also a Reforming Church. It is very clear that the Liturgy express the faith and theology of the Church with a Biblical foundation. Mar Chrisostom, the Valiya Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church mentioned that he is so doubtful about the theological analysis of the situations of the reformation period. He says that the Reformation in the Mar Thoma Church did not originate from a systematic theological analysis of the situation then. But it was a gradual process because of the thorough study of the Scripture.

Liturgy is the language of its believer's conviction and its primary focus is on their relationship with God in connection with the context. That which is not contextual and unable to influence the people becomes irrelevant. The Reformed Liturgy is the continuation of the Apostolic faith of the Church that was handed over to it from generation to generation. The mode of communication and contents need to be contextualized for the modern period. When the Liturgy becomes contextual, it will influence the people and the total life of the Church will be transformed. The Reformed Liturgy of the Mar Thoma Church has several unique features such as; rich theological content, centered around the Trinitarian doctrine, active participation of the people takes place, the prayers and petitions have scriptural support and the presence of the eschatological dimension of salvation. This does not mean that the Reformed Liturgy is without any limitations. If one critically observes the Reformed Liturgy of the Mar Thoma Church it is evident that it does not consider its context very much. There are several areas where they need further adaptations, changes or renewal of Liturgy. A relevant Liturgy should reflect the day to day affairs of the community, their problems, hopes, and aspirations. A Contextual Liturgy must address the issues like injustice, poverty, exploitation, discrimination on the basis of caste, color, gender and so on. The participation in the Liturgy should challenge such evil systems in society and enable them to fight against them. Through the Liturgy, the real sanctification and transformation of the people have to take place. For better ecumenical relations, the Church should formulate and celebrate an Ecumenical Liturgy and also new modes of communication techniques should be incorporated in the worship for explaining the signs and symbols. Another aspect of the present Liturgy is that, it is a God centered Liturgy in the frame work of the Church. We think God loves the Church, and the Church is God's prime arena of work and forget the importance of the world. Instead of this, our primary concern should be God-World-Church. God loved the world and because of God's love for the world, God created the Church. The world should write the agenda for the Church. So Liturgy should not deal only with the acts of God in the past but must relate to the life situations of today. Edification of the people about the role of liturgical prayers and practices are important in this juncture. This helps the participants to worship God keeping the great heritage and tradition of the Church and satisfying their spiritual needs in connection with their day today life. The Eucharistic community should be a reconciled, renewed and missionary community. Only then can the Church influence the world.

*(Continued on page 30)*



# Corinthian Church: Called to be Saints

Rev. Minoy N. Kuruvilla, MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch

**T**he Church is the body of Christ and it is called out to be the 'light' and 'salt' of the Earth. God's divine calling plan of people and community can be seen throughout the Bible. God calls people and community from the beginning of human history to fulfill His purpose in this world through the called ones. The calling is not just to fulfill His purpose but also to make us realize and to regenerate from the circumstances where we went wrong in this wilderness journey. Calling on the other hand is also a responsibility towards the society, to be a role model and witness for our Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to be witnesses of Jesus Christ by living a life worthy of our Lord Jesus Christ. This article is based on the calling and the witness of the Corinthian Church, a Church which is called to be Saints. The experiences, struggles and the transformation of the Corinthian Church and its believers are still relevant in the Diaspora context of our Church.

To understand the text of Letters to Corinthians and Paulian thought, we need to have an understanding of the economical, political, cultural and the value systems of the society in which the writer and the people lived and worked, which made the author to articulate the text to the readers. For having the text relevant for today's context for the Church and the believers of today we should know the following points. They are:- (i) The world before the text; (ii) The text itself; and (iii) The present world after the text.

**The City of Corinth:** Corinth was a prominent Roman colony, known for its importance as a prosperous commercial center and for the famous temple of Aphrodite, Goddess of Love. From the dawn of Greek civilization the City of Corinth seems to have been a major maritime center. Its strategic location at the meeting point for the shipping channels assured the rebuilt Roman city under Julius Caesar, a new era of prominence during the time when Paul ministered in Corinth. In ancient times Corinth was also known as the city of sin, in Asia Minor, due to its sexual immorality.

**Paul's Mission to Corinth:** During his third missionary journey, as recorded in the Acts 18: 1-18, Paul provides a brief narrative of founding of the Church in Corinth. Paul stayed at Corinth longer than anywhere else except Ephesus, and even when he was there, he kept in touch with the Corinthian Church. Paul, the Apostle of Gentiles might have taken it as a challenge to preach the gospel in this metropolis. After Paul's initial missionary work at Corinth we find many Jews were coming to this place after they were expelled by the Emperor Claudius from Rome. Aquila and Priscilla (1 Cor.16:19) and even Apollos (Acts 18:24-19:7) might have reached Corinth after being expelled by force and not by chance. Paul speaks of Apollos with full respect for him and his commitment for the Church in Corinth (1 Cor. 3:5-9; 4:6; 16:12), but it is apparent that some of his followers were trouble makers in the Church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11-12; 3:4).



**The Content of St. Paul's Letter:** The New Testament scholars have difference of opinion regarding the letters written by Paul to Corinthian Church. They are of opinion that few of his letters are missing and at least one is compiled with the contents from the existing letters. Whatever the contents of the letters may be, Paul tried his best to address and deal with the struggles and challenges the Corinthian Church was facing such as moral laxity, division among believers etc. Paul wrote a letter and later sent Timothy to follow up the spirit of the letter hoping that some of the developments and abuses in the Church might be rectified. But

the report he received was different and the problems of the Corinthian Church became worse and critical in nature. It is also believed that Paul had made an urgent visit to Corinth and the experiences he had faced and witnessed there was very much painful for him (2 Cor. 2:4) and 7:8-12 speaks about effect of the letters on the Corinthian Church. In short when we read the letters we find the pain and the agony of an Apostle who labored hard for Him and His ministry, yet struggling in pain and hope that the Church in Corinth will overcome its initial struggles and different temptations. St. Paul through his letter challenges the believers of Corinthian Church that they should remember that they are called to be saints. I am trying to restrict my thoughts around the called community and what it means to be saints.

**Called for Becoming:** Most believers think being a Christian as something 'we do'. We pray, we read the Bible, we go to church, we sing hymns, we give money to charity, we do and we do.... and assume that is the Christian life is all about. Authentic Christianity is about 'becoming' rather than 'doing'. The faith life that God designed involves receiving Jesus and allowing Him to change our habits, mindset, belief, interests and concerns so we become more and more like Him. The Church and its believers must be in the continuous process of 'becoming' the witnesses of the Risen Lord wherever they are planted. It is not what the Church or the believers do that matters, but it is the way of life or 'living the gospel' that makes a Church and its people to be the true witnesses of God's mission and His purpose. We often try to make others Christians, but we forget of 'becoming' Christians first. Our life and actions should reflect the life of our Lord Jesus Christ so that others will know that we are Christians. A church and its believers should not exist for doing the mission and purpose of God, but by doing His mission and purpose, the Church and its people should be able to exist.

**Called to be Broken:** When we think about becoming it is not an easy task. There are a few things which we have to give up in order to be like Him. As the potter molds the clay and makes it in to a beautiful pot as he wishes, so do God wants our submission to Him so that He can mold us as He wants us to be. Once surrendered, He should not be restricted to remove the things which He doesn't want within us. It's the process the Lord uses to strip us of things that have become—or may one day become—



an obstacle to our spiritual growth. He also uses the tool of breaking to address issues we have declared "off limits" to Him, such as unhealthy behaviors or relationships that we often try to rationalize. We need to submit ourselves to the God almighty so that He can mold us as useful pots to carry the love of God and share the same with others. God is the creator and we are the creation, thus creation need to submit to the creator at all times fully and unconditionally. Without a total surrender the Creator is unable to mold us to be useful for His purpose and mission. We need to experience the pain, trials and tribulations of this world, then only God will be able to mold us in the way He wants us to be to share the burdens of others.

**Called for Re-Creation:** God created human in His own image, but the fall took place and man alienated himself from God. Jesus' redemptive act paved way to receive the image back. Jesus' persistent work of 're-creation' in us is happening through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit helps us to identify the wrong attitudes and replaces them with Godly ones. In short our priority should be to follow the Savior's life and His way of living as a model. It seems often difficult because we think in the worldly point of view and only upon our partial surrendering. His calling makes zeroes in all areas of self-will and self-sufficiency to remove everything within us that relies on "self". We need to regenerate from the old since we are a new creation and part of the body of Christ. Christ should live within us and allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us in all our thoughts and deeds. Paul, himself is an example of re-creation in the hands of God, who used him to be His Apostle among the gentiles and to transform them. Like a seed decays and re-generates while lying in the soil and becoming a tree bearing fruit, we should be able to re-generate ourselves in order to bear fruit.

St. Paul through his letter tries to emphasize that the believers have to think and act differently. Evaluating every matter in the Godly point of view, they should understand that Jesus uses brokenness to remove those inclinations so that they can live moment by moment, day by day, in full dependence on Him. Today we have to re-read the text and ask ourselves, how much we were able to live the way Paul challenged the believers of Corinth? Does the Corinthian ways exist in us? Do we feel bad if we are called as Saints...or are we worthy to be called as such! We need to 'live the gospel' in its true spirit wherever we are planted by God. The world around is decaying with its filthiness and immorality. In order to regenerate the world and society around us, we must be able to shed the darkness of sin and remove the decaying elements from within us and around us. We should be able to do it only with the enabling strength of the Holy Spirit which should dwell within us so that we may be able to transform ourselves and the lives around us. Like Paul, the Apostle of Gentiles, we need to be the Apostles of Jesus Christ in the community where we are planted by God. The Church and its people need to be missionaries in its nature and existence. The Church and its faith should enable the believers to transform the world around it, and not to submerge in the ways of the world. Let the Word of God help us to re-surrender and be fruitful not only for us but for the society as true 'light' and true 'salt' of the Earth. ■

**Editor's Note:** The above article is based on a course of study attended by Rev. George Varghese (Sehion MTC, Dallas, Rev. A. P. Noble (St. Paul's MTC, Dallas), Rev. Regi Zacharia (Colorado MTC), Rev. Varghese Mathew P. (Oklahoma MTC) and Rev. Minoy N. Kuruvilla (MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch) at South-West Episcopal Seminary, Austin, Texas, under a program initiated by the Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church.

## Salient Features of the Mar Thoma Liturgy *(Continued from page 15)*

culture, transmit the cultural moorings of the worshipper. It should also reflect the ecological crisis and concerns of the present day. The language and participation must be inclusive. Only such a Liturgy can articulate the redeeming and liberative work of God in Christ to the world at large.

**The Missionary Mandate of the Liturgy:** The very purpose of Liturgy is to participate in the Mission of God in Christ. The sending forth of the faithful at the end of the Liturgy has a sacramental significance. It is for the continued mission that they are sent out into the world. Thus participation in the Liturgy involves a missionary mandate of the faithful. About the liturgical gathering of the Church is said that 'gathered for worship and dispersed for mission'.

By participating in the liturgical life we participate in the 'Mission of God'. In the 'Liturgy of the Word', we hear the Word of God and the sermon. Bible is the history of God's mission. By hearing the Word of God, we receive the call to participate in mission. Participation in Holy Eucharistic exhorts us to take part in the divine plan of Salvation and bear witness to it. The worship of the Church is a celebration of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Benediction is commissioning for the divine mission in the world.

**Conclusion:** Liturgical life is a life in the Spirit. It is the experience of forgiveness from sin and fellowship with Christ through the Holy Spirit. Continued participation in worship will lead us to continued Mission. The worshipping community must be

transformed to be the prophetic sign of the Kingdom of God. We were discussing the salient features of the Liturgy. It has dimensions and aspects. It should be related to the realities of life and to the cultural context. Let me conclude this study by quoting Rick Warren "In genuine worship, God's presence is felt, God's pardon is offered, God's purposes are revealed and God's power is displayed."<sup>10</sup> ■

### Notes:

1. J. G. Daires (ed). *A Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, SCM Press London (1984). P. 222.
2. George Mathew, *Liturgy for our Times*, CSS, Tiruvalla (2006) P. 88 ff.
3. Lucian Deiss, *Spewing Time of Liturgy*, College Ville (1979) P. 3.
4. George Mathew, "An Introduction to the Lectionary of the Mar Thoma Church" Yuvadeepam (2002) Vol. 4, P. 14-152.
5. Irenaeus, *Against Heesies* (3:24)
6. L. Arrangassery, *Ecclesial dimensions of East Syrian Liturgy* OIRSI
7. George Mathew, *The Faith and Sacrament of the Mar Thoma Church*, CSSM Tiruvalla (2004) P. 87-93.
8. George Mathew, *Eucharist, the Celebration of the Economy of Salvation*, OIRSI Vadavathoor (1999) P. 98.
9. George Mathew, "A search for an inclusive liturgy for today", Keynote address delivered at ECC, Whitefield in A National consultation on worship and Liturgy: A critical Re-look on 20th August 2008; P. 5.
10. Rick Warren *The Purpose Driven Church* Zonderian, Michigan (1995) P. 247.



# Lay Leadership in the Church

Dennis Abraham

Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam (St. John's MTC, New York)

The theme selected for this issue of the Mar Thoma Messenger is apt and speaks for the need of the day, both in the Universal Church and the Mar Thoma Church. This is something that has been discussed not only in the Church, but also among Ecumenical Circles, such as the World Council of Churches (WCC). A meeting of the WCC's Department of the Laity, which met many years back, made a statement about lay ministry, emphasizing lay ministry as the basic constituency of the Church, and the fact that it is from this point, that people experience and live out their faith.

When we think of lay leadership in the Church, we often rely on our popular and collective understanding: it is mainly for assisting the clergy during the Holy Communion services, and other special services and sacraments. All matters of faith related to the parish seem to be only within the territory of 'lay leaders,' is a common notion and understanding of many of us today (unconsciously or consciously). Having this in mind, we may tend to back ourselves away from the mainstream life of the Church, and leave faith-related responsibilities in the hands of the clergy and lay leaders. By this, we separate and inhibit ourselves from being the witnesses of Christ and continuing the mission to which we have been called and entrusted. The need of the hour is to understand our call, not as having passive roles in the Church, but rather, as leaders who have an active role in the life of the Church and its mission.

The word "lay" comes from the Greek, *laos*, which means people. The "People of God," was a very important concept in the Old Testament, referring to the Israelites, who were a called out people by God, intended to live according to what He intended. They were representing God to other nations (especially to other nations who were observing polytheistic religious traditions and who had not come to know Yahweh). Their responsibility in God's mission was understood by virtue of their identity as the People of God. God was committed to them, and they were committed to Him, by a covenant/promise which was never broken from His side. In the New Testament, it is used in the Gospel according to St. Luke to mean, men, women, and children who heard Christ's preaching, witnessed His miracles, healing, and those who listened to the Apostles' teaching. In the NT, they can be seen as the 'Body of Christ', and their presence was reaffirming the people-character of the Church.

By virtue of being the Body of Christ, there are many parts. We as the people of God are blessed with various talents that can be used for the betterment of the Church. Being the body of Christ should invoke in us a sense of responsibility. Many of us have talents in singing, playing instruments, painting, drawing, and organizing. Some of us



are tech-savvy. Whatever our talents are, they can, to a certain degree, be manifested in the ministry of the Church. The question is whether or not we have recognized our talents as God's blessings. As lay leaders, we are indebted to give to God that which is due to Him, and this can be done through the manifestation of our talents. We should allow the Holy Spirit to inspire us to take a more active role in manifesting these talents appropriately for the glory of God.

The call for lay leadership is not simple: it comes with challenges and burdens, which are all part of being an agent in Christ's mission. The call is not simply to exist, but to also be active. We are all called to be in this world for Christ, because it is God Himself who reconciled the world to Himself through Jesus Christ. The seriousness and importance we give to this call is measured through our leadership and active role in the life of the Church. Just as in other areas of our lives, we must try our level best to bring glory and honor to the Church, and the body of Christ, so that it becomes a living and visible manifestation of the presence and blessings of God. Lay Leaders are to help bridge the relationship between the Church and the world, that is, between the people of God in the Church and the whole people of God in the world. The laity are the common element between the Church and life of the world. At the same time, it is important to work with the clergy to develop an appropriate and efficient plan for lay leadership that would benefit both the Church and the local community.

As lay leaders, it is important for commitment to rebuilding the Church community, by being inclusive, attending to others' needs (especially spiritual), and being promoters of Christian mission. As the Church is a spiritual hospital for the spiritually weak and sick, being lay leaders, we are the 'spiritual doctors,' in this hospital, by attending to the needs of our fellow brethren.

Friends, when we think of lay leadership, we oftentimes think of what we can do on a macro level. But for this type of ministry, it is important that we start from the micro—the grassroots level and build ourselves up. We need to go from the local to the global. Our local parishes have their needs and it is important that we build a foundation from the parish level. We must know that whatever we do for God, whether great or small, has a great mark in the Kingdom of God. What matters is how much we humble ourselves and lead with the right intention. We should not claim the glory for ourselves, for it is due to God. The moment we do, we compromise the integrity of the mission and witness of Christ.

Our Diocese has abundant opportunities for lay leadership, mission, and ministry, starting from the parish



level. The start of 'Lay Institute' speaks well of the Church's concern for lay ministry and leadership in the Church. Having a basic knowledge of the Bible, theology, church history, worship (liturgy), and Christian ethics, can better equip us for this, which is the main reason for this program. The Native American mission, Mexico mission, and contextual ministries such as Neighborhood and Prison ministry are all vehicles we can use for participation in the mission of God.

Lay leadership is important even for our youth today. The trend of youth leaving the Church has started to gain leverage in recent time. Many youths who spoke to me personally have shared the fact that they don't get anything out of the Church, and that there is no spiritual nourishment. But if the youths in this regard, are given ample opportunities to take an active role in the Church, would the same be said? The most important fact of a Church is not about what we get, rather, what we can and have given to the Church. The children and youth are the hope of tomorrow's Church. If no one is there to take up leadership in the present time, who will lead the Church tomorrow? Therefore, it is important to delegate responsibility and leadership roles to them, not only in the sense of church administration, but also in matters relating to the faith, life, and mission of the Church. They too, are participants in the Kingdom of God, and their importance must also be recognized in the lay leadership. Our Church has great potential in this matter, as it is a Church which gives primal importance to mission.

As the people of God, taking an active role in lay leadership can be a stepping stone for dedicating oneself to the ministry of Christ. There are many ways in which God can use us. There are many individuals from this Diocese, who have dedicated themselves and answered the call of God, whether it was through the ordained ministry, or even full-time/part-time ministry (non-ordained). Being an active part of the laity is also ministry. As God's people we are called to specific tasks, let our response be according to His will.

Ultimately, what matters is how well we participate and engage with the society. If we are not active in this matter, how can we say that we are Christians, when being a Christian, by virtue of definition, involves mission and witness? The salient characteristics of Christian faith and practice must be taken seriously in our lives. God has many expectations from both the clergy and laity as His people. As we expect much from God, God also expects much from us. He expects us not to just be active human beings, but also active Christians. He was active throughout history—He engaged in the lives of people throughout history and continues to do so today.

As a Church, our mission is to the world. As the laity, we are part of the "church happening." We ourselves are a vehicle of mission to the world. We may consider ourselves as good Christian men and women who are faithful to Christ in our personal lives, convictions, and ethics, and we may be satisfied with this. This can be dangerous, as it may lead to a static or passive Christian life, revolved around "Me, Myself, and I." However, as a called out community, we are called to the dynamic realities of the world, which demand a dynamic response from our part.

I Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (NRSV) As people of Christ and *en Christo*, we are to participate in the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The priesthood can't simply be limited to the ordained ministry. Rather, it is a priesthood shared by all believers. It is the dispensation of gifts by the Holy Spirit that enable us to take active leadership as members of the priesthood of believers. Our consciousness of this call should not allow room for pride or differentiation of status. We can be true lay leaders, only when we emulate and manifest the high priestly example of Christ and His character of obedience, service, and suffering (Hebrews 4:14–5:10).

The whole Church participates in Christ's ministry. We may oftentimes leave the clergy to do the ministry. But we must remember that the clergy alone does not constitute the Church. The laity consists of 98% of the Church. The clergy is given to the Church to lead and guide the people of the Church. It is the responsibility of the laity to also participate in the priesthood of believers. Just as Paul says that certain ministries accomplished by certain specifically called people, there are certain ministries, like lay ministry, which are accomplished by all people.

Let us examine ourselves and see whether we have faithfully been active in our call and responsibility in our vocation of lay leadership. If there are any weaknesses on our part, let us work together as the laity of the Church, the *laos*, and construct a new model of lay leadership that will not only be a blessing to our faith community, but also to the society.

Just as Henri Nouwen once said, "Priest are living reminders of Christ," let us all do the same and remind others of the comforting and awesome presence of our God, who lived throughout history, spoke and worked through our ancestors and continues to work through us today, as leaders in the Church. May God bless us all. ■

### MAR THOMA CHURCH OF SAN FRANCISCO

**Congratulations:** Tiara Abraham (4 ½ yrs old) & Tanishq Abraham (7 yrs old) members of the Marthoma Church of San Francisco and children of Mr. Bijou Abraham & Dr. Taji Abraham have been accepted into MENSA—the high IQ society, which provides a forum for intellectual exchange among its members. The American Mensa has a membership of about 56,000 and the international chapter has a membership of 100,000. Tiara and Tanishq are active in the Sacramento prayer group.

Rev K. A. Abraham, Vicar

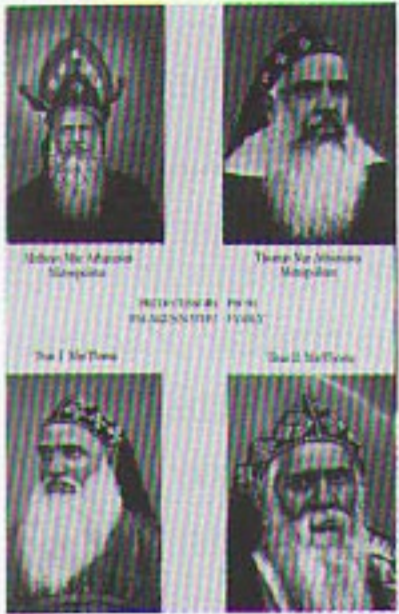


# 'ENPATHUKALUDE NIRAVIL' - JOSEPH MAR THOMA

Compiled by Lal Varghese, Esq., MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch

Q: Thirumeni was born at Maramon on June 27, 1931, in the famous Palakunnathu family, which is the family of our Church fathers Mathews Mar Athanasius, Thomas Mar Athanasius, Titus I, and Titus II. Now looking back at your childhood time what are your reflections about those days?

A: The spirituality that was prevailing in the background of reformation was evident in my childhood days. I am very much fond of my childhood days especially the Maramon village where I was born and brought up and the Maramon Church, which played a pivotal role in my spiritual life, where I attended the Sunday School, Yuvajana Sakyam and several other Church organizations.



Q: Maramon village, river Pampa, Aranmula Vallam Kali, and Maramon Convention were always an inspiration for Thirumeni to be with the people. Does Thirumeni still feel same way that Thirumeni is the Bishop of the people?

A: I consider myself as the Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church as well as the Bishop of the people. My childhood environment helped me to have a broader perspective about other religion and people as well. That created in me a feeling of ecumenism not only among Christians but with other religions and people as well. I see people as a whole, and anyone can approach me at any time in their need. I will be with them irrespective of their religion or affiliation.

Q: The Palakunnathu family played a major role in the Maramon Convention since its inception in 1895. Does Thirumeni still cherish the memories of thatching the convention pandal, and making all the arrangements including housing famous speakers like E. Stanley Jones at the Palakunnathu house?



A: Maramon Convention originated as a convention of the Maramon parish. Later, even though MTEA took charge of it, all arrangements for the convention were made locally. Irrespective of religion, people opened their doors to believers who attended convention from distant places. I know several Hindu families in Maramon who helped to provide the coconut leaves and poles for the pandal and also helped to thatch the pandal in my childhood days.

Q: Thirumeni's pet name was 'Baby' and official name was 'P.T. Joseph' which became 'Joseph Mar Irenaeus' when you were consecrated as a Bishop, and is now 'Joseph Mar Thoma,' after being installed as Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church. How do you describe the challenges faced

in the transition as an individual from 'Baby' to 'Joseph Mar Thoma'?

A: It was always a challenge to move from a secular background to a non-secular environment. The primary focus was always the meeting the challenges of the Church and its people. But I always maintained a cordial relationship with all religions and people wherever I served.

Q: Through Abraham Malpan, Palakunnathu family guided the destiny of the reformed wing of the Malankara Syrian Church and provided four Metropolitans to the Mar Thoma Church and now a fifth—Joseph Mar Thoma. Does Thirumeni think that you are able to carry on the reforms as envisioned by your predecessors in its true spirit?



A: Many fathers from my family committed their life to the Church and sacrificed themselves for the faith for which they stood. We have the open Bible with us now. Realities are to be faced when making reforms at any time in the Church.

Q: What is Thirumeni's opinion about the liturgy of the Church? Does it need any reform because the Mar Thoma Church has become a global church?

A: Worship should be made in the language of the people. That was not the case before the reformation. Abraham Malpan in 1835 at Maramon parish for the first time read the 'Promeon' and 'Sedra' in Malayalam by looking at the Syrian Thaksa. When a person worships in true faith and spirit, by understanding the meaning of the liturgy, no one will ever demand that there is need for change in the liturgy.

Q: What is Thirumeni's opinion about ordaining women in other Christian denominations? Does the Eastern Church accept the ordination of women?



A: Women regardless of age should be given equal rights in the administration of the parishes, diocese, and Church. There are several churches that still do not have voting rights for women. Eastern ecclesiastical spirituality does not recognize the ordination of women.

Q: Thirumeni had education at Always U.C. College, UTC Bangalore, Virginia Theological Seminary in the US, and Canterbury and Oxford in England back in the 1950s and 1960s. What prompted Thirumeni to become an ordained priest of the Mar Thoma Church at a young age?





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A: Like I mentioned earlier, my family, my parish and the environment in which I grew up influenced me a lot and instilled a firm faith within me. It was not an attractive job to become an ordained priest of Mar Thoma Church during that time.



A priest had to struggle very hard to make ends meet, and also to take care of the needs of the parish and its people. It was a really a challenge for me to become an ordained priest of the Mar Thoma Church and with God's grace I took up that challenge, now I am 80 years old with 54 years in the service of the Church and 35 years as a Bishop. *(Thirumeni is at extreme left in the picture)*

Q: Thirumeni studied at Virginia Theological Seminary in the US, which awarded Thirumeni honorary degree 'Doctor of Divinity' and also at Canterbury and Oxford in England where you specialized in 'Patristic Theology'. How has such education at famous places helped Thirumeni in your services as a priest and later as a Bishop?



A. My education in the US and England provided me with a wider view of ecumenism and provided me with a modern vision for the Church. The Serampore University in Calcutta awarded me an honorary doctorate also. All of these created in me a new outlook about religion, the Church and its people.

Q: Thirumeni was ordained as a 'Kasessa' in 1957 and served in several parishes both inside and outside Kerala including serving as the 'traveling secretary' of the MTEA. Was it different from the present and how would you describe the challenges you faced during that time?

A: There was no parsonage for priests to live during that time. There was only a single room attached to the 'Madbaha' of the parish where priests lived. There were no bathrooms or toilet or kitchen. There was no electricity or buses to travel from one place to another place. But, God helped me to overcome all challenges and keep in the faith journey of the Church. I had a very good relationship with the Hindus and Muslims wherever I served.



Q: Thirumeni was consecrated as a 'Ramban' along with late Easow Thirumeni in 1975 at Trichur, and as a Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church in the same year at Thiruvalla. Thirumeni served in various dioceses of the Church. Now looking back after 35 years serving as a Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church what do you think about the Church and its members as a faithful witnessing community?

A: The communities where we live always change and Church's mission also should be attuned to those changes in

the community. The Mar Thoma Church has become a global Church, and we have to be the witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ wherever we are planted. We should have a contextual mission; we need to review and change our attitude towards mission on a regular basis.

Q: The name 'Irenaeus' for Thirumeni was chosen from the name of Bishop Irenaeus who lived in the second century and who wrote a treatise against the Gnostics. Does Thirumeni feel that our Church and its leaders have false teachings or that people follow any false teachings?

A: Our Church, like all other traditional churches, faces the challenge of the prosperity gospel. The promise of the gospel is not of prosperity, but it is one of sacrifice and commitment to our Lord. Another challenge we as a Church facing now is the growth of several parachurch organizations, which are using established churches like ours as a 'milking cow.' Our Church and its leaders do not have any false teachings and we believe in the Holy Bible and the Holy Trinity.



Q: When Saddam Hussein's army invaded Kuwait, thousands of our people lost jobs and were forced to return to Kerala. Thirumeni was in charge of the Kuwait region then, and Thirumeni helped thousands of returning Malayalees irrespective of their religion or race to settle down in Kerala. At that time everyone praised the United States for coming to the rescue of Kuwait. What is Thirumeni's opinion about the involvement of United States at present in Iraq and Afghanistan?



A: During Kuwait's invasion by Iraq, the United States helped Kuwait to regain its freedom, and that country is one of the best countries in the world providing jobs for thousands of people from all over the world. We have a Mar Thoma parish in Kuwait which has the largest number of families. But the United States involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan is different from that of the rescue of Kuwait. In Iraq, the United States was using them to fight Iran, and when they turned against America during the regime of Saddam Husain, they tried to take control of it. Same thing in Afghanistan—in order to fight Russia in the Cold War days, America provided money and weapons to the Taliban, when the Taliban turned against America, the US is trying to take control of the situation. History reveals that even the Russians failed in Afghanistan, and it will be a costly effort for America too.

Q: Thirumeni's in depth involvement as a leader in various ecumenical bodies like KCC, NCCI, CASA, ECLOFF, WCC, CCA, CCI helped those organizations. Why don't we



see such ecumenical involvement is not taking place at the grass root levels of the Church especially at the parish levels?



A. There are several sociological and cultural reasons behind it, but wherever it is possible we are co-operating with other churches in the ecumenical realm. We have full communion with the C. S. I. and C. N. I. churches in India. We as a Church need to be involved in a cordial relationship with other religions also.

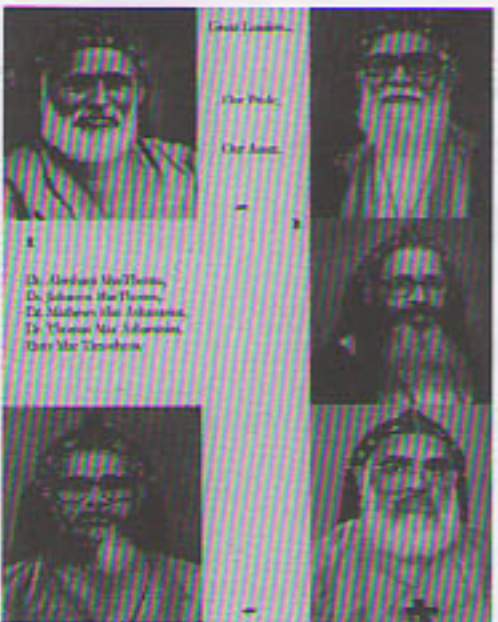
Q. Thirumeni is often known as a 'builder of the Church'. Which according to Thirumeni is more important 'building the Church' or on the other hand 'building the people'?

A. Both are important, 'building the Church' and 'building the people', since both areas are interrelated and interdependent. Neither one can exist without the other.



There was a need to build the Church and at the same time we built the people also, for example—by establishing our own mission fields in various places in India.

Q. Thirumeni was closely associated with the late Abraham Mar Thoma, the late Yuhannon Mar Thoma, the late Alexander Mar Thoma, the late Thomas Thirumeni, the late Easow Thirumeni, the late Mathews Thirumeni and Philipose Mar Chrysostom, Valiya Metropolitan. How do you recollect your association with all of them?



A. They all had different outlook and different emphasis, but they never contradicted each other. All of them worked hard for the Church and its laity and served the God. I admire all of them as faithful servants of our Lord and for their commitment to the Church and its people.

Q. Thirumeni interacted with a large number of world leaders, Indian political leaders, Kerala political leaders, various community leaders, Church leaders and ecumenical leaders. Did Thirumeni's interactions with these leaders help the Church and its people in any way?

A. Yes, when I interact with such leaders, I interact as the Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church. Our Church and its people received countless benefits through such interactions. We have our own parishes now in Gulf regions where it was not allowed in the past. The Church is not an inclusive community and we should not exclude anyone from our sphere of activities as a 'missional' church.

Q. Thirumeni was installed as metropolitan of the Church in October 2007 and three years have completed. What is your

opinion about the contributions and participation of the laity in the administration of the Church especially the Diaspora laity of the Church?



A. Laity is very important part of the Church and without a faithful and committed laity no church can exist. We have a value-based democracy and a well-defined constitution; all are subject to the constitution including the priests, Bishops and Metropolitan.

Q. Thirumeni and our Bishops are criticized for everything and anything nowadays by a group of people. What is your attitude to such criticisms and the group of people behind it?

A. Criticism was there from the very beginning and Jesus Christ was criticized more than any one else. I accept each criticism in a positive way and if anything is good in it, I receive it; the rest I just ignore. I do not have any enemies at all, and I always pray for such people so that God may use and guide them for His glory.

Q. What is Thirumeni's opinion about use of technology?

A. It is a blessing from God, but it should be used for the benefit of all people. It should not be distorted by human for selfish gain or with ill motives. The Church should adapt the use of all modern technology in all possible fields.



Lal Varghese, Esq., Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma, Rev. Saju C. Pappachen (Metropolitan's Secretary)

Q. What is the future of the Mar Thoma Church especially in North America and Europe in Thirumeni's opinion?

A. The Church is the body of Christ. God will guide our Church, its leaders and its people throughout all generations. Leadership should be passed on to second generation and third generation, and God will definitely guide them in the continued faith journey of the Church.

*Editors Note: The above interview was conducted in Dallas with Joseph Mar Thoma by Lal Varghese, Esq., Associate Editor of the Mar Thoma Messenger on the occasion of Metropolitan Thirumeni's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and 35 years as a Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church.*



# My Diaspora Experiences: A Walk Through the Memory Lane

Jacob Chacko, The Mar Thoma Church Staten Island

**T**oday, when we look at the Diocese of North America and Europe, we have a resident Bishop, about 60 full time priests, 80 Parishes and a beautiful Diocesan Center (Sinai Center). The adjacent property of the Long Island Mar Thoma Church adds an extended view for the Mar Thoma establishment. Mar Thoma Church in US has membership in the National Christian Council, and we do have our own web sites, publications and so on. As an established Church, now we have the ability to go to foreign lands and start mission fields, which was once the domain of the people of the West. While the Almighty Lord blessed us abundantly, we should not forget our past and the routes that we came through. Also this is a time to sit back and analyze whether or not we are caring for our succeeding generation who will be our future torch bearers.

The Marthomites who arrived in the 50's and 60's came for higher studies with the intention to return to Kerala upon fulfillment of their intended purpose. They were smaller in number and scattered all over this country. Due to geographical and cultural limitations, there was not much effort to begin an organized Mar Thoma worship during those years. However, the Marthomites who arrived in the 1970's came as permanent residents, were in larger groups and stayed mainly in metropolitan cities. This might have been God's great plan. Some of them took initiative to begin a Mar Thoma worship service and cottage prayer meetings. On April 9, 1972, they began a Mar Thoma worship service in Queens, New York.

May 24, 1973, was a unique day in my life, walking out of the JFK airport filled with uncertainty. I had to pay \$25.00 in taxi fare for my first voyage to Staten Island. During the ride, the driver highlighted several landmarks including the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. Finding a place to stay in Staten Island was not easy since there was nobody to guide me. The newly built houses and the property owners were reasonably generous. (While I am writing this article from India, I got sad news that my first property owner just passed away).

Very soon, I discovered that there were no other known Malayalee families living on Staten Island. Only a few Malayalee nurses who had just started to work at Willowbrook Developmental Center on the same day that I arrived. I then learned a new phrase "either swim or sink". Quickly I learned about supermarkets, Department of Motor Vehicles, used car dealers, insurance brokers etc.

Finding a job for a male in Staten Island was difficult rather than impossible. The first job application at the United Nations went through without real hazards and a new life began. Gradually I learned that some Mar Thoma



families lived in other boroughs of New York City and they do come together to worship in Queens every Sunday. Dr. Joseph Mattackal and Dr. Mammen C. Jacob extended their assistance to organize prayer meetings in Staten Island as they did in other boroughs of New York City. In Staten Island, members of other denominations came together in all prayer meetings until they had their own leadership.

September 24, 1974, was another significant milestone in the history of the Marthomites in Staten Island. His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma (late

Metropolitan) accompanied by Rev. Dr. Oommen Koruthu (present Zachariahs Thirumeni) and Late Rev. K. O. Mathew conducted the first Holy Communion Service in Staten Island. It was my first experience to assist a Bishop in the Holy Communion Service. We are grateful to the authorities of Our Lady of Good Counsel located at 10 Austin Place, Staten Island for permitting us to utilize their facilities. Lukewarm response from the Church hierarchies, persuaded some of the local leaders to begin a joint worship under the banner of Mar Thoma CSI congregation of Greater New York, thinking that the Church hierarchies may be sympathetic and formal approval can be obtained as time goes on. Drafting a bylaw for the joint Congregation took more than a year and finally dissolved the entity by its own membership on May 11, 1975. Few members ignored the decision and continued in their own way for some time and ended up nowhere.

Majority of the Mar Thoma members assembled on the following Sunday May 18, 1975 and began a new entity by the name "The Mar Thoma Congregation Greater New York" During their first meeting, they elected an ad-hoc committee.

Dr. T. M. Thomas, Vice President; Mr. Joseph Mattackal, Secretary; Mr. M. V. Thomas, Joint Secretary; Mr. Jacob Chacko, Treasurer; Mr. A. Abraham, Committee Member representing Brooklyn; Mr. M. K. Thomas, Committee Member representing Manhattan; Mr. K. T. Mathai, Committee Member representing Queens; Mrs. Baby Thomas, Representative of Ladies; Mr. Mammen C. Jacob, Lay Leader; Mr. T. S. Yohannan, Auditor; Mr. P. K. Thomas Vaidyan, Auditor.

During the infancy of the Mar Thoma Congregation of Greater New York, it was not easy to carry out the day-to-day business of the Congregation since there were only a handful of members who were gainfully employed. The highest amount of the monthly subscription was \$5.00 per month. It should be noted that the value of a dollar was Rupees 7.28, and the biweekly salary of an RN was approximately \$300.00 in New York City area. Yet most of the adults put a dollar bill as offertory. The honorarium of the



Achen was \$60.00 per service. The Achen from Princeton or Boston was required to travel to New York Port Authority by train/bus and then take a subway to Fort Washington. After the Service on each Sunday, the Secretary would announce, "on next Sunday we will have a service at a place that will be notified to you either by mail or by telephone." Authorities of United Methodist Church located at 777 United Nations Plaza was kind enough to meet our temporary needs for a place of worship. Finally, when we found a School Auditorium at 108th Street in Manhattan, we did not have the money to pay the rent. I graciously remember Mr. T. S. Yohannan who advanced some money to pay the rent.

When I was elected as the first treasurer of the Mar Thoma Congregation of Greater New York, I was bestowed a leading role in the Congregation to set up its roots in the adopted land in accordance with the rules and regulation of the land. I found a legal way to open a bank account on behalf of the Congregation, even though we did not incorporate the Congregation as per the religious law of New York State. Notwithstanding the formal approval from Thiruvalla, the Congregation functioned as an established Parish of the Mar Thoma Church. I thank all the Parishioners and committee members who stood up during crisis. A core group of members was always ready to meet the challenges of the time.

Time went so fast. I completed two years as the treasurer. I was then elected as a member of the Board of Trustees. As the coordinator of the trustees, it was my primary responsibility to incorporate the Parish as a legal entity in accordance with the religious law of New York State. I am so much indebted to the librarian of the Legal Library at the United Nations from where I learned about McKinney's Law of Religious Corporations. In 1975, Rev. Oommen Koruthu completed his studies and returned to Kerala, and Rev. K. S. Mathew (present Sabha Secretary), arrived. On January 5, 1976, the Church officially approved the Mar Thoma Congregation of Greater New York and appointed Rev. K. S. Mathew as the first Vicar. Rev. K. S. Mathew completed his studies and returned to Kerala and was succeeded by Rev. Thomas P. George (another student achen) and life continued as in the past. Soon the Church realized that they should appoint a full time achen rather than a student achen. Thus, when Rev.

Thomas P. George returned, there came the full time Vicar, Rev. M. V. Benjamin.

During crisis, it was extremely difficult to contact the Headquarters in Thiruvalla since the telephone communication was not so great. There were occasions when it took more than a month to get a reply for a written communication. During these years of struggle, several bishops visited the congregation and studied the situation. We graciously remember the visits of Rt. Rev. Easow Mar Thimotheos, Rt. Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom (present valiya metropolitan) and Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Athanasius.

During the tenure of Rev. M. V. Benjamin, the membership grew rapidly and the Congregation was congregated with segregation. In 1980, His Grace Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan visited the Congregation and took a judicious decision to divide the Congregation into four Parishes on a geographical basis. St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church in the borough of Manhattan, Bronx and Yonkers; Epiphany Mar Thoma Church in the borough of Brooklyn and Queens; The Mar Thoma Church Staten Island in the borough of Staten Island (Richmond); and The New Jersey Mar Thoma Church in the adjacent State of New Jersey.

During 1976 and in the subsequent years the Church has approved several Parishes in different parts of the United States and Canada. At a national level, we began conducting several Conferences. The territory was considered as a Zone and a Zonal Assembly was established. Later years it turned out to be one of the Diocese of the Mar Thoma Church and a Diocesan Assembly was established. Zacharias Thirumeni was the first resident Bishop of the Diocese. The Diocesan Assembly decided to sell the property at Richboro in Philadelphia and move the Diocesan Center to Long Island. The Sinai Center was built during the tenure of his Lordship. I had the privilege of serving in the Zonal assembly and Diocesan Assembly and as a Council Executive. The construction of Sinai Center was one of the biggest achievements of this Diocese.

While assisting the then Metropolitan (Alexander Mar Thoma) to hoist the Mar Thoma flag in front of the Sinai center, I deeply felt a sense of accomplishment, greatly thank the Almighty, humbly bow myself and vividly remember the past. However, this is a time to sit back and evaluate our succeeding generation and will they be our future torch bearers? ■

## **A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Reformation in the Eucharistic Liturgy...** *(Cont'd from pg. 20)*

The Mar Thoma Church is a Syrian Church only in the sense that she uses Syriac in the Liturgy. The term Syrian signifies not an ethnic identity but a liturgical tradition. The Reformation in the Malankara Church was initiated with Abraham Malpan celebrating the Liturgy in Malayalam. This was a theologically significant act. He also wanted to make the Liturgy more simple and comprehensible to the public. If one observes the Mar Thoma worship, there is no similarity in the use of languages. There is no such theological support for each and every thing. This is the peculiarity of this Eastern Church and members are open

enough to understand this. Finally one can say that the Reformation Process caused the formation of a simple and uncomplicated Liturgy in the Mar Thoma Church. It avoids the intricacy and perplexity of performing rituals, symbols and signs. Moreover it helps for an active participation of the people throughout the worship. Even though theologically there is not much difference, both the Liturgies denote a great tradition and history of their faith life. ■

**Note:** Rev. K. Jameson is pursuing his Masters degree in theology at St. Patrick's College, Dublin, Ireland and is also involved in Mar Thoma Ministry in Ireland)



# XXVIII Mar Thoma Family Conference-2010



*Lamp Lighting Ceremony.*

The 28th Annual Mar Thoma Family Conference of the Diocese of North America & Europe was hosted by The Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in DFW airport, during July 1-4, 2010. The theme of the conference was *"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* John 20:21. By July 1st afternoon, the hotel was buzzing with jubilant families ready for 4 days of

speaker was unable to do so because of poor health. The blessings and prayers of Chrysostom Thirumeni were conveyed through an opening video message from the Valiya Metropolitan.

After the ceremonial lighting of the lamp, the dignitaries offered felicitations for the conference. The dignitaries included His Grace Dr. Mathews Mar Severios, Bishop of the



*Inaugural address by Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius.*

Christian fellowship in an atmosphere away from everyday life. Representing 70 churches and congregations in the Diocese, more than 650 delegates attended the conference.

## Opening Day Program

The program began at 6:00 pm with worship service. The inaugural meeting followed with flag presentation, national anthems and welcome speech by President Rev. Minoy Kuruvilla. The adult and youth choirs blessed the occasion with welcome and theme songs. Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius delivered the inaugural address. He said that our beloved Chrysostom Thirumeni, as much as he wanted to attend this conference as the keynote

Orthodox Church, Rev. Canon Charles A. Hough and Rev. Fr. Roger Grist of the Fort Worth Episcopal Diocese, Mr. Tim O'Hare, Mayor of the City of Farmers Branch, and Rev. Vinoy Daniel, the Diocesan Secretary. A Souvenir commemorating the 2010 Family Conference was also released.

Main leaders of the Conference were Rev. Dr. Sham P. Thomas, Vicar St. Andrew's MTC Secunderabad and former Chairperson of the Dept of Communications, UTC, Bangalore, Dr. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, Professor of Pastoral Care, SMU Dallas, and Mr. Tenny Thomas, Doctoral Student, Columbia University, NY.

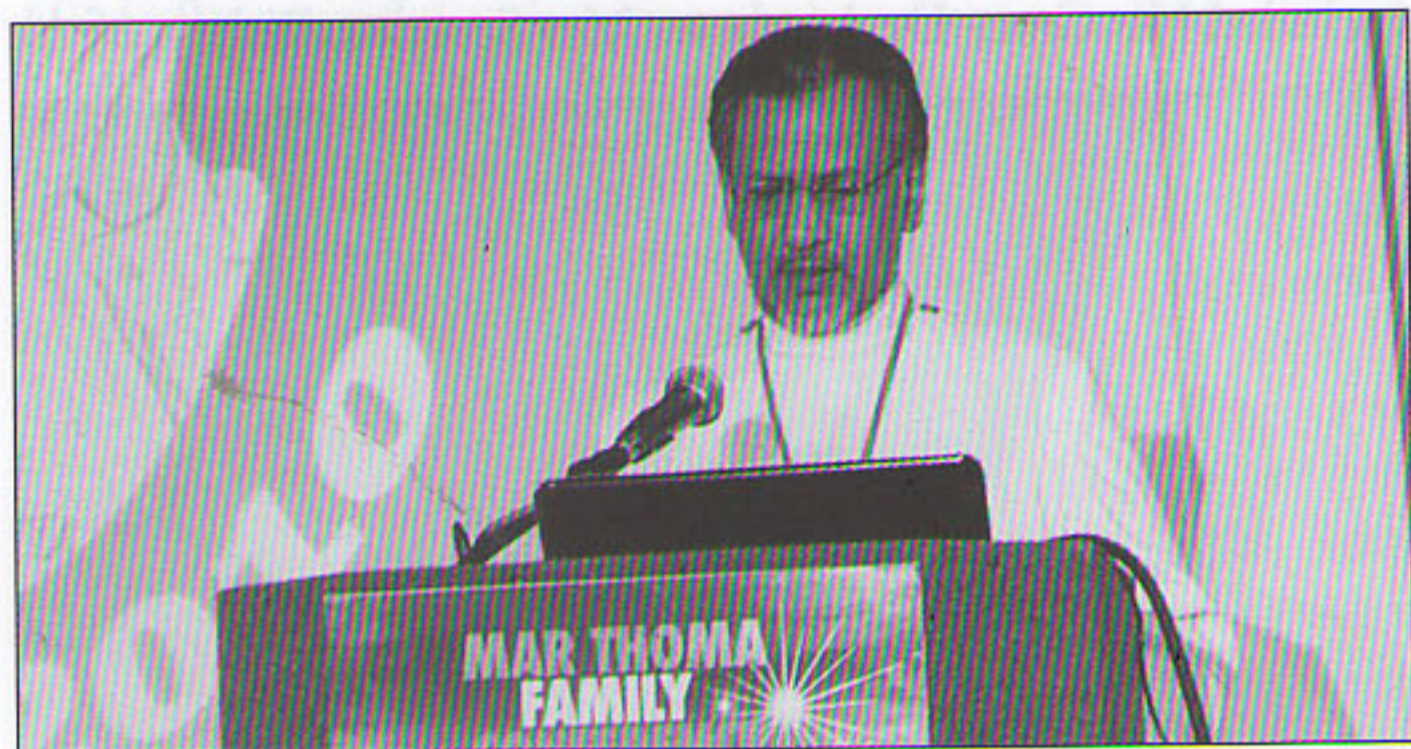
The evening cultural program included dances by Dallas youth, a special performance by the visiting





*A Section of the Audience.*

Oklahoma Native American Mission partners and a play titled "Adhi Kudumbam, Adhamin Kudumbam" written and directed by Mr. P. T. Chacko, NJ, and produced by MTC Dallas, FB.



*Theme exposition by Rev. Sham P. Thomas*

### Highlights of the Conference

- Friday and Saturday began with morning meditation and worship service after which the young families, youth and children moved for their own separate tracks.

For the first time, a separate session was organized for the young families, a growing segment of the Church. Dr. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, an expert in family systems was the leader.

- Youth Fellowship track was led by Mr. Tenny Thomas a very dynamic and talented youth leader. The youth Praise and Worship team led singing in youth sessions.
- Children's track was led by Mr. Thomas Andrews and the Child Evangelism Fellowship of Fort Worth. Children were entertained by songs, crafts, workshops, and magic show.
- Chrysostom Thirumeni's video messages on the theme were shown on all days of the conference
- Mar Theodosius held open sessions with adults, young families, youth and children
- Friday night's talent show was a very entertaining display of talents by almost all participating parishes, with songs, dances, poetry, and magic show etc.
- Trinity MTC Edmonton delegates had the opportunity to showcase their church and city, the venue of the 2011 Family Conference and also kickoff pre-registration.



*Adult Conference Choir.*





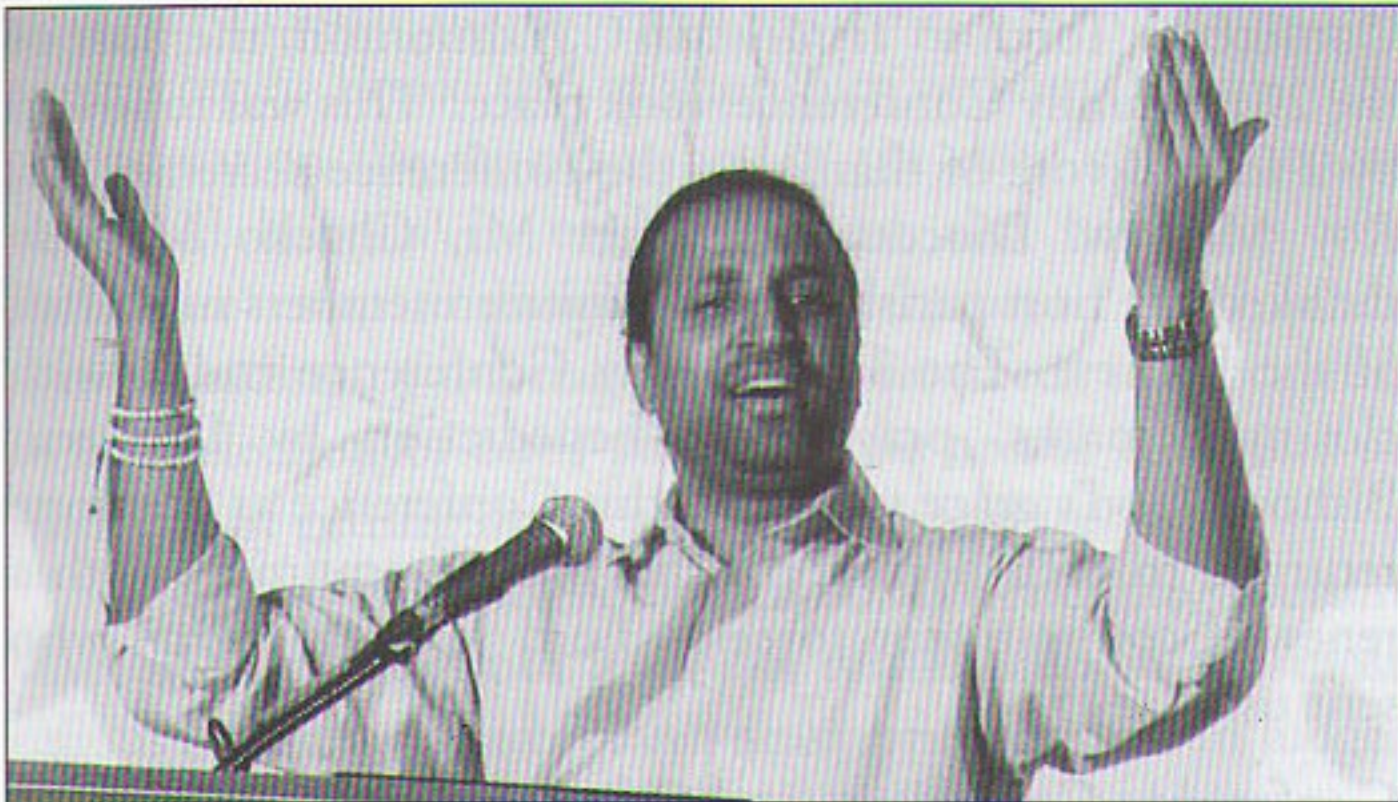
*Youth Conference Choir.*

- Diocesan officials presented awards, inaugurated Souvenir fundraising program and Literature Society website, and introduced many upcoming Diocesan events.
- There was ample free time in the afternoons to make friends, play indoor games, and enjoy the swimming pool.

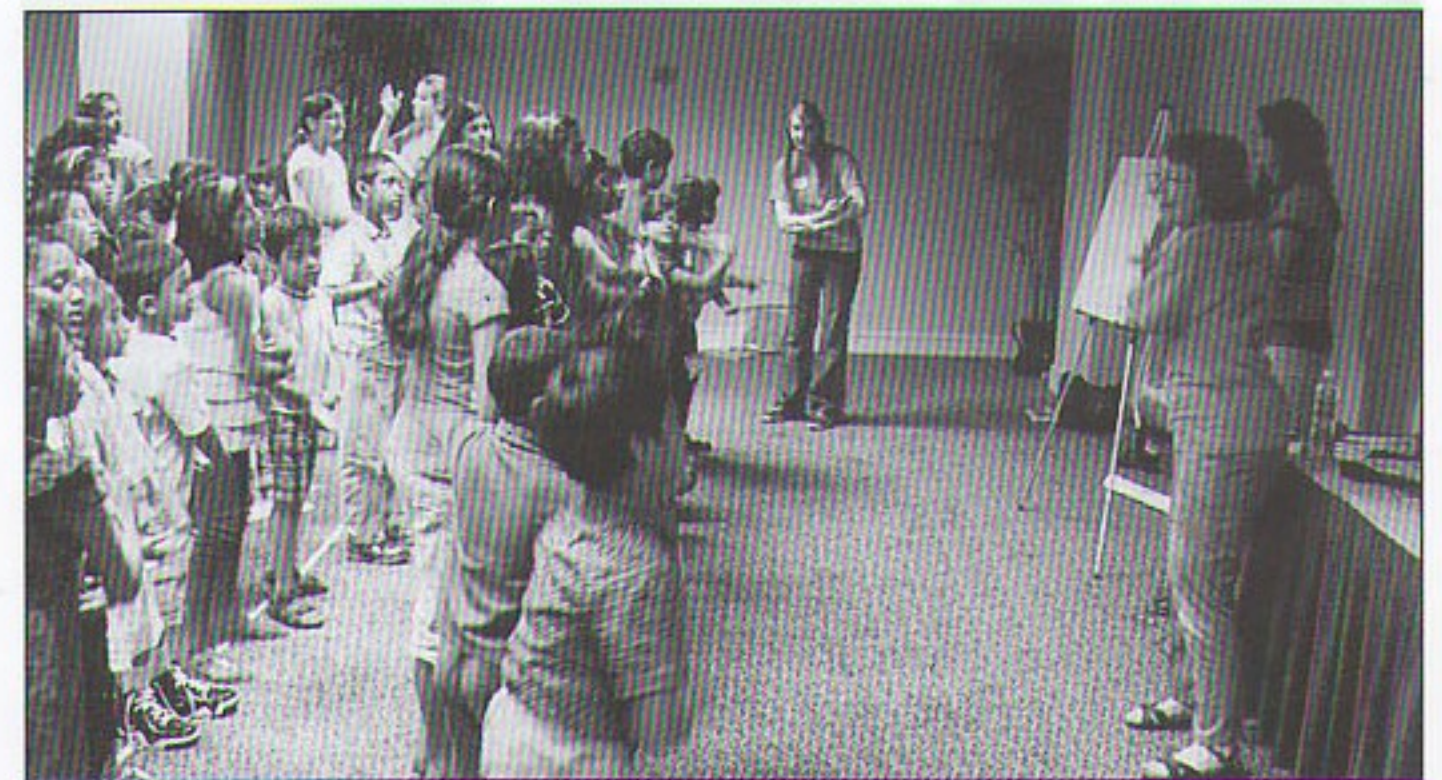
- The food menu was sumptuous and satisfying to both Indian and American palates

**Main Adult Sessions**

All sessions began with the heavenly singing of the Conference Choir that set the stage for spiritually receptive



*Bible Study by Mr. Tenny Thomas.*



*Children's Session.*

- Early arrivals at the conference had an opportunity to join the sightseeing tour of Dallas attractions including the new Dallas Cowboys stadium, JFK museum, wax museum etc.

audience. Bible studies in the morning and evening sessions were very enlightening and were led by Rev. Joseph Daniel



*XXVIII Mar Thoma Family Conference-2010 Committee.*



(Switzerland), Rev. Oommen Varkey (Epiphany), and Mr. Tenny Thomas.

Rev. Dr. Sham P. Thomas was the main speaker whose exposition of the theme was pointed, thoughtful, humorous and captivating. Sham achen, very eloquently spoke about the characteristics of a sent out community. Drawing a distinction to the life of Jonah who was a reluctant witness for God, Sham achen delivered a strong message for unconditional response to call for mission. Achen engaged the listeners in open feedback after his main talks.

In the afternoon, there were seminars on three topics of contemporary importance. Two separate sessions for men and women were also held the next afternoon focusing on the challenges faced by them in American context. All sessions were well attended and drew active participation.

Rev. M. M. John (Washington DC) led the witnessing service with an inspirational call to dedicate or rededicate



*Scene from the opening night play.*

our lives in the light of two days of uplifting messages and experiences. Many people responded to the call which concluded with a public dedication prayer and benediction. Young families and Youth had their own dedication services led by Youth Chaplains.

### **Closing Day Program**

Sunday program began with praise and worship songs by the Youth Choir. Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius celebrated the Holy Communion and Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla delivered the sermon. Worship service was open to all and many from the four area churches attended the service. The closing program started with the theme song



*Sunday Holy Qurbāna.*

followed by Rev. Dr. Sham P. Thomas delivering his closing thoughts on the theme. Most memorable part of the closing program was Chrysostom Thirumeni's closing message and blessings through a video presentation. Dr. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner and Mr. Tenny Thomas expressed their appreciation for inviting them to be part of this Conference. Then the ceremonial passing of the Conference Torch to Trinity MTC, Edmonton, the host of the 2011 Family Conference, took place. This was followed by a formal vote of thanks by the conference secretary Dr. Roy Mathew. Diocesan Treasurer Mr. Chacko Mathew thanked the host parish and committee members on behalf of the Diocese. The 2010 Family Conference ended with closing remarks, prayer and benediction by Diocesan Bishop. God's grace was upon this Conference as everyone returned to their homes, parishes and communities with a renewed commitment to serve Lord Jesus, the One who sent us.

### **Conference Committee and Subcommittees**

The conference committee and 21 subcommittees worked close to two years to prepare for this Conference. All those who served are grateful for the opportunity and the experiences of God's grace every step of the way. The successful conclusion of the Conference exceeded expectations of the organizing committee. The members of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch are honored by the privilege to host this Conference.

**Dr. Roy Mathew, Conference Secretary**



*Dining Hall Scene.*



# Beyond Buddies

**Run Samson Run: Lessons from the Life of Samson**

Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla, Youth Chaplain, Philadelphia

**A**t one point or another, every human being realizes that even though they have wonderful friends they need someone with whom they can share their life together. It is this urge and need that prompt people to move beyond the relationship of buddies to the building of a serious relationship, so that this relationship leads to marriage. But this decision involves a lot of commitment and responsibility and hence it is important that one should be careful in getting in to what is called as a serious relationship.



Often many of the youths get involved in relationship in a very casual manner and then later on the slightest pretext they break the relationship without taking into consideration the repercussions or the deep consequences that will happen in one's life, and also how this will influence the individual with respect to his/her understanding of marriage. Hence one needs to be careful in the selection of one's partner as he or she considers of thinking of getting into a serious relationship.

The life of Samson is one such notable example, a person who gets involved into a serious relationship in the most callous manner and later pays a heavy price for that. In Judges 14: 1-2 "Once Samson went down to Timnah and he saw a Philistine woman. Then he came up and told his father and mother, I saw a Philistine woman at Timnah now get her for me as my wife". What are some of the lessons that we can learn from the follies that Samson committed and how can every youth who is deciding to get involved in a serious relationship be wiser so that he does not later repent at leisure at the relationship that he/she has involved.

## **Marriage is an Institution Designed by God**

Marriage is an institution designed by God and hence our life and the relationship that we build are made a blessing for us when we seek His will and purpose for our life through our relationships. In Genesis 2:18 we find God pronouncing that it is not good for man to live alone and that He is going to make a partner suitable for him. The understanding of God for the wellbeing of human being is that every human being should be living in relationship and that one of the most ultimate and fulfilling relationship in one's life is that of a husband and a wife. But even before one enters into a marital relationship, God has given us other significant relationships like that of being a son, a daughter, a friend, a brother a sister and so on. These relationships are important because when we acquire

responsibility, each of these reminds us how to be responsible in various aspects of family life. It is here that the family nurture children to play responsible roles within the family and society and when that is done we are in turn preparing them to play greater roles. In today's society many do not understand the seriousness of this issue. Without discharging any responsibility at home I find lot of youths getting married or involved in serious relationship. To take relationship seriously and enjoy the warmth of relationship is something

that God intended in human life and only when that is done that they will experience warmth and intimacy in the marital relationship. Moreover, since it is God who has designed this concept of marriage it is important that every individual also takes seriously his/her relationship with Jesus Christ because only then can they be led by God to a relationship that is satisfying and meaningful. There are three aspects that are important in a person's life. They are relationship to the Master, finding a mate, and then establishing a mission in life or in other words—Master-Mate-Mission. All these three elements are important and how we view our life and how we experience satisfaction in life depends on these three aspects in one's life. Relationship with one's master is what determines one's selection of one's mate and also one's mission in life and not in a reverse order.

But then the question arises as to what should I do or what are the things that I need to consider when I enter into a serious relationship. Is there something that one should be careful about and so on? It is here that Samson's life teaches us lot of lessons especially on the pitfalls that could happen in our lives. If we look at the life of Samson we find that he did everything that God did not want him to do and in the end he pays a heavy fine for not taking the guidance and commands of God seriously. Here is a person who is very special but yet he wanders away from the guidance of God and makes his life a total mess.

## **Getting Married Without Having any Expectation in a Relationship**

In Judges 14: 1-2 "Once Samson went down to Timnah and he saw a Philistine woman. Then he came up and told his father and mother, I saw a Philistine woman at Timnah, now get her for me as my wife." Here is Samson who has only one look at a Philistine woman and lo he feels that this is the woman of his life and he tells his parents that he wants to get married to her. There is no discussion between



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Samson and his parents on why Samson wants to get married to her even though later the parents seem to object to this fancy idea of Samson getting married to the Philistine woman. One of the basic needs when you select something is to have some basic concepts about that need. Here is Samson who just does not have any ideas or concept about relationships or any expectation about the person whom he is marrying. In other words the way he approaches marital relationship is like going out to for a walk in the park. I think what is important for a person who is moving beyond the 'buddies stage' is to first have an honest evaluation about what he expects from his future partner. When you have some expectations about your spouse it will at least help you to understand to be wise to choose who should be one with whom you should involve in a serious relationship. Even when you pray to God in your selection of your spouse it is better that you have at least certain expectations. Some of the important areas that you may have to deal with may be in areas of job, family background, spiritual belief, church orientation, personality features, character traits and so on. The list could be sometimes endless. It is not that you approach God with all these list of expectations and then tell Him to do just that. It is important to be in tune with God as He guides us in life decisions. Samson just did not have any of these and one can find that he lands his life in a mess.

### **Choosing a Partner on the basis of Physical Features and Appearance**

Another major folly that Samson does is that he just looks at the girl and tells his parents that this is the girl that he is going to marry. Here is one person who only looks at the outward appearance of the person and feels that she is the best. He was concerned only about her physical features, her height, her look, her skin color, her physique etc. It was the outward appearances that were most important for him and not the faith and other values which help in the strengthening of relationship. But all this is inconsequential in a real marital relationship. He is just not bothered about the important things that should be the base of any relationship. This can be also a pattern of practices for many of the youths. Physical appearance is important in any relationship but for some that is the ultimate test. Many youngsters put physical appearance of their partner more important than many other qualities that they should be emphasizing. Remember what the book of Proverbs says: "Beauty is fleeting and charm is deceptive." Any relationship that is built on beauty, emphasizing on physical appearance alone has every chance of losing its meaning and appeal very soon. Hence one needs to be very serious and evaluate, when I enter into a serious relationship, whether am I going to be influenced only by the physical appearance of the other person or will I be concerned with other aspects that actually build strong foundation in a relationship.?

### **Getting Married to Someone who has a Different Faith, Belief System and Culture**

Another major setback that Samson had when he got into a relationship is that the girl had a different belief and faith system. One of the commands that God gave to the people of Israel—the chosen nation, was that they should not marry from other nations who had a different belief system and their faith was not in Yahweh. Here is Samson who is not concerned about one of the cornerstone of a relationship and that is the belief and faith tradition of the person whom he is going to marry. He felt that it does not matter even if it is a Philistine who has a totally different faith tradition than the people of Israel. He goes ahead with this relationship and finds later that the girl cheats him and has no faithfulness to him.

We live in a world where we will meet people from different faith traditions along with those who do not subscribe to any faith in particular. It is important for every youth who is now moving from the 'buddies stage' to the stage of dating and entering into serious relationship, to focus on to how his faith tradition is important for his life and also how important is the faith tradition of the person that one is going to marry. If you feel that faith in God is something that you can take for granted then you are in for greater shocks and challenges in life. It is our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ that helps us and gives us wisdom and strength to build up lives in the way that God intended us to plan. When person from the same faith tradition decides to get married to another person who also subscribes to the same faith tradition, then the chances of adjustment and also building ones family life on strong foundation is greater, as the home is going to be built on same Christian principles. This does not mean people who are believers have no adjustment problems but basically what we need to understand is that it is our faith that binds us together and stronger. When a problem occurs at home and if both the spouses come from different spiritual and faith tradition, they will look to their spiritual traditions or faith practices and this can cause a lot of disharmony. Hence when you move from your 'buddies stage' to a stage of intended intimate relationship, be serious in taking your faith and also the faith of your partner.

### **Not Ready to Listen to the Advice and Guidance of Parents When Entering into a Martial Relationship**

Another major folly that Samson does is that when he chooses a girl for marriage, his parents are upset at his decision. In Judges 13:4 we find Samson's parents asking him: "Is there not a woman among your kin or among all our people that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised philistines?" Here the parents are giving him

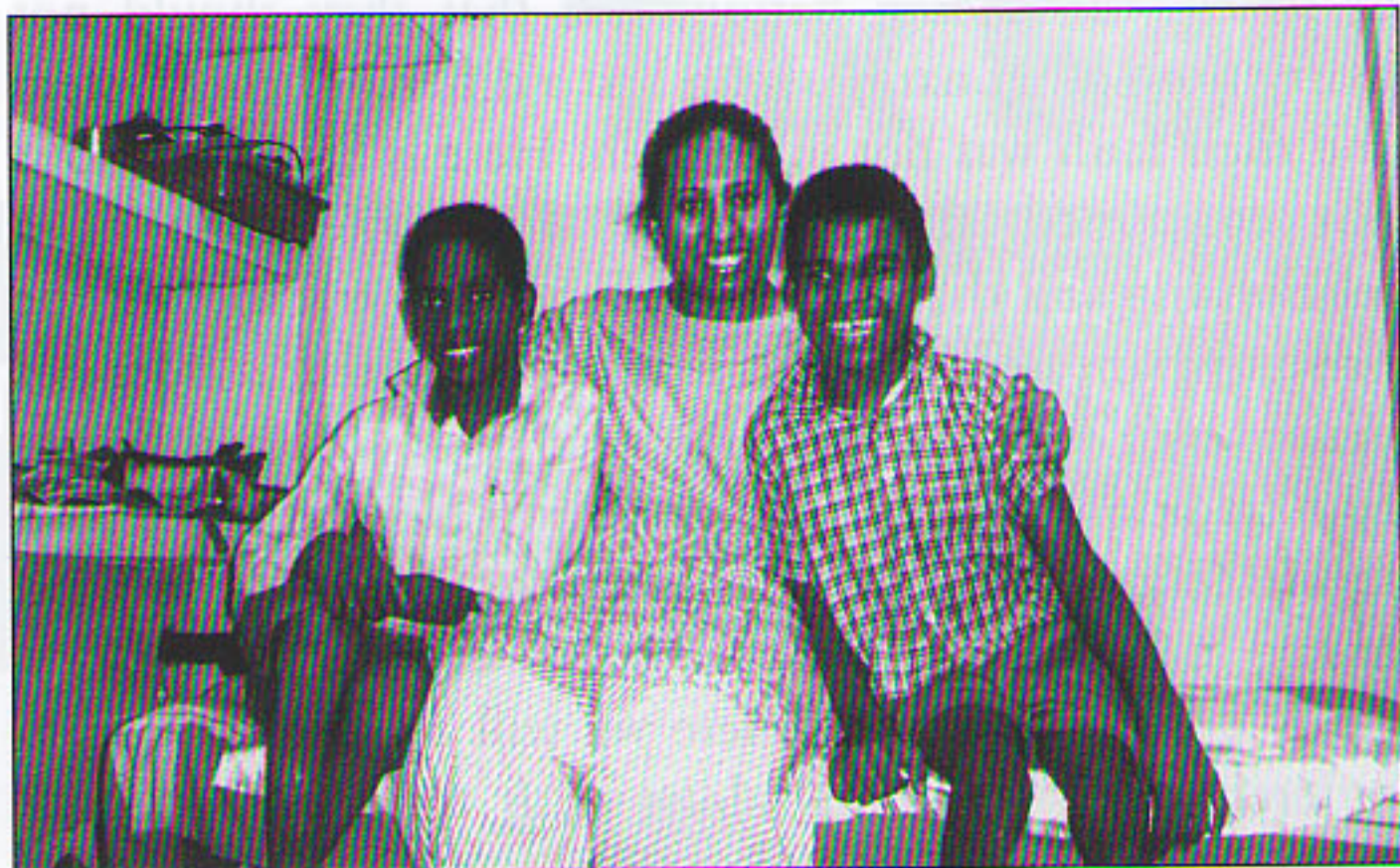
*(Continued on page 39)*



# YOUTH CORNER

## Serving God by Serving Others

Susan Philip, St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, NY



*Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 20:25-28, Hebrews 6:101  
Peter 4:10-11*

God has told us of many ways to serve Him. If we become like Jesus, then we are going to serve like Jesus. This is one of our purposes in life: "serving God by serving others." The biblical word for that is "ministry" but I'm sure ministry makes you think of preachers and priests. However, the Greek word for ministry is the word for service. Ministry doesn't mean anything but helping people. Therefore all Christians are ministers, because ALL CHRISTIANS are called to help people.

In March 2009, my husband and I had the opportunity to spend time with the children of Asha Bhavan, Kerala, home for physically challenged kids. These kids are not orphans. They all have families. They are sent to this Home which is run by the Mar Thoma Church to be rehabilitated and educated for free. The Mar Thoma Church takes care of all their expenses through donations given from all over the world. They age from 8 years (Kukku was the youngest) all the way to 22 years. Asha Bhavan takes care of their transportation, lodging, food, education, school supplies, and whatever else they may need. We stayed in the parsonage with Rev. John Mathai and family. We woke and attended morning devotion and breakfast with the children before they went to school. I helped Robin, the physical therapist, who comes there to provide physical therapy services to those kids after school. Then we would have evening devotion and dinner together. We would sing songs and play games with them. They shared their personal stories, their family background (parents, siblings, religion etc) and their story at Asha Bhavan.

*"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).*

So to become like Jesus means one must serve like Jesus did. If you had a line-up of different people like Larry King, Mother Teresa, Jay Leno, and Michelle Obama, and you were asked to pick out the one similar to our real Jesus, it would be the one kneeling down besides AIDS patients, and holding the hand of the dying. That is what Mother Teresa did...and that is what it means to be like Jesus—to serve others as He did.

Becoming like Jesus means one must serve others like Jesus. When Jesus was talking about the true nature of leadership, He said, "You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must become your slave. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28 NLT). If you want to be like Jesus you have to become a slave to others. The point of life is not to be served. It is to serve others.

We see Jesus acting out exactly what He asks us to do. John tells us that during His last meal with His disciples, the night before He was nailed to the Cross, Jesus took a basin of water and did what a slave would do: He washed the feet of all His disciples. The disciples were obviously



shocked and questioned Jesus. And Jesus replied: "I have done this to give you an example, a paradigm for your life. If I your teacher and Lord have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet."

And another big reason that we tend to forget at times is that serving others means that we are serving God. Hebrews 6:10 (NLT) says that God will not forget "how you have shown your love to him by caring for other Christians." How do you show your love for God? You show your love for God by caring for other Christians. 1 Peter 4:10: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received."





When we serve other people we are serving God. Jesus told a story about the last judgment to make this very clear. It is found in the last part of Matthew 25. Some of us will be invited into the Kingdom. Jesus will say to some of us, "I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me." Then we will say, "When did we do any of that? We never saw you." But Jesus will say, "When you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!"

BUT to the rest of us Jesus will say, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. I was hungry, and you didn't feed me.

## Beyond Buddies *(Cont'd from page 37)*

a piece of wisdom and advising Samson, that the girl that he has chosen is not the one for him, basically because she comes from a community that has totally different faith, culture and practices than Israel, the chosen one. Are the parents of Samson old fashioned who cannot fathom new ideas, new concepts and adjust to the changing situations in life especially in terms of relationship? No, they know that this relationship is very temporary as the relationship has no strong foundation or nothing to keep it going and this is a relationship which is based not on certain values or faith or mutual understanding but purely on the physical and elements that are transient like beauty and wealth. But Samson is not ready to take the advice of his parents, he just tells them "you are supposed to get her for me" and the rationale for his decision is that "she looks good for me." It is like a child asking his father please get me a particular candy or pizza from a store because it looks so tempting. The parents are forced to agree to his decision and they are also mute spectators to the disaster that happens to their son's life because of the foolish decision he has taken in his life and not heeding to the advice of his parents. When a person moves from the 'buddy stage' to a stage of intentional relationship one of the strong resource to have a good relationship that will last for a life time will be at least

I was thirsty, and you didn't give me anything to drink. I was a stranger, and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me no clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me." Then we will ask him, "Lord, when did we ever see you like that? When we saw you, you were high and lifted up and surrounded with glory." And Jesus will tell us, "When you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me." And those of us who refused will be taken away to eternal punishment. If you do not serve people in need, you have not become like Jesus, and you are no follower of His. Those who don't help people are not Christians, whether they sat in church or not, and their true nature will be revealed in the end.

When we serve others we are serving God, but we don't serve God with our own strength. God gives us the strength to do what He calls us to do. 1 Peter 4:11 (TNIV) tells us, "If you serve, you should do so with the strength that God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."

We were blessed to spend that time with the children at Asha Bhavan. This was a promise that I had made to God in August 2001. I went there to fulfill my promise to Him, but left knowing I gave myself a sacred gift. The gift of knowing these children personally and helping them and living with them is one that nothing can compare to. ■

to give a patient listening to the advice and the counsel of one's parents or at least some grown up couples who are mature believers. Not that all their suggestions are going to be perfect for one's life, but at least they will be able to see one's relationship in a different perspective and help us to understand the positive and negative factors associated with a particular relationship.

Marriage is an experience of a life time, a relationship that needs to be taken seriously because it is the experiences that we receive in our marital life, that moulds our life in future and also the way we nurture our future generations. If the experiences in marital life are painful this may be transmitted and carried as a legacy. On the contrary when our experiences in our marital life are heartwarming and something beautiful, life becomes worth living. Hence friends who are intending to move beyond the buddies' stage remember "Samson".

**Editor's Note:** Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla served as Director of Diocesan Counseling Center at Thiruvalla, General Secretary of Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam, and also as Professor at Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam prior to the present assignment as the Youth Chaplain of our Diocese in the South East Region based in Philadelphia. Achen can be contacted on phone (215) 298-3504 or at joeachan@gmail.com.



# Be Proactive in being Active

Nisha Skariah, MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch

I left my job, my family, my friends, and my home to be in the US Peace Corps. I didn't make the decision on my own. At a point in my life when I had many decisions to make and when I was considering many avenues on which to proceed, I heeded the advice of those friends, family, and most importantly, listened to the guidance of God in making the choice to join the Peace Corps. When an opportunity is presented to you, don't be afraid to take it, especially if it's one of those God-approved opportunities. So far, I'm having the most enlightening and rewarding experience of my life, I don't regret it at all, and I am glad that I embraced the chance I was given.

I remember listening to my parents' tales of their childhoods—stories of chasing chickens, feeding cows, listening for the drop of the coconut from its tree and then retrieving it, swimming in the river—and being amazed, but not really relating to those experiences from the confines of my suburban American life. Now, as a volunteer with the Peace Corps, living and working in a small, rural village in Indonesia, I am starting to appreciate those stories because I encounter most of those situations every day.

The Peace Corps is a program of the U.S. government that sends volunteers to developing nations all around the world. The mission of the organization includes sending trained individuals to interested countries, promoting a better understanding of American culture to other countries, and promoting a better understanding of other cultures to Americans. As a volunteer, I will live and work in the community that I serve. While the Peace Corps has many different sectors, my area of service is in English education and since June of this year, I have been teaching English as a foreign language to high school students. Volunteers also have secondary projects, in the host community, that we pursue during our service and I hope to include outreach for family health, youth empowerment, and continuing education opportunities for all in the community.

Since high school I have been involved with many different organizations—helping collect paper for my high school recycling club, building houses with Habitat for Humanity, tutoring English to Spanish-speakers with the Lifeworks Literacy program—and they have all helped me get to where I am today. Through various clubs, the church youth fellowship, and by my own initiatives, my previous experiences have helped me to become the professional volunteer that I am now.

I do admit that the Peace Corps lifestyle is not for everyone—there was a reason our parents left India for America—but while it may be difficult at times, there are so many rewards for what I do here in Indonesia. I have visited Kerala before and stayed at my parents' homes, but never before did I truly empathize with their circumstances. I was always just a tourist, temporarily looking in to their world



and trying to adapt, but always maintaining my American mindset and lifestyle—just in a new location. Now, as I assimilate myself into a completely new society and culture for the next two years, I am actually able to appreciate the difficulties my parents faced, the communal aspect of life that is often lost in suburban America, and a sweet return to simplicity that is both refreshing and challenging but well worth it. Toward the beginning of my service, as I was still attempting to adjust to this new world, it felt like every aspect of my life was a battle...and I was losing. When simple things such as eating, using the bathroom, transportation, and especially exercising my independence were constant struggles and tests of my patience, it seemed like this would be the toughest two years of my life. But that passed. Looking back on those first few weeks of frustration, doubt, and endless culture clashes, it strikes me as funny how inconsequential each of those battles were and how much I will be able to accomplish because of the risk I took and the decision I made to stick it out...especially through times of uncertainty.

The Mar Thoma Church offers many ways for youths to get involved in their communities—I remember trips to nursing homes and children's hospitals, opportunities to connect with various local charities, assistance for those wanting to go on mission trips—but it's completely up to the youth to get involved and take advantage of those chances. The church is a great way to get involved, but you can also pursue other avenues—clubs, campaigns, and individual organizations—that cater specifically to your talents and desires.

Giving back to the community and charity, in terms of volunteerism, is a lesson I have learned from my parents. Even if they are too busy to give their time, my parents have always supported people and causes that they feel strongly about. I truly urge the parents of the Mar Thoma Church to support their kids in their ventures and if you want them to be more active, the best way to guide them to that path is by setting a good example yourself. Be committed to your community. Pursue your interests. Be proactive in being active. And everything else will work out. ■



# 100th Year Student's Conference and India Mission Trip 2010

Team Leader: Rev. Jaisen Thomas

Team Members: Mr. Adarsh Abraham, Mr. Arun Varghese, Ms. Betty Vattakunnel, Mr. Jorge Wilson

**STUDENT'S CONFERENCE 2010:** By God's grace, our Diocese was able to send four members representing Youth Fellowship and Rev. Jaisen Thomas to visit India in May 2010 during the Mar Thoma Centenary Students' Conference. Following the conference, our visit continued to various



mission fields under the care of the Mar Thoma Church. It was a fruitful experience and we hope the following will provide readers a good outline of the trip's highlights.

The Students' Conference has played a major role in molding the youth of our church in the East. The theme of this year's conference was "My Lord & My God" (John 20.28), the proclamation of faith by St. Thomas, the Apostle of India. The conference was held at Charalkunnu Camp Center in Kerala, India. The team arrived to find youth from many Dioceses around the world, from all walks of life, ready to embark on four days of Biblical exposition, fruitful discussions, and Christ-centered fellowship. Over 400 delegates registered from all over India and various parts of the world as we were blessed to represent this Diocese.

Many of our Bishops were in attendance throughout the conference and some of them were available for informal discussions with delegates between sessions. Keynote addresses were given by a few of the Bishops as well as Joseph Mar Barnabas Episcopa, the conference President who welcomed everyone.

The worship music sessions were filled with songs in Hindi, English and Malayalam. The Student Conference was filled with enriching Bible studies, talks and group discussions. Along with our Bishops and Achens who led a majority of the talks and Bible studies, there were also guest speakers who led main talks: Rev. Jose Mariados (Catholic) and retired Supreme Court Judge Hon. Justice K. T. Thomas

There were also elocution and essay competitions during the free time as well as a special quiz competition in which six delegates were competing for various prizes including a trip to the Holy Land.

In the evening, there was a special Centenary Program with special guest, former UN Under-Secretary General, Mr.

Shashi Tharoor. Mr. Tharoor amended the theme of the conference and added "My country" to St. Thomas' "My Lord, My God." He spoke of the importance of a person's ties to his/her nation to lift it from bondage to true freedom.

The conference ended on Saturday after a special Holy Communion service in a beautiful chapel. Barnabas Thirumeni was the chief celebrant; Thirumeni gave a message on the harvest being plentiful but the laborers few. He challenged us to return to our various regions as agents of change for Christ by Christ.

After the closing ceremony, our group as well as a group from Mumbai was taken on a tour to Nilackal. St. Thomas, after landing at Kodungallur in AD 52, established seven and half churches or Christian communities. These churches are known as Seven and Half Churches or *Ezharappallikal*. The seven churches are located in different parts of Kerala. The Church established at Thiruvamkode in the Kanyakumari district of Tamilnadu is accorded the status of a Half Church. By God's grace, we were able to visit the church established in Nilackal; this church is built high in the forests near Sabarimala. It was the first ecumenical church established in the world. It was under renovation at the time of our visit and a beautiful sight to behold. We were able to pray together as a group there.



*US Youths in Kerala during the Students Conference visit.*

All in all, it was such a blessed time of fellowship with our brothers and sisters overseas that we are grateful beyond words to our Lord for allowing us the time at Charalkunnu for this momentous event in the history of our church.

**MISSION FIELD VISITS:** Taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8)! As five members from the Diocese of North America & Europe travelled across the world to India to participate in an exposure mission trip, the members were able to taste and see that the Lord is good even in the most underdeveloped areas of India. This trip allowed members to understand and see the variety of services the Church provides for the less fortunate; at the same time the team members were able to see how God is using the Church to fulfill the evangelical mandate to preach the gospel to all nations.



**Pollachi Mission Field:** In 1983 two families moved their lives to Pollachi (Tamil Nadu) in hopes of a job. After starting small prayer meetings among themselves and also being exposed to the needs of the people within the villages around them, the initiative of the families led to the beginnings of the mission fields in Pollachi. Rev. Shibu Samuel is currently the missionary Achen and Vicar overseeing and providing spiritual development and sacraments to those in the various centers. Along with Rev. Shibu Samuel, evangelists are assigned to each of the centers to assist in the spiritual development of the people.

Team members participated in visiting villagers at their homes, praying for families and their needs, participating in prayer meetings, providing short Bible lessons and encouragement, teaching songs, and taking time to listen to the villagers' stories. The team was also being exposed to a faith as pure as that described in the New Testament of those who were first exposed to Jesus Himself. When asked in Tamil if they (the villagers) were Marthomites, the villagers immediately claimed themselves to be Marthomites. Our brothers and sisters on the Pollachi Mission Field are in great need of our support and prayers.

**Mar Thoma Center for Rehabilitation and Development (MCRD):** As the team visited this Center along with many others, it was beautiful to see how much the Mar Thoma Church is providing assistance to the local people despite their religious or economic backgrounds. MCRD is a center which does just that; it provides education and care for children with special needs. The age of the children attending this center is between six and 24 years. Their diagnoses include but are not restricted to the following: autism, cerebral palsy, mild to severe mental retardation, ADHD and other diagnoses. A majority of the students stay in either the boys or girls hostels along with caregivers/ house families who provide general care for the children. A new building is being constructed and is expected to be inaugurated in August 2010. Within this building there are new classrooms being built along with rooms for speech therapy, physical therapy and occupational therapy.

This mission center has provided a place of hope for both the children and families giving them a sense of worth and love that God has for them. Although the center has adequate resources for the children, more caregivers and therapists are needed to provide better and more efficient care to the children.

**Mar Thoma Suvishesha Sevika Sanghom/Sneha Theeram Halfway Home:** During our visit to Sneha Theeram, we learned more about the Suvishesha Sevika Sanghom and their role in our church. This organization consists of committed women, married and single, who have committed their lives to serve the Church. These women also provide care for those who are at Sneha Theeram. This mission center was developed to provide care and assistance to women who are facing mental instability. Through this center the Church provides an opportunity for these women to regain a sense of peace and control in their lives so they can be re-integrated into their homes and society.

**Mar Thoma Sanyasini Samuham: Mar Thoma Society of Sisters:** Established in 2001 the Mar Thoma Society of Sisters opened up a ministry for women who have taken a vow of chastity and who want to live a life fully dedicated to serving the Lord. The team members were very blessed to meet the superior of the center, Sr. P. T. Mariamma and the members of this society, Sr. Omana Mariam and Sr. Elizabeth Chandy. The team members were able to hear their personal stories and their choice to serve in this manner. The sisters are very active and engage in the following: meditation, intercessory prayer, ministry among children, Sunday school camp, free tuition, training in tailoring, and prayer cells.

**Balika Bhavan:** Balika Bhavan is a mission center that caters to young girls who come from low income backgrounds or are orphans. This center provides the girls shelter via a hostel, clothing, food and arrangements for education. They stay in the hostel and are cared for by the Suvishesha Sevika Sanghom and the Society of Sisters.

**Prathyasa Bhavan: Rehabilitation Center for Cured Mental Patients:** Rev. Daniel Varughese greeted the team warmly and immediately guided the team members to the main hall where all of the patients of the Center were seated. He informed the team that Prathyasa Bhavan is a center for the rehabilitation of recovered mental patients. They have the following goals: preparing the patients to interact in society; teaching a vocation to lead a self-reliant life; enabling the family and society to accept the patient in the rehabilitation process. The team was told that these men do have occupations that they engage in to provide them with a sense of usefulness and worth. There is a set schedule for the patients and their psychologist who visits the patients to provide professional medical care along with occupational therapy and music therapy. This center provides clothes, food, shelter and medical care and is spending approximately Rs. 5000 a month for each patient. The activities of this center are running well with good support yet they could still use the continued support of the members of the Mar Thoma Church.

If anyone is interested in contacting or contributing to any of these mission fields, please contact the Diocese of North America & Europe Mission Board at [convener@marthomamission.com](mailto:convener@marthomamission.com) or please contact the mission field directors directly at the following:

**Pollachi Mission Field: Missionary:** Rev. Shibu Samuel, Tamil Nadu Gospel Mission, Mar Thoma Communication Centre, 29 Arumuganagar, Mahalina puram, Pollachi-642002; Ph: 04259 221069, 0946 245101; Email: [revshibukottanad@gmail.com](mailto:revshibukottanad@gmail.com)

**Mar Thoma Center for Rehabilitation and Development (MCRD):** Director: Rev. Eapen Cherian, Kolabhagam P O, Thadiyoor, Pathanamthitta Dist., Kerala 689545; 0469-2662269 (Off.), 2669754; [eapenachen@rediffmail.com](mailto:eapenachen@rediffmail.com)

**Prathyasa Bhavan: Rehabilitation Center for Cured Mental Patients:** Director: Rev. Daniel Varghese, Karikulam P.O., Ranni; Ph: 04735 221211, 223345, 223594; Email: [revdaniel\\_varghese@yahoo.co.in](mailto:revdaniel_varghese@yahoo.co.in) ■



## Power of Prayer

Vivek Zachariah Samuel, London

*The following is my reflection on 1 Samuel 1 and the power of prayer*

The first two verses talk about Elkanah. It gives information about his family and his background. It doesn't say what his occupation or his caste was. But he was definitely an important man in the city of Ramathiam. He had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. In the ancient world, many men had more than one wife. A man wanted children, especially a son, to continue his family name. So, if his first wife could not have children, he sometimes took a second wife. A woman who could not have children felt shame. People said that she was a failure. Genesis 2:24 shows that God wanted men to have only one wife. When a man had more than one wife, usually there was trouble between his wives.

Israelite men had to go and give "sacrifices" to God three times a year (Exodus 23:14-17; Deuteronomy 12:5-7). They went to 'the house of the Lord', a building or temple in Shiloh, and offered sacrifices. Elkanah and his family too worshipped and gave their sacrifices to God. The priests burned part of the animal. Then the priests would eat some meat from some of the offerings. Afterwards the people could eat the rest of the meat. This shows that God wanted this to be a happy time for the people.

Peninnah was proud that she had many children. She was unkind and cruel to Hannah, who did not have any children. Peninnah tormented Hannah every year at the sacrifice and made Hannah very sad. God does not want people to behave like this. Elkanah loved Hannah although she could not give him a son. "Am I not better to thee than ten sons?" Elkanah loved Hannah very much but he did not understand how sad she felt. A woman feels pain in her heart if she cannot have children. Elkanah's love was not enough. Hannah was desperate for a son.

Some women in the Old Testament could not have children. They believed that God had prevented it. In Deuteronomy 7:12-14, God told the Israelites to obey His laws. God said that they must obey Him. Then they would have children. Hannah was desperate when she prayed. But she did not pray in a selfish way. She wanted a son so that she could give him to God. 'No one will ever cut his hair off'. This is a mark of the Nazarene promise (Numbers 6:1-21). The person promised to give all his life to God for a definite time, maybe months or years. Then he lived separate from ordinary life. He let his hair grow long, which showed that he had made the Nazarene promise. Hannah asked God for a son. She made this promise on his behalf. It was very unusual for someone to be a Nazarite all his life.



Hannah prayed in a humble way as a servant of God. She felt that God had forgotten her. But she knew that God was all-powerful. She knew that God was the only person who could help her. Hannah did not pray aloud. But God heard her as she prayed in her spirit. In those days, people did not say silent prayers. They prayed aloud. (This happens in many countries today.) Eli the priest watched Hannah and thought that she had drunk too much wine.

The sons of Eli were priests. But in 1 Samuel 2-3, we see that they were wicked. Eli may have seen people who behaved badly in the temple. Eli spoke to Hannah. Then he realized that she was a good woman. She trusted God. So Eli was kind to her. In the Old Testament, the priest spoke on behalf of God. Eli gave Hannah peace from God. Then he prayed that God would answer her prayer. We do not know whether Hannah told Eli her prayer request. Hannah said, 'May I always please you' to show respect to Eli and to God. Now Hannah ate and was not sad. She trusted God to answer her prayer.

The main learning for me is the power of prayer. "God hears no more than what the heart speaks; and if the heart be dumb, God will certainly be deaf" (Thomas Brooks). Prayer is one of the most positive things that a man can do. While we might discuss burdens or plead for needs, the very fact that one is praying is a positive position whereby one believes that Almighty God will lift those burdens and meet those needs. ■

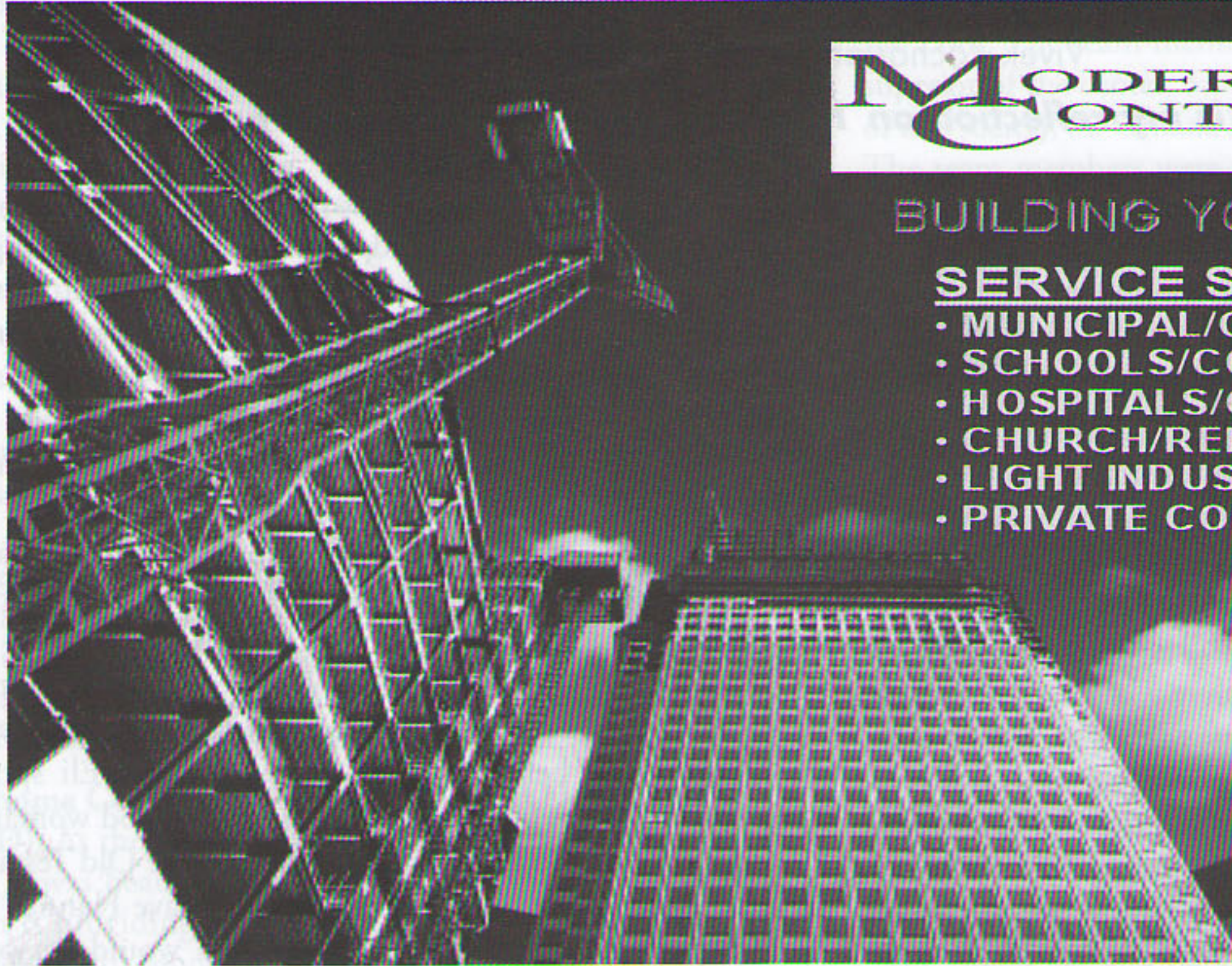
### MTC OF DALLAS, FARMERS BRANCH



Metropolitan Thirumeni with members of the MTC Dallas, FB Youth Fellowship, overall champions of South West Center (Region 4) Sports Tournament held in Houston.



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# A Mother's Divine Love

Sarah S. Jacob, MD

I was deeply moved by a touching true-life story that is told about Solomon Rosenberg and his family. During World War II and the devastating holocaust, that took the lives of millions of Jews, Solomon Rosenberg, his parents, wife and two young sons were captured and placed in a Nazi concentration camp. It was a labor camp and the rules were simple. "As long as you can do your work, you are permitted to live. When you become too weak to do your work, then you are taken out and exterminated."

Rosenberg watched helplessly as his mother and father were marched off to their deaths and he knew that next would be his youngest son, David, who had always been a frail child. Every evening Rosenberg came back to the barracks after his hours of labor and searched for the faces of his family. When he found them they would huddle together, embrace one another and thank God for another day of life. One day, Rosenberg came back and did not see those familiar faces. He finally discovered his oldest son Joshua in a corner, huddled, weeping and praying. He said, "Josh, tell me it's not true." Joshua turned and said, "It is true Poppa. Today David was not strong enough to do his work. So they came for him." "But where is your mother?" Asked Mr. Rosenberg. "Oh Poppa," he said, "When they came for David he was afraid and he cried. Momma said, 'there is nothing to be afraid of David' and she took his hand and went with him and the soldiers."

*If this is the love of motherhood how much greater is God's Love.*

We read in Ephesians 3:17-19: "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love may have power together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God".

What is a mother? The word 'Mother' may mean something different to each of us. However, we can all agree that a mother is underpaid, has long hours and gets very little rest. She worries too much about her children but she says she doesn't mind it at all. And no matter how old her children are, she still likes to think of them as her little babies. Let us focus on a few qualities that set a mother apart.

## **Mother: A Guardian Angel of the Family**

Proverbs 31: 27-28:- She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, he praises her.

As we review history we see that many of the greatest people in history have quoted how important their mothers were to their lives. Abraham Lincoln has said "All that I am I owe it to my angel mother".

This is also true of one of the greatest men in the Old Testament, Moses. As we read the story of his birth in Exodus chapter 2, we are introduced to Jochebed – a spiritually strong Hebrew woman. She lived a life of oppression and slavery in Egypt. The Pharaoh had passed a decree that every male child born to a Hebrew woman was to be thrown into the Nile and drowned. The society in which she lived propagated the culture of death—Egyptian soldiers were everywhere keeping a close watch on the Hebrews.

But, Jochebed chose "Life" for her son and she trusted in God to provide it. She cared so deeply about her son that she dared to risk everything and she put in an awful lot of planning to make sure her child survived. She and her husband built a little boat—a basket covered with pitch which could float. She placed the boat with her child in it along the shore of the Nile, in the bulrushes, not out in the current where it could be swept downstream but in a sheltered place where it could be found. She wanted him to be found by a person who had the power and the influence to make sure that he was not put to death. And Pharaoh's daughter was the only person with both!! She had her daughter Miriam watch from a distance and at the right time approach the Pharaoh's daughter and offer to find a nursemaid for the baby.

We can only imagine the anguish that she must have endured as she waited and prayed. The God she worshipped and served did not forsake her and her family. He saved Moses and granted Jochebed herself the opportunity to raise him. As Jochebed raised her son under the protection of Pharaoh's daughter, she shared her faith with him. She empowered him with the knowledge of God. And because God was real to her, God became real to Moses as well.

Here is a question for us to think about: Is God real to us? Do our children see that we have God in our lives?

## **A Role Model and an Inspiration**

Titus 2:3-4:- Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to too much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children.

As I ponder upon my life, I realize I was privileged to be blessed with a devout mother who is deeply rooted in her faith. My mother, Mrs. Annie Daniel, raised four children while holding a full-time teaching job at our local college. She lovingly and selflessly cared for her parents and her in-laws as they grew increasingly debilitated by age. She wholeheartedly supported my father, Mr. J. Daniel, who served as the principal of the St. Thomas High School which was a part of the Mar Thoma mission in Honnavar, North Kanara, Karnataka State, India. She was a gracious host to the numerous visitors who stopped by our home every day. Living in a small town she had to raise chickens for eggs, cows for milk, and we also had cats and dogs! Never have I



heard her murmur or grumble. She has carried her cross with fortitude and I suspect her faith and her prayer life have helped her be such a worthy role model.

I am also reminded of my godmother, the late Dr. Annamma Mathew. She dedicated her life to Christa Mitra Ashram Hospital in Ankola, Karnataka. She had no children of her own but she was "Doctoramma/Doctorammachi" to many. She was one of the early members of the Mar Thoma Medical Mission and was instrumental in providing medical care to patients who had no other access to care. She tirelessly cared for the sick and the suffering, the poor and the needy. I worked with her for about a year after I graduated from medical school and was amazed at the love and care I witnessed. Her prayer life was so rich and abundant – there were morning and evening prayers both at the ashram and the hospital everyday, in addition to special prayers and services. She toiled tirelessly in the vineyards of the Lord – healing physically and emotionally, and leading people to the truth of Christianity. By her life she exemplified Christ!!

### A tender hand of love and guidance

Proverbs 31: 20:- She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.

Proverbs 31: 26:- She speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue.

As a physician, I care for my patients and share in their joys and sorrows. I am honored to be drawn into the fabric of their lives. I have seen a lot of strong, praying mothers—women who have overcome adversity to give every advantage to their offspring. To name a few, there is Yvonne, who cared

and prayed for her frail and sickly child and is today experiencing the joy of seeing her child in medical school. There is Linda who has dared to raise her handicapped child all by herself—the abundant joy seen in her wheelchair-bound daughter, Debbie, is a testament to her success. Then there is Margaret, who is so very ill but wants me to tell her son that it is okay for him to move to another state because she knows that the job he has been offered there is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for him. These are examples of mothers who live their faith.

Jochebed was also such a mother; she wanted Moses to know God—the most powerful force in her life. She did that because she knew that this was a hard and difficult world. And there would be times when Moses would doubt whether he was loved by anyone. When that time came she wanted him to know that he was loved by God. And that is the reason our children need to know the Lord as well. There will be times when they won't feel worthy, loveable or needed; at such times they will need to know that GOD will never leave or forsake them.

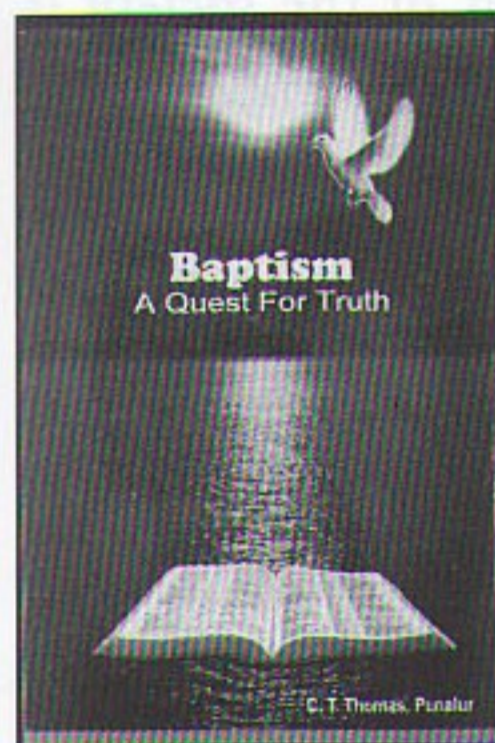
Even with the most advanced education our society can supply, without GOD at the center of our lives there will be an emptiness that nothing else can fill. Only GOD can help us to reach our potential, realize our promise and possibility. Without Christ in our life, it is meaningless and empty.

Ephesians 2:10 tells us that as Christians we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

We have a purpose, value and a reason for our lives—because CHRIST is in our lives. ■

## Book Review

Dr. Eapen Daniel



**Baptism—A Quest for Truth** is a recent book written by an eminent teacher and a recipient of the prestigious National Award for Teachers, Mr. C. T. Thomas, Punalur, currently a member of The Ascension Mar Thoma Church Philadelphia. The subject 'Baptism' has long been a subject of controversy and confusion

among believers. Our members are often in a dilemma when the non-Episcopal churches advocate only adult baptism and hint that infant baptism is against the scriptures. Mar Thoma Church baptizes adults coming from other faiths. Their children are also baptized. Nowhere in the Bible, had we read about children being kept aloof from the faith community. The term 'household' or 'family' is repeatedly mentioned in the Bible when referring to the people coming to faith. This book explains in uncompromising terms, the validity and significance of baptizing the children born to Christian parents. This book is unique in the sense that the points discussed are solely based on relevant verses from both the Old Testament and the New Testament with reference to the context and not out of context as some authors do.

This book with a foreword from our Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius was released during the 2010 Maramon Convention. Thirumeni begins his foreword "I am immensely happy to introduce the '**Baptism—A Quest for Truth**' written by Mr. C. T. Thomas, Punalur, for everyone to read and study. Since there are many teachings and interpretations in existence on this subject, both quoting the scripture and otherwise, this book is one which will enlighten the members of the Church by clarifying their doubts. This is a precise, clear, treatise with quotations from the Bible and very helpful for group study." Copies of the book are available both in Malayalam and English. I hope and pray that all our members, both young and old, will acquire a copy of this great book and read and reinforce their understanding on the importance of infant baptism and challenge those who interpret the scripture out of context for their own advantage. To get the copies of the book please contact 'binucthomas123@yahoo.com'





# Social Truth—Living Well in a Society

Dr. Kurien S. Thomas

**V**ery recently, a 40 year old man came to me with his parents for counseling. Analyzing him through the lens of a psychotherapist, I could make out many flaws in the way he looked at his life. One of them that made him unable to cope at work, home and other places was the lack of a social life. Just as we all have work life, family life, and other kinds of involvements, we ought to have a social life too. Man is said to be a social animal even though at times he fails to be one. There are many lessons to be learnt from social life, some of which are listed below.



## 1. Be confident

The key to establish contact or to initiate a process is confidence. Confidence has to develop from within. Nobody but you is the creator of this unique quality. Confidence portrays how well you adapt to a given situation. At a social level you can learn to stand up straight, smile, look very approachable, give a firm handshake, take care of your personal hygiene, remember names, know where to say 'No' and converse revealing only information that needs to be shared.

## 2. Be genuine and smart

Initiate a smart topic that would interest you and the rest while you converse. Talk to the point with good voice modulation, sparking it up with pleasing expressions. When you smile, smile with your heart. A superficial smile could sometimes be unpleasant. Put your ego aside and approach the other as one of the group. Hierarchy always builds barriers.

## 3. Be a smart conversant

Another art to being a social person is being good at conversing. Try to choose acceptable topics that may lead to a lively debate but not deteriorate into an argument. Avoid too technical or philosophical a topic or using too much jargon as that creates a vacuum. You may like a particular topic but that doesn't mean all do. Learn to balance topics, emotions and expressions to be a social person. Most importantly, be humble.

## 4. Be a person of the society

Those who are totally introverted find it difficult to be a person of the society. If you are a member of a Church, it is an easy way to establish contact. You may also be a member of a club or sport association or non-governmental organization or even a political party. Take up social responsibilities on topics that interest you or make you feel challenged. Brainstorming to make your area a better place to live can be a blessing in disguise as you will spring out with enough acceptable ideas that will prove beneficial to you and the people around you. You are then poised to become an acceptable leader in society.

## 5. Be everybody's person

It is easy to hate someone, but try to hate his/ her habits not the individual. In this way you mark your presence making yourself acceptable in society. It is very important to be acceptable in society if you wish to make a notable impression. Do emphasize but learn to float and not sink in the problems or issues of the other. There can be times when you feel people take you for granted or do not respect you. Learn to accept that scenario and motivate yourself positively to do greater work. Social life improves your personality to some extent. Encourage yourself and learn to encourage others to do greater things for society. Betterment of the society is our moral responsibility. You become a leader when you create leaders.

Note: Dr. Kurien S. Thomas is a writer, columnist, corporate trainer, psychotherapist, yoga therapist & counselor; founder & executive director of Effective Living Inc., a global counseling & stress management clinic, which has a unique approach to psychotherapy, counseling, yoga therapy & wellness therapy. He also conducts seminars and workshops for corporate, schools, colleges and various organizations. Post in your queries, suggestions and feedback to [effectiveliving@gmail.com](mailto:effectiveliving@gmail.com)



## CONGRATULATIONS TO MR. EASO DANIEL NEW JERSEY MAR THOMA CHURCH, RANDOLPH, NJ

Mr. Easo Daniel, received the Mar Thoma Messenger Best Promoter Award for the year 2009 from the Diocese of North America & Europe for promoting the Mar Thoma Messenger at the New Jersey 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 very active in the NJ MTC Sunday School and is promoting the Messenger for the last couple of years.



# പ്രകാശ ഗോപുരം

മാതൃ പെരുംപൊയ്ക

ക്രിസ്റ്റോസ് മാർത്തോമ്മാ ചർച്ച്, ഫിലിപ്പൈൻഫിയ

തിരുവായ്മൊഴിയുമ്പോൾ നർമ്മത്തിന്റെ നാദം, പശ്ചാത്തലത്തിൽ ആത്മാവിന്റെ ചിരകടി ശബ്ദം, കേൾവിക്കാരുടെ ചിന്തയിൽ പശ്ചാത്താപത്തിന്റെ നീറ്റൽ- സദസ്സിനെ തന്റെ മാസ്മരിക വലയത്തിലാക്കി- അനുദിന ജീവിതയാഥാർത്ഥ്യങ്ങളേയും ആനുകാലിക സംഭവങ്ങളേയും തിരുവചനത്തിന്റെ വെളിച്ചത്തിൽ വ്യാഖ്യാനിച്ചുകൊണ്ട് വാക്കുകളുടെ അത്ഭുത ലോകത്തിലൂടെ ആത്മാവിന്റെ അപാരതീരങ്ങളിലേക്ക് ശ്രോതാക്കളെ നയിച്ചുകൊണ്ടു പോകുന്ന മാർ ക്രിസോസ്റ്റം അദ്ധ്യാനിക്കുകയും ഭാരം ചുമക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നവന്റെ വേദനകൾ സജീവിതത്തിൽ അറിയുകയും ആത്മാവിന്റെ സ്പന്ദനങ്ങൾ അനുനിമിഷം ശ്രവിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്ന മഹൽവ്യക്തിയാണ്. ചിരിയും ചിന്തയും തമ്മിൽ സമ്മേളിക്കുകയും ഭൗതികതയും ആത്മീകതയും തമ്മിൽ സമനയിക്കുകയും ആകാശവും ഭൂമിയും തമ്മിൽ ആലിംഗനം ചെയ്യുകയും ചെയ്യുന്ന അപൂർവ്വ നിമിഷങ്ങൾ- അതാണ് തിരുമനസ്സിന്റെ സന്നിധിയിൽ സംഭവിക്കുന്നത്. രൂപഭാവഹാവാതികളിലൂടെ വാക്കിലും ചിന്തയിലും പ്രവർത്തിയിലും ദൈവത്തേയും മനുഷ്യരേയും തമ്മിൽ ബന്ധിപ്പിക്കുന്ന ഗോവേണിപോലെ- മലങ്കരയുടെ മഹത്വമായി, മാർത്തോമ്മാസഭയുടെ അഭിമാനമായി, മലയാളിയുടെ മാനസ്സപുത്രനായി വിരാജിക്കുന്ന Most Rev. Dr. ഫിലിപ്പോസ് മാർ ക്രിസോസ്റ്റം വലിയ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്തായുടെ ധന്യജീവിതത്തിലേക്ക് അത്ഭുതാദരവുകളോടെ ഒരു എത്തിനോട്ടത്തിനു ശ്രമിക്കുകയാണ്.



കല്ലുപ്പാറ രാജകുടുംബത്തിലെ ശ്രീദേവി തമ്പുരാട്ടിയുടെ സന്തതി പരമ്പരയിൽ കലമണ്ണിൽ കുടുംബത്തിൽ- വികാരി ജനറൽ Very Rev. K. E. ഉമ്മന്റെ മകനായി 1918 ഏപ്രിൽ 27-ന് ഇരവിപേരൂരിൽ ജനിച്ചു. പടിപടിയായി ഉയർന്ന് (ഡി.കെ.ൻ, കശ്ശിശ, റമ്പാൻ, എപ്പിസ്കോപ്പാ, സഫ്രഗൻ, മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്താ) 1999 ഒക്ടോബർ 23-ന് മാർത്തോമ്മാ സഭയുടെ പരമാധികാരിയായി. മാർത്തോമ്മാ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്തായായി അവിസ്മരണീയ സേവനം കാഴ്ചവെച്ച തിരുമനസ്സ് 2007 ഒക്ടോബർ 2 മുതൽ വലിയ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്തായായി തുടരുന്നു. എന്നും ഒരു മുഴം ഉയരത്തിലും മുന്നിലും പറക്കുന്ന പക്ഷിയായി തന്റെ യാത്ര തുടരുന്നു.

ധർമ്മിഷ്ഠനായി വളർന്ന്, നല്ല ഇടയനായി ജീവിച്ച്, നല്ല സമരിയാക്കാരനായി ഇന്നും പ്രവർത്തിച്ചുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്ന തിരുമേനിയുടെ ജീവിതം മുപ്പിരിച്ചരടു(മാർത്തോമ്മാ സഭ, മാറാമൺ കൺവൻഷൻ, മാർ ക്രിസോസ്റ്റം തിരുമേനി) പോലെ മാറാമണ്ണുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ടതാണ്. അഞ്ചാം വയസ്സുമുതൽ മാറാമൺ കൺവൻഷനിൽ പങ്കെടുത്തിട്ടുള്ള തിരുമനസ്സ് തൊണ്ണൂറ്റിരണ്ടാം വയസ്സിലേക്ക് പാദമുനുമ്പോൾ 115-ാംമതു കൺവൻഷൻ പ്രാർത്ഥിച്ച് തുടക്കം കുറിച്ചു. ബിഷപ്പ് ഗോർ, വോക്കർ സായിപ്പ്, സ്റ്റാൻലി ജോൺസ്, സാധുസുന്ദർസിംഗ്, മദർതൈരേസ തുടങ്ങിയ ഭക്തിശിരോമണികളുടെ പാദസ്പർശത്താൽ അനുഗ്രഹീതമായ മാറാമണ്ണിൽ കഴിഞ്ഞ അറുപതു വർഷങ്ങളായി ലക്ഷക്കണക്കിനു വിശ്വാസികൾക്ക് ഒരേ വേദിയിൽ നിന്നുകൊണ്ട് നേതൃത്വം കൊടുക്കാനും വിശ്വാസ സമൂഹത്തെ ദൈവോൻമുഖരാക്കി നയിക്കുന്നതോടൊപ്പം സാമൂഹ്യപ്രതിബദ്ധതയിൽ വളർത്താനും തിരുമനസ്സിനല്ലാതെ മറ്റാർക്കും ലോകത്തിൽ സാധിച്ചിരിക്കില്ല.

നർമ്മത്തിന്റെ തേൻപുരട്ടി തൊടുത്തുവിട്ട വാക്ശരം പൊട്ടിച്ചിരിയുടെ മാലപടക്കത്തിനു തീ കൊളുത്തുന്നു. വെടിക്കെട്ട് അടങ്ങും മുമ്പ് തെറിച്ചു വീണ ഒരു തീപ്പൊരി അന്തരാത്മാവിൽ പശ്ചാത്താപത്തിന്റെ നീറ്റലായി അവശേഷിക്കുന്നു. ഇതിനിടയിൽ ആരും അറിയാതെ വചനത്തിന്റെ ഒരു വിത്ത് ഹൃത്തിനുള്ളിൽ വീണു കഴിഞ്ഞു. കാലം എത്രകഴിഞ്ഞാലും നശിക്കാത്ത ആ വിത്ത് അനുകൂല സാഹചര്യത്തിൽ വളർന്നുവരും ലക്ഷോപലക്ഷം ജനഹൃദയങ്ങളിൽ ഈ നല്ല വിതകാരൻ വചനത്തിന്റെ വിത്ത് വിതച്ചുകൊണ്ടേയിരിക്കുന്നു.

‘കണ്ടത്തിന്റെ ഗുണം കൊണ്ടേ- വിളവുണ്ടാവുള്ളു വിതച്ചതിലതികം’

എന്ന് കുഞ്ചൻ നമ്പ്യാർ പാടിയിട്ടുണ്ടെങ്കിലും കണ്ടത്തിന്റെ ഗുണവും മണവും നിലയും വിലയും നല്ലതുപോലെ മനസ്സിലാക്കിയിട്ടുള്ള ഈ വലിയ കൃഷിക്കാരൻ ഭൂമിയുടെ നിമ്നോന്നതികളിലേക്ക് ഇറങ്ങിവന്ന്- സദസ്സിന്റെ നിലവാര മറിഞ്ഞ് വചനം വിതയ്ക്കുന്നു. മറ്റാർക്കും വശമില്ലാത്തതും ദൈവം വരദാനമായി തനിക്ക് നൽകിയിട്ടുള്ളതുമായ പ്രത്യേക ശൈലിയിൽ കാതലായ പ്രശ്നങ്ങളും സംശയങ്ങളും, ചോദ്യങ്ങളും ജനമദ്ധ്യത്തിലേക്ക് തന്നെ ഇട്ടുകൊടുക്കുന്നു. പല്ലും നഖവും ഉപയോഗിച്ച് ഈ സമസ്യയുടെ കെട്ടഴിക്കാൻ സദസ്സർ ശ്രമിക്കുമ്പോൾ ലോകപ്രകാരം തനിക്കുള്ള അറിവും ബുദ്ധിയും തന്നു തിരുമനസ്സും നമ്മെ സഹായിക്കുന്നു. എന്നാൽ നമ്മുടെ ബുദ്ധിയിലും യുക്തിയിലും കഴിവിലും കൂടി ഈ സമസ്യയുടെ പൊരുളറിയാൻ സാധ്യമല്ല എന്ന് ജനത്തിന് ബോധ്യപ്പെടുമ്പോൾ, ദൈവരാജ്യത്തിന്റെ മർമ്മങ്ങളെ അറിവാൻ വരം ലഭിച്ചിട്ടുള്ള തിരുമേനി തിരുവചനത്തിന്റെ വെളിച്ചത്തിൽ വളരെ ലളിതമായ ഉത്തരം നൽകുന്നു. വൈരുദ്ധ്യവും വൈവിദ്ധ്യവും നിറഞ്ഞ സദസ്സ് തൃപ്തികരമായ ഉത്തരം ലഭിച്ചതിൽ ആശ്വാസം കൊള്ളുന്നു നിർവൃതിയിലാകുന്നു. ഈ കേൾവിക്കാരിൽ കുറെപ്പേരെങ്കിലും നല്ല ഫലം പുറപ്പെടുവിക്കുന്ന ചെടികളായി വളരുന്നു. ഇനിയും വളർന്നുകൊണ്ടേയിരിക്കും. ഇതാണ് ക്രിസോസ്റ്റം സ്റ്റൈൽ.

ലോകത്തിൽ ജീവിച്ചിരിക്കുന്ന അതുല്ല്യപ്രതിഭകളിൽ മുൻപിലാണ് തിരുമനസ്സിന്റെ സ്ഥാനം. അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ സൗഹൃദവലയം അനുപമം ആണ്. ഇന്ത്യൻ പ്രതിപക്ഷ നേതാവ് ലാൽ അദ്ധ്യാനിയേയും UAE ഭരണാധികാരികളിൽ ഒരാളായ ഷെയ്ക്ക് നഹയാൻ ബിൻ സായിദിനെയും തന്റെ സൗഹൃദത്തിന്റെ കരങ്ങളിൽ ചേർത്ത് പിടിക്കുവാൻ മാർ ക്രിസോസ്റ്റത്തിന് കഴിയുന്നു. അതേ കരങ്ങൾ മദർ തൈരേസായേയും മാതാ അമൃതാനന്ദമയിയേയും ചേർത്ത് പിടിക്കുന്നു. രാജാക്കൻമാരോടൊപ്പം സൗഹൃദം പങ്കിടുന്ന തിരുമേനിയുടെ ഉറ്റ സുഹൃത്താണ് തമിഴ്നാട്ടിൽ നിന്നും വന്ന് കേരളത്തിന്റെ തെരുവിൽ കഴിയുന്ന ചിന്നസ്വാമി. അവന് ഭവനം ഉണ്ടാക്കുവാനും തിരുവല്ലയിലെ തെരുവു കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങൾക്ക് ആഹാരം കൊടുക്കാനും അവർക്ക് വസ്ത്രം വാങ്ങിക്കൊടുക്കുവാനും മറന്നുപോകാത്ത ക്രിസോസ്റ്റം അവരുടെയും ഉത്തമ സുഹൃത്താണ്.

ദൈവത്തിന് ഒന്നാം സ്ഥാനം കൊടുത്ത് സമൂഹത്തിന്റെ പ്രശ്നങ്ങൾക്ക് പരിഹാരം കാണുവാൻ അവിടുന്ന് ഉത്ബോധിപ്പിച്ചുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. തിരുമേനിയുടെ നവതിയുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട് ആയിരത്തിത്തൊള്ളായിരം ഭവനങ്ങൾ നൽകിക്കൊണ്ട് സുവിശേഷവും സാമൂഹ്യ സേവനവും ഒരു നാണയത്തിന്റെ രണ്ടു വശങ്ങളാണെന്നും പ്രവർത്തിയില്ലാത്ത വിശ്വാസം നിഷ്ഫലമാണെന്നും തന്റെ ജീവിതത്തിലൂടെ അദ്ദേഹം ബോധ്യപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു. ജീവിക്കുന്ന സുവിശേഷമായി മാർ ക്രിസോസ്റ്റം നമ്മുടെ ഇടയിൽ പാർക്കുന്നു. പണ്ഡിത പാമര വ്യത്യാസമില്ലാതെ, ജാതിമത വർഗ്ഗവർണ്ണലിംഗഭേദം കൂടാതെ, പ്രായഭേദമന്യേ എല്ലാവരെയും സ്നേഹിക്കുന്ന തിരുമനസ്സ് കേരളത്തിന്റെ സാമൂഹ്യ സാംസ്കാരിക, ആത്മീകമണ്ഡലങ്ങളിൽ എരിഞ്ഞു ശോഭിക്കുന്ന ദീപസ്ഥംഭമായി നിലകൊള്ളുമ്പോൾ ‘അവകലേക്ക് നോക്കിയവർ പ്രകാശിതരായി അവരുടെ മുഖം ലജ്ജിച്ചുപോയതുമില്ല’ എന്ന തിരുവചനം എത്ര അനർത്ഥമായിരിക്കുന്നു. സർവ്വശക്തനായ ദൈവം ഇനിയും കൂടുതൽ സമൃദ്ധമായജീവൻ നൽകി ഈ പ്രകാശ ഗോപുരത്തെ കൂടുതൽ തേജോമയം ആക്കട്ടെ, ആ പ്രഭയിൽ ഈ നാടു പ്രകാശിക്കട്ടെ എന്ന് പ്രാർത്ഥിക്കുന്നു.



# നീതിസൂര്യൻ

സുജ നൈനാൻ

ന്യൂയോർക്ക് എബനേസർ മാർത്തോമ്മാ ചർച്ച്

ദിവ്യ മഹത്വം വർണ്ണിച്ചിടാൻ വേരുകൾ  
ദിവ്യ നാമം സ്തുതിച്ചിടാൻ നാവുകൾ  
കർത്തൃ നാമം പ്രചരിച്ചിടാൻ മുത്തുകൾ  
കാഹളധനി പൈതൃകമായ് പരത്തിടും

മാർത്തോമ്മാ സഭയുടെ പരമാധ്യക്ഷപദം ഏകും  
ഇരുപത്തി ഒന്നാം മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്തയിൻ മൂദ്രണം  
കാംക്ഷിക്കും ജനതതി എന്നും ആകൃഷ്ടരായ്  
തീരട്ടെ നാൾക്കുനാൾ വാഴട്ടെ സാകുതം

സുവിശേഷ മഹത്വം ഭൂതലേ വിതറുവാൻ  
അഷ്ടദശവത്സരം ജീവിത നൗകയിൽ  
മുഴുകുവാൻ ജീവിപ്പാൻ കൃപയരുളിയ  
ക്രിസ്തു യേശു നാമം സ്തുതികളാൽ വിളങ്ങട്ടെ



കാലഘട്ടത്തിന്റെ മുഖമുദ്രയെന്നോണം  
ഈ ലോകപാതയിൽ ജീവിപ്പാൻ നിയന്ത്രിപ്പാൻ  
യേശുനാമം ഈ ഭൂതലേ വ്യാപിച്ചിടാൻ  
നന്മ തിന്മകൾ വിവേചിച്ചറിയും തിരുമേനി

പാവന പരിശോഭിത ഗണങ്ങൾക്ക്  
പരിപൂഷ്ടിയേകിടും ആത്മീയ നൽവരം  
ഉപദേശിച്ചിടുന്ന വേളയിൽ സംതൃപ്തി  
ഏകട്ടെ പകരട്ടെ ദിവ്യശക്തി ഭൂവെങ്ങും

മംഗളം നേരുന്നു പ്രാർത്ഥനയാൽ എന്നും  
കൃപമേൽ കൃപകൾക്ക് അധീനനായി എന്നെന്നും  
ആയുരാരോഗ്യ സമ്പന്ന നന്മയാൽ  
നാൾക്കുനാൾ വാഴട്ടെ ദീർഘായുഷ്മാനായി

# നാഥനായ് ജീവിതം

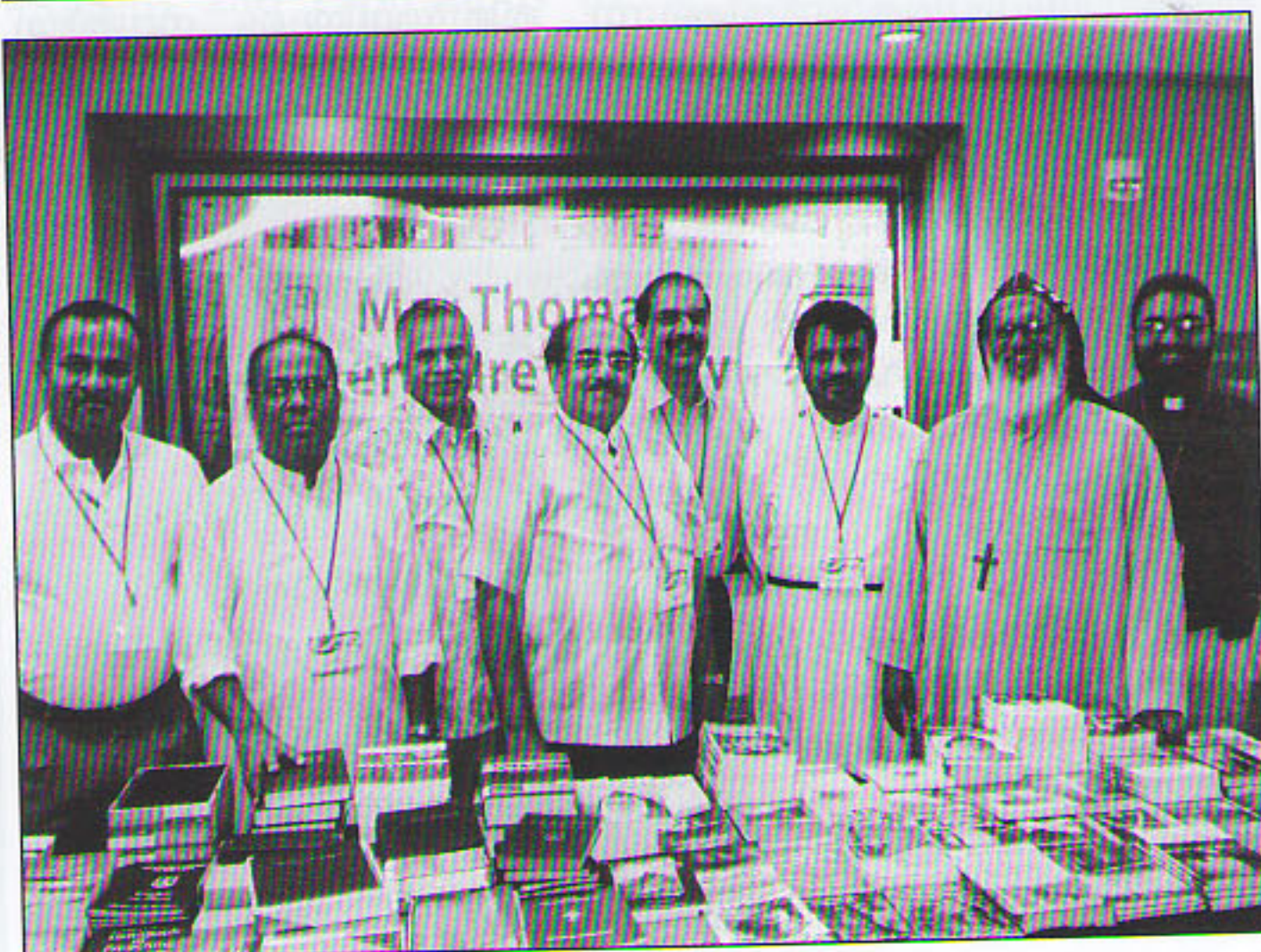
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പ്രാണൻ ബലിയായ് നൽകി  
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ജീവിതമേകിയ തിരുമേനി

## THEODOSIUS THIRUMENI VISITING THE MAR THOMA MESSENGER AND LITERATURE SOCIETY BOOTHS AT THE DALLAS MAR THOMA FAMILY CONFERENCE-2010





# DIOCESAN/PARISH NEWS

## ANNUAL CLERGY CONFERENCE

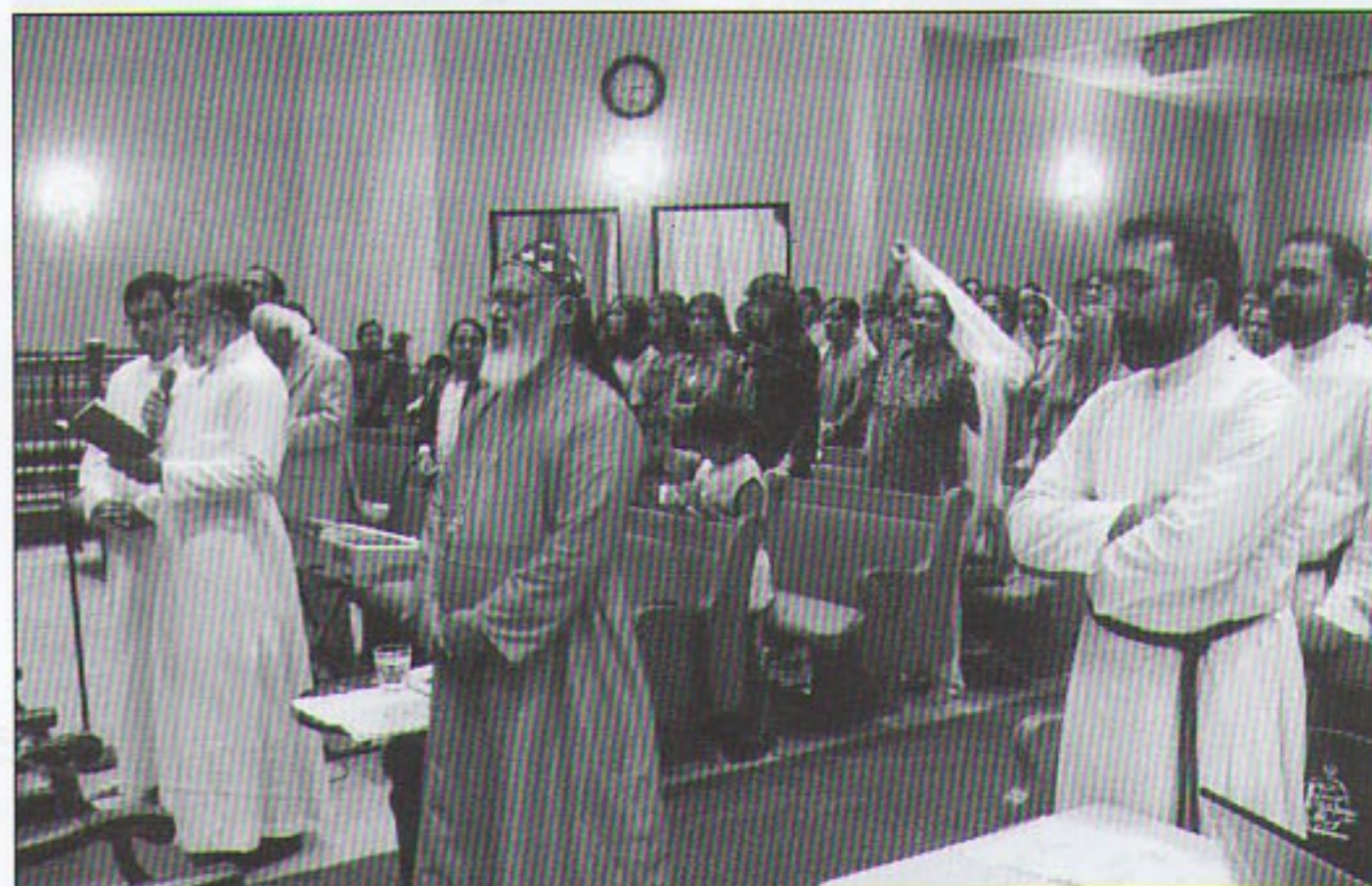


The Annual Clergy Conference of the Diocese of North America & Europe was held at the St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church, Dallas from 4th to 6th July 2010. The main theme of the conference was **"Ministry in a Technocratic world"**. About 46 Achen and families from various parishes of the Diocese attended the Conference. The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa was the main leader of the conference.

The Diocesan Secretary Rev. Vinoy Daniel, Rev. Dr. Sham P. Thomas (India) and Rev. Joseph Daniel (Switzerland) also spoke during the conference. Thirumeni in his inaugural address emphasized the need for adapting the new methods of communications based on new technology so that information and interpersonal relationship can be made much faster. Rev. Dr. Sham P. Thomas gave keynote address based on Mathew 9: 16-17 and addressed the changes in today's world, the challenges brought by the changes and our response to the modern challenges.

Revds. Mathew Varghese, A. T. Thomas, Roy P. Thomas, Philip George, Jose Abraham T., K. C. Varghese, Abraham Thomas and Joe Joseph Kuruvilla participated in the discussion. Rev. Sham P. Thomas and Thirumeni responded to the issues raised by the Achen.

Rev. K. C. Varghese led Bible study based on II Chronicles 1:12 (I Kings 3:12). Achen talked about Solomon's life style and challenges of his dynasty. Rev. Oommen Varkey and Rev. Dr. Sham P. Thomas responded. Following the Bible Study, Thirumeni led a session based on "Parish Ministry and the use of e-tools". Thirumeni emphasized the need for making use of the technology in the ordained ministry, if not the ministry will become irrelevant in this technological world. It is not to replace God, but use the same to discern good from evil. Following Thirumeni's talk, Mr. Biju Abraham, a member of San Francisco Mar Thoma Church, talked on the subject of **"Technology and Tools for the Mar Thoma Church"** mainly concentrating on the use of web and accounting technology and content management system.



Rev. Santhosh Thomas and Rev. Joseph Johnny made presentations based on the main topic, **"Family concerns in a Technocratic World"**. Rev. Santosh Thomas focused on family concerns in a technocratic world in his presentation. Rev. Joseph Johnny focused his paper on the impact of technology on family. Achen mainly discussed about the relationship in the partnership and relationship in parenting. Following the presentations a general discussion on all the previous talks were made. Rev. Benu John, Rev. T. Johnson, Rev. Roy P. Thomas, Mrs. Ruby Mathai Varghese, Mrs. Sara Joseph, Mrs. Oommen Varkey, Rev. Vinoy Daniel and Rev. Biju P Simon took part in the discussion.

Another presentation was held on the topic of **"Erosion of Values in Technocratic World"** by Rev. Jacob Varghese. Achen reminded us that we are called to relate to this world. Technology is the gift and outcome of God's mandate to human beings. (Gen. 1:27). Technology must never replace God as the object of our trust. He raised questions regarding God's place in technology. Theodosius Thirumeni, Rev. Benu John, Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla and Roy Abraham participated in the discussions which followed the presentation.

Following a break for dinner there was a talent night program. Many talent programs were presented by children, Achen and Kochammas. Rev. A.T. Thomas and Rev. Mathew Varghese coordinated this event. The St. Paul's Mar Thoma parish youth fellowship organized separate meetings for children throughout the conference time on all days.

Bible study was led by Rev. K. E. Geevarghese based on the book of Nehemiah 10:28-39; Achen analyzed the Nehemiah community, his role and leadership, and the application for contemporary mission and ministry of the Church. During the discussions held thereafter Revds. Mathew Varghese, Thomas Mathew, and Santhosh Thomas participated. K. E. Geevarghese Achen responded to the questions. Mrs. Sairah Joseph made a presentation on the theme **"Partnership in Ministry"** and emphasized that need to be





in partnership with God, spouse, and Church. She also spoke on the challenges likely to be faced by being the spouse of an Achen and pointed out that the challenges should be considered as part of God's plan to work through us.



Following Mrs. Sairah Joseph's presentation, Mrs. Anitha Daniel presented a paper on **"the practical aspects of Kochamma's Ministry"** and emphasized the need to learn the language of faith and submitting to God and to experience the presence of God in our lives. A discussion followed regarding the **"partnership in ministry"** and Mrs. Zachariah John, Mrs. George M. Kuruvilla, and Rev. Omen Markey took part in the discussion. At the request of Thirumeni the following Achens offered practical advice to be implemented in the Diocese and the following Achens participated.

Rev. Noble—Allowing women to assist in the Holy Qurbana; Rev. A. T. Thomas—Internet Bible Study for



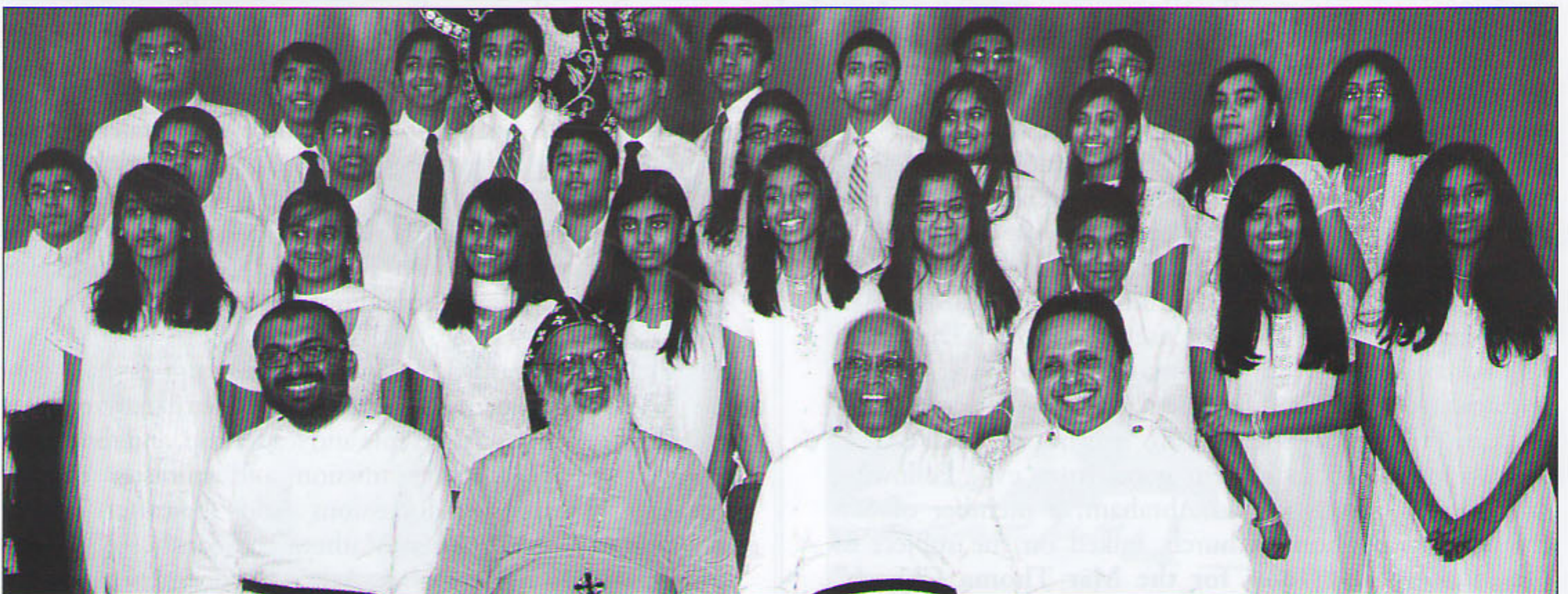
the youths, Rev. Oommen Varkey—Recommended printing main talks by Rev. Dr. Sham P. Thomas Achen from the Family Conference studies to provide for the youth fellowship. Rev. Roy P. Thomas—Explained the struggles of the youths and their world views and how some individuals exploit their spirituality. Rev. Dr. Sham P. Thomas—Suggested the possibility to start a **"sermon discussion website"** for the clergy in this Diocese by writing one sermon by each achen; intervene in Sunday school.

Thirumeni talked on General Administration of the Diocese and highlighted the areas where the ministry of each Achen in the parish can be effectively made. Diocesan secretary Rev. Vinoy Daniel informed that the Diocesan Council appointed Rev. Philip George (Philadelphia MTC) as a member to the Diocesan Council in place of Rev. P. J. Varghese, who was transferred from this Diocese.

Rev. Philip George expressed vote of thanks to Thirumeni, Sham P. Thomas Achen, Rev. Vinoy Daniel and other Achens and Kochammas who led various sessions and worship services in the Conference. He also extended vote of thanks to the Vicar and members of St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church, Dallas, Texas for hosting the Conference and for extending hospitality to the participants. The Conference came to a conclusion with the prayer by Rev. Jose P. Abraham and benediction by Thirumeni.

**Rev. Vinoy Daniel, Diocesan/Bishop's Secretary**

## CHICAGO MAR THOMA CHURCH

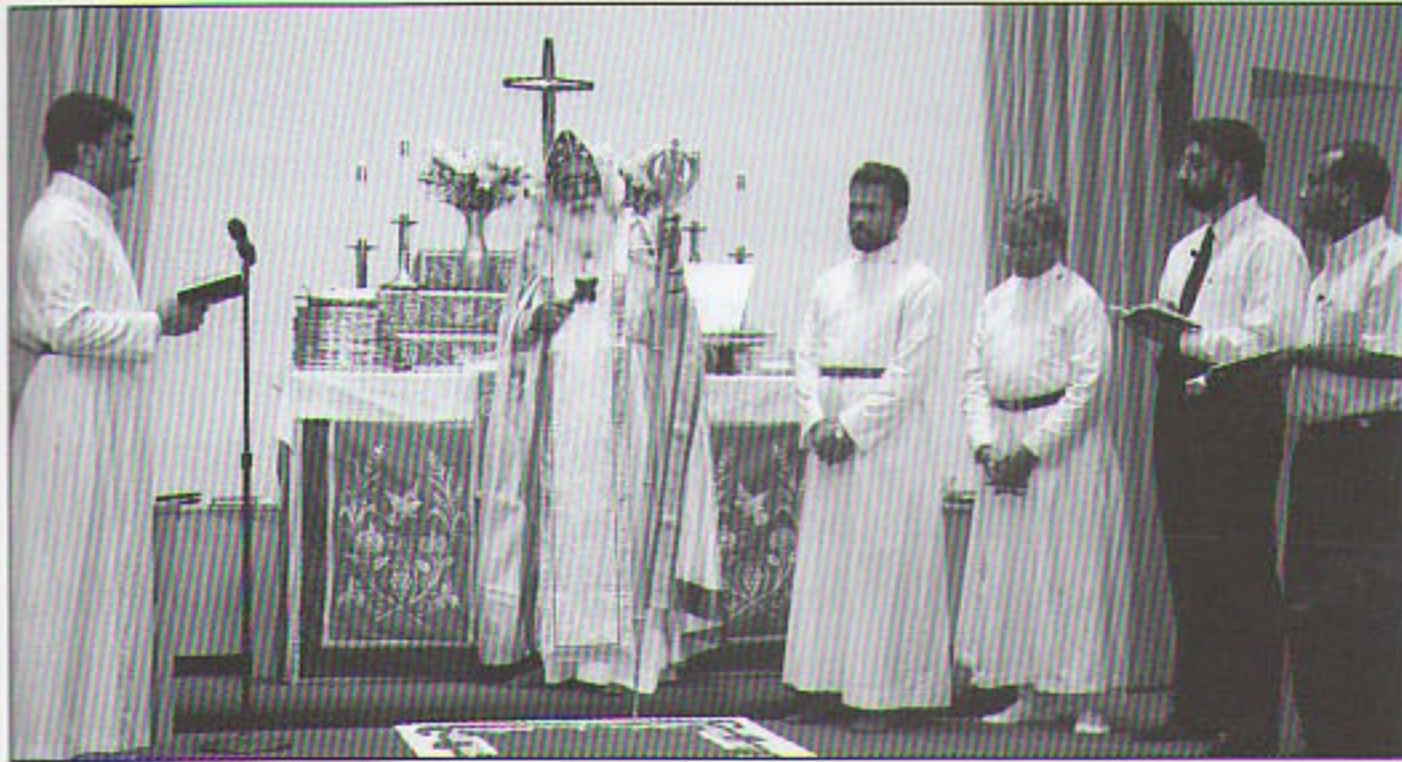


Chicago Mar Thoma Church First Communicants with Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa, Vicar Roy P. Thomas, Rev. V. T. John and Rev. Alex Peter.



## MAR THOMA CHURCH OF DALLAS, FARMERS BRANCH

**METROPOLITAN'S VISIT—MTC DALLAS, FARMERS BRANCH:** Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, farmers Branch was blessed by the visit and celebration of Holy Communion service by The Metropolitan, His Grace Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma on Sunday August 1,



2010. This is the first time that Metropolitan Thirumeni is visiting the parish after being installed as the 21st Mar Thoma on October 2, 2007. Approximately 900 people attended the morning worship service and about 600 members received Holy Communion from Thirumeni. During the service Thirumeni gave a homily and challenged believers to be the witness of Jesus Christ and not to be confused



by the prosperity gospel. The promise of the gospel is not of prosperity, but it is one of sacrifice and commitment to our Lord. His Grace reminded the parish that witnessing about Jesus to others is like "one beggar informing another beggar where to find food and shelter".

After the Communion service, a formal reception was held to felicitate Thirumeni on his 80th birthday. Vicar, Rev. Minoy N. Kuruvilla in his opening remarks reminded members the importance of Thirumeni's visit to the parish, when the Mar Thoma Church is celebrating 175th year of Reformation initiated by Thirumeni's predecessor Abraham Malpan. The parish secretary, Thomas Mathew commented on Thirumeni's life and shepherd ministry highlighting the vision Thirumeni has for the Church. Thirumeni has completed 54 years as a faithful servant of the Church and 35 years as an ordained Bishop. As a token of love and appreciation of the parish, Thirumeni was presented with

replica of a boat. Thirumeni at the request of Mr. Philip Thomas, convener, inaugurated the registration of the Family Retreat of the parish by accepting the first registration from Lal Varghese, Esq. Thirumeni also distributed trophies to the Youth Fellowship members of the parish who won the South West Region Championship in the sports tournament held in Houston. The birthday celebration ended by the cake cutting by Thirumeni and sharing with the members of the parish including children. Rev. Saju C. Pappachen, Metropolitan's secretary was also present during the occasion.

**Rev. Minoy N. Kuruvilla, Vicar**

**PARISH DAY CELEBRATION:** MTC Dallas, FB celebrated its Parish Day on August 15, 2010 in a special way. This was the 34th anniversary of formation of Mar Thoma Parish in Dallas. The highlight of the parish day was the presence of Rev. Peter Johnson, who was a civil right activist who worked with Dr. Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. In his message Rev. Johnson narrated his personal experiences with Dr. King and Rosa Parks that were very moving. He reminded the congregation the resemblance between Mahatma Gandhi's teaching of nonviolence and teaching of Jesus in the New Testament. He also reminded that everything happening in our lives is not by accident or coincidence, but it is by God's divine plan.

Parish honored ten members who turned seventy years of age, during the parish day celebrations, in a very special way by presenting them with 'ponnada'. Rev. Minoy N. Kuruvilla thanked the honorees on behalf of the parish for their sacrificial services and contributions to the parish and



exhorted the youth to respect the elderly and always be grateful for what they have done to the community. As a gesture of appreciation, Rev. Peter Johnson was also presented with a 'ponnada'.

During the parish day celebration, the kick-off-tickets for 'Mar Thoma Fest' was conducted by handing over the ticket to Mr. K. S. Mathew, Vice President of the parish by Rev. Peter Johnson. Mr. Jose Cherian is the convener for this year's fest and is expected to raise about \$25,000 for the various mission works in India undertaken by the parish.

**Thomas Mathew, Secretary**



## IX SOUTH-EAST REGIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE, ATLANTA-JULY 22-25, 2010



The IX Southeast Regional Mar Thoma Youth Conference was held at the Calvin Conference Retreat and Camping Center in Hampton, GA from Thursday July 22nd to Sunday July 25th, 2010. One Hundred delegates, ages 12 – 34, participated in this blessed conference, mostly from the states of Georgia and Florida. The Hermon Mar Thoma Church of Atlanta, Georgia hosted this year's conference. This year's theme was, "Heart of a Champion" based on the book of 1 Samuel 16:7.

This conference had many unique highlights. The major aspects of the conference included theme talks, bible studies, group discussions, worship services, recreation, team building activities, dedication & witnessing, and Holy Eucharist. Most of these events touched many of our attendee's hearts, which led many to dedicate their life for Christ for the first time and many others to re-dedicate. This conference reminded our youths that God has called us to take up His Cross and follow Him with all our hearts (as David did)—not just partial. Our Lord's physical heart stopped beating on Calvary for our sake, but His spirit (His true heart) keeps beating at the Father's right hand.

The opening ceremony started at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday night. During the opening ceremony, Mr. Sean George (Youth Secretary/ Conference Convener) welcomed the gathering. Rev. Thomas Mathew, president of the 2010 SE Regional Youth Conference gave the presidential address. Rev. T. Johnson (Vicar, St. Mark's Mar Thoma Church, Tampa) gave the inaugural address. After the lighting of the lamp ceremony, Rev. Jai Varghese (Vicar, Atlanta

Mar Thoma Church) and Rev. Jose P. Abraham (Vicar, South Florida Mar Thoma Church) gave felicitations. The main leader for this year's conference was Mr. Tenny Thomas. *[Tenny was born and raised in the Middle East and as a teenager he moved to England. Mr. Thomas did his schooling at Cambridge and Oxford University. He is currently working on his PhD at Columbia University. He also works as a Research Consultant for the Nida Institute at the American Bible Society working on Biblical translations and literature publications.]* He encouraged delegates to walk with God. Achens from the region conducted morning and evening devotion sessions for the delegates; they dealt with a wide array of issues pertaining to the youngsters' lives. Friday night all the delegates and leaders had a bonfire, where they sang songs and enjoyed the evening with fun filled activities.

On Saturday evening there was a question and answer session which was led by Mr. Tenny Thomas (for the boys) and by Ms. Jency Thomas, member of Atlanta Mar Thoma



Church, (for the girls). Saturday night delegates shared testimonies and re-dedicated their lives to our Lord. Special thanks to the Executive Committee of Hermon Mar Thoma Church-Atlanta and committee members of its Youth Fellowship along with the conference conveners: President, Rev. Thomas Mathew, Mr. Shiboo Varghese, Mr. Sean George, Ms. Jaysly George, Mr. Geen George, Mr. Joel George, and Mr. Nibin Thomas for their hard work and commitment.

The conference concluded on Sunday after the Holy Qurbana service led by Rev. T. Johnson and concluding sermon and message by Mr. Tenny Thomas. The torch was handed down to the St. Luke's Mar Thoma Church, Corral Springs, FL, to host the 2011 SE Regional Youth Conference.

**Sean George, Youth Secretary/Conference Convener  
Hermon Mar Thoma Church, Atlanta**



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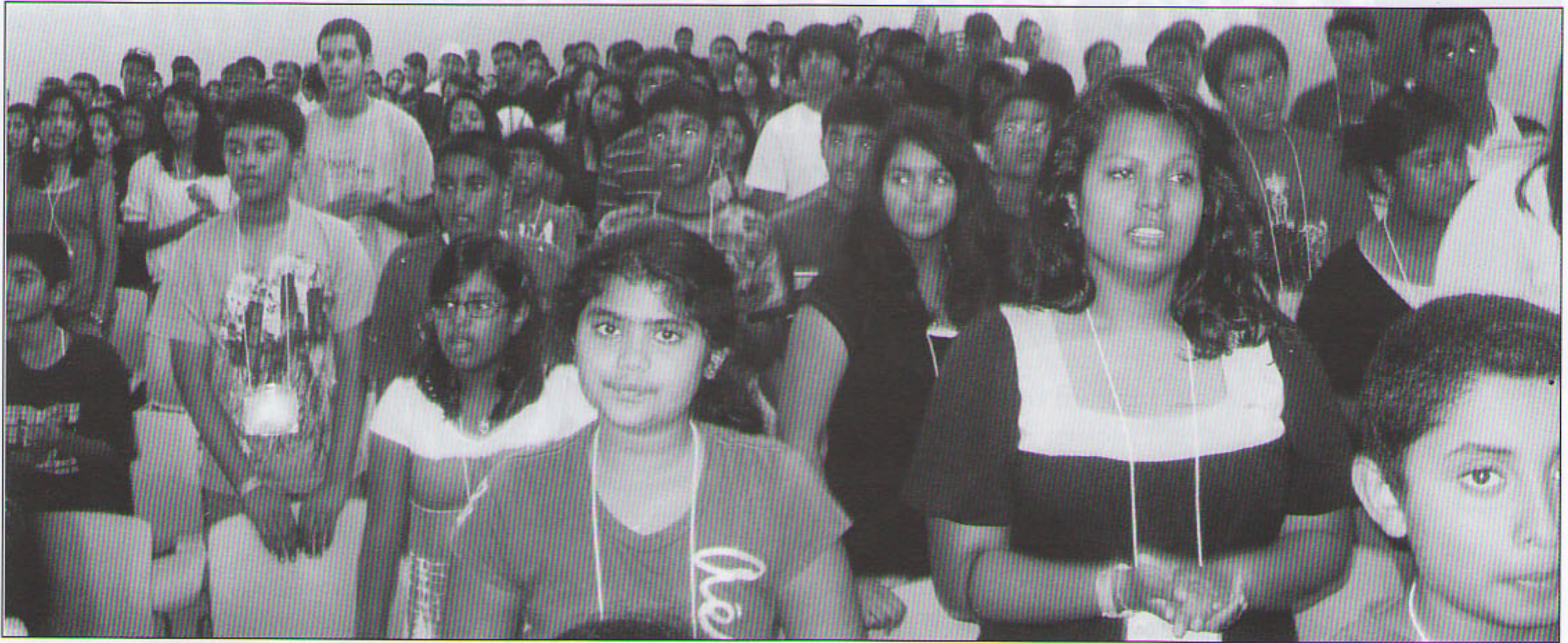
**972.394.1349**

Email: philipthomascpa@yahoo.com

*A member of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch*



## JUNIOR-SENIOR CONFERENCE 2010



This year's Junior-Senior Student's Conference, hosted by the North East Region Sunday Schools, was truly a blessed experience! The conference, which included churches of both the NE and SE Regions, was held from July 15-18, 2010 at Ramapo College, NJ. Over 300 students ranging from 6th to 12th graders attended the Conference. We were fortunate to have Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Rev. Dr. Sham P. Thomas, Mr. Thomas Kurien (CEO of Almega Cable), Ms. Faith Dugan (Child Evangelism Fellowship), and our Youth Chaplains from both regions as guest speakers of the Conference.

The conference focused on the theme 'Walk with God', (Genesis 5:22). The four days were filled with theme talks, Bible studies, group discussions, worship services, and recreation. The highlights of the conference were the Talent Night, Q & A Session with Thirumeni, live concert of the Christian band Anonymous, and the dedication and witnessing session. Overall, the conference was both a success and a blessing that led many Sunday School students to dedicate their lives for Christ.

**Amy Thomas**

## THE CANADIAN MAR THOMA CHURCH, TORONTO

**METROPOLITANS 80TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION AND PARISH RECEPTION:** Rt. Rev Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma visited Canada and had a week long stay at the Canadian Mar Thoma Church Toronto. On the 9th of July, 2010 the parish celebrated the Metropolitan's 80th birthday and arranged a befitting reception for Thirumeni. Anglican Church of Canada Toronto Diocese Suffragan Metropolitan Rt. Rev George Elliot was the Chief guest. Rev. Alex P John, vicar St. Mathew's Mar Thoma Church, Rev. Manoj Zacharia, and Mr. Cherian Abraham parish Vice President gave felicitations. Church choir sang melodiously. Parish vicar Rev. A Abraham welcomed the dignitaries as well as the audience and Mr. Thomas K John, parish secretary gave the vote of thanks, in his reply speech the Metropolitan evoked fond memories of his first visit to North America in the early 1960's.

On Sunday the 11th the Metropolitan celebrated Holy Communion with 21 young 1st communicants and it was a solemn and blessed occasion. Rev. A Abraham, Rev. Saju Pappachen and Rev. Manoj Zacharia also were co-celebrants.

The parish celebrated its parish day on the same day. Metropolitan was the Chief Guest of Honor. Rev. A Abraham, Rev. Saju Pappachen and Rev. Manoj Zacharia

were present. Parish vice president Mr. Cherian Abraham presented a ponnada to the Metropolitan who was celebrating his 80th Birthday. Secretary Mr. Thomas K John welcomed the audience and dignitaries and accountant Mr. Santhosh Varghese expressed vote of thanks.

**Rev. A. Abraham, Vicar**





## NATIVE AMERICAN MISSION—OKLAHOMA SUMMER CAMP



As part of the Native American Project of the Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church we are introducing different programs among the Native Americans in Oklahoma and Alabama and elsewhere. Over the past few years the Mar Thoma Church had partnered with the Choctaw Cumberland Presbyterian Church in providing and leading the weeklong summer camp at Camp Israel Folsom in southeastern Oklahoma. This year's summer camp was held during June 7-11, 2010. Volunteers from various parishes namely, Oklahoma MTC—Amy Chandapillai, Ashley Koshy, Jensey John, Lirin Jacob, Jeremy John, George Thomas, Aby Paramayalil and Jaison Samuel; Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Carrolton—Chris Abraham, Tobin Abraham, Arly John, Jensey John, Abey Mathew and Ammu Varghese; Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch—Sheena John, Ashly Kolath, Mr. George Mathew, Mr. Skariah T. Philip, Mrs. Mary K. Philip and Mr. Abraham Mathew; St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church, Dallas—Patrick Maruthumootil, Sam Itty from Atlanta MTC and John Koshy from St. Thomas MTC, Delaware Valley took part in this year's summer camp by volunteering their time and talents. Rev. Jaisen Thomas, Youth Chaplain, Dallas and Rev. Shibi Abraham, Youth Chaplain, Houston led the devotional sessions during the camp. Both of their families attended the camp with them. Mr. O. C. Abraham from Philadelphia MTC played a key role in organizing the summer camp and making arrangements for transportation and accommodation for the volunteers.

The theme for this year's camp was **"Egypt: Joseph's Journey from Prison to Palace"**. The camp lessons were mainly focused on the life of Joseph as he grew up with God; from a desolate teenager searching for hope, to a powerful ruler who was finally able to reunite with his family. Many of the Native American children who attended last year's camp returned this year with elated enthusiasm, along with a number of first-time Native American children attendees. About 62 children, the largest number ever we had, attended this year's camp. The number of volunteers from various Mar Thoma parishes has increased from the previous years to 26 this year. At the beginning of the day every one in the camp would start off with a morning devotional time followed by singing session. After that the camp children who were ranged from nursery to high school were separated into

different groups and were taught lessons based on the theme by the volunteers for the rest of the morning. In the afternoon, all the children joined for craft lessons under the leadership of the volunteers followed by enjoying the rest of the afternoon free time by having various recreational activities including playing basketball, soccer and volley ball. Every one enjoyed the swimming and canoeing in the nearby beautiful and picturesque cold Broken Bow Lake. The evening programs varied from day-to-day, one day it was singing devotional songs around campfire and another evening was set apart for cultural programs including Choctaw Indian dance and our traditional dances from our motherland India. A team-building session was included in this year's camp, in which people living in different cabins would perform group activities and face off in competition in order to build mutual trust, faith and love among others. The groups from each cabin were also rewarded with prizes throughout the week of the camp for being good and faithful



servants of God. Another new program introduced for this year's camp was a dedication session led by Rev. Jaisen Thomas, during which the campers were invited to share what they have learned through the camp and how it would help them in their future lives.

During a short motivational talk, Mr. Abraham Mathew, MTC Dallas, FB, briefly explained to the Native American children that even though we are an immigrant community, how well we could live and work in this adopted country is because we worked diligently to attain our goals. He challenged the children that, being born as Native Americans in this land of opportunities, they could do much better than the rest of the people who are mainly immigrants. He



encouraged the children, regardless of their age and background, to obtain better education by working hard and make use of every opportunity to grow in wisdom and maturity so that they could find better jobs and live better lives. A majority of children came from broken families and foster care families. Some of them are from abusive households and have family members including parents in the jail serving their time. Our volunteers were able to talk to them on a 'one on one' basis and were able to make good relationship with these children by listening to their life experiences and the miserable conditions in which they are being brought up. Mr. George Mathew and Mr. Skariah T. Philip and Mrs. Mary K. Philip from the MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch helped in cooking our Indian spicy foods and served throughout the days of the entire camp both to the volunteers and the Native American children. The Native American children really enjoyed the spicy Indian foods cooked by our volunteers. Rev. Minoy N. Kuruvilla, Vicar MTC Dallas, FB, Mr. Joji George, Abraham Mathew (Rajan) and John Mathew from MTC Dallas Farmers Branch visited the camp and spent time with the children and the volunteers. They also shared their time and talents with the Native American children.

Choctaw camp was a blessing for all those who were involved and we are fortunate to have such a strong bond between the Choctaw Indian community and the Mar Thoma Church. Many campers look forward to the summer camp held every year because of the love and care and fun time they experienced during the earlier camps. A small group of members from Choctaw Cumberland Presbyterian Church

attended our 2010 Family Conference held in Dallas and performed Choctaw Indian dance which was a novel experience for those who attended the Family Conference. All the volunteers who attended this year's camp agreed that they learned more from these amazing Native American children than they could have ever thought. It was a life changing experience for the volunteers who attended the camp. We hope and pray that we are able to build on the solid foundation that we have established couple of years back, so that we may have many more memorable camps for years to come. After having emotional goodbyes and promising to return next time all volunteers returned homes with vivid life time memories.

A Church exists by its mission and I thank God that we are provided with different mission projects like Native American Mission, Mexico Mission, Neighborhood Mission and India Mission. I encourage each individual especially the youths be a part of any of these mission projects of the Diocese and make effective use of your time and talents provided by God for the well being of the less fortunate and the needy. We need more individuals especially the youth volunteers for the summer camps and other programs being conducted among the Native Americans in Oklahoma and Alabama and other parts of the country. Those who are interested may please visit the Mission Board web site at <http://nae.marthomamission.com> or contact the Mission Board members.

**Abraham Mathew, MTC Dallas, FB, Mission Board Member**

## DIOCESAN SOUVENIR PUBLICATION KICK OFF

The Diocesan Assembly held on April 17, 2010 at the Atlanta Mar Thoma Church decided to publish a Diocesan Souvenir to collect up to 1.5 million for the developmental activities of the Diocese. The objectives of this project are:

- Further development of the Sinai Mar Thoma Center, Merrick, New York
- Purchase of residences for the youth chaplains at Houston, Dallas and Chicago (to pay up to 50% of the cost of the residence)
- To pay off the 50% of the existing mortgages of the youth chaplains residence in New York and Philadelphia
- 10% of the proceeds will be set apart for the Mission work of the Diocese

The souvenir will include a short history and heritage of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and this Diocese and articles. The kick off for receiving the compliments to the souvenir was held during concluding session of the Family Conference held in Dallas. Many members from different parishes pledged compliments and received the order form from Theodosius Thirumeni. A substantial sum was listed as "promised by the well wishers" who pledged during the Family Conference.

The following persons were selected by the Diocesan Council to co-ordinate the publication

of souvenir: Rev. M. P. Yohannan, Convener; Rev. Philip George, Editor; Mr. Chacko Mathew, Diocesan Treasurer; and Mr. Varughese P. Varughese, Diocesan Council Member.

The Diocese is counting on the support and co-operation of the members of all parishes, business community, and well-wishers, by providing advertisements and compliments. The souvenir will be published throughout USA, Canada and Europe during the first half of 2011.

**Rev. Vinoy Daniel, Diocesan Secretary**





## NATIVE AMERICAN MISSIONS IN MT. VERNON, ALABAMA: AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE

**"For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus."** (Galatians 3:26)

Anika Chacko, Detroit Mar Thoma Church (Pictures by Varsha Thomas, Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington)



When I committed to join the Mt. Vernon, Alabama missions group, I knew that we would lead a Vacation Bible School on "Joseph's Journey from Prison to Palace"; we would emphasize biblical applications from Joseph's experiences, namely God's presence during the peaks and valleys of our lives. Thirty-three volunteers traveled to Mt. Vernon, AL, including our leaders, namely Ms. Jency John Thomas (Georgia), Ms. Alisha Thomas (Maryland), Mr. Liju Abraham (New York), Dr. Suresh Matthews (Alabama), and Mr. O.C. Abraham (Delaware).

Our Alabama VBS officially began on Monday, June 14th, and lasted till Friday, June 18th. We served children from ages three to thirteen in the morning. Each of the morning classes experienced the following VBS centers: Worship, Games, Bible Adventures, Class Time, and Crafts.

A group of teachers as well as Ms. Alisha Thomas and Dr. Suresh Matthews led worship, which involved a lively rendition of our VBS songs as well as a strong emphasis on memory verses for the week. Worship energized volunteers and students and left all participants with inspiring memories. During class time, teachers expanded on the daily lesson of Bible Adventures and helped students draw connections between Joseph's experiences and their respective lives.

Last but not least; Crafts allowed students to mingle with one another and to express their creativity through a variety of Egyptian themed projects.

During the late afternoons, students over the age of 13 came to the church to engage in icebreakers and small group discussions on the story of Joseph. The icebreakers served as a wonderful forum for bonding between the Mt. Vernon youth and our volunteers; small-group time for males and females reinforced these bonds.

Meanwhile, parent volunteers as well as mission trip leaders planned for the subsequent festivities, from *biriyani* and mango pie to snow cones and cotton candy. When

"Family Fun Day" arrived, each class did a superb job with their respective presentations; a charismatic Bollywood-style dance with Mt. Vernon youth and Mar Thoma volunteers followed. Celebrating what the students had learned was a joyous experience. As Ms. Arlene J. George of Atlanta, Georgia stated, "This being my fourth year being a leader for this mission trip, it really is a privilege to see the children that I taught grow not just physically, but mentally and spiritually. I love being able to use the gifts that God gave me and incorporate it into almost every aspect of this trip whether it is just listening to my kids or teaching them to dance for our Lord. It makes me feel like I am meant to be here and make a positive impact."

Reflecting on my time in Alabama has shown me the multitude of opportunities for spiritual growth and fellowship with the Mt. Vernon community. Our time in Mt. Vernon allowed us to teach and learn from our students, but we also had opportunities to lead morning devotionals and to engage in a Praise Night with singers and a body worship team from Mt. Vernon. We enjoyed these opportunities for spiritual growth and fellowship because of the constant support of the Aldersgate minister, Mr. Ron Hill, as well as the tireless efforts of individuals from the Mt. Vernon community, namely Ms. June and the female volunteers who aided meal preparations and our interactions with the VBS children.

Ms. Ashley Issac of Atlanta, Georgia reiterated my sentiments when she stated, "For the second year, this trip has changed me. The joy and love that every child is constantly showering on each one of us is enough alone to make the difference. And, after you get back home, you realize that our one week with them changes them just as much as it changes us." If you come to Mt. Vernon, Alabama for the 2011 VBS with an open mind and a loving heart, you will be enveloped by the presence of God within the Mt. Vernon community.



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## TORCH FOR THE 2011 FAMILY CONFERENCE HANDED OVER TO TRINITY MTC, EDMONTON, CANADA



The 2011 Family Conference of the Diocese of North America & Europe of the Mar Thoma Church will be hosted by the Trinity Edmonton MTC in Edmonton, Canada.

Rev. Minoy N. Kuruvilla, Vicar of the MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch, host parish of 2010 Family Conference handed over the torch to the Vicar of Trinity MTC, Rev Reji John by handing over the same to Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Diocesan Episcopa. During this handing-over ceremony, Thirumeni requested support, prayers and participation from all parishes in the Diocese, for the 2011 Family Conference. Rev. Reji John extended an advance welcome and requested the prayers and participation as well. Many members of Trinity MTC who were delegates in the 2010 Family Conference, attended the handing over ceremony, along with other parish members. A video presentation of the highlights of the conference, host city was also shown to the participants of 2010 Family Conference.

**Dr Roy Mathew, Conference Secretary  
2010 Family Conference**

## LITERATURE SOCIETY ONLINE STORE INAUGURATED DURING FAMILY CONFERENCE IN DALLAS



The Mar Thoma Literature Society's online store was inaugurated during the Family Conference held in Dallas by Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa, Diocesan Bishop of the Diocese of North America & Europe of the Mar Thoma Church. The online store was a long cherished dream of the Literature Society. Now it has become easy for anyone to order books online. The Mar Thoma Literature Society that was founded by our Valia Metropolitan during our 1991

Florida Family Conference, had another leap in its progress history as it was able to inaugurate the new web site [www.marthomals.org](http://www.marthomals.org). Dr. Thomas K. Jose, Secretary provided glimpses of the progress of the society and welcomed and introduced the committee members Mr. C. V. Simonkutty, treasurer; Mr. M. Thomas; Mr. Chacko Mathew, Diocesan Treasurer and Rev. Vinoy Daniel, Diocesan Secretary were also present at the inaugural ceremony.

Literature Society has a sizable collection of different kinds of Bibles, song books, devotionals (both in English and Malayalam), Sermon outlines, worship books, constitution of the Mar Thoma Church and other Sabha publications, publications from the Diocese, etc. The Literature Society is also planning a book store in a convenient place in New York so that people may buy books in person from the store in addition to establishing libraries in the parishes. For more information please visit the web site at [www.marthomals.org](http://www.marthomals.org) or contact Mr. C. V. Simonkutty at 516-742-3520, or Dr. Thomas K. Jose at 718-317-2263.

**Dr. Thomas K. Jose, Secretary**

## RELEASE OF NEW MUSIC ALBUM 'SEYON SANCHARI' (BY JAYAN)



Secretary and Bishop's Secretary, who was also the former

Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa, released a new music album titled 'Seyon Sanchari', produced by George Varghese (Jayan) of MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch, during the 2010 Mar Thoma Family Conference held in Dallas. Thirumeni released the CD by giving a copy to Rev. Vinoy Daniel, Diocesan

Vicar of MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch. Thirumeni expressed sincere appreciation for the mission works undertaken by Jayan through the Music ministry and wished all blessings and success for the distribution of the newly released CDs and prayed that it may be used for the glory of God. All the songs in the CD were written and composed by Jayan from the real life experiences. The Album was recorded and mixed at DSMC Studios at Tiruvalla, an undertaking of the Mar Thoma Church. As in the past, the proceeds from this album will also be used for the various mission works undertaken by the Mar Thoma Church in India. Personal Experiences and meditation on the Word of God are the sources of all Jayan's compositions.



## MATRIMONIALS

NRI Marthoma parents invite proposals for their daughter 24/163, fair, B/B in Kuwait, B.E. Computer Engineer, employed in Bangalore. From parents of godfearing, goodlooking well employed boys brought up outside Kerala belonging to Marthoma/CSI/Orthodox family. Respond with recent photograph and bio-data. E-mail: abraham2108@yahoo.com.

Marthomite family settled in Texas invite marriage proposals for their God-fearing, family-oriented, fair complexion daughter (30 yrs/5'5"), who, born and raised in the USA, has attained her PharmD and is an earning professional. We welcome interested and compatible Marthomite grooms, between the ages of 30 and 34 years, one who is Christ-centered, family-oriented, professionally qualified, raised and settled in the USA to respond with a recent photograph and bio to twbd2010@gmail.com.

Marthomite parents settled in the U.S. invite proposals for their son. He is 26 years old, 5' 11" tall and completed his Masters in Engineering from a top university in the U.S. and currently works as a Manager at a major financial services company. He does not drink/smoke and is active in the Mar Thoma Church and is currently serving as a Sunday School teacher. We invite proposals from parents of God fearing girls to send a photo and bio-data to malluproposal09@gmail.com

Mar Thoma parents invites proposals for their son 28 years old MD from medical school in USA doing 2nd year residency. He is 5' 8" fair, seeking suitable Mar Thoma, Jacobite or CSI alliance from parents of girls with similar qualifications from US schools. Please respond with a recent photograph and bio-data to thomastomasny@yahoo.com

CSI Syrian Christian parents settled in Toronto, Canada invite proposals for their son, born and brought up in Toronto (32/5' 6", slim, wheatish, M.D.), currently doing residency in General Surgery, Toledo, Ohio, USA. Proposals invited from CSI/Mar Thoma/Jacobite parents of girls, 26-30; M.D., slim, wheatish/fair and brought up in USA. Respond with photo and details. E-mail: zac.philip88@gmail.com; Tel.: (905) 780-6332

## OBITUARY

**MR. ALLAN GEORGE VARGHESE:** Allan, an active youth member, athlete, and sports representative of Ascension Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia, was abruptly called to eternity on Saturday September 11, 2010.



Born on March 22, 1989 as the eldest son of Mr. George Varghese (Baby) of Chethikkattu Karoor, Thiruvalla and Mrs. Baby Sona Varghese (Sona) and elder brother of Ashok G. Varghese. Allan was a good son, a loving brother, and supportive cousin

and friend to many who knew and loved him. He was completing his bachelor's degree at Penn State University. He was hardworking and dedicated in every aspect of his life—Church, School, and relationships with friends and family.

Allan was an outstanding sportsman and had represented Ascension Marthoma Church (Philadelphia) in inter-church tournaments and other youth fellowship activities. He was a bright young man who brought joy and warmth to others, who was patient, loving, humble, and a blessing to everyone who knew him. Allan will be missed, but forever remembered by his parents, brother, family, and friends.

The funeral service was held at Ascension Mar Thoma Church on September 17-18, followed by the burial services at Forest Hills Cemetery.

**Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Vica**

**MR. CHERIAN JACOB:** Jacob was born on February 6, 1914 as the eldest son of late Rev. C. Cherian and late Saramma Cherian of Thazhoomadom, Manakala, Adoor. He was called to eternity on April 23, 2010 at the age of 96 in Waukee, Iowa. He was a member of the Mar Thoma Church in Chetpet, Madras from 1945 till 2001, when he and Mrs. Rachel Jacob moved to the USA to be close to their four children, and were members of the Iowa



Congregation. He taught Mathematics and English at Madras Christian College High School and retired after 25 years of service, as Assistant Headmaster. He was actively involved in various church activities and was instrumental in starting the Sunday school program at the Madras MTC and supporting it even after he moved to USA. He leaves behind his wife married for 69 years, Mrs. Rachel Jacob (91 years) and four daughters, Saramma Alexander (Iowa), Elizabeth Manaloor (Georgia), Crissy Kaleekal (Kansas), and Susan Jacob (Kansas), 6 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren. Funeral Services were conducted by Rev. A. P. Noble of St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church, Dallas, Texas and he was laid to rest at the Waukee Cemetery, in Waukee, Iowa, USA.



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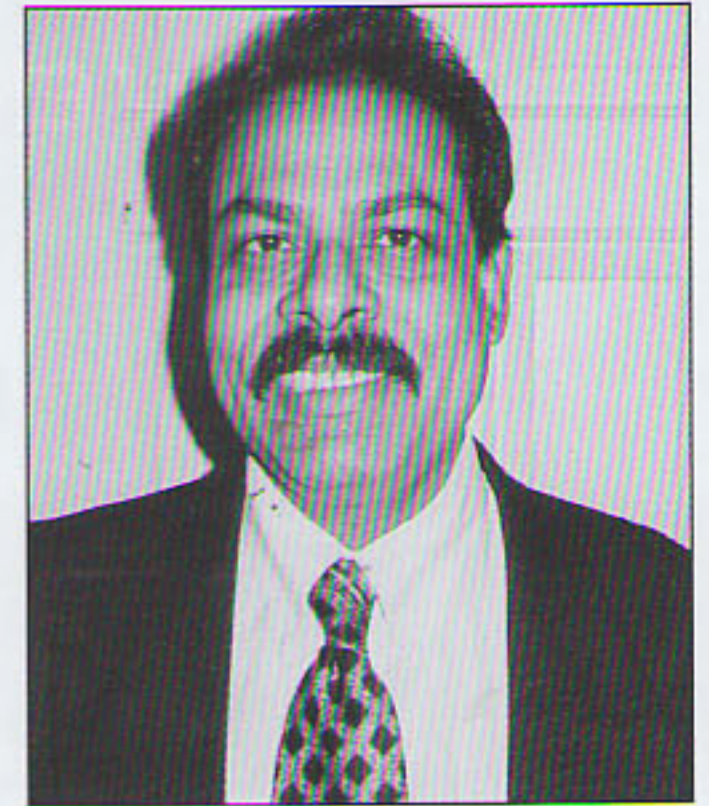
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Human history paints pictures of many departures and returns to Godly wisdom and clean living. As stated in Romans 3:11-12 "No one understands. No one seeks God. All have turned away from God and all have gone wrong. No one does what is right, not even one".

There's no question that we are living in bad times, worried about financial security, world peace, erosion of natural preserves, and so on. To a great extent, the world dictates our morals and values. Solid principles, a sense of obedience, neighborhood concerns, and law-abiding nature are slipping away. Persuasive pressure from all sides is making individuals act in unnatural ways. Even within conservative societies, excessive use of liquor and drugs are prevalent. Many of the younger generation around us are following a stream of technological breakthroughs and a world of endless probabilities. Many parents are behind their children in understanding and applying their electronic knowledge. In fact, in the Western World, we are removing God and His importance from schools and other institutions, and shaping up a generation who has no faith. We consume many foods and drinks that are genetically altered and mass-produced with global marketing ideas. So-called world leaders are simply seeking ways to compete and preserve authority and control. There are numerous predictions and calculations, surfaced recently, that lift up the validity of the "Mayan Calendar" according to which the world ends in December of 2012. These predictions have either a negative or positive impact on human thinking: Some think that, since the world is ending, "let us enjoy what is left", and for others, "end times are near so wise up"! According to many religious leaders and faith practitioners, there is no better time than now to discipline ourselves anew for building and keeping stronger relations to the Almighty. We ought to bring order into our lives and be in tune with the Creator. As a global church, are we preparing our members for a return? As members of Mar Thoma church, are we seeing ourselves as ministers and missionaries, propagating righteousness and good news? As a Diaspora community, are we attending to the immediate needs of the community that we live in? Are we guiding our younger generations on a path that adds to values and perseverance of our traditions? As a Diaspora community, we cannot point fingers at church authorities or remote powers; rather we must use Godly wisdom and faith to become committed disciples, thereby slowly causing needed change within the community where we are planted. Psalm 31:19 reads: "How great is Your goodness, which You have stored up for those who fear You, which You have wrought for those who take refuge in You."



While I was finishing up this editorial, I came to know the sad news about the sudden demise of Allan Varghese of Ascension Mar Thoma Church, an active youth member who was a dear friend and mentor to many of our youth. As a family friend, I feel the pain and suffering of parents, and those who were close to him, and I pray to the Almighty to console the bereaving.

The Mar Thoma Diocese of North America and Europe needs to strengthen its base here for the betterment of all who are members, as well as the Christian community as a whole. We ought to support its activities for the sake of Christianity and also for the betterment of our future generations. As we all are aware, those who practice tithing will have no problem in providing the needed financial support! Messenger committee is very thankful to those who supported its activities through the past 28 years and we are counting on the support of more Marthomites, within this Diocese to make this a global Christian publication.

**Dr. Eapen Daniel**

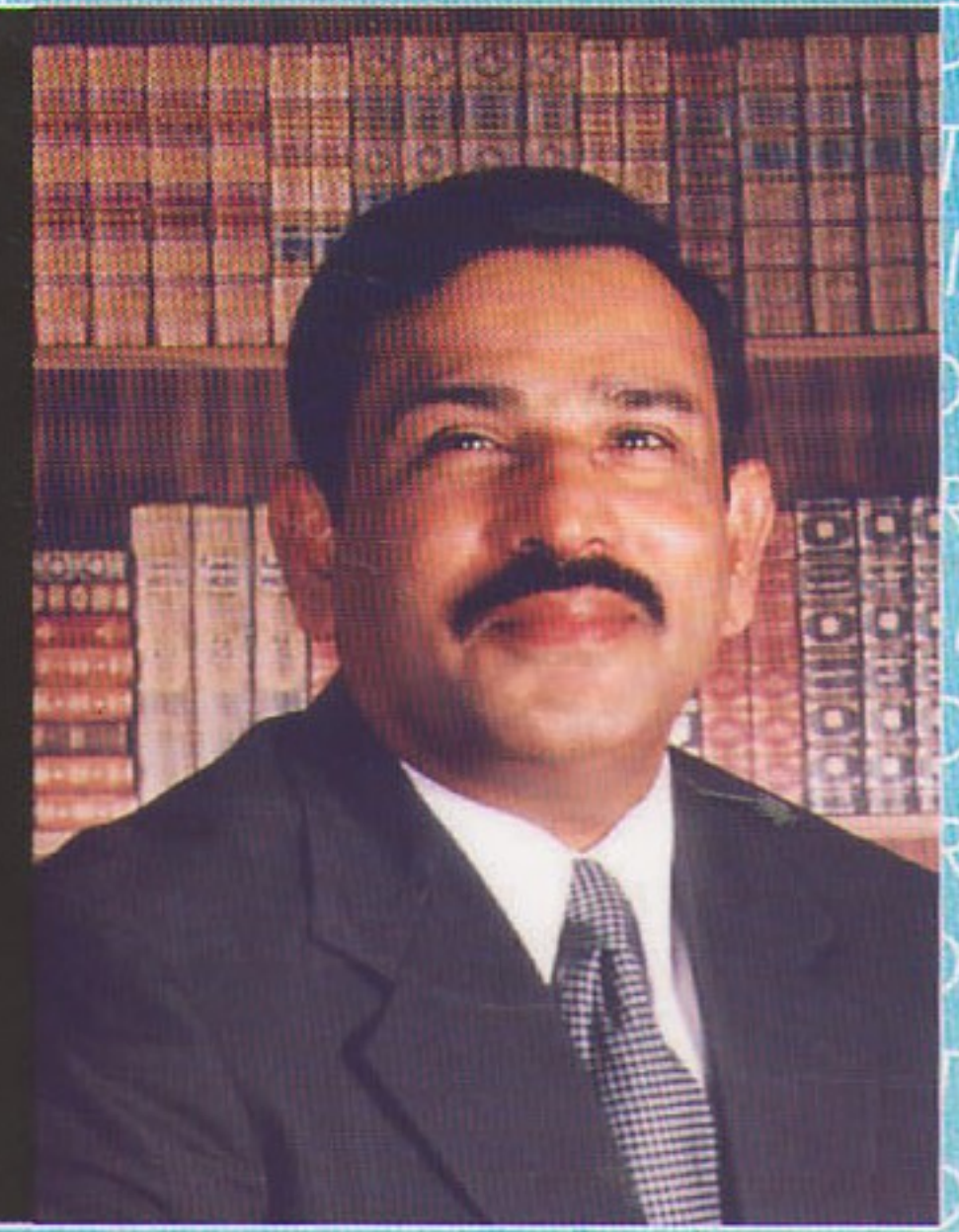


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