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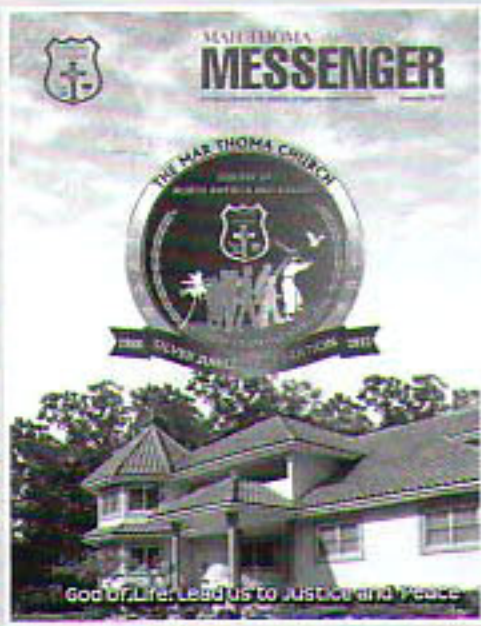
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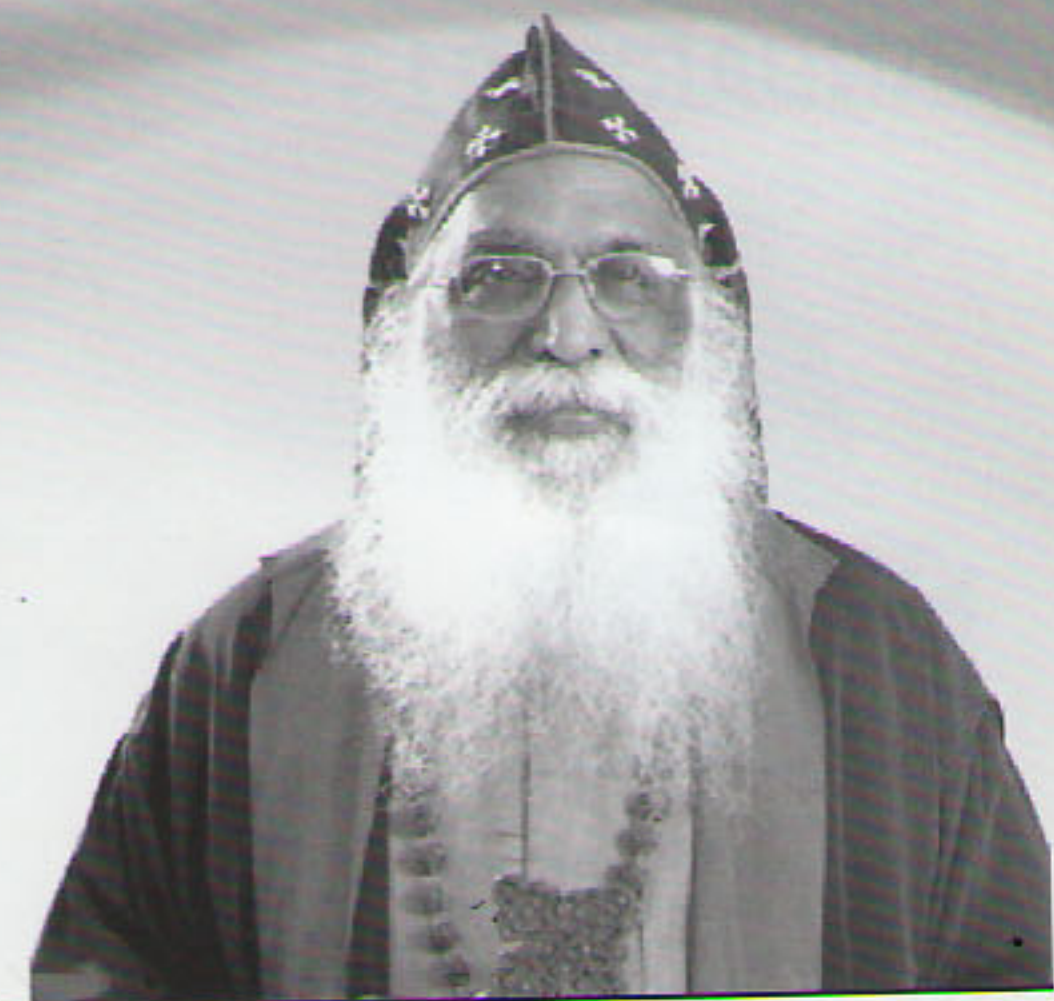
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Message from the Metropolitan

Dearly beloved in the Lord,
Ahead are the days of abstinent purity. We will enter into new visions and meditations that kindle our spiritual practices and thoughts. For the Christian Church, these days remind us of the words of priest Zachariah that '.....the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.' The community of believers enters into this spiritual bondage that paves the way to experience the New Year with all its fullness. Today we observe throughout the world the staging of violence, anarchy, and terrorism. In order to get out of this tragic situation we have to make a sincere quest for the right paths of peace. Let us together strive for this. It is a fact that in this modern period the vision of a value based family life is seen distorted. The moment when Jesus enters the house of Zacchaeus with him, it becomes a house of salvation. This must become an example for us. Before Jesus' declaration, 'today salvation has come to this house,' many things had happened in the life of Zacchaeus. Being aware of his wrong doings, he shows complete willingness to correct his sins. For those who continue in their sins, even after knowing their sins, the blissful experience of salvation will always be strange and distant. Zacchaeus saw clearly his wrong past through the mirror, namely Jesus Christ. He accepts Jesus as the 'right one' and relinquishes the wrongs of life. Let our houses be transformed homes to enable Jesus say, "Today salvation has come to this house." We have to make a serious study of devotion, the genealogy of families that were chosen for the birth of Jesus in this world. Then we will come to know that the Book of Ruth has to be studied with great attention. This book vividly emits the rays of love and amity expressed between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. The characters such as Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth represent persons in different areas of life. They become a family. Jesus is born in this family. We should be able to declare like Joshua, "My family and I will serve the Lord."

In 2012, Twenty-seven candidates for theological studies were admitted in the Kottayam Theological Seminary and 16 in other different Theological Seminaries. It is really a very inspiring experience that young people with conviction, dedication, and faith are coming forward to serve the Lord and the Church.

Our devotional thoughts in the coming days will be centered on our children who happen to be the hope of our future. I want to remind everybody that the children must get proper training through Christian Educational activities. They should derive God's blessings. They should get training to move forward, imbibing strength from the Word which is truly a lamp for their feet and light for their path. This should give them strength when they move through the difficult, different, and dangerous byways of life. They should be inspired through our Sunday schools. Only those who truly love our Lord can enjoy the life in Christ. Let the Sunday school be the medium for such divine transition for our children so that they, from their childhood, will experience the blissful presence of the Lord who offers true friendship and noble life style to live in this modern world of many a temptation. The root of a tree is that which makes it stand steadily on the ground. The roots should go down deep into the earth. Then the tree will be able to withstand any storm or rain. It will not, then fall down. This lesson of Nature is synonymous of children too. They should have faith's deeper roots, so that their lives will become stronger in Christ. This is true witnessing. Let me tell you a true story. A girl from a poor family in Kerala came to Mumbai in search of a job. One day she crossed a busy road in the big city. While she was waiting for her friend to cross the road, a car hit her. Her leg was crushed. She was hospitalized. The leg had to be amputated. I was travelling secretary of the Mar Thoma Evangelical Association in those days and I, along with other priests went to see her in the hospital. We were very much perplexed to face her. But the girl said, "My Jesus will hold my hand and move me forward." A person on another bed in that general ward overheard what she said. His son was the managing director of a big company. He asked his son to help her. He helped the girl financially. She got a new prosthetic limb. Later she was given employment in his company. Let us praise God for her faith in the Lord.

When, in these days, we spend our time in prayer and devotion, our lives must be renewed. We must obtain a new spiritual strength. Let our strength be the words of Elizabeth who was visited by Mary, "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished! (Luke 1:45)." We must remember that Elizabeth says this in the context of the disbelief expressed to the angel of the Lord by Zachariah, her husband, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years (Luke 1:18)." And Zachariah had to remain at home not able to speak owing to his disbelief. Instead, let us be the sharers of the heavenly blessings obtained through constant faith in our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

Grace be with you all

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan

Message from the Diocesan Episcopa



Dear friends in Christ,

Two thousand twelve was quite an eventful year and significant to all of us. It is important to live every moment of our life to the fullest because our life on earth is set for an unspecified yet definite time frame between the time of our birth and death. We should also be mindful that our life is historically determined, culturally constructed, religiously and socially shaped, and that we share our lives with other beings and nature.

We started 2012 with the Leadership Conference in Tampa, Florida. Since then we had more than ten conferences at different places, spread over a twelve-month period. These conferences were organized for the spiritual nourishment of the members of the Church, giving due consideration to the various age groups and gender. I congratulate all the organizations for their leadership and all the host parishes for their hard-work in successfully conducting the conferences. In general, it appeared that more members than usual were interested in participating in the conferences. We also were fortunate to have efficient leadership for all the conferences and experienced a greater sense of unity among those who participated. It is my prayer that we not only hear more from the Word of God, but also put them into practice so that it will bear fruit in our lives (Mt. 7: 21).

We are also witnessing the emergence of new leadership in various church circles.

- The faithful Coptic Christians gathered together for worship and after prayer they selected His Grace Bishop Tawadros II as the new pope and leader of the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- The Malankara Catholic Church is honored that the Pope declared the Bava Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis Catholicos as one of the new Cardinals. This is a significant recognition to the Malankara Catholic Church and its St. Thomas tradition. His Grace is now the youngest Cardinal and has tremendous scope to lead and guide the Church in the years to come.
- The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams is stepping down to serve as the Master of Magdalene College of Cambridge University. The Mar Thoma Church is indebted to him for his Episcopal leadership and pastoral care for the ecumenical fraternity of churches and wider ecumenism. We are also very grateful to him for his much-valued friendship and support for our community in the United Kingdom. The Anglican Church worldwide was able to select Rt. Rev. Justin Welby as the new Archbishop whose installation service will take place on Thursday, March 21, 2013 at Lambeth. Bishop Welby is the bishop of Durham, and will be the 105th Archbishop to sit on the throne of Saint Augustine, succeeding Rowan Williams.
- The Syrian Orthodox Church is gifted with the consecration of a new Bishop, Mathew Mar Timotheos, in Lebanon. His Lordship is now serving as the Secretary to the Patriarch Most Rev. Ignatius Zacha - I.

I congratulate these new leaders and wish them God's blessings.

The "super-storm" Sandy was a major catastrophe in 2012. Our church members in USA, particularly in the North East and South East regions of the Diocese, continue to recover from the devastation it caused. Many of us have been following up about this disaster through the media. It is comforting to know that all our members were safe in their respective places and that our parish buildings and properties were intact. But still many people are going through various difficulties. When one member suffers, the whole community suffers. About 175 lives have been lost due to the storm. Millions of people were without electricity, water, and food for some time, and many have lost their homes and loved ones. It is gratifying that President Obama visited the affected places before and after his election, and authorized federal assistance for victims to rebuild their lives, homes and towns. But that is not enough. We need to remember the people affected by this disaster in our prayers and find ways by which we can also assist them in rebuilding their lives. We should not perceive such natural calamities as the end of life and hope, but see them as opportunities to add a silver lining to the cloud of darkness and despair that they bring.

President Barack Obama has been reelected to serve a second term by the American people after the very stiff competition in the most expensive election in American history. This is not just another victory for him, but an opportunity for the President to implement what was left undone during his first term. He gained the support of a majority of Latinos, Asians, African Americans, women and the younger generation. They all look forward to a leader who would safeguard their human rights and protect their dignity to have a just space in the world for a meaningful existence. However, he is not only the President of those who voted for him but the President of all people. Therefore, he has to broaden his agenda. He has the task of fully implementing the health care reform and employing government policies to keep the economy growing at a faster and greater pace. He has the opportunity to address issues that could positively impact climate change by possibly advocating tougher carbon emission standards. It is also a time when world peace is being seriously threatened with agitations and tensions in several places. He also faces many other new challenges that are on the increase both domestically and internationally. The American government is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Hence, all of us should work together with the President and the government to meet the challenges that lie ahead. The President's words of encouragement in this regard are "Even if there were certain kinds of bumps on the road in recent years, we should be able to move beyond it. There is nothing better to mend any scar or grudge from the past than making better achievements in the present and the future."

This time the Mar Thoma Messenger will come to you in January 2013. I wish all the readers a very blessed and bright New Year. 2013 is also the Silver Jubilee year of our Diocese. It is a time for us to thank God for the wonderful ways in which God has guided us thus far. It is also a time to dedicate ourselves to work with one accord for the glory of God and for the furtherance of His kingdom. Our diocese has eight regions. The Diocesan Council is making an effort to have the celebration in a befitting manner in all the regions for greater participation of our members. The Lord has enabled us to establish our parishes wherever our members can come together for worship. This is a time to honor those who labored hard to achieve this Diocese's growth by spending their time, effort and money. The Church is more than its infrastructure. The Jubilee celebrations should be a time for the spiritual awakening of the members. Christian nurturing, though meant for everyone, has its focus on the growing generations. The commitment of the new generation is vital for the continued growth of the church as we look forward to 2013 and beyond. The church exists by her mission. Therefore, our Jubilee celebrations need to attend to the outreach missions of each local parish and region. The growth of the church is to be seen in her mission engagements. The theme that is selected for the Jubilee year is 'Church: Journeying with Christ'. May the Jubilee year be an occasion to know Christ and to follow him!

God bless us all

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**Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar
Philaxenos Episcopa
Dec 5th**



**Rt. Rev. Thomas Mar
Timotheos Episcopa
Dec 13th**



As we herald a New Year, we all hope for the better: better lives, better governments, a better world.... One's hope for the future is sustained by personal faith. At each changing phase of life, hope deepens or dwindles based on individual life situations. One of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poems paints human hope in a different way:

*Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last — far off — at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.
So runs my dream: but what am I?
An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry.*

Tennyson's lines point to human helplessness. Hope is made possible also by human limitations. We do not know our future and neither do we know the extent of the existing possibilities for future, including life after death. In fact, Tennyson's thoughts align with what Paul has written in 1 Corinthians 15:19, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only; we are of all people most to be pitied". As Christians, our hope is beyond today and tomorrow: it is eternal. We must not lose our hope with situational shifts. In Romans 12:12 Paul wrote, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer". It is our unchanging faith that carries us through troubled waters. Job is a great Biblical example of faith through tribulations (13: 15): "Though he slay me, I will hope in Him; Yet I will argue my ways to his face".

Humans tend to forget what has happened in the past and when you forget the past, we repeat the same past – same mistakes. At the beginning of New Year, many renew their vows. Many come up with resolutions that, hopefully, will change their lives in a positive way. However, if we make a new decision but continue the same behavioral patterns of the past, the end result will be a replica of the past.

The Diocese of North America & Europe is celebrating its Jubilee year in 2013. From a very humble beginning in the Malankara soil to 25 plus years of successful expansion as a Diocese in the western hemisphere, it is clearly something to celebrate. Indeed it's a celebration of God's providences that helped a faith community to thrive on unfamiliar turfs and be fruitful for its followers. Our visions, rooted in Christian values and family ties, will take us to newer heights and we hope that future generations will reinforce the values that we have learned and propagated to make them the norms of a stronger Christian community. As a growing Church, we need to create newer ways to develop inclusive worship ideas and mission models that will support all ages, gender, cultures and languages. A spiritual existence eked out of routine worship bordering on ritualism and doctrinal teaching without critical thought will not generate the growth required for such an outreach. We need dynamic social intervention that requires our support in every manner, and as an influential Diocese, we can do it with support from our members who has chosen to become part of a Diaspora community.

Wishing our valued readers a blessed and fruitful year ahead!

Dr. Eapen Daniel

Editorial

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What is that to you? You must follow me!

Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius



This Bible study is taken up in the context of the Jubilee celebration of the Diocese of North America and Europe. It is my desire that the Diocese will take up 'group Bible Study' in our parishes and congregations in 2013 to understand various theme related Bible portions better and to be disciples of The Risen Christ. Our Church is an Eastern Reformed Church that gives emphasis to open Bible where the faith and practices of the church are understood Biblically. In addition, the Diocese is starting the year with the leadership Conference on Staten Island Mar Thoma Church the first week end of January, for a group of New Generation Youth, 21 years and older. I am attempting here a study on the disciple Peter, to whom we can look for leadership qualities as one who journeyed with Jesus Christ. This study, though not exhaustive, is confined to the details of Peter given in the Gospel of John.

Simon Peter is an amazing person. He is the one who denied Jesus before daybreak on the day when Jesus was arrested. But that is not the end of the story. Bible students will be amazed how Jesus looking at a person like Peter, once said, 'upon this rock I will build my church' (Mt. 16: 18). As the theme, Church: Journeying with Christ is assumed during the Silver Jubilee year of the Diocese, it is only appropriate that we take time to study the life and work of Peter. St. John is the only gospel that tells us about the risen Jesus turning to Peter to ask the specific question three times: Simon, Son of John, do you love me more than these? (Jn. 21: 15-17). Jesus asked him three times to 'Take care of my Sheep'. Then in the following verses St. John recounts to us that Jesus said to Peter two times: "You follow me" (v. 19 & 22). The second command is very clear and emphatic when Jesus says unequivocally, you must follow me (22b).

Peter is standing with other disciples, where the risen Jesus encountered him. Peter saw Jesus, standing by and asked Jesus what will happen to him. (Jn. 21: 20-22). On hearing this, Jesus asked: 'why should that issue be Peter's concern' (v 22)? Therefore Jesus corrects Peter by telling him that what is needed is to focus on ones' own life to ascertain that following Christ is the fore-most thing; once that focus is correct all other things will be in order under the Lordship of Christ. As members of the Church, we are familiar with Christ, our life in the Church and the various religious practices. We are devout Christians. At the same time, we are worried about our spouses, our children and the growing generation. Can we hear the words of the risen Lord telling us: What is it that to you? You must follow me (22b). Let us put first things first.

Who is this Simon Peter?

He is from the town of Bethsaida, at the Sea of Galilee (Jn 1: 44). The word Bethsaida means, house of fishing. He was a fisherman (Jn 21: 2-3). Some call him 'Big Fisherman'. He had leadership qualities. Synoptic gospels say that, Peter owned a boat (Lk 5: 1-2, Mk. 1: 16, Mt. 4: 18). His father was John (Jn 1: 42, Jn 21: 15, 1: 40-42). He had a brother called Andrew. His original name was Simon. Jesus called him Peter in Greek or Kepha in Aramaic, the word meaning, "rock" (Jn 1: 42f and Mt. 16: 18). The gospel tells us that Peter took the lead among the disciples several times (Jn 13: 24, 21: 3) and he often responded first (Jn. 6: 68-69; Jn. 13: 6, 36, Jn 21: 11). He spoke on behalf of the disciples (Jn 6: 68-69) and he was named first in several instances (Jn. 18: 15, 20: 2, 21: 2).

Peter's understanding of Jesus

The understanding of John's Gospels varies from the understanding the Synoptic Gospels give about Peter. As a fisherman he saw Jesus, heard him saying the words 'Follow Me' and Peter left everything, his boat and hired men, and committed himself to be the disciple of Jesus. When the Synoptic Gospel give emphasis to the incident at Philippi Caesarea (Mt. 16), the writer of the Gospel of John turns our attention to the words of Peter as seen in Jn 6: 67-69.

"Do you want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the twelve. Simon Peter assured him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy one of God" Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil".

John 6 narrates the story of rejection

- (i) where the Jews emerge as a hostile group and rejects Jesus (vs 41-51)
 - (ii) the people not living up to the expectation of Jesus (Vs. 2, 26, 36) and
 - (iii) Some of the followers finding his teaching hard to accept and therefore leaving him (V 60-66).
- But Peter in response to the question of Jesus affirms that they remain loyal to Jesus (Vs 68-69). In the gospel of John, Peter's confession about Jesus comes not in the beginning when Andrew, Philip and Nathaniel are revealing the identity of Jesus (Jn 1: 41, 45, 49). There Jesus is foretelling that Simon will be called Peter. Here Peter asserts on behalf of the twelve (Vs 67f) with an affirmation and heart touching words. The statement of Peter is also revelatory for those who read the gospel of Jesus: you are the 'Holy one of God', You have the words of eternal life'. Certainly Peter was able to say this only by the guidance of Holy

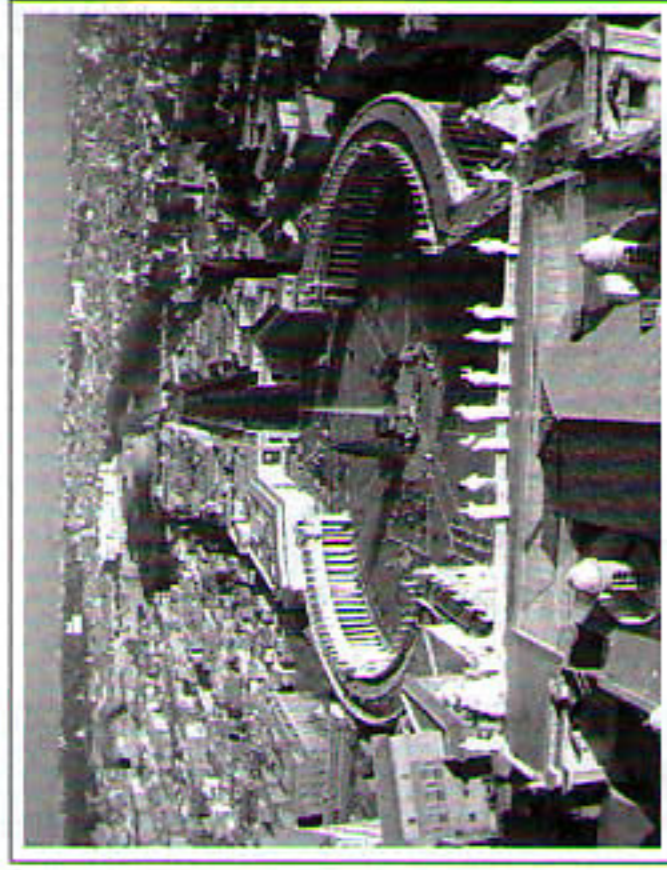


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Spirit (Jn. 14: 17). Jesus points out the limits of the humanity in Peter and the possibility of the devil dominating in the person. Therefore Jesus reveals that one among the twelve is possessed by the devil (v. 69).

The gospel writer is indicating to the reader that this points to Judas Iscariot. As human beings we need to understand our limits. If we do not rekindle in us the influence of the Holy Spirit the devil will dominate us. Peter is rebuked by Jesus in saying: Get behind me, Satan (V 23). All these are indicative of the fact that human beings have the choice to be led by the Holy Spirit or to be pulled away by the satanic force. It is a question of choice and a spiritual commitment to journeying with Christ. We are also called to follow Jesus with zeal and loyalty understanding that Jesus is the Holy One, His words are life-giving and He enables us to inherit eternal life. This is not a onetime affair, but a life time one. Journeying with Jesus is mandatory in the life of a Christian, throughout the days of his or her life.

Peter's denial of Jesus

Peter's denial of Jesus cannot be considered as emotional or momentary action. The fact is that Peter could not understand Jesus, His words and actions fully. Even the words of Jesus that Peter would deny, could not be understood in the proper perspective. Look at the various instances:

In John 13 we see the portion where Jesus washes the feet of the disciples. Here Peter questions the propriety of Jesus' action, who is his Master and Lord (V. 6). While Peter looks at it from the earthly level, Jesus is taking them to a spiritual level. At the Passover feast which happens to be the last supper of Jesus with the disciples. Jesus is revealing the full extent of his love for them. In the action of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples, there is a conversation between Jesus and Peter (Vs 6-10). This is revelatory as this is a conversation between Jesus who knew that the time had come for him to leave the world and Peter, a human being, who couldn't understand Jesus' symbolic action. Therefore, Jesus sits with Peter and others and teaches them the need and meaning of servant - ministry (Vs. 14-17). Journeying with Jesus is not only to understand the teacher but also to put into practice, all that He is teaching us.

John 13 also mentions another instance where Peter is unable to understand Jesus (v. 31-38). It is here that Jesus predicts Peter's denial (v. 38). This conversation is also interesting. Peter is asking Jesus, Lord, Where are you going? (v. 36) The commitment of the disciple is clear when he says that he is willing to follow Jesus wherever it is and even at the cost of his life (v. 37). Jesus points to the human limitations when he says to Peter "...I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come" (v. 36). At the same time Jesus is pointing to the potential of human life by saying: "..... But you will follow later...." (v. 36b). Again, when Peter is claiming that he will lay down his life for Jesus, Jesus points out his human limitation by saying: "..... You will disown me three times....." (v. 38). Peter is not yet the disciple he thinks he is. Jesus wanted him to learn the new commandment and put that into practice to be a true disciple. Love one another as I have loved you (v. 34). Jesus teaches him and us so that we understand that to be the true mark of discipleship (v. 35)

Let us move on to John 18 where Peter is carrying a sword. It is clear that Peter is not able to conceive the path, Jesus is taking. But Jesus is clear. Peter may have been clinging on to the idea of seeing Jesus as the warrior-messiah. Though Jesus knows what is happening, when people come to arrest him, Peter draws his sword and attacks the servant of the high priest. Here Jesus rebukes Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" and shows him the greater path of love. In a world of violence, where Gun culture is prevalent Jesus' way of love is to be learned in our spiritual journey'. We look at the response of Peter in chapter 20 when Mary reports to him about the open empty tomb (20: 1-7). The text is not indicating that Peter unlike John reached the resurrection-faith (v. 8-10). He might have been puzzled and distressed at what has been heard and what has been seen. How limited are we in our comprehension, when God reveals mysterious things in unexpected ways in our lives day after day!

As Jesus predicted, Peter denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed (Jn. 13: 38 - 18: 17, 25-27). This is the most tragic incident in Peter's life, the one who said he will not leave Jesus falls short in his discipleship three times and is not able to follow his master, the entire way. The disciple John goes further than Peter. Certainly Peter is a man of conflicting traits indicating that he is not fully developed in his spiritual growth... Peter is journeying with Jesus to mould his life. Peter represents a Christian in the making where personality can reveal how zealous the person can be for Jesus and at the same time how frail the same person can be in falling miserably to witness Him.

Restoration and Commission

The beauty of the Gospel of John is that it has chapter 21. It appears that this chapter

is added exclusively to reveal how much Peter loves Jesus and vice-versa. Jesus embraces him by giving Peter and friends a warm breakfast (v. 13). Peter's three-fold denial is countered by three-fold question and three-fold commission. Peter's sadness indicated here can be understood as his realization of the difference between his claim and reality of love. This is a painful molding of Peter where Jesus affirms the spirituality growth of Peter by giving him the commission three times to be a shepherd. Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future.

The resurrected Jesus not only commissions him but also warns him of what lies ahead (21: 18-19). "Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go. Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" This is a painful reminder, but the exhortation that Jesus gives is to follow Him. This is ultimately what Jesus desires from each person. In journeying with Christ, there is no point in life where one can stop following him. It is life-long journey. No servant can be greater than the Master. No messenger can be greater than the one who sent him (Jn. 13: 16).

The story of Peter does not end here in the Gospel. Now Peter and the beloved disciple John are with Jesus (v 20). Peter knows that John is unlike Peter. John never denied Jesus and did not run away during the Passion. He was able to go with Jesus after the arrest and was at the foot of the Cross. There Jesus saw the faithful disciple and entrusted Mary to be taken as his mother. When Peter spots John, he immediately asked, Lord what about him? (v 20-21). This reveals again the human nature of Peter. We relate ourselves to our intimate ones instead of relating to Jesus. All our relatives come to us as gifts of God. We should not love the gifts more than the giver. All that matters in one's life should be Jesus and Jesus alone. Jesus wanted a radical change in the thinking of Peter.

People will differ in their talents, personality traits and in the paradigms of discipleship. Peter is an example of self sacrifice (2 Pet. 1: 12-15). John demonstrates love. These are complementary traits of discipleship found in two persons. These differences are to be celebrated. At the same time it is important to focus on one's calling and mission of following Jesus. As a church and as a diocese, let us journey with Jesus to be a true follower of Him - not my way or your way but our way with Jesus. Leaders aren't born, they are made.

Peter functions as a leader of the twelve. He functions as a spokesperson of the disciples. He has the ability to take the initiative. He exhibits insights, confidence and bravery. But his skills need to be honed by the Master. Once that happens, even through a crisis experience, he is ready for discipleship which is demonstrated by his surrender to lay down his life for the Master. Put your hand in the hand of the one who calmed the Sea. Peter becomes a good shepherd by journeying with Jesus by placing his foot on the footprints of Jesus. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. That is St. Peter.

God of Life: Lead us to Justice and Peace



Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos (Chennai - Bangalore Diocese)

The theme for the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, "God of life – Lead us to Justice and Peace" was selected after several serious and meaningful discussions, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Usually the theme chosen for WCC assembly could be a prayer, a call, an invocation and a challenge to WCC member churches and the wider ecumenical movement. Being the second assembly in Asia, the theme for the forthcoming Assembly, to be held at Busan, South Korea has much significance. It is a prayer that reminds us of the life to which we are called as one body, in serving God's world so that all may have life in its fullness. It is an accepted fact that the living organisms that grow and flourish in the world is an expression of God's will and they work together to bring everything to an inter-connected whole. Therefore, we need to recognize that the lives of people and everything in God's creation are woven together in mutual interdependence. In other words one need to acknowledge that the "creation's life and God's life are intertwined".

Relevance of the theme: Dependence on God and relation to human beings and the world.

The theme, 'God of life, lead us to justice and peace,' as said earlier, is a prayer to God, the Source and Ground of life. The basic text that gives expression to the theme is Isaiah 42:1-4. The whole Bible gives the message that is envisioned here and it has become the central concern about people and the world. Of course, we make this invocation seeking divine guidance in the life-enhancing patterns of the world because we believe and affirm that life, in all its forms, is the gift of the Creator God. The creation accounts in the Book of Genesis (Gen. 1-3) emphatically affirm that life originates from God and the distinctive nature of God's creation is its inter-connectedness and relationality. It is to be noted that God created human beings in His image and likeness which doesn't provide them any special privilege and right over other creatures of God. Rather, the image and likeness of God that humans bear indicate the importance of human responsibility over God's creation (Gen. 1: 26-31; 2:15-17) in the continuation and sustenance of life. The relationship within the triune God, gives more meaning to the unity and relationality in human existence. As the creation accounts further describe, the identity and existence of each creature depends upon the survival of the 'other' which explicitly manifests the covenantal character of God's created order. In this regard, God established a covenant with His creation and He continues to renew His covenant with His creation through multiple forms and instrumentality. Humans are specially commissioned to continue the task of covenanting not only with God but also with the rest of God's creation. The most important goal and concern in our life and ministry should be to seek how we could preserve life and the life-giving oikos, i.e. the household of God. Because, what we witness all over the world is the multifaceted life-threatening powers operating in the micro and macro levels. Such ominous powers are assuming more and more demonic – both in its visible and invisible forms – in all spheres of the created order. It is to be noted that the members of the oikos have the basic responsibility of working for the good of all people (Gal.6:10). Therefore, the theme calls for human response to the multifarious forces operating against God's gift of life. It also demands serious human engagements against the injustice and the unjust forces from the side of the Church and, moreover, it asks the Churches to join hands with all other ongoing struggles to make God's shalom more near and real in God's creation. As the words of Jesus powerfully evidenced, participating in the struggles for the enhancement of life in the created order is an inevitable element in the journey of Christian discipleship. As Jesus proclaimed and demonstrated in his ministry, "I have come in order that you may have life – life in all its fullness" (John 10:10), embracing this journey of discipleship shows our commitment to the life-affirming values and structures. In other words, the Church, as the body of Christ, makes this prayer to God as a sign of our discipleship to the Lord of the Church and, further, we participate in the struggles for justice and peace as a demonstration of our radical obedience to Jesus Christ.

Life in its fullness – Continuity in Created Order

The theme, further, explicates that God is not only the ground of life but also the Liberator

who intervenes in the life negating contexts for the sake of the oppressed and vulnerable. For the people of ancient Israel, the centrality of the exodus event was well taken because it affirms and celebrates Yahweh's decisive intervention in their history when they were terribly oppressed in the life negating brickyard of Pharaoh in Egypt. God confronted the hegemonic powers of Egypt through the instrumentality of Miriam, Aaron and Moses. The exodus event, consequently, turned to become the central affirmation of faith which had been continuously remembered and revisited by the people of God in their liturgical and social living. Moreover, it is affirmed that God made a covenant with the liberated Israel, at Mount Sinai, on their way to the Promised Land and made them as His own people and possession. The Sinai covenant further redefined their identity as the people of God and re-determined their subjectivity as the covenantal community who has special care and concern for the vulnerable and disembodied like the widow, orphan, poor and the alien, the so-called "other" in the world of rich and dominant. The reading of the Word of God helped them to reassert their life as the covenantal community with its affirmation of justice and peace as the covenantal obligations. Furthermore, the remembering and re-visiting of the exodus event enabled them to position their faith as more dynamic, life-affirming and liberating. It reminded them of their responsibility to participate genuinely in the struggles for justice and peace in order to continue life in the created order. The Church, in this regard, affirms its identity and role as the community of the New Covenant who has been redeemed and commissioned by Jesus Christ. The ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus affirmed the centrality of life because Jesus had given himself as a living sacrifice for the life and renewal of God's creation. Jesus entrusted his disciples to continue his life-affirming mission of justice and peace through the church. As we read, the resurrected Christ empowers the disciples saying "peace be with you." It gave renewed strength to the perplexed mind and the disillusioned people. Jesus also exhorted the disciples saying, "As the father has sent me, I send you". This sending is with a definite purpose, which is to become the agents of transformation in the lives of people and bring peace among the communities and in the world. In other words, it clearly speaks that death and life walk hand in hand, and it is our responsibility to bring new life to the systems and structures that causes destruction and also that becomes threat to life. It is to be noted that wherever there is forgiveness, respect for human dignity and care for the weak, we catch a glimpse of the gift of peace. Therefore one has to understand that peace is lost when injustice, poverty and disease, as well as armed conflict, violence and

war, inflict wounds on the bodies and souls of human beings. It was well explained by St. Paul when he remarked about the groaning of creation. (Rom.8:20-26) The creation's "groaning in travail" together with human groaning is audible in the ecological crisis we face. Climate change and threats to the integrity of creation have become the significant challenge in our day to day life. We do recognize that the marginalized people in their struggle for freedom and human dignity points to the close link between environmental crisis and exploitation: whether it is done to the subalterns or women. We are again and again reminded that where life, liberation and justice are denied in practice, God is denied. Therefore, we need to foster commitment to life-affirming values and structures, solidarity with the poor and marginalized in their struggle for justice and dialogue with other faiths directed towards a peaceful co-existence in order to fulfill our vision of a 'new heaven and new earth'.

Justice and Peace for Just-living

The vision of justice and peace is not one option among several other choices rather the vision of shalom is very central in the biblical affirmation. The meaning of 'Shalom' in the Old Testament understanding would be narrow and constricted if we translate it simply as peace. However, its meaning in the real sense would be 'wholeness' or 'fullness' which includes justice, righteousness and peace. It suggests the vision of God towards His own creation. In other words, vision of Shalom in the biblical understanding is the vision of the celebration of Sabbath in its original sense because, as the creation accounts describe, God observed and kept the seventh day as Sabbath in the process of His creation of the world. It shows that God observed Sabbath when the whole creation was completed according to the vision of God. Therefore, Sabbath was the celebration of wholeness for God and the vision of Sabbath is the vision of Shalom which is the celebration of life in its fullness. It also has to be emphasized that the word peace is not just an inner feeling but a dynamic reality that is expressed in human relationships and actions. Expressing liberative solidarity demands genuine social and political engagement in the life-negating situations. Christian faith advocates a unitary perception of different aspects of peace - personal or social, spiritual or material, internal or external. There is also an integral relation between peace and justice in our concrete areas of relationships and action. This is viewed as the harmonious relationship between humans and other living beings including nature, or the celebration of goodness received whether it is mental or physical healing, all leads towards a shalom experience (Lev.26:3-7, Isa. 35:1-10). As indicated, for the prophets of the Old Testament, there is no peace without justice (Jer.7:5-7, Mic. 2:1-12, Amos.4:1 and Psalm.34:14). The prophets asserted that no shalom can be perceived if there is economic inequality, judicial perversion and unjust relationships. Therefore, the prophets had a wide range of concerns: commercial exploitation (Hosea 12:8, Amos 8:3, Jer. 5:7), hoarding of land (Micah 2:1-3, Eze. 22:29), dishonest courts (Amos 5:7, Micah 3:5-11, Isa.5:23), violence of the ruling class (II Kings 33:30, Micah 3:1-12, Amos 4:1) unjust functionaries (Amos 5:7, Jer. 5:28). Can we afford over-spending and wrong planning in the use of resources that God provides? It all demands the Shalom experience of a person who lives a caring, sharing and a just life in the God-given world. The word shalom shares linguistic roots with the Aramaic word salamu and the Arabic salaam, which means "to have enough, to equalize". The Korean word Pyung Hwa suggests that peace has to do with being fed and satisfied. The Sanskrit word Shanti speaks of wholeness, health and tranquility. All these words encompass the well-being of human beings and of creation, which are intrinsically interconnected.

Towards a Life of Peace with Justice

The question often raised is, can there be peace without justice? We sometimes pursue peace at the expense of justice, and justice at the expense of peace. It is vital to understand that peace and justice go hand in hand, for we read "justice and peace shall embrace" (Ps. 85:10). The very essence of the ministry of Jesus Christ is witnessed in the message and realization of the Kingdom of God which envisions the fullness of life together with the realization of Shalom in God's created order. Just as St. Paul has mentioned in his letter to the Romans, "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit," (Rom. 14: 17) which explicitly explains that the Kingdom of God should be realized in the life together with peace and justice. The scripture reminds us that "we are made in the image of the Giver of life, forbidden to take life, and charged to love even enemies, judged with equity by a righteous God, nations are called to embrace truth in the public square, turn weapons into farm implements" (Exodus 20:17, Isaiah 2:1-4, Mathew 5:44). As a matter of fact, the reflections and deliberations on the tenth General Assembly is expected to reach its realization in the transformation of the life-negating and life-threatening biosphere by enabling and challenging the churches to address the issues demanding to live a life having peace with justice in the world.. It calls

for the church's commitment to Unity, Mission, Justice and Peace. Vancouver Assembly has made a comprehensive statement on peace and justice. It is expected that the Busan Assembly –meeting thirty years after the Vancouver Assembly - will make a new and major impact on our journey in peace and justice. The Vancouver statement begins with a graphic picture of the alarming situation in the world at that time. "Never before has the human race been as close as it is now to total self- destruction. Never before have, so many lived in the grip of deprivation and oppression." The Assembly succeeded in combining the concerns of peace and justice. The statement said, "Peace cannot be built on foundations of injustice. Peace requires a new international order based on justice for and within all nations, and respect for the God-given humanity and dignity of every person. Peace is, as the Prophet Isaiah has taught us the effect of righteousness." The statement underlined that commitment to justice and peace is a mandate to churches. That commitment becomes a matter of faith. "The churches today are called to confess anew their faith, and to repent for the times when Christians have remained silent in the face of injustice or threats to peace. The biblical vision of peace with justice for all, of wholeness of unity of all God's people, is not one of several options for the followers of Christ. It is an imperative of our time." As a way forward the Busan Assembly 2013 will surely address the global issues and try to suggest ways and means for a healthy living. However, considering the happenings around, we cannot ignore and neglect the life-challenging issues that we encounter in the Global societal scenario with its complex and multiple justice-peace issues in all spheres of life especially in the Asian continent and Palestine region. This, we affirm, should not be considered as discontinuous and separate from the issues faced by the rest of the world because the global issues are very closely interconnected in the contemporary post-secular and high-tech world. What is intended here is that the challenges the world faces are that injustice and violence need to be understood and tackled towards peaceful living. The theological and action oriented qualities of life need priority in tackling the issues the world face today. It must be reckoned with a global perspective because the issues are inter-linked and complex with different and diverse local manifestations. What we need is to reflect critically and theologically identifying our own particularities together with the similarities and differences which must guide us to enlarge mutual respect and commitment that could enable us in our ecumenical endeavors to make God's shalom fully realized in the creation. Let the unity in Trinity be better understood in relating to the 'other' in a meaningful way and the life on earth and of humanity be better preserved. We need to listen to the word of God that says, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness..." (Micah 6:8). Yes, the challenge is to be peacemakers and to develop a culture of peace with justice for a just living. ●

Philoxenos Tirumeni is working as the central committee member, and also serve as the member of program and planning committee for the 10th General assembly of WCC to be held at Busan , South Korea, in 2013. Tirumeni is the president of Holistic Child Development India, and the President of Senate of Serampore College (university).

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Reflections on 'God of Life - Lead us to Justice and Peace'

Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham



This theme is going to be studied at the 10th Assembly of W.C.C to be held in October 2013 at Busan, South Korea. Most of the W.C.C Assembly themes were Christocentric in nature in the latter half of 20th century. For example, for the New Delhi Assembly it was "Jesus Christ – the light of the world" and for the Nairobi Assembly it was "Jesus Christ frees and unites" and so on. Nevertheless, in the third millennium, there is a shift in the selection of themes from a Christocentric to a Theocentric emphasis. For example, at Porto Alegre in 2005 it was "God in your grace transform the world". The present theme is a continuation of the reflections at Porto Alegre. According to many in the ecumenical field, this shift is geared to make the member churches more inclusive and relational in nature.

Context of the Assembly reflections:

At the outset, it should be remembered that we are not trying to suggest to God something that He has never thought of. We cannot give a mandate to God. On the one hand, we are at the height of human self-sufficiency, autonomy of human reason which is a product of enlightenment, science and technology, communication revolution, etc. while on the other hand, we have our contemporary historical predicaments, hate campaign, violence, uncertainties and 'walls of partition'. Caught the midst, we are trying to see afresh the need for God in the transformation of the world. In other words, this theme is on the one hand a negation of all deterministic notions such as political determinism, economic determinism, cultural determinism, etc. and, on the other, an affirmation of God's sovereignty over the created order.

It is as if we are praying thus:

"God, we acknowledge that this is your world, the entire creation belongs to you. We cannot transform this world without you. Sinners and sinned against as we are, we are sorry that we have tried to 'manage the affairs of this world' without you. We thought we are unlimited and that we are on our own... Today, more than ever, we need you; we need your transforming presence, healing presence and reconciling presence in the world. Enable us to go with you into the world with your eyes, with your arms, with your Spirit. Amen". (cf. Messenger 2005 article by the author, "God in your grace transform the world")

1. A Prayer Theme

What we have in the theme is a cry for life; a cry of the post-modern humanity who are at the zenith of human capabilities and potentials. According to Bishop William Temple "The proper outline of a Christian prayer is not please do for me what I want; but Lord, do in me, with me and through me what you want". Prayer is also a rediscovery of God's presence in God's world and in our lives. Nevertheless, prayer is not an end in itself. So what we need in our times is acted prayers and prayerful actions. The genuineness of prayer is not

the number of times or the amount of time we prayed but what kind of people we would become through our prayer. It would be nice if we can ponder on this question: Do we try to transform God, our situations or ourselves through our prayers?

2. Affirmation of life

Here we have to distinguish between 'life' and 'physical existence'. There are three words for Life in Greek language. "Bios" refers to life in general, which includes all forms of life. "Psyche" refers to the emotional and relational dimension of life. "Zoye" refers to the beyond dimension, the transcendent element and the sanctity of life. While the first two exist in nature which is part of God's created order, the third one has to do with the specificity of human life; which is God's image in the human. This element of life needs to be promoted through our life of faith. Faith gives us a new perspective on life; that life on earth is God's gift and what we make of it is our gift to God. Human life becomes meaningful only when it is at the service of God and human beings in the community.

3. Discernment of our vocation

Life becomes authentic when we make it a vocation. A sense of vocation enables us to discern the sanctity and the 'beyond dimension' of life. Here we have to raise some of the ultimate questions such as "What is the meaning of my life?" "What is the purpose of my life?" "What should I do in my life?" and so on. According to Paul Tillich, the famous theologian of the 20th century, "That which concerns us ultimately is divine". Discernment of our vocation is the human-response to God's call in our lives. In other words, God would never impose His will on human beings. Rather, He inspires, motivates, guides and leads. The challenge before us is always to opt for life or to "choose life" (Deut. 30:19) or to promote the symbols of life at all levels.

4. Search for alternatives

There are alternative searches in all fields all over the world such as alternative media, alternative medicine, alternative sources of energy, etc. This is due to human search for creativity and also the result of reverence towards life and a critique of the values of the market such as profit, competition, success, pleasure, etc. According to Konrad Raiser, the former general secretary of W.C.C, "Christian faith is a resistance movement against fatalism and resignation. When a person stops hoping, death has the upper hand. Hope is the breath of life."

Last but not the least, the theme challenges us to underscore two significant values of the Kingdom of God

and their inner relationship.

a. Relationship between peace and justice

The peace that Jesus gives is not pax romana, or peace at gun point. This is not peace of the graveyard. Peace cannot be built on the foundations of injustice. Rather than an inner consolation which is the result of our devotion to Jesus, shalom is peace in the community, peace in our relationships. As Paul reminds us, this is inevitably on the way of the cross. "He is our peace; He has broken down the walls of partition" (Eph. 2:14-15). Jesus wants us to be peace makers and not simply peace lovers.

b. Relationship between legal justice and redemptive justice

Dr. M. M. Thomas reminds us: Our struggle for legal justice and our stances for redemptive justice which transcends legal justice would bring suffering for the church. Jesus wants His followers to promote peace and justice at all levels. The emergence of the new would always bring suffering and pain.

The culmination of our life is with Christ in its fullness. The question is whether we can create and support social forces which would facilitate life at all levels. Hence the earthly life is neither to be glorified as such nor to be negated. There should not be any dichotomy between life after birth and life after death. Rather, it is to be lived in authentic relationship with God and with other human beings. The question here is whether we are prepared to be with God in His transforming mission in the world. Let us wind up these reflections with the following prayer:

"God, come to us and journey with us so that we may walk in your grace and peace.

Fill us with hope so that we may break through barriers. Inspire us on our ecumenical journey, making possible encounters and dialogue. Send your Spirit to strengthen us in our prophetic role of proclaiming liberation. May your Spirit be a gentle breeze when we need comfort and security. Let it be a strong wind when we are too settled and need to speak out. Let your life-giving peace come into our bodies and be expressed in action for peace between people, between churches, religions and between nations. May your transforming grace inspire us to join hands and declare the freedom given by your love!

Shower your blessings upon us as we journey on, announcing the good news of justice, caring and acceptance."

(From Springs of Living Water, WCC Publication, 2005)

ANNUAL CLERGY CONFERENCE 2012



The annual clergy conference of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church was held from Nov. 27 – 30 at CEC, Charalkunnu, Kerala. The theme for this year's conference was ' Cultural, Social and Spiritual Dimensions of Liturgy and Pastoral Vocation.'

Holy Week Liturgy

(English) Web Publication

The Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church is planning to upload the Order of Service in English for Holy Week (from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday) both in Word and Power Point format. This can be accessed from the website www.marthomadc.org. As part of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Diocese, the Western Region of our Diocese has initiated the Development Center as their project among the eight regional programs of the Diocese. The Development Center of the Western Region is in the process of developing this online Worship Order for the Holy Week. The Development Center is progressing under the leadership of Rev. T. K. Viji, Vicar of San Francisco MTC. Achen may be contacted at his email: revtkviji@gmail.com or at his phone number (925) 556-0301

NEW VICAR GENERALS FOR MAR THOMA CHURCH



The Episcopal Synod of the Mar Thoma Church, presided over by Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma, has decided to appoint ten new Vicar Generals for the church. Mar Thoma Sabha

Secretary Rev. P. T. Thomas (Chachipunna Salem MTC) will be the Senior Vicar General. The other Vicar Generals are as follows: Rev. Dr. K. G. Pothen (Kaviyoor Njalbhagom MTC) presently serving as Mar Thoma Theological Seminary Faculty, Rev. T. K. Mathew (Adoor Kannamkode MTC) presently serving as Vicar of Kabhumbhagom Ebenezer MTC, Rev. Dr. Cheian Thomas (Keezhvaipur St. Thomas MTC) presently serving as Director at Bangalore Ecumenical Christian Center, Rev. Dr. C. A. Varghese (Venony Varampoor St. Thomas MTC) presently serving as Satna Christukula Mission Higher Secondary School Principal, Rev. V. T. John (Valanjavattom Ebenezer MTC) presently serving as Vaideeka Trustee and also as Vicar of Manganam St. Peter's MTC, Rev. Dr. Jayan Thomas (Cheriyannadu Immanuel MTC), presently serving as Karipuzha Salem MTC, Rev. Thomas Cherian (Kallooppara Bethel MTC), presently serving as Bishop's Secretary at Delhi Diocese, Rev. Skariah Abraham (Punnackadu Immanuel), presently serving as Vicar of Pandalam MTC, Rev. Dr. C. K. Mathew (Mekkozhur Trinity MTC), presently serving as Vicar of Maramon MTC. The installation will be taking place on Feb. 9, 2013 at SC Seminary compound in Thiruvalla.

The Master's Plan for a Life of Abundance



Dr. Anita Daniel, New Jersey

Against the backdrop of unfulfilled dreams, shattered hopes, foggy vision, and constrained joy, comes the forceful reminder that though our many master plans fail, the Master's plan for bringing abundance in our life will never fail. On the fateful night before Christ's crucifixion, there stood eleven of Christ's disciples unclear of what their future will hold for them once Jesus was gone from their midst forever (John 13:33). Having sacrificed the warmth of their homes, the pleasures of their time, and the security of their resources, the disciples were utterly stripped of their identity by all that had transpired in the Upper room on the eve of the Passover Feast. While contemplating on their escape from the cruel hands of the Romans, and having shared hidden dreams of prosperity and place, the disciples are shocked to hear from the mouth of Jesus of a new ruler coming to the world and of one of his disciples betraying him (John 13:2-5). Added to this is the act of their Master and Teacher washing their feet after the last supper. The conversations that follow makes it clear to them that their master will be gone before long, and their plans of personal greatness will never work. However, unnoticed by the disciples, the Great Master understood their dilemma (John 14:27). With hardly any time to think of His own severe suffering, the loving Shepherd takes His disciples on a faith ride through the vineyard, to reveal the greatest spiritual lessons of all times. These final words did what the world still considers to be amazing and unbelievable (Acts 4:13). The disciples are no longer worriers but warriors of faith, they are no longer tense but intense in their proclamation of faith, they are no longer reluctant but relentless in serving the Lord, and they are no longer unhappy but are bubbling with joy at the thought of suffering for their faith (Acts 4:33). What an incredible transformation!!!

What blueprint does the Master sketch before the eyes of the disciples before His crucifixion that has remained unaltered all throughout the ages even when all our master plans let us down? The fifteenth chapter of the gospel according to St. John reveals the essential components that make the divine plan realistic and appealing to all who seek a life of fruitfulness. It can be viewed as a spiritual document that describes the components of the Divine plan that can lead believers in Christ to grow towards a life of abundant grace, abundant fruitfulness, and abundant joy. The essential components are analogous to what every organization deems necessary for fruitful results.

1. Identifying our Mission statement: For the success of any plan it becomes essential that the person involved or the organization as a whole defines its purpose of existence in clear terms so that others are drawn towards the values represented. The imagery from the vineyard spells out the mission statement for every believer in Christ- to bear fruit that lasts (John 15:16); to bear fruit in abundance (John 15:5), so that, the Father is glorified (John 15:8). Both, the purpose and the why of our existence is implied in the mission statement delineated in this chapter of the gospel. Anything less than abundance is certainly not God's desire for our lives. The mission statement is God's way of reminding us that we are created not to be failures but to be conquerors. The mission statement is the affirmation of the fact that every individual is special in God's eyes. The mission statement drawn from the final 'I Am' statements mentioned in John's gospel is God's explicit image of His willingness to reside and be Lord of our lives. The apostle Paul saw each event of his life as an avenue to glorify God, the people of faith mentioned in the book of Hebrews seemed to have fathomed the meaning of what Jesus is now sharing with His disciples, and today we are being invited to reconsider the mission statements we have formulated in our lives. What are we living for? What is the purpose of our life? We need not struggle to formulate one. The Lord has shown what needs to be the driving force in our life- a life totally submitted to God's will.

2. Analyzing our strengths and weaknesses: Having laid down the mission statement that ought to steer the disciples to a life of purpose while being on earth, Jesus draws the attention of his downcast disciples to the next level of effectiveness- identification of one's strengths and weaknesses. He is coaxing them to consider their strengths of being connected to the true vine, and of being cared by the true gardener-God himself (John 15: 1). In the course of his conversation, Jesus also directs their attention to



their weaknesses or a state of nothingness, if they decide to remain unconnected to the very source of life (John 15:4) - "No branch can bear fruit by itself"; "If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned" (John 15:6).

The very nature of the vine is a picture of strength- of unbroken sustenance, uplifting grace, stimulating life, unending vitality, unambiguous direction, everlasting peace, and everything that individuals long to possess on earth. Here is the assurance of god's love being poured into our lives in a measure unfathomable (John 15:9). There is the assurance of our prayers being answered because our will gets aligned with god's divine will in our lives (John 15: 16). Here is the assurance of possessing everything that belongs to the vine.

Isn't it a blessing to note that you and I are not expected to bear fruits through our individual efforts? Isn't it comforting to realize that our strength is truly God's indwelling strength in our lives? Isn't their enough reason to rejoice because the barrier that stood between man and God has been removed for ever? Isn't their ample hope that we are not alone in this journey towards fruitfulness for there are other branches going through similar experiences as ours? The list seems unending. That is the positive message that Jesus desires to reinforce in the hearts and minds



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of his timid disciples and in the minds of all who will believe in Him through their message (John 17:20).

Being certain of man's innate nature to run ahead of God's plan, Jesus warns His disciples of the dangers of remaining disconnected even for a short while. All our efforts that may appear to be good, pleasing, and acceptable to others, can take us no further from where we are, if we fail to lean on God (Proverbs 3:5,6). Our reluctance to allow the gardener's timely intervention to produce more fruits in our lives can be the greatest hindrance towards a life of fruitfulness; our desire to keep working instead of remaining still in the hands of God can prove fatal to our growth; our unwillingness to see life as a mixture of pruning and disciplining in order to bear much fruit can stop us from rejoicing over the work of the loving and all-caring master; and our inner longing to produce fruit quickly can stall the life of perseverance and self-control which is the greatest key to effectiveness in God's kingdom. Jesus emphatically states that unless we yield to the pruning shears of the gardener and align our time with God's time, our lives will undoubtedly be on its way to fruitlessness. The moment we stop allowing the words of Jesus to sink into our very being, we are on the road to destruction. The choice is placed before every believer. What we choose will determine the extent of our fruitfulness.

3. Having a vision of the future: The divine Master does not want His disciples to be focused just on what they will receive while on earth but pushes them to see what is in store for them in future. The future from the perspective of the vine is to see its branches bask in joy that overflows (John 15:11) and to be surrounded by the real love, and enjoy each moment being encircled by that Divine love (John 15:9). Here is an invitation to see each and every intervention on the part of the gardener as a means to get hold of unending joy and eternal love. It is an invitation to fix our eyes beyond the horizon on something that will last all throughout eternity. The decision and lifestyle we adopt now is cardinal in taking us either towards that eternal prize or away from it.

Some lessons gleaned from viticulture may assist us in shaping and strengthening our vision for the future. They are: a) each branch is valuable to the gardener; b) each branch receives the treatment unique to its needs; c) the gardener is respectful of the fact that every branch does not yield the same quantity of fruit or the same quality of fruit either. Differences are God's way of reminding us that we are unique in His sight and finally, it is never too late to bear fruit. Aren't these valuable lessons to clarify our vision?

4. Specifying our goals and objectives: With the vision of something that has a permanent and sure end, the disciples are guided to set their priorities right. They are being encouraged to reach the ultimate goal by setting up small achievable goals. Jesus wants his disciples to understand that a life of fruitfulness rests on the cooperation and active participation of every branch. But he wants his disciples to understand that such a transformation requires time, patience, and a lot of waiting. Accordingly, Jesus tells them about the timely things that the gardener does, and of the qualities they need to develop gradually.

They are being prepared to face the trials and tribulations beforehand and are being told what to expect from the hostile world (John 15: 18); they are being led to see the testing of their faith as something that every branch 'in the vine' will have to undergo, and are being encouraged to remember all that Jesus has said (John 15: 20) when such things happen. A step-by-step guidance into undertaking their task is being emphasized. A moment-by-moment reliance on God's grace (John 15:26) is being expected from each believer in Christ.

The need to go in small steps is evident through the very image of the vine and its branches which are always under the careful eyes of the gardener; lest the vine produce a profusion of leaves and branches that aimlessly trail on the earth with sin clinging on to its leaves. Specifying our objectives or the small-term attainable goals is a sure way of recording what God is doing in our lives, and in paving the way for strengthening other believers in their spiritual growth towards fruitfulness. What is good for one may not be applicable to us in all circumstances. We are being challenged to discover what will work for us. It is essential that we take time off our busy schedule to reconsider our priorities. Having specified our goals to please God in the specific areas where we need His guidance we are drawn to the most important step of the Master's unending plan for our lives.

5. Implementing our strategies: The aforementioned steps are likely to lead us to conclude that since Christ's unending resources are at our disposal, since the watchful eyes of God are there to allow light and air enter our lives through His careful pruning of our branches, and since we have agreed to set our priorities right, everything is taken care of. In order to remove misgivings of any kind, Jesus uses the word 'abide' not less than 10 times in the first six verses of this chapter so as to fix our attention on the key strategy we are expected, or commanded to take with all seriousness. The powerful weapon handed down to the disciples is the freedom to remain connected to the son of God, and the Holy God himself through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our

hearts (John 14:26). Here is a desperate call by Jesus to his disciples to remain in God's word (John 15:10), to remain in God's love (John 15:9), to remain in God's wisdom with all diligence and alertness lest we are thrown away with no scope of return (John 15:6b). As God works in our lives, as the Word clarifies the direction of our journey, you and I are called to remain still and with faith in our relationship with Christ. Feelings may mislead us, our emotions may play tricks on our minds, but whatever be the case, Jesus wants nothing to direct us away from the feet of Christ which is our right place to be. As a writer correctly pointed out, "God's purpose is not that you will do more for Him but that you will choose to be more with Him". Only when we abide can we enjoy the friendship with God (John 15: 15). Our close association with Jesus is inevitable for our journey towards fruitfulness. A vital connection is expected from you and from me 24/7, and at all point of our lives; whether the experiences are bitter or better. Only then can we say with Paul, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28). Here is an invitation to walk in faith and trust the vine to supply everything essential to bear the right kind of fruit, at the right time in the place where we are planted. Undoubtedly, God's actions are geared to "nudge you lovingly, wisely, persistently-toward the life and character you desire but can't reach without help" (Bruce). If we are wise enough to grab the opportunity to build our lives on the components outlined in John 15 and stick fast to its principles, we can watch our Creator smile with pleasure at us when we stand before Him on the Day of Judgment with our containers overflowing with the sweetest fruit ever! May the Almighty direct our thoughts and actions to produce fruit that lasts!

Matrimonial

Marthomite parents, well settled, invite proposals for their 28 year old daughter. Very fair, good looking, family oriented, God fearing. 5'6", currently doing final year residency in Internal Medicine, from parents of doctors, in USA or Canada, having good Christian values. Interested parents please respond with recent photograph and bio-data to thomas6059@hotmail.com

Marthomite parents settled in Houston, Texas invite proposals for their daughter. She is 25 years old, 5'4, M.D. brought up in the U.S. She is starting her medicine residency in July 2013. She is a strong Christian and family oriented girl looking for a boy with similar values between the ages of 25 to 30 years preferably in the same profession. Interested parents please contact with recent photos and details to houston1805@gmail.com.

Covenant for a Reforming Church



Dr. Titus Mathews, St. Thomas MTC, Calgary, Canada



Fundamental to the Judeo-Christian religions is a belief in the covenant relationship between God and human beings. This is the main idea behind the prehistoric stories you read in the book of Genesis. God has created the world and everything in it and as His creation he loves it and promises never to destroy it, even if the created beings wander away from the ideal of a mutually dependent relationship.

The covenant relationship is more explicitly described in the story of Abraham. God chose to bless all the peoples on earth through Abraham (Gen: 12: 2-3). Abraham leaves his country, his people and his father's household and goes to a land that God will show him, in obedience to the Lord's commandment. God's covenant with Abraham is stated explicitly in Gen: 17: Abraham and his descendants will keep His covenant and observe circumcision as a sign of the covenant. Abraham's faith is tested by the demand to sacrifice Isaac and after he passes the test (Gen. 22) animal sacrifice becomes part of the Jewish response to keeping the covenant.

The ancient covenant relationship between God and his people came under a new arrangement in Exodus. Moses became the mediator through whom God redeemed the people of Israel from slavery. The covenant is renewed at Mt. Sinai and Sabbath becomes its new sign, and the Ten Commandments are given. After the conquest of Canaan, the covenant is renewed on Mount Ebal and Joshua read all the words of the Law to the people in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant (Gen: 8: 34). Through the covenant God is telling the people of Israel: "You shall be my people and I shall be your God". This is the core of the Jewish faith.

The word covenant is used in the New Testament in the context of the last supper, (Mt 26:28, Lk 22:20). In the account of his birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, the covenant relation is taken further in the sacrifice of His incarnate Son, this time by God himself, obviating the need for any further sacrifice except contrite hearts. Human sin is forgiven and salvation offered as a gift, by grace to anyone who believes. Christians have

taken and expanded the Old Testament Covenant to include the gentiles in the New Covenant and thus the Church becomes the 'chosen people'.

[The idea of chosen people, which came out of the Old Testament Covenant, has been interpreted in history by different people and exploited in different ways. The Jews used it as justification to occupy the 'promised land'; the Imperial British, to rule over their colonial subjects; Adolph Hitler, to commit the atrocities of holocaust; the Afrikaners in South Africa, to practice apartheid; the American colonizers, to exploit the African slaves and for some Christians to preach the "prosperity gospel" as the sign of their chosen-ness.]

Several points need to be remembered about the covenant relationship between God and his chosen people:

- (1) It is God who makes the Covenant, chooses the people to make the covenant with and gives them priority.
- (2) He becomes their God if they obey his commandments (or the Law given to Moses, elaborated by the Levites later).
- (3) Obedience (or observation of the Law) is the means of salvation for Jews.
- (4) Through the covenant relationship, Israel came to know God as the liberator (redeemer) and faithful (promise keeper) but also a punishing God.

In the New Covenant, God is revealed as a Trinity, of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In this community of Trinity, each one yields to the other, the Father to Son, the Son to Holy Spirit and Holy Spirit to the Father in agape or self-giving love. That is why we can say God is love. God loved the world so much that He gave his only Son to be sacrificed on the cross for the sin of mankind for all times. Salvation is through faith in Christ alone (*sola fide*) and by His grace alone (*sola gratia*), as the European Reformers proclaimed in the sixteenth century.

Jesus came not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. Jesus said: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind and with all your strength". "Love your neighbor as yourself (Mk 29-30). To the 'Shema' (Jewish confession of faith), Jesus joined the commandment from Lev 19:18 to show that love for one's neighbor is a natural and logical outgrowth of love for God. He also gave a new commandment: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27).

Worship is the central act of religious communities. It is honoring God and paying homage and respect to God. Over the past two thousand years, Church fathers have developed and evolved various forms and order of corporate worship called liturgies. There is no need to invent new forms of worship but only to make the language of worship understandable and attendance at worship services an uplifting experience.

According to the scriptures, God created humans in His own image so that he can have fellowship with them. God created them as male and female so that they could have fellowship with each other. The word fellowship implies friendship, companionship, sharing and participating in acts of common interest. It is the practical expression of following the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Everyone has the opportunity to bear witness to Christ through small concrete actions. All of us know people who have various kinds of needs. Responding to them out of generosity and love is the Christ-like way. We live among people of different faiths, even no faith. We need to interact with them with an understanding of the diversity in religious and cultural spheres. We should enter into dialogue with others with humility and out of genuine charity and without judgment.

Christians should remember both old and new covenants. They should become a community of worship, fellowship and witness. The Church must be reformed to become a fellowship of such communities. We should be united in bearing witness to Christ by following the example of Jesus' own ministry: to the hungry he gave food; to the suffering he gave comfort, to those in despair, hope; to all he gave forgiveness.

MAR THEODOSIUS AT ECUMENICAL CHRISTMAS CAROL IN DALLAS



Our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa was the chief guest at the Ecumenical Christmas Carol service held in Dallas. The 34th annual joint ecumenical Christmas Carol conducted by the Kerala Ecumenical Christian Fellowship (KECF) of Dallas was held on Dec. 1, 2012 at M. G. M Auditorium in Garland, Texas. About 20 choirs from different Kerala Christian denominations in Dallas – Fort Worth metroplex participated in this year's Christmas Carol service. Rt. Rev. Mathews Mar Theodosius, Metropolitan of the Idukki Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Church led the worship service and C. S. I moderator Most Rev. G. Devakadaksham inaugurated the carol service by lighting the lamp followed by other chief guests. Theodosius Thirumeni in his Christmas message reminded that the ecumenism should lead us to glorify God together. It should also overflow to our neighborhoods so that the whole nations and the humanity may know about our God. Thirumeni ended his message by saying that our ecumenism should lead others know that He is the God, Savior and King.

Lal Varghese, Esq., Dallas

The Road to Justice and Peace



For many people in Houston, the God of Life, led them to establish justice and create peace. But the road to justice and peace was about a 400 miles trip (one way) from Houston, Texas to Broken Bow, Oklahoma. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amos 5:24. The prophet Amos spoke these words, because the people of Israel were not practicing justice and creating peace. They prayed, they sang songs, they offered sacrifices, but they did not practice justice. During Amos' time, there were some extremely rich Jews, and they were oppressing the poor people. Many people were committing sins of one nature or another. Many sang, prayed, and sacrificed offerings, but very few people worked to establish justice and peace. Therefore, the God of Life rejected their festivals, offerings, and songs (Amos 5:21-23.)

The God of Life wanted His children to return to Him and to follow His example of establishing justice and creating peace. When the members of the Immanuel MTC and Trinity MTC in Houston collected new and used items for their brothers and sisters in Broken Bow, they were working to establish justice. They collected so many items that a 16-foot truck was needed to carry all the clothes, toys, books, furniture, bikes, children's items, and household items from Houston to Oklahoma. The rented truck was then driven 400 miles to Oklahoma and then another 400 miles back to Houston. By donating these items the people who gave them, realized how blessed they are. They had so much, that they could easily share with others. Their sharing, demonstrated their faith in the God of Life, and their desire to establish justice.

The God of Life wants His children to practice their faith and to share their blessings with their brothers and sisters. Like the Samaritan who helped the bleeding and broken Jew by the road, justice requires us to help those around us who are less fortunate. These are the types of worship that God wants; these are also the types of worship that God will reward. And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Matthew 25:40. The members of the MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch also collected new and used clothes, toys, blankets, computers etc. for distribution at Broken Bow, Oklahoma under the leadership Mr. Abraham Mathew. The plan is to distribute the items to the Native Americans during the Thanksgiving Day holidays.

Rev. Shibi Abraham, Oklahoma

Our God of Life Who will Lead us to Justice and Peace

Rev. Abraham Skariah



As the preparations for the 10th Assembly of WCC are on the go, churches all over the world focus their attention on the prayer, "God of Life Lead us to justice and Peace". The prayer invites us to think afresh about the God of life and his beautiful creation which now face threats on an unprecedented scale. It also demands from us a return to the word of God which clearly teaches about our distinct roles, rules and responsibilities as human beings and of the purpose of God for the entire creation. Anyone who genuinely makes this prayer is entering into a solemn commitment to work with God in promoting life and to establish peace founded on God's justice. The discussion here aims at deriving practical concepts based on faith in dealing with issues that pose threat to life on earth.

God the foundation of life

Bible begins with the affirmation that "In the beginning God" (Gen.1:1). Scholars would say that more than explaining the sequence of events when God created, these opening words affirm the being of God as the source, foundation and reason for all that has been created. "The bedrock of all reality, of creation, is a God, who desires over and above anything else to share life with that which God has created, including us. God loves life, and God's world is designed to bring forth life." This core belief has many ramifications. An elaborate discussion on all the aspects though desirable, this article seeks to discuss only three of them very briefly due to practical reasons.

1. The intrinsic value of life

According to Charles Birch, "intrinsic value is the value of an entity in itself, for itself and for God." Gen.1:31 says, "God saw all that he had made and it was very good". Norman C. Habel opines that "According to this text, it is not God's pronouncement that makes creation good; it is already good. God discerns its intrinsic worth..." God values every single part that he created and each of them is playing a role in making this beauty or harmony. It is not just human beings alone that enters into God's Sabbath but the whole universe; it is this world that is the sanctuary of God's saving activity (Jn.3.16; Colo.1.20) and everything created has a unique role in the maintenance and promotion of life; and it is this world that is evolving into the age of salvation (Rom.8.18-22; Rev. 22.1-2). This understanding about creation calls forth a respectful attitude on our part towards all the created entities – animate or inanimate. As human beings the purpose of our life according to God's plan can do nothing but acknowledge this intrinsic worth of everything and live in mutual respect and care. But human history is one of cruelty and aggression against fellow human beings, animals, birds, land, and water and so on. Mechanical, utilitarian and commercial values that guided the imperialists and colonisers in the past are still the driving force for political coalitions and the free market today. They overlook the intrinsic value of creation and their policies and strategies aiming at selfish gains and profits often lead to violent killings, exploitation and devastation and thereby topple the plans of the God of life.

2. The organic inter-connectedness of all creation

The creation account in Genesis presents human life not in isolation but as deeply interwoven with the rest of the creation. While reflecting on Gen.2:1 ("The sky and earth... and all that was within them were complete"), Howard Wallace points out that "God completes the work of creation as all parts find their completion in relationship with each other." Paulose Mar Gregorios in his book, "Healing a Holistic Approach" perceives our human existence as an 'interactive field'. The life-force or the healing force according to him evolves out of an intrinsic relationship between four levels of reality namely: inorganic, organic, conscious and cosmic. Psychologist Carl Jung postulated that human life (psyche) is not only connected to the present world but linked with countless species, events and experiences from the distant past of human existence. The creation account in Gen.1 views human life in relationship with a plethora of other entities. We are reminded that the ultimate aim of life is to be in a life-giving relationship with the God who created us, and gives us relationships with others. Robert D'Mello invites us for deeper understanding and true repentance when he says: "The ecological crisis is an invitation to theologians to return to the primitive myth of creation as generation, to re-fashion its notion of God, the world as the becoming of God, and recognise the fact that the human community is nothing but the earth becom-

ing conscious of it. This means recapturing the sense of kinship with the organic and the inorganic universe; the recovery of our umbilical cord with the earth, and rediscovering the immanence of the divine. For Christian theology this involves a twofold task; discovering the divine with the nature and restoring to human beings their position as children of nature, and putting an end to the spirituality of conquest".

The Sabbath celebration on the seventh day gives us space to simply be present to God, ourselves, others, and the world and thus be part of 'shalom' the true life in God's design. O.H. Steck describes shalom as guaranteed by Yahweh comprises of "the stability of the world as a place to live in, the fertility of the earth and of cattle, the absence of war, as well as social justice and the wellbeing of insecure social groups...". Breach of relationship at one level can lead to large-scale damage and multiplication of death instead of multiplication of life (Gen.1:28a). The purpose of life can be nothing but maintaining and promoting this harmony in God's design and not destroying it.

3. The redemptive role of human beings as bearers of the 'image of God'

The 'image of God' mentions in Gen.1:26-27 is interpreted in a number of ways. This text often interpreted with a view to establish human uniqueness and supremacy over earth and other creatures. Ellen Van Wolde makes an interesting observation regarding the 'image of God'. He says except human beings everything was created and is to procreate after 'his' or 'her' or 'their' kind – indicate that the plants and animals refer back to these creatures themselves. But in the case of human being, unlike the other creatures, does not find a point of reference in himself or herself but in God. And the implication is that, human being in their being related to the earth, they are intended to be an image or sign of God. In the words of Wolde, "Their profile on earth is to represent God, to make God present and visible". In our relationships with one another and all of creation, humans stand unique as those responsible for bearing the image of the life-giving God. To understand the 'image of God' in this way entails up on us a serious commitment to participate with God in doing justice, showing compassion, bringing healing and wholeness not only to the human beings but to the whole creation. Jesus manifested the image of God through his life and given the mandate to his disciples to continue his ministry until the shalom of God becomes a reality in this world. The purpose of life in God's plan is nothing but continuing this ministry of healing, redemption and transformation.

Justice and Peace

Justice and peace are not two separate entities but

mutually reinforcing and are integral part of 'life'. Justice is pertaining to the relationship between multitudes of players contributing to life. Any serious discussion on justice must be based on the divine principles that affirm the intrinsic value of life, seek mutually enriching coexistence, and an active compassion intending to seek and save the lost. The people of Israel understood themselves as a people having a covenant relationship with God. And this covenant relationship bound them with God, every other persons including sojourners, aliens and even the slaves and animals working for them (Ex.23:1-13; Dt. 14: 28-29; 15: 12-18). God spoke through the prophets when this relationship was broken and confronted kings and rulers when they do injustice (e.g. 2.Sam.12; 1.King.21). A just person in this light is one who understands this relationship and act according to God's expectation. Prophets in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament spoke in one voice that worship and all other expressions of piety in themselves have no merit. They become meaningful only if the relationships are set right with fellow beings and being sensitive to their hunger, sickness, shame and bondage (Am.5:21-24; Is. 58:Mtt.7:21-23; 25:31-46). Isaiah 32:16-17 says, when justice and righteousness prevail in the land peace will become a reality. The kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurated and its full manifestation for which the church is struggling is nothing but the shalom – the peace that is based on justice which enables life expressed in harmony and the intensity of relationships. It transcends the worldly justice founded on the pillars of merit, fairness, equality and the like. Langmead, for example, states: "Justice is fairness embedded in the structures of society. Biblical justice goes further than strict justice, and is imbued with grace, mercy and forgiveness. It is structural love." Hence the divine justice stands up for the woman caught in adultery instead with the fanatic mob believing that scripture tells to stone her to death. It embraces lepers who were prohibited from entering into the society. It is with the same justice Jesus appreciated the two coins of the widow, the woman who anointed him with alabaster perfume and appraising the faith of the heathen centurion above the faith of Jewish people. It was this sense of justice that was the force behind Jesus to question the pretensions and the unjust practices of the Pharisees and other religious people and finally leading the people into the temple to cleanse it and to reclaim the place of the gentiles in the temple. When justice exists in relationships, life flows smoothly facilitating peace, the shalom of God. On the contrary, the dysfunction or malfunction and disrespect to mutual contours and responsibility lead to collision resulting in a cycle of violence that damage life in general and the weak and powerless in particular. Bonheoffer said, "Christ in the shape of community is the church". All those who are members of the church through baptism are united into the body of Christ. Every time we partake in the holy Eucharist we celebrate the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who united us as a community to God's service. 1. Peter 2:9-10 earnestly reminds us that church is a chosen community with a special mission of sharing with the world the divine light received through Christ. Sensitivity to human hurts and a burning passion to redeem them is the fundamental character of God revealed to us by Christ. Therefore involvement with the marginalised in their struggle for dignified humanity is an essential mandate for the existence of the church. According to Mar Gregarious, church being the shepherd of the world needs "to open doors that confine people in oppression, injustice and exploitation, to lead the nations to where they can find just societies of green pastures and the still wa-

ters of peaceful and secure national and international situations...it is from a relationship of trust that the church should be able to lead the nations away from their confinement, injustice, war, oppression, exploitation, terrorism and environmental decay". But the world we live in is far away from God's design. Global agencies and governments act like concubines of the corporate that are guided by insatiable greed. Unjust and unethical economic pursuits uproot life. Helpless people are chased, cheated, manipulated, divided and killed. Forests and other natural resources are plundered without a thought for the future generations. They silence every threat through tips, bribes, awards, political decisions and police/military force. A mighty minority emerges as the major beneficiaries of all the development projects and the farmers, aboriginals, tribal people and a number of zoological and botanical species get uprooted from their habitats resulting in large-scale extinction. We need an earnest introspection at this point. Are we following the shepherd who was sensitive to the hurts of humanity and wanted to seek and save the lost by giving even the last drop of his blood? Or are we conspiring against them through our silence? In a final interview shortly before his death, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini called for a "radical transformation" of the Church. In that interview he said, "Our culture has grown old ... our churches are big empty spaces".

Conclusion

There is no sense in making any other prayer when we realize that justice is what God desires from us and that shalom is God's design for this world. It cannot be a trickling down of benefits as perceived in the neoliberal economics. Rather a symbiotic relationship with each other is God's desire. Justice is falling into God's design for life and not being hijacked by a group of greedy people. If our prayer is genuine, we take up on us the mandate to swim against this current and to engage the powers that defy life. Church can never claim to be the body of Christ unless and until it manifest itself in action for justice. Let us pray along with millions on the margins, "God of life lead us to justice and peace".

Relief Work by Bethany MTC, NY



The members of the Bethany Mar Thoma Church, New York felt the impact of Hurricane Sandy that hit the North East seaboard on October 29, 2012. Many of us were without power, heat, and facing unforeseen challenges. However, so many other people in the coastal communities of New Jersey, Far Rockaways and Breezy Point in Queens, Staten Island, and even Stony Point in Rockland County were suffering from truly devastating personal losses. The Young Couples & Families, Youth Fellowship, and Sunday School of Bethany MTC with the overwhelming support and generosity of the Parish collected over 16 boxes of non-perishable food, toiletries, clothing, cleaning agents and household supplies plus multiple boxes of cereal, bottled water, bathroom tissue and paper towels. Each box was sorted, packaged, and finally labeled with an inspirational message. On November 20th, the collection was picked up by The Salvation Army and was brought to their distribution center in Mount Vernon, New York for packaging and shipment to all severely affected areas. Charitable financial donations were also collected. It was wonderful to see so many of our Parishioners come together, donate

their time, and help those who were in need. As a Parish, we will continue to fervently pray for those who were severely affected and displaced and pray for recovery.

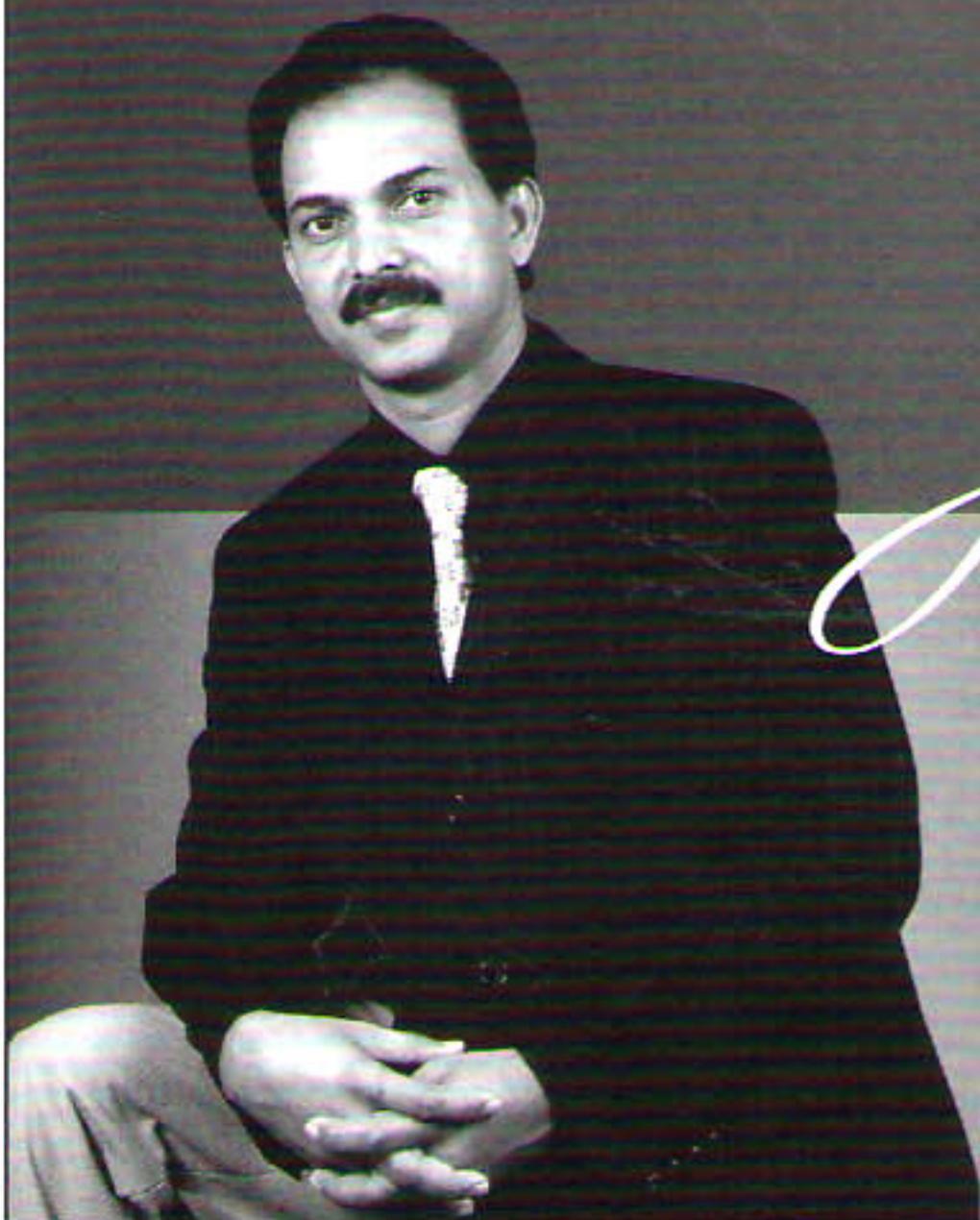
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God of Life: Lead us to Justice and Peace — A SHORT REVIEW



Rev. John N. Abraham, Lubbock

Biblical faith affirms God as the creator of all that exists, which means he is the God of life. The doctrine of *ex nihilo* ("creation out of nothing") is firmly rooted in Genesis chapter one and Proverbs 8:22-24 and the whole Bible. By the time of New Testament this view had become deeply ingrained in the Judaic consciousness as well as in the emergent apostolic faith. Paul affirmed that God "calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom. 4:17, Heb. 11:13, Acts 14:15, 4:24). God not only created in the past, but he continues to create. New forms of existence come into being and old forms are renewed by the spirit of God. The Psalmist says "when you send your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth (Ps. 104:30). God not only calls the worlds into being, but directs the course of the world. He is the compelling presence that engages all things God's providential rule is to be seen in close relationship with Jesus Christ. All things are created for the sake of Christ and all things are directed towards their goal in Christ. Christ is the "appointed heir of all things" through whom He "created the worlds" (Heb. 1:2, Ep. 1:10). We are not masters of our fates and captains of our souls, but we are nevertheless by the grace of God covenant partners with him in building a future that fulfills the hopes and dreams of a lost and fallen humanity through the ages.

The Bible has something to say about issues that resonate today. The concern for the oppressed is foundational to faith, and the Bible encourages action from giving to praying to live responsibly. To know God is to seek justice and peace. The Bible speaks loudly and clearly on justice and peace. Worship without a concern for justice and peace is denounced as evil and unacceptable. Union and communion with God cannot be achieved apart from the achievement of earthly justice and *shalom* (peace) and this peace is not compatible with wickedness (Isa. 48:22). Taking the Bible as a whole there is one central theme: justice and peace. Peace in the sense of justice leading to harmony and fullness of life for all. God is a God of justice and peace. The words justice and peace have Messianic associations, for the Messiah will be the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). Peace is identified with welfare and with hope (Jer. 29:10-11). It is linked with salvation and divine justice. All men and women are called to establish a society which reveals God's justice and peace. This was an act of social and political liberation but it also led to the establishment of the covenant. This was a binding mutual commitment between the liberating God and the liberated people which created a new community of justice and peace. Today as a covenant community we are as instruments in God's hands leading the world into justice and peace. This covenant meant doing God's will and God's will demands justice and peace, which will lead to peaceful and just inter-personal relationships with others. The covenant community must give each person protection, security, justice and peace by expressing their sharing and caring of goods. Micah 6:8 says "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

The Prophets proclaim that oppression is an insult to God. The Law demands not only sacrifice but interpersonal justice and peace, not merely external rituals. Isaiah points to the arrival of an ideal new King who will be an agent of renewal for Israel and who will herald the coming of justice and peace (Isaiah 9:6-7). Peace is his delight. "Peace on earth and goodwill towards men". Peace and justice throughout his entire universe is his highest wish and his greatest delight. Jesus incorporated the earlier Old Testament ideas of salvation into his own person and extended it. The righteousness and peace that Jesus speaks about is something better than ordinary justice and peace. The fundamental thing about righteousness and peace is that it goes back to God. We are not made for war but for peace and justice. We need peace, not war. God has not fashioned us in the spirit of battle and injustice but the spirit of love, joy, peace, justice and quietness. God created no war. Sin is the mother of wars. The evil angel brought it first. When man fell, God made peace not by His might and power, but by His mercy and justice. God is the great peacemaker and thus He is indeed the God of Peace and Justice. God of life has used many people to sustain peace and justice in this world. When Napoleon launched war on Austria, Henry Dunant, a Swiss banker and multi-millionaire reached that place. Standing on a hill he saw terrific scenes of fighting and heard the trumpet calls for war. 24 June 1859 was a turn-

ing point in his life. Dunant was deeply hurt. He was convinced that war was no solution to the problems of mankind. On the other hand it always caused ruin and destruction and calamities. Dunant gathered together a few women to nurse the wounded, making no distinction between friend and foe. He declared through a book the need for an organized arrangement to nurse the wounded. As a result of their effort in 1864 the Geneva Convention was signed. Dunant travelled all over Europe with the message of peace and justice speaking against war. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace in 1901. As a result of his attempts and actions "The Red Cross Society" now active all over the world began. The National Flag of Switzerland is red in color with a white cross; that of this organization is white with a red cross. This international organization not only takes care of the wounded in war time but is also active in the service of offering solace to the suffering in times of peace and justice.

The Sermon on the Mount is the key to the meaning of justice and peace in the New Testament. The Beatitudes (Mat. 5:1-12, Luke 6:20-23) describes the right order which God will establish when his reign has its full effect. In Mathew 25:31-46 Jesus identifies with and enters into personal solidarity with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick, the naked and the prisoner. This solidarity means that it is Jesus whom we encounter in the person of the oppressed. The parable warns Christians that they must not only act for justice and peace but they must discover where justice and peace are to be done in our own society.

The Christian is called to bring peace based on justice, truth, freedom and love. This peace will give a spiritual tranquility where there is sinfulness, a mental stability where there is anxiety, an emotional security where there is lack of loving, a physical capability where there is illness, and a material possibility where there is poverty. In Colossians 1:10 Paul says that faith frees people "to lead a life worthy of Lord ... bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." Faith in action gives birth to a new creation. The grace of Christ saves the oppressor from committing injustice and protects the oppressed from enduring it. According to St. Paul the whole of Christian life is summed up in service that fulfills the demands of justice and peace. The redemption of Christ has broken down barriers of race, culture and creed and established equality, because "all the members of the body, though many, are one body" (1Cor. 12:12). No one can maintain peace and justice in the world but God, as He is the only one who can maintain it. God alone can preserve peace and justice for He is the God of peace; since He preserves it, trust in Him.

From Corridors of Power to Expanses of Divine Grace



Mrs. Elzi Zac-Varghese, London, UK



I would like to quote for today's meditation from St. Paul's letter to Ephesians Chapter 2 verses 8 and 9. "For it is by God's grace that you are saved, through trusting him; it is not your own doing. It is God's gift, not a reward for work done."

As it is a special Sunday for celebrating 'matured youth-hood' in our church, the theme of my talk is 'From Corridors of Power to Expanses of Divine Grace.' All religions begin with man's initiative, man searching for God. In Christianity God takes the initiative. In other religions we have man's search for God; in Christ, we have God's search for man, the lost sheep. It is up to us to respond to God's initiatives. We do not find God, but under grace we put ourselves in the way being found by God. Grace is almost a strange realisation to many of us because we are mostly at all times concerned with our own 'self justifying works'.

In the last century, mankind has made tremendous advance in science and technology, the information technology and biotechnology are transforming us beyond our imagination. These amazing advances made man arrogant and led him to believe that his future is in his own hand. Man's hope is now placed upon scientists and politicians rather than on God. We want to be associated with these power generators and move in the corridors of the power that they create around themselves.

When we move from the corridors of power to the expanses of divine grace we have salvation. In the corridors of power we are under bondage, in the expanses of divine grace we have freedom. The basic proposition is that corridors of power are not good and the expanses of divine grace are something very desirable. This is probably true, but how do we come to that conclusion?

Corridors of power are not very desirable because it sounds like a torture chamber, a confined place, and a place where there is very little space for movement or to breathe. It is a place where reputations are deliberately destroyed. Character assassination is an important agenda because people involved in this activity have to prove their worth by destroying the reputation of others. There is a need to destroy the reputation of one political or religious leader to create another, which has become the main business of the news media. It is the modern version of the gladiatorial games that Romans played.

I compare the corridors of power to that of a kitchen cabinet. You know that most of the decisions are taken in the Kitchen and others involved are there as proxies to keep up appearances. This was certainly true when Mrs. Thatcher was the prime minister. In a

kitchen there is only room for one lady and this was absolutely true in Mrs. Thatcher's time, she never appointed another woman cabinet minister.

Now let us go to the Old Testament time: we know how Rebecca plotted with Jacob in the kitchen to cheat Isaac. Through a carefully concealed plot and over a carefully crafted meal Jacob illegally obtained the blessings from his father. We are inheritors or worshippers of one of the greatest acts of cheating because we consider Jacob as our patriarch as well. We must at all times consider the consequences of our action. It took thousands of years of waiting for the ultimate redemption on the cross on the Calvary hills. It took a tremendous sacrifice under the guidance of divine grace to get back to normality again.

The opposite of the comings and goings in a kitchen is the openness, the freshness, the calmness, the beauty and the vitality of an out door garden. We often take for granted the slow miracles in the garden. Year by year, water irrigating the vineyard becomes wine, but we stand amazed when the same process takes places in a quick motion in the hands of Jesus at Kana of Galilee. We often forget miracles hidden in our gardens and in flowers. Garden is a place of creativity and a place of happiness. I came across this ancient Chinese wisdom:

To be happy for one hour- get drunk,
To be happy for three days- get married
To be happy for eight days- kill your pig and eat it.
To be happy for ever- create a garden.

If we spent more time in the garden and learn to talk to the birds and the bees and enjoy the music in the wind then there will be no time for destroying reputations in the corridors of power.

There is an on-going practise in the English civil service, in the corridors of Whitehall. That is simply this: when a senior civil servant commits a serious blunder; he is sent for a gardening holiday to correct him. This is considered to be a very severe punishment; men would rather die than going on a gardening holiday. Therefore, the issue before us can be reduced to a simple statement: What shall it be kitchen cabinet or outdoor garden? When I think of corridors, I think of torture chambers and when I think of expanses I think of outdoor gardens.

Now let us think of Power and Grace:

God has two hands, the hand of law and the hand of Grace. If you won't take from hand of grace then you must take from the hand of law, justification and judgement. Grace produces a Christian and the law produces a Pharisee, a fundamentalist. If you do not live by the grace of life, then you live by the law of

life. The law of life tells you that you reap what you sow; you take out what you put in. You get back from life what you give to life; it works on a cash and carry basis. You bargain with life and life bargains with you on an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth basis.

It is the religion of the elder brother in the story of the prodigal son. The elder brother had a strict business contract with his father. He was living strictly by his business ethics. So when the scene closes on him, he looks at the balance sheet and he finds his loss. Then he realised he was on the inside living by the law, in the corridors of power. But the younger brother was living outside, comforted by the love of his father in the expanses of divine grace. They had two currencies to do business with; the exchange rate was in favour of the younger brother who relied on grace.

The Christian way is the way of the grace. What do we mean by grace? Late Dr. Stanley Jones said Grace is God's short hand for God's redeeming love, God's unmerited love. Lawyers may tell you that you cannot have a short hand in law. In law every 'i' should be dotted and every 't' should be crossed.

People who live in the corridors of power are like the Chinese nobleman who was sitting in his brand new Roll Royce car. He had his servants push him up and down the street in his new powerful car. When asked if there was not any power in the mighty Roll Royce Engine. He replied, yes, but I am afraid to turn it on. We are afraid to turn to God, turn to the Holy Spirit. The power lay there in our life totally unused. Instead we turn to human agencies for getting things done. We waste our time in the corridors of power. If you have a Rolls Royce, for heaven sake, use it properly, it is better to turn the engine on, instead of asking others to push it around. But we should never ever forget that it is through an amazing grace that the Lord has laid his hands upon us, to call us out into the membership of his Church and to authorise and empower various ministries entrusted to us. Furthermore, it is only in and through grace that our life is nurtured, encouraged and enabled. Our life should be an outward sign of inward grace. The ministry entrusted to us is surely his service; for what we preach is not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord with ourselves as servants for Jesus' sake. Thankfulness is a soil in which pride does not easily grow.

One of the many images we have of Jesus is that of him washing disciples' feet. Here the master and Lord, not lording it over others, not exercising his authority in an authoritarian way, but, rather, performing an act of humble service, showing himself to be the servant of all. For any Christian, service is not an optional extra, not something we can choose to engage in, if we feel like it. It is an integral part of what we are called by Jesus Christ to be. Genuine Christian service arises out of the deep reverence, awe and respect that one person must have for another. Jesus said, in as much as you have done it to the least of these you have done it to me (Matthew 25:40). We must prepare to let go of

ourselves and keep our eyes and ears and arms open for our neighbour that is the important thing.

Paul wrote (1Cor 1: 25) that the weakness of God is stronger than human understandings of power. The God of Christian faith is defined by the weakness of the cross and God of the New Testament is therefore not an almighty tyrant. What kind of power is represented on the cross? Briefly, it is the power of love and forgiveness, which refuses to answer evil with evil and violence with violence. Our motto is 'Hail to cross our only hope' which signifies the Christian conviction that in no circumstances violence is the answer to human problems.

Strict adherence to laws and regulations may take all joy out of life; we should learn to celebrate our lives in the expanses of divine grace. At the heart of the Gospel lies the theology of grace, which means giftedness, we live under the blessings of that free gift. Yes, this is how I understand power and grace, we should be willing to move out of our comforts zones of life, form the corridors of power of any kind. We should develop a child like enthusiasm to jump into the expanses of divine grace. Are we prepared to take a gamble today and say "Thy grace is sufficient for us?" Psalm 119 gives us a beautiful illustration for a matured youth-hood; it is the longest Psalm and you should read it. The young life become matured and blessed when a young person moves out of the strict parental control to the university campus or to the expanses of the wider world. Maturation takes place in the University of Life.

"For it is by God's grace that you are saved, through trusting him; it is not your own doing. It is God's gift, not a reward for work done."

**(This sermon was given on 21 October 2012 on Youth Sunday at the Sinai Mar Thoma Church, North London. The speaker is a scientist.)*

General Assembly of Presbyterian Church of Korea



His Grace, Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan and Rev. P. T. Thomas, Sabha Secretary participated in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK). The 97th General Assembly of the PCK was also the Centennial Anniversary held at Somang Church from 17th September 2012 to 21st September 2012. The theme of the conference was "Christians, Friends of the Least." Leaders from many Christian denominations outside South Korea participated in the General Assembly

Themes for Future Issues:

April 2013

Christian Response to Environmental Protection.
(Dead line to receive articles Feb. 20, 2013)

July 2013

Church, Journeying with Christ.
(Dead line to receive articles May 20, 2013)

October 2013

God of the Bible, People of Migration and Mission of the Church.
(Dead line to receive articles Aug. 20, 2013)

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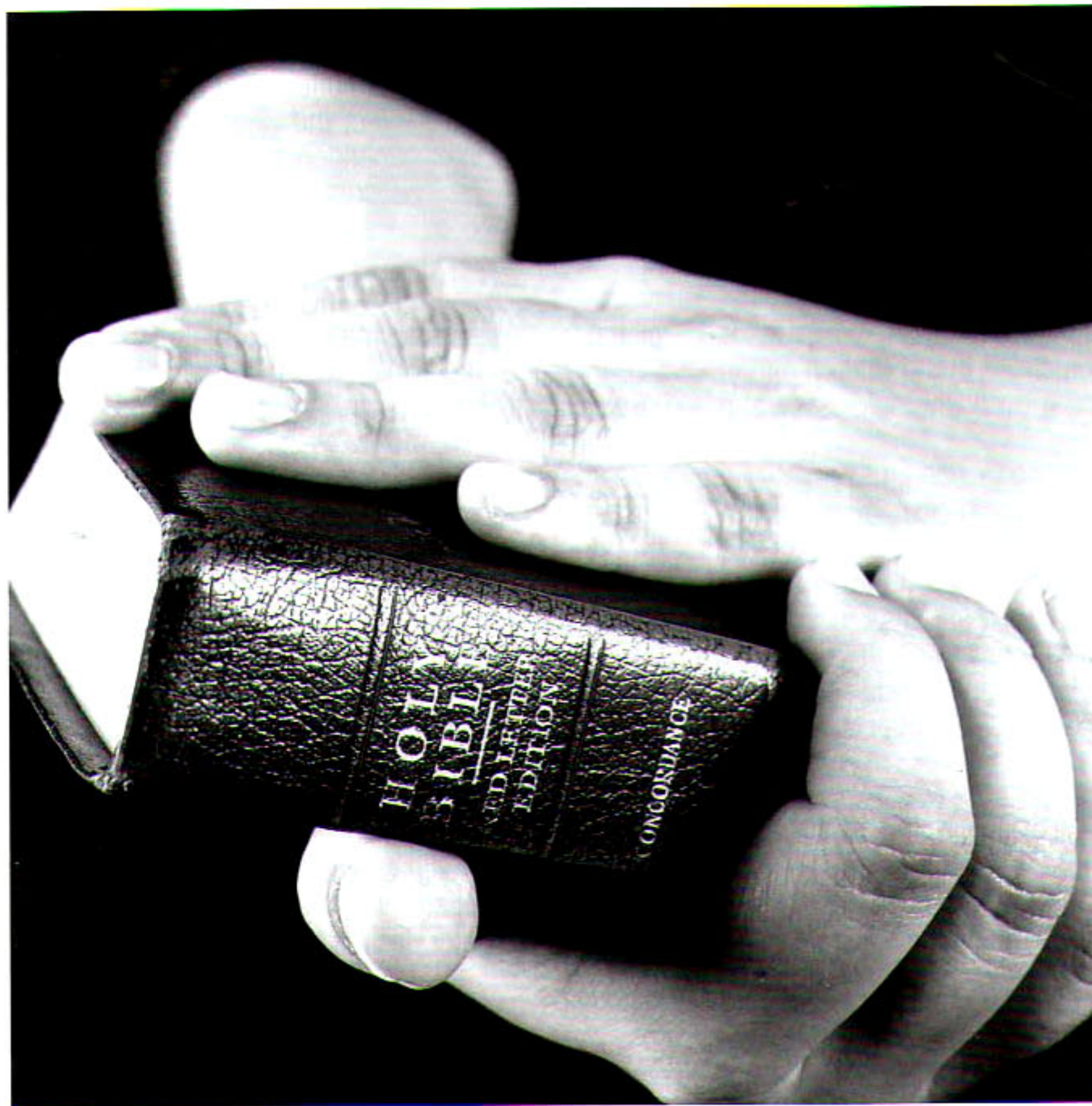
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A Study on 'God of Life - Lead us to Justice and Peace'

Rev. Dr. Cherian Thomas (Director, Ecumenical Christian Centre Whitefield, Bangalore)



The World Council of Churches General Assembly will be meeting at Busan, South Korea in 2013. The main theme to be discussed in the Assembly will be "God of Life: Lead us to Justice and Peace".

God of the Bible is the God of Life. God is the source and ground of all forms of life and also life is the gift of the creator God. In the book of Genesis God completed all creation in six days stage by stage. Whatever life whether animal life, plant life or human life, are created by God and therefore it is holy and they are to be preserved and protected. Now we talk about human rights. At the same time the rights of other forms of life are equally important and are to be protected. The rights of the earth are important and are also to be considered fundamental rights. In order to preserve life, earth, air, and water are to be preserved against contamination and pollution. The consequence of modern development whether in US or in India or in any other parts of the world the above three mediums the earth, air, and water are polluted and the existence of life is threatened by this pollution.

In the New Testament two words *psyche* and *Zoe* are used for life. *Psyche* is natural life of which death is the terminus, and *Zoe* is the eternal life. *Psyche* is given when God breathes his spirit into the dust of the earth (Gen: 2:7) and *Zoe* is given when Jesus breathes his spirit upon his disciples (John 20:22). In both cases, the spirit of God is the life giving force (John 6:63). According to St. John's Gospel, eternal life (*Zoë*) is qualitatively different from natural life (*psyche*). It is a life that physical death cannot destroy (John 11:26). The real enemy of eternal life is not death but sin resulted in spiritual death (1 John 3:15, 5:16). In the Apocalyptic writing eternal life is the life of the age to come, but it is given here and now. It is a share, the believer enjoys in this life. Eternal life is the life of

Jesus Christ who lived in the human body for 33 years on this planet earth, hence it is a life that is possible in this human body, here and now as the gift of God. For many it is thought that eternal life is that something the believer experienced the life after death. In fact it is different. The believer can enjoy this in this life and life after death.

Life is possible where justice (righteousness) and peace prevail. Therefore the vision of justice and peace is the central to the Bible and Christian faith, and the Holy Spirit guides the community of Christ to make God's justice and peace fully realized in our context. The prophets of the Old Testament cry for Righteousness and Peace. For them Peace originates from Justice. Justice and Peace are two sides of the same coin. Ps.85:10 presents the notion of righteousness and peace kissing each other. Prophet Jeremiah laments: "they have treated the wound of my people carelessly; saying 'peace, peace' when there is no peace." (Jer.6:14). He says there is no justice in the land, hence there is no peace; God is just and righteous and wants humans to be just and righteous as well. The Prophet Amos says "I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs, I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream." (Amos 5:21-24). The prophet vehemently criticized the religious life of the Jewish community in Northern Israel as the life was not possible because of the injustice and corruption in the land.

The term "righteousness" (Latin: *justitia*; Greek: *dikaiousune*; Hebrew: *tsedaqah*) means a relationship established according to the divine plan. It also embraces the meaning of truthfulness, salvation, justification, etc. By establishing a relationship, God creates a community which is his saving activity (Isa.46:13ff) and the community life is sustained by justice. But what we see now is that the communities and nations are subject to injustice and violence due to reasons of poverty, corruption, discrimination and human rights violations. When we are engaged in God – discourse like life, justice and peace, we need to address the above human issues that deny life in our daily living.

God of life is the God who experiences the realities of human pain, struggles, and the one who confronts the forces of death on the cross, and brought about shalom (Eph.2:14). How does God establish his shalom in the context of complex N. Ameri-

can and Asian realities such as injustice, human rights violations, in their struggle against brutality and climate injustice, in their struggle to affirm identities, to eradicate inhuman practices such as caste variations, corruption and neo-liberal exploitations? The churches in co-operation with other secular organizations that genuinely have a desire to establish justice and peace need to be active in solidarity with the struggles of the people and communities. We need to adopt resistance and confrontation as a form of witness in bearing the cross as the way of establishing justice and peace. The author of Ephesians is saying that he is our peace, he has broken down the dividing wall and created in him one new humanity in place of the two (Jews and Gentiles) thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death, that hostility through it.

The author of Ephesians is referring to the dividing walls in the temple Jerusalem. The very inside of the temple was the holy of holies where the high priests used to go once in every year with sin offering, outside of it the court of priests. No lay persons were allowed to go inside. Outside of it the court of men of the Jewish community, outside of it the court of Jewish women, outside of this is the court of Gentiles. From here Jesus drove out those who were selling things there and it is written my house is a house of prayer and you made it a den of robbers. These businesses were done by the temple authorities including the chief priest. Since the dividing walls of separation have been broken down the Gentiles and the Jews, both lay persons and priests have access to God. No priestly mediation is needed and injustice of division has been removed. Now in the body of Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female for all of us are one in Jesus Christ (Gal.3:28). Equality of men and women are not yet practiced in the Church and in the world. Disparity between the rich and the poor is widening everywhere. Injustice and corruption are rampant in all walks of life.

Church is not the only agency working for establishing justice and peace, and affirming life. The main function of the United Nations is to work for justice and establishing peace every where. Governments and other secular authorities are working for the welfare of their people by establishing justice and peace. The constitution of democratic countries like USA and India, and other democratic countries clearly stand for justice and peace in the world and affirming life, and are committed to the preservation of life. The justice departments of all these countries (courts) are committed to preserve life especially human life. These secular organizations have been used by God along with ecclesial bodies.

The Indian culture is a unique one. Before they cut a tree they ask permission of the tree to be cut. They preserve plants like sacred basil (Thulasi) and banyan tree as sacred ones. The forefathers identified these plants are very useful for preservation of human life. The banyan tree produces a large amount of oxygen, and Thulasi is very useful for health and such plants are considered sacred. They preserve Kavu in some

places (allowing growing all type of plants in one area in cluster). It regulates the climatic conditions of that locality. All these show the culture of preservation of nature. When the Western missionaries came to India they misunderstood these cultural practices as superstitions. Therefore it was destroyed. For preservation of life environment has to be preserved and protected. If forest is destroyed, all forms of life will be destroyed. Plants, animals, humans are closely related and inter-dependant. Destruction of flora and fauna has to be considered as a sinful act. Destruction or removal of non-living things without considering their importance in preserving the bio-diversity is a life negating act. We have no right to manipulate the nature in such a way that affects the life. The fluttering of butterflies in the Amazon region will affect the weather in Himalayas. Such a close inter-dependence is a unique characteristic of nature. The preservation of life is through the preservation of flora and fauna and this is called eco-justice. Consequence of our thoughtless disposition, we are facing many environmental problems like global warming and climate change etc. The people in Bangladesh are living under fear of rising sea water level. Life is threatened everywhere because of our wrong policies and the consequences of present development model. Nuclear waste is another threat to life. Therefore erection of new nuclear power plants in any parts of the world should be stopped for the sake of posterity. Alcoholic beverages, drugs, powerful insecticides, etc. are being used that are crippling the very gift of God, life. Prudence is to be used lest it destroys life.

The members of the Christian community have the responsibility to watch the working of the Governments and Government agencies and other power structures; and they have a responsibility to raise prophetic voice against any life negating activities. We are obligated to protect and preserve life as the way the creator desires to be.

Diocesan Reception to Mar Makarios Episcopa



The Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church has arranged a reception to the newly consecrated Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Mathews Mar Makarios, Diocesan Episcopa of Kottayam-Kochi Diocese, at the Westin hotel, Los Angeles airport, on Sunday, October 7, 2012. Bishop Makarios was visiting the North America and Europe Diocese for the first time after being consecrated as Bishop of the Church. Thirumeni was the chief guest and main leader of the 13th National Sevika Sanghom conference of the Diocese. The reception meeting was arranged along with the closing ceremony of the Sevika Sanghom conference. The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius blessed the occasion by chairing the meeting and delivering presidential address. Thirumeni congratulated the new Bishop and

wished all blessings to carry out the God given responsibilities. Rev. Thomas John, Vicar of Los Angeles Mar Thoma Church welcomed the gathering and introduced the new Bishop. Felicitation speeches were made by Rev. Mathew John, Vicar, Seattle MTC representing the clergy, Ms. Anita Sujit, Diocesan Council Member representing the Diocese, Mr. John Titus, Seattle MTC representing the Laity and Mr. Robin Kuruvilla, member of Los Angeles MTC representing the younger generation in the Diocese. Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary handed over a gift to Thirumeni on behalf of the Diocese. Rev. T. K. Viji, Vicar of San Francisco MTC, gave a plaque to Makarios Thirumeni representing the western region. In his reply speech Mar Makarios thanked the Diocese for arranging the reception and requested prayerful support of the believers of the Diocese for a fruitful ministry in the Church and society. The Sevika Sanghom choir sang melodious songs. The parishes in the western region took the initiative in hosting the reception. Rev. Thomas John and Ms. Anita Sujit served as the general conveners of the reception program. The Diocesan Council members Mrs. Checha John, Mrs. Laila Anie Philip and Mrs. Anita Sujit were also present.

Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

God's Life; a Prayer, a Journey and Much Hope

Reflections on Busan-2013

Rev. Mathew Skariah, Kottayam



Through her death defying courage in defending the right of the girls to attend school against the diktat of the Taliban, Malala Yousafzai, now recuperating at Queen Elizabeth Hospital at Birmingham, has emerged as a symbol of life and freedom that defies the powers of darkness and death. The aspirations of all peoples regarding life, justice and peace have found convergence in the overwhelming response against the shocking bid on her life. The quest for authentic life becomes ever more meaningful in the context of agonizing deprivation of the foundations of life. The theme of World Council of Churches, God of life, lead us to justice and peace, voices the deepest desire for divine guidance towards authentic life with peace, justice and dignity. WCC has chosen the theme for the forthcoming 10th Assembly to be held in November 2013 at Busan, South Korea. WCC states that the theme was inspired by the diversity of Asian contexts and by a growing sense of urgency to care for life and seek justice. It is formulated both as a prayer and a statement of faith based on the Servant Song in Isaiah 42. The theme connects to the mission entrusted with the servant of the Lord to bring peace and justice to the people of God who were lost in the depths of despair in exile. The contemporary situations of increasing despair, caused by the endangering of lives and livelihoods, the alarming destruction of our planet and the erosion of values, makes the theme-prayer utmost urgent and inevitable. Dietrich Werner of WCC provides three fundamental positions helpful in the theological reflection of the theme. First, the theme puts an emphasis on our longing for God in the context of humanity's longing for peace and justice. The prayer form of the theme is an important indication of the way in which Christian faith should address the world. The prayer mood of the theme that the very source of Christian theology is prayer and worship, not abstract concepts. In prayer we become open to the dynamic presence of God and allow God to transform our inner beings and our churches.

Second, there is an interrelation between any thinking of God and the challenges in our contemporary culture. Our concept of God has in the history of the Church been formulated in creative response to the prevailing ideologies and concepts, whether in the Bible or in the early centuries of the Church. The concepts of God in the ecumenical movement that stressed the universal Lordship of Christ were developed in confrontation with the claims for Lordship and power in German fascism and early Soviet communism. Similarly, in the context of 21st century our theology and spirituality need to be in critical

dialogue with the contemporary culture and the dominating value systems of our societies.

Third, the theme echoes the message of the angels to the shepherds announcing the birth of the Messiah, which attributes glory to God as the first and decisive step towards peace on earth. There is an interrelation between the doxology of Christmas time and the issues of peace and justice on earth. As in the biblical narrative of Cain and Abel, the break up of the relation with God fractures the bonding with the brother and the earth, resulting in death, desolation and wandering. The present theme is thus a call to authentic worship, a worship that forms and reforms the worshipping community and the world at large.

Life: the liturgy of God

Liturgy-litourgia- originally meant an act of public work towards the common good of the city. It was something that provided a greater meaning to the existence of the people at large. Life is likewise an intrinsic quality of God that is provided to the whole creation so as to provide meaning for its existence. The creation accounts in Genesis are liturgical rendering of God's glorious liturgy of bringing order to the primal chaos. The Genesis liturgy is formulated in response to the imperial liturgies of creation in Babylon and other cultures that celebrated the imperial victory over all other powers.

Biblical theological formulation starts from God as the source of life. Life is the unique quality that God imparts to creation; a quality that only God can impart. The foundational Biblical affirmation is that God is the creator of life; God wills so that life, the heavens and the earth and all that is in it, comes to existence. God's nature is characterized by the continual concern for the nurture and sustenance of life. Right from the garden, the humanity is called and commissioned as co-workers in the nurturing of life. Thus the divine will to life begins in the theology of creation and its moves forward in the election of Israel and the covenant. The concern about life is unmistakably voiced in the command to choose life and not death (Deut.30:19). John's gospel spells out clearly in Jesus' own words that the Son of Man has come that we may have life and life in abundance (John 10:10). The book of Revelation provides that enduring picture of the tree of life, which provides healing to the nations.

Justice and Peace: A Grand Biblical vision

According to Rolf Knierim, the concern for justice pervades the entire Old Testament...no sphere of Israel's

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life was exempt from concern for justice, and the Lord was known to be at work in all its spheres. Justice in Hebrew is *mishpat*, which denotes the act of equity, fairness, kindness, upright loving and the quality of being just. Justice is the primary concern of God, who as a judge distributes justice, holds equal justice for all, hears the cries of the oppressed and defends the weak. The Ten Commandments and other law codes (Ex. 20-23; Deut. 12-26; Lev. 17-26) are expositions of the divine concern of justice. Based on the law, OT prophets of all ages, from Nathan to Amos and Micah, provide the most powerful exposition of the demands of divine justice, bringing to judgment the unjust rulers, the traders and the system itself. The people of God are to practice the justice of God in their daily living and especially in relation to the vulnerable in their society. Amos dreams of a time when justice flows like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (5:24). All the institutions of Israel are commanded to dispense justice to the people. The Israelite king is portrayed in the ideal role of establishing and maintaining justice in Psalms and Isaiah. Jesus adopts this royal function of bringing justice to the oppressed in his Nazareth Sermon (Lk. 4:16-21) from Isa. 61:1-2, which becomes the overarching perspective of his earthly ministry.

Shalom in Hebrew and *eirene* in Greek are the term for peace in the Bible, which refers to spiritual, social, moral and material wellbeing. Shalom is the wholeness of life, which goes beyond the absence of conflicts and wars. It is the state of a being that lacks nothing and has no fear of being troubled. The Israelite greeting of shalom is a wish for wellbeing and happiness. But the great innovation of OT is to make peace a religious idea; that it is a gift of God (Judg. 6:24; Isa. 45:7; Ps. 35:27). It is God who brings peace and secures peace (Isa. 26:12; 57:19; 66:12). Peace is granted to those who walk with God in peace and uprightness, conversely there can be no peace for the ungodly. The unmistakable content of Israelite peace is the fruit of trusting and loving relations with God, and it links peace with justice and salvation (Isa. 26:3; 32:17-18; Ps. 29:11; 85: 9-14). It is primarily a relationship between God and human and the world, which is characterized by righteousness, right relationship. In the NT, the Messiah brings peace, the gift of God, to all people. For Paul, peace is in the person of Christ, who brings about a new relationship with the people through his own body (Eph. 2:13-17). This peace is synonymous with salvation, obtained through the cross of Christ. Though the qualities of justice and peace are seemingly distinct, they have a mutual relation in the Biblical vision. In the long history of humanity, many empires, nations and societies have strived to dispense justice and to ensure peace. But for all its good intentions, such efforts have fallen short of its grandiose designs. They have either resulted in exclusion of justice to the overwhelming majority of the people, or else they have meted out authoritarian peace in totalitarian regimes with little or no concern for justice.

New directions in a long-traveled ecumenical road

Ecumenical movement has always held the concerns of justice and peace in high priority, especially with the program on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. But a change could be discerned in the orientation of the theme from the past few conferences. Whereas the earlier themes were marked by the confidence in the human action to deal with the justice and peace issues and take it on the path towards resolution, the recent themes have stressed on the being and initiative of God towards justice and peace. This is a Copernican Revolution, in the arena of ecumenical thinking, so to say. The dominant attitude of certainty of the positive outcome of ecumenical action is in fact based on the concept of linear progress of modernity. The ecumenical movement has from the beginning resisted the situations of injustice and oppression in the global political and economic structures. But this response has always been expressed in terms of activism. The contemplative and meditative aspect of ecumenism has not been properly practiced. This is not to say that the meetings never started with prayer or corporate worship, it always has. But even the worship and prayers became contexts promoting activism. The catchword had been 'conscientisation,' which has its moorings in the purposeful alteration of the mindset and attitude based facts. But the recent themes, especially the present theme, have provided new directions by looking into the spiritual practices of prayer and journey in the road to justice and peace.

New situations demanding new responses

The contemporary situations of life create the context in which the demands of any theme is reflected and practiced. The postmodern situation in which the world finds itself has altered the equations of life on earth in an unprecedented manner. The notions of certainty that modernity advocated have been called into question. The aftermath of the Cold War and the uni-polar world, which resulted, has splintered into multi-polar world of cultures and identities. The dominant narratives have been called into question by the resurgent identities, especially in the West Asia. The Arab Spring has challenged entrenched regimes and forged new identities; people are taking to the streets the world over. The 'occupy' movement, with all its limitations, has exposed the vested interests that collude in deny-

ing justice to the poor people. The poll patterns of the recent US election have shown the deepening race-ethnic and financial divide of the nation. The economic meltdown exposed the vulnerability of the predominant economic patterns that claimed to provide prosperity for all. Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate and the former vice-president of World Bank has argued that the contemporary American economic system works on the formula: 'of the 1%, by the 1% and for the 1%.' The insensitive market driven model of development and neo-liberal policies has caused huge deprivation of the poor. But the voices of the victims are beginning to be heard louder than ever. And there is no more possibility for any silencing. Certain areas that the theme calls to question need to be mentioned.

God's life and Earth's Life

Sept 27th 2012 marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring*, which is considered as the pioneering work in the history of the environmental movement. Its startling revelations on the hazards of synthetic pesticides and how it wiped out many species of birds and insects, kicked up stormy debates that shook the foundations of the American pesticide industry and agriculture establishment that many nations including UK and US banned DDT. She would not buy the argument that the destruction of the environment was the inevitable cost of progress. She argued that we had no right to destroy this beautiful planet that we have inherited to live and that humanity had transgressed all boundaries in misusing the earth for its own convenience. As Christians we have considered the earth as God's bounty given for us to utilize for our own benefit, even without any concern for the wellbeing of creation. Popular theology and preaching has encouraged the maximization of consumption as the blessing of God. It has completely sidelined the concerns of justice and peace of the creation. The mantra of development has caught our imagination so much that we are willing to forfeit the future of our planet for our own immediate pleasure. It is good sign that the mainline film industry has taken up themes related to the destructive consequences of unbridled consumption and development, with the movies like *Wall E*, *Evan Almighty* and the like. It is the churches and the faith community that are still reluctant to accept the challenge of ecological responsibility.

'Walmartisation' and 'Garbagisation': Twins of the consumer era

The rising high volume retail consumption has found its ultimate destination in Wal-Mart store with its promise to provide everything with the lowest prices possible. It is touted as the savior of humanity, and it is being welcomed with open hands by many Asian governments including India. But it is advisable to check where this kind of Walmartisation is leading us. Nissim Mannathukkaren ("Garbage as our alter ego," *The Hindu*, Nov 3, 2012) tells that according to a report from The Institute of Local Self-Reliance, Washington, D.C., in the 20-year period from 1990, the same period in which Wal-Mart grew to a behemoth, the average number of miles that a U.S. household traveled for shopping increased by around 1000. And from 2005 to 2010, despite Wal-Mart's initiation of a reduced

waste program, its reported greenhouse gas emissions shot up by 14 percent. It has been showed that big box stores increase consumption manifold, which results in phenomenal amounts of garbage. (It would be hypocritical if I do not admit that I too was among those multitudes that thronged the Wal-Mart alleys of Northeast Philadelphia rummaging the shelves for cheap and affordable stuff during my years there; but that does not justify the business model) Garbage disposal has not only been conducted in unhygienic ways, it has also grievously endangered the livelihood of the communities near the landfills. The issue of has reached a flash point with the Vilappilsala (Trivandrum) inhabitants who opposed the waste treatment plant. There is no easy way out of this complex situation, other than a radical restructuring of our consumption patterns. The problem of increasing consumption and generation of waste is a spiritual problem that the faith community needs to address.

Globalization-A double edge sword

It was with much enthusiasm that the governments of many Asian nations embarked upon the course of structural adjustments of the globalised era. Indeed it has created a booming middle class with much disposable income and the power to buy. But it has painfully alienated huge sections people of their stable livelihood. This has happened no only in the so-called Third World, but it is very much the case in the heartlands of the First World. It is the U.S. and Europe that is reeling under the weight of the systems they themselves have construed. Job market and the housing market have become so unstable that it erodes the quality of God given life. A case in point is the plight of the employees of Cardone Industries; an auto re-manufacturer based in Philadelphia, U.S., the single biggest job provider for most of the Indians who migrate to the area. A good number of our parish members are employed in the various units of the firm. But, the escalating costs on one side and the availability of cheap labor just across the boundary, has caused the shifting of most of its units to Mexico, leaving the families in dire straits. Both the developed world and the developing world bear the brunt of unsustainable economic processes of globalization.

'The Audacity of Hope'

The elaboration of the problems might frighten us. But there is little room for despair. The theme is the strong voice of hope; that the world is pulsating with the life, the energiea,

of God. It is God's world and we are called to join the journey of hope. It is not a journey that we undertake by ourselves. It is a journey of the people of God of the generations that have gone before us. Participating in this journey with all the diverse faith traditions makes it meaningful and blessed. It demands a change of heart and a reorientation of our attitudes that would create a new sense of the people of God in this world.

Sacraments-For the life of the world

Eastern Christian tradition, to which our church belongs, has always moved in the path of spiritual practices that helps to experience the life of God on earth. In such a tradition, the value of sacraments in experiencing the transforming presence of God is utmost important. Celebration of the sacraments are not meaningless, it instills fresh life in the world, and brings back the drifting world to anchoring in the faith in the Lord. Sacraments are not for itself, but for the life of the world, as each of them are a celebration of the creative and redeeming action of God through Christ in this world. The Holy Spirit provides fresh lease of life and hope to the faith community and to the world as the church participates in the sacraments. Let us experience anew the guidance of God, as we are lead towards the new vistas of justice and peace, in this world and the world to come.

**Mar Thoma Messenger
Celebration of the 30th Year of Publication**



The Mar Thoma Messenger, the publication of the Diocese of North America and Europe, has entered into its 30th year of its existence in 2012. Messenger began as a small newsletter in early eighties and later as a magazine in 1982 and now it has grown to the status of a world class Christian magazine. The Messenger is a media to propagate enriching Christian thoughts, news and views of the Diocese and Church, not only to the Diaspora Marthomites but also to the global Christian community. In order to commemorate this special occasion, the managing committee and editorial board has arranged a special release of the October 2012 issue Messenger at the time of Diocesan reception to Mar Makarios held at the Westin hotel, Los Angeles on Sunday October 7, 2012. This was a time to remember the paths through which God has guided this publication and also to thank all those who have labored behind the steady growth of this magazine. The Diocesan Secretary Rev. K. E. Geevarghese invited Mr. T. A. Mathew, the Managing Com-



mittee member, to offer felicitation. After a brief introduction, he invited the Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa to release the special issue of the Messenger. Thirumeni with the words of appreciation to all those who worked behind both in the past and present released the issue by handing over the same to the Rt. Rev. Dr Mathews Mar Makarios Episcopa. The presence of Achens and representatives of the Diocesan Council blessed this occasion. The messenger Managing committee member Mr. Thomas V. Mammen and the first Chief Editor Mr. Abraham Mattackal were also present during the occasion.

Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

Sharing the American Dream With Our Neighbors



Rev. Benu John, Baltimore MTC



1. Introduction

Historian James Truslow Adams popularized the phrase "American Dream" in his 1931 book *Epic of America*. He wrote "... the American dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement". If the American dream has to be a reality for the American community we need to share the dream with the community who has no means to actualize the dream. When we reached the shores of this great nation we came with the American dream that enticed our journey. It's in this perspective that we need to discuss the significance of neighborhood mission for the Diaspora Asian-American Marthoma church. It's in this perspective that we need to examine our identity as a migrant community and our future impact upon the local community and their needs. How much are we in touch with the ground realities of this nation? How is our relation with our suffering community? We have been successful in occupying the resources in this land of 'milk and Honey' but are we in touch with the 'Occupy Movement' community which is just across our streets? This article attempt is to articulate a Christian approach to social responsibility especially as a Diaspora Indian in the North American context.

2. What is neighborhood mission?

Despite the clear biblical mandate for social action over the years there has been a variety of different ideas on the subject of Christian approach to the social involvement. These range from the extreme of maintaining complete non-involvement to the extreme of wholehearted committal. The former is based on the contention that Christianity is spiritual and not social, because the gospel deals essentially with man's spiritual problems. The latter extreme maintains a fully-fledged social gospel and sees no relevance in the spiritual issues. The question is what a mission is and who delegates us for neighborhood ministry. Mission and mission field are related ideas. In a Christian perspective Mission is God's mission a mission set out by Jesus himself. It's not our agenda or objective. So our mission field in neighborhood mission is God's children. We are his instruments of His Mission. Neighborhood mission therefore is reaching beyond the barriers created by humanity. "Go out into the world" is the mission to step out of the coziness of our social space and interact with the community in need of our presence. Missionary efforts should therefore address the mental, emotional and even spiritual needs of the needy community. It's sharing us with the needy person or community. It starts from our self-understanding of being created in the image of God. According to the Bible, humanity became distorted due to sin and so God gave us a responsibility to seek the last, lost and the least. So neighborhood mission is God's mission to involve the effort of humanity to make each person fully redeemed in the Lord. It should therefore not be limited to the physical and social development of the person or family but also the overall mental, cultural and spiritual growth of the person in need. In short, the church's gospel ministry of 'evangelism' and 'social responsibility'

is a single ministry. These two dimensions cannot exist independently of each other. The church's social responsibility includes, but extends beyond, physical needs and relates to people's full humanity as spiritual beings made in the image of God and called to be reconciled to Christ. We have people like Razia Jan who is an Afghan-American (who is nominated as a CNN hero award 2012) who decided to go out to her war-torn country home leaving the security of American life. She has taken the challenge to educate the girls in her native country even though it's risky job. In the world of Taliban she is one who has the wisdom to understand her true neighbor.

3. Biblical basis of Neighbor Mission

We need to seek a biblical base for neighborhood mission. So when we perceive the biblical basis of neighborhood mission we first have a look at the Jesus agenda of Mission. "The Spirit of the sovereign Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom to the captives and release from darkness to the prisoners [not to vote against or veto bans on torture], to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn" (Isaiah 61:1-2). Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action" (1 Jn. 3:18). The biblical witness not only gives a rationale for engaging socially and doing justice (Micah 6:8; Luke 4:18) but also provides a foundation for understanding the nature of social relationships and the form and content of the society to which we witness (Matt. 5 - 7; Rom. 12 - 15) as well as defining our responsibility towards the whole of creation (Rom. 8:19-25). The gospel is an agency of reconciliation and any social reform which Christians show must be in line with and indeed prompted by that aim. The church is to live and witness as a sign and foretaste of the Kingdom of God. The church's social responsibility is thus an integral part of its response to Christ who gave himself to the world to create 'a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds' (Titus 2:7-14). 'You are the light of the world ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.' (Matthew 5:14-16). It doesn't matter how much darkness there is, the smallest light will dispel it. Actually, darkness is just an absence of light, so if there is any light at all, there is no darkness.

4. The inadequacies of our current approach to our neighbors

Having laid the social and biblical basis of neighborhood mission we need to introspect our approach to social problems around us in this community. We the

migrant community from India had struggled hard to come up on the social ladder of the American community. It's a struggle in which we received countless help from our American friends and neighbors around us. The Indian community especially from the south India had grown incredibly fast due to God's grace. But how far we could translate this incredible growth as blessing for the local community we exist today. Our first challenge is that we still live in a self-isolated world even though we claim to be connected with the world. Our smart phones may connect us as one but our lifestyles isolates us from our immediate neighbors who may be in need. We boast about our connections with the rich and the famous in this country but our knowledge of poverty in USA is only second hand information from media. The second challenge is self-justification. We may argue that there is no one who is actually poor or needy as the Government takes care of them or the needy are just a lazy bunch of people sole aim is to rob the rich. So the only thing we do is to blame the needy as "lazy and unworthy of help" as they do not share our values. We have now donned the role of the Pharisee who arrogantly asked Jesus the question "who is my neighbor." Poverty for us is a few beggars roaming around on the streets or malls and it can be fixed by proper government "action".

Thirdly we don't reach out to the poor because we think that we have needs ourselves. We become so focused on our own needs that we forget about others. Unfortunately, our churches have developed a "fortress mentality" in which we hide ourselves inside our churches, and hope the world won't come in to bother us. Our perception of poverty and basic human need is very shallow based on our limited social space we interact. We are still wearing our dark tanned glasses of deliberate ignorance and self-isolation. The idea is to escape the reality and meaningful participation in human struggles. So we hardly looked outside these windows to understand the pain and sufferings outside us. Lastly there is a struggle between evangelism and social action in traditional churches. The contention is that when church focuses its attention on social work it loses its focus on the real gospel.

5. Our legacy in neighborhood mission

In the midst of this incorrect or inadequate understanding of social problems and our responsibility we need to discover alternative vision which can correct it. One such vision is our own legacy as an enlightened community when we started out as a church in modern times. The idea of sharing and reaching out is within our Indian psyche itself which cuts across the barriers of religion or caste. The Mar Thoma church is renowned throughout the globe as a pioneer in social responsibility. The idea of sharing within the community for a larger cause became the forefront of the Marthoma identity when we were in the last phases of the 19th century. It was the time when the church lost everything in litigation but yet inspired its community to share its resources. The thirteenth Marthoma metropolitan of the undivided Malankara church Mathew Mar Athanasius Thirumeni had a very strong sense of social responsibility. He was pioneer in leading social movements in close network with the government. Later on when the Maramon convention kicked off the church set apart its meager resources to help the needy community. In fact the idea of social responsibility and neighborhood mission was inbuilt into each marthoma family right from its inception. Our marriage liturgy and baptism all bears testimony to the fact that church and family values deeply infused the values of sharing and caring our neighbors in need. In the 1970's the Marthoma church started a unique movement called CARD (Christian Agency for Rural Development) to address the problem of poverty by going to the grass-roots level and empowering the needy community. It was one of the first movements which seriously researched poverty and social change and implemented transformation in the Indian society. This movement actually inspired other churches to emulate this process of social responsibility. Our American diocese has strived hard through our visionary Bishops, Achens and specially our lay community to keep this legacy alive in its macro level despite our challenges that we face now. The successful rehabilitation of the Mexican community and our work among the Native American community is clearly role models for us to start our own missions in our local areas.

6. Process of Neighborhood mission

Now we have worked out the basics of neighborhood mission and its vision as laid out by our forefathers and foremothers in faith. We now need to revisit the methodology of our mission from a Christian perspective. The first step is Identifying my neighbor in God's creation. When Jesus was asked the question about "who is my neighbor". Jesus had a very clear answer to the tricky question of a Jewish lawmaker. But I feel that still we have reservations in accepting the Samaritan model of being a neighbor. The priest and the Levite mentality of holiness is still the greatest challenge to the Jesus vision challenge of identifying my "right" neighbor. Jesus identified a Samaritan who is a non-Jew and a community which is unlikable to the Jewish community has a neighbor who actually came by to help him. The idea that our neighbors are always those who share our faith and culture

and looks was busted by Jesus when he exposed the unwillingness of the Jewish priest and the Levite (who were actually supposed) to help the suffering Jew. So our neighbor is not simply a Marthoma family or Indian or even an white American. Can we accept African Americans and Muslims too who may not share our faith or religion or even our skin color. It's a question of living the Gospel among the community. Secondly it's out of genuine love that all humane actions erupt. God's greatest commandment to humanity is to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Genuine love is to experience the pain of a suffering community as our own. It is to love as Jesus loved us by giving himself on the cross. As Mother Teresa reminds us we need to seek the image of God in the agony of my neighbor's face had been forsaken by even his own people. Genuine love is not from human compulsion but emanates from soul that drives us with a divine mission to serve Christ. When our hearts reach out to love we are willing to make sacrifices for the cause. We can never serve out of our surplus. We need to experience the pain of the suffering person or community in order to help the poor genuinely. Are there role models amongst us? I researched and found a strange role model. He happens to be José Mujica who is the President of Uruguay. He gives off 90% of his salary for charity and is renowned as the poorest president in office today. He says that "It is a mistake to think that power comes from above, when it comes from within the hearts of the masses ...it has taken me a lifetime to learn this". Thirdly we need to move out of our glass houses to the streets to understand the pains of the community and to share their grief. Firsthand information about the needs of a community is only received from experience. The strength of the community organizer emanates not from political power structures but from the heart of the community. When we reach out we can access the primary needs of the community and facilitate help by networking the flow of resources and by empowering the community to manage its own resources meaningfully. So basically the role of neighborhood mission is to access the basic needs of a community and to facilitate human and non- human resources according to the need. The final process and the most important of all is to foster long term relationship with the community in need. It's a symbiotic relationship not parasitic relationship in which both sides are nourished. Instead of the trickle down missionary approach the donor community should be able to encourage the needy family or community to grow and sustain on their own in the long run and even to help others in need. The question facing our future existence as a community Lets come back to the hard facts about this nation and where we stand as a community. About 15% of the American community is in poverty which amounts to about 30 million people. About 48 million people in this country have no insurance at all. What's our response to some of our massive problem facing this nation? We know the government cannot handle it alone. The need of the hour is not just financial but it extends to the spiritual and mental support of the community which is deprived of it. So the need of the hour is to rethink our strategy and vision. Our vision as a family, church and community based on the vision of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ and specifically based on our forefathers

in faith who led us. The need is to seriously analyze the society and its needs and to rethink our strategy to be meaningful presence in the American community. Let's come back to the basic question we started off in the beginning of this paper. How much are we in touch with the ground realities of this nation? How is our relation with our suffering community? This question is asked in every tragedy which strikes the minority community here in this nation. It is often asked when we have to respond to an unprecedented natural or human disaster. It is asked by our federal government when we apply for or seek to renew our status as a charitable body. It is for us to answer both collectively and individually.

7. Conclusion: Now is the time to respond

So as we come to a close of this discussion we understand that we need a change in our perspective. But who will bring this change? Is it the church, our community or church leaders? I would quote Dr. Catherine Garner who teaches and motivates staff nurses "Now it's time to consider the ways you can become an agent of change within your unit. It's essential to be proactive, rather than living with the status quo." The church is not just Bishops and Aichens and committee members but it is you and me. So It should start from you who is reading this article. Think about it that one simple school teacher Clara Barton thought about her community and the American Red Cross was born. There is still hope for us to transform ourselves as a community with a beacon of hope for the world at least for our local community where we live. We had survived the storms and hurricanes of own life. But there are millions among us in this wealthiest nation who cannot even dream

beyond their next meal let alone the American dream. Cast aside our distorted view of the local community now itself and let's see a new vision which reaches out to the needy. Now is the time to respond to the call of God to respond and to the call of this nation to respond to its most pressing need as a meaningful neighbor. So we need to pray diligently to seek God's vision for us which can impact the life of the family you see every day. Our responsibility does not end in sending a check to an organization. It starts with seeking God's guidance that helps us to reach out with a passion of love towards my neighbor. As you read this article think how you can make a difference to your own local community in cooperation with your own church, community or family. You can make a change. World revolution starts simply from a person in a family which permeates to the family. it spreads from the family to the community and then community in turns inspires the nation and the world.

Diocesan Bishop's Visit to Sandy Affected Areas



Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, along with Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary, Rev. Baby John, Vicar of Staten Island MTC, Mr. Jacob Chacko, Mr. Mathai P. Mathew and Mr. Prince Thomas visited the areas affected by the hurricane Sandy in Staten Island, New York on Nov. 20, 2012. Both the church buildings of St. George Orthodox Church and St. John's Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, sustained substantial damage due to hurricane Sandy. The team also visited the houses of members who have severe damages. Volunteers from the Red Cross and other organizations are providing relief assistance to the residents. Government officials and various agencies are trying their best to restore the affected areas. The Diocese has established a Sandy Relief Fund and requested all members to contribute generously for the recovery efforts being done by the Mar Thoma Church in the affected areas. The Diocese has joined in the recovery efforts with the help of Youth Fellowship members along with the Red Cross, United Way, City Way and other organizations. The Youth Fellowship members from New York area under the leadership of Rev. V. M. Mathew, Youth Chaplain, New York joined in the recovery efforts and also distributed essential supplies to those living in shelter in Long Island and Merrick areas on Nov. 10, 2012.

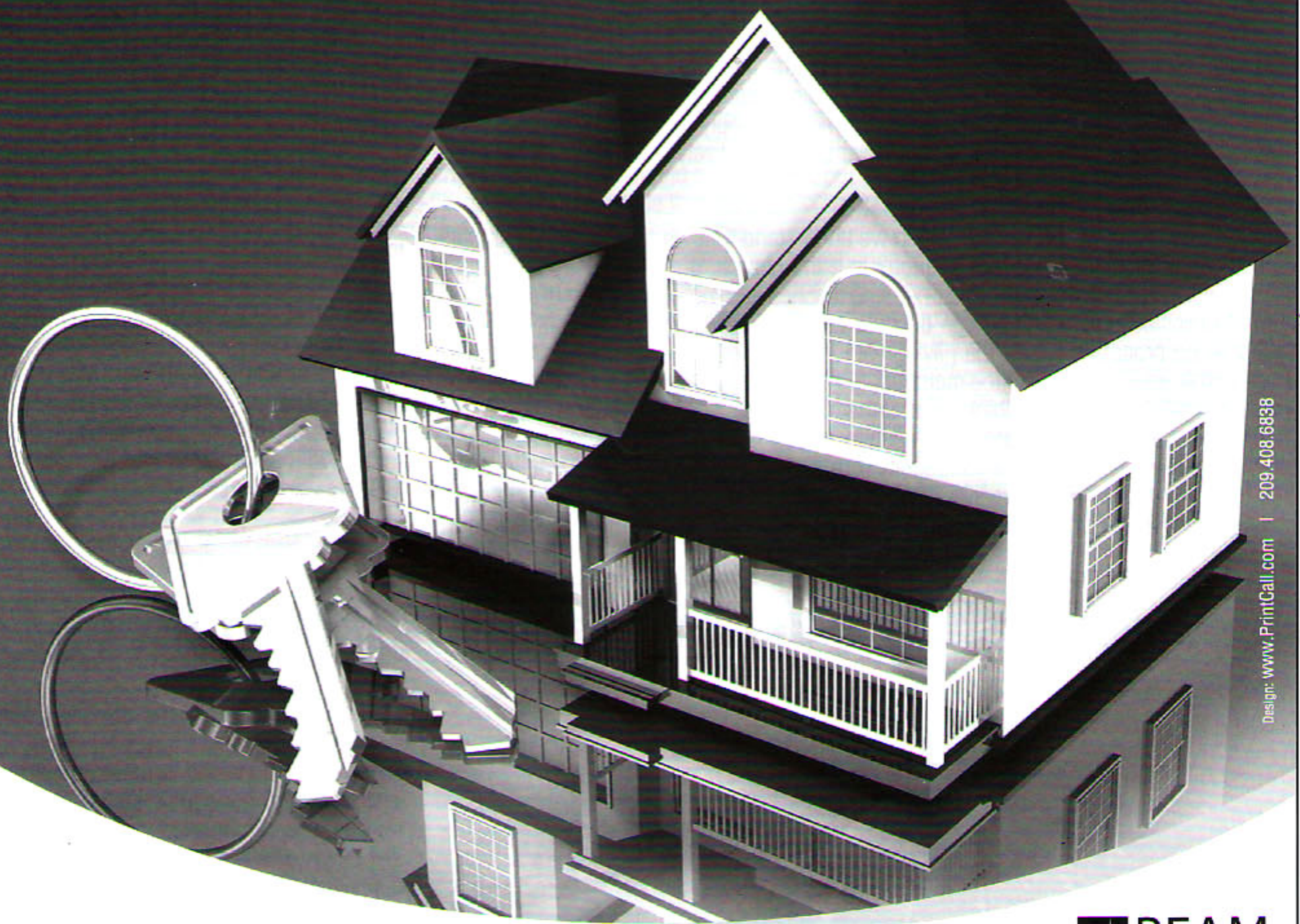
The Aichens of the North East region with few members of the Mar Thoma Churches in Staten Island visited the Sandy affected area of Staten Island On Monday, November 12, 2012. The costal area of Staten Island was severely devastated by the Sandy hurricane. The team visited the houses of the Mar Thoma members who are affected by hurricane sandy and comforted them and prayed for a speedy restoration. The team also visited the other affected areas and relief centers to know the possibilities of working with them in the coming days in whatever way possible. The team also communicated the

willingness of the Diocese to participate in the relief activities of the different organizations. The Hurricane Sandy has devastated the lives of millions of families in the Eastern coast of United States. Thousands of families are still in shelters and thousands have no electricity, gas and/or heat. Many houses are damaged and hundreds of vehicles were washed away in Long beach, Rockaways, Coney Island and Staten Island. Our hearts and prayers go out to all.

Many of our churches and families in these region lost electricity and suffered damages to their properties and homes. The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius has urged the parishes to assist through voluntary contributions and voluntary work. The Vicars and the executive committee members of each parish are asked to enquire on the safety, welfare and needs of each and every family in our parishes and report to the Diocesan office and also to assist the people in the neighborhood who are in need.

The youth fellowship members from the North East Region participated in the Sandy relief work on Saturday, November 10, 2012 in Long Beach and Merrick road led by Rev. V. M. Mathew, the youth chaplain. The team involved in sorting the relief materials that are to be distributed in the shelters and affected areas. They also helped in unloading the relief material from the trucks. The Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church also participated in the disaster relief work in the Eastern coast. The Diocese has set up a Sandy relief fund to help those who are in need. The Dioceses and the youth fellowship registered with Red Cross, FEMA, United way, city hall, NYC cares and other organizations working in the affected areas. The parishes are requested to form a group of volunteers to go, if the NGOs request assistance.

Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary



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Youth Corner

Faith or Belief ?

- Alvin Sam Jiji, Phoenix Congregation, Phoenix, AZ



A question so often asked by many Christians, what's the difference between faith and belief? In the dictionary the definition for faith is a strong or unshakeable belief in something. Likewise, the definition for belief is confidence in the truth or existence of something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof. They almost have the same definition but there is a difference. Faith is a belief beyond words.

Everyone needs faith to go on. For example in Matthew 8:23-27, Jesus calmed the storm even when the disciples didn't believe they could escape the storm. Verse 25 and 26 say, "The disciples went and woke him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!' He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?'" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. In these two verses the disciples had little to no faith that they will survive the storm. This is an example of poor faith. An example of strong faith is displayed in Luke 8:40-48, it shows a woman suffering from bleeding that no one could heal. She had enough faith to believe that even touching edge of Jesus' cloak could heal her from her disease. Verse 48 says "Then he said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.'" Faithfulness is a vital trait to everyday life. You should have faith in God and in everything you do. Another verse that expresses faith is Matthew 17:20, says, "He replied, 'Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.'" What Jesus was trying to tell them in this parable is that it doesn't take great faith to produce great results. By just having a little faith in God it can help you do things you could never do before. Another example of strong faith is displayed in Luke 5: 17-26 in which it shows some men lowering a paralyzed man through the roof to Jesus who was preaching to a crowd at a house. Verse 18-20 says "Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.'" In these three verses it shows that you can do anything if you have the faith. As you can see, faith is a thing that is most important in anything you do.

All in all, there is barely a noticeable difference between faith and belief. But if you look at it more closely you will see that there is actually a big difference. The difference is that faith is much more than belief. Faith is a belief that is unexplainable. We hope you have learned more from this article about faith and belief. Thank you for reading and may God bless you.

Diocesan Sunday School Exam 2012 - Winner



Neha Sam
St. Mathew's MTC, Canada, Grade 10

India Mission Trip – 2013

The Diocesan Council has decided to arrange Mission Trips in 2013 to the mission fields in India. Since 2013 is the Jubilee year of the Diocese, the India Mission Trip will be for five different groups which will give more rooms for the younger generation in the Diocese to know about the Indian mission fields, the people over there and the mission programs that are going on at various centers. The Diocese is considering to sending different teams from USA, Canada and UK to Mumbai, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka - Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Kerala, depending on the availability of candidates and also volunteers to lead them. The visit will be for 10 to 15 days in the months of June - August, 2013.

Mumbai Mission Tour

Dates: June 1 to 15, 2013. The team will visit the following Mission Centers in the Mumbai Diocese. Ahwa and Dang, tribal belt of Gujrat, Boichipada and Vidharbha Region (10 Mission fields). There will be opportunity for 10 college students or working youths in this team. Those who are interested please contact Mrs. Laila Annie Philip, Boston varampath23@msn.com), Phone number - 978- 663-3203 on or before February 15, 2013.

Karnataka - Andhra Mission Tour

Dates: August 8 to 20, 2013 (12 days). The team will visit the mission centers of Chennai-Bangalore Diocese in the states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The team will be visiting and experiencing life in the rural mission fields of Devenahalli, Vijayapura, Siddlaghatta, Sivanapuram in Karnataka and Madanapally and Chaglamari mission fields in Andhra Pradesh. There will be opportunity for 10 mission oriented college going students from our Diocese. Those who are interested please contact Mr. George Thomas, New Jersey (georgie4christ@gmail.com), Phone number - 201-214-6000 on or before February 15, 2013.

For more details about the five groups, contact the Diocesan Office (marthomadiocese@gmail.com).

Diocesan Silver Jubilee Celebration: Prayerful Expectations!



Dr. Mathew T. Thomas, Diocesan Council Member

In 2013, the Mar Thoma Church Diocese of North America and Europe will celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary. Although the Mar Thoma Christians (Marthomites) had formed several small worship groups in North America and Europe during the 20th century, it was on July 1, 1988 that the Episcopal Synod of the Mar Thoma Church formally approved the formation of this Diocese. The Diocesan Council through the direction of the Diocesan Assembly has developed a framework to commemorate the Diocesan Silver Jubilee with year-round celebrations and related activities. Theodosius Thirumeni has issued a Kalpana directing all eight regions in the Diocese to memorialize this historic milestone by conducting relevant activities in USA, Canada, and Europe. In addition to the celebrations the most important objective is to encourage and empower each of the eight regions in the Diocese to formulate plans that benefit the people in the region and thereby promote the overall growth of the Diocese.

The key proposals from the Diocesan Council to observe the Silver Jubilee are to:

- Have all Jubilee festivities centered on the theme: Church: Journeying with Christ.
- Inaugurate the Silver Jubilee celebrations in Houston, on Saturday, January 18, 2013.
- Declare July 7, 2013 as Diocesan Thanksgiving Sunday, and conduct a special order of service while inviting a voluntary thanksgiving offertory of \$50.00 per family.
- Conduct a closing ceremony in the North East Region on Saturday, November 23, 2013.
- Publish a Jubilee volume and/or directory to commemorate the 25th anniversary.
- Encourage at least five batches of second and third generation youths to go on mission trips to different places in India to understand their roots and witness Christianity to others.
- Strengthen the ongoing Diocesan mission projects (Native American Mission, Mexico Mission and Neighborhood Mission).
- Organize Regional Family Conferences in UK and Europe, Canada, and USA.
- Form a "Regional Activities Committee" (RAC) in all eight regions of the Diocese to plan, prioritize, and implement various regional programs and projects.

The formation of this Diocese was the product of God's blessings, and the hard work and fervent prayers of many dedicated and committed early Mar Thoma immigrants and prayerful and visionary church leaders. At the time of the 2011 Diocesan Annual Report, the Diocese had recorded that it had grown to 66 parishes and 11 congregations spread across the USA, Canada and Europe, serving about 7667 families. The church has brought many to Christ including nine young American citizens of Indian origin who have already been ordained to serve the church. In addition, one person is currently undergoing training at the theological seminary and two more will be joining the seminary shortly and committing themselves to being ordained to serve the Mar Thoma Church. The Diocesan organizations have flourished and its mission activities have benefited so many people around the world. When reviewing the activities of the Diocese all people, especially Marthomites should be proud of our accomplishments over the past twenty-five years. At the same time, we should humbly thank God for His bountiful blessings and pray for His perpetual guidance.

The Diocese should also be cognizant of the challenges that have limited its growth and offered setbacks to its progress. For instance, many of our youths and some of our elders and even a few of our leaders have distanced themselves from the church for a variety of personal and ecclesiastical reasons, but the most significant reason among them being their inability to worship regularly in a language that they understand, and in a style that is contemporary. It is ironic that one of the principle prerogatives for the reformation of the Mar Thoma Church was that its members be able to worship in a

language (Malayalam) that is understandable to them, yet the members in many Mar Thoma churches today still struggle to follow this principle and accommodate meaningful worship in other languages (other than Malayalam).

The challenge for the Diocese is also not to just simply sustain what it has achieved thus far, but to set a vision for its future growth. We need to think ahead of how our Diocese would, or should look in the next 25 years, or at the time of its Golden Jubilee. To get us there we need to identify and cultivate dedicated and visionary leaders, and committed missionary workers who prayerfully seek God's blessings to inspire the current and future generations. It is in this context that, I believe, the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Diocese becomes relevant and important, because it provides an opportunity to,

- Emphasize Bible Study and faith in God's salvation through Jesus Christ;
- Teach our church's history to the newer generations;
- Review and accept to abide by our church's constitution;
- Appreciate those who contributed to the Diocese's past growth;
- Arouse passion within the current and future generations about the uniqueness of the Mar Thoma church;
- Encourage the expansion of the church to serve all peoples; and
- Stimulate people to lead the Diocese into a promising and productive future.

One of the immediate objectives of the Diocesan Silver Jubilee celebrations is to form functional and effective Regional Activities Committees (RACs) in each region. As envisioned, the role of the RACs is vital. The Diocese expects that each RAC will take the broad vision articulated by the Diocesan Council and generate ideas and implement programs that benefit the people at the regional and local levels. The role of the Vicars in each region would be to coordinate the formation and direct the operations of the RAC, and any subsequent regional subcommittees that may be formed. The RAC might include the current Assembly members, Mandalam members, and Executive committee members from the parishes in each respective region. The Diocesan Episcopa may also nominate additional members to the Regional Activities Committee (RAC), as necessary. Ultimately, it is important that the RAC includes those who are interested in working on regional activities for the glory of God and the growth of the Diocese, and committed to working within the discipline of the church.

Operationally, the RAC and any other regional subcommittee must obtain the Diocesan Epis-

copa's approval prior to executing decisions. The RAC may have a Chairperson, Convener, and Executive Secretary, and must prepare minutes of each meeting and present the meeting minutes and quarterly reports to the Diocese regarding its activities and decisions. The regional committees may need to identify one or more regional projects as per the guidelines set by the Diocesan Bishop and the Assembly, and document its progress on the specific regional projects.

Amongst other things (these are just suggestions) the RAC could:

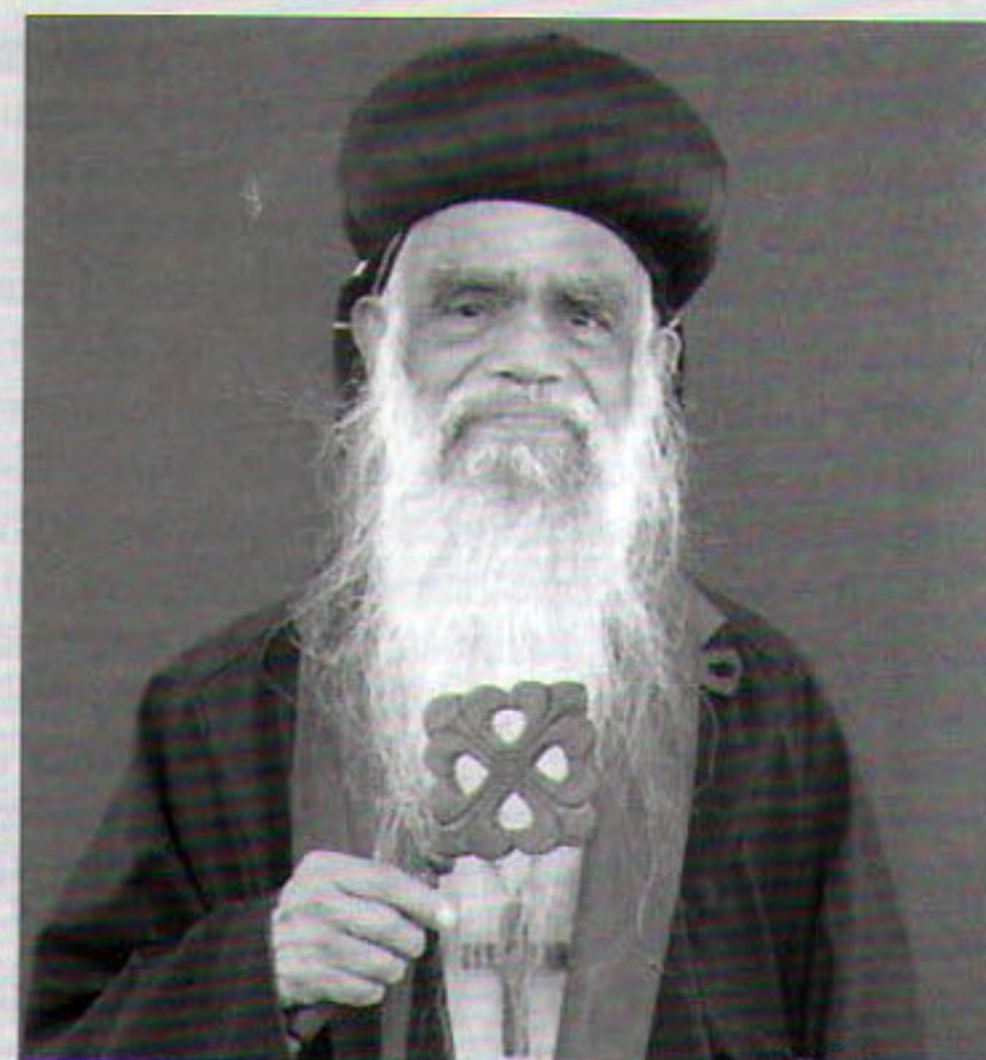
- Consider establishing a Regional Office in one of the parishes that can either spare a room or an address for this purpose. During the Jubilee year, the Diocesan Episcopa could formally inaugurate these offices in the respective regions.
- Consider the possibility of registering the RAC at a State level as a regional organization.
- Explore the possibility of obtaining health insurance for the clergy at a regional level thereby potentially reducing the amount of premium.
- Encourage youths to take up leadership roles in the local, regional and diocesan activities.
- Encourage youths to become 'Altar Boys' in the parishes and identify and motivate those who are considering serving God through a greater ministry.
- Generate venues for the second and third generation Marthomites to share their aspirations, concerns and dreams of the Church, and enable parishes to visualize and implement a relevant church ministry for the future.
- Encourage the first generation Diaspora members of the Church to document and transmit their faith tradition and experiences to the new generation, and recognize the pioneers.
- Organize regional Bible Studies, and spiritual revival meetings through Bible Conventions.
- Motivate Diocesan organizations for special ministry to commemorate the Jubilee, and host annual conferences and Jubilee celebrations.
- Arrange orientation classes for clergies coming from India to join the Diocese.
- Promote regional unity by organizing community gatherings and Holy Qurbana services on a regional level for the young and older generations.
- Invite ecumenical leaders to attend Jubilee events.
- Plan and organize Neighborhood Mission projects.
- Arrange fund raising programs in each region for regional developmental activities.

Many people may casually question what the Diocese has done for the growth of their individual parishes and congregations. If they carefully look back they will be able to see how the formation of the Diocese has helped the growth of the Mar Thoma Church in USA, Canada, and Europe. It is because of our Diocese and our parent church that we now have our parishes and their effective and coordinated administration that offers ecclesiastical supervision, pastoral guidance and a visionary approach. The governance of the church is that all the Bishops and Clergy are for the whole Church. We have a democratic operational setup within the parishes and congregations, which in turn are linked to the operations of the Diocese and the parent church.

We should also bear in mind that we are an indigenous church that is self-supporting and that contributes to the welfare of the entire community. Therefore, we should gladly and enthusiastically support the growth of our Diocese through prayer, monetary contributions, and loyal service. We should recognize that as a church we are endowed with certain unique features which are for the edification of society and the integration of created order. We are called to be the 'light' in every situation that prevents darkness. We are called to be the 'salt' in every situation that presents tastelessness to life. We are to be like the 'leaven' that ferments dough and thereby represents a connection to our past that adds a flavor to our character, and a force that invisibly spreads through the commu-

nity effecting a change that offers visible growth and expansion through our activities and labor. We thank God and all those who contributed to that growth. Our 'prayerful expectation' is that leaders with vision and passion will continue to rise to lead our parishes, our Diocese and our church into the future, by renewing our relationship with God and committing to serve all of creation.

Condolence



Mathews Mar Barnabas Metropolitan

The Metropolitan Mathews Mar Barnabas of Malankara Orthodox Church is called to eternity in Tiruvalla, Kerala on Sunday, December 9, 2012. Tirumeni was the former Diocesan Bishop of the North American Diocese of the Orthodox Church. Also Tirumeni was a good friend of the Mar Thoma Church and had a very good relationship with our Diocese when he was in USA. Let us remember the Malankara Orthodox Church and the faith community in our prayers.

The Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church expresses its heart felt condolence on the demise of Metropolitan Mar Barnabas of Orthodox Church



FOURTH ECUMENICAL FELLOWSHIP DINNER

The Ecumenical Fellowship Dinner hosted by the Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church will be held on Friday, January 18, 2013 at 6 PM at Immanuel Center, Houston. This time the Ecumenical dinner is held by the Diocese, with the help of the Mar Thoma parishes in Houston. This is an opportunity to relate with and know other Christian denominations. The Diocesan Episcopa will preside and other church leaders will deliver the messages. The previous ones were held at New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia. All are cordially invited to join by contacting Mr. George Samuel (281-658-2341).

Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

എന്നിൽ വസിച്ചു ഫലം കായ്പിൻ Abide in me and be fruitful

യോഹന്നാൻ: 15:3

ധ്യാനവിചാരം



റെയ്ച്ചൽ വർക്കി, എപ്പിഫാനി മാർത്തോമ്മാ ചർച്ച്, ന്യൂയോർക്ക്

ക്രിസ്തു പകർന്നു നൽകിയ ചിന്തകളിൽ ഏറ്റവും ഉദാത്തമായ ഒന്നാണ് യോഹന്നാന്റെ സുവിശേഷം 15-ാം അധ്യായത്തിലെ കൊമ്പും മുന്തിരിവള്ളിയും എന്ന വർണ്ണന. പ്രതീകാത്മക ഭാഷയിലുള്ള യേശുവിന്റെ പ്രഭാഷണത്തെ യോഹന്നാൻ തന്റേതായ ചാരുതയിലാണ് വിവരിക്കുന്നത്. മുന്തിരിവള്ളി എന്ന പ്രതിബിംബമാണ് (imagery) ക്രിസ്ത്യാനുഭവത്തെ വെളിപ്പെടുത്താൻ ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്നത്. ക്രിസ്തു അവബോധത്തെ വെളിപ്പെടുത്താൻ യോഹന്നാൻ ഇതര ഭാഗങ്ങളിലും നിരവധി പ്രതിബിംബങ്ങൾ ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്നു. അപ്പം, വെളിച്ചം, വാതിൽ, ഇടയൻ, ജീവൻ, വഴി, സത്യം - ഇവയെല്ലാം ക്രിസ്തുവും ദൈവവും തമ്മിലുള്ള ബന്ധത്തിന്റെയും ക്രിസ്തുവും ശിഷ്യസമൂഹവും മായുള്ള ബന്ധത്തിന്റെയും സൂചകങ്ങളാണ്. യേശുവിന്റെ ശിഷ്യസമൂഹത്തിനു പരിചിതമായ പ്രതീകാത്മക ചിഹ്നങ്ങളാണ് യേശു തന്നെത്തന്നെ വെളിപ്പെടുത്തുവാൻ ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്നത്.

ഈ വേദഭാഗം യോഹന്നാൻ ധ്യാനിക്കുന്നത് Johannine community-യുടെ പ്രത്യേക അനുഭവതലത്തിൽ നിന്നുകൊണ്ട്. യഹൂദ അധികാരികളുടെ പിന്ധനത്തിനും പുറത്താക്കലിനും (Persecution and excommunication) വിധേയനാകേണ്ട സമൂഹം. മുന്തിരിത്തോട്ടത്തിന്റെ ചെത്തിയൊരുക്കുന്നതുപോലെ Johannine communityയും ഒരുക്കപ്പെടുകയാണ് എന്ന അവബോധമാണ് ഇവിടെ പങ്കുവയ്ക്കപ്പെടുന്നത്. ഈ വേദഭാഗത്തിന്റെ ഒരു ദൈവശാസ്ത്ര തലത്തിലുള്ള വ്യാഖ്യാനത്തിലേക്കു പ്രവേശിക്കാതെ നമ്മുടെ ധ്യാനാത്മക അനുഭവത്തിനു സഹായകരമായ ചില ചിന്തകൾ പങ്കുവയ്ക്കട്ടെ.

ഒന്നാമതായി ക്രിസ്തുവിൽ വസിക്കുക എന്നുവെച്ചാൽ ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ മൂല്യത്തിൽ വസിക്കുക എന്നതാണ്. (To live in christ means to live in his value system)

എന്നിൽ വസിച്ചിൻ എന്ന ആശയം യോഹന്നാന്റെ സുവിശേഷത്തിന്റെ ആദ്യ താളുകളിൽ ശിഷ്യരെ യേശു വിളിക്കുന്ന ഭാഗവുമായി ചേർത്തു ചിന്തിക്കാൻ സാധിക്കും. (യോഹ: 1:38,39) യേശു എന്ന ഗുരുവിലേക്ക് താൻ എങ്ങനെ എത്തിച്ചേർന്നു എന്ന കാര്യം യോഹന്നാൻ വെളിപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു. യോഹന്നാനും അന്ത്രയോസും തന്റെ പിന്നാലെ വരുന്നതുക്ക് യേശു അവരോട് നിങ്ങൾ എന്തന്വേഷിക്കുന്നു എന്ന് ചോദിക്കുന്നു. അതിവ ധ്യാനം നിറഞ്ഞ മറ്റൊരു ചോദ്യമാണ് ശിഷ്യന്മാർ യേശുവിനോട് തിരിച്ചുചോദിക്കുന്നത്. റബ്ബി, അങ്ങ് എവിടെ വസിക്കുന്നു? എന്നുവെച്ചാൽ നീ വസിക്കുന്ന ഇടം അല്ലെങ്കിൽ വീട് ഏതാണെന്ന് ഞങ്ങൾക്കു കാണിച്ചുതരിക.

വസിക്കുന്ന ഇടം ഏതാണ്? ഒരാൾ വിശ്വസിക്കുന്ന മൂല്യങ്ങളാണ് അയാൾ വസിക്കുന്ന ഇടം. സ്നേഹത്തിൽ മാത്രം ജീവിച്ച മദർ തെരേസയുടെ വീട് സ്നേഹമാണ്. അഹിംസയിൽ ആഴ്ന്നിറങ്ങി ജീവിച്ച ഗാന്ധിയുടെ വീട് അഹിംസയാണ്. അങ്ങനെയെങ്കിൽ യേശുവിന്റെ വീട് യേശുവിന്റെ മൂല്യങ്ങളാണ്. നാം എന്തു മൂല്യങ്ങളെ പ്രതിനിധാനം ചെയ്യുന്നുവോ അതാണ് നമ്മുടെ വീട്. യേശു ശിഷ്യരെ ക്ഷണിക്കുന്നത് യേശുവിന്റെ വാല്യ സിസ്റ്റത്തിലേക്കാണ്. നിന്റെ വാല്യ സിസ്റ്റത്തിലേക്കു ഞങ്ങളെ പ്രവേശിപ്പിക്കുക എന്നാണ് ശിഷ്യർ ആവശ്യപ്പെടുന്നതു്. മറ്റൊരു വാക്കിൽ പറഞ്ഞാൽ സുവിശേഷാത്മകമായി ജീവിക്കാൻ ഞങ്ങളെ ബലപ്പെടുത്തുക. യോഹന്നാൻ സ്നേഹത്തിന്റെ അപ്പോസ്തലൻ ആയി രൂപാന്തരം പ്രാപിക്കുന്നത് യേശുവിന്റെ മൂല്യബോധത്തിലേക്കു സ്നാനം ചെയ്യപ്പെട്ടപ്പോഴാണ്. എന്നാൽ ഒരിക്കൽ യോഹന്നാൻ അങ്ങനെ അല്ലായിരുന്നു. ശമര്യക്കാർ ക്രിസ്തുവിനെതിരെ എദയം കഠിനമാക്കിയപ്പോൾ സ്വർഗ്ഗത്തിൽ നിന്നും അഗ്നിയറക്കി അവരെ ദഹിപ്പിക്കാൻ യോഹന്നാൻ യേശുവിനോടാവശ്യപ്പെടുന്നു. (ലൂക്കോ: 9:54). മറ്റൊരിക്കൽ തനിക്കും സഹോദരനായ യാക്കോബിനും പ്രമുഖ സ്ഥാനങ്ങൾ വേണമെന്ന് ശുപാർശ ചെയ്യുന്നു. (മത്താ: 20:20-22). അതി സ്വാർത്ഥനായ ഒരാൾ. പിന്നീട് ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ അന്ത്യ അത്താഴവേളയിൽ ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ നെഞ്ചോടു ചാഞ്ഞ് അവന്റെ സ്നേഹഹൃദയത്തോടു ചേർന്നിരിക്കുന്ന യോഹന്നാൻ. തന്റെതന്നെ വാക്കുകളിലൂടെ യോഹന്നാൻ തനിക്കൊക്കുന്ന രൂപാന്തരത്തെപ്പറ്റി പറഞ്ഞുതരുന്നു.

ചേർത്തുപിടിക്കുവാൻ ചില മൂല്യങ്ങൾ ഉള്ളിൽ സൂക്ഷിക്കുന്നവർക്കോ തല ഉയർത്തി നിൽക്കുവാൻ സാധിക്കും. കാഴ്ചയുള്ളതുകൊണ്ടുമാത്രം കാരുമില്ല. നാം ജീവിക്കുന്നതിൽ പുലർത്തുന്ന കാഴ്ചപ്പാടാണ് പ്രധാനം. കാഴ്ച ശരിയാകണമെങ്കിൽ നമ്മുടെ ഉള്ളിൽ സ്നേഹം വേണം, ദൈവ വചനം വേണം, ദൈവഭയം ഉണ്ടണം. നമ്മുടെ ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ ബലഹീനത (weakness) എവിടെയാണോ അത് നമ്മുടെ ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ അന്ത്യത്തിനു നിദാനമായിത്തീരും എന്ന സത്യം നാം തിരിച്ചറിയണം. ഭാരതീയ ചിന്തയിൽ പറയുന്നത് ഓരോ ജീവിയുടെയും അന്ത്യം അതിന്റെ ബലഹീനതയിൽ ആണെന്നാണ്. ഉദാഹരണത്തിന് ഒരു വിന്റെ ബലഹീനത അതിന്റെ നാസികയാണ്. മണംപിടിച്ച് താമരപ്പൂവിനുള്ളിൽ ചെന്നിരിക്കുന്ന വ് താമരപ്പൂവ് സന്ധ്യയിൽ അടഞ്ഞുപോകുമ്പോൾ ഉള്ളിൽപ്പെട്ട് മരണപ്പെടുന്നു ഈയലിനു ബലഹീനത കണ്ണാണ്. വെളിച്ചത്തിലേക്കു കർഷിക്കപ്പെട്ട് അത് അന്ത്യത്തിലെത്തുന്നു. നമ്മുടെ ഇടയിൽ മദ്യപാനം പോലെയുള്ള വികലശീലങ്ങളിൽ വ്യാപരിക്കുന്നവർ അതിൽത്തന്നെ തങ്ങളുടെ അന്ത്യം കുറിക്കുകയാണ്. ധനത്തോടുള്ള നമ്മുടെ അമിതസ്നേഹം നമ്മെ എത്തിക്കുന്നതെവിടെയാണ് എന്ന് നിരീക്ഷിക്കാൻ നമുക്കു കഴി

യണം. നമ്മുടെയൊക്കെ ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ ബലഹീനതലങ്ങളെ തിരിച്ചറിയുക അതിൽനിന്നും മാറി യഥാർത്ഥവും മൂല്യവത്തുമായ ക്രിസ്തു ദർശനം പ്രാപിക്കുക. ദർശനമില്ലാത്തതിടത്ത് ജനം നശിക്കും എന്ന പ്രവാചക നിരീക്ഷണത്തെ നാം ഗൗരവമുള്ളതായി കാണണം. ക്രിസ്തുദർശനത്തിൽ, ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ മൂല്യങ്ങളിൽ വസിക്കുന്നവർക്കെ ഫലം പുറപ്പെടുവിക്കാൻ സാധിക്കുകയുള്ളൂ.

രാമതായി ക്രിസ്തുവിൽ വസിക്കുക എന്നാൽ ക്രിസ്തു ആരോടൊപ്പം വസിച്ചുവോ അവരോടൊപ്പം വസിക്കുക എന്നാണ്. (To live in christ means to live with the community with whom Jesus lived)

നിങ്ങൾ എന്നിൽ വസിച്ചിൻ എന്നുപറയുമ്പോൾ ഒരു mystical dwelling ആയി മാത്രം അതിനെ പരിമിതപ്പെടുത്തരുത്. അതിന്റെ പ്രായോഗിക അംശംകൂടി ഉൾക്കൊള്ളാൻ നമുക്കു കഴിയണം. ഒരാളെ തിരിച്ചറിയാനുള്ള മാനദണ്ഡം അയാൾക്കുചുറ്റും ആരാണെന്നുള്ളതാണ്. "A man is known by the company he keeps" എന്നത് നമുക്കു സുപരിചിതമായ ഒരു ചൊല്ലാണല്ലോ. നമുക്കുചുറ്റും ആരാണു? നമുക്കു ചുറ്റുമുള്ളത് സമൂഹത്തിലെ മധ്യവർഗ്ഗത്തിലും അതിലുപരിയുമായവരാണ് (upper, middle class community). നമ്മുടെ ബന്ധങ്ങളും സഹവാസവും അവരോടൊപ്പമാണ്. യേശുവിന് ചുറ്റുമായിരുന്നവർ ആരായിരുന്നു? യേശുവിനു ചുറ്റും സദാ സമയവും ഉായിരുന്നത് ദരിദ്രർ, ചുങ്കക്കാർ, പാപികൾ, സ്ത്രീകൾ, കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങൾ ഇവരൊക്കെയായിരുന്നു. മർക്കോസ് ഈ ഗണത്തെ 'ഒക്വിലോസ്' എന്നാണ് മലയാളത്തിൽ 'പുരുഷാരം' എന്ന പരിഭാഷ ഗ്രീക്കിലെ 'ഒക്വിലോസ്' എന്ന പദത്തിന്റെ അർത്ഥത്തിനു തത്തുല്യമല്ല. മർക്കോസ് ഈ പദം 42 പ്രാവശ്യം തന്റെ സുവിശേഷത്തിൽ രേഖപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു. അത് ഒരു കാറ്റഗറി ആണ്. അതിൽ ചുങ്കക്കാർ, പാപികൾ, രോഗികൾ, സ്ത്രീകൾ, കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങൾ എല്ലാം ഉൾപ്പെടുന്നു. യേശു സദാസമയം ഈ 'ഒക്വിലോസി'നോടൊപ്പം ആയിരുന്നു. ഒരു preferential option യേശുവിന് അവരോട് ഉായിരുന്നു. കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങളെ അരികിൽ വിളിച്ച് യേശു തന്നോടു ചേർത്തു നിർത്തുമ്പോൾ മുതിർന്നവർ മാത്രമെ ആദരിക്കപ്പെടാവൂ എന്ന സാമൂഹിക നിഷ്കർഷക്കെതിരായിട്ടാണ് യേശു സഞ്ചരിച്ചത്. പുരുഷമേധാവിത്വമുള്ള സമൂഹത്തിൽ സ്ത്രീകൾ അവഗണിക്കപ്പെടുകയാണെന്ന കർശന നിലപാടാണ് യേശു സ്വീകരിച്ചത്. ചുങ്കക്കാർക്കും രോഗികളും യേശുവിന്റെ സഖികൾ ആയിരുന്നു. ഏതെങ്കിലും തലങ്ങളിൽ കുറവനുഭവിച്ചവർ - യേശു അവർക്കു ചുറ്റുമായിരുന്നു സദാ സമയവും. യേശുവിനോടൊപ്പം വസിച്ചവർ അവരായിരുന്നു. അപ്പോൾ യേശുവിൽ വസിക്കുക എന്നുവെച്ചാൽ ഇവരോടൊപ്പം വസിച്ച് അവർക്ക് ഉതവി ചെയ്യുക എന്നും അർത്ഥമാകാം. ഈ ചെറിയവരിൽ ഒരുത്തനു ചെയ്തിടത്തോളം എല്ലാം എനിക്കു യേശു ചെയ്തു എന്ന് കർത്താവുതന്നെ അരുളിച്ചെയ്യുന്നു. (മത്താ: 25:40).

അങ്ങയുടെ വീടെവിടെയാണെന്ന് ഒരു ചെറുപ്പക്കാരൻ യേശുവിനോടു ചേദിച്ചപ്പോൾ കുറുവികു കുടും കുറുനരികൾക്ക് മാളവുമുള്ള ഭൂമിയിൽ മനുഷ്യപുത്രനു തലചായ്ക്കാൻ ഇടമില്ല എന്നു കർത്താവു സൂചിപ്പിക്കു

ന്നു. (ലൂക്കോ: 9:58). യേശു ശിഷ്യന്മാരെ കൂട്ടിക്കൊരു പോകുന്നത് സുന്ദരവും മനോഹരവുമായ കല്ലുകളാൽ പടുത്തുയർത്തിയ വിശാലമായ യെരൂശലേം ദേവാലയത്തിന്റെ സുരക്ഷിതമായ ഇടങ്ങളിലേക്കല്ല, നഗരവാതിലിനു വെളിയിൽ ഗോൽഗോഥായുടെ അരക്ഷിതാവസ്ഥയിലേക്കാണ്. അവനോടൊപ്പം ആയിരിക്കുക എന്നാൽ ഈ അരക്ഷിതാവസ്ഥയുടെ വെല്ലുവിളി സ്വീകരിക്കുക എന്നതാണ്. ശിഷ്യത്വത്തിനു കൊടുക്കേ വില അതാണ്. പക്ഷെ, ആ വില നൽകാൻ തയ്യാറാണോ എന്ന ചോദ്യം നാം നമ്മോടു തന്നെ ചോദിക്കുക.

നാനാണത്തു ഭ്രാന്തനെപ്പറ്റിയുള്ള ഒരു കഥ ഇപ്രകാരമാണ്. അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ രീതികളിൽ ആകൃഷ്ടനായ ഒരാൾ അദ്ദേഹത്തെ പിൻതുടരാൻ താൽപര്യപ്പെട്ടു. നാനാണത്തു ഭ്രാന്തൻ അയാളെ നിരൂപണപരപ്പെടുത്തിയെങ്കിലും അയാൾ വഴങ്ങിയില്ല. പൊള്ളുന്ന വെയിലിൽ യാത്ര ചെയ്ത് ദാഹിച്ച അവർ ഒരു കുടിയിലേത്തി. അവിടുത്തെ വീട്ടമ്മ തണുത്ത സംഭാരം കൈയിൽ ഒഴിച്ചുകൊടുത്തു. നാനാണത്തു അത് കുടിച്ചു. ശിഷ്യനും കുടിച്ചു. വീടും യാത്രതുടർന്നു. പിന്നീട് ഒരു കള്ളുചെത്തുകാരനെ കൂ. അയാൾ ഇളംകള്ളി കൈയിലൊഴിച്ചു കൊടുത്തു. നാനാണത്തു അത് കുടിച്ചു. ശിഷ്യനും അതുപോലെ ചെയ്തു. തുടർന്നുള്ള യാത്രയിൽ വീടും ദാഹിച്ചു. വഴിയിൽ ഒരു നീരുറവയും കിട്ടി. നാനാണത്തു അവിടെ ഒരു മുശാരിയുടെ ആലയിൽ കയറി. അയാൾ തിളച്ചുചുറ്റുന്ന ലോഹദ്രാവകം നാനാണത്തിന്റെ കൈയിൽ ഒഴിച്ചുകൊടുത്തു. നാനാണത്തു അതും കുടിച്ചു. അതോടെ ശിഷ്യൻ തന്റെ ഉഴുത്തിനു കാത്തുനിൽക്കാതെ ശിഷ്യത്വം അവസാനിപ്പിച്ച് ഓടി രക്ഷപ്പെട്ടു. ശിഷ്യത്വം കേവലം വൈകാരികമായ അനുഭവമല്ല, മറിച്ച് യേശുവിനോടു ചേർന്നുള്ള ഒരു സാഹസിക യാത്രയാണ്. ശിഷ്യത്വം വാഗ്ദാനങ്ങളല്ല, വെല്ലുവിളിയാണ് ഉയർത്തുന്നത്. ഞാൻ കുടിക്കുന്ന പാനപാത്രം കുടിക്കുവാൻ നി തയ്യാറാണോ എന്ന ക്രിസ്തു ശബ്ദം നമ്മുടെ കാതുകളിൽ മുഴങ്ങുന്നു. ആ സാഹസിക യാത്രയുടെ തീവ്രത സ്വന്തം ജീവിതത്തിൽ തിരിച്ചറിഞ്ഞ ബോൺഹോഫർ പറയുന്നത് 'When christ calls a man he bids him come and die'

മുന്നാമതായി ക്രിസ്തുവിൽ വസിക്കുക എന്നാൽ ക്രിസ്ത്യാനുഭവത്തെ നമ്മുടെ ജീവിതത്തിൽ ജ്വലിപ്പിക്കുക എന്നതാണർത്ഥം.

ക്രിസ്തു പറഞ്ഞു നിങ്ങൾ എന്നിൽ വസിച്ചാൽ ഫലദായകമായ അനുഭവത്തിലേക്കു വരും. കൊമ്പ് മുന്തിരിവള്ളിയുമായി ഒട്ടിച്ചേർന്നിരിക്കുമ്പോഴാണ് ഫലദായകമാവുന്നത്. ക്രിസ്തു എന്ന കേന്ദ്രബിന്ദുവിൽ നിന്ന് ഉൾത്തൂണി പകരപ്പെടുത്തിയെ ജീവൻ നമ്മിൽ നിലനിൽക്കും.

ഒന്നാം സങ്കീർത്തകൻ നമ്മെ ഓർമ്മപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു. ആറ്റിരിക്കത്തു നട്ട വൃക്ഷം, അത് തക്കകാലത്തു ഫലം കായ്ക്കണം. നമ്മുടെ ജീവിതത്തെ സ്വാഭാവികമെന്നോ യാദൃശ്ചികമെന്നോ വിശേഷിപ്പിക്കരുത്. നാം ആറ്റിരിക്കത്തു നട്ട വൃക്ഷം പോലെയാണ്. ഓരോരുത്തരും ആയിരിക്കുന്നതിന്റെ പിന്നിൽ കൃത്യമായ ഉദ്ദേശ്യവും ലക്ഷ്യവും നമ്മുടെ ഉടയവനായ ദൈവത്തിനു നമ്മെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള ദൈവ ഇഷ്ടം എന്താണെന്നു തിരിച്ചറിയാൻ നമുക്കു കഴിയണം.

ഫലമില്ലാതെ പോവുക എന്നാൽ ഒരുവൻ തന്നെത്തന്നെ കഞ്ഞാൻ കഴിയാതെ പോവുക എന്നത്രെ. ആർക്കും ഉപകാരമില്ലാതെ പോകുന്ന ജീവിതമാണ് ഫലം നൽകാത്ത വൃക്ഷം.

12-ാം വയസ്സിൽ യേശു ഉച്ചരിച്ചതായി രേഖപ്പെടുത്തിയിരിക്കുന്ന ആദ്യ വാചകം പിതാവിന്റെ ഇടത്തിൽ ആയിരിക്കേണിന്റെ ആവശ്യകതയെക്കുറിച്ചായിരുന്നു. ക്രിസ്തു ക്രൂശിൽ മിഴിപുട്ടുന്നതിനുമുമ്പ് ഉച്ചരിച്ചതും പിതാവേ അങ്ങയുടെ കൈയിൽ എന്റെ ആത്മാവിനെ ഭരമേൽപ്പിക്കുന്നു എന്നാണ്. പിതാവിൽനിന്ന് ആരംഭിച്ച് പിതാവിൽ അവസാനിപ്പിച്ച ജീവിതം. ഈ ധ്യാനാത്മക ജീവിതം യേശുവിനെ നയിച്ചത് സ്നേഹത്തിന്റെ പരമമായ തലത്തിലേക്കാണ്. സ്നേഹത്തിന്റെ അനുപമമായ തീരങ്ങളിലൂടെയാണ് യേശു നടന്നുനീങ്ങിയത്. എല്ലാം നൽകപ്പെടുവാനായി (self emptying) ഉഴിഞ്ഞുവച്ച ആ സ്നേഹദീപം യേശുവിനെ കൊത്തിച്ചത് ത്യാഗത്തിന്റെ കൊടുമുടിയിലാണ്. ക്രൂശിനെ ധ്യാനിക്കുമ്പോൾ നമ്മിൽ നിറയേയ്ക്കേണ്ട യേശു വെളിപ്പെടുത്തിയ സ്നേഹവും ത്യാഗവുമാണ്.

ക്രിസ്തു അവബോധം നമ്മുടെ ഉള്ളിലേക്കു പ്രവേശിക്കുമ്പോൾ നമ്മുടെ താല്പര്യങ്ങൾക്കും അഭിലാഷങ്ങൾക്കുമെല്ലാം മാറ്റം സംഭവിക്കുന്നു. ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ ഇടത്തും വലത്തും ഇരിക്കാനാഗ്രഹിച്ചവർ സമൂഹ പരിവർത്തനത്തിനു വിധേയരാകുന്നു. സ്വയസ്നേഹത്തിൽ നിന്നും ദൈവസ്നേഹത്തിന്റെ പരമമായ തലത്തിലേക്കു യോഹന്നാൻ വളരുന്നു. സ്നേഹത്തിന്റെ അപ്പോസ്തലനായാണ് പിന്നീട് നാം യോഹന്നാനെ അറിയുന്നത്.

നമ്മുടെ സ്വാർത്ഥതയുടെയും പൊയ്മുഖങ്ങളുടെയും ഭൗതിക താല്പര്യങ്ങളുടെയും കാടുവള്ളികളെ ചെത്തിവെടിപ്പാക്കുന്നതിലൂടെ നാം ഫലദായകമായ ശുശ്രൂഷയ്ക്കായി ഒരുക്കപ്പെടണം. ക്രിസ്തു സഞ്ചരിച്ച ആഴമായ പ്രതിബദ്ധതയുടെയും സ്നേഹത്തിന്റെയും ത്യാഗത്തിന്റെയും പാതയിലൂടെ നമുക്കു സഞ്ചരിക്കാം. ക്രിസ്തു പകരുന്ന സമൃദ്ധമായ ജീവന്റെ അനുഭവത്തിനായി നമ്മെത്തന്നെ സമർപ്പിക്കാം.

(ലോസ് ആഞ്ചലീസിൽ വച്ചുനടന്ന സേവികാ സംഘം നാഷണൽ കോൺഫറൻസ് 2012-ൽ ചെയ്ത ധ്യാനപ്രസംഗം)

ആരെ അന്വേഷിച്ചു ഞാൻ

ജീവിതമാം ചക്രം പാരിൽ ശ്രീഘമായ് ഉരുളുമ്പോൾ
തടസ്സമായ് നിൽക്കുന്നതാം ഘടകത്തെ സംരക്ഷിക്കാൻ
ആരെയെന്വേഷിച്ചു ഞാൻ ധരയിലെ വൈദ്യനേയോ
മായയാം ലോകം കാക്കും ദൂതല നിക്ഷേപത്തെയോ
തിരക്കു പെരുത്തോരൻ ജീവിതയാത്രയിൽ ഞാൻ
ശരിക്കും മറന്നുപോയ് ജീവിത യഥാർത്ഥ്യങ്ങൾ
എന്നിലെ തെറ്റിനെ ഞാൻ നിൻ മുഖിൽ അർപ്പിക്കുന്നു
ദീർഘമാം ക്ഷമയാലെൻ തെറ്റിനെ പൊറുക്കണെ
രാത്രിയിൽ ഏകയായ് രോഗക്കിടക്കയിൽ
നിറകൺകളോടെ നിമിഷങ്ങൾ എണ്ണവെ
രാത്രിയാമത്തിൽ ഒരു ദൂതനായ് വന്നെന്നിക്കാ-
ശ്യാസമേകിയീ പ്രാണ സ്നേഹിതൻ
ഇന്നിതാ ഞാൻ രോഗ വിമുക്തയായ്
അത്മമുതമാം കരം എന്നേത്തലോടി
എന്നേ മെനഞ്ഞവൻ നന്നായി അറിയുന്നോൻ
എന്നിലെ രോഗത്തെ തീർത്തു മായ്ച്ചവൻ
എൻ മനതാരിലെ ആർത്തനാദം കേട്ട്
മാറോടണച്ച എൻ യേശുനാഥാ
ഇല്ലില്ലൊരിയ്ക്കലും ഈ ജീവിത പന്ഥാവിൽ
നിയല്ലാതാശ്രയം യേശു നാഥാ.
കുശവൻ കരത്തിൽ കളിമണ്ണുപോലെ
ഈ ചെറുജീവിതം നിൻ കയ്യിലർപ്പിച്ചു
എന്നേ മെനഞ്ഞീടു നിൻ സുന്ദര ശില്പമായ്
പാരിൽ നിൻ സാക്ഷിയായ് അർപ്പിക്കട്ടെ



Susan Mathew, Basildon, U. K

Positive Notes from our Readers

This note is to congratulate Messenger Committee on the recent publication of the 30th Anniversary Edition of Mar Thoma Messenger. When I was with the caroling team of our parish visiting many houses, was proud to see the latest issue of Messenger displayed on the front row of the shelves at each house. The current edition of Messenger was as classy in the pictorials and articles and news. The latest edition maintains and improves on the already high standard of the previous editions. Please keep up the good work!

Thomas Mathew (Jeemon),
Promoter, Malankara Sabha Tharaka
Trinity MTC, Houston, Texas.

The Mar Thoma messenger is an excellent magazine for youths and adults. A very well designed magazine with Christian news, articles and church activities around the globe. Well informed, up to date articles and well published. Thanks to the editorial staff.
Cherian Cherian, Houston, Texas.

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യോസേഫ് എന്ന തച്ചൻ

Rev. Roy Geevarghese, Philadelphia Christos MTC



സ്നേഹത്തിന്റെ പുണ്യോത്സവമായ ശാന്തിയുടെ ദിവ്യോത്സവമായ മഞ്ഞുപെയ്യുന്ന രാവിൽ ആട്ടിടയർ ഉണർന്നിരിക്കുന്ന രാവിൽ പുൽക്കൂട്ടിൽ പിറന്നവന്റെ തേജസ്സ് നിലാവിന്റെ സംഗീതം പോലെ പരിസരങ്ങൾക്ക് ഉണർവേകി. ദിവ്യസംഗീതം കേട്ടവർ രക്ഷകനേയും രക്ഷാസങ്കേതവും തേടി പുറപ്പെട്ടു. ക്രിസ്തു മസ്തിഷ്കം ഒരു യാത്രയുടെ തുടക്കമാണ്. എന്നിരുന്നിട്ടും പുറത്തേക്ക്, എന്നിരുന്നിട്ടും ക്രിസ്തുവിലേക്ക്, ക്രിസ്തുവിൽ നിന്നും സമൂഹത്തിലേക്ക്. ആ യാത്രയ്ക്ക് തുടക്കം കുറിച്ച വ്യക്തികളിൽ ഒരാളാണ് യോസേഫ്. യഹോവ വർദ്ധിപ്പിക്കട്ടെ എന്നർത്ഥമുള്ള യോസേഫിനെ കുറിച്ച് ബൈബിളിൽ വളരെ കുറച്ചു മാത്രമേ രേഖപ്പെടുത്തിയിട്ടുള്ളൂ. ദാവീദ് രാജാവിന്റെ കുടുംബത്തിൽ ഉൾപ്പെട്ടവനാണ് യോസേഫ്. മത്തായി : 1: 16ൽ യോസേഫിന്റെ പിതാവ് യാക്കോബ് എന്നും ലൂക്കോസ് 3 : 24ൽ ഹേലി എന്നും രേഖപ്പെടുത്തിയിരിക്കുന്നു. ദാവീദിനോടുള്ള കുടുംബബന്ധം അബ്രഹാമിൽ തുടങ്ങി അവരോഹണത്തിൽ 14 വീതമുള്ള 3 ഗ്രൂപ്പുകളായി തലമുറകളായി ആരോഹണകരത്തിൽ വിവരിക്കുന്നു.

യോസേഫ് ഒരു സമർപ്പിത മൗനസഞ്ചാരി

യോസേഫ് ദൂതന്റെ ഉൾവിലിയുടെ മുമ്പിൽ ജീവിതം സമർപ്പിച്ച വ്യക്തിയാണ്, ദൈവശബ്ദം കേട്ടപ്പോൾ അതിലധികമായ ഒന്നും പറയാനില്ലാതെ മൗനയാത്ര ചെയ്തു. എല്ലാ പരിഹാസവും നിശബ്ദമായ ഒരു ചെറുപുഞ്ചിരിയോടെ നേരിട്ടു.

യോസേഫ് നീതിമാന്റെ വഴിയലുടെ സഞ്ചാരിച്ചവൻ (മത്തായി 1:19)

സ്വന്തം ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ സുരക്ഷിതത്തിനും സുഖത്തിനുമായ് ആരുടേയും ജീവിതം ബലികൊടുക്കരുത് എന്ന് ആദർശമായിരുന്ന യോഗി. താൻ കാരണം ആരുടേയും കണ്ണ് നിറയാതെ ജീവിക്കുക. കന്യകയുടെ അന്തസ്സിനു ക്ഷതം വരാതെ അവളെ ആദരിച്ച് വേദനയിൽ അവളെ നെഞ്ചോട് ചേർത്ത നീതിമാൻ.

യോസേഫ് വചന ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ ആചാര്യൻ (മത്തായി 1:20,27)

യോസേഫിന്റെ ദൈവവചനത്തിനു പുറത്തുനിൽ ഇടം നൽകി. പുറത്തുനിൽ വിഴുന്ന് വചനം പാഴായി പോകില്ല. ദൂതസ്വരം ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ ലാവണ്യമായ്, ദർശനമായ്, ധ്യാനമായ് മാറി മറുവാക്ക് ഉദിയാടാതെ സ്വന്തം സ്വപ്നങ്ങളെ ബലിക്കഴിച്ച് ജീവിതം സമർപ്പിച്ചു. മതത്തിന്റെ നിഴലിൽ വിവാഹ മോചനം നേടാമായിരുന്നെങ്കിലും ദൈവവചനങ്ങളുടെ ആത്മനിറവിയായ് ജീവിതം ഒരുക്കി.

യോസേഫ് മനസലിവുള്ള തച്ചൻ

ഉള്ളിമുനകൾ കൊട് കൊത്തിയൊരുക്കി ചാരുതയാർന്ന വസ്തുക്കൾ നിർമ്മിക്കുന്ന ശിൽപ്പിയാണു തച്ചൻ. സൃഷ്ടിപരമായി ചിന്തിച്ച് പുതിയ രൂപവും ഭാവവും ശിൽപ്പി നൽകുന്നു. ഒന്നും പാഴായി ഉപേക്ഷിക്കുന്നില്ല. ന്യായപ്രമാണങ്ങളിൽ കന്യക ഗർഭിണിയായാൽ കല്ലെറിഞ്ഞു കൊല്ലണം (ആവർത്തനം 22 :23). കന്യകരിയാമിന്റെ പ്രാണനും അന്തസ്സിനും കേടുവരാതെ അലിവോടെ അവളെ ചേർത്തുകൊടു.

യോസേഫ് രക്ഷകന്റെ സംരക്ഷകൻ

രക്ഷകനായ് കാത്തിരിക്കുക അവനായ് ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ വഴികളേയും സ്വപ്നങ്ങളേയും മനയുക അതിൽ കവിഞ്ഞ് എന്താണു ജീവിതത്തെ പുണ്യമാക്കുന്നത്. ശിശുവിനെ ഹനിക്കുവാൻ രാജാവ് ശ്രമിക്കുമ്പോൾ ശിശുവിന്റെ പ്രാണരക്ഷാർത്ഥം പാലായനം ചെയ്യുകയും എല്ലാ കഷ്ടതകളും സഹിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തു. ലോകത്തിനു രക്ഷയും പുണ്യവും പ്രദാനം ചെയ്യാൻ രക്ഷകനോടൊപ്പം സംരക്ഷകനായി യോസേഫ് സഞ്ചാരം തുടർന്നു. നമുക്കും യോസേഫിന്റെ തുടർയാത്രക്കാരായ് തീർന്നു രക്ഷകനെ ലോകത്തിനു നൽകാം.



The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius congratulated the new Cardinal - Bava Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis Catholicos and the Malankara Catholic Church and Apostolic Exarchate in the USA. Mar Theodosius visited the Malankara Catholic Bishops House in Hicksville and conveyed his felicitations to the Most. Rev. Thomas Mar Eusabius of North American Exarchate and spoke to the Cardinal on the phone. We offer our prayers and felicitations. We look forward to the visit of the new Cardinal to bless all of us in North America.

APDM CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION - 2012



The Christmas celebration of the Association of Physicians and Dentist of the Mar Thoma Church in North America was held at the Courtillian Hall in Syosset, New York on December 1, 2012. The APDM Choir sang melodious carols under the guidance of Dr. John Abraham. Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary gave Christmas message. Dr. John Abraham also spoke on the occasion. The celebration was an evening of carol singing and prayers and about 100 people attended this celebration. Everyone enjoyed the fellowship dinner and the collection made will be contributed to for the rehabilitation and relief work in the Sandy affected areas.

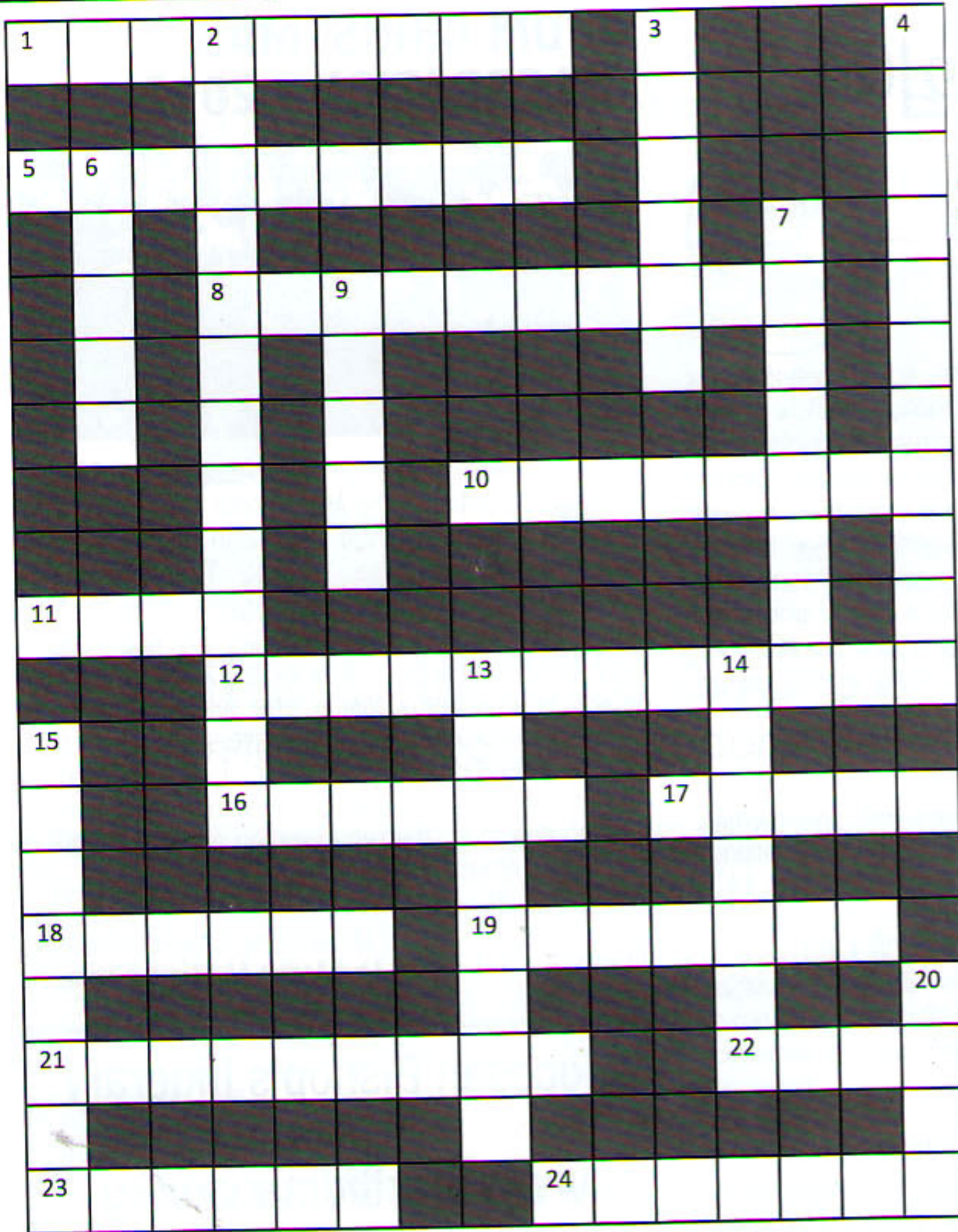
APDM website: www.apdmonline.com
 Dr. Mathew Chacko, President
 Dr. Mohan Abraham, Secretary

Diocesan Bishop's Itinerary
 Please visit the Diocesan website at
www.marthomanae.org
 for the details itineary of Diocesan Bishop
 Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese
 Mar Theodosius Episcopa.

Doctorate Degree for Joseph Mar Thoma

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma, Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church received the doctorate degree from SHIATS Deemed University (Formerly Allahadad Agriculture University) for the exemplary work in the field of social service. This is Metropolitan Thirumeni's third doctorate degree.

Bible Crossword Puzzle



**Judges Chapters:
1-16. NIV Bible**

July 2012 Winners List Continued

WINNERS NAME	Church/Place
31 Santha Varghese	Ascension MTC, PA
32 Thomas GeeVarghese	Bethel MTC Philadelphia
33 Kevin George	Carmel MTC, Boston
34 Molly Mohan	Emmanuel MTC Houston
35 Sosamma Varghese	Emmanuel MTC Houston
36 Aleyamma Mathai	Epiphany MTC NY
37 Sam Thomas	Hermon MTC UK
38 Jeremy Horeb	MTC, Colorado
39 Sicily Skariah	MTC Dallas Famers Br
40 Shaila Mathew	MTC Dallas Famers Br
41 Saramma Poikail	MTC Greater Washington
42 Susan John	MTC Los Angeles
43 Unnee Ranjan	MTC New Jersey
44 Sheila Chandy	MTC San Francisco
45 Omana Titus	MTC Seattle
46 Maureen E Mathew	MTC, Los Angeles
47 Dr. Maxine M Mathew	MTC, Los Angeles
48 Merrill A Mathew	MTC, Los Angeles
49 Annamma Thomas	New Jersey
50 Susan Thomas	Pheonix MT Cong Arizona
51 Maria Stephen	St. Marks MTC Tampa FL
52 Elizabeth George	St. Mathews MTC, Toronto
53 Elsie George	St. Peters MTC, NJ
54 Monica Abraham	St. Peters MTC, NJ
55 Mary Simon	St. Peters MTC, NJ
56 Aleyamma Ninan	St. Thomas MTC NY
57 Saramma Sreeba	Trinity MTC, Houston
58 Chinnamma L John	Trinity MTC, Houston
59 Mariamma M Thomas	Trinity MTC, Houston
60 Achamma Chacko	Trinity MTC, Houston

ACROSS

- 1. The Benjamites failed to dislodge the ___ who were living in Jerusalem.
- 5. Unlike their fathers, the Israelites quickly turned from the way of ___ to the Lord's commands.
- 8. When Gideon praised the Ephraimites, their ___ against him subsided.
- 10. The Lord said to Gideon, ___ now to the people" Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead."
- 11. The Lord gave ___, son of Gera the Benjamite, as a deliverer to the Israelites.
- 12. Midian so ___ the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help.
- 16. ___ was called Jerub-Baal because he broke down Baal's altar.
- 17. The angel of the Lord told Manoah's wife, "No ___ may be used on the boy's head as he is to be a Nazirite."
- 18. That night God did as Gideon requested. Only the ___ was dry, all the ground was covered with dew.
- 19. God sent an evil Spirit Between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem so that the shedding of blood might be ___.
- 21. For eighteen years the Philistines ___ all the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead.
- 22. Gideon told the Israelites, " I will not ___

- over you, Nor will my son. The Lord will rule over you".
- 23. When Samson was approaching the vineyards of ___, a young lion came roaring toward him.
- 24. When the judge died, the people returned to ways even more ___ than those of their fathers.

DOWN

- 2. The angel replied to Manoah, "Why do you ask my name? It is beyond ___.
- 3. The Israelites cried out to the Lord, "We have ___ against you, forsaking our God and serving the Baals.
- 4. The Lord gave the king of Aram into the hands of Othniel who ___ him.
- 6. ___ was the name given to Timnath Serah (Joshua's inheritance) where the angel of the Lord spoke to the Israelites and they wept.
- 7. Delilah called a man to shave off the seven braids of Samson's hair and his ___ left him.
- 9. The angel told the Israelites, "they will be a thorn in your sides and their gods will be a ___ to you.
- 13. The Lord was angry with Israel because they had ___ the Covenant.
- 14. ___, son of Anath, was next in line after Ehud to save Israel.
- 15. Samson's parent did not know that the Lord was seeking an occasion to ___ the Philistines.
- 20. The Lord left some nations in order to ___ the Israelites to see whether they would obey the Lord's commands.

Deadline for Answers:
Feb15, 2013

Mail to:
Philip Manuel
23 Lake Street
Billerica, MA 01821
Phone: 978-663-3203

By Email (pdf format only):
Varampath23@msn.com

Please include your name, name of Parish, State and phone number.

Prepared by Mr. Philip Manuel
and Mrs. Laila Anie Philip
Carmel, MTC Boston

30th UK & Europe Mar Thoma Family Conference



The 30th UK and Europe Mar Thoma Family Conference was held at the High Leigh Conference Centre, London from August 31 to September 2, 2012. St. James MTC, London hosted the conference. The theme selected for this year's conference was "Ecclesia - Life, Identity and Challenges." There were separate sessions for youth and adults. Rev. A. T. Zachariah and Rev. Jaisen A. Thomas were the main leaders. All Achens from UK and Europe attended this conference. About 264 participants experienced God's blessings through this family conference. Dr. K. John, conference convener welcomed all Achens and delegates

to the family conference. Rev. Sajeev Thomas, Vicar of St. James MTC delivered the presidential address. His Grace Bishop Angaelos officially inaugurated the conference by lighting the lamp and delivered a thought-provoking message. The conference committee released a resource book and souvenir. His Grace Bishop Angaelos released both publications by giving the first copies to Rev. A. T. Zacharia & Rev. Jaisen A. Thomas respectively.

Rev. Sajeev Thomas & Shiju Thomas

The Diocesan Council Meeting



A meeting of the Diocesan Council was held on Friday, September 28, 2012 at the Sun Palace Restaurant Meeting Room, Harlingen, Texas. The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius presided over the meeting. Mrs. Laila Anie Philip led the devotion. Rev. K.

E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary, welcomed the council members. This meeting was arranged in association with the Mexico Mission visit of the council members. Rev. Sabu C. Mathew, the Diocesan Council representative from Europe region was also present in the council meeting.

The council has decided to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the Diocesan formation from January – December 2013 and also planned various programs and projects to make this celebration relevant and meaningful both in the Diocesan and Regional level. The Council approved the Report and Accounts of the 30th National Family Conference. The details of the ecumenical fellowship dinner to be held at Houston on January 18, 2013 were also discussed. Various mission involvements of the diocese are evaluated and took appropriate decision to strengthen them regionally along with the Jubilee Celebrations.

Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

Churches Together in England Forum - 2012

We had the privilege and honor to attend the CTE triennial forum on the behalf of the Mar Thoma Church, which was held at the Hayes conference centre at Swanwick from 23rd to 25th October 2012. The theme 'What does love require of us?' was based on 1 Corinthians chapters 12 & 13. Professor Judith Lieu, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, gave a thorough theological exposition of the theme; it was a most memorable talk.

The moderator of the forum was Janet Scott of the Society of Friends and the vice moderator was Bishop Doye Agamma of the Apostolic Pastoral Association. There was an amazing calmness about the place; the Quaker influence was most evident and very effective. It was a most representative ecumenical gathering of 270 delegates from 35 member churches, local ecumenical partnerships and Churches Together groups. The following are some of the thoughts emerged at the conference: *Photo Courtesy: Chris Dobson*

1. God has gifts for us; we should open our hands and receive with gratefulness what God has to give to us and then share these with others for the common good of the community.
2. Love binds the Trinity and each of us in the love of God.



Photo Courtesy: Chris Dobson

3. Opposite of unity is not diversity, but disunity.
4. Visible unity in God's love is our ultimate goal; we must be patient with those who are disappointed and impatient with ecumenism, it is a journey together.
5. The ecumenical movement is now moving to be mission-oriented phase first, more than with unity first. Social action is feeding a hungry person; social justice is asking the question why so many are hungry? The answer to the question, 'can we do mission together?' is yes, we can under God's grace. We are a people of God, conferring together, rooted in prayer, receiving gifts from one another, varied and diverse gifts, but concerned as stewards of God's created world.
6. Churches must stand and make voices heard on behalf of those who have no voices and those who are left in the margins of the society. However, all churches have different authority structure; making consensus-based statements on public issues are not often easy.
7. Diversity is God's distribution of gifts for different situations and different needs and we should learn to celebrate this diversity in unity. The triune diversity and unity in God is the source God-given diversity and unity of God's people. We should learn to celebrate it with thanksgiving. Mary Tanner one of the presidents of WCC said, "To live apart from one another is to contradict the very nature of God's own being, to con-

WHAT
DOES
LOVE
REQUIRE
OF US?
CTE FORUM
23-25
OCTOBER
2012

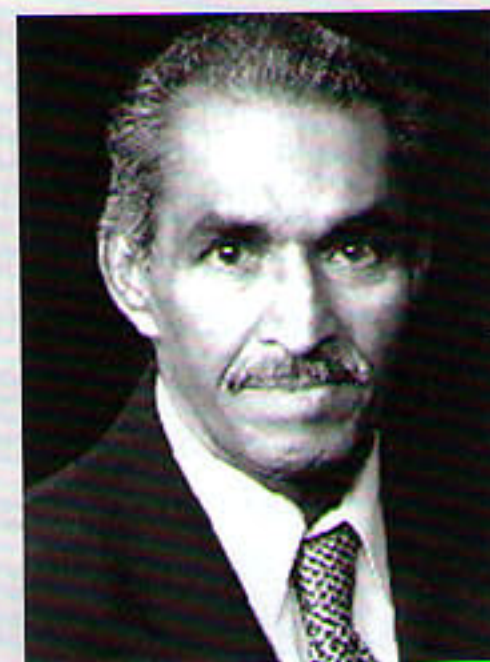
tradict love. To be visibly one is the only truly credible way to manifest God's love in our broken and hurting world. That is our ecumenical vocation: there is no turning back."

8. We discussed, privately and in public debate, the pain felt by many of the lack of Eucharistic hospitality. Rev. Dr. Cornick had a beautiful anecdote to tell us: Twenty-five years ago, at the time of Swanwick declaration and forming the CTE, Cardinal Newman of Westminster invited non-Catholics to come forward for a blessing during Eucharist, and he found himself blessing Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie and host of other church leaders who could not share the bread and wine. And then, after the communion, there was a significant silence. Cardinal Hume found it hard to finish the Mass, since he was deeply moved. The following day's service, when the Cardinal and the rest of the Catholic delegation came forward to receive blessings from Anglican and Presbyterian clergy, was equally moving. We highlight this significant and moving story to do something about it in our relationship with Orthodox, Jacobites and our Church. We had 176 years of separation; it is time that we come to terms with such important issues in our ecumenical relationships.

9. The General Secretary of CTE, the Rev. Dr. David Cornick had the following message in his report: "Unity is, in the end, not about instruments, structural architecture, or money, it is about recognizing the likeness of Jesus in each other and wanting to grow together in fellowship, service and mission for unity, as Pope Benedict reminded us, is born nothing less than our faith in Christ. As we grow in Christ, we grow in relationships with each other, and the more painful our separation from each other become. We exist for no other reason than to enable churches of England to grow together until separation becomes invisible, and there is '... no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3.28). We are deeply grateful to you for allowing us to attend this forum on behalf of the Mar Thoma Church.

Rev. Sajeev Thomas & Dr. Zac Varghese, London

Obituary

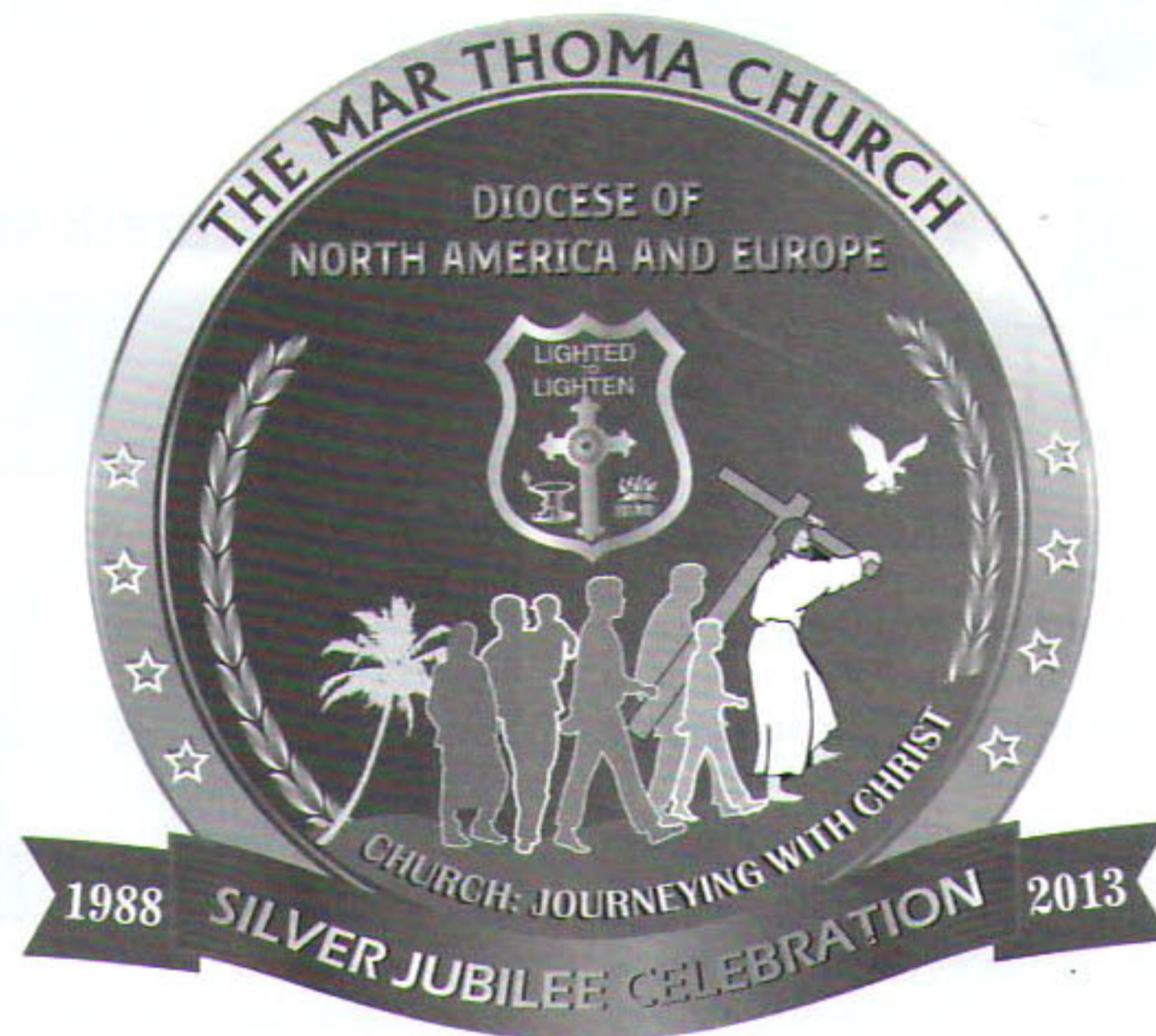


Puthethu Chacko Jose

Puthethu Chacko Jose was born on February 2, 1950, in Pandunadu North (Prayer), Kerala, India. He was the fifth of seven children born to late Puthethu

Chacko Mathai and Alayamma Mathai. P.C. Jose was a hard-working, young man. Growing up with his three brothers and three sisters, he always put his family above all else. Jose got married on April 24, 1978 to Suseela (Chavadivadakkethil) from Kollakadavu. Working in the Middle East from 1980 until 1996, they were blessed with three sons. In 1998, with his family, P.C. Jose immigrated to the United States. They settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and he worked for Cardone Industries from 1998 until 2009. He was a loving husband, father, grandfather, brother, and uncle. He is survived by his wife Suseela Jose, children Justin P. Jose married to Sini P. Justin, Jessin P. Jose, and late Jeffin P. Jose. His grandchildren include Jayden Jose Justin and Janice Mary Justin.

Diocese of North America and Europe Silver Jubilee Year - 2013



Jubilee Inauguration

**At the Immanuel
Mar Thoma Church, Houston
on January 19, 2012**

**09.00 a. m.
Holy Qurbana Service**

**10.30 a. m.
Public Meeting**

The Diocesan Bishop
**Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese
Mar Theodosius**
will preside over the meeting.

Very Rev. Dr. Douglas Travis
(The Dean of South West
Episcopal seminary, Austin)
will give Key note address.

Major events of the Jubilee Year

01. Jubilee Inauguration
02. Jubilee Thanksgiving Day with Special Order of Service on July 7, 2013
03. Jubilee Focus: Empowering the 8 Regions of the Diocese.
04. Closing Ceremony: Nov 23, 2013 in New York.
05. Formation of Regional Activity Committee (RAC)
06. Bible Study and LEAD program
07. Jubilee Celebration with Common Holy Qurbana in each region.
08. India Mission Trip: (To five places)
09. Strengthening the on-going Mission of the Diocese.
10. Regional Family Conferences in 2013
11. National Conferences: Various Organizations
12. Publication of a Jubilee Volume and Diocesan Directory.
13. Altar Boys in Parishes.
14. Pre-Theology Training.
15. Orientation Program for Clergy coming to the Diocese.
16. Study of Church History / Lay Leadership Training.
17. Dialogue on the Journey and Growth of the Diocese.
18. Seminar on Identity, Vision and Mission of the Diocese.
19. Regional Projects and Programs. Possibility of a Regional Office.
20. Involvement of the Various organizations
 - Yuvajana Sakyam : 25 Housing Aid.
 - Youth Fellowship : Mission Projects / Scholarship in Mexico, Manna etc.
 - Sevika Sanghom : 25 Marriage Aid
 - Vol Evg Assn. : Support for 5 institutions for the Differently Abled.
 - Sunday School : Scholarship for higher education
 - Senior Fellowship : Support for the Mandirams of our Church
 - Parish Choir : Musical Instruments in mission field

EPISCOPAL VISITS

St. Peter's MTC, New Jersey



The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius visited St. Peter's MTC, NJ on November 18, 2012. The Parish celebrated this day as Thanksgiving Day and Diaspora Sunday. Thirumeni led the Holy Qurbana service in which Rev. M. S. Daniel, Vicar, and Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary also assisted in the service. The special worship service for Diaspora Sunday was also conducted. Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, preached from the word of God based on Luke 1: 5-23 in which he explained the contemporary challenges and mission of Diaspora community drawing some parallels from the life and ministry of Zachariah and his context. The parishioners participated in one-day income collection as an expression of thanks giving and dedication. About 400 people participated in the Holy Qurbana.

Rev. M. S. Daniel, Vicar

St. Stephen's MTC, New Jersey



The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius blessed the St. Stephen's MTC with his visit on October 13 and 14, 2012. His Grace met with various organization representatives and

office bearers of the parish during his visit. Thirumeni led the Holy Communion Service in English on October 14th, which the parish celebrated as Family Sunday. His Lordship also conducted the dedication service of first communicants. There was also a dedication of the altar boys. Five boys dedicated as altar boys and ten children received first communion. The luncheon fellowship is followed after the Kaimuthu service. The visit gave an occasion for the parishioners to greet the Diocesan Episcopa and also to interact with him.

Rev. Geevarghese Kochummen, Vicar

Dublin Nazareth MTC, Ireland



The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa visited the Dublin Nazareth MTC from Sep. 13th to 15th 2012. This was Thirumeni's 3rd Episcopal visit after taking charge as the Diocesan Bishop of the North America and Europe Diocese. On Thursday, evening Thirumeni met members of the parish at parsonage. On Friday, 14th there was a meeting with His Grace. Dr. Mathews Mar Themotheos, the Bishop of UK, Europe and African diocese of the Indian Orthodox Church at the parsonage. It was an opportunity to enhance the ecumenical relationship between the two churches in Dublin. In the afternoon Thirumeni visited the War Memorial Park, which is a sacrificial symbol of the 44,400 soldiers who gave their life for the country during the First and Second World Wars. In the evening, there was managing committee meeting in which Thirumeni chaired and discussed various matters related to the growth of the parish. Thirumeni celebrated Holy Qurbana on 15th Saturday morning at Tallaght St. Maelruain's Church. Six children received the first Holy Communion and thereby entered into the full fellowship of the Church. During the service Thirumeni gave a meaningful exhortation based on the gospel of St. Luke 2:25-38, in which he highlighted on the vision on church as the people of God, the eloquent vision about the uniqueness of Christ and the role of elders to translate the divine responsibility to the next generation through the church. After communion service there was a general body meeting of the parish and Thirumeni presided over the same. During the meeting, Thirumeni gave directions to take appropriate decisions for the overall development of the parish. After the general body meeting there was a fellowship meal in which the members shared the joy of being with Thirumeni. Thirumeni gave concrete suggestions and blessings for the constructive growth for the parish. As a parish we are honored and blessed by the gracious presence and leadership of our beloved Thirumeni.

Rev. Jameson K., Vicar

MTC of Greater Washington

Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius visited the Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington from Sept. 22 -23, 2012. On Saturday, Sept.22, Thirumeni met with the Executive Committee and inquired about the progress of the parish and its organizations.



Thirumeni expressed his gratitude to the parish for its assistance in hosting the Clergy Family Conference, and the Diocesan Assembly in 2012. He challenged the MTC of Greater Washington to take a leadership role in the regional activities of the Diocese and to encourage the younger generation to play an active role in the growth of the parish and the diocese. Thirumeni also met with the eleven children who were preparing to take Holy Communion for the first time on Sunday. He discussed with them the importance of this sacrament and answered their questions. Later that afternoon, Thirumeni participated in a Social Hour/Cook-Out hosted jointly by the Yuvajana Sakhyam, Young Families Fellowship, and Youth Fellowship at the parish facility. It was an opportunity for fellowship, food, and fun activities for all who attended. Thirumeni participated in all activities and everyone enjoyed the company of Thirumeni. In the evening Thirumeni led the Sandhya Namaskaram and shared a message.

On Sunday, Sept. 23, the Diocesan Episcopa led the Holy Communion service. During this service, he welcomed the eleven First Holy Communicants to participate in this sacrament. He congratulated the children and their parents on this important milestone of their Christian lives. After the service, Thirumeni met separately with the Sevika Sangham, Youth Fellowship, and Young Families Fellowship to discuss the future goals of each organization. Later that afternoon, Thirumeni visited four parishioners who were unable to attend the worship service due to their physical ailments and prayed for them.

Beena Philipose, Secretary

San Francisco MTC, California

Diocesan Bishop visited the parish from September 29, 2012 – October 3, 2012. On September 30st, Thirumeni celebrated the Holy Communion Service along with Vicar Rev. Viji T. Kurikesu, at the Church in Livermore. Eleven children participated in the Holy Communion for the first time. Thirumeni gave an inspiring sermon in relation to the sacrament of confession. Thirumeni distributed Bible and certificates to the First Communicants. Thirumeni handed over prizes to the Sunday School children who achieved a distinction score in the Diocesan Examination. There was a fellowship at the Social Hall and Thirumeni interacted with the members of the parish. Thirumeni met with the Executive Committee members of the parish and discussed the upcoming programs and other activities of the parish. Thirumeni also held a teleconference with the committee members of the Mar Thoma Development Center. Anita Sujit summarized the work so far done and



Biju Abraham shared the feedback receiving from various parishes in US. Thirumeni recommended several new projects that DC team can undertake in the upcoming months including creating and distributing liturgies and chants, Bible Study series etc. Thirumeni attended a prayer meeting at the residence of Dr. M. M. Thomas in Stockton, CA and members of the parish especially from the Sacramento region attended the same. The Episcopal visit was a great blessing to the members of Mar Thoma Church of San Francisco. *Rev. Viji T. K., Vicar*

Brownsville Prayer Fellowship, TX



The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius visited the Brownsville prayer group of the Immanuel MTC, Houston on September 27, 2012, which met at the residence of Mr. Soni Oommen, McAllen. The visit was in connection with the Diocesan Council meeting at Harlingen and visit to Mexico Mission field on September 28-29, 2012. Thirumeni celebrated Holy Qurbana assisted by Rev. A. T. Thomas, Vicar, Immanuel MTC, Houston, Rev. Roy Abraham Thomas, Youth Chaplain, Houston, and Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary. Rev. K. E. Geevarghese shared word of God. Thirumeni exhorted the community to give all possible support to the mission work of the Diocese. The visit was a blessed experience for the members of the prayer fellowship. Brownsville prayer fellowship is a part of the Immanuel MTC, Houston.

Rev. A. T. Thomas, Vicar

St. Mathews MTC, Canada



As part of the Episcopal visit to the St. Mathew's MTC, Toronto, Rt.

മലയാളി

മനുഷ്യരിലെ നമ്മുടെ സുഹൃത്ത്

Coming
in
April 2013

മലയാളികൾക്കു മാത്രമായി അമേരിക്കയിൽ നിന്നും ലൈഫ്സ്റ്റൈൽ മാഗസിൻ.
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Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius visited the parish on Friday 3rd August 2012. On the same day in the evening there was a combined meeting of the Executive Committee and the Property and Capital Management Committee presided over by Thirumeni. On Sunday Thirumeni conducted the Holy Qurbana in the morning. During the service Thirumeni gave 14 children their First Holy Communion. Rev. Varghese K. Abraham, Vicar, Rev. T. J. Abraham and Rev. Dr. Abraham Kuruvilla were present and assisted the service. Thirumeni also visited the houses of few members. The members of the parish were encouraged to plant more trees in the land available to make it green and a clean environment. The committee and youth members were motivated to organize the national youth fellowship conference for the year 2013.

Rev. Varghese K Abraham, Vicar

St. James MTC, London



Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa visited St. James MTC, London on 16th September 2012 and celebrated Holy Communion and led the dedication service for the First Communicants. Four youngsters became the full communicant members of the church by taking the first communion. It was a blessed time for the parish to remember its responsibilities in nurturing children born and brought up in a different community. Thirumeni in his devotional address based on Luke 2: 41-52, reiterated the importance of the place of worship in our lives. Our generations should be molded within the framework of the divine spaces including the home and the temple of God. We as a worshipping community should move forward even in the midst of our struggles and look forward for a better and liberated world.

The choir dedication was also conducted during Thirumeni's visit, Parish celebrated the Sunday as Suvishesha Nidhi Sunday and set apart the offertory towards the Diocesan Suvishesha Nidhi. Thirumeni congratulated the parish for hosting the 2012 UK and Europe Family Conference. In his concluding remarks Thirumeni challenged the parish members to initiate the mission engagements in the Jubilee Year of the Diocese. Episcopal Visit truly energized the parish and had given clarity on its ministries and journey ahead in the life of St. James MTC.

The parish Secretary Mr. Geogy Varghese welcomed the Diocesan Bishop and Mr. Shiju Thomas, Family Conference Convener presented a brief report of the 30th Session of the UK and Europe Family Conference. Thirumeni interacted with the parish members after the service. Presence, prayers and leadership of Theodosius Thirumeni made 16th September 2012 a blessed day in the life of St. James MTC, London. More than 250 people attended the service and joined in the fellowship meal.

Rev. Sajeev Thomas, Vicar

Sinai MTC, North London, UK



Our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa visited Sinai MTC on 25th and 26th of August 2012. On 25th Saturday at 10 A.M Thirumeni presided the COMPE (Council of Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe) meeting, which was hosted by Sinai MTC in the St. George's Church hall. The delegates from different parishes in UK and Europe attended the meeting.

The executive committee of the parish met with Thirumeni and discussed about the concerns and growth of the parish. The committee was encouraged to complete the purchase of a parsonage for the Vicar. They were also motivated to remit all the dues for the Sabha and Diocese promptly every year. On 26th Sunday, Thirumeni conducted the Holy Communion service in Malayalam. Around 150 members participated in this service. This Episcopal visit was a blessed and graceful occasion.

Rev. V. G. Geevarghese, Vicar

San Antonio Prayer Group, TX



San Antonio Prayer Group, under Austin Mar Thoma Church was honored to host the visit of our Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius on Friday, 23rd Nov, 2012 in San Antonio. During his visit, Thirumeni led the Holy Communion Service followed by an official inauguration of our Sunday School. Thirumeni was assisted by Rev. John N. Abraham, Vicar of Austin Mar Thoma Church and Rev. P.M. Thomas (Retired). Lay Leaders, Mr. Jinnu John and Mr. Mathew Kurian also assisted Thirumeni in the Service. The Holy Qurbana was in Malayalam and about 59 people attended the Service. Following the Service, Sujan Easow, San Antonio Committee Member announced the upcoming events and the schedules. He welcomed our Bishop to the great city of San Antonio and the Sunday School students sang English and Malayalam songs on that occasion.

Thirumeni addressed the small but vibrant San Antonio Mar Thoma Community. Thirumeni also officially inaugurated the Sunday school and reiterated the importance of parent's role in the life of the children. Thirumeni announced the upcoming Diocesan Silver Jubilee inauguration at Houston and invited all members to be a part of this great celebration. Ani Alexander, our Sunday School Superintendent also spoke on the occasion about the Sunday School. The guests for the evening were, Rev. Mathews George, Vicar of San Antonio Orthodox Church, Ms. Michelle Carey and Juliana Ebenezer representing Oxford United Methodist Church.

The evening program ended with vote of thanks by Jinnu John and prayer by Rev. Mathews George, which was followed by a Kaimuthu Service by our Bishop. Our Thirumeni encouraged a 'Meet and Greet' session while the dinner was being served.

Sujan Easow, Committee Member, San Antonio

MTC Dallas, Farmer's Branch



The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa visited the MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch from July 27-29, 2012. The visit witnessed the ordination of Rev. Dn. Christopher Phil Daniel of MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch. On Saturday Thirumeni attended a clergy meeting of Dallas area and visited the sick people. He also met the parish committee and members of the second-generation group. On Sunday the newly ordained Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel celebrated the Puthen Qurbana and the Diocesan Bishop delivered the sermon. The Episcopal visit was a blessing to the parish and a time of rejuvenation.

Rev. Jose C. Joseph Mathew, Vicar

Austin Mar Thoma Church



The Austin MTC was blessed and honored by the annual visit of the Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa from 22nd to 26th November 2012. This was his 3rd Official visit to the parish after he took charge as the Diocesan Bishop of North America and Europe Diocese in 2009.

On November 25th Sunday at 9:30 am, Thirumeni led the celebration of the Holy Communion in English. Besides the Vicar Rev. John N Abraham, Rev. P.M. Thomas assisted the service. Thirumeni gave an inspiring and thought-provoking sermon based on Luke: 1:28. Very Rev. Dr. Douglas Travis, Vice president and Dean of the South-West Episcopal Seminary also attended the service as a special invited guest. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa led first Communicant's dedication service during the Holy Communion service. Eight children from the parish received their first communion. Rev. Douglas Travis presented all the first communicants with a copy of the Holy Bible on behalf of the Parish.

After the Service and announcements, Parish day celebration was also held. Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Thirumeni, Rev. Dr. Douglas Travis, Rev. John N Abraham and Rev. P.M. Thomas were present. During the program of the parish day Secretary Mr. Sabu T Cheriyan presented the 2nd Parish Day Report. Diocesan Episcopa gave the message and Rev. Dr. Douglas Travis gave the felicitation. Along with the Parish day program Mr. Jacob Thomas convener of Souvenir committee introduced the souvenir and Thirumeni did the Souvenir Kick Off. About 192 people attended the service and participated in the lunch fellowship in the Seminary cafeteria hall organized by the first communicants. The Executive Committee Members shared with Diocesan Bishop their concerns in an open discussion and the meeting ended by 2:00 pm with prayer and benediction by Thirumeni.

The Diocesan Episcopa with the Vicar and the parish Secretary visited some families where members are either sick or bereaved at the loss of their dear ones. The Members of the Austin Mar Thoma Church are blessed and honored by the visit of the Episcopa.

Sabu T Cheriyan, Secretary

Christos MTC, Philadelphia



Christos Mar Thoma Church 2nd Anniversary and Reception to Rt. Rev. Dr Mathews Mar Makarios Episcopa was held on Oct 14th at the church. Following the Holy Communion, a public meeting was held. Many distinguished religious, political, and social leaders from the Tristate area attended the public meeting. Chief guests list included our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Rt. Rev. Dr. Mathews Mar Makarios, Pennsylvania State Senator Michael Stack, Representatives Brendan Boyle, Brain O' Neal, and Priests and Vicars from local parishes and denominations.

Rev. Roy Geevarghese (Vicar) Mr. Binu Philip (Secretary)

GENERAL NEWS

South-East Region Sunday School Competitions





2012 South-East regional Sunday school competitions were held on Nov 17th Saturday at Philadelphia Mar Thoma Church. As always, this is a forum for our talented youngsters to present their God-given talents. This year's overall winner trophy was won by St Peter's MTC, New Jersey. The second overall trophy was won by Ascension MTC Philadelphia, and the 3rd place went to Philadelphia Mar Thoma Church
Thomas V. Philip, Regional Secretary

APDM Annual Retreat – 2012



The 21st annual retreat of the Association of Physicans and Dentists of the Mar Thoma Church, Diocese of North America and Europe was held at the Kaatskill Mountain Club, Hunter, NY from Oct 19th to 21st, 2012. The main speakers were Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Diocesan Bishop and Rev. Saju Cherukara, student at Princeton University. The theme was "Establish the work of our hands" (Psalm 90:17b). About 30 participants attended the conference from different parishes of the Diocese. The high lights of the conference were Bible studies, meditations, theme presentations, talent night, mission and witnessing sessions. The conference came to a close with Holy Qurbana on Sunday, October 21st. It was a real blessing and everyone praised God and felt renewed and strengthened after the retreat.

Dr. Alex Thomas

Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam 14th National Conference – 2012

The 14th Yuvajana Sakhyam National Conference was held from October 12 - 14, 2012 at Embassy Suites, Philadelphia, hosted by the Ascension Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam, Philadelphia. The theme for the conference was "Empowering the Family: Enriching the Generations." About 344 delegates from 19 parishes from all over United



States and Canada participated. A Souvenir was also released to commemorate the occasion. The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa inaugurated the conference. Rt. Rev. Dr. Mathews Mar Makarios Episcopa of Kottayam-Kochi Diocese led the theme exposition and the Bible study. Apart from the Bishops Rev. A. B. Binu, Vicar of Long Island MTC exposed the main theme and Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla, Youth Chaplain, South-East Region led a Seminar based on the theme. Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary and Rev. Baby John, Vice President - Diocesan Yuvajana Sakhyam gave the felicitation speeches during the inaugural session. Mr. John Varghese, Diocesan Yuvajana Sakhyam Secretary and Mr. Babu P. Simon, Diocesan Yuvajana Sakhyam Treasurer also delivered felicitations during the Conference. On Sunday morning, Rt. Rev. Dr. Mathews Mar Makarios Episcopa led the Holy Communion and delivered the concluding message. The St. Mark's MTC Yuvajana Sakhyam, Tampa, Florida, will host the 15th National Conference. Rev. Antony T. Varghese served as the president and Mr. Binu C. Thomas as the general convener of the Conference.

Rev. Antony T Varghese, Vicar, Ascension MTC, PA

13th National Sevika Sanghom Conference



The XIII National Sevika Sanghom conference of the Diocese of North America and Europe was held at the Westin hotel of Los Angeles from October 4th to 7th 2012. The Sevika Sanghom of the Los Angeles MTC had the honor of hosting the 13th national conference with the support of the Diocesan Sevika Sanghom. The theme selected was "Abide in me and be fruitful" based on John 15:4. About 228 registrants from 26 parishes of the Diocese attended the conference. The conference was a great blessing to everyone who attended. Everyone enjoyed the beautiful ambience, food, and comfort offered by the Westin hotel while having a very meaningful and fruitful study, fellowship, and spiritual experience during the conference. The inaugural day program started with a ceremonial procession, worship service, welcoming the delegates, lamp lighting and release of the souvenir. Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Diocesan Episcopa, Rt. Rev. Dr. Mathews Mar Makarios Episcopa, the President of the Suvishesha Sevika Sanghom and Mrs. Anita Daniel were the main leaders. The conference was also blessed by the presence of seven Achens from various parishes. Cultural activities, yoga sessions and talent night program added to the enjoyment during the conference. The choir sang beautiful songs throughout the conference. The conference closed on Sunday with Holy Communion.

The Sevika Sanghom of Emmanuel MTC, Lubbock, will host the 14th conference.

Rev. Thomas John, Vicar, Los Angeles MTC

Ecumenical World Sunday School Celebration



Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." Matthew 19:14. The "little children" came to Jesus in a very special manner this year on World Sunday School Day. Because, this year, World Sunday School Day was celebrated in an ecumenical manner at the Mar Thoma Church of Oklahoma on Sunday, November 4th. Over 120 Sunday School children, parents, teachers, and Achen from four churches namely St. Thomas Orthodox Church, St. George Syriac Orthodox Church, Holy Family Catholic Church, and the Mar Thoma Church of Oklahoma participated in this event. This was the first time such an ecumenical program was conducted for the Sunday School children. The program gave the Sunday School children of each church an opportunity to sing songs to praise God. After a brief program, there was time for fellowship, food, and fun for all those who attended.

Rev. Shibi Abraham, Vicar, Oklahoma MTC

Lay institute report Washington, Baltimore & Virginia Parishes



A one-day seminar of the lay institute was held in Washington MTC on November 8, 2012. It was a joint effort of the Washington, Baltimore and Virginia parishes of the South-East Center. Rev. Sajeew Thomas, Vicar of St. James MTC, London led the study session. The theme and vision of the meeting was "Relevance of Bible Study and its Methodology." Achen stressed the Zacheus methodology of Bible study. Zacheus climbed up the tree to see and understand Jesus who he loved. But Jesus requested him to come down and walk with him to his home. So we need to humble ourselves from our "heights" and be ready to Journey with our Lord to understand him and to witness to him. Rev. Binoy Thomas, Vicar of Washington MTC, Rev. Benu John, Vicar, Baltimore MTC, and about 16 members from all the three parishes attended the seminar. After the study session there was a discussion session in which the attendees decided to follow up the materials discussed during the study session. A lay-coordinator was also nominated for the

purpose of leading the discussion session. The Washington MTC under the able guidance of Rev. Binoy Thomas hosted the study program in a way, which benefited all those who attended. The members from Washington/Baltimore/Virginia Parishes who participated in the Lay Institute appreciate the Diocese and specially our Diocesan Episcopa for initiating a Bible meditation seminar, which lies at the core of our spirituality.

Rev. Benu John, Vicar Baltimore MTC

PARISH NEWS

MAR THOMA CHURCH OF DALLAS, FARMERS BRANCH

MAR THOMA FEST - A FESTIVAL WITH A PURPOSE



The 13th Mar Thoma Fest by the MTC Dallas, FB was held on October 6, 2012. The festival is an occasion for the members of the parish and other sister parishes to come together to raise funds for the various mission projects of the parish. The funds raised through the fest are used for 'Snehatheeram' HIV/AIDS project at Manjalummoodu, and MRCD an institution for mentally challenged children in Thelliyoor, Kerala. This year's chief guest was Mr. Bill Glancey, Mayor of the City of Farmers Branch. He congratulated the parish for providing its support to the citizens of the City of Farmers Branch through its neighborhood mission projects. He informed that the City is taking efforts to request U. S Immigration to make the period required for a Green Card holder to become a U. S citizen lesser so that the families can unite much earlier since there are huge waiting periods in many family categories especially spouses and children. There were several entertainment and cultural programs including Vallam Kali by Yuvajana Sakhyam, Villadichan Pattu by Dallas/Mesquite prayer group, all of which added flavor to the fest in addition to the songs by Springs of Glory, Magic show by Magician Kendal Keyene, dances by different groups and songs by individuals and Choir of MTC Dallas, FB. The traditional Kerala style Chenda Melam by Chirackal family from Houston was an added attraction of this year. There were different stalls by outside businesses and parish organizations and also different rides and games for the children. All the proceeds from this fest are being donated for the different charity works undertaken by the parish. A raffle was also conducted to raise funds and also a round trip ticket to India has been auctioned to the highest bidder. The Mar Thoma Fest has grown to one of the largest festivals of the Indian Christian community in Dallas. Mr. Suju Mathew, coordinated the event with the support of various subcommittee conveners and committee members as wells as volunteers and members of the parish. Rev. Jose C. Joseph, Vicar of the parish provided the leadership and guidance for the effective conduct of this year's fest.

Mr. Suju Mathew, Convener

MTC Dallas, FB Family Retreat – 2012



The 10th annual family retreat of the MTC Dallas Farmers Branch was held from August 30th to September 2nd at Camp Copass Retreat Center, in Denton Texas about 30 miles of north of DFW airport. Rev. Saji Thomas, Vicar of Sehion MTC, Dallas was the main speaker. This year's theme for the retreat was 'Challenges in Christian Family Life.' Rev. Jose C. Joseph, Vicar of MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch, gave active leadership for the retreat. The Convener, Mrs. Vijaya Raju, and Joint Convener, Mr. P.V. Thomas, coordinated the retreat in a setting that provided fun for the entire family with enjoyable programs and a time for spiritual growth and reflection for all those who attended. Rev. George Jacob, the Dallas area Youth Chaplain, led the Bible study, which focused on topics of Christian family. Mr. Sam Alex presented the retreat theme. Ms. Janice Mathew and Ms. Sheena John led breakout sessions for children. Other programs that contributed to the success of the retreat included the worship led by the melodious choir, the Bible quiz conducted by Mrs. Susan Thomas, and the group discussions all of which made the retreat an uplifting spiritual experience. The evening was filled with various programs during the talent show including songs, skits by adults and children, and a comedy show for all ages and 'Pradesikavartha' radio program in Malayalam. Rev. Jose C. Joseph led the dedication service on Saturday night, which served as a time for rededication for many families. The retreat concluded with the Holy Communion Service, on Sunday morning, which was led by Rev. Jose C. Joseph, and assisted by Rev. P.V. Thomas.

Mrs. Vijaya Raju, Convener

Epiphany MTC, New York



Harvest festival of the parish was held on Sunday, September 2nd, 2012. The events of the day began with Holy Qurbana service at 9:30 AM. From 11:30 am to 4 pm, three events were held simultaneously. First part was auction of various items brought by the families which included decorative pieces, hand crafts, paintings, new cloths, potted plants, fruits, vegetables and baked goods. The second event was the food sale where various organizations of the parish arranged five food-stalls in the parish parking lot. The third event was entertainment

programs. It was a blessed time of fellowship for all those who have participated.



The 31st Parish day was celebrated on Sunday July 15th 2012. Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Theethos Episcopa was the chief guest and gave the Parish day message. Parish gave reception to Theethos Thirumeni since it was his grace first visit to the Parish.



Epiphany Mar Thoma Sevika Sanghom won the overall Championship in the Sevika Sanghom North East Region Kalamela. Epiphany Mar Thoma Parish picnic was held on Saturday, August 11th 2012 at Belmont State Park, Long Island. A good number of Parishioners including children and youth participated in the picnic. Sports and games were conducted for various age groups and prizes were awarded. It was a time of fellowship and enjoyment for all.

Rev. Oommen V. Varkey, Vicar

Men's Retreat at the MTC of Oklahoma



Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. – John 14:27. Jesus gives his disciples a very special gift, a peace unlike anything the world has ever experienced. But to enjoy that peace we have to be his disciples. We have to be the people who, just like Jesus, do the will of our heavenly Father. To help make better disciples, the first men's retreat of our Diocese was held at the MTC of Oklahoma from Friday September 28th to Sunday, September 30th. Male youths from the South West Region, including Dallas, Houston, and Oklahoma came together for this unique retreat to discuss the theme "Men's Improvement." The main speaker was Dr. George Horton. Dr. Horton through his education, experience, and faith gave powerful talks on how to overcome some of the things that prevent us from being true disciples of Jesus. Since this conference was just for men, specific issues and problems that men faced were discussed.

We were also blessed to have the presence of Rev. George Jacob, the youth chaplain of Dallas and Pastor Randy. Pastor Randy is a member of the Choctaw Indians at Broken Bow, Oklahoma. Pastor Randy is one of the people who helped the Mar Thoma Church to

minister to the Choctaw Indians through our Native American mission projects. The conference was a blessing for all those who attended. While the conference was just for the men of the region, it was the women of the MTC of Oklahoma that provided the food for the retreat. By providing the food, they performed some of the same services that the disciples, and later the first deacons of the church did (Acts 6:1-6.) The conference was also a blessing in another way since when Pastor Randy and his wife Betty returned to Broken Bow, their van was loaded with new and used items for the Choctaw tribe. Clothes, toys, and childcare items were filled in the van, which will be used by Native Americans who needed the same. Jesus' peace is with his disciples, and though the Men's Retreat was for men to discuss problems they faced, it brought men and women closer to God. It also enabled us to share God's love with our Native American brothers and sisters.

Rev. Shibi Abraham, Oklahoma

TRINITY MTC, HOUSTON SUNDAY SCHOOL



Trinity MTC, Houston Sunday School team, which received overall 2nd place in the 2012 Sunday School Regional competition held on October 20, 2012 at MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch with Vicar Rev. Zachariah John, Youth Chaplain Roy A. Thomas and Mr. Anil Varghese, Sunday School Superintendent.

Anil Varghese, Sunday School Superintendent

Bethel MTC, Philadelphia Silver Jubilee Celebrations

Bethel MTC celebrated its silver jubilee on November 10, 2012. The ceremony began with a colorful candlelit procession by members of the parish from the street outside and proceeded in to the sanctuary symbolizing the glorious 25 years. The program was inaugurated with the lamp lighting by chief guest Rt. Rev. Dr. George Ninan, bishop of Church of North India and all other invited dignitaries. Thereafter church choir melodiously presented the Jubilee Theme Song.



Due to the absence of the Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Vicar Alexander Varughese read the message of the

Thirumeni. In his message, Thirumeni emphasized "the time of silver jubilee as a time to rededicate us as partners in the divine ministry of establishing egalitarian community". Mr. Varghese Philip, silver jubilee convener presented the silver jubilee report, which was followed by a beautiful song performed by Sunday school children. The chief guest Bishop Dr. George Ninan delivered the keynote address based on the theme of the jubilee year "Building up the Lord's House, Rejoice in Fellowship." He highlighted in his presentation to keep building the congregational life and to provide for the organizational facilities for effective ministry and mission in the context at the same time rejoicing in the reality of unity and fellowship in the body of the Christ and widen the fellowship by moving forward and reaching to others in the name of Christ.



Hon. State Rep. Mr. Brendan Boyle's office representative Mr. Nicholas A. Him Bach, Rev. Santhosh Mathew, Chairman of Ecumenical Fellowship of Indian Churches in Philadelphia, Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla, Youth Chaplain, Mr. Chacko Mathew, Diocesan Treasurer, Mr. George Mathew, President of FOMAA, Mr. Alex Alexander, President of MAP and John Kunchandy, Diocesan Assembly Member gave felicitations on the occasion.



Mrs. Laila Alex & Mr. Libu Mathew handed over a copy of the souvenir to Rev. Shajan V. Daniel, and Bishop George Ninan released the same. During the celebrations, Bishop George Ninan presented 'Ponnada' to the senior members of the parish. Since the silver jubilee is an occasion to appreciate the hard work of all founding members, they were invited to light the candles. Three members of the parish were also acknowledged, who have worked selflessly for the parish by presenting plaques to them, followed by giving memento with picture of the church and its name on it to all members. The parish Trustees Mr. P. J. Varughese and Mr. Varughese Kunjachen talked about the importance of being involved in the mission of the Church and Diocese and handed over the funds for Mexico Mission Church Building Project and Hurricane Sandy Relief Fund to the Diocesan Treasurer Mr. Chacko Mathew. Yuvajana Sakhyam members also organized a fundraising program for charity works by conducting a raffle draw and gave three attractive prizes on the same occasion. The program ended with cutting the jubilee cake and a fellowship dinner.

Rev. Alexander Varughese, Vicar

PHILADELPHIA MTC

Philadelphia MTC was invited to participate in the Upper Dublin Township Community Day Celebration held on 29th Sep. 2012. Philadelphia MTC is the only Indian community being invited to participate in the program. The parish was allotted 30 minutes to perform various programs which included an opening musical procession, introduction to parish history and its mission, Indian culture, dance performances and cultural fashion show. More than 100 families from the parish attended the program. It was also a time of fellowship with the



neighborhood community. Mr. Salvin Varghese served as the convenor for the program. Philadelphia MTC Sevika Sanghom won Second place in the 2012 South East Regional Sevika Sanghom Bible Quiz competition held at St. Stephen's MTC, NJ on 10th Nov. 2012.

Rev. P. A. Abraham, Vicar

MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch Neighborhood Mission by Parish Mission



As a part of the various mission activities, the MTC Dallas Farmers Branch parish mission extended its activities to the various Neighborhood Mission fields this year. During Thanksgiving holidays, parish mission members visited the Metrocrest Agency in Dallas and donated 1,000 pounds of turkey to distribute among the financially poor communities in the neighborhood. Parish Mission members also visited North Texas Food Bank and donated 2,250 meals and the members also volunteered to pack Six Thousand meals for distribution. Parish Mission members also visited the Union Gospel Mission's Men's Shelter in Dallas and donated four hundred meals. Parish Mission also participated in the Hunger Walk organized by Church World Services Crop and made a financial contribution to support the various mission activities in the poor countries around the world. Parish mission also supported the Christian Community Action, Denton Habitat for Humanity, Meals on Wheels and Choctaw ative American Mission. The Parish Mission also distributed school supplies to the children of Farmers Branch Elementary School during the beginning of the school year. The Mayor of the City of Farmers Branch, Principal and Counselor of the school appreciated the parish for what they are doing for the neighborhood community. During the Thanksgiving Day, after the service in the sanctuary, thanksgiving lunch was served to all those who attended the service by the Parish Mission. About 300 people attended this year's Thanksgiving Day service and the lunch served in the fellowship hall. Rev. Jose C. Joseph, Vicar, Rev. P. V. Thomas, Rev. George Jacob, Youth Chaplain led the service and witnessing session and also participated in the fellowship lunch.

Skariah T. Philip, Secretary, Parish Mission

Upcoming Programmes

Leadership Conference, Staten Island, NY Jan. 3-6, 2013

Ecumenical Dinner, Immanuel Center, Houston Jan. 18, 2013

Inauguration of Diocesan Silver Jubilee Celebration Jan. 19, 2013

Diocesan Assembly Meeting 2013, in Chicago Apr. 12-13, 2013

Diocesan Clergy Conference 2013, in Chicago Apr. 11-12, 2013

MISSION CORNER

Disaster Relief Ministry at Dulac, Louisiana

The Disaster Relief ministry at Dulac, Louisiana mission project lasted two weeks from Nov. 1 – 16th, and we had twenty-five mission volunteers participated this time, which was the largest number of volunteers at a time in any mission project of this type undertaken by the Native American Mission of our Diocese. Twenty-two volunteers spent three days at the site and two volunteers namely, Mr. Thomas Mathew and Mrs. Mary Mathew, members of the Seattle MTC devoted two weeks of time at Dulac with the Houma Native Indians and helped to renovate their homes. They came on October 31st and started working on November 1st at one of the homes where the rest of the volunteers started to work during the Mission team's April visit.



Annie's House

Annie, a Houma Indian widow, the owner of the house has been living with her relatives since Katrina in 2005. Her brother Junior was great help for Mr. Mathew. He worked side by side with Mathew in all the plumbing, carpentry and electrical work they worked at the house for 13 days. Five other volunteers also joined with them from Thursday day Nov. 8th to Saturday the 10th. Mr. Mathew who is very talented in all areas of construction work as well as the team who worked with him. Mrs. Mathew and Annie the owner also participated in the renovation. One of the members of this work crew was Rev. Fr. M. K. Kuria-kose from the St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church, Philadelphia. He is also the Diocesan Secretary of the North East Diocese of the Orthodox Church. They installed a hot water heater, a new vanity, a washbasin, installed new ceilings for kitchen and dining room, installed lights and switches, painted the ceilings and the front porch. The house is almost ready and Annie has plans to move in by Thanks Giving. The house still requires some external make up like roof and sidings etc.

Linda and Leroy's house

Another work project the team completed was the house of Linda and Leroy. During the last mission trip in April, the team finished two bedrooms and the living room including all the walls and ceiling, painting and installing floors in all the above rooms. Tomy Zachariah, a Malayalee, resident of Louisiana, a great friend of Marthomites in Los Angles, provided leadership in completing the house. Abraham Mathew and

Shelly Jacob from Dallas, three volunteers came from the St. Thomas Orthodox Church, Philadelphia completed the rest of work by installing new flooring in the Kitchen, the master bed room and bath room, about 400 square foot area. A family consisting of five members lives in that house.

The House of Louise

Louise, a widow operates a small restaurant in the town. Her house was destroyed during Katrina. She renovated her house and was living happily for about four years since renovation. But recent Hurricane Isaac took the roof of the house and damaged the whole building. This house requires a lot of work like putting insulation on walls and ceiling, new sheet rock, painting, installing a bathroom etc., in order for her to move in. Mr. Mathew from Seattle after his work at Annie's house gave his entire concentration on this project. Many of the new volunteers helped to complete the insulation work and hanging the sheet rock in the house. There is lot more work still need to be done in this house.

Francene's House

Francene speaks only French. She is a home confined person because of her disabilities and the steps leading to the house. She keeps her house immaculately clean. Her main time pass every day is to watch the pictures of her about fifty grand children, which are on the wall of her house. Her porch railings and floor were in very bad shape. Mercy Cherian, a mother of 4 children ranging from 3 - 8 years, was the leader for the painting. The group consisted of Arlene Mathew from Houston, one of our Diocesan council members. Several other young women participated in this mission project. They did a superb job and many had never held a paintbrush up to this time. All in all, the fellowship of working together as a team for those in dire need was a spiritual experience.

O. C. Abraham, Philadelphia

**Reflections by Dulac Mission Team
 (Labor of Love)**



The Dulac Mission (Labor of Love) of November 2012 was not unlike any of the missions before it in that area. Much like the mission trips before it, it represented the love that our church teaches us to have, and the servitude that is commanded by Christ. Our team was able to experience more than just the labor of love, but also had the opportunity to build new relationships. Amongst us were rookies and veterans of mission work, and we all shared the same purpose and desire to give joyfully which was asked of us. The following are some thoughts shared by a few of us that have accurately and beautifully summarized the inspiring work that the Holy Spirit is leading our church to do among the Native American people of Dulac, Louisiana.

Sheen Andrews, Mississippi

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I

know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:11-13) It is a frustrating dichotomy to begin rebuilding a community and then to have to suddenly prepare for the next hurricane and the possibility of it being completely wiped away. In Dulac, Louisiana that has been a reality for the past 7 years. Yet, it is hard to see the remnants of living through that kind of destruction in the Houmas' attitudes or even on their faces. All those I encountered on this trip, had an inner joy and contentment in their circumstance and even in the possibility of the unknown. I was able to speak to several members of the Houma Tribal Council after the Medical Mission session. One councilman described 100-mile stretches of swampland separating him from his representative constituents with the greatest needs. I learned so much in conversation, about the role each of them play in their respective areas and how connected they are with what people need in their area. The conversations were always collaborative in language and selfless in scope. As someone who is trained to find "solutions" to issues professionally, I found myself consistently agreeing that the "solution" was not a solution at all, but a reminder of what the mission of being a follower of Christ truly is. To me, it is a resolution to live in service of others and to remember to address and fully understand the needs of those I am serving, as my Father in Heaven did. Perhaps, rebuilding a community seems like the obvious "problem" we are solving, however; really we are rebuilding a home for our life eternal. "For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Corinthians 5:1)"

Philip Mathew, New York

"In today's exchange of news, there is often an imbalance in catastrophic news to that of joyful news. As a result, many of us have come accustom to absorbing sad news and carrying on with our lives without any action. Having most recently been affected by Sandy, I had the unfortunate familiarity to life without power, a time of strain on gas supply, and reduced availability of vital goods. Since traveling to the community of Dulac, Louisiana, it is unbelievable to see people still recovering from disasters from months and years past. It was important for me to understand the way of life and outlook to those repeatedly battered and bruised by Mother Nature. In this fishing community, where salaries are modest, there is a shortage of materialistic goods but an abundance of smiles and the willingness to help others. During my time, I had the opportunity to interact with an elder by the name of Junior. Junior lacked manpower and proper tools to efficiently rebuild his sister's home. Through fellowship, we were able to repaint the house and install a new ceiling. In addition, Junior had even taken the time to teach me about life on the Louisiana Bayou, which included the art of releasing a shrimp net. Despite being three times my age and experiencing so much hardship, his excitement towards living life to the fullest was inspiring. After spending several days in the greater New Orleans area, it is only appropriate to quote the local musical artist Dwayne Michael Carter Jr., who has gone on to say, "Don't ask me what's wrong, ask me what's right." I believe that it is this upbeat and optimistic outlook that helps the people of Dulac carry on without feeling burdened by what they cannot control."

Mercy Cherian, Philadelphia

1 Thessalonians 5:18 "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Dulac Mission trip was truly a very humbling experience for all of us to serve God. Volunteers came from Seattle, New York, Texas, California and PA, and different churches, however the common bond between us was that each of us had the same passion and commitment to help those in need. We also learned that we should not take God's blessings for granted, but always be thankful. I was able to experience the sense of a call to duty from one and all. O. C Uncle's zeal to continue the wonderful work that God has called him to do, the leadership of Rev. Fr. M. K. Kuriakose, expertise of Thomas Mathew uncle were instrumental in helping us achieve success with the mission trip. Aleyamma aunty, Sosamma aunty, Elizabeth aunty, Kusumum aunty and Mary aunty's

mission was to provide volunteers with food, so that we could spend all our time working on site and not having to worry about cooking each meal. Philip, Justin, Shibu, Mathew, Bivin, Shelly, Jeeva, Arlene, Jency, Renita, Lisa, Julie and Sheen- these youngsters have set a wonderful example of how they can make any work seem seamless and fun. Each and every volunteer's family members' love, sacrifice and support cannot be overlooked.

Jensy John, Dallas

"Actually taking up the challenge of learning how to insulate and build dry wall was difficult but I pushed forward because of the people I was surrounded by. This was a completely different crew but their hearts were in it the whole way. Like Darryl (organizer of the mission work) told us, "you just need the heart to work, not skills", and that is what a lot of us had, no sense of skills but the desire to help. Mrs. Lois (the owner of the house we were working on) was truly an inspirational figure in itself. Her optimistic attitude to move forward even though this was the second time the hurricanes hit her house and completely destroyed it gave me a sense of gratitude and respect for the people of the Dulac community. She didn't sit around and complain, instead she ran a small restaurant right next to her house and has been living there since the last hurricane hit about 6 months ago. I learned the value of appreciating the small things in life and always counting my blessings. This is my second consecutive year coming, and I hope to come again to help our fellow brothers and sisters in need so we can make at least a small difference in their lives."

Shibu Thomas, Philadelphia

"Time is a very important factor in human life. God gives us more than enough time and strength, but how much of that do we share with others? The trip to New Orleans was a great moment in my life. Even though I decided to go at the last minute, I'm glad I did. Skills were not a factor in this mission, only an open heart was enough. Through prayers and open-mindedness, we were able to complete our mission by helping and learning about others. Romans 12:13 "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." As true Christians, we need to learn to share and help others with a good heart, even through a small thing. As a small community we can do great things for others, as we see that through the New Orleans trip. Hebrews 13:16 "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." I was so happy to meet many people and spend time with them, even though it was only two days. I felt I knew everyone and had been there for a long time. When I saw the smile on those people we helped, it made me happy and encouraged me to do more, and it also made me think that I was doing the right thing. Through this trip, I was able to share my thoughts and inspire others for future missions."

Renita Philipose, Dallas

"I came, I saw, I remember. I CAME to Dulac without tools or skills, but brought two hands and a heart to serve. I SAW multiple homes that had been ruined within a moment by Mother Nature's wrath. Amazingly, a humble elderly lady still smiles despite all of the heartache and financial burden created from not one, but three hurricanes. Mrs. Lois visited the drywall team with a warmhearted smile and homemade food on a daily basis. I REMEMBER that God always provides. He provided all of the volunteers needed for this mission, the organized schedules, the amazing cooking from our "Marthas" in the kitchen, and, most importantly, the fellowship. We were reminded how graciously blessed we are and how quickly we forget the "little things" in life, such as drinking water, clean clothes, and a bed to sleep on at night. We were presented with a basic wooden structure. After three days, many eager volunteers, and borrowed power tools, God had transformed this hollow room into a warm home, one nail at a time. This was my first mission trip, but it will surely not be my last."

Lisa James, Philadelphia

"If anyone has not been on a service based trip I encourage them to do so. This is the first trip I went to through the church and I was trying to understand how it would be different than trips I went to through my school in the past. While I was in Louisiana, a group of us worked on

painting a deck for an elderly woman named Irene in the community. As we were doing the work I realized that this time around, my motivation was completely different for wanting to go. It wasn't just about showing compassion for people who have been through a hardship—as a believer I've asked God to break my heart for what breaks His and He said "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40.) In trips that I did through school, I never really approached the work as if I was working on God's house, or as if I was painting the deck for God's kingdom. This was a humbling moment. God has blessed me so much and I know now that I have a responsibility to use His blessings to be a blessing for others." We each hope that our experiences and reflections encourage you to join these missions and labor in love, as commanded of us by Christ Jesus. In everything we do, may His name be praised!

Dulac Mission Team

Visit to Mexico Mission



The Diocesan Council Members under the leadership of the Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius visited the Colonia Mar Thoma in Matamoras, Mexico, the mission field of the Diocese of North America and Europe, on Saturday, September 29, 2012. This gave an opportunity for the delegates to obtain first-hand information about the mission activities in Mexico. The team visited the 45 families living in their houses in 'Colonia Mar Thoma' and had fellowship with them. The residents of Colonia Mar Thoma welcomed the Bishop and council members with great enthusiasm. Prior to the field visit Diocesan Episcopa visited the Matamoras Mayor's office and discussed the concerns with his political leaders and requested their support for several projects being undertaken in Colonia Mar Thoma. Diocesan Secretary Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Mr. P. T. Abraham, Brownsville, Mr. Pat Pace and Mr. Pillar accompanied Thirumeni to the Mayor's office. At the time of mission field visit the council members took part in the tree-planting project with the aim of making the campus greener. A fellowship get together was held at the Chapel with the members of the community. They sang songs both in Spanish and Malayalam. Mrs. Laila Anie Philip, Diocesan Council member shared a moral story with them. Diocesan Episcopa gave a message exhorting them for moral and spiritual nurturing and prayed at the occasion. The members of the Diocesan Council also took part in the Manna distribution, a food program project for the residents. The community members run a grocery store 'Mar Thoma Super,' and a teashop as an income-generating program. Poultry farms and pig rearing units are some other income generation programs implemented in the Colonia Mar Thoma. A Chapel in the mission field is an immediate need of the community and the estimated cost will be about \$35,000 in U. S Dollars. The Diocesan council has decided to construct the same with the support and contribution of the well wishers from various parishes in the Diocese as early as possible. Those who would like to contribute to this noble cause may send their checks to Diocesan office with memo Chapel at Colonia Mar Thoma.

Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

Sandy Disaster Serving those in need, one life at a time



It was a Saturday morning, nearly two weeks after Sandy hit the north-east! Few of the North East Regional Youth Fellowship members along with Youth Chaplain Rev. V. M. Mathew boarded the bus from Nassau Community College to Lido beach. We were accompanied by a group of New Yorkers, from all walks of life, who had volunteered with the American Red Cross to help with the relief efforts at Lido Beach. Hurricane Sandy dubbed as "Frankenstorm" for its monstrous proportions disrupted the lives of millions of people when it turned toward the Northeast United States. When the Hurricane hit us, our faith was sorely tested while the mind was building up castles of uncertainty of what would happen, fear of safety for our lives, doubt of deliverance to escape unscathed and tension of loss of materialistic possessions. Most of our families had to go without power and struggle with the limited gas supplies for a week or two. While having no power altogether was an inconvenience, it gave families an opportunity to huddle together and spend time, sharing and praying together. And it was easy because there were no distractions; we were completely unplugged from the digital world since we do not have access to Television, Mobiles, Facebook or Twitter. After two weeks most of us resumed our daily routine in no time, but some lives were changed forever. As our own lives came to normalcy after the storm, some of us wanted to help those whose lives were impacted even more. But nothing prepared us for what we were to witness in the week ahead.



As the bus neared Lido beach, the impact of the storm became very real to us. We felt an eerie calm and quite atmosphere and the silence was discomfiting. We realized it was because most of the people were no longer living in those homes. We saw a few people cleaning their homes and all their furniture was dumped outside their homes. Some were loading up trucks with whatever left over furniture

they could salvage. Since the Red Cross trucks did not make it in time at Lido beach for distributing kits in the neighborhood, we were then taken to a FEMA distribution center in Freeport. The center was giving out clothes, blankets, and canned foods items and cleaning supplies. The wrath of Hurricane Sandy became further more real to us the following week, when a group of seven volunteers from Young Family Fellowship from the St. John's MTC, New York visited Staten Island for clean up activity and signed up with Hope for New York. As we reached Staten Island, we saw many homes in the neighborhood "red tagged" which meant that it was declared unsafe even to enter those homes. The seven of us from St. John's were assigned a home that was safe and asked to throw out everything in that home and gut the basement and first floor. We spent hours throwing out furniture and household items - there was nothing left undamaged! The next home belonged to an elderly woman who lived alone. As we helped her cleanup the garage, we noticed lot of construction tools, which were old and rusty. Her husband, used to be a construction worker, had passed away 14 years ago and this garage was her only place of solace whenever she missed him. She was grateful that we helped her save a few old tools that were memories of her beloved husband. Tears flowed down her face as she hugged and thanked each of us. At the last home, we had to help a mother and her 2 children. While we threw out furniture, toys and other memories so precious to them, we saw the pain in their teary distraught eyes. At the end of the laborious day, we had just managed to help handful families but there were hundreds more to be helped. When a natural disaster of this magnitude hits, we might wonder if one day of volunteering, a one - time donation of goods or money would make a difference. Well, to this elderly lady, a single day of our volunteering meant she was able to save her husband's memories. To the man who came to the FEMA center, one donated blanket meant one more chance to stay warm in the harsh cold winter. This reminds us that every small contribution and effort counts. Once we reached back to the warmth & safety of our homes, some questions lingered in our minds. Who will volunteer to help set these pieces of lives together? As a Christian community did we do our best to respond to this crisis? "A Christian responsibility to society has always been regarded as fundamental to the mission of the Church." (The Statement to the Nation of the Inaugural Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, 1977) The essence of Christian living is tested during such times when we have to get out of our comfort zones and reach out to the need of the community and society. The character and relevance of a church is reflective in its response to the crisis or need of the community it is based. As a Church community do we have a responsibility to serve those around us? Absolutely yes! We are called to be the hands and feet of Christ wherever we are placed. Jesus' ministry while on earth was among the people and so each one of us is called to reach out to those around us in need. If each of us did our part imagine the difference we would make, the number of lives we would touch. And to everyone who reads this article we ask you the above two pertinent questions. We pray and hope that the answer to the questions challenges you to step forth and play your part. God Bless.

Chris Thomas, St. John's MTC, New York

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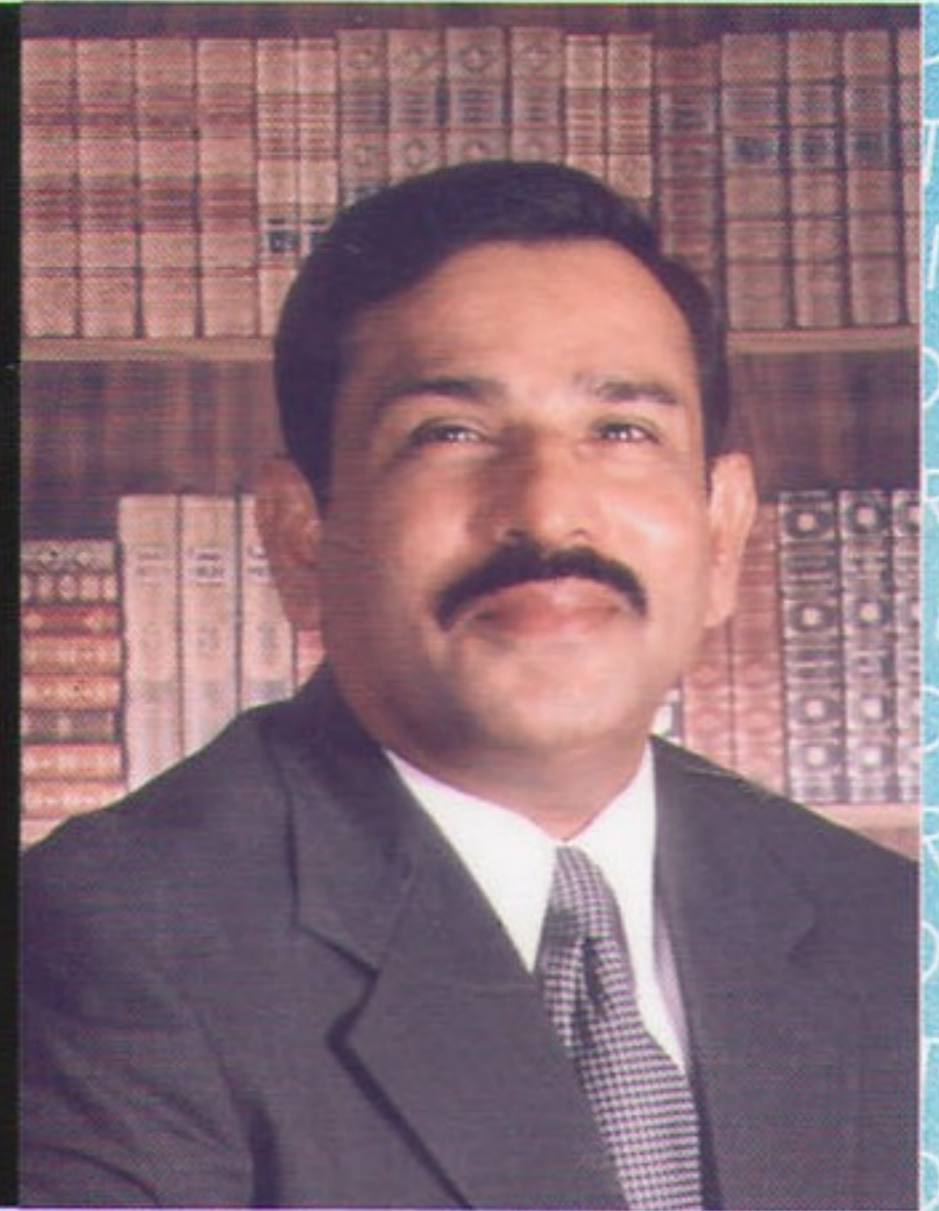
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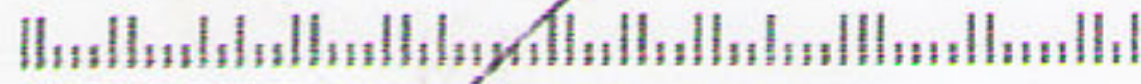


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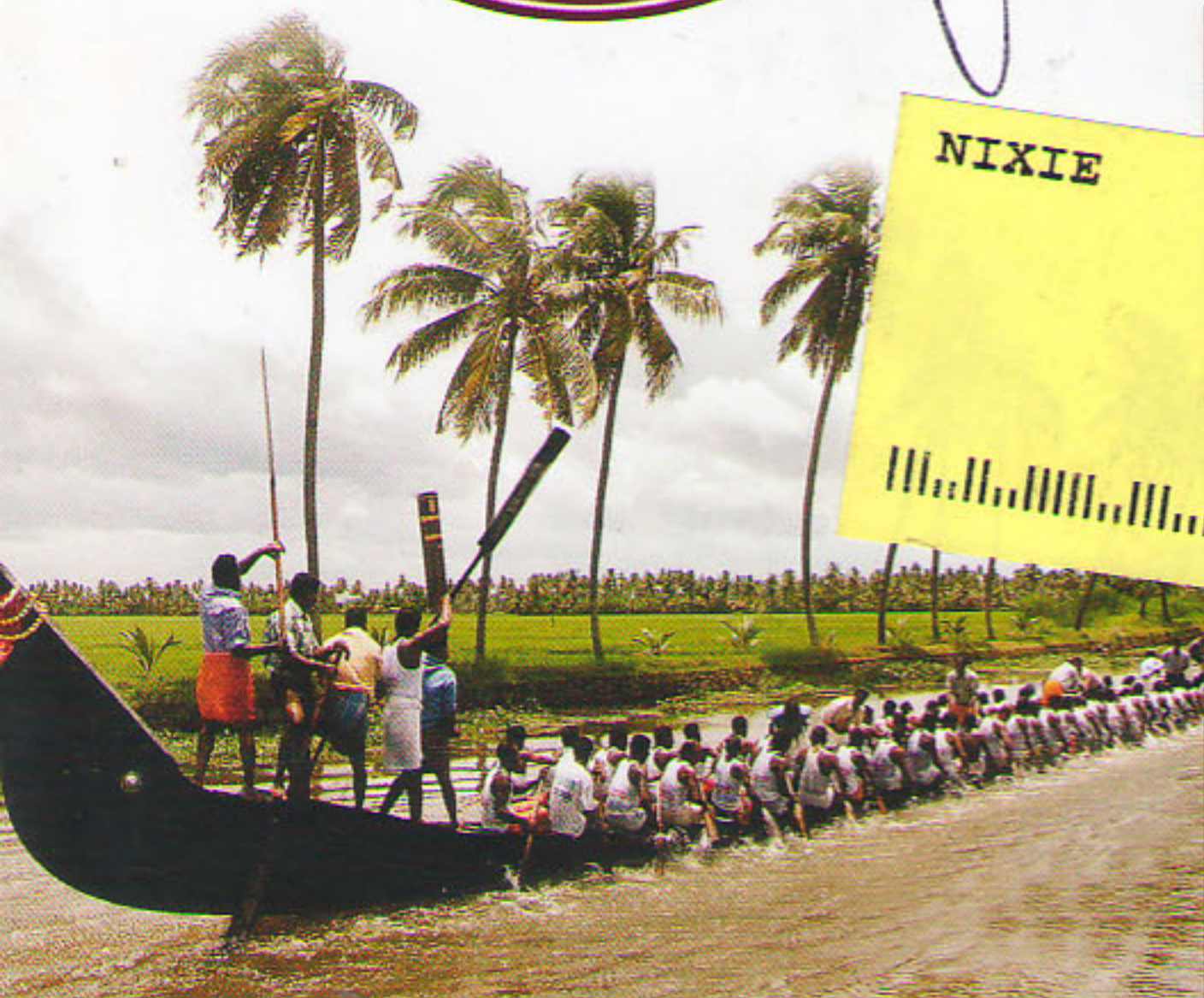


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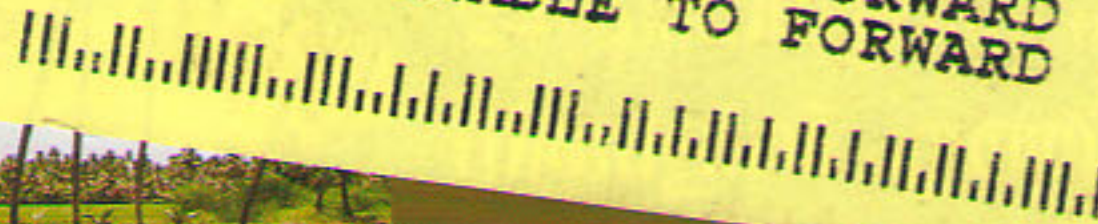
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