



MAR THOMA

MESSENGER

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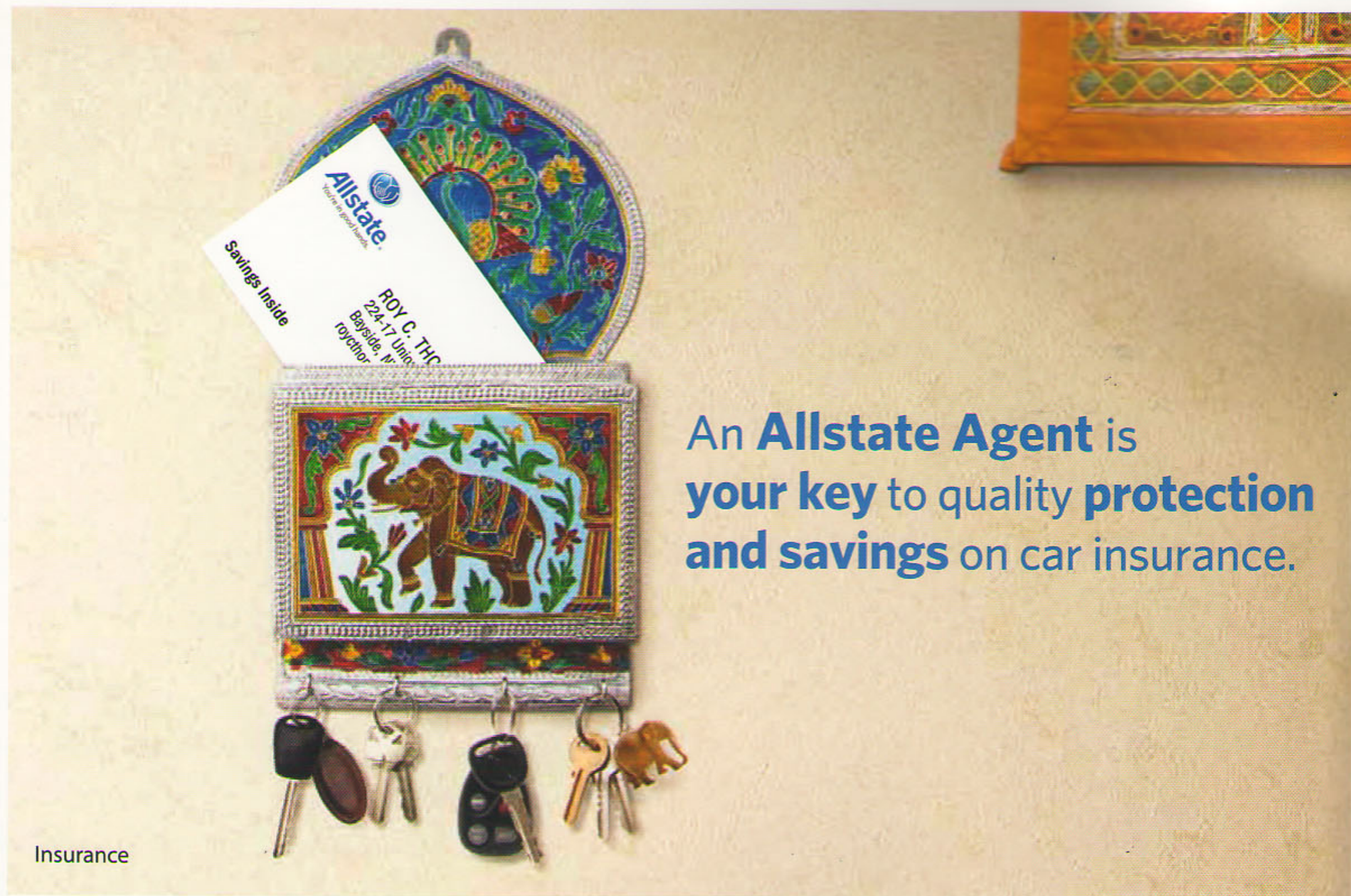
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DIASPORA ISSUE

God of Bible:

People of Migration and Mission of the Church



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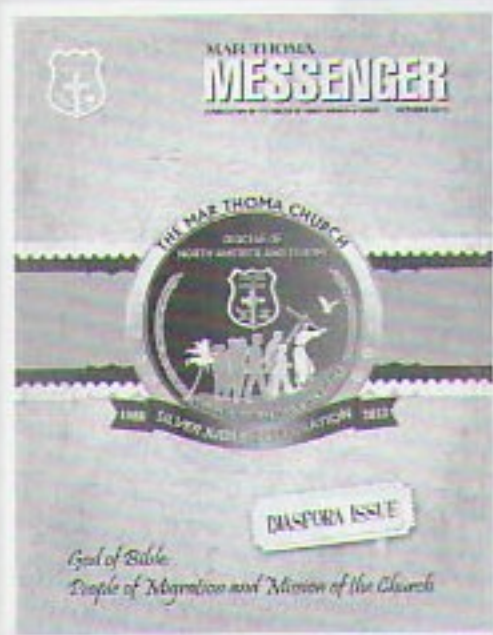
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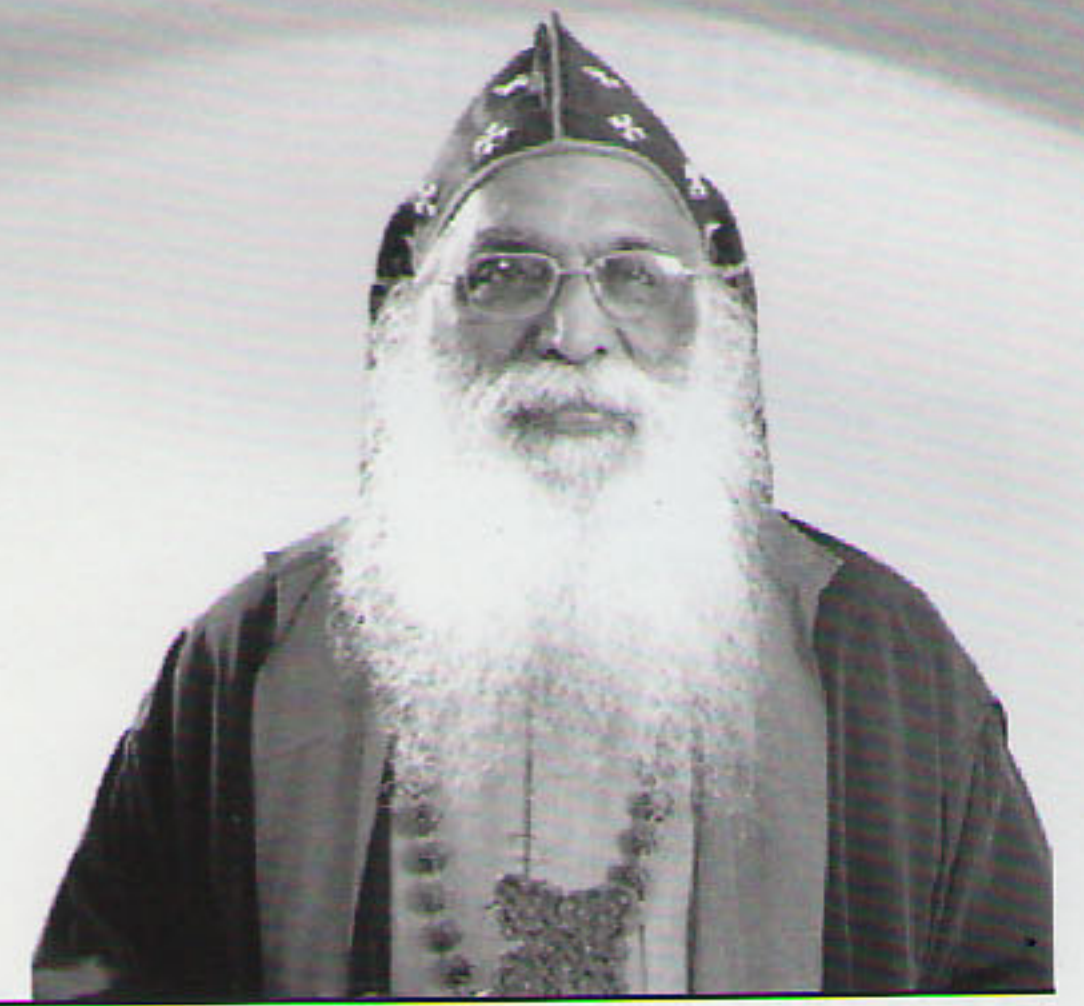
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Message from the Metropolitan

Dearly beloved in the Lord,

Kerala was under the grip of heavy rain during the months of June and July. Great floods occurred. Though the land was relieved of the scorching heat of the sun, many districts were badly affected by the rain and flood. Nature has the capacity to reinstate order and joy in the world. So let us hope for the best. Utharagant, a State in North India also suffered devastation owing to the floods. The Mar Thoma Church will contribute two hundred thousand rupees to the Prime minister's relief fund. We also want to build 25 houses for those who have become homeless. I invoke all the members of the Mar Thoma Church to contribute liberally for this noble cause.

The arrangements for the Sabha Prathinidhi Mandalam are in progress. A subcommittee is working on improving the constitution of our Church. If the report of the Sub Committee is ready by the time of Mandalam Meeting, we wish to have a special session of the Mandalam to discuss in detail the recommendations of the Sub Committee on Constitution improvement. Each Mandalam member will receive the draft. They are supposed to make an earnest effort to study the proposed changes in the Constitution and make notable contributions in the Special Mandalam to be held for this purpose.

World Council of Churches has its next assembly being held in Korea from the 28th of October 2013 to the 8th of November, 2013. The Mar Thoma Church will be sending six representatives to attend this great Assembly. I consider it a great privilege for being invited to attend the Assembly as a senior guest.

The synod of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church has appointed a commission to study on the possibilities of the areas where that Church can cooperate with the Mar Thoma Church. This is really a very blessed approach. The Mar Thoma Church considers this as a great step taken by the Jacobite Church, especially in the context of the present day Ecumenical advancements. This year 26 individuals are being ordained as priests of the Mar Thoma Church from the 1st of August. Let us pray for their well being and blessings in the service of the Church and society.

God willing, we plan to lay the corner stone for the proposed new Pulateen on August 15, 2013. This is going to be the Head Quarters of the Mar Thoma Church. A consortium of buildings, this will serve many purposes of the Church in the modern world. The month of August offers us many noble thoughts. We share them with humble hearts and submission before the Lord. It denotes the history of liberation through the observation of the Lent of 15 days. All our meditations begin from the knowledge that Jesus Christ, by His sacred blood, redeemed our lives from the slavery of sins. On Mission Sunday we meditate on the Church's responsibilities of introducing Jesus. On the festival of Transfiguration, we think of the glorification of our Lord and the way in which the disciples responded to that great event. On the Mount of Transfiguration, the representative of the Covenants namely Moses, and Elijah, the personification of prophecies are seen talking to the savior of the world, Jesus Christ. The disciples saw this vision that came from the eclipse of the clouds to the clarity of truth's lighted glory. They were under the influence of an ethereal power which enveloped them for moments. They were elated and completely satisfied. They felt that everything is complete. There is no need of any forward move. The place is good. The condition is supreme. They ask permission for the construction of three huts. Moses and Elijah vanished in another cloud. Later we see the disciples arguing for power and position. But the same disciples became pure and selfless when they attained the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Today things are different. We see many who are selfish and power mongering in the Church and society. The apostle Paul reminds us not to use the blessings of the Holy Spirit for our selfish motives. Today we have the 66 books of the Bible which is authoritatively accepted as the acumen of our faith. May God bless us and help us to go forward rooted in the Word, accepting the authenticity of the Word, producing the fruits of the Holy Spirit, loving even the enemies, praying for those who curse, and not doing evil for evil, but only goodness to everybody.

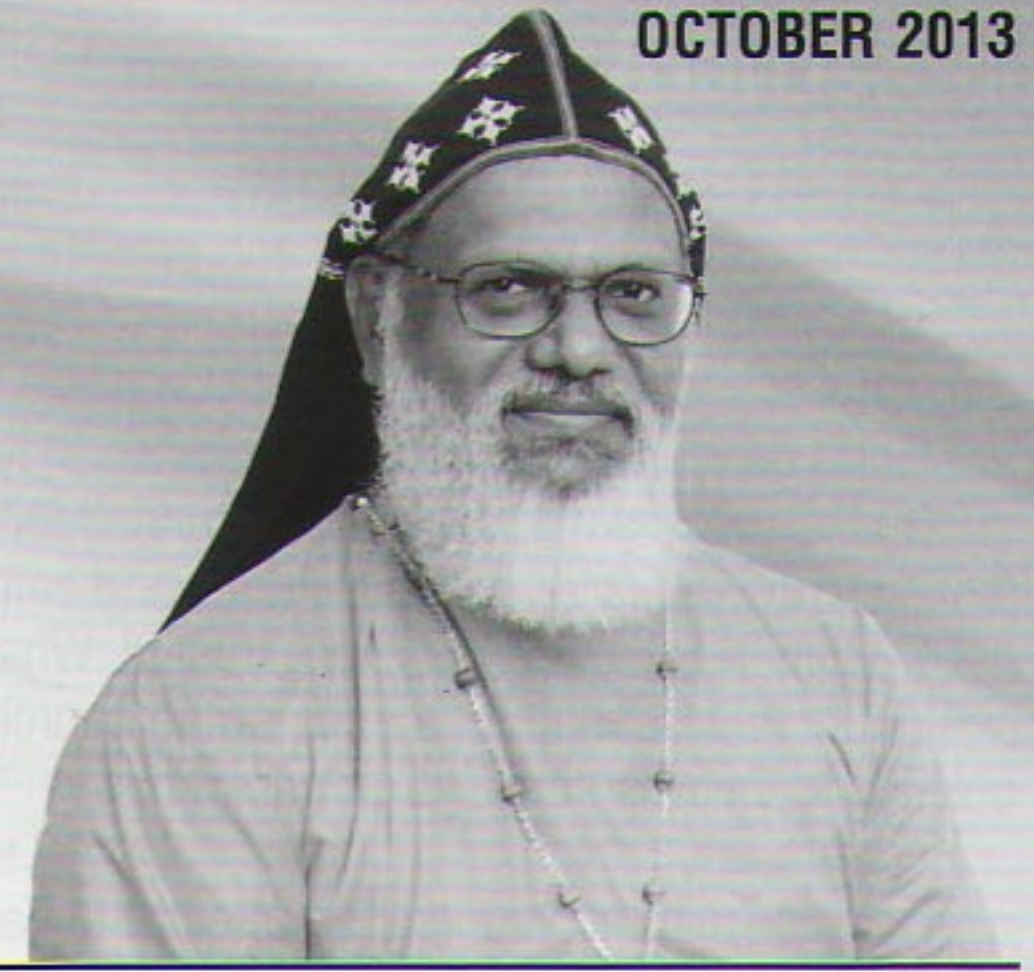
"I can do everything through him who gives me strength." May these words give you strength and courage.
Grace be with you all.

Grace be with you all

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan

*Taken and translated from Malankara Sabha Tharaka
June/July/August 2013 issues*

Message from the Diocesan Episcopa



Dearly beloved in Christ,

“Bless the Lord O my soul, all that is within me bless his holy name
Bless the Lord O my soul and forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:1-2)

It is with a grateful heart, that we prepare ourselves to participate in the finale of the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Diocese of North America and Europe in November 2013. We thank God for bringing us together as families and congregations and constituting us as a diocese. We acknowledge the sacrificial and daring ministry of the early immigrants who committed themselves to grow as worshipping communities in each place and to remain as loyal members of the Mar Thoma Church. We admire the shepherding ministry of the bishops and clergy who led us from time to time with vision. We continue the mission revealed to us by the members of the church in reaching out to the people and communities.

The diocese will be publishing several books and publications in the jubilee year. I urge all of you to obtain a copy on these publications that will be released in the month of November.

A pertinent question to ask ourselves at this juncture is: What are the short time and long time goals for the future? As individuals and as the church we should recommit to the following:

1) Journey with Christ: As we read in the gospel of St. John Chapter 21, “Follow me” is the exhortation given by the risen Jesus to St. Peter, even after commissioning him to “feed the sheep.” This call is to each one of us and is relevant for all of us even today. The Church is the body of Christ and belongs to God. It is constituted with God’s people. It continually manifests in various forms. It appears afresh and expresses its life and dynamism as it confronts the realities of the present day world, thereby leading to redemption, integration, and abundant life. Therefore, we should let the parishes grow as Christ-centred communities.

2) Church for “Faith Living”: When Peter openly confessed to Jesus that you are Christ, the Son of the living God (Mt. 16: 18) Jesus said, “Upon this rock will I build my Church.” Faith formation with faith living is a ministry that is to be carried out by each parish and congregation through the generations. The clergy with the laity are called to renew their faith in the midst of secularization and westernization. “Have faith” is the repeated exhortation of Jesus in the midst of the forces of death and disintegration (John 11: 26 & 40). A faith that does not produce culture is not a true faith. As Christians, we are challenged to keep Christ in our living culture. This will certainly transform the culture that we see around. Each parish and its organizations are primarily for nurturing the members spiritually and leading them to a fruitful life. Regular study of the Holy Bible is to be taken more seriously in the parishes. We must also note that the role of the women in our parishes is not adequately taken care of when we realise that they are also partakers of our faith and God’s grace. As a faith community we are sanctified to be an inclusive community where we recognise the role of each person and continue to welcome the new ones. Mathew 5: 14-16 reminds us that we are called and sanctified to be the light of the world and salt of the earth.

3) Be a disciple of Christ: Each member of the Church is called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Pope Francis said, “the living God is He that you may see with your eyes within your heart” (Job 42: 5). When Jesus chose the twelve apostles, he allowed them to be with him, go out to preach, and have authority to cast out the demon (Mk. 3:15). Christian discipleship involves spiritual growth that holds on to the values of the kingdom and the disciplining of oneself to practice them. We are called, summoned, and touched by God (1Pet 2: 9). Generally, we are happy if there is a spiritual environment in the parish, but we do not recognise our responsibilities to create it every time we meet. Our own homes, local parish, and neighbourhood are arenas for faith practices, Christian living, and witnessing to the Lord. The dimensions of spiritual life that we attain will acquire meaning, according to the Holy Bible, only when they are used to help ‘uplift others’. That is why we insist on a relevant neighbourhood ministry. In a 2013 exhortation to the cardinals Pope Francis says, “When we walk without the cross, when we build without the cross, when we profess a Christ without the cross... We aren’t disciples of the Lord.” Taking up the cross is vitally important in Christian life.

4) Encourage the youth: We are convinced of the need to conduct regular English worship services for the sake of the new generations. The children who are born and brought up in our families are generally allowed to exercise freedom and to shoulder responsibilities when they move to the university campus and start working at various places. When they marry we welcome their life partners, irrespective of the racial and linguistic background. I feel that it is time that the parishes recognise the diversity of the younger generations and incorporate them into responsible positions from when they attain the age of 18. They are talented and capable of carrying out various responsibilities. The senior members of the parish with their long and valuable experiences can support and guide them, but should encourage the younger people to bring their new ideas, energy and enthusiasm to further God's kingdom. The younger generations should have the feeling that they are wanted in the Church and are trusted. What is the use of all of them waiting for another 20 to 25 years to get a chance to participate, contribute and strengthen the life of the church? We will lose them if they are not regularly attending and participating in the church that belongs to their parents and grandparents.

5) Train the young: The attempt to have 'altar boys' and 'covenant girls', in the parishes, is to train the teenage boys and girls to grow in the faith and practices of the church. I am glad that the North East and South East regions of the diocese have identified about forty youngsters who are undergoing this training. This becomes possible and effective only when they are encouraged, the parents help them, the clergy train them, and the parishioners welcome them. I consider that this group, as they grow and get trained, can strengthen the ministry of the youth chaplains in forming teenage fellowships in the parishes, campus groups in the university campuses and later become mentors to guide the then teenagers of the parish. This systematic training and growth will take about 10 to 12 years to yield visible results. The spiritual discipline at home, training in the parishes, study in the Sunday School classes and camps, participation in the youth fellowship meetings and leadership conferences can help them to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. The LEAD classes meant for lay people of the church will also be useful in this training.

6) Prepare for ministry: We gratefully acknowledge the leadership and spiritual ministry of all the Aghens, particularly those who come from India for a period of 3 years. In the diocese presently we have ten ordained ministers who are citizens of USA. We need more people from Europe, Canada and USA who understand the culture and life of the newer generations. All the members are urged to keep this need in our prayers, find out proper committed persons and groom them so that they will be good shepherds of our time. Regular worship, Bible study, and witnessing the Lord are tools for grooming the aspirant youths. An exposure to the length and breadth of the diocese is necessary to understand the variations we have in our style of Christian living. Promising candidates for theological training will be selected and given one year practical training in the diocese and subsequently sent to seminary for studies. The ministry to which they are called is not only to celebrate the sacraments and administer the community as per the constitution of the church but also to reach out to the neighbours to realise the relevance of neighbourhood ministry, or to serve the new communities through Mexico mission, Native America mission and the India mission. The untimely death of Patrick Maruthmoottil has opened the hearts of Native American friends in Oklahoma to strengthen the bond with the Mar Thoma community. The recent mission trips to the five states in India by the young people guided by the senior members have enlarged the vision and scope of carrying out mission activities among the unreached. The dedication of the Jubilee chapel in Mexico is enabling us to start a Mar Thoma congregation to help the people there to grow as a worshipping community and learn elementary lessons of Christian living. I am expecting all the parishes to budget an amount equivalent to the tithe of their income so that they can meaningfully engage in the mission activities in one way or the other. Can the Church bring the message that we care for the poor? Let us start doing it remembering that each one of us is called out to be a missionary. We will have the involvement of more of the youths, provided that they are extended financial help to meet their expenses while they invest their time and talents. Together, let us carry the message of love and compassion and that in each other we see the 'face of God'.

7) Start regional projects: It is time for us to decentralise the functions and ministries. While keeping the unity of the diocese, each region is encouraged to open up Regional Action Centres (RAC) which will cater to the overall growth of the diocese and at the same time focus mainly on the persons and families in that region. One example is the need for a counselling centre. Instead of saying that such a centre is not practical, we should put our heads together to find ways and means by which this can be done. The community has professionals who can provide support to the centre and help those persons experiencing difficulties. The parishes in the south-east region are thinking of having a 'family empowering and family enriching' program. Since we are having youth chaplain ministry in major centres, we come across a major concern to provide help for those struggling with substance abuse, addictions, bullying, sex abuse and the like. The church is called to be the tower of hope for those whose life is hard or in danger and who look for assistance and empowerment. 'In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk' (Acts 3: 1-10) should be a gospel ringing in the ears of those who are stressed, depressed, and helpless. Let the church happen in the lives of the people in our communities and outside so that our lives and actions will always be for the furtherance of God's Kingdom.

Hitherto, the diocese has been concentrating on forming worshipping communities and investing our resources to own places of worship. Now it is time to build the people of God so that we as a Church will continue to journey with Christ.

God bless us all
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Recently I read an interesting article by Thom Shultz titled "Why Church doesn't fit most people". The article states that people aren't disinterested in God or spiritual things, but many simply don't find the church's format a good fit for them. As we all live in an information-soaked era, most do not realize that they are lacking the spiritual know-how. It's almost like a vitamin deficiency that many do not recognize, but causes major health issues at a later time.

Spirituality is NOT a spectator activity; rather it is a lifestyle adaptation. As we know, Christianity is a way of life centered on glorifying one God revealed through Jesus Christ. The collective will of Christians around the world has made drastic changes to many communities for good. Starting with the Old Testament times, God has freed His people from bondages and inequities. Remember apartheid and other great movements of the modern times that have instilled freedom thoughts via Christian unity. But now, are we conforming to a self-contained, contempt group of civilized citizens? Do we not propagate the Gospel anymore? Are our values wrongfully placed in structural and financial matters? To a certain extent, sadly the answer is yes. We are the Church and we make the move. Starting at individual level, let's try to uphold Christian values within and outside ourselves, our families and within our parishes.

We may face challenges when we get out of our comfort zones, but God will see us through. Remember the story of Iranian Pastor Saeed Abedini, a 32 year old father of two, who was imprisoned in 2012 while working to establish a non-religious orphanage in Iran. His trial was done in secrecy and he was handed down a conviction in Jan 2013 for his work with house-churches. He was sentenced to 80 years in the brutal and deadly Evin prison – a prison known to those who have served time there and survived as "Hell on Earth". We continue to pray for such victims, who are tortured for Christ, and hope in the Lord that they will be freed sooner. Many Middle-Eastern Christians undergo such tortures without the world knowing. According to statistics, the largest community of Syriac Christians in the Middle-East resides in Syria numbering close to 1,140,000 who ethnically identify as Syriacs-Arameans. Most belongs to Greek Orthodox Churches and they also face various challenges. As 1 Peter 2:9 states, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light", we are chosen to continue God's work. Do not keep your spirituality personal, rather, share it.

As we are closing in on our Diocesan Jubilee celebrations let us thank our Almighty for the manifold blessings that we have received. Special thanks to our pioneers who landed on this western hemisphere and courageously survived by depending on the only God they knew. Many of us may not realize how lucky we are to be on a land where religious and social freedom exists for all and where one can fulfill their dreams at its best. Let's live a life of Thanksgiving and Christian solidarity, helping others in any way we can. Come; let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come to Him with thanksgiving. Let us sing psalms of praise to Him. For the Lord is a great God, a great King above all gods. Psalm 95: 1- 3

Dr. Eapen Daniel

Editorial



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JOURNEYING WITH CHRIST – A LIVING EXPERIENCE



Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life" Rev. 21: 6.

I am delighted to be here to participate in the Regional celebration of the Silver Jubilee of the North-American Diocese of the Mar Thoma Church. I extend my sincere thanks to the Diocesan Bishop for making it possible to be with all of you. The coming together as a community gives us new inspiration to face new challenges. The theme for our study, "Church: Journeying with Christ", has vital relevance in the present context. The Bible speaks about a God who journeys with the people and motivates and strengthens people to move forward in life. The Mar Thoma community which was small in the initial stages in North America, with their commitment to Christ ventured to organize worship groups in different parts of the country. We thank God for their life, untiring efforts and witness. As we gather together today, we indeed remember our small beginning, the many number of initiatives of our laity, Bishops and clergy, generous gift of time, efforts and financial resources, and hard work of each and everyone, for the growth of the church. It calls for a critical and creative look from all of us upon the ways that we have trodden in the past, the challenges we face today and the hope that we aspire for the future.

As Church we draw inspiration from Jesus Christ. The Revelation of John clearly indicates the presence of Jesus Christ 'beyond all times'. Rev.21.6 reads "I am the Alpha and the Omega". The Gospel of John starts with the words, 'In the beginning was the word'. Most stories begin with words like 'Once upon a time' – with a sense of a beginning somewhere in the past. However John's story of Jesus begins with "once before time". It indicates the presence of Christ before time, in time and future time. In other words, Christ was present in the creation, and Jesus taking form as human being, and the promise of Jesus that he will not leave us alone. J. B. Philips in his interpretation puts it in this paraphrase, "At the beginning God expressed himself. That personal expression, that Word, was with God, and was God".

Jesus Christ, the personal expression of God, reveals the nature of God. Jesus said, "Those who have seen me have seen the Father", shows the very nature of Divine presence. Jesus expressed himself aloud and often. He gave clear messages about how he felt regarding situations and people. His feelings were expressed through his voices. His actions of touch of a leper, of a blind, and holding of hand to make the lame stand, were expressions of the loving father, enabling others to stand and experience that expression of love and care. Quite often we are inspired when actors dance to perfection, or athletes do excellent performances and break previous records. We love it because often they express our dreams, our hopes and imaginations. Yes, Jesus expressed himself and helped others to express themselves. His expressions become our expressions through our living relationship with Jesus Christ.

It is essential to understand Jesus as the ground of knowledge and wisdom, our existence and life; therefore he is the Alpha. Jesus is the key to the future; therefore he is the Omega. The book of revelation narrates John as a victim and captive in Patmos. The island Patmos is considered as a closed system of bondage; there is no hope; no way forward; nothing to imagine or to inspire. In this setting of darkness John sees a new vision, the ultimate vision of the crucified Lamb of God. John was imagining a new world order inaugurated through the ALPHA AND OMEGA. In the setting of the larger Roman colonization and conflicts for power, John inspired the early Christian community with a new vision. Jesus Christ, the crucified/wounded Lamb of God as the Alpha. He is the beginning of everything. He is the ground of our being and becoming. Therefore, our formation should be through this Alpha/Being.

Furthermore, He is the Omega. He is the goal of everything; the KEY to the future. The



destiny of humanity is determined by the relation that exists between the created humanity and the creator God. Jesus the 'way, the truth and the life' will lead humanity to the goal. What we need to do is to journey with Christ to the future. It also reminds us of the human responsibility in the moving of life and history. We are placed in between the Alpha and the Omega. Therefore for us, the events/happenings of "in between alpha and omega" are significant. Church is set "in between" alpha and omega point. The goal must be the omega point. In this regard, church could be termed as an "omega community". The Omega community is the Kingdom Community: it is understood as a present event as well as an eschatological event. The realization of the Kingdom of God is the Omega point. The responsibility for us is to inspire others for the realization of the Omega community which is a community of communities. The task before Church, therefore, is helping others to imagine for a new world order and equipping the society to work for the building up of a just community. Yes, it calls for our responsible engagement in transforming the life of the people.

In the modern globalized world setting, there are claims of making different worlds with different agendas and motives. How to make the world a better place for living? The vision of the church must go beyond the human boundaries. Our mission, in this setting, must inspire others for having a new vision. The basic af-

firmation that we find in the last chapter of revelation is "To the thirsty I will give water... from the springs of the water of life". How to make the promise of Christ relevant through our involvement in changing the life of people? In this respect, we need to look into three areas for renewing our commitment to Christ.

Jesus the word of life

It is essential to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the life-giving word, active both in creation and in re-creation. He provides living water to all who are thirsty. Flow of water of life gives a refreshing experience. It is renewal and change in the life of humanity.

The conversation with the Samaritan woman, leads to the realization of Jesus as the giver of living water. The woman who came to draw water and the approach of Jesus who asks water for thirst portrays a dramatic picture of human life situations. Ultimately the whole episode becomes a turning point with Jesus saying, "The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to Eternal life" (Jn. 4:14). It indicates the change happening in perspectives of life. The woman was convinced of the need for water of life and others were brought to the 'word of life'. It also reminds us the words of Jesus, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me".

Peter at one point asks the question, "Where shall we go, you have the words of eternal life". (Jn.6:68). It was the acknowledgement about Jesus as the word of life. We are entrusted this responsibility of leading people to the springs of living water. I wholeheartedly appreciate the initiative of the Diocese in its mission programs, either through local mission at the neighborhood or the India mission or Mexico mission. Yes, let us take the responsibility as the people of God enabling others to draw near to Jesus – the word of life.

Living in Christ: An everyday experience

As Christians it is necessary to affirm our living relationship with Christ. It should be an everyday experience of vital relationship with Christ. God has blessed us and the Diocese abundantly. Does our life build on this relationship with Christ? Often we speak about the freedom that we experience. What does freedom mean if our life is not worthy of living. It is often said, freedom is the ability to know and actualize the value of one's own life. One should know what makes his/her life more dignified and useful. In today's world we come across the use and misuse of freedom and knowledge. Either a person can give constructive contribution to society or a person can be destructive and become a problem to society. Someone has commented, 'no place is a safe place'. In all situations people are confused and they long for peace and a life in harmony. Here we find the challenge to the Christian involvement in the social transformation and nation building which is vital.

The inter-connectedness and relationship that we experience in life need to be acknowledged. In the computer age we use words, connect and disconnect. We must ask whether anyone is disconnected. We must also ask as to how to keep everyone connected to Christ and to one another. In Genesis Chap: 11, we read about the journey of Therah and Abraham, from Ur to Haran and to Canaan, the Promised land. We find the connectivity in journey, while Therah settled at Haran, Abraham carried on the journey obeying the instruction given by God, and therefore he is known as the father of the faithful. God said to Abraham, 'walk in my presence... journey to the land that I will show you'. Yes, we need to Journey with God, in the light of the Lord to the future, journeying to the 'unknown'. This calls for journeying to the people.

In our present day context it is to be seen in the process of building the church on the corner stone – namely the Lord himself, and together move forward. We can walk as much as we want, we can build many buildings, but if we do not walk with Christ and walk with people we go wrong. Of course it is not very easy. It calls for our commitment and sacrifice. Even Peter who professed Jesus Christ, tells him, 'I will follow you, but let us not speak of the Cross'. When we journey without the cross, when we build without the cross, we are not disciples of the Lord. Peter could realize the meaning of the cross, when the resurrected Lord confronted with the question "do you love me more than these". Yes, living in Christ should be an everyday experience in our life journey.

We are called to participate in the re-generating process of human communities

The Church was seen as a pilgrim church, 'called out' of the world and sent back into the world. Therefore, the missiological nature of the church is seen with the ecclesiological understanding of the church as the sacrament, sign and instrument of the kingdom of God. The well-known statement of the Archbishop William Temple which is often referred in the missiological discourses, that "the church is the only society in the world that exists for the sake of those who are not members of it". The classical expression of the identity of the church was more closely linked with the perception of the church as proposed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer who wrote, "The Church is the church only when it exists for others". Here our responsibility is to appropriate our vision.

As salt of the earth the Christian community is entrusted with the task of renewal and change in the life of God's people. How far have we made efforts towards fulfilling this task in the North American context? As we move forward with the conviction that the community has always upheld and strengthened its significant faith experiences through its historical path, we should provide the possibility to transform the life of others. That is the mission that the Mar Thoma community needs to carry on. It is my prayer that God will continue to guide the church 'to live as the expression of Jesus Christ in this history and journey in confidence with Christ into the future'.

NEW POOLATHEEN FOR MAR THOMA CHURCH: LAYING OF FOUNDATION STONE



The laying of the foundation stone for the new Poolatheen building in the SCS Campus, Thiruvalla, was held on 15th August, 2013 at 3:30 pm by His Grace Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan. H G Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan blessed the foundation stone and Sabha Secretary, Lay Trustee and Clergy Trustee placed the foundation stone in the ground. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Suffragan Metropolitan and Thomas Mar Timotheos Episcopa were present for the foundation stone laying ceremony. Vicar Generals, Achens, Sabha Council members and members from various parishes including from St. Thomas Parish were present for the function.

CHURCH: JOURNEYING WITH CHRIST



Dr. J. Paul Rajashekar* (The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia)



It is my joy and privilege to celebrate with you the Silver Jubilee of The Diocese of North America and Europe of the Marthoma Church. I am honored by your invitation to address you on this occasion. It is a special honor because as a Lutheran Pastor, originally from the State of Karnataka in India, I am neither a Malayalam speaker nor associated with the Syrian Christian tradition in India. So I want to express my gratitude to The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Episcopa of this diocese, for the kind invitation. This is not the first time I am speaking to a Marthoma audience. I participated at the Ecumenical Reception in Philadelphia in January 2012. This occasion is even more special for it marks an important "milestone" in your journey with Christ from the sub-continent of India to the United States and Europe in the history of the Marthoma Church.

My reference to the phrase "milestone" may seem a bit odd, even anachronistic, especially for the younger generation. In olden days there used to be mile markers, usually made out of stone at every mile indicating the miles one needs to travel to the next destination. These days milestones have almost disappeared, even in India, and we have become accustomed to four-lane highways and GPS assisted travel. Highways now have rest stops every thirty miles or so for the travelers to pause and refresh themselves. So think of this jubilee celebration as a rest stop to pause and reflect on your journey, from where you have come from and where you are heading, to refresh your memory and anticipate the future course of the journey. You have appropriately chosen the theme, Church: Journeying with Christ. I want to reflect with you three interrelated aspects of this journey in the context of The Marthoma Church in North America and Europe.

An Immigrant Centered Journey

The Marthoma Church in North America of course is an immigrant church transplanted from the shores of India to the West. Most of us gathered here today are immigrants, sons and daughters of immigrants. I myself am an immigrant and know by firsthand the struggles and challenges facing immigrant communities. In one of the essays in the festschrift for Bishop Geevarghese Mar Theodosius entitled, *In Search of Christian Identity in a Global Community* (ed. M.J. Joseph, Thiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithi, 2008), I learned that the earliest Marthoma presence in North America goes as far back to 1912 when Deacon N. M Abraham was a student in Toronto (later became Bishop Dr. Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan). Those who followed him as students to North America eventually returned home. With changes in immigration laws in the United States in 1965 a substantial number of professionals arrived as immigrants. Not long after Marthoma congregations were established in early 1970's. From what I gather, the first officially authorized Marthoma con-

gregation was established in 1976 in the Greater New York City. From this humble beginning, which took years to get official authorization from the hierarchy of the Church in India, The Marthoma Church has been nourished by subsequent waves of immigrants settling all across North America (and Europe) establishing new worshipping communities. Primarily led by the laity loyal to the Marthomite tradition and often served by student pastors, you now have a full-fledged Diocese in North America and Europe with a resident bishop. So it is important to take note that immigrants came first and the church followed them! By all counts it has been a remarkable journey and you have to pause and be thankful to God as a church.

You may know that in the past few decades or so, there has been a phenomenal growth of immigrant churches especially from Asia to North America (Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos, Vietnamese and others). According to a Pew Research Survey, *The Rise of Asian Americans*, released in 2012, 42% of Asian immigrants to the US are Christians and the rest belong to other religious traditions. Among Indian immigrants to the US, only 18% are Christians, majority of them are Protestants (11%), most of them affiliated with Evangelical churches. Roman Catholics account for 5% and Syrian Christians and others represent about 2% of Indian Christian immigrants. The experiences of Indian immigrant churches in North America are very similar, irrespective of denomination, linguistic or ethnic roots. Let me highlight a few issues.

The most important issue facing Indian immigrant communities in the US is the question of identity in relation to the mainstream American culture. Asian Americans are perpetually in search of their identity and belonging, they are neither embraced in their homelands nor in North America! Unlike European immigrants, Asian Americans have not been able to "blend" or "melt" into the American mainstream because of their physical appearance, racial identity or cultural background and more importantly for reasons of discrimination, marginalization and exclusion. Even those who have "assimilated" into the mainstream culture struggle with identity issues. The American born generations of Indians have had to cope with a "hybrid" identity, neither "here nor there" and are challenged to navigate between "American" or "Asian-Indian" identity and often straddling between two distinct identities and cultures, one at home/church and the other in society, school or place of work. Even when younger generations (as Sam George's book calls, "The Coconut Generation") are comfortable and culturally well assimilated in America, they often find structural assimilation extremely difficult.

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On the other hand, the older or first generation immigrants, though they live in America, understandably their mind-set is still rooted in Kerala or India. They have a profound nostalgia for their homeland, prefer to speak in Malayalam, watch Malayalam movies, sing Malayalam songs and some even build expensive homes in Kerala hoping and dreaming that someday they would go back home and live in their retirement. Most of these homes, I am told, sit empty! These immigrants have economically prospered here in America and want their children to emulate their journey to prosperity by holding on to inherited values and traditions.

But their children and grandchildren, the younger Facebook/Tweeter generations have acquired a different set of values and priorities in life. The American born generation has little or no commitment to Kerala or the Malayalee culture! Many first generation parents have frequently heard the complaint, "Mom and Dad, we are in America not in Kerala. This is the place we belong, so please stop interfering with our lives and identity!" This is the hard part of an immigrant's journey. In so far as immigrant churches are dominated by values and traditions of the older immigrant parents, the American born generations will strongly resist adhering to parental values. As a result, intergenerational conflicts become more acute, especially in matters of family values, dating and marriage, vocational preferences, and the like. The cultural challenges immigrant families go through are enormous. Family relationships, between husband and wife, parent and children are now radically redefined. Divorce among Indian immigrants is now becoming fairly common. With the break-up of communal set-up and joint-family system the rearing of younger children has become an issue. Unlike India, families don't have domestic help and thereby putting an enormous burden on women and often the primary breadwinners in Malayalee families. Among all Asian immigrants to North America, Indians seem to have the lowest percentage of inter-racial marriages, but the situation is fast changing creating additional set of challenges among tradition bound Indian families.

How well the Indian immigrant-centered churches are prepared to deal with these cultural issues is a question that needs serious attention. The hegemony of the inherited culture is bound to undergo change and will sooner or later collapse in a matter of couple of generations. The power and control the older generations exercise both in the church and at home will surely diminish. Are the immigrant churches prepared to be more democratic and let the younger generation take up the leadership roles in the church is a crucial question. What sort of spiritual and pastoral care that congregations offer aside from introducing English language worship services, abbreviating the St. James liturgy, or adding a bit of praise-band worship to satisfy the younger generation is worth examining. As you know, worship is the central aspect of The Marthoma tradition and yet there is a profound hunger for spirituality that is unmet by tradition-bound churches and therefore younger generations are turning elsewhere to satisfy their spiritual hunger in independent, Pentecostal or evangelical free churches that provide the space and opportunities of greater participation and involvement in worship. They are more drawn to multi-ethnic congregations and thus the tradition-bound churches are experiencing a silent exodus of younger generations!

This is a problem for all immigrant churches, whether Syrian or non-Syrian. As the Diocese becomes firmly rooted in North America, you have to come to terms with these issues sooner or later. How well equipped are your pastors and priests to relate to the American context, especially in their preaching and teaching and in providing pastoral and spiritual care is a question that I raise for you to wrestle with. Some in Marthoma member have observed that the system of replacing the clergy every three or four years hardly gives your pastors the needed time to get to know their members, let alone understand their life-situations in America, especially if they are trained in India. The priests themselves are trying to cope with the stresses and strains of the new context of their ministry, let alone provide the much needed pastoral care or address issues of their members. Sermon illustrations, members say, often are drawn from India with no relevance to the American context. Christian education is highly deficient or neglected.

I hope these comments are not intended to be critical of the Marthoma polity. There are good reasons for continuing the practice of periodic transfers, for it gives equal opportunity for your clergy to experience life outside of India and, perhaps, earn a better salary than in India. It may broaden their outlook and enrich their cross-cultural experience. I also understand that with insufficient number of clergy theologically educated and formed in America the transfer system is the best option for the present. That said, for reason that I have identified, in the long run, the practice of frequent transfer of clergy may be detrimental to the best interests of parishes outside India. What I am fearful of is that the

current practice may contribute to gradual erosion in membership. I am aware that The Diocese is striving hard to recruit local candidates for ministry and you now have about ten priests who are American educated in ministry. The sooner you accelerate this process the more promising the future will be. This brings me to my second point.

A Church-centered Journey

The formation of The Marthoma Church is a remarkable journey in the history of the Church in India. With roots in the Eastern Orthodox family, it initiated a "Trumpet Call of Reformation" through its founder Abraham Malpan in 1836 and carried it through the translation of the liturgy into Malayalam and became a church of the "reformation" within the Syrian Christian tradition. As one who hails from the Lutheran tradition, which initiated the original Reformation of the Church in the 16th Century, I feel a strong affinity with The Marthoma Church, for it embodies the tradition the Syrian/Eastern Orthodox traditions and the spirit of the Protestant Reformation through the influence of the Anglican Church Missionary Society in its emphasis on Scripture and evangelism. It has been a bridge builder between Eastern Orthodox traditions and the heirs of the Protestant Reformation by establishing communion with the Church of South India, Church of North India, the Episcopal Church in the US and the World Council of Churches. The Marthoma Church provided ecumenical leadership through the most well-known of your members Dr. M.M. Thomas. The ecumenical commitment of The Marthoma Church is commendable and needs to be celebrated on an occasion like this.

While remembering and celebrating this unique past, the Marthoma Church seems to be at a critical crossroads. With over 1200 parishes in 12 dioceses across the globe and with 800 plus active priests The Marthoma Church is now a global diaspora. You have been open to reaching out to non-Syrians, including those of Dalit background. The Church's remarkable growth of course brings has its own challenges and opportunities. The Marthoma Church may think of itself as a global church but as your members strike deeper roots in Western contexts, I am afraid the hegemony exercised by the hierarchy in Tiruvalla will come under pressure. Not long ago, a bishop in the Syrian Orthodox Church in India raised the question, "Can Kottayam really rule the world?" Let me pose the same question to you, "Can Tiruvalla really control the overseas Diaspora? It is a provocative question and I am afraid it is more than a rhetorical question. Any institution with a global footprint must face this question.

The question in a way captures the tension between the global dimension and the local/contextual dimension of the church. Another Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan based in New York, Mar Nicolavus, some time ago compared the Malayalee churches in North America as potted plants, like the Curry plant that every Indian home keeps. Because the weather outside is inhospitable (unless you are in a warmer time zone), the Curry plant remains in its pot forever. As a non-Malayalee, it is my observation that Malayalam speaking congrega-

tions in general, irrespective of their tradition or denomination, tend to be closed communities or linguistically bound transplants with no real outreach into the broader community, evangelistically or socially. They display a remarkable love for "their own church" or congregation but that love seldom extends beyond the boundaries of their own community. I have not come across very many ethnically or linguistically oriented congregations getting involved in local communities, like running day-care centers, community counseling centers, social service centers or any such local activities in America. There is very little ecumenical cooperation or collaborative work in the community or local neighborhoods. Admittedly, this is a generalized comment and there are some notable exceptions. I am aware that the diocese is involved in active work in Mexico and in other places. The point is that active engagement in local communities must become a priority for congregations.

Understandably, most Malayalee congregations are new and busy establishing themselves in a new context and have enough difficulties to raise the money needed to pay salaries of their priests, maintain buildings or pay rent. But that said there are well established congregations with 200-300 families with wealthy members but are least interested in serving the community in which they are located. Indian congregations speak a lot amount mission but that mission is usually directed to projects in India or Kerala, although the need is greater there. The point is not that we stop supporting the Church in India but rather engage also in serving the communities in America. Put differently, you are called to become Marthoma churches of America than simply content to be Marthoma churches in America. A church-centered journey without effective local community outreach becomes purely dependent on future immigrants with little prospects for growth. There is a Chinese proverb which says, "deeper the roots, the stronger the shoots."

I am afraid I may be touching on a sensitive nerve among you but it is my humble submission that a church that prides itself in a tradition of reformation within the Syrian family of churches may be in need of a modern day Abraham Malpan who can initiate a cultural translation or transformation of the Church today. A Church-centered journey can continue and flourish as long as we are able to reexamine and reform congregations in light of the changing culture and circumstances where they are situated. In the Protestant tradition there is a Latin saying, *ecclesia semper reformanda*, which means the church is always reforming or changing. The Church is always in need of reform otherwise it becomes "curved in upon itself," that is, it becomes a closed community, self-centered, celebrating only its past but not concerned about its future.

Surely, no one knows the future for it is yet to come. And yet, being aware of the challenges facing the Church today, we can already see the writing on the wall, though we are not always sure how to read it. I know full well that ecclesiastical bodies and institutions are often allergic to change. Change is unsettling for the power structures and controlling interests. Changing the existing system creates new issues and problems. Change implies adaptation to new contexts and situations and it is often difficult to manage change. It is not change for the sake of change. Change is easy but improvement is difficult, as Martin Luther once said. And yet, a church that is open to change and adaptation is a healthier church. Sooner or later, new generations of members far removed from the nostalgia of their parents, grandparents and great grandparents for their homeland, will raise the question, "How long Tiruvalla will rule The Marthoma Church in America?" May be this anniversary will be an occasion to ponder that question. Given the commitment, enthusiasm and loyalty of the Marthomites, especially among the laity in the Church, I see a lot of promise and hope for a better future. Let me be clear, a Church-centered journey alone is insufficient unless it is firmly grounded in a Christ-centered journey. I now turn to my third and last point.

A Christ-centered Journey

The Marthoma Church is a biblically grounded community of believers on a global journey. The metaphor of journey is profoundly biblical. The Bible is full of stories of people's journeys from Genesis to Revelation. Beginning with Abraham in the Old Testament, the story of Israel via Egypt to the Promised Land was a long journey. Many generations later the people of Israel were forced to be in exile in Babylon. There the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Ps. 137:4). This has been always the story of migrant people. The migrants want to sing the songs of their native land while living in a foreign land. But for those who have taken roots in the foreign land, the songs of their ancestors appear out of place, like singing "strange songs in the Lord's land." How shall we sing the songs that are relevant and appropriate to contexts

and cultures where we find ourselves in life is an age-old problem.

The metaphor of journey is also found in the New Testament. Jesus himself was constantly on the move in Palestine. As you know the story of the disciples in the Acts of the Apostles is about their journeys to preach the gospel to the "ends of the earth." St. Thomas reached the shores of India to proclaim the gospel. Among all the Apostles it was St. Paul who travelled all across the Roman Empire and Asia Minor to spread the message of Jesus Christ. The message of the Apostles was about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This Christ-centered message became the foundation for a global and cross-cultural mission of the Church reaching all continents.

This global outreach however did not happen easily. Christianity was born as a movement within Judaism of the first century. Jesus himself was a Jew, so were all his disciples. Interestingly, the mission of Jesus was primarily directed toward his own people. He explicitly stated, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). He even commanded his disciples, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news" (Matt. 10:5-6). Reading such sayings in the Gospels one gets the impression that the mission of Jesus was only to his own people. In fact, there are only five direct encounters between Jesus and the Gentiles recorded in the Bible, some of them difficult to interpret. His response to a Canaanite woman, for example, who comes begging to Jesus to heal her daughter is astounding. He tells her, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (Matt. 15:26, Mk. 7:24). And yet, in his preaching and teachings Jesus often lifted up the Gentiles and Samaritans as models of faith (as you know in the parable of the Good Samaritan and others). What transformed Jesus himself to command his disciples "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." in Matthew 28 is the event of his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. The one who was sent to save his own people found himself rejected by his own! Now the door to the Kingdom of God is thrown wide open to all to enter. The mandate to preach to all nations therefore appears only in post-Resurrection narratives and not during his earthly ministry. Isn't that interesting?

It is apparent that Jesus himself undergoes a conversion or transformation through his death and resurrection to the realization, God's love embraces all people, not one's own people, tribe, ethnic or linguistic community. Predictably, even the disciples had to undergo similar conversions in the Acts of the Apostles in the controversy between Paul and Peter in the matter of Jewish-Gentile relations. The early Church had to learn under difficult circumstances that it exists not for itself but for the sake of all God's people! The Church was called to be God's people in the midst of the whole people of God in all nations and cultures.

A Christ-centered journey then is not one of going around circles among our own people thinking that we are on a pilgrimage! A church that exists for it-

self or for its own community, seeking only its self-preservation runs the risk of being a closed community. It becomes a social or cultural club of like-minded people, but not really a Christ-centered community. The Church is called to be an ex-centric community, that is, not an inward looking but outward looking community. This is true not only for The Marthoma Church but all churches that claim to confess the name of Jesus Christ. It is especially true for immigrant churches in the context of North American pluralism.

The vision of the Church I have shared with you is profoundly biblical. It may appear idealistic or unrealistic. It is easy for one to say what a Christ-centered church ought to be than to deal with as it really is! For reasons of social cohesion communities draw boundaries around themselves by subscribing to certain values, traditions, rituals and linguistic affinities. After all the Church is a human institution, subject to realities of human sinfulness. No church has ever approximated the biblical vision of a Christ-centered community and it may never realize that vision. Nonetheless, a Christ-centered community never abandons that vision and journeys in faith and hope that someday we will come close to realizing it as humanly as possible. Life itself is a journey that we undertake in faith and hope that God will forgive us for our failures and accept us as we are. I want to conclude by citing two passages from Scripture:

First Letter of Peter 1: 9-10, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people, but now you are God's

people, once you had not received but now you have received mercy."

Hebrews 12:12-13, "Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore, let us go forth to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come." May God bless you in your Christ-centered journey as you celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the Diocese. May your faith in Christ Jesus be strengthened and may you live up to your Church's motto: "Lighted to Lighten" the world.

**Dr. J. Paul Rajashekar is Luther D. Reed Professor of Systematic Theology and former Dean of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. He formerly taught at the United Theological College in Bangalore, India and served as an Executive Secretary for Theology and Studies at The Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, Switzerland. He is also a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.*

JUBILEE SEMINAR IN NEW YORK



A Seminar on "Identity, Mission and Vision of the Church" was held at the Epiphany Mar Thoma Church, New York on Saturday, July 13, 2013

FIRST SUNDAY SCHOOL CAMP - ST. MATHEW'S MTC, TORONTO



The Sunday School of St. Mathew's Mar Thoma Church, and Toronto organized their first camp at Jackson's Point Conference Centre from 10 - 12 May, 2013. 56 students from grades 6 - 10 along with 14 teachers / volunteers participated in the camp. The highlights of the camp were: the theme presentation, the praise and worship sessions, the leadership strands focusing on leadership qualities like Communication, Team Work, Proactive Behavior and Self Awareness and applying these qualities in our Christian lives, the talent night and various other interactive sessions for the children. The camp ended on Sunday, 12th May with a worship service led by Rev. Varghese K. Abraham.

BOOK RELEASE



The new book titled "Churching the Diaspora, Discipling the Families" written by Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa was released by the Metropolitan Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma on Tuesday, September 17, 2013 (the first day of Mar Thoma Sabha Prathinidhi Mandalam) at Tiruvalla by handing over a copy to the Valiya Metropolitan Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Tirumeni. The author of the book Mar Theodosius spoke on the significance of the book. Copies of the book were distributed to all the bishops during the release at Mandalam. Congratulations to Theodosius Tirumeni on behalf of the Diocese of North America and Europe.

- Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

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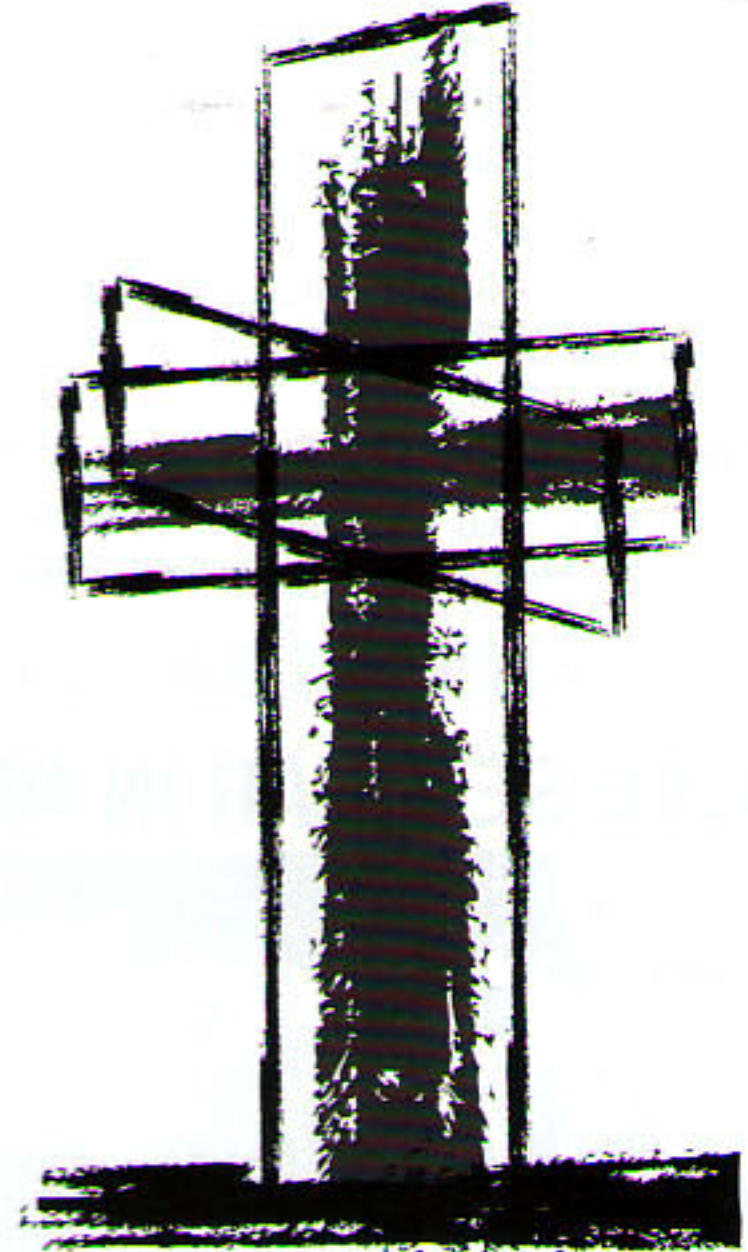
DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE: SEMINAR ON IDENTITY, VISION AND MISSION



Titus Mathews, St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Calgary

This seminar on Identity, Vision and Mission of the Mar Thoma Church in North America was held to mark the Silver Jubilee of the Diocese. Though the Diocese is only twenty-five years old, Mar Thoma parishes date further back to the mid-1970s. Regular prayer group meetings in Edmonton started as early as 1974 and regular worship in Malayalam in 1976 when the prayer group was approved as a congregation. It became a parish in 1982. Similar stories can be said about parishes in Toronto, New York, Philadelphia, Houston, and Dallas and so on. When we look at the history of each parish, we can see they were primarily communities of worship. When the number of parishes and congregations increased it became necessary to organize them into a zone and the zonal council was set up in 1984. As the number of parishes increased steadily, the zone was raised to a Diocese in 1988. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan was the first Diocesan bishop followed by Chrysostom Thirumeni, but they were not resident in North America. Theophilus Thirumeni was the first resident bishop from 1993 to 2001 and Koorilos Thirumeni followed him. Since 2009, Theodosius Thirumeni is our Diocesan bishop. We had bought a Diocesan Center near Philadelphia in 1992, which was sold later and we built our present Diocesan Center in New York. Many activities, such as the Youth conference and Family conference, pre-date the Diocese itself. At the end of twenty-five years, we have nearly seventy-five parishes and congregations as part of the diocese. This reflects a steady growth in membership, primarily because of continuing immigration to North America and Europe. If this growth of about five percent per year continues, we can expect more than two hundred and fifty parishes and congregations in this diocese in the next twenty-five years. This may be an overestimation if a significant number of our people go to other charismatic churches for personal or ecclesiastical reasons or their inability to worship regularly in a language they understand. Even if the net growth rate is only three percent per annum, we should expect the number of parishes and congregations to be more than double with an average membership of hundred families. Therefore the Diocese faces some serious challenges.

It is desirable to have most of our parishes served by priests who grew up here. If so the Diocese will have to attract many more second or even third generation youngsters, to dedicate themselves for church work. The diocese is encouraging youth born and brought up in North America, to enter into the ordained ministry of the Church. We have about ten young priests of the second generation serving in our diocese now. Far greater efforts must be directed towards the second and third generations to keep them engaged in our church activities. I am happy to note that the diocese is planning several projects to attract young people to serve the Church. The growth of many parishes depends on continuing immigration. The first generation prefers Malayalam as the language of liturgy, whereas the second generation finds prayers in Malayalam incomprehensible. The first generation is so used to the chants in Malayalam that they are not comfortable using the English version of the liturgy. This creates a tension between first and second generations. It is not practical to arrange worship services in both Malayalam and English every Sunday. Perhaps we can use Malayalam chants during English services making them attractive to older generation and have some prayers in English for the benefit of young people during Malayalam services. But whether it is Malayalam or English, we should make an effort to make our worship services more relevant to the younger generation. During the early years, every parish focused on worship and on providing social occasions to meet one another. It is natural for newcomers to do that. In a new country where members of immediate family were not close by, making new friends among other newcomers was important. Our unique identity perhaps required us to meet as a separate group. Unfortunately, this also meant cutting ourselves off from other Christian communities whether recently arrived, immigrant or settled. The danger of developing a ghetto can be seen in Oklahoma but we can initiate the Neighborhood Mission in Canada. We can join in interfaith relief organizations in any city and support programs such as Inn From the Cold, the Food Bank or the Mustard Seed ministry. We can also support the mission work of the Church in India more actively, especially with larger monetary contributions.



In Calgary, our mission statement is: "As a parish of Mar Thoma Church, we will be a Community of Worship, Fellowship and Witness". The word fellowship implies friendship, companionship, sharing and participation in acts and areas of common interest. Fellowship is the practical expression of obeying the commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself". A community without fellowship is not a community at all. There are several activities in each parish, which promote fellowship. Prayer groups, Youth groups, Edavaka Mission, Suvisesha Sevika Sangham – all provide opportunities for fellowship. Conferences organized at the Diocesan level of various organizations as well as family conferences provide opportunities to promote fellowship across the Diocese. But Fellowship within one's own community is not enough. We must have fellowship with other faith communities also. We should invite them to our activities and we should participate in their programs. As a church we are committed to Ecumenism.

What is your vision of the Mar Thoma Church in North America in another twenty-five years? Do you think a mission statement such as "A worshipping community becoming a witnessing community" is suitable for your parish? Can you think of a set of new activities to make this a reality? How can we help with mission activities of the Diocese? These are some of the questions you can discuss and answer during small group deliberations.

**Paper presented at the Diocesan Silver Jubilee seminar in Edmonton on 16 March 2013.*

SILVER JUBILEE OF THE NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE DIOCESE OF THE MAR THOMA SYRIAN CHURCH



Rev. Dr. Martin Alphonse

(Delivered on the occasion of the 10th National Conference of the Mar Thoma Volunteer Evangelists association, July 19-21, 2013 at the Farmers Branch Mar Thoma Church, Dallas TX).

It gives me enormous joy to be able to bring greetings to you on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee celebration of the North America/Europe Diocese of the Mar Thoma Sabha. You are not 25 years old. You are 25 years young! I bring greetings to you today, not as a total outsider, nor even as a guest, but as a friend of the Mar Thoma Sabha with which I have been associated for a number of years.

I first heard of the Mar Thoma Sabha in 1973 when I was enrolled as a student at the Union Biblical Seminary, Yavatmal (now in Pune) Maharashtra. Dr. Saphirt Athyal, the President of the seminary and my professor of Old Testament, is a son of the Mar Thoma Sabha. His father known as Valliya Athyal Achen, had served the Mar Thoma Sabha with distinction for several decades. I also had several seminary mates who were members of the Mar Thoma Sabha. I had the joy of participating in the Holy Qurbana for the first time in May 1976 when I attended an all India Seminary Students Conference, held at the Mar Thoma Seminary in Kottayam. It was here I was introduced to Dr. M. M. Thomas, the famous lay theologian of both the Mar Thoma Sabha as well as India. A few months later, I received my first invitation to preach in a youth event at the Mar Thoma Church on Harrington Road, Chennai. Four years later in January 1980, I was invited to preach in my first Mar Thoma convention ever in Nilambur/Chungathara. Since then, for the past 33 years I have had the singular honor of preaching repeatedly in a number of family conferences, youth conferences, parish conventions in North America, and in several other Diocesan Conventions like Kottarakara and Ranni/Nilackal in Kerala as well as at the Maraman Convention. I am most profoundly grateful to you for accepting me as a "Friend of the Mar Thoma Sabha".

My observation and appreciation:

Over the past 33 years of my association with the Mar Thoma Sabha as a whole, and especially with the Mar Thoma churches in North America for 30 years since 1983 beginning with the Los Angeles Mar Thoma Church, I have come to observe and appreciate a number of significant things about the life and the ministry of your church. Let me just mention a few here.

1. You are a Traditional Church.

You are blessed with a very unique and rich theological tradition as seen vividly in your liturgy, especially the Holy Qurbana. I have often heard today's young people commenting on how boring it is to participate in the liturgy with those long hours of standing on your feet and chanting over and over again the same terms and phrases. Every time such a remark was made, my response has always been: "But look into the content of what is being said, recited and sung. It is thoroughly biblical and evangelical, strongly affirming and emphasizing the proclamation of the gospel."

Tradition by itself is not wrong unless it totally lacks or stubbornly blocks the process of holistic transformation from taking place within the Body of Jesus Christ. This certainly not the case with the Mar Thoma Church. You are committed to change and transformation by the transference of your faith to the younger generation, in every generation. This leads me to my next observation.

2. You are a Transferring Church .

The Mar Thoma Church is faithfully transferring the Christian faith to the younger generation in the same way Timothy's grandmother and mother did to him as pointed out by Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 1:5 " I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now

lives in you also." In these past 33 years of my association with the Mar Thoma Church, I have had the privilege of staying with several families when I went to speak in conventions. I have never stayed with any family where I didn't see the tangible evidence of this transfer of faith taking place. Every family I stayed with regularly gathered for prayer frequently spoke the God language to the children and constantly encouraged the young ones to actively involve in the life of the church. I encourage you and urge you to never give up on this rich tradition of transferring the Christian faith to your children, especially in this day and age when we live in North America. Do continue to celebrate this rich tradition and keep on transferring it to the younger generation!

3. You are a Transplanted Church

Continuing on from the previous observation, it is vital that you never give up on perpetuating the tradition of transferring the Christian faith to your children, especially in this day and age when we live in North America. One of the greatest and most frustrating pressures upon Christian immigrants to North America is on how to raise our children in the Christian faith amidst a religiously pluralistic and secularist environment. There are a number of inter-generational issues to be tackled such as individualism, materialism, consumerism, moral relativism and so on. We live in a time and age where the most cherished Christian values of marriage and family are radically redefined, and our children are both constantly exposed to it, as well as being indoctrinated by it. So, the question is, how do we safeguard our children from deviating from the fundamentals of the Christian faith under the circumstances?

We can learn from the apostle Paul, who in a similar situation and as a spiritual father to Timothy helped him to discover the best from each culture he was exposed to and use it for his own growth and ministry. Timothy as a young man was a tri-cultural product. His mother was a Jewess and father a Greek (Acts 16:1), and he was brought up in the Roman Empire. This means, Timothy was constantly exposed to and strongly influenced by his mother's Jewish culture, his father's Greek culture and the dominant Roman Culture in the schools he attended. Facing the reality of the pressure of the tri-fold culture on him, Paul advised Timothy to bring out the biblically competent best out of each of those cultures and live with it productively. For example, he advised Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:3-7 as follows: in verse 3 to "endure hardship as a good soldier (Roman) of Christ; .. v5 to compete as an athlete (Greek) and in v 6 to be hardworking as a

farmer (Jewish. Note: Jews were good farmers even as the LORD Jesus Christ used the Parable of the Farmer to explain the gospel). Again, in his closing remarks, perhaps a few weeks before his death, Apostle Paul powerfully reminds Timothy of this in 2 Timothy 4:7 "I have fought the good fight (like a Roman soldier), finished the race (like a Greek athlete), I have kept the faith (like a devote Jew). Your children who live here in North America are also tri-cultural products. They are Indians, Mar Thomites and Americans. A number of aspects of our Indian culture and the American culture are in direct conflict with the Mar Thoma Culture, if I can call it so. This is quite a challenge for you. For the past 25 years you have struggled with it, and you will continue to struggle with it until the LORD returns. But you need to keep moving on. The best way you can inculcate the Christian faith

in them is by enabling them to discover the biblically competent best elements from each of the cultures they are being exposed to and use them for their own Christian growth and ministry. This way they can, not only change themselves, but also become agents of transformation of the environment in which they live in North America. This indeed is one of the finest contributions the Mar Thoma Sabha can make to the nation in which its members now live.

The Diocesan Silver Jubilee Finale

and Episcopal Silver Jubilee Celebration of Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius



**Nov 23, 2013,
Saturday
New York**

Holy Qurbana at 9 a.m.
Public Meeting at 11 a. m.

Chief Guest:
The Most Rev. Dr. Joseph
Mar Thoma Metropolitan

Bishops of Sister Churches will also attend.

STRUGGLING TO BE A GOOD CHRISTIAN?

Thomas Philip, Philadelphia



Before a person comes to Christ, there is only one force or nature in him which we call carnal nature. The moment he or she accepts Jesus Christ the war begins: the war between two forces – carnal and spiritual (Eph. 6:12). Every believer has good intentions of living the best Christian life and to bear the fruit of the Spirit. It is not that they lack the earnest desire, but many Christians fail in the area of discipline. To be a disciple we need to be disciplined in our walk with the Lord. When we don't have the discipline, the gravity of flesh and sin pull us down and we fail to become the kind of believer that the Lord intends us to be. We try again and again to become the faithful Christian that God desires us to be, but fail miserably and some even fallen away from faith. Many Christians are willing to live a lukewarm state of the Christian living because it gives them the freedom to pick and choose while keeping the social acceptance of religiosity. So the question is, "Does God wants us to live our lives defeated once we accept Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of our lives?"

As I mentioned earlier there are two natures in us – spiritual and carnal. If we feed the spiritual being within us, the spiritual man gets stronger and powerful. In this process we begin the journey from being a believer to becoming a disciple. When we find more time to nurture the spiritual being, the carnal nature begins to starve. Believing in Jesus Christ is only the beginning of our spiritual journey. If we are to win the battle and finish the race, we need to be disciplined and trained. In 1 Thess. 2:19, apostle Paul talks about this discipline. Just like an athlete controls his or her body, believers have to be trained, disciplined and spiritually fit to run the race. An athlete works towards competitive endurance and fitness levels. Similarly, as believers we need to be 'heart' healthy and practice endurance in our daily walk with the Lord. Being saved does not mean that we can sit back and wait for the rapture or death. Being saved means we have to get to work for the glory of God. Revelation 22:12 reads, "Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds..."

There are many Christians today who think they are saved; they think they are safe and secure from an eternal perspective, but they continue to live a life conformed to the standards of the world and sin. They still go to church on Sundays, read the Bible and pray whenever they feel because that is a requirement and a norm for a believer. Often, there is no evidence of spiritual fruit in their lives. Rather, it is the religiosity that forces them to answer the call of duty as a Christian. What is the true motive of my religious works and protocols? Am I truly on fire for the Lord? Is it the passion and devotion for the Lord that gets me involved in the ministry? Do I have a burning desire to bring others to Christ? The question we should ask is this: In my struggle to live a Christian life, am I replacing passion with passivity, devotion with emotion, worship with works, and inspiration with perspiration? Jeremiah 17:10 says, "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve." Again in Proverbs 16:2 we read, "All a person's ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the Lord."

According to 1 Corinthians 3 there is only one foundation a believer can build upon and that foundation is Jesus Christ. Getting the foundation right is a good start; that's why we are called Christians! The Bible says we are the temple of God, so we need to look beyond the foundation. 1 Cor. 3:11-15 says, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved — even though only as one escaping through the flames." On this foundation we are expected to build a portfolio of works to benefit the Lord and His Kingdom. It is for the believer's fulfillment and joy that we perform such works, and rewards are waiting for us on the Judgment Day. Our works will be tested by fire to see if it has any eternal value! What happens when we escape through

the flames? We get burned! Therefore, it is essential for us to be mindful about the way we build our lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

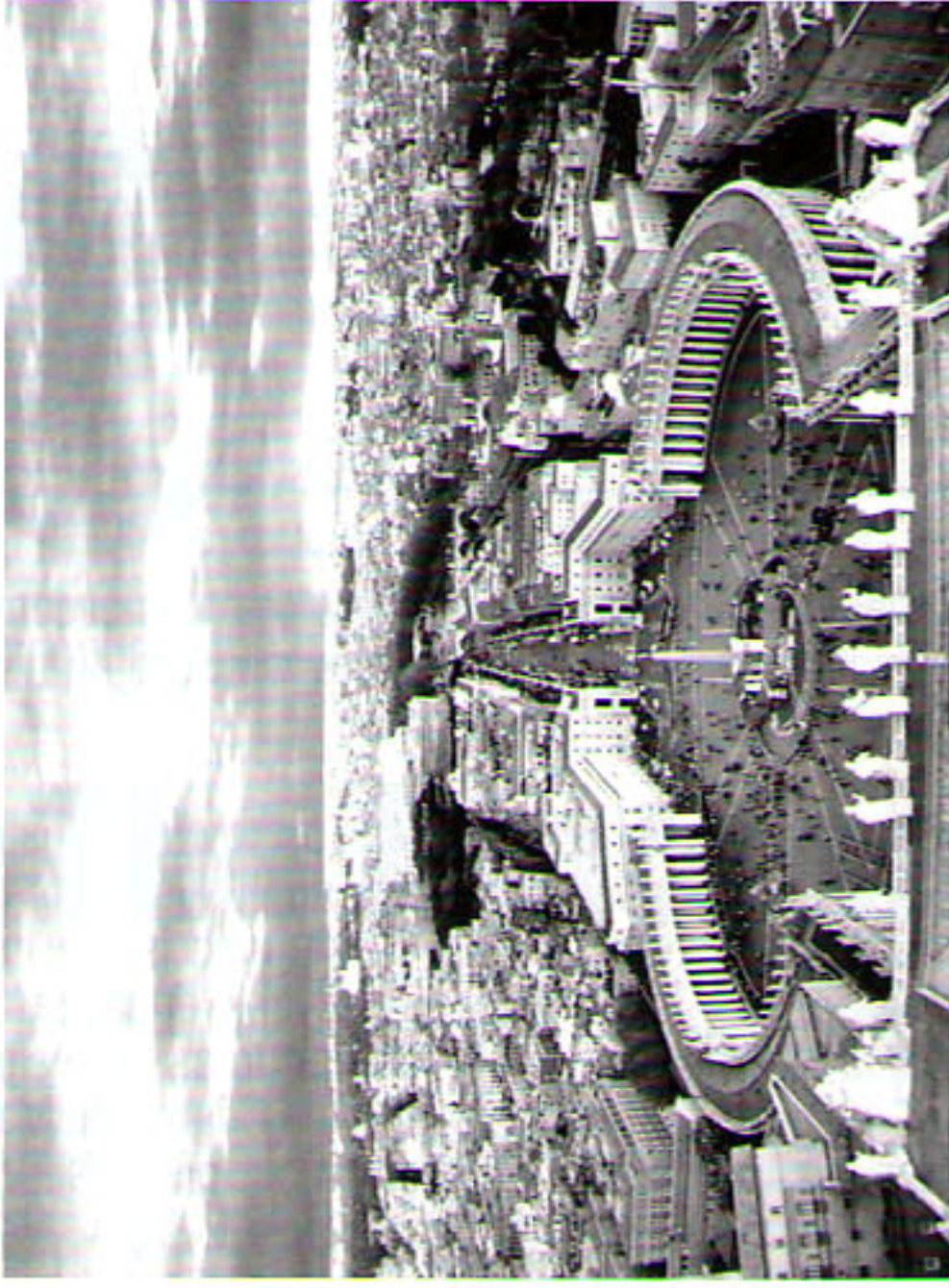
So let's see how we are called to live the Christian walk. We are not called to live a righteous life of our own. We are given the Holy Spirit, who is the third person of the Trinity to empower and energize our Christian lives. Holy Spirit is referred to as the Helper, the Comforter, the Advocate, and the Counselor. Many Christians live their whole life without giving serious thought to the Helper who is available to them. Many are either ignorant of the Holy Spirit or ignore the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came to convict us of sin, to give us understanding of the Word of God, to give us faith, to equip us to do ministry and so on and so forth. When we go into this world without the directive of the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, we will be total failures. We are not asked by the Lord to serve Him with our own strength. In the book of Acts we see that the apostles were told to wait for the Holy Spirit. Today, the Holy Spirit is waiting for acceptance into our hearts. He is willing and ready to be accepted into our lives to live the very life that we are called to do. Many believers struggle to live the Christian walk because they are trying to make it without the Spirit of the Lord! The Holy Spirit must become a vital part of a believer's life. In the Gospel of John chapter 3 Jesus is essentially saying to Nicodemus, "It's true that you have the Jewish background, but you have to be born of the Spirit." This is still true for you and me. It's true that we have the traditions and beliefs of the Mar Thoma church. Traditions and belief systems are good to some extent, but more than that we need to be born again in Spirit. We need the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. As believers we need to abide in Jesus Christ. Why do you think Jesus told the apostles to stay in Jerusalem and wait until they are anointed by the Holy Spirit, until they were filled with the Holy Spirit? Jesus knew that if He sent out the 11 disciples with only their experiences, testimonies, witness and miracles, it would be a failure. There has to be more than the knowledge, the wisdom, and experience. Moreover, these disciples argued, they doubted, and they denied Him. If they tell the world that Jesus died and rose again then went up to heaven, no one is going to believe them. There must be more than what the disciples can come up with their own in order to convince and persuade the world around them. Without a divine indwelling the task set before them could never be accomplished. If the apostles were not ready without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are definitely not! We must also prepare ourselves in prayer to be filled with the divine indwelling of the Spirit to equip and empower us to fulfill the purpose and will of God.



(Journey of St. Paul
& The Seven Churches)

From: JFK - NY, Washington DC Chicago, Houston & LA	
Sep 08 - 20, 2013	Turkey & Greece
Sep 22 - 04, Oct, 2013	Turkey & Rome
Oct 06 - 18, 2013	Turkey & Greece
Nov 17 - 29, 2013	Turkey & Greece
May 18 - 30, 2014	Turkey & Rome
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Turkey & Rome or Greece

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connected with the 7 Churches mentioned in Revelations and St. Paul's Journey

Triangle Tour (5 Days): Delhi/Agra/Jaipur

HOLY LAND TOURS 2013 & 2014

Sep 01 - 14, 2013	Jordan/Israel & Egypt*
Nov 17 - 26, 2013	Jordan & Israel
Feb 23 - 08 Mar, 2014	Jordan/Israel & Egypt*
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*Egypt and Nile Dinner-Cruise-optional

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In order to understand the importance of the Holy Spirit in our lives, let's take a look at the lives of a few of the disciples before and after Pentecost.

1) In the Gospels we see the disciples obsessed with Jesus setting up the earthly kingdom. We see the reference again in the book of Acts 1:6. But after the Pentecost, we don't see the disciples trying to set up an earthly kingdom. Are we focused on the heavenly Kingdom or the earthly kingdom?

2) In the Gospels we see the disciples cowardly avoiding the cross, but after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit we see the disciples embracing the suffering and persecution. Are we willing to embrace the way of the Cross?

3) In the Gospels we see that the disciples were asking all the questions. After the Pentecost in the book of Acts we see the disciples answering them. Similarly, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, He enables us to answer the questions in the light of the Gospel.

4) In the Gospels we see the disciples struggling to pray. On the mount of transfiguration they fell asleep. In the book of Acts, we see the disciples have no problem praying. Peter is on the roof top praying; the Church is always praying earnestly! The Holy Spirit enabled them to pray without ceasing!

Now let's take a look at our own spiritual lives. Where do we stand as believers? Today, many of the believers and churches are trying to exist without the guidance and constant filling of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when we earnestly invite the Holy Spirit into our lives and submit to the will and Lordship of Jesus Christ, He enables us to abide in Christ. In John 15:5 we read, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in Him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." When we abide in Christ, God's Kingdom and righteousness will become our priority. When we submit to the leadership of the Holy Spirit within us, we can expect love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control flowing from us. Who doesn't want these fruits of the Spirit? We all desire them in our lives. The branch simply abides in the Vine and the life-giving sap that runs in the Vine flows into the branches and produces the fruit for the glory of the Father and for the nourishment and blessing of others. If we separate ourselves from the Vine there is no fruit. When we indulge ourselves in the sinful pleasures of the world we gradually become worldly Christians. Sin starts to accumulate in us and slowly begins to restrict the free flow of the vital sap from the Vine to the branches (see diagram). We need to be disciplined in our Christian lives where we seek, surrender, and be obedient to the power of the Holy Spirit who will unclog the effect of sin in our lives. Since we live in a fallen world everyone is prone to sin. When we abide in Christ, we will have an intimate daily fellowship with Christ, where nothing gets in between Him and us.

The blood of Jesus and the Holy Spirit works together as the cleanser that removes specks of sin that gets into our system. This is why the disciplines of prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other believers are so important.

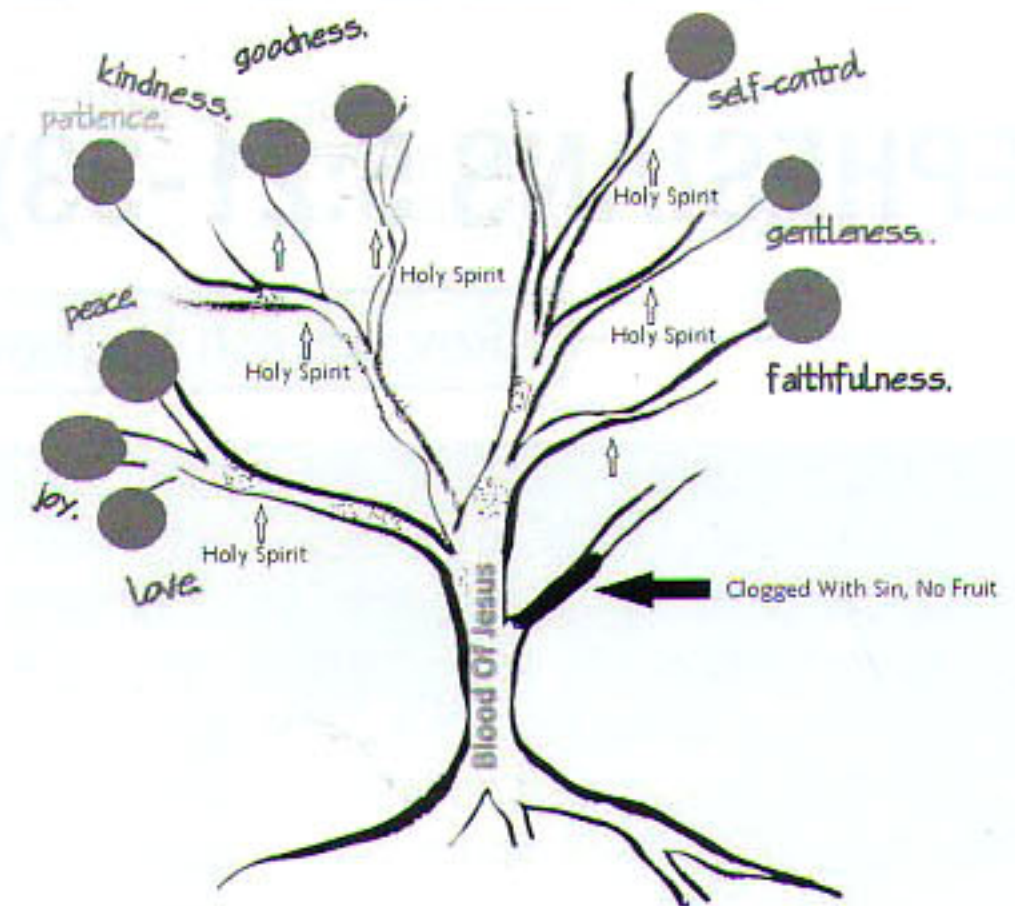


Diagram 1: Vine and the branches (Ref: St. John 15, Gal 5:22-23)

Solomon chose to ask for wisdom and knowledge when God appeared to him. If there is one thing that God asked me today, that should be the abiding presence and constant filling of the Holy Spirit. When God Himself takes residence in a believer's life, He leads, directs, and counsels everything in the life of the believer. I don't have to struggle to become the perfect Christian, because the Holy Spirit lives inside me and He is willing to live the very life that He called me to do! When the Holy Spirit takes residence in our lives, He is the President of our lives and He presides over everything in our lives! Amen!

തിരുമഹത്വം

അലകടൽ ആഴികൾ അഖിലങ്ങൾ ഉടയവനാകും നാമാ ഉറവുകൾ, നദികൾ, മലനിരകൾ നിൻ കരുവിരുതിൻ തെളിവല്ലോ. തവ തിരുസുതനെ അടിയങ്ങൾക്കായി ബലിയായ് നൽകിയ നാമാ കീർത്തിച്ചീടും തവ തിരുനാമം അടിയങ്ങൾ അനുദിനവും. സൂര്യ ചന്ദ്രാദികൾ ആയവയാലിപ്രപഞ്ചം വർണ്ണ വിതാനമതായ് മഞ്ഞും മഴയും പൊഴിച്ചു ദൂതലമതിനെ ദലദൂയിഷ്ടമതായ്. സൃഷ്ടിതൻ മകുടമായ് മനുജകുലത്തെ സൃഷ്ടിച്ചു നീ ദൂതലത്തിൽ പാപ ചെളിയിൽ വീണതാം മനുജനിൻ രക്ഷകനായി നീ വന്നു. പാപബലിയായ് മരകുരിശേന്തി യേശുവിൻ രക്തം ചിന്തിയാൽ കഴുകണം എങ്ങിൻ പാപകറകൾ തിരുസുതനിൻ നിണം അതിനാലെ.



Benjamin George, Christos MTC, Philadelphia, PA

തലമുറകൾ

ദൈവമേ എത്ര അഗാധം നിൻ സ്നേഹം ദിനവും തെളിക്കും പാത അഗോചരം കുടുംബ വൃക്ഷത്തിൽ ഇളം മുകുളം നിൻ കരത്തിൽ വളർത്തും കൃപ മനോഹരം അമ്മതൻ മടിയതിൽ മാറോടണഞ്ഞ് അമ്മിഞ്ഞ മടിയതിൽ നുകർന്ന് പൈതങ്ങൾ അച്ഛനും അമ്മയും ആകുന്നതോർക്കുകിൽ പിൻതലമുറകൾ കാണുവാൻ സൗഭാഗ്യം കണ്ണുകൾക്കേകിയ സർവ്വേശ്വരാ! നന്ദി എണ്ണിയാൽ തിരാത്ത നക്ഷത്ര ജാലം പോൽ എൻ തലമുറയെ നാമാ നീ തീർത്താലും.



Andrews Anchery, MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch

HOW TO ACCOMPLISH A SUCCESSFUL FAMILY LIFE

(EPHESIANS 5:21-33)

Rev. Sajesh Mathews, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam



This is the right time to reflect about Family since it is being distorted by the influences of global standards of lifestyle. Indian society is influenced by the sub-cultures, modernization and the global culture. People who live as homosexuals and lesbians claim they are family as do single people who adopt children without getting married. Hence, the concept of family is being changed in our society. So, we need to focus on the significance of family life in all our meetings with due respect. Family is the basic unit of all social formation. Society is a web of relations between individual members.

The definition of family has been set out in various ways in different societies, but the crux is the same. Its definition can be found in any book of sociology, but it is much more than a mere definition. It is the unit which binds husband, wife and children to celebrate, to enjoy and to have fellowship as they stay together as a family unit.

We're in crisis at the moment. Our world is turning towards a fundamentally different idea of marriage and we hardly reflect on marriage but talk more about relationships which may be the influence of western culture which does not focus on marriage because of the divorces and broken relationship within their communities. Now in our context, there are an increasing number of gay marriages and open marriages, broken marriages and sex outside of marriage that challenge the real family system in our society. As we celebrate family Sunday in our church we should not forget the fact that the Church consists of widows, orphans and the divorced who must be included in our broader family relationship. That's why today it's more important than ever to turn back to the Bible and remind ourselves of how God intended marriage to be. Whether you are a husband, a wife, single, married, a widower, a mother, a father, a friend or a child, we all should understand not just more about marriage, but understand more about God and His relationship with us.

A marriage is solemnized in the church because the church is the holy place of God where we can feel and experience the presence of God. Moreover we have a sacramental life. All the moments, good or bad, should be allied with sacraments. Marriage is a sacrament in which bride and bridegroom join each other.

The Husband-Wife Relationship

In Paul's discussion in Ephesians 5 there appears to be a tension between patriarchal practice and a modern outlook of family life. The problem lies not in the Word of God but

our understanding of it. The text is very clear as it is linked with the relation of Christ and the Church. So there is only one model that can be followed. That is, the relationship of Christ and Church and we should realize the fact that family life is not a contract but a covenantal relationship wherein Christ is the head of the family. Hence, just as the church (the bride) and Christ (the bridegroom) have an inseparable relationship so also should husband and wife.

The word 'Submission' in Ephesians 5: 22 is a misinterpreted word. The word "submit" means to "arrange your life in subjection to another..." Here, Paul is not talking of submitting to an external authority. So the relationship is not oppressive or submissive and submission does not mean blind obedience or submission does not imply inferiority. In Christian marriage, submission is based on Christ's unity with and love for the church. Husband and wife are essentially one body, one unit, just as Christ and the church are essentially one. The passage suggests that something more profound than a birth relationship is being established by this union. The man and the woman are one flesh in a way in which the parents and child are not. The wife's body does not belong to her alone, but also to her husband; the husband's body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife (1 Corinthians 7:4)

The husband's submission implies that his sacrificial love and his love is parallel to Christ's love in its sacrifice. In today's world many husbands and wives merely understand the value of equality and mutual respect. Marriage is like a companionship where possessiveness, selfishness and ego have no place. Ephesians 5 instructs the husband to cherish his wife. This means that she is to be treated with tenderness and affection. This would mean that since love must be fed, there is to be a warm demonstrative love relationship.

When the bride and bridegroom join together in marriage, they LEAVE their parents and BEGIN a new life. They grow to be a NEW family unit. In other words, a new couple will detach from their old home. Two problems can happen here. Sometimes the parents find it hard to let their children leave when they get married. The role of the parent is to support their children as they start a new family life not interfere too much, but sometimes parents do more than support – they control – that prevents the couple from cleaving together as they need to. The second problem is when the one or both of the married couple finds it hard to

leave their old family, sometimes even after 20 years. Some people may still live with their parents after marriage, mentally. But regardless of how happy or sad their household was growing up, it's important to establish our own family unit together.

In the selected passage, when Paul refers to love, he is not talking about erotic love. The word "erotic" comes from the Greek "eros", a love that responds to the beauty of the other. Or it is not more than friendship love. The Greek word for this type of love is "philia," which is sometimes translated "brotherly love." So in marriage there is a place for erotic love, and a place for friendship love. But the greatest of all loves is agape love, a love that gives, a love that does not demand or hold on to rights, but has the good of the other at heart.

In Ephesians 5: 28-30, another principle of the husband's love is stated – loving his wife as he loves himself. It is a sacrificing Love which means to give over power to another. It is the opposite of selfish – it is s-e-l-f-l-e-s-s. "No man ever yet hated his own flesh..." If we do anything well, we know how to love ourselves. It is natural to be aware of how we project ourselves and appear to others just as we would never embarrass or belittle ourselves.

Parenting – Relation with Children

Without reference to children and parenting in Christian family life, this writing may not do justice to the idea of family. It is high time to reflect about parenting when children are not being properly nurtured in the changing world and parents are not being trained to look after their children. Nowadays children seem to be a burden for the new generation parents. The increasing number of couples who opt not to have children challenges God's intention for His creation. They may have to sacrifice their job or give up their career and promotion by having a child. But they should not forget the fact that their parents sacrificed their lives to raise them opening all the possibilities of life.

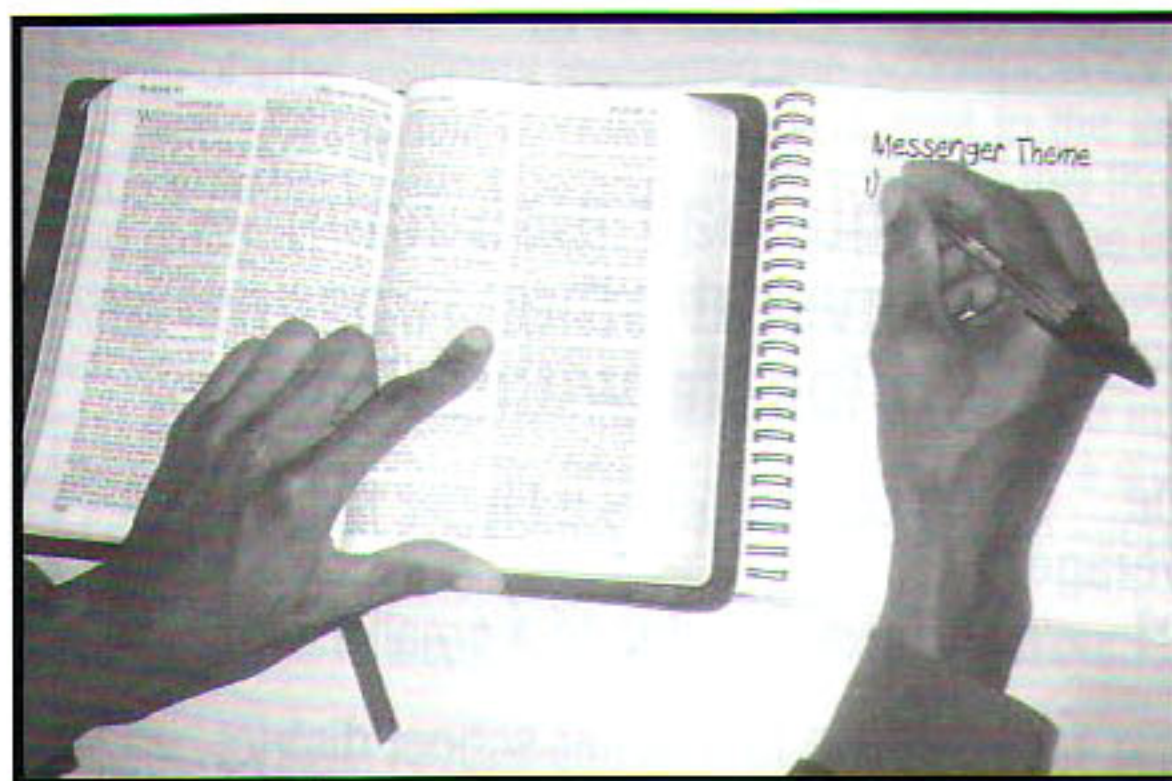
Following are a few ways to make parenting successful:

- Parents are role models for children. They will follow what you act rather than what you say. Spend time with children and understand their feelings because active listening is very important.
- Explore their talents and mould them to attain their goal: never underestimate your child or compare your child with anyone else's. Each child is gifted with lots of potential to

improve his or her abilities. It is important to develop a positive self-esteem in the child.

- Don't advise all the time which will provoke children to hate their parents. Don't punish your children if it is not required.
- Parents have to talk to children about sex, media and TV. They are to be taught how to watch it or search websites wisely.
- Family atmosphere will definitely influence the children's character formation. What you render at home about life, values, family, church, world and frustrated comments about family life will persuade their view points.
- Parents must see that their children are assigned some responsibilities so that this would create oneness in his/ her mind. They must realize the financial conditions and struggles that you are going through.
- Express your emotions and understand the children's emotions. Let the children have the freedom to share what they have on their minds.
- Ultimately, your efforts to improve their spiritual growth will help the children.

Conclusion: "better ideas" or "new innovations" in the husband/ wife relationship that we see in this world may help us or destroy us. But our focus needs to be clear and it should be based on strong faith in God and in his word. We need to renew our determination to practice scriptural principles in our married relationship. If both the husband and the wife put God first and keep Him there, God will ensure the success of their marriage. May God help us to fulfill the vision of parenting and family life according to His will.

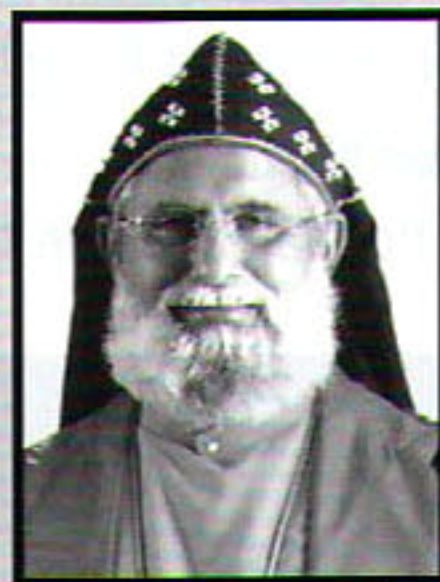


THEME SUGGESTIONS FOR MAR THOMA MESSENGER 2014

As a valued reader, we ask you to send us suggestions for Themes for the 4 issues of 2014 Mar Thoma Messenger. We prefer themes that are Christian based with reference to the Mar Thoma Church in this Diocese, Mar Thoma Church at large and Christianity at global level. Please send your suggestions to the Chief Editor or the Diocesan Center via email with a subject line 'Theme Suggestions' mtmessenger1@gmail.com



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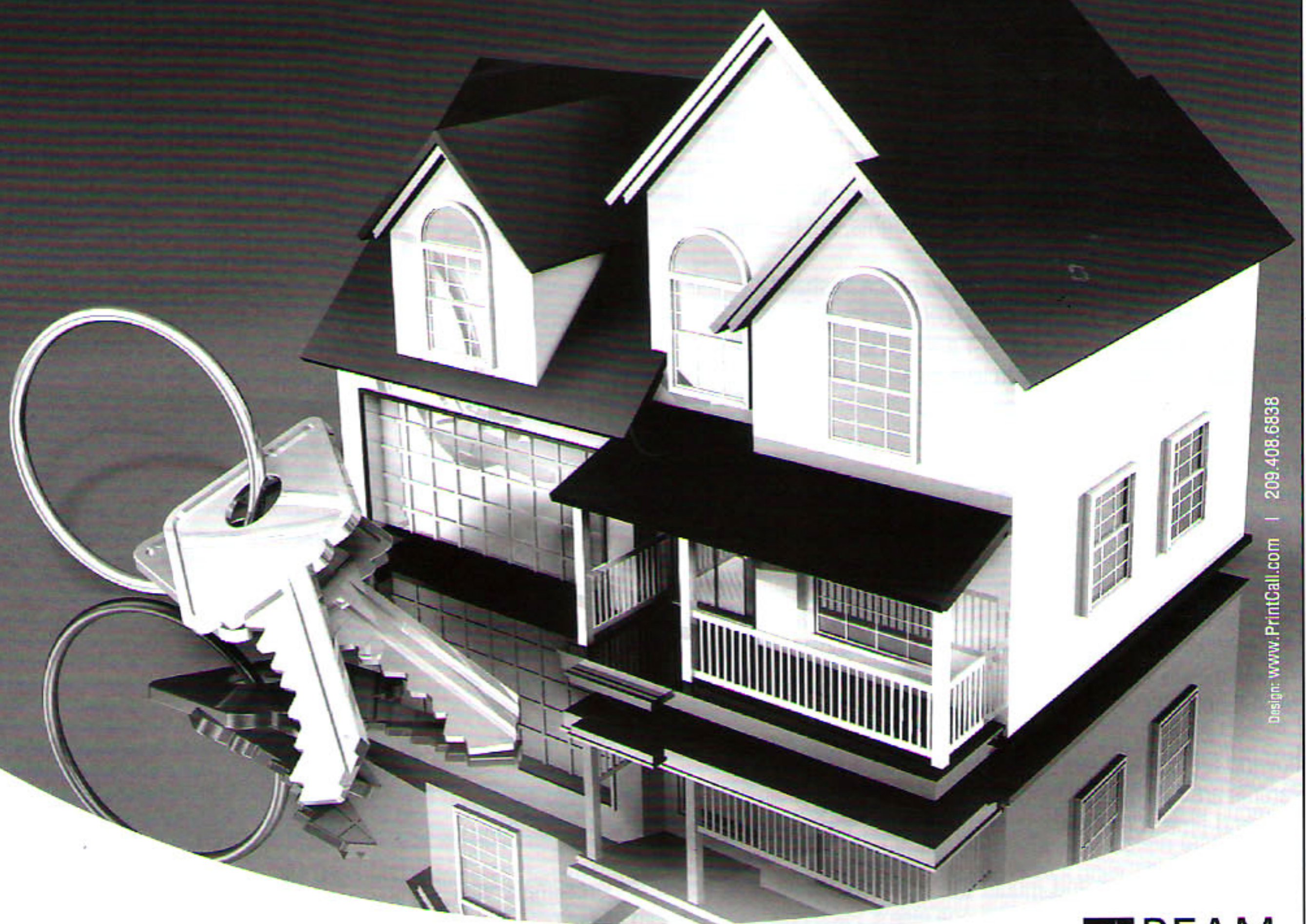


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THE POWER OF VISION

James Mathai, Sehion MTC, Plano, TX

(Presentation on Vision given at the Seminar on Identity, Mission, and Vision, @ Sehion Mar Thoma Church, Saturday, June 8, 2013)

As we celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the Diocese in North America it is a time for looking back on the accomplishments of the past, for inward reflection, and for looking forward. I would like to draw your attention to the topic of Vision and its relevance as we seek to build a shared vision for the future of our Diocese.

Vision: What Is Vision? 2 Corinthians 5:7: "For we walk by faith not by sight"

First and foremost we must realize that vision is an act of faith. Vision does not arise from our human capability of sight and it is not the product of our human tendency to speculate or prognosticate about the possibilities of the future. True vision is looking beyond possibility. Vision is grounded in values but changes to meet needs. So as we set out to understand vision, we must understand its importance, its different aspects, and how we can develop a vision both as individuals and as a community of faith. Vision is not speculation about a likely future. History has shown us that no one has a crystal ball and that life is full of uncertainty. If we knew the future completely there wouldn't be any faith involved. God gives us the grace to walk with him and to grow in faith day by day.

The Importance of Vision Proverbs: 29:18 "Where there is no vision, the people perish"

Why is vision important? Why is it of such importance that the lack of Vision causes people to perish? I would posit the following key reasons: vision is essential for leadership and vision builds unity. Many times as leaders in our communities we are so concerned about dealing with the day-to-day problems – the next event, the next deadline, the next important milestone – that we miss the bigger picture. Visionary leadership allows us to see beyond the immediate problems of today to the larger possibilities of tomorrow. We owe it to ourselves and to those we seek to lead to develop this visionary leadership. A great example of what visionary leadership can accomplish can be seen in the story of Joshua and Caleb. Of the twelve spies that were sent to the land of Canaan, only Joshua and Caleb came back with a hopeful report. Why was this the case? It is not that Joshua and Caleb didn't see the opposition, rather they saw that the opportunity promised by God was greater than the opposition. And on this Silver Jubilee, we should acknowledge that it has been the vision of many Joshuas and Calebs in various parishes in those early years that laid a strong foundation for the growth of the Diocese in North America. A shared Vision builds unity in the Church. Many times it is a lack of a shared Vision that leads to disunity and discord within the Church. It is this discord that keeps us from accomplishing all that we could and should accomplish as a community of faith. We should always strive to build a shared Vision in a spirit of unity and concord with our fellow believers.

A Vision of Christ Hebrews 12:2: "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith." If we look at the life of Jesus, we see someone who was misunderstood by many who were closest to Him. The greatest disappointments in Jesus' earthly ministry came when people didn't see Him for who He truly was. They misunderstood his teachings and projected on to Him what they wanted out of Him – a carpenter's son, a good rabbi, a political leader, or an occasional miracle worker – but they never understood who He truly was: the divine Son of God sent to redeem the world.

The apostle Paul never met Jesus in his earthly life, yet he often speaks of "knowing Christ". How does Paul know Christ, and how can we as believers know Christ? Identifying with Christ leads us to a clearer knowledge of Christ and a Vision of His will for our lives.

Philippians 3: 10-11 "I want to know Christ — yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead."

As the theme of our Silver Jubilee is "Journeying with Christ", we should recognize that Christ is the one that set us on this path and He is the one that leads us along the way.

A Vision of Our Beginnings Isaiah 51:1: "Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn"

As the saying goes, it's hard to know where you're going if you don't know where you've been. No vision can be complete without an understanding of its origins. We must have a vision that is grounded in the past but oriented to the future. As we acknowledge the unique heritage of the Mar Thoma Church which has its origins in India we must consider the enduring relevance of that heritage to this Diocese in North America.

A Missionary Vision John 4:35: "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest"

We must develop a vision for the unreached as our motto states we are lighted to lighten. Mission is a central aspect of this vision, in North America and in India. I would encourage each member to make it a priority to support those involved in mission activity especially our youth. It was Christ's final words to his disciples; the Great Commission to the Church to go and make disciples of all nations, those words should be our guiding principle as we develop this missionary vision.

Developing Individual Vision

The first century Jerusalem scholar Rabbi Hillel was often asked by his students, "How do we develop a vision of what we are to do in the world?" Hillel was a very wise man and was considered the greatest rabbi of his era, and as wise men often do he responded to this question with a question (actually three questions). His three questions were:

- 1) "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"
- 2) "If I am for myself alone, what am I?"
- 3) "If not now, then when?"

So let us now consider the meaning of these questions.

Question 1: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"

This may appear to be a selfish or self-centered question. It is not; rather it is a self-regarding question. Vision always begins with an individual. When developing a vision we should ask ourselves what we're about, what we value, what we have to contribute. As we look back on the history of the Malayalee immigrant community in North America, we can see that individual decisions have profoundly shaped the destiny of our community. Whether it was a young nursing student deciding in the early 70's to pursue a career in America, or a student today deciding to pursue full time Christian service, our collective destiny has been and will continue to be shaped by many individual visions.

Question 2: "If I am for myself alone, what am I?" This question illuminates an important reality: that we are

in the world in relationship with others. Read this question carefully and you realize that it proposes that even be a "who" and not a "what" is to recognize that we are in the world in relationship with others and that our capacity to realize our own objectives is inextricably wrapped up with the capacity of others to realize theirs. So as we broaden our vision we see that it must encompass our various spheres of influence: family, friends, and the wider community and a realization that our influence must be a positive one that benefits all of these constituencies.

Question 3: "If not now, then when?" The time for action is always now, because it's often only through action that we can learn what we need to learn in order to be able to act effectively in the ways that we intend. We must put action to thought and develop our vision by learning through purposeful action. The very fact that these methods of developing vision are posed as questions is important because it suggests that developing a vision is not about knowing – it's about learning.

A Vision that Inspires Others

Vision has the power to inspire and we are all called to be leaders and to inspire others by our vision and our actions. The apostle Paul said: "Follow me as I follow Christ." To the extent that we follow Christ and show a Christ-like nature we will inspire and lead others. The picture above tells a story, it is a story that spans many years and many continents. It was the vision of Mahatma Gandhi that inspired Martin Luther King, Jr. in his campaign for civil rights for African Americans. The vision of a non-violent revolution was adapted and implemented in India but inspired many beyond its borders. This example should be a source of particular encouragement to the Indian diaspora as it shows that we are the descendants of a nation that has already exerted a profound positive influence in North America.

The Urgency of Vision

"Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right." - Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

The quotation above comes from a letter written by Martin Luther King, Jr. from a prison in Birmingham, Alabama after he was arrested for participating in a non-violent protest against racial segregation in 1963. When we speak of visionary leaders such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., we see from their lives that men of vision are men of action. It was the actions of Gandhi that inspired Martin Luther King, Jr. in this otherwise bleak situation: one prisoner drawing hope from the triumph of another against all odds.

Carrying on the Vision

To put it succinctly, there can be no success without successors. There must be a "Joshua Generation" to carry on the vision that has been passed down by the generations that came before. It is not for us to judge whether or not our own efforts have been successful; that task will be left to our successors. They will be the judges of our success.

As our Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius observed "twenty

NORTH EAST REGION SUNDAY SCHOOLS JUNIOR & SENIOR CONFERENCE

North East Region Sunday Schools conducted the Junior and Senior Conference 2013 at Ramapo College, New Jersey from July 11-14, 2013. The theme of the conference was, "Christ is in You" (Colossians 1:27). The conference was inaugurated on Thursday, July 11, 2013 by our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa. Rev. V. M. Mathew, Rev. Dennis Abraham, Mr. Jojoy Koshy and Ms. Betty Vattakunnel were the conference leaders. Mr. Sushil Mammen was the leader of Praise and Worship Team and the other members of the team were Ms. Marybeth Babu, Ms. Anisha Varghese, Mr. Joshua Mathew, Ms. Minti Thomas and Mr. Noble Thomas. Panel Discussion on "Social Media" was conducted by Ms. Betty Vattakunnel, Ms. Melanie John, Mr. Sushil Mammen, Mr. Jojoy Koshy, Mr. Prijo Thomas, and Mr. George John. Talent Show was coordinated by Ms. Melanie John and Recreation activities were arranged by Mr. Jebin Yohannan. Ms. Leena Mathew was in charge of Medical emergencies. Students were given opportunity to participate in Name Game and Art Challenge. Winners received prizes sponsored by the youth members in the Region.

- Mathew P. George, NERSS Secretary

five years, if not forty" have now passed in which Mar Thoma congregations have been in North America. A generation of youth who came of age in this Diocese, is now raising families of its own. As we look back on this occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Diocese in North America, we must recognize that a generational change is taking place, one that will have profound implications for the future.

We should all take it as a personal responsibility to make a practical effort to encourage the youth of the Diocese. To speak from my personal experience, I posed the following questions to our youth members when speaking at a Dallas Area Youth event recently: "How will you work toward collective goals as a member of your Church community? What goals should we be working toward as a Diocese in North America in the next 25 years and what personal commitment will you bring to achieving those goals?" I asked the youth to discuss these questions and afterward some of them came forward to give their answers. As they spoke, I noticed a young man sitting in on the back pews. He was paying close attention but he didn't come forward to answer the questions. As I know now that young man's life was a living answer to these questions: that young man was Patrick Maruthmotil. These events took place less than two weeks before the tragic car accident that took his life. As we now consider the life and legacy of Patrick, it remains for all of us to carry on the missionary vision that his life exemplified. I ask that you all continue to pray for our youth; especially those involved in the mission work of our Diocese and help and encourage them in any way possible.

A Transformative Vision

The first century Greek historian Plutarch observed "What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality." The inward achievement of a Christ-focused vision will be a catalyst for change in the outer realities that we face today. Every reality or great accomplishment we see in the world today began as a vision – an idea in someone's mind. Let us develop this transformative vision – the vision of Christ that will transform our minds, our hearts, and through us the world.



Graduates of 2013 New Jersey Marthoma Church, Randolph, NJ

IDENTITY OF THE MAR THOMA CHURCH: WHY WE SHOULD BE PROUD OF IT?

Varghese Manaloor, Mathews Manaloor and Usha Manaloor

Abstract

The Malankara Mar Thoma church is an Eastern Church with oriental roots. It is a church rooted in the gospel. Historical evidence points to the fact that the church was established when Apostle Thomas came to India around 52 AD. The establishment of the church, in India, is therefore as significant as the spread of the Gospel by Apostle Paul throughout the Roman Empire. The Mar Thoma church evolved as a strong indigenous church with a distinct identity that we as members of the Mar Thoma Church should be proud of. This paper traces the historical growth of the church, its struggles in defining an identity of its own and dwells on aspects as to why it is important that we relate to the identity of the church. In our opinion, tracing the roots and dwelling on the identity will help sustain the church, especially outside Kerala.

Discussions about identity, in general, go along cultural, race and linguistic lines. Yet, with migration some of these characteristics related to identity might not be as cohesive factor as one would like. We can all identify ourselves as Indians (East Indians). Within the Indian context our young people identify us as 'Mallus' (Malayalees), people originally from Malankara or Kerala who speak the common Malayalam language. The Mar Thoma church, in North America that was established by immigrant communities has all the characteristics of culture, race and linguistic traditions. The Mar Thoma church in the Diocese of North America and Europe was established because of visionary leaders and the passion of an immigrant community who longed for a place and format to worship based on the traditions and language they were used to. However, for a wider acceptance, especially among the second generation Marthomites this has to go beyond the basic traditional definitions of identity. One has to start looking at what is it that makes us distinct? How can one relate to the unique characteristics and history of the Mar Thoma church to develop an identity that goes beyond just cultural, race and linguistic lines?

From a religious perspective, identity is something more than the traditional definition. As Christians, we are all followers of Jesus Christ. Within the Christian context we as members of the Mar Thoma Church are a part of this larger group with a distinct identity. We hold a particular set of beliefs and practices that has come to define who we are. Learning about this identity and accepting the uniqueness will help sustain interest in the Mar Thoma tradition, particularly among new generation Marthomites.

If we think about the dictionary meaning of identity we all fit into a particular category in a broad sense. At least in the past, before the growth of the church outside Kerala we were a very homogeneous group. It continued to be the same (to a certain extent) even when the spread occurred outside Kerala, to other parts of India, and then to Malaysia/Singapore, to Africa and then to the UK, USA and Canada. However, the homogeneous group that once was a uniting factor seems more heterogeneous. Add, to this the 2nd and 3rd generations, removed from Kerala and inter denominational marriages and marriages outside of the Mar Thoma belief (inter racial marriages), our dictionary definition seems a bit stretched. Does the identity of the Mar

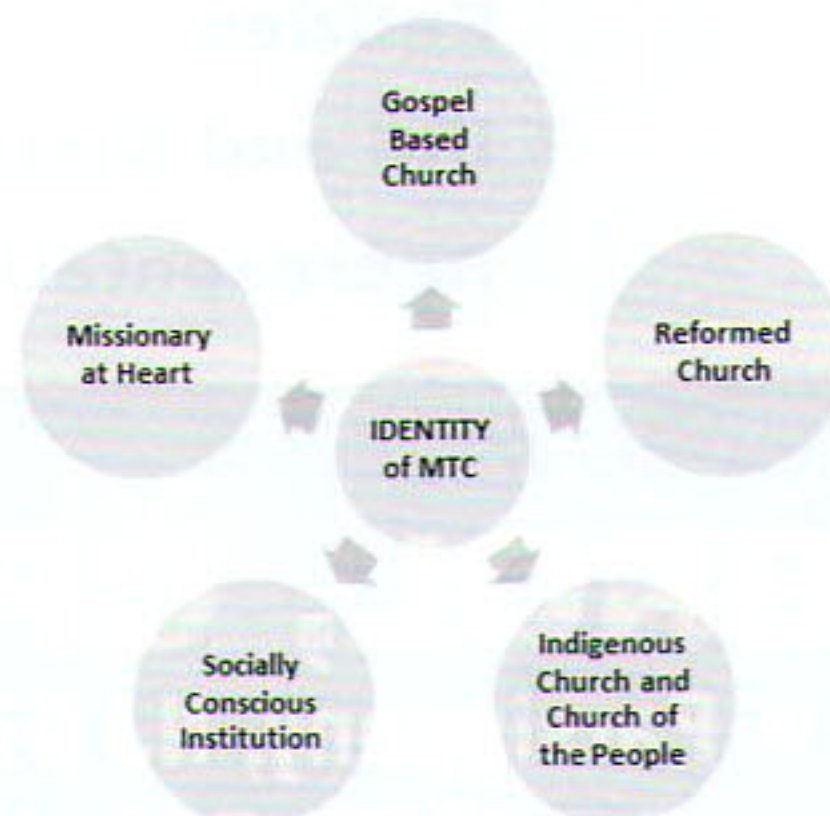


Figure 1. Diagrammatic representation of the identity of the Mar Thoma church

Thoma Church depend on being a homogeneous group or just linguistic and cultural lines? We argue that it is based on much more than homogeneity and traditional definition of identity. Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation of the five fundamental pillars that define identity of the Mar Thoma church

As a church community, the practices and beliefs make us a distinct identity and the five pillars make us unique. If heterogeneous groups of people can identify with the five pillars, one could confidently say that we have been successful as a Mar Thoma Church that has the motto "Lighted to Lighten" Obviously, this requires us to adapt, adjust and accept. Historically, during the growth of our church, this is something we have done and at the same time keeping our uniqueness intact. To understand the building blocks of our identity and unique characteristics we need to go back in history and recognize the struggles that led to a very distinct identity that we have today.

Early Beginnings

We can divide our history in three major segments: the Ancient era, the Persian era, and the era of Division and Reformation. Figure 2 is a schematic representation of the historical timelines in the growth of Eastern Christianity in India.

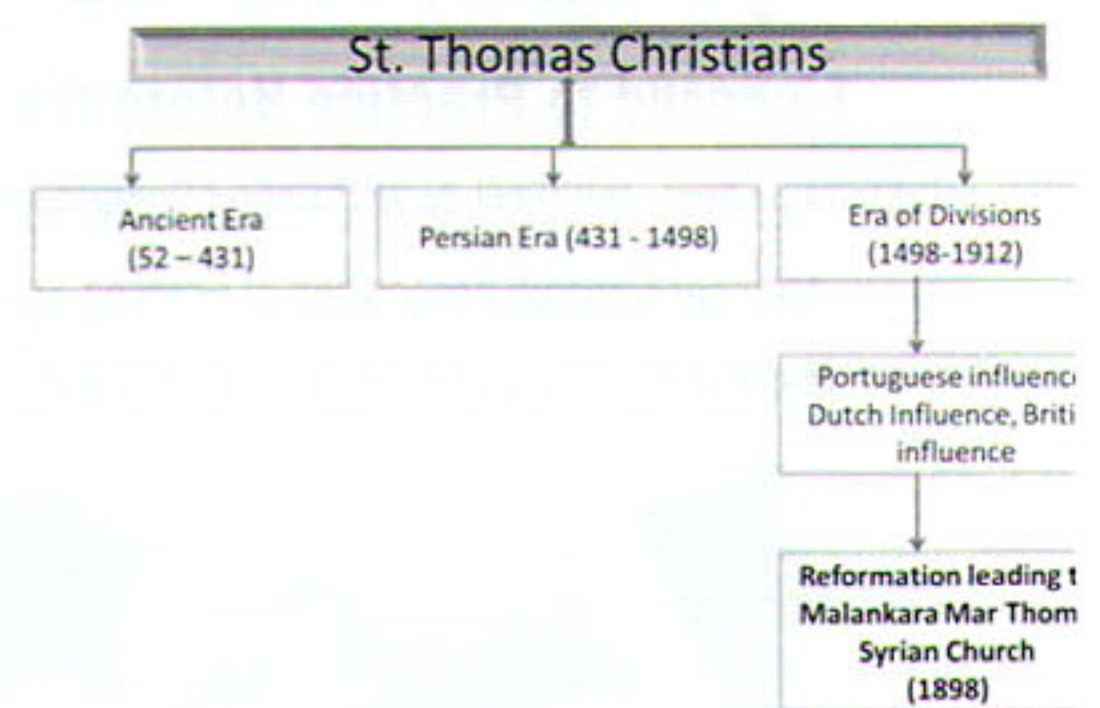


Figure 2; Schematic representation of the growth of Eastern Christianity in India

The Ancient Era² (AD 52-431)

The Ancient Era starts in AD 52, when St. Thomas, the Apostle of Jesus Christ is believed to have landed in the ancient port of Miseries (modern day Cranganore) near Cochin, which was at that time an important seaport on the Malabar Coast, having trade connections with the Middle East. In his book, "A History of the Syrian Church in India" F.E. Keay has pointed out that this should not be surprising. He argues that the Book

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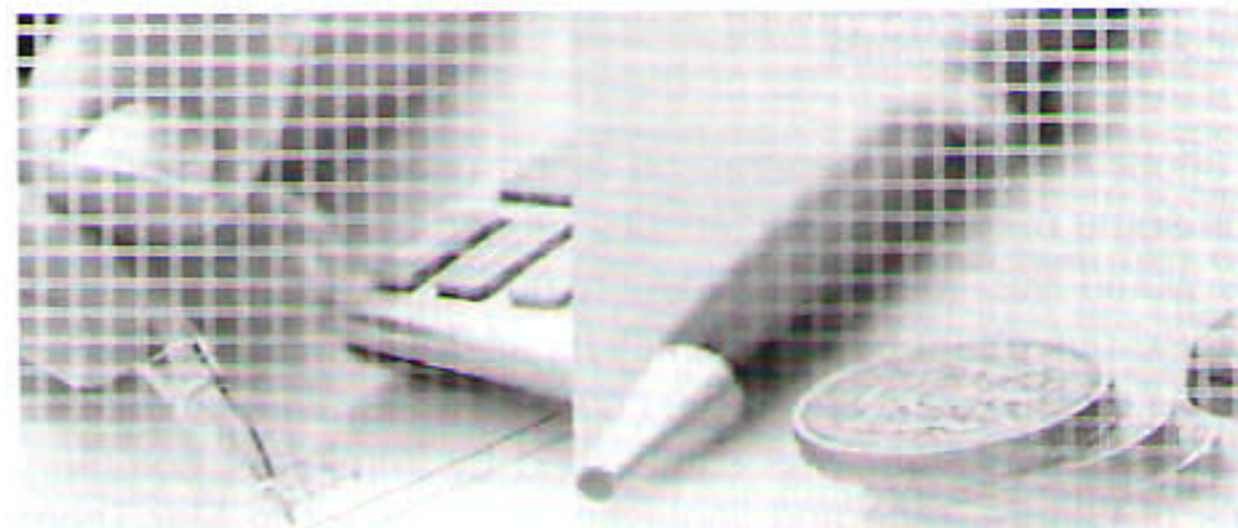
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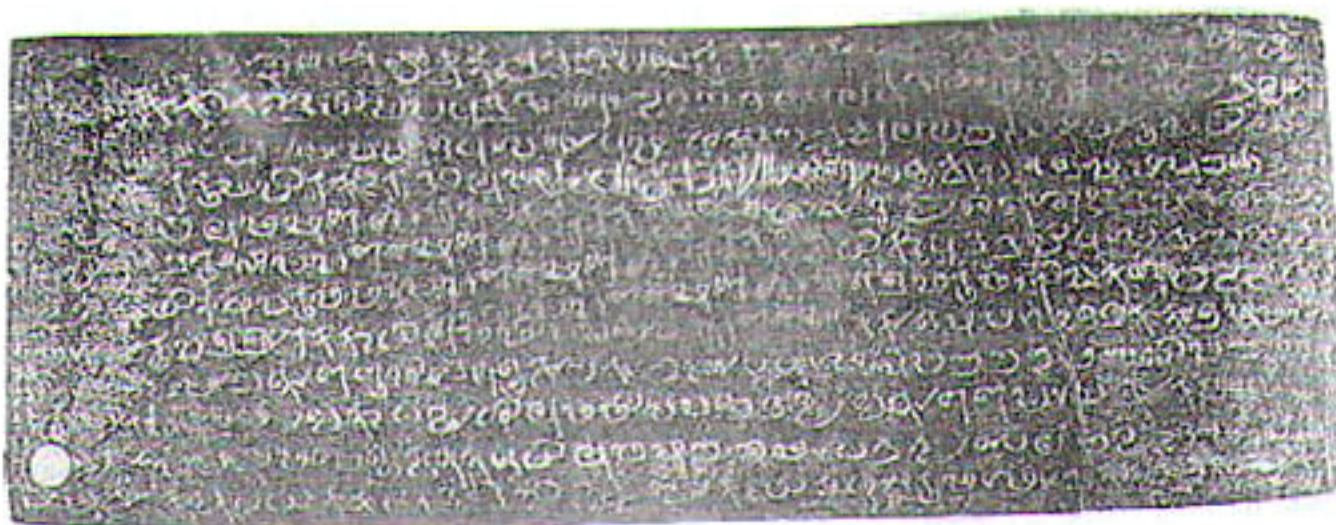
of Kings mentions about articles brought to the court of King Solomon from India. Thus even before the time of Christ, there was trade in spices and luxury articles like ivory etc., between the Malabar Coast and the Middle East. Thus, the spread of Christianity, Eastward, in AD 52 is not surprising.

Therefore, it was quite natural for St. Thomas to come to India with the Gospel as the disciples went to all parts of the world to spread the Gospel. The development of the identity of the Mar Thoma Church and who we are began with the spread of Christianity in India around 52 AD. We, the Marthomites, believe that the roots of our Christian identity start with arrival of St. Thomas who converted Jews and other locals to the Christian faith based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. His approach was based on God's will, his own individual efforts and his own faith in what he practiced. It was not a state sponsored effort and thus not a colonizing exercise but based on outreach and the study of the Gospel. This is when the seeds of what we call "Eastern Christianity" were sown in India. This is when the identity of our church starts taking shape. In the true Apostolic tradition St. Thomas preached, first to the Jewish settlers in and around Cochin, and then worked among the locals. Through the ministry of the Word and the many miracles which tradition attributes to him, he brought many locals to the Christian faith. It is believed that he established seven and half churches: Cranganore (Malankara), Chavakad (Palur), Paravur near Alwaye, Gokamangalam, Niranam, Nilakkal (Chayal) and Quilon (Kalyan) and Thiruvithamcode. It is believed that St. Thomas travelled to the East coast of India and died a martyr's death at a place called St. Thomas Mount, and was buried at Mylapore in Chennai/Madras. Mention is made in the records of the Council of Nicea (AD 325), of the presence of a Bishop John of India. Jawaharlal Nehru, the 1st Prime Minister of India, in his 'Glimpses of World History' (1934) commented as follows:- "You may be surprised to learn that Christianity came to India long before it went to England or Western Europe, and when even in Rome it was a despised and proscribed sect.

Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan concludes the chapter on the St. Thomas Tradition in his book, Christianity in India and a Brief History of the Mar Thoma Church as follows: "The History of the Christian Church in the first century does not depend entirely on historical documents. Tradition is often more true and more compelling than plain historic proof. In this sense St. Peter's founding of the Roman Church and St. Thomas' founding of the Malabar Church, may be said to stand on the same footing. Both are supported by traditions which are sufficiently early and sufficiently strong".

The Persian Era² (431 – 1498 AD)

The history of this ancient Church during 4th to 15th centuries reveals the fact that it was in friendly relations with the Church in Persia. It is believed that a group of 400 immigrants from Persia arrived in Malabar in AD 345 under the leadership of a merchant named Thomas of Cana, known as Knaye Thommen. Mention is made also of immigration from Persia in the year AD 825 under the leadership of a Persian merchant named Marwan Sabriso with two Bishops named Mar Sapro and Mar Prodh. They landed in Quilon. King Cheraman Perumal gave them land and extended to them special privileges, inscribed on three sets of Copper Plates (in Malayalam "Chepped"). One of these is still in the Old Seminary in Kottayam and the other two are at the Mar Thoma Church Head Quarters, Tiruvalla (Figure 3).



There was ecclesiastical connection between the Church in West Asia and the Church in Malabar till 16th century. The Bishops who came from Babylonian Patriarchate were Nestorians. Even now there is a Nestorian Church in Trichur, called the Chaldean Syrian Church. They are connected with the Nestorian Patriarch. Though there were such ecclesiastical connections and ministrations, the Church in Malabar was independent in administration under its own Archdeacons.

Era of Divisions² (1498 – 1912)

During this period, the Eastern Christian church came under the influence of Western Christianity. The Church in Malabar came under the colonial influence from the 15th cen-

ture onward: the Portuguese, the Dutch, and then the British. By the 18th century, the Dutch influence had started to wane and the British started ruling India. In 1806 a Chaplain of the East India Company became very interested in the ancient church of Malabar (Kerala). In 1811, he translated the four gospels into Malayalam. Public worship was conducted in Syriac language. Very few people understood it. Little training was imparted to clergy. Some Roman Catholic faith practices continued even though Malankara church was independent: prayers to saints, masses for the departed; main sources of income were based on compulsory fees for baptism, marriages, and masses for the dead. There was no regular salary for clergy. Bible was considered to be a closed book, not a living book. People carried on with superstitious beliefs such as offerings to saints to avoid calamities and to gain personal advantages. Images of saints were taken out in festival processions to please them and to win favor. Some members of the Malabar church were very concerned about the faith practices and influence of the church from the west and started thinking about some reforms that led to our unique identity. A Reformed Church

The watershed event that forged our identity into what we are today was led by a nucleus of people in the church who longed for the removal of unscriptural customs and practices which had crept into the church over the centuries. They envisioned a reformation in the Church in the light of the Gospel of our Lord. There were two outstanding leaders in this group; one was Palakunnathu Abraham Malpan of Maramon (1796-1845) and the other, Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan of Puthuppally (1800-1855). Both were teachers at the Syrian Seminary in Kottayam. This seminary was established in AD 1813 by Pulikottil Mar Dionysius. They had opportunities to come into close personal contact with the missionaries and to share their insights regarding the Christian life and the nature and functioning of the Church as depicted in the New Testament and to imbibe the ideas of the Western Reformation. Palakunnathu Abraham Malpan from Maramon and Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan from Kottayam who spearheaded this movement, never wanted to start a separate Church. They wanted the reformation, staying within the Church. In 1836 this group approached Col. Fraser, the then British Resident, with a memorandum. But since nothing came of it, Abraham Malpan decided to take action in his own parish in Maramon. The congregation in his church was sympathetic towards his ideas of reform. He translated the liturgy of the Holy Qurbana into Malayalam from Syriac and also eliminated from it the prayers for the dead and invocation of saints etc. He celebrated Holy Qurbana in his church using the revised St. James liturgy, on a Sunday, in 1836. This was seen as the first step towards reformation. He later on removed from the church the wooden image of a saint reputed to have miraculous powers and in whose honor an annual festival was held that brought in huge income to the Parish. Abraham Malpan concentrated his attention on the work of reform, holding Bible classes and prayer meetings and instructing the deacons who were loyal to him. A church rooted in the Gospel started to take shape Gospel Based Church

The most prominent elements in the reformation era were:

- Return to the gospel message of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ;
- Cleansing of wrong ways of life,
- Taking up responsibility to be witnesses of Jesus Christ to others and,
- All importance is given to the primacy of the Word of God.

This marked the return to the purity of the life and practice of the early Church. The emphasis on preaching the word of God led to revival meetings, which were led both by the clergy and laymen. The domination of the clergy as custodians of grace became a thing of the past. Emphasis was given to the sole mediation of Christ. Importance of laity and priesthood of all believers was emphasized.

Missionary at heart

The Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association is the missionary wing of the Mar Thoma Church. The first and oldest of the National Missionary Movement in India owes its origin to the enduring vision of a small band of devout men—eleven laypeople and one priest—who gathered for prayer in the upper room of the Kadavil Malika (Kallissery-Chengannur) on the banks of River Pamba. This Missionary Movement was started in the wake of the Reformation Movement pioneered by Abraham Malpan, the Martin Luther of the East. The Church awoke to its missionary task and the Evangelistic Association was formed in the year 1888 AD and was registered under the Company's Act of India. This Association has now grown far beyond the dreams and imaginations of the original founders. Rapid strides of progress have been made in evangelistic endeavors in and outside Kerala. Bishop Abraham Mar Thoma was the ardent supporter of this movement and Titus II Mar Thoma Metropolitan sent a circular to all parishes encouraging the formation of branches of the Association. The objective of this association is that every member of the Church should be a witness to Jesus Christ, whatever his occupation may be.

The crowning jewel of the missionary effort of the Mar Thoma church is the Maramon Convention. The origin and growth of this annual get together, for a full week, can be traced to the great revival movement which gathered momentum along with the reformation in the ancient Syrian Church of Malabar. This brought about the resurgence of the ancient apostolic Church in Kerala that traces its origins to the work of St. Thomas, the Apostle of Jesus Christ. The first convention was held in 1895. Maramon Convention is pre-eminently a special event for Christians to gather together and listen to the Word of God as read and expounded by leaders of Christian thought from all over India as well as abroad. In addition to the Mar Thoma Bishops, several prominent Christian Leaders have spoken at this convention. They include Rev. Thomas Walker, England (1900–1912), Sadhu Sunder Singh, Punjab (1918), Dr. G. Sherwood Eddy, (1919) Dr. E. Stanley Jones, USA (1920–1968), Dr. Toyohiko Kagawa, Japan (1938), John R. Mott, Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1946 and President of World Alliance of YMCAs., Dr. Bob Pierce, Founder and president of World Vision (1964 & 1966), Astronaut Coln. James Irwin, who spent a few hours on the moon, (1985), Dr. John Haggai, founder president of Haggai Institute (1973), Bishop Donald Jacobs, Mennonite church (1974), Rev. Dr. Robert Runcie, Arch Bishop of Canterbury (1986), Rev. Dr. George Carey, Arch Bishop of Canterbury (1995) and a host of others.

Socially Conscious Institution

Mar Thoma Church has been in the forefront of helping the poor and the marginalized. The Church has 31 social welfare institutions, 11 destitute homes and five hospitals. Some of these programs like build homes for the poor that were started by the Church has been copied and implemented by the State of Kerala. The church sets aside funds to help with the marriage of woman from poor families. The Church has been active in the field of education and owns colleges, higher secondary schools, vocational and training schools and other educational institutions that are managed by individual parishes. The Mar Thoma Theological Seminary (est.: in 1926) and 6 other institutes cater to the theological education of both the clergy and the laity. Further, there are three Study Centers, (Managanam, Kottayam and Trivandrum) for arranging regular study programs and meetings to provide opportunities for creative dialogue between church and society on various ethical, moral, social and religious issues. The religious education of children is looked after by the Christian Education Department - the Sunday School Samajam (organized in 1905) and the work among youth is carried on by the Youth Department - the Yuvajana Sakhyam (organized in 1933). The Church has a women's department - the Mar Thoma Suvisesha

Sevika Sanghom (organized in 1919).

A bright future ahead

As our Metropolitan His Grace The Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan reminded us in this year's Maramon Convention's inaugural message³, Quoting from Acts 1:8 about Jesus command "But you will receive power, when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth". He recalled how when as a young boy he was sitting in the front rows at the Maramon Convention, Abraham Mar Thoma, upon seeing the vast number of people sandwiched in front of him prayed, "Nee ende jana'te chiterikename. (Lord, you spread my people)". Enable them to take the experiences and the blessing that they received here to the far corners of the world. God heard Thirumeni's prayer. From its very humble beginnings, God has immensely blessed this small church of less than 900,000 people (at present) and spread them across the globe.

Conclusion

Do we draw our identity from being a Keralite, a Malayalee or an East Indian? If so, we could lose the unique identity our forefathers' struggled hard to define. This could be true, especially in the Diocese of North America and Europe where we have become more and more heterogeneous. The way we can keep our identity and still be a global church is by focusing our identity rooted on the five pillars: a gospel based church, a reformed church, an indigenous church and a church of the people, a socially conscious institution, and a church that is missionary at heart. The Mar Thoma church distinguished itself from the Protestant identity under the Dutch influence. The hard work of the reformers and believers gave the Mar Thoma church an identity that was different from The Anglican Church under the British and the CMS influence. They accepted, adopted and adjusted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and forged a unique identity without compromising its core principles.

The Mar Thoma churches journey with Christ is based on the five pillars that define our identity. It should be our guiding light as we journey together. It has evolved as a strong church by accepting, adapting and adjusting to the needs but without losing or compromising its founding principles and identity. We can apply the same process to any of the challenges that we face as we continue to grow

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BE A PART YET SET APART

Susan Mathews BS MA MSW, New York

We migrated to this country to build a better future for our families and we cannot do that in isolation. Hillary Clinton's book says it takes a village to raise a child. The public school system effectively integrates different backgrounds so the kids to grow up to state "I am an American," unlike in India where everyone identifies themselves first by their state of origin. As Nehru said, India is like a salad bowl, while the US is like a soup.

Success

We did not leave all that was dear to us to merely subsist in this land or end up on welfare. To be successful in this country we must communicate effectively to deliver a product or a service that people are willing to pay for to meet a need. We adapt ourselves towards this goal by using education, training, and anything else we can lay our hands on. We will not let language or culture get in the way when it is important. After all, we were willing to travel to the 'ends of the earth' to achieve it!

Confusion

Caught between our overzealous adaption to be successful and the fear of throwing our identity away, we are raising the ABCDs (American-Born Confused Desies). What proportion of the confusion is parent-induced, by us IBCDs (Indian-Born Confused Desies) unfamiliar with the norms of parenting in this culture, tinged with homesickness and the occasional feeling that the grass is greener on the other side of the Pacific? But all that will soon level off, at the speed of IT, since it is said that America's biggest export is its culture.

Failure

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 1 out of 3 children here live in biological father-absent homes. Anthropologist Margaret Mead observes "the supreme test of any civilization is whether it can socialize men by teaching them to be fathers". America is failing the test. Studies show that the affected children have elevated rates of high school dropout, teen pregnancy, crime, violence, suicide, and poverty. Looking at our community today, these statistics may seem irrelevant. But research also says that an immigrant is fully assimilated into the U.S. 'soup' within 2.5 generations. It does not help to know that the divorce rate in church-going Americans is the same as non-church attendees. It seems that the social morals are seeping into our faith instead of our Christian values influencing the secular world.

Death

It is sad to see the golden Cupolas of a Church in an adjacent town stand in silent testimony, cringing at its failure, evident by multiple images that are now worshipped on its alter by its new owners. In downtown Manhattan, just before a tunnel, there is a small church with beautiful ornate architecture bearing a sign that it is now a seedy night club. We can imagine how much intense effort and resources have gone in vain there.

Redefining Success

Success is worthwhile only if you are in favor of both man and God (1 Samuel 2:26). What is the use of being successful in this life but completely messing up your eternal lifestyle and burn up as the chaff in unquenchable fire (Matt 3:25)? We should all aim for the supreme acknowledgement. "This is my child in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). Wherever there is an opportunity, a Malayalee is there with the ubiquitous 'tea shop'. A majority of us are employed in the field of healthcare and work closely with those in pain and suffering on a daily basis. Outcomes of treatment depends on physical, emotional, and spiritual health. With the prevalence of depression being at 1 out of 4 there are a lot of vulnerable people whose life could be changed by sharing our experience of faith, God has placed us where "the harvest is plentiful" (Luke 10:2). We should understand and feel secure by the comfort of our Father's presence so that we can overcome the stress in our lives which is the common cause of anxiety or depression in our lives. We can then share understanding without fear or embarrassment because He is with us always even to the end of this age. (Matt 28:18-20). He will put the right words in our mouth, just as He did for Moses and Jeremiah (1:7). After all, everyone is made by one God and wants to please

Him. It is just that we disagree on what pleases Him.

Clarity

We have to sift through our various practices and customs so that we don't throw the baby out with the bath water. Jesus respected His parents culture, so when He was 12 years old, they went up to the Feast according to the custom (Luke 2:42). Yet He never let it compromise His mission and actually questions His mother (Luke 2:49). In this land where freedom and informed choice are considered supreme, 2013 years of sermons have made professional Christians out of us with a sophisticated view of God which in reality, as Paul says, is but a poor image. And, although small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only few find it (Matt 7:14), our forefathers did! The wealth of that Christian heritage nurtured me until I found my own direct path to my Father, because this is not something you can get 'grandfathered in'. We are born into this wealth, and this privileged background comes with a responsibility (Ezekiel 33:6) to share the information or we will be held accountable. Honestly, if I was born into another faith, I may not choose to convert, because, Christian or not, all the people I know seem to live the 'average' crime free life. Of the two billion Christians in the world, one billion are Roman Catholics. The very Romans who were the superpower involved in Jesus' Crucifixion! That evidence is belied by the fact the other 1 billion Christians are splintered into more than 7000 major denominations in spite of the warning in Ephesians 4:14 not to be tossed around with every wind of doctrine.

Forewarned

We value our background and culture because we are proud of who we are. But when we idealize it and idolize it in our minds, we attribute qualities and powers to it that get in the way of our relationship with our Father. It is an invisible fence that excludes everyone with the language handicap, including the next generation. The very fact they speak with a completely different accent than us shows that the quantity of influence we have is not much on their growth and development. We have to protect and provide the 'quality time' as parents to the children God has chosen us to take care of. A lot of social problems are swept under the rug in our native land and it can get pretty ugly when it sees the light of day in future generations. The idea is to grow as the child Jesus did; He increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man (Luke 3:52). We should all become successful children of God, make a difference where we are placed, like the salt of the earth, yet set apart spiritually like an island in the sea of darkness (1 Pe 2:9,10). We want to enable future generations to "guard the good deposit entrusted to them" (2 Timothy 1:14), always grateful that God brought us to this land.

INTERVIEW WITH RT. REV. ZACHARIAS MAR THEOPHILUS, SUFFRAGAN METROPOLITAN ON THE OCCASION OF THE SILVER JUBILEE OF THE DIOCESE



Compiled by Lal Varghese, Esq., Dallas

His Grace Mar Theophilus is the first resident Bishop of this Diocese and is considered the builder of this Diocese. I remember His Grace's term here as the Diocesan Bishop in 1993-2001. During His term the Mar Thoma Center at Philadelphia was purchased and dedicated in 1994 and later was moved to New York. The present Sinai Mar Thoma Center was dedicated in 1998.

Q. Thank you His Grace for giving me an opportunity for this interview, especially when the Diocese is celebrating 25 years of its existence. Looking back what you think about the laity, parishes and Diocese at present?

A. It has grown beyond anybody's imagination with 68 parishes, 9 congregations and about 70 clergy serving in this Diocese including 10 youths as ordained ministers from here itself. This Diocese has a purpose to fulfill of the mission of our Lord in this part of the world and I hope and pray that it will continue the faith journey of the Church into the future.

Q. His Grace, can you tell us a little about your childhood days?

A. I came from a strong Christian family in Niranam, where all denominations are equally strong. It is a strong Christian belt since the coming of Apostle St. Thomas in A. D. 52. Hindus, Muslims and Christians, all lived together as brothers and sisters. People were poor and they helped each other at the time of need.

Q. What about school and college days?

A. I studied at St. Mary's School, Niranam, N. S. S. College, Changancherry, and U. C. College, Alwaye, the college which helped me to transform my life into a Christian way of living.

Q. It appears that we both studied at the same College U C C, Alwaye, in the same class (B. Sc. Botany Main), sitting on the same bench, but it appears that His Grace studied there even before I started my school days?

A. Yes, but during my time, especially, I was even afraid to enter the class before the professor came, since out of the 24 students, 21 were girl students. I used to stay outside the class until the professor came and then I entered the class. U. C. College has influenced me greatly in shaping my life and dedicating myself to the full-time ministry of our Church.

Q. Did His Grace work in secular field before going for theological studies?

A. Yes, I was a teacher. After my studies, FACT offered me a job as a Chemist and I also had a teaching offer from Ashramam, Perumbavoor. I had to choose between spending the rest of my life in a lab and being with students. I selected the latter, since I preferred a life with students. I worked at the Ashramam High School, Perumbavoor, St. Thomas School, Mysore and St. Thomas Residential School, Trivandrum. Dr. T. M. Thomas, New York was also a teacher at Ashramam High School, Perumbavoor, at that time. I worked for 10 years as a school teacher.

Q. What motivated His Grace to go for theological studies after 10 years of teaching?

A. I always felt that there was something more I could do to lead a more fulfilled spiritual life, which was living a life totally committed to God and service to humanity.

Q. Where did His Grace go for theological studies and how was that experience?

A. I took my bachelor's degree in divinity from Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur. Later I took my Master's degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, NJ, and Doctorate from Boston University. My dissertation was 'Interchurch Integration and Intercultural Integration as Mission.'

Q. Which was the first parish assigned to His Grace by the Church and how was the service as a priest during that time?

A. My first parish was Mumbai Santa Cruz MTC, then Kozhencherry St. Thomas MTC. I also conducted services in New York while studying for M. Th. and Ph.D.; when there was a joint Mar Thoma – C. S. I. congregation. Also conducted services at Philadelphia, Boston and Washington areas, during which time there were no parishes or congregations as we see today.

Q. In which Dioceses has His Grace served as the Diocesan Bishop?

A. I served in Adoor – Mavelikara Diocese, Kottayam – Ranni Diocese, Madras – Kunnamkulam Diocese, the South Zone of Delhi – Calcutta Diocese, Chennai – Bangalore Diocese and Malaysia – Singapore – Australia Diocese. Both the church and people then were poor when compared to the present. Travel was very difficult and in some places where I had to stay,



there was not adequate facility to stay or sleep. At present I am serving Chengannur – Mavelikkara Diocese and also the Suffragan Metropolitan of the Church.

Q. His Grace served in this Diocese from 1993 -2001 and I had the privilege to serve the Diocese and His Grace in my capacity as an Attorney during the later period of His Grace's tenure here. How is being a Diocesan Bishop in this Diocese different from being one in India?

A. The church and its people are entirely different here. This diocese is a vast diocese extending all over United States, Canada, England, Switzerland, Germany and other parts of Europe. In Kerala, especially at present, the diocese comprises of only small geographical areas. In United States the parishes occupy different time zones with three hours of difference between east coast and west coast. The earlier migrant community had a lot of identity crisis, but they were faithful to the mother church and began forming prayer groups, congregations and later parishes. Even the leaders of the church were against forming parishes here and asked them to join Episcopal churches. But later, the leaders of the church permitted parishes and finally a diocese in 1988 and we are celebrating its 25th year of existence in 2013.

Q. What is His Grace's opinion about the future of the Mar Thoma Church in this Diocese?

A. As I said earlier Mar Thoma Church here is different from the one in Kerala. In a sense our liturgy is the one connecting both. If our liturgy is lost, the relationship between the two is lost and the existence of the church here itself will be lost. I believe Mar Thoma Church will be here for many more years.

Q. Liturgy should be in the language of the people, which is easily understood by them. What is His Grace's opinion about discontinuing liturgical worship and moving to contemporary worship as followed by nondenominational churches?

A. Liturgy should be modified to a language that is easily understood by the second and third generation Marthomites. I am glad that this Diocese has already published a book containing a short liturgy for Holy Communion, which can be finished within 45 minutes along with other short orders for worship for different occasions. I do not agree that liturgy should be replaced, since liturgy is the essence of our worship. If we understand the meaning of the liturgy, we feel the presence of the Lord during the worship service; simply repeating it, will be monotonous.

Q. The Anglican Church with which Mar Thoma Church has communion has appointed gay Bishops and ordained women as clergy. What is Thirumeni's opinion about homosexuality and ordaining women as clergy?

A. Women are being ordained as priests in different denominations. Mar Thoma Church has never condemned such practices, but has not accepted the same yet. But we as a Church have condemned homosexuality, since it is against Biblical principles. These are all internal faith matters of each denomination, but if one denomination follows practices which are not accepted by our church, that does not mean that we should not join with such denomination for any purpose.

Q. His Grace served as the Executive Committee member of World Council of Churches (WCC) and served in various international ecumenical bodies. How does that differentiate Mar Thoma Church from other Churches?

A. Ours is a mission-oriented church with evangelical zeal, Biblical basis, and ecumenical in nature and with social concerns. I fear at times, we have become a worshipping community only and forgot the mission of our Lord – to live the gospel. The Church exists for the mission and mission should not merely be one of the programs of the Church.

Q. What prompted to start the 'Santhigiri Ashram' in Alwaye?

A. As I mentioned above, Church, should exist for Mission as Emil Bruner said. The mission of our Church is to be involved in the community around us and to aspire for social justice for the people. I would like the Church to transform into a sharing and caring community than merely stay as a worshipping community. Santhigiri is one of the means by which our Church can attain this goal.

Q. What are the major programs, projects undertaken by Santhigiri?

A. It is not a retreat center or conference center alone, but we conduct meditation classes, conference and devotional meetings. We are also involved with the local community,

majority of who belong to Islam religion by providing them with medical help, educational help, a pain and palliative care center, an Ayurveda center and so on. I encourage adults especially those who lead retired lives here to visit Santhigiri when they are visiting Kerala. I also encourage the second and third generation youths to visit Kerala and stay at Santhigiri Ashram, which will be a life-changing experience for them.

Q. His Grace is at present Suffragan Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church. What is His Grace's vision about the Mar Thoma Church?

The Mission of the Church should be living the gospel. Church should not be a worshipping community alone, but at the same time it should be a sharing and caring community also. High priority should be given to the spiritual growth of the Youth and Diaspora community.

Q. We celebrated the 175th anniversary of reformation recently. Does the Mar Thoma Church need another reformation?

Reformation is not a one-time process, but it should be a continuing process. During the reformation the main thing was transforming the liturgy into a language that can be understood by the people, that is, from Syriac to Malayalam. Now also the liturgy should be transformed into a language that is easily understood by the second and third generation Marthomites, especially those living outside Kerala. There should be constitutional reformation so that the needs of the laity living in different countries can be addressed in a more meaningful way.

Q. Recently, the Mar Thoma Church faced several issues like Kuwait parish issue, Episcopal election, etc. How has it affected the church as a whole?

A. All churches have their own internal problems. Problems are always associated with the growth of the Church. But the key issue is how the Church should address the problems. You cannot have any Church without any problems, for example Catholic Church has its own problems, Anglican Church has its own problems, and Orthodox Churches in Kerala have their own problems. All problems and issues should be handled in a Christian spirit so that the Church's movement into the future should not be affected.

Q. His Grace has written a couple of books including Ulkazhakkal, Ormakalude Idanazhiyilude and published couple of CDs containing songs composed by His Grace. What prompted to take up such enterprises?

A. As I have mentioned before, my intention is to live a spiritual life to its fullest. God has given me certain talents like writing, composing songs, etc., which I received during my prayerful times spending with God alone, and I thought that I would use the same to reflect upon God's grace to others also, so that they may also benefit from God's grace.

Q. Church is not for building structures, but it is for building the people. What is His Grace's opinion about building structures and not building the people?

A. I totally agree with the statement. Churches should not exist for building structures or acquiring property

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and structure, it should build the people. Mar Thoma Church did not have any structures or buildings when we lost the Vattipana Case in the Royal Court. The poor, faithful people built the Church and now it is the turn of the Church to build the people mentally, spiritually and physically. In order to build the people, structures, facilities and equipment are needed. Good communities should be built by parishes wherever they are situated.

Q. There is always a criticism that the Church has turned into a corporate entity and is conducting the administration mainly concentrating in income and expenses. Is it true?

A. Every organization has its own rules to administer the same and the churches are no exception to it. We have a very good constitution and administration at the central level, diocesan level and parish level. That set apart Mar Thoma Church from several other denominations in Kerala.

Q. Thirumeni served as the Convener of the Constitution Revision Committee appointed by the Mandalam. Why have the suggestions made by several people, including about 30 pages of constitutional changes suggested by me, been ignored by the committee?

A. People are always against changes and our church is no exception to it. The people in Kerala always think the Church exists only in Kerala, and they are not concerned about the people outside Kerala and their needs. Our constitution needs to be revised to accommodate the contemporary needs of the people living in different parts of the world. Mar Thoma Church in one sense is a global church at present.

Q. Family conference in N. America and Mar Thoma Messenger completed 30 years in 2012. It appears that the Family Conference is no longer going to be conducted every year, since no parish is coming forward to host the same. Any suggestions for its continuance?

The National Youth Conference and National Family Conference kept and maintained a national character to the Diocese. It is during these occasions that people living in different places get an opportunity to come together. It is just like the Maramon convention where people living in different parts of Kerala and outside come together and the Church gets a national character for its existence. The Family Conference should be conducted at least every three years and if possible other national conferences may be conducted along with it. Mar Thoma Messenger as we are today is the result of several people who worked behind it and I remember them all at this time. It is different from Tharaka and is addressing the needs of the laity and parishes in this Diocese. More and more youths should be encouraged to contribute.

Q. We have 10 ordained youths from this Diocese serving in this Diocese at present. What is His Grace's opinion about youths from this Diocese coming forward for full-time ministry?

A. I am glad that more and more youths are coming forward from this Diocese and the Church has great expectations from them and pray that they will fulfill such expectations of the Church and its people, especially those here. I congratulate MTC Dallas, Farmers

Branch for sending two youths for ordained ministry and one youth at present for theological studies. I encourage more youths especially from Philadelphia, New York, New Jersey, Chicago, Detroit, Canada and Europe to come forward for fulltime ministry of the Church.

Q. Opinion about the retirement of Bishops of Mar Thoma Church, especially in the light of Pope Benedict's retirement very recently?

I will tell you a secret here; I expressed my intention to retire at the age of 65, but it was not accepted by the then Metropolitan Alexander Mar Thoma. He replied to me that he had also considered retirement at one time and wrote to then Metropolitan, but it was not accepted. I believe retirement at a certain age and time is appropriate for new leadership with new ideas to come forward to lead and guide the Church.

Q. Concluding our interview what would His Grace like to add?

A. Lal, I am glad that you spent this much time with me, recollecting our relationship in the past since I was a Vicar at St. Thomas MTC, Kozhencherry. I would like to see retirement homes, camp centers for youths and adults, lay training institutes, may be even a minor seminary, counseling centers, etc. established for the people of this Diocese. I hope and pray that the 8 regional projects planned by Theodosius His Grace will fulfill all of the above. I wish and pray that God showers His abundant grace and mercy upon all laity, clergy and the Diocesan Bishop in fulfilling His mission of the Church in this Diocese. Thank you.



Christos Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia Sevika Sangom members with Vicar Rev. Roy Geevarghese, Rev. M. John and Rev Dennis Abraham. Winners of first place in the South-Eastern Regional Sevika Sanghom Bible Quiz Competition held in Virginia in Sept 2013.



Malankara Darshan is the official Television Programming of Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church. It started broadcasting on Saturday, August 3, 2013. You can watch the Episodes on Shalom TV India time on every Saturday at 9:00 AM Eastern Standard Time (8:00 AM Central Standard Time). The repeat of the Episodes will be on every Tuesdays at 10:30 PM Eastern Standard Time (9:30 PM Central Standard Time). If you like to sponsor an Episode or for more information, please call Mr. T. A. Mathew, the General Coordinator for Malankara Darshan, USA (appointed by the Metropolitan for the Diocese of North America and Europe).

AS TIMES CHANGE... SO MUST WE

Dr. George K. Jacob, Sabha Council Member - North America & Europe



We face so many changes as a global church. I recently sat with my son to discuss much of it, and we put many of our thoughts together. I share below, his and my views.

"The Mar Thoma Church defines itself as "Apostolic in origin, Catholic in nature, Biblical in faith, Evangelical in principle, Ecumenical in outlook, Oriental in worship, Democratic in function, Episcopal in character and is a Reformed Church. Until the beginning of 20th century Marthomites lived in a few districts of Central Travancore and Kunnankulam in Kerala. Since that time it has spread with the 20th-century Indian diaspora to North America, Europe, the Middle East, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, and currently has around one million members worldwide. Their mother tongue is Malayalam, the language of Kerala." (Wikipedia)

There are, and will always remain, several reasons regarding the decision of many to convert. But the bottom line is many of us did. Unfortunately, it is evolving into a sad state of affairs within the organization. The church has been losing its younger couples, and youth to non-denominational churches, or to a completely non-spiritual lifestyle. The numbers vary geographically, but it still begs the question "Why?" Why would many of us want to leave? When the older generations moved to different states, they made sure there was a Mar Thoma church nearby. It is not even close to being a deciding factor for many of the younger generations. This is not just a Mar Thoma issue, it is one many Indian-origin churches and denominations go through. What is going on, and more importantly, where and why are they leaving?

There are many ways to address this, and here is my humble opinion on how.

1. Modify the Liturgy. Most members have a great deal of the service memorized, but simply reciting the same thing every Sunday will not create a better connection to GOD. Let us shorten the liturgy and concentrate on making the service more meaningful. The focus should be not only on the liturgy, but the Bible readings, inspirational songs of praise, and the sermon. It is a big change, and we all want to hold on to the traditional ways, but if we do not move with the times, the times will move right past us. This change will unite the congregation. It will let them leave feeling great about what they received from their Sunday morning ritual. It will stop being a chore, and start becoming a "Must," to start their week.

2. Modify the Clergy training requirements for those not residing in India. Have those individuals who are interested in pursuing priesthood, and not living in India, attend a recognized theological seminary in their own country. Afterwards, a one-year apprenticeship should be completed for them to gain knowledge of our Mar Thoma constitution, principles, and traditions.

3. Achens born and brought up in these times should lead the families born and brought up or adjusting to these times. This is by far the most important thing I could suggest here. Having elderly or out-of-touch Achens coming here, spending half of their 3-year terms here adjusting is a waste of time. They cannot muster up the right answers, or the proper debates on religion that many of our children and youth need. That demographic is the most vital focus area. If we are to keep them strong in their faith as they move on to college, and their future lives, it is going to have to be PRIORITY NUMBER ONE, especially, as they start families, and begin to train their kids to be strong Christians.

Remember that our children will make an emotional connection to this society in half the time that it took us. I know many of our children only understood what is going on in our society regarding politics, sexuality, the law, drugs, alcohol, music and a host of other things by high school or even college. That is not the case anymore. TV, MTV, Reality Shows, Facebook, Twitter, and all the Billboards convey those things more openly than in our times. Future generations will start understanding these concepts by the time they are 6-10 years old. Not only will they understand it, they will be okay with it because society is okay with it. That is, unless they get great guidance from their parents, and their religious leaders. Again, I am not suggesting a prudish attitude towards life, just leadership that is fully aware of what we go through. Suggesting to not allowing Achens who



are over 50 years to be transferred to this Diocese to take charge as parish vicar, if it is Achen's first time as vicar to this Diocese. This Diocese needs Achens who are well-versed in the issues of today's children, youth, young couples, and families. Simply bringing Achens that are trained in performing a Liturgy and not in communication or a viable connection to the parish is not an option. Many come with great intentions... intentions to lead, inspire, teach, and advise. But soon they too are caught up in the whirlwind of this melting pot we live in. Chances are, they slowly conform to the available luxuries, and realize many of the church's families can greatly impact their lives when they go back to India; mostly financially. It is easy to mistake an honestly joyful personality with that of a person attempting to sell me on their care. I am not saying it applies everyone, but after a few years, we can all read through the trends.

4. All Sundays should have an English Service with additional Malayalam-only services, directly after or before the English Services. We know the older generations, and the migrating families will greatly benefit from it as they assimilate to the American Standard. But English is this country's language. I think it is very important we hold on to our ability to understand our native tongue, but not at the risk of alienating parish members. Let the families teach their kids their mother tongue. Let the community and community organizations be delegated to teach the importance of knowing how to communicate with our elders back home. It should not be the duty of the church.

5. Let us redefine cultural and religious points-of-view, and select only what is best for our congregation. It is very important to me that the church has enhanced my community and sense of pride in my culture and not just for me but also for my children. That aside, let us make sure the Mar Thoma Church provides us with more than just community and friendship. Many of the young couples may return to the Mar Thoma Church because of what it has given them in community, friendships, and cultural upbringing. But in regards to Christianity, it simply will not suffice.

6. Add more relevance to all the Conferences. Whether they are regional or nationwide, Family Conferences, Youth Conferences, Junior Conferences, and smaller meetings like Coffee Houses, hugely impact the youth of the Mar Thoma Church. At these conferences and events our children gain friendships, listen to the testimonies that change their lives, listen to messages that have a lasting impact on their views of Christianity, and even where they may first officially accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. These conferences need to gain more emphasis as we move forward. Our churches should push their parish members to attend. It is going to play a very important role in the growth of young Christians.

7. Create a more open and inviting church. This not only relates to our Church but many of the Indian churches. Our church tries to be very ecumenical in many aspects; however, the Mar Thoma Church remains traditional and strict on certain issues such as Communion and weddings, and non-Malayalees attending service. If we are being selective, we should not be concerned when people leave. Holding on to those who want to be a part of the church is more important than being prideful and forcing them out. Where young married couples attend church, and why they are going elsewhere are very important issues to solve. It only takes an open ear and an open mind to figure this all out.

8. We must earnestly listen to our youngsters when they speak up. If the ones who are going to be responsible for continuing the traditions of this church are ignored, they in turn will ignore the church's plight when it will need them. When I was attending an Assembly meeting a few years ago, I asked the Achen, "Where will the Mar Thoma Church be in 20-25 years in the US?" One Achen responded: "Don't worry about that now, we'll be

fine." Unfortunately, based on the current progression, we will not be fine! It is time to start thinking about it. I am concerned about the future; our youth and young couples are also concerned about it: worrying about where our grandkids will learn what our children and we have learned; worrying about where their quality friends will come from; worrying about their stance on many topics this world so desperately needs to come to terms with. If our youngsters are worried, then we should be even more worried because when we are not around for this church anymore, they may not be either. Of course this is all up for debate, as it should be. But all I am asking is that we debate it, instead of brushing over opinions. History tells us that future generations dictate the new flow of things, the rules, the laws, the changes and all that will affect the generation after them. Let us be proactive in our efforts to transition a positive change that will not alienate our current members and force those who want to be a part of this great church away.

ST. MARK'S MTC, TAMPA PROVIDES RELIEF TO THE FAMILY OF SINK HOLE VICTIM

Love thy neighbor as yourself – Mark 12:31 has been one of the commandments that Jesus emphasized and it is on this belief that the members of St. Mark's Mar Thoma church, Tampa decided to help the family of Jeffrey Bush a resident of nearby town of Seffner who lost his life on February 28th 2013, when the earth literally opened up underneath his bedroom and swallowed him along with the bed he was sleeping in. His body was never recovered. His brother Jeremy and sister-in-law Rachel and niece Hannah who were living in the same house were spared.



The Church members were able to collect \$1,900.00 and the Sunday School students raised \$311.00 for helping the family. It is noteworthy to understand that the collection the Sunday School raised was all from their own pocket money. The Church wanted to instill in its children the joy of giving and helping others and they responded with enthusiasm and by far surpassed the amount we had expected them to collect. The checks were handed over to the family on Saturday June 1st 2013 in an informal function held at the Church. The Church collection was handed over to the family by Rev. John Kuruvilla (Vicar – St. Mark's Mar Thoma Church) and the Trustees John V. Philipose and Mathew Varghese. The check from the Sunday School students were handed over by the Sunday school students themselves. Norman Wicker (Father-in-law of Jeremy Bush), Jeremy Bush, Rachel Bush and Hannah Bush were present to receive the checks and expressed their gratitude for the help that was offered.

CHURCHES GATHER TO WISH 'EID MUBARAK' TO ALL BRITISH MUSLIMS



Representatives of several of the UK's largest Christian denominations symbolically delivered Eid greetings (marking the end of the Muslim month of Ramadan) to the entire British Muslim community in London. A "first" of its kind, the handover of the printed and framed "Eid Mubarak" message took place at the London Muslim Centre in Whitechapel, East London. It was witnessed by the Director of the adjacent East London Mosque, Dilowar Khan and was organized by the Christian Muslim Forum (the UK's largest network of Christians and Muslims), whose patron is the Archbishop of Canterbury. Representing Mar Thoma parishes in London, Dr. Zac Varghese, a member of Council of Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe (COMPE) also participated in the event.

OBITUARY

REV. T. J. ABRAHAM, ATLANTA



Rev T. J. Abraham was born as the son of the late T. C John Upadeshi and Rahelamma of Punalur into the Thattamannil House of the Vellarath Family on March 28, 1930 at Punalur, Kerala. He was called to eternity on August 11, 2013. He was married to late Sosamma Abraham of the Katturukudiyil Family in 1965 until her demise in 2010. During their 45 years married life they were blessed and crowned with two children and their

spouses. (John Abraham "Sunny" and Susan, Rachel George "Sheeba" and Koshy George) and four grandchildren. From rather humble beginnings he rose to become a commissioned Indian Army officer, while earning his B.A. as a part-time student. After which he resigned and joined government services for a short period. During this time he began to preach the gospel in the evenings. Thereafter, he joined the Leonard Theological College in Jabalpur and earned his Bachelor's in Divinity. He was ordained as a minister of the Mar Thoma Church on June 29, 1963. He served in the following parishes thereafter: South Travancore Missionary serving 40 rural churches, Aluva, Chathannoor, Trivandrum, Puliyoor, Othera, Poona, Mukkula, & several other parishes throughout Kerala. His special assignments include serving as the Bishop's Secretary in the Madras-Kunnamkulam Diocese. After retiring from active service on April 30, 1995 he remained active in preaching the Gospel. He along with Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Mammen (retired director of the Kerala Agricultural Department), formed the Grama-Jyothi National Institute for the Differently Aabled, School in Nalanchira, to which he continued to serve as President until 2012 and until his death remained as an active patron of the school. He has a special place in the hearts and minds of all who knew him and will always be affectionately remembered. The memorial service was held on Aug. 13, 2013 at Tom M. Wages Funeral Home, Lawrenceville, GA led by Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa. The funeral services was officiated by Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church at Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Paruthippara, Trivandrum and was laid to rest at Muttada Cemetery, Paruthippara, Trivandrum.

MARYKUTTY THOMAS, DALLAS



Mrs. Marykutty Thomas was born to Late K. M. Mathai and Late Thankamma of Thondanveil Vadakkathu Mannil in Muttom, Thumpamon on September 10, 1933 and she was called to eternity on Sunday June 16, 2013 at Baylor Hospital, Irving, Texas. She was the oldest in a family of 7 children; V. M. Thomas, P. K. Raju (deceased), Lilly Kutty, Kunjumole, Lizzyamma (deceased) and Chinnamma. She was married to Rev. P. V. Thomas of Peedikayil, Mulakuzha, Kerala, India on

November 24, 1966. She worked as a High School Math Teacher for 28 years in Kerala and retired from SCS High School, Thiruvalla, Kerala. She along with her spouse immigrated to United States in 1999. They are members of the MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch. She was simple and sincere at heart. She modeled compassion and humility through here lifestyle. She has a unique way of reaching out and touching everyone who spent time with her. She will truly be remembered for her calm demeanor, spiritual discipline, love for her husband, children grandchildren and extended family. She also remained as an inspiration for all the faith community in Dallas area especially the members of the Mar Thoma Churches in Texas. She was survived by her spouse Rev. P. V. Thomas, children, George Thomas (Joji), Mathew Peedikayil Thomas (Jiji), Mary Thomas (Raji), daughter in laws, Sunita George, Jilsy Thomas, son in law

Soj Thazathu, and grand children Juan George, Alen, Carolin, Rimitta and Ruben. The memorial service was held at MTC Dallas, FB on Friday, June 21, 2013. She was laid to rest on Thursday June 27, 2013 at St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Mulakuzha, Kerala, India.

- Jose C. Joseph Mathew, Vicar

THRESIAMMA SAMUEL, DALLAS



Thresiamma Samuel (Pushpa) was born on August 19th, 1940 at Maleruthu House in Kozhencherry, Kerala. She was called to heavenly abode on Tuesday June 11, 2013 at Baylor Hospital, Dallas, Texas. She was trained in Bombay, India in Nursing. Her independence and drive brought her to Dallas in 1968 where she joined as a Nurse at Parkland Memorial Hospital. She returned to India in 1969 where she married Mr. K. C. Samuel (Babu). They began their life together in Dallas and were blessed with three loving daughters Beata, Zita and Diana. She enjoyed spending time with her seven grandchildren, friends, learning and giving back to the community. She was passionate about her faith and lifted up her family and friends through loving words and prayer. She was able to laugh, exercise and pray with her husband every day, up until the day she was called by God. We believe she joyfully took His hand on June 11th, and will continue to look down on all those whose lives were touched by this angel. She is survived and will be missed by her husband, K. C. Samuel of 43 years, her 3 daughters and sons-in-law (Beata and Arun Gowdamarajan; Zita and Shantanu Naik; Diana and Mathew Jacob) and her 7 grandchildren (Grace; Shreyus, Sivin and Nila; Simryn, Mason, and Niam). She is also survived by her 3 sisters (Chinamma Philip, Santhama Chacko, and Alice Martin) and 1 brother (Jose Daniel) and many nieces and nephews. The memorial service was held at MTC Dallas, FB on Friday, June 14, 2013, and the funeral service was held on Saturday June 15, 2013, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa led the service. She was laid to rest on Saturday June 15, 2013 at Sparkman/Hillcrest Funeral home in Dallas, Texas.

The memorial service was held at MTC Dallas, FB on Friday, June 14, 2013, and the funeral service was held on Saturday June 15, 2013, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa led the service. She was laid to rest on Saturday June 15, 2013 at Sparkman/Hillcrest Funeral home in Dallas, Texas.

- Jose C. Joseph Mathew, Vicar

P. G. MATHAI, NEW JERSEY



Mr. P.G. Mathai was born on January 28, 1931 to Chona & Saramma Geevarghese, Palolil House, Vettiyar, Kerala, India. He was married to Aleyamma (Koshy) Mathai for 53 years. He was called to his heavenly abode on June 24, 2013. He is survived by his wife Aleyamma, children, Susan Babu, Susan Thomas (Mercy), George Mathews (Babu), sons-in-law, Babu Varghese, Abraham Thomas (Jose Vilayil), daughter-in-law, Darly

George (Shirly) and five grandchildren; Bibin, Babina, Divya, Anup and Allen. Mr. Mathai is also survived by his siblings, P. G. Pappy, P. G. Oommen, Chinnamma John and P. G. Alexander. He is preceded by his brothers P.G. Varghese, P. G. Daniel, and sisters, Rachel George, Sosamma Samuel, and Thankamma Thomas. He served in the Indian Air Force for 27 years before immigrating to the United States in 1985. He enjoyed his new life with his family in the U.S. He was a member of the New Jersey Mar Thoma Church ever since he came to the US. He was loved by all who had the privilege of knowing him and his meek spirit. He will be missed by his family as well as his church family. We know that he is with our Lord and our family finds solace in that fact. He loved the Lord with all his heart and will be greatly missed.

Mission Corner

ALABAMA MISSION

June 9-15, 2013

Morgan Byrd - Representative of the Choctaw Nation

(Morgan is a Choctaw youth who participated in all the VBS program for the last 12 years, She directed the VBS at Mt Vernon, Alabama during 2012 and 2013)



In Mount Vernon, Alabama the Native American children have the opportunity to experience a mixture of cultures, fun-filled activities, and gain knowledge of our Savior Jesus Christ. We are proud to announce the Volunteers of the Marthoma Church has introduced a world of excitement like we have never experienced before. During Vacation Bible School (VBS), the tribe of the MOWA Band of Choctaw Indians intertwine their heritage with those from the country of India. They trade customs, language, dance, and other unique ideas which make each of them unique. The activities are an attraction all on their own. The kids create a variety of unique Bible related crafts. There are physical activities that one may not have participated anywhere else in the world. There are also songs and skits that keep the Native Americans coming back for more. Most importantly, is the influx of teachings of the life of Jesus Christ. At VBS, we cover the life of Christ in such a way; it makes one feel they were actually there. You can experience the true and living Spirit of Christ, be a witness and receive witness from others. Through community service projects and long hours of bonding, over the years, VBS in Mount Vernon has become more than just a week of fun. The two cultures have bond well and are now like a family. We, the Native American Choctaw Indians greatly appreciate the hard work and dedication given by the Marthoma Church Volunteers. The love and support they have shown to our community is beyond words.

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL AT CAMP ISRAEL FOLSOM BROKEN BOW, OKLAHOMA NATIVE AMERICAN MISSION

by Stan Samuel



From Monday, June 3 to Friday, June 7, 2013, the Diocese planned the annual VBS mission trip to Camp Israel Folsom in Broken Bow, Oklahoma among the Choctaw tribe there. The theme of the VBS was: God's Backyard Bible Camp under the Sun: Where Kids Have a Blast Serving Jesus. The main verse was taken from Luke 10:27: "He answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;' and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Our group consisted of individuals from New York, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Texas. By God's grace, we arrived safely in Oklahoma on Monday, and we conducted the first session of the day. I was going on my first VBS trip to Broken Bow, and the first day was an amazing glimpse of what the week was supposed to be like. We took the time to teach the children songs, conducted the first lesson, and spent time with the children present.

Prior to going to Oklahoma, we spent time planning and coming up with ideas of what the schedule should be like, what activities we should do with the children, and how to reach out to them by the Scripture, so they may come closer to Christ. On Tuesday, June 4th, we had the morning session with the children. We sang songs, and we had our VBS lesson as well as lunch. Afterward, we went to a lake for leisure time where the children and us volunteers went canoeing and taking time to relax. Tuesday was off to a great start.

As the children made their way back to the campsite, we also got in the car and decided to drive back to the campsite. As we were driving back, we were in a head on collision with a big van. In less than a minute, our lives were changed, and what started off as a bright sunny day became the darkest day of our lives. I was driving the car, Ammu was in the passenger seat, and Justin and Patrick were in the back. Immediately after the cars collided, Chris Tomlin's song, "Whom Shall I Fear" turned on, and the first line I heard was, "The God of angel armies is always by my side," a promise only God could give us. Shortly after the accident, several individuals came to our assistance, and we were able to get out of the vehicle before the fire incinerated the car. Among the people that assisted us, there were three trauma nurses that served the Lord in all they did. They not only took care of us as we waited for EMS, but they also prayed over us. One of the nurses stood over me as I lay on the ground, and she prayed with tears flowing from her eyes. Never had I witnessed such a passionate prayer for strangers. While I was in the ER, I found out that Patrick passed away. The emotional pain of finding out my best friend passed away was far greater than the physical injuries I was dealing with.

What was supposed to be a tremendous week of serving and teaching the children to serve, turned out to be shortened, and became the most painful week of our lives. Yet, we realize that our plans were not exactly what God had planned out. Regardless, throughout the pain, God remained true to His promise that the God of angel armies would always be by our side.



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DIASPORA EXPERIENCE

42 YEARS OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF A PILGRIM

Koshy Thomas, Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston



Luke chapter 24 verses 15 and 16 state, "As they talked and discussed amongst them, Jesus himself drew near and walked along with them. They saw Him but somehow did not recognize Him." When I reflect on the last 50 years of my family life, I realize that this is exactly what has happened to us. Christ has been our unseen companion, guide, and protector. More than 42 years ago, as a family, we started our journey to a foreign land leaving behind a comfortable life. I was a supervisor in a company. My wife, Moani, was a nursing sister in Irwin Hospital and two of our three daughters were attending private school in India. As a family, we decided to take a leap in faith, take a chance, and emigrate to the United States of America. When we took this leap forward, we knew no one in the United States except one or two people. Everywhere we turned, we met nothing but challenges.

We were able to meet every challenge with courage and determination because we were steadfast in our conviction that we were not alone. As a family, we believed as we still do today, that God's hands were upon our lives. We were firmly rooted in the unshakable belief that it is God who goes before us; God who stands behind; God who keeps guard over every moment in our lives. My family arrived in the United States in three batches. Moani emigrated first so that she could start her nursing job in early July 1971. My two daughters and I followed approximately 4 months later and arrived in New York. Our third daughter joined us a year later. When our youngest daughter finally joined us in the United States, our family was complete. Since that time, my family and I have continued our journey in the United States - the Promised Land - with God and He is still holding us in His hands.

In August 2013, Moani and I celebrated 50 years of our married life. God has been gracious to us and has been with us in every step. As pilgrims in a new land, one of our first challenges was to adjust our British style spoken English to the American style. Ordering food at a fast food chain became an experience in futility because it took months to identify some of the frequent slang to match the way we spoke. Another more serious challenge was to find a Sunday school for our daughters and a worship place for the family. This became a pressing concern for us. Moani and I were the only couple who had young children of Sunday school age among all the known Malayalee immigrants. There were only a handful of Malayalee Christian families at that time. Discouragement and disappointment started creeping into our lives at the lack of services to meet these basic

needs. However, God was great. He sent us an angel in the form of a pastor of Pentecostal faith Mr. Joy Oommen. He offered to pick us up on Sunday mornings and drop us back after Sunday school and church service. This was a great relief and a timely help, but it was still not enough.

My determination was to have a Mar Thoma worship service set up, so that the families in New York at that time, as well as families who would come in the future, would be able to partake and benefit from the experience of their shared faith. By April of 1972, we had a few more families who had migrated to the New York area. We thought that the time is now to start moving for the fulfillment of a congregation in the United States: George Kurian, I (Koshy Thomas), Joseph Mattackal and Thomas Mathew joined hand in hand, later Mariamma Kochamma wife of late Mathai Kutty Achen also joined and the group formed. This first congregation consisted of 46 members of Mar Thomites, CSI, and Orthodox members. The whole endeavor justified what is written in the Bible: - Nothing is impossible with God. This congregation was started on April 9, 1972. The formation was announced in the May issue of Sabha Tharaka. In spite of several requests, The Most Rev Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan wrote in his own hand that, "This is not our policy to form Mar Thoma parishes in western countries." The Metropolitan's advice was to identify ourselves with local churches and join their congregations. This position by The Metropolitan was heartbreaking to us. Though he ruled out the possibility of a Mar Thoma Parish, The Metropolitan was very much concerned about finding an Achen for sacramental services. In the meantime, the number of new families was rapidly increasing day by day. This heavy influx turned out to be the positive aspect in our quest for a Mar Thoma Church. With Thirumeni's approval, Rev. Ipe Joseph of the Pune Parish visited New York and conducted a Mar Thoma Service in Manhattan, New York. This was the first official service and we collected funds for the Pune Parish. In addition to this development, Rev. Oommen Koruthu (now the Suffragan Metropolitan) was admitted to Princeton University as a doctoral student in their theology program. He was available for all our needs. Together with him, we travelled extensively in the East and his vision helped to strengthen the growth of Mar Thoma Church. Years later, he came back as the first resident diocesan bishop and built the dioceses on a strong foundation.

At every stage of life, there are challenges. Once we had settled the issue with worship services, Moani and I were still concerned about our children's education. It was very difficult to accept the change from a private school atmosphere to a public school system. Out of fear that our children would lose their

Indian culture and values, we decided to send our two oldest daughters to Nazareth Convent in Ootty. This was a very painful decision as our daughters were only seven and eight years old at the time. After a year of trying boarding school in Ootty, we brought our daughters back to New York and enrolled them in a local Catholic school.

The lines of challenges were many. The next in line was more unfortunate. Moani was diagnosed with diabetes at a very early age and the concern about our future loomed over us. Partly due to her medical issues, we decided to move to a warmer climate. Therefore, we moved to Texas in 1978 with a new business venture for me and a new job at the VA Medical center for Moani. Once we arrived in Texas, our priority was to locate the best school system to get the best value in education. Well, that ended up about 20 miles away from Moani's work place. However, our financial situation did not allow us to have two cars because every last penny was invested in the new business. This forced us to learn how to do with little and still be happy. This period of our lives was probably the most challenging and emotionally trying times, but it was also probably the best decision God led us to make. These challenges made all in my family to be more determined. This determination is a part of everyone in my family even today.

In 1979, I was elected as the Secretary of the Mar Thoma Congregation in Houston. My goal was to establish a Sunday school. The first Sunday school was started in 1979. In spite of all obstacles in our day-to-day lives, my family and I continued to serve the church and people. Fourth family conference was held in Houston in 1988. Most Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan attended the conference. The theme was "We are Partners working together for God", It was widely published through Voice of Asia, the only English Newspaper owned by a Malayalee in North America then and now. Moani served in the choir since the day Choir started and continued until she was physically unable to perform. She also served as the secretary of the Sevika Sangam. I had the honor to

continue to serve the church in various responsibilities such as Secretary, Lay Leader, Vice president of Family Conference, elected as Assembly member in 1994, Convener of Public Relations Committee and a Member of the Editorial Board of Messenger. It was a major assignment when Dr. Zachariah's Mar Theophilus Thirumeni appointed me as the Convener of Public Relations Committee and performed my responsibility to the best I could, including fund raising for the diocese.

Some of the main challenges facing us as a community now are: - How can we make full use of our youth, especially the young boys? So they can be trained to run the Church, How do we take care of our Senior Citizens? Unless we address both these segments for our community in a thoughtful and proactive manner, I am afraid that we will destroy the fine fabric of values, compassion, respect, tolerance, human dignity, and humility that we profess as of our own. There are many ways and means to serve and lessen the hardship of others. My prayer is that we continue the journey with Jesus and use everything God has given to each of us for the benefit of all. Matthew 28:20 gives us the promise that "Lord I am with you always even to the end of the age."

WHERE CAN WISDOM BE FOUND?

Ivy Mathews, Christos Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia



Scholars go into the depth of the oceans
Of their knowledge and learnedness
To find the reservoir of wisdom
But never a drop satisfies them.

Wisdom is not of the world
Wisdom is not of the tradition
Wisdom is not of the school
Wisdom is not of the age.

But what wisdom is
The mystical knowledge
That the Almighty showers
To those who are surrendered to Him.

It develops from the ardent love
It is formed by the intense care
It is molded by the amazing grace
It is the unique expression of God.

Frail are the foolish humans
Pride leads them in their envy
Spite sprouts from the jealous inside
Wins Satan over our selves!

Relief is poured from above
Yield to our Lord God
Surrender our flaws to Him
His potential will be filled in us.

Seek ye the transformation
The amazing love can change
Any hard nature or stony heart
To an astonishing beauty.

Humble ourselves before the cross
Be meek and mild in our deeds
"Step into the shoes" of others' trouble
Empathy serves better than sympathy

So, let the spirit come upon us
Fill us with wisdom and knowledge
Free us from the frailties
Form us as the porter's pot
Seek ye first the kingdom of God
Anyone who lacks wisdom
Will be provided abundantly
The precious treasure above.

The beauty of holiness is wisdom
'Flexible and Peaceful' it is
'Gentle and Gracious' it is
God's workmanship is our minds.

Thy wisdom is beyond our comprehension
Thy power is beyond our apprehension
O Lord, we bow before Thee,
Whose handiwork this firmament is!!!

APOLOGETICS - ROLE IN CHRISTIANITY & MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Yohann Thomas Kuruvila



"When did God begin to exist?"

"What makes Christianity so exclusive?"

"Why do you believe in a 2000 year old myth called Christianity?"



If you are confronted with the above questions, what would your response be? This is where the role of apologetics comes in. Apologetics is the defence of Christian faith. The word apologetics comes from the Greek word "apologia" which means answer. It is a biblical discipline that dates back to the early church.

You may be wondering why I am stating these facts. The reason is that for a church to sustain itself, it needs to be involved in Apologetics. Apologetics defend faith by debating Atheists, answering questions from seekers and troubled Christians. Many debates end up with the Atheists realizing the futility of the position they hold. Question and Answers periods with seekers/confused Christians help show that Christianity is reasonable and defensible. I remember going to a Ravi Zacharias (Indian-born Apologist) question and answer period where I saw questions from confused and helpless Christians being answered extremely well. I remember him talking about different things which confused Christians like how the

New Age/Eastern religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism etc.) have infiltrated our western culture. He also talked about issues if the church does not get involved with Apologetics - the church will lose its youth to atheism, liberalism, or other religions. A Church can be involved with Apologetics by talking about controversial issues, giving the background of the text that is being read and explain what is happening in it. We could also show how to defend opposition from atheism or other religions that may be against what is said in a sermon.

Spreading the word of God is the mission that God gave the church. Apologetics can help in spreading the word of God. Apologetics helps by explaining to the non-Christians that Christianity is truthful and can be relied on. It also gets rid of many of the doubts that may be stopping them from coming to Christ.

Nowadays, people aren't satisfied with a personal testimony. They want answers to their questions based on facts. I remember debating with a friend (an atheist) who thought that Christianity had stopped all scientific innovation during the dark ages. I explained to him that Christians were the people who created the colleges and universities during that time period. In an attempt to ignore what I said, he seemed to have the impression that all that Christians can offer in defense is testimony and not facts. He was surprised at the fact that I was one who didn't appeal to testimony but sought facts instead. Testimony is good but these people are looking for more than just testimony, they want facts. They want to know things like how do we know Christ were resurrected, if miracles are real, how do we know God exists.

The mission of the church is to spread the word of God, and apologetics is a way to address the Christian's doubts and answer the non-believers questions.

BLESSINGS OF MY BREAST CANCER

Review By, Laila Anie Philip

(A book by: Aley Abraham)

blessings
of my
breast
cancer



Blessings of My Breast Cancer written by Aley Abraham is an outstanding inspirational book. The Biblical verses and simple illustrations help us to face any dreaded sickness and difficulties of life with great courage. Aley Abraham's faith in God Almighty and how she fought the fatal disease with a disciplined life with poise, joy and a positive attitude is something all of us should emulate.

As this book meant a lot to me, I had recommended this book to all my loved ones and I am recommending this book to everybody who reads this review

"I am happy to recommend the book Blessings of My Breast Cancer by Aley Abraham. The authenticity of the book lies on personal experience of going through the dreaded sickness of cancer. To hear about the disease and to go through the sickness are not the same. The reader will get a blend of these two experiences through the chapters of this book. The traumatic experience of recognizing that one is a cancer patient can turn the life for good or bad. In Aley Abraham, the reader will find a transformed person with deeper faith, entering into theological reflections and learning greater biblical truths. Therefore, the book is a scholarly work, full of life's experiences, medical treats, biblical truths, and theological insights. I congratulate Aley Abraham for the good work. I wish and pray that this book illuminates the lives of innumerable people to recognize that life is 'fearfully and wonderfully made' by God."

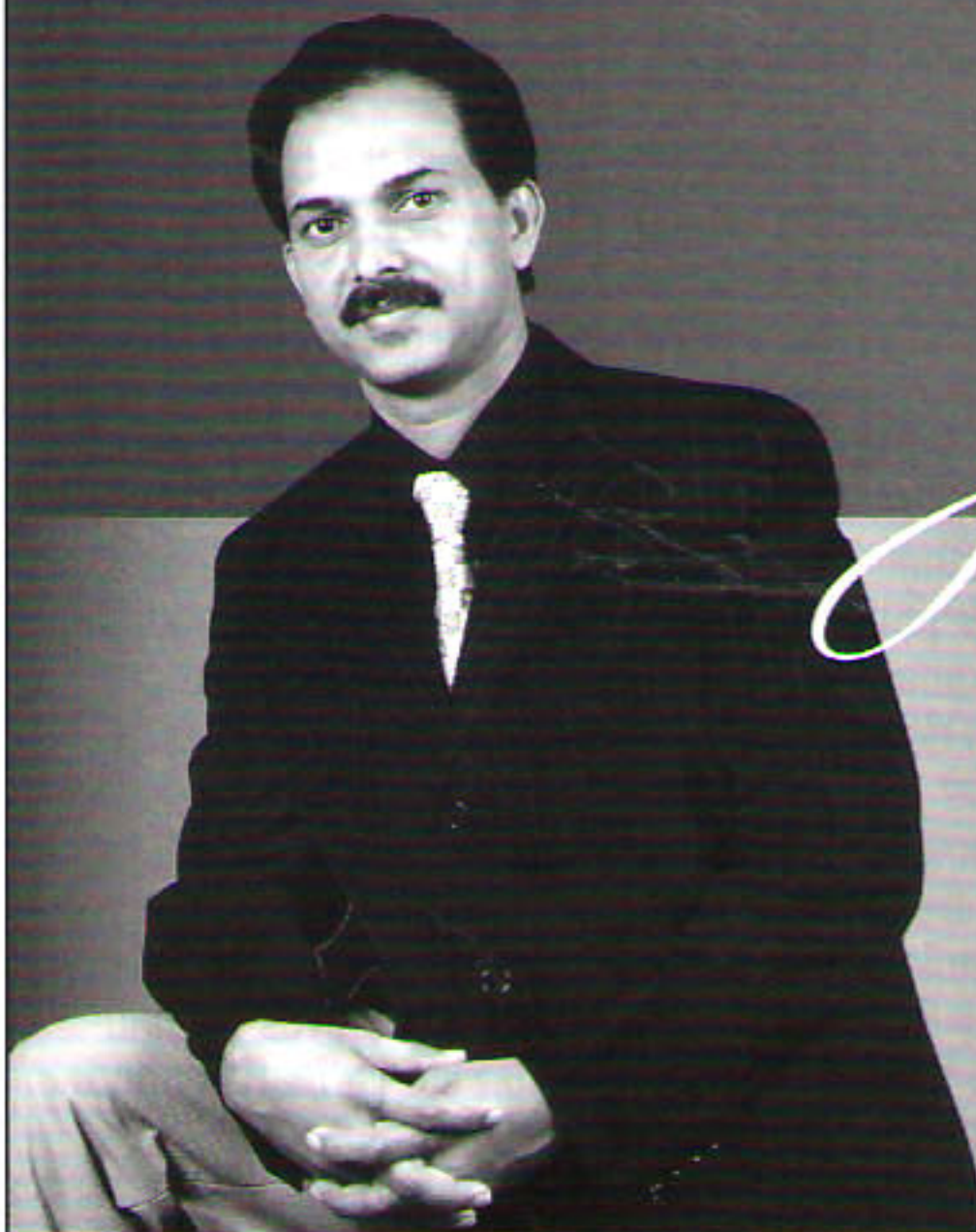
Rt. Rev Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius

Dream home in Dream land

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WORSHIP MALLS AND RELIGIOUS CONSUMERS



Rev. V. M. Mathew, Youth Chaplain, New York

We live in a world of shopping malls which satisfies our shopping desires. We have multiple choices according to our tastes and desires. Malls compete with each other to attract its consumers using various commercial techniques and offers. The commercials and sale offers stimulates our tastes and our desires to become consumers of many things that are not necessarily essential in our daily lives. But still we are attracted to the new brands and new models.

James J Farrel in his book, *one nation under goods: Malls and the seduction of American Shopping* say, "Malls embodies the values and ideals of what we might call "commercial utopianism" – freedom, abundance, leisure, happiness, individualism and community". He goes on to state that "it emphasizes opportunity but not equality. It evokes passion but not compassion... Malls sell the good life but not a good society."

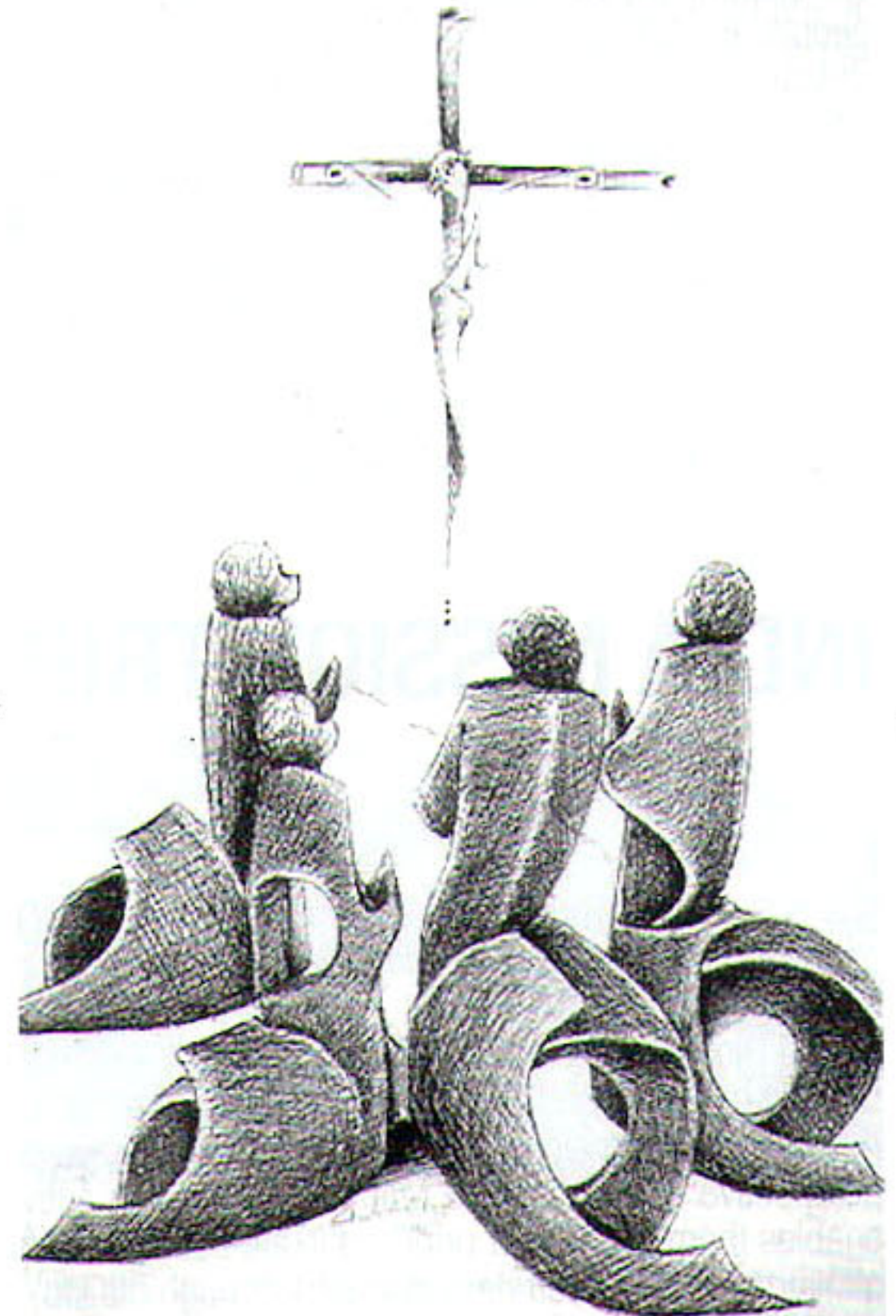
Gabriel and Lang comment "there are no worries here, no pushy salesman, no invisible pickpockets, goods have fixed price tags and covered by the trade description act; if you run short of cash, plastic money is welcome. To be sure this is a fantasy world; it brings exotica to the consumer instead of taking the consumer to the exotica". Farrel again says "the mall is the place where we let people know who we are; at the mall we are just looking at ourselves by looking at commodities."

In our context we experience life in a shopping mall where people come with desires and tastes and look for the satisfaction of these desires and tastes. We completely experience a kind of freedom and leisure in a shopping mall. So this is not only place for sales and purchases but also a place for entertainment and freedom. In this context we also experience a major shift in the worship places and worshipping styles. Now people shop for worship that means worship is becoming like a commodity that can be bought. We look for worship places according to our tastes and we desire a satisfaction of that tastes. Different worship malls are available to cater to the different tastes of religious consumers. Churches are competing with each other in their styles, names and attractions. Now we get sale papers and offers, we have commercials in electronic media that incite our desire for shopping. Worship malls also provides their attractions in their worship malls such as music styles, cafeteria arrangements, babysitting options, car parking facilities, healing gifts, and offer names of worship leaders through their programs in the electronic media and newsletters. So consumers are free to choose their options according to their convenience and tastes. I would like to analyze these worship malls in the following aspects. Worship malls cater to our desires and tastes

Many people look for churches to cater to their tastes and desires. Some people are interested in a particular style of worship, some look for a good preacher, some look for better facilities like seating arrangements, parking, good audio and video facilities, so on and so forth. Every time we look to satisfy our own desires and tastes, we have umpteen options available around us. So as religious consumers we can make our own choices to satisfy our desires and tastes.

Worship malls cater to an individual not a community

In the worship malls the community aspect is not entertained or catered to. When we look at the first century church, the community aspect was encouraged and emphasized. A community who worshipped together lived in sharing and caring. In the worship malls, community is not important, families are not important but individuals are important. People don't know and are not interested in knowing who is sitting next to them. A kind of individual satisfaction is encouraged in these worship malls. A relationship between God and the individual (God and me and me and God) is given supreme importance. Individuals are 'spiritually' and emotionally satisfied. Many a time the question "where is your sister/brother?" is not addressed in these malls. People get a kind of selfish emotional and spiritual satisfaction. I am not denying the importance of a personal relationship with God but if our spirituality is not extended to a communal spirituality and community living, it is a futile, selfish Endeavour.



Worship malls entertain people, not disturb

Some worship services entertain certain traditions and the so-called religious consumers are satisfied by observing certain religious practices and rituals. They are not at all disturbed about their wrong doings or corrupt ways of lives when they attend worship. Their worship always encourages them to live without any changes in individual and corporate living. People come to the worship malls to buy the product called worship and to be entertained. These entertainments are enhanced by flashing lights, soothing music, entertaining sermons and many other things. Churches are becoming like worship malls where they sell a commodity called 'worship'. Many are satisfied with certain religious rituals and body movements and go back with some kind of emotional and spiritual satisfaction and lead a complacent life.

Worship malls project Jesus' death and forget his life and teachings

One of the main commercials for worship malls is the assurance of forgiveness through the death of Jesus. Forgetting his life and teachings and projecting the death of Jesus is an attractive way of getting people together to offer free salvation. I do understand that the salvation that we experience through Jesus is

completely free but that is not an end in itself. It demands us to live like Jesus lived and taught and that is the only way to witness Jesus in this world. Jesus' birth, life, teachings, passion, death, resurrection and His presence today through the Holy Spirit and waiting for His second coming are equally important and salvation is accepting all these into our lives. Then we will experience a transformed living and I believe salvation and transformation go together.

Worship malls are increasing but disciples are decreasing

Churches are blooming and the number of people who are attending church worships is increasing. But where is the Christian living? Where are the disciples? Jesus' great commission instructs us to make disciples. Acts 1: 8 says that when the Holy Spirit comes you will become my witnesses. But now we see in the media that when the Holy Spirit comes people are falling down, people are doing diverse body movements so on and so forth. Devotees are increasing and disciples are decreasing. The rising number of Christians who are engaging in crimes, the increasing incidence of domestic violence in Christian families, the rising number of people who are addicted to various addictions, rising sexual immorality among Christians and increased selfish lifestyles alarmingly challenge us to re-look at our own spirituality. If worship is not extended from Monday to Sunday, then worship is a momentary experience and a futile exercise.

These are self examination and let us ask ourselves are the churches becoming like worship malls? And I should ask myself if am I part of this worship mall business. Let us

look to Isaiah chapter 6, where we see an ideal form of worship in which Isaiah surrenders completely to the will of God. In that worship we have praise and adoration, we have the experience of God's presence and God's glory, we have confession and forgiveness of sins and we have commissioning to the world. And all through Isaiah's life he witnessed God through his words and actions. If we are part of this worship mall business, God is looking at us and saying "Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood!" (Isaiah. 1: 14-16). But He also says "Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow (Isaiah. 1: 17) Let us accept Jesus into our lives, let our worship and other religious activities transform our lives. Let us experience salvation every day in our worship life and live a life worthy of His calling.

INDIA MISSION TRIP-2013 TO MUMBAI MISSION FIELDS

Laila Anie Philip, Carmel MTC Boston

"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8.

As the Diocese is celebrating its 25th year of existence in this foreign land, the Diocesan Council had arranged five mission trips to India especially for our youths during the summer break. The main purpose of this trip is to give our youths an exposure and a wider perspective of the different Mar Thoma mission activities going on in India. This in turn, enables them to set their priorities in life based on Jesus' command and call for a servant ministry as He himself demonstrated through his life.

On June 1st 2013, eight youths and two adults embarked on a mission trip to the Mumbai Mission fields in India. The team members are: Julie Panachakunnel, Nincy Mathew (MTC Dallas Farmers Branch), Stacy Ann Varghese (Sehion MTC, Dallas), Hanna John (St. Paul's MTC, Dallas), Melanie John (Long Island MTC, NY) Shobitha Shaji, Sairah Johnson (Christos MTC, PA), Tim John (Bethel MTC, Chicago) Philip Manuel and Laila Anie Philip (Carmel MTC, Boston). We were received at the Chhatrapati Shivaji International airport on June 3rd at 2:30 am by the Bishop's Secretary, Rev. Mathew Samuel and Diocesan Treasurer, Mr. George P. Kurian. After a thanksgiving prayer at the airport, we went to the Mumbai Diocesan Centre at Vashi, Navi Mumbai. At the Center, we were received by the Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Theethos Episcopa.

The Executive committee members and Achen of the Main Parishes who support the mission fields travelled miles to meet us in these mission fields. Rev. K.C. Chacko, the Missionary Achen and Vicar of Nelloso para Jerusalem MTC received us in Vashi on 3rd afternoon. He was with us during the entire mission trip. As the Mission fields we visited were far apart, we had to spend many hours in travel and sometimes in heavy down pour. On June 3rd around 8 am Thirumeni, gave an over view of Mumbai Diocese, its mission and projects. In the afternoon we went for shopping as well as sight-seeing. Again in the evening, after the prayer, Thirumeni met with the youths and he asked a poignant question, "Do you practice, what you preach? Thirumeni reminded that "what is productive and profitable is acceptable" is not Christian principle. Thirumeni also reminded that we should never evaluate a person based on wealth/intelligence. We should give importance to living the Gospel rather than preaching the Gospel. Rev. K.C Chacko gave us an overview of the different Mission activities going on in different mission fields in Mumbai (Maharashtra, Goa and Gujarat Regions) and also gave more details about the next few days program based on the itinerary.

During Morning Prayer with Thirumeni, Thirumeni reminded us that;

1. Salvation is becoming like Jesus Christ and growing in Jesus Christ.
 2. Let someone see you and say, here is another Christ.
 3. Is it possible to smile at difficult situations?
 4. Smiling is a special gift. So smile at everyone. If we smile only to certain people, it becomes a curse.
- Thirumeni quoted many illustrations of Philipose Mar Chrysostom Valiya Metropolitan.



Nallasopra

We travelled in our hired van to Jerusalem Mar Thoma church in Nallosopara, in Thane District of Maharashtra. (Western suburb of Mumbai.) Rev. K.C Chacko our missionary Achen is the Vicar of this Parish. We had a meeting with the Evangelists many of whom had come from faraway places. They taught us Marathi songs and each Evangelist explained the works going on in their respective villages. They asked questions about our Diocese and its mission activities and our lifestyle in the US. Mr. Thomas Samuel, the Diocesan

Secretary(MTVEA) gave each of us, as a token of their love a songbook 'Sthuthi Tharangangal' published by the Voluntary Evangelists' Association of the Mumbai Diocese. It contains English, Hindi and Marathi songs.

Jerusalem Mar Thoma church became a full-fledged Parish in December 2010. They have only 49 families. Even though, small in number, they have many outreach programs. The parish freely offered its premises as a Gurukul for the Mar Chrysostom Centre for Mission and Development Studies, the first Mar Thoma Bible Training Institute in Maharashtra for the evangelists. Now the Jerusalem church once again, even with their limited resources, consider it as a God's calling, voluntarily set aside more resources to start the Daye Nikethan Tribal Children's Hostel in a temporary shelter. Now they have 13 girls in this hostel. God had led them thus far and depending fully on that assurance, the parish at Nallasopra has decided to build a multi-facility complex on its land. They showed us how a small number of families through their sacrificial giving are accomplishing great things for God and a real witness among the tribal group. Even though the schools were not opened, few children came back early to the hostel to meet us. They entertained us with English and Marathi songs and dances. We also met Mr. Reji Easow, an active youth, from that parish, who has been accepted as a Theology student in the Leonard Theological Seminary in Jabalpur and a 3rd year B.D student, Mahesh Nanji, studying at Faridabad Theological Seminary. He secured first class for his B.Th. He can speak in Marathi, Hindi, English and Malayalam. He is sponsored by the youths of the Immanuel MTC, Borivili,

Needs and concerns

Our prayers and monetary help to construct a Multi Storied Building for Church, School and Hostel to accommodate 100 girls in the land they already have. Those who like to have a hall or a class room named after their loved ones, can e-mail to jmcnallasopra@gmail.com or kcrvjm@gmail.com. They are planning to have 2 halls and 20 classrooms. (Rs. 25 Lakhs for a hall and Rs. 5 Lakhs for a class room.) Any donation is welcome to cater to the needs of these children.



Diocesan Centre, Vashi

We returned to the Diocesan center to attend a special program Thirumeni had arranged for our youths with psychologist Dr. Dolly James from Nirmala College of Social Works. She also works as a Counselor in the Navajeevan Centre. Her talk was based on the story of the " Good Samaritan". She asked a few thought provoking questions.

1. Do we allow ourselves to be abused? (E.g. bribing others to get our own way.)
2. Do we keep silent when we see injustice? (By being silent, we are also part of the problem.)
3. Do we help others without getting any returns? (Gave money to the Innkeeper to take care of the wounded)
4. Do we try to avoid problems? (Priest and Levite's action in the story of the Good Samaritan)
5. Do we love and care for others sacrificing our comforts and facing risks and be a part of the solution?-(Good Samaritan).

She opened our eyes to what is going on in the "Red Street" in Mumbai and how the Mar Thoma church through Navajeevan Centre is making a positive difference in the lives of underprivileged, commercially, sexually exploited women and their children. She emphasized the fact that if each one of us takes responsibility and accountability for our actions, we can influence and change the corrupt system in our society. Youths from the Navajeevan Centre Extension Home (18 years and above) also joined us later. They shared their painful testimony, entertained us with music and magic show. Mr. Roshan Abraham, their warden, also shared his testimony, as how God led him to help these children. Rev. Mathew Samuel & Preena Kochamma, Rev. Daniel Thomas, Rev. K.C Chacko also graced

the occasion with their presence. The Diocesan Centre arranged a special dinner for everyone along with Thirumeni. Our youths later got some time to interact with the extension home youths. They played games and sang songs together.

Boichapada

On June 5th, after morning worship and breakfast with Thirumeni, we went in our hired van to Boichapada mission field in Thane district and attended a Holy Qurbana service in Marathi. Achen always made sure that the services are bilingual for the youths to follow him. This mission field is supported by the Immanuel MTC, Borivili. They have 242 believers covering 14 villages and 91 children. They have nine prayer groups, five Bible studies. This is the first Marathi Mar Thoma Congregation accepted by the Synod. An old man named David, who lost his fingers while hunting was the first one who got baptized in this area. Recently 45 people received baptism. Only a few people can read or write so not very many can respond during the liturgy. Mahesh Nanji, B.D student at Faridabad is from here and he is the first one in his family to receive higher education. To just to see a Physician, they have to travel more than 100 Kilometers. They are all living by the protection of God.



Need and concerns

Villagers who want to study like Mahesh in Faridabad needs sponsorship. It only cost Rs. 3000/-to sponsor a student for one month. Our prayers and contributions to build well-equipped hospitals with Physicians. Voluntary services of Medical Doctors /dentists/are also welcome. .

Jawhar

Later we went to the Jawhar Mission Fields, which is sponsored by the St. Thomas MTC, Santa Cruz. They helped to build a worship place for the believers. Jawhar has more than 300 believers who attend the Sunday Worship service. The mission work is based in Jawhar and covers 27 surrounding villages. They have two worship groups, one Sunday School ,346 believers and 100+ seekers (those interested in the faith, not yet baptized) We stayed in a hotel in Jawhar as they couldn't accommodate all of us. We heard the testimony of many believers. Many of them came from Buddhist backgrounds. Our youths, taught the Sunday school children action songs and later they performed for the whole congregation. Evangelist Bapurao Sakharkar and family with the help of some youths prepared our dinner, breakfast and lunch.

Mokhada

This mission field is sponsored by the MTC, Dadar. They have 50 families, covering 18 villages. By the

time we reached, the house where they had gathered for worship was fully packed. Our time at Mokhda was very humbling. The house was made of mud and coated with cow dung with a straw roof. They were singing songs with flute and tabala. We heard the testimony of the first converts of this village, a husband and wife. Earlier they believed in witchcraft and local medicines. But by the prayer of an evangelist, they got healed from their sickness and opened their home for prayer gatherings. The villagers also brought their grains and seeds for cultivation and asked Achen to bless it. Achen also told us that after the harvest they bring their 1/10th to church. The local authorities are opposed to conduct worship services in the village. A request to conduct the Christmas program was granted only two days before the program. But later, the local village leaders accepted the invitation and attended the programs.

Need and concerns

Need a place of worship. Pray for the local authorities who are against Christianity and building a church.

Nasik

We reached Nasik, St. Thomas MTC, around 7PM in heavy downpour, as the monsoon season began in Maharashtra. Rev. Biju C. P and Anie Kochamma received us when we reached there along with Parish Secretary, Treasurer and Vice-President of that Parish. Mr. Manoj Mammachen, coordinator of the Gujarat region joined us. We stayed overnight there in the school hostel, which was recently built.

Shantinikethan Ashram

We reached Shanti Nikethan Ashram, Ahwa. Many children came back three days early from their summer vacation to meet us, travelling 40 to 60 kilometers. Our youths played many games with the children. A hostel building was renovated from a dilapidated condition to a permanent structure, by the generous support of the Gujarat Centre Mar Thoma Voluntary Evangelists' Association. At present there are 70 boys staying in this hostel up to 12th grade. The children, who passed the 12th grade, are planning to go for higher education with the help of sponsors. Some children are also sponsored by the MTVEA of Gujarat. The prayer of Theethos Thirumeni is that the number of children sponsored should be raised to 100.



Kasara

We had Holy Communion service in Marathi, at Kasara in one of the believer's home. The members from Kasara (A) and Kasara (B) came for the Holy Communion service. The house was fully packed and many people were standing outside. This mission field is sponsored by Bethel MTC, Malad and St. Peter's MTC Goreganon. The sponsoring churches are looking for a suitable place to build a church for the believers. Evangelists are Sunil Sonkanble (Kasara (A) and Babu Suryavanshi (Kasara (B). Later we went to Thane.

Needs and concerns

Our prayers for a good location to build the worship place.

Thane

We met with "Friends of Mission' at the MTC at Thane. Many youths from all over Maharashtra attended the meeting. It has been for two years that these youths are conducting family conference for all the Evangelists and their families. The families were rejuvenated and equipped with the tools they need to spread the Gospel. Even the volunteers left with a resurrected spirit. The themes they had chosen were "Serving Joyfully' (2012)' and "Serving with Zeal."(2013). From there we went to Navajeevan centre, Kalyan (West).

Need and Concerns

The youths are looking for Sponsors for upcoming annual four day Evangelists Family Conference. The expenses may come up to four lakhs.



Navajeevan Centre

We reached Navajeevan Centre, Kalyan (W) around 9:30 PM. As we drove in we saw hills, stables for cows and several cottages. We were welcomed by Rev. Thomas Kurian, Asst. Director of Navajeevan Centre. We had dinner there and stayed in their guesthouse. On Sunday, the 9th of June, we attended the Holy Communion Service in English in their Sanctuary (Upasana Mandir). The uniqueness of this Sanctuary is that wherever we sit, we can see the altar. Jesbin an M.Com graduate from Nasik Parish narrated his testimony about how he decided to serve the Lord by dedicating himself to full time ministry. He accepted a position in the Navajeevan centre instead of taking a job elsewhere. He made this decision during the one day Conference for Ministry Dedicated Youths of the Diocese held on 8th of June 2013 at the Mar Thoma Centre, Vashi. It was his parent's commitment that forced him to attend church and Sunday school till he was in the 12th grade. Later, anytime he wandered away from God in his teenage years, his mother's prayer life, and constant advice always echoed in his mind. Many priests, especially his association with Rev. K.C. Chacko also influenced him to dedicate his life for the full time ministry. Rev. Thomas Kurian was the celebrant. He congratulated each child by name. Neglecting God's creation, we will not be able to enter heaven. "Use goods wisely and share goods widely." "Take out the creation from the "ICU". Remember the "4R's." Reduce, Recycle, Reuse and Refuse. Do something for others, coming out of our comfort zone.

To Be Continued...

EXPERIENCING THE VISION AND MISSION OF MT CHURCH: (Thiruvanthapuram and Pollachi area mission fields - July 15 to July 25, 2013)

Anita Sujit and Varghese Manaloor (Mission trip co-ordinators)

The Silver Jubilee year of the Diocese has been an occasion for us to learn about our identity, mission and vision through seminars, workshops, and meetings. However, another excellent opportunity that the Diocese provided, especially for the youths in North America and Europe, was by facilitating participation in mission trips to India.

In the next sections of this paper, we have tried to capture some of the experiences of 9 youths and 6 adults (from USA and Canada) who participated in the mission trip (July 15 to July 25, 2013) to mission fields in the Thiruvanthapuram region (Kerala) and the Pollachi mission field (Tamil Nadu). After several months of planning and the tremendous amount of help from achen in Thiruvanthapuram and Pollachi we were finally ready for our trip. Rev. K. A. Abraham (Thiruvanthapuram) and Rev. Shibu Samuel (Pollachi) were full of energy and excitement as they accompanied us to various sites. One is a short achen, the other is a tall achen but they both had big hearts and they made sure we were well fed and got just the right amount of sleep so that we could be up and running the next day. We are very grateful to them and their team in making our mission trip a memorable experience. The question that lot of us has, especially in this part of the world, is what does the Mar Thoma church do apart from providing the worship services to its faithful members? We keep hearing in Kalpanas about the various work being done and pretty sure very few of us have experienced it. Of course, believing without seeing is a blessed experience but being physically present at the mission fields, interacting with people (children, young and elderly) is truly an eye-opening and rewarding experience. The work among the HIV patients, giving hope to the hopeless, providing care for the elderly who have nowhere to go, setting up educational institutions for the less fortunate, facilitating counseling services for the sick and their families are some examples of the compassionate work that we experienced.



Experiences from the Thiruvanthapuram and area mission fields

After months of prayer and planning, the group met together on July 15th in JMM (Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan) Center in Thiruvanthapuram. Rev. K.A. Abraham was already there ready and excited to receive us. Achen was involved in the minutest details of our planning for this trip. Achen coordinated the arrangements for food, accommodation, travel and daily mission visits making sure we had a comfortable and fulfilling mission trip experience. From July 16 to July 19th Abraham Achen took us to visit various mission centers in South Travancore. We left early July 16th, to visit the Vazhuthur Mission Center. We spent some time in the mission parish which caters to the Dalits (the untouchables in the Hindu caste system) in this area. Currently, they also have a working women's hostel and a children's nursery. After breakfast, we left for Manjalamoodu and visited the many projects there such as the 'Land for landless, home for homeless' for

the dalits in the area, Balawadi providing education for the children, and Snehagiri project providing accommodation to children. Sneha Theeram which is a center for HIV patients provides support for livelihood, extending medical care, vocational training, fellowship and counseling. We attended a prayer meeting and then ate lunch with the HIV patients and their families. We then visited 'Arappally' founded by St. Thomas in 63AD and regarded as the oldest church structure existing in the world. The team then spent some time watching the sunset at Kovalam beach and a delightful dinner and fellowship time hosted by Mrs. Elizabeth Abraham (Theodosius Thirumeni's sister).

On July 17th morning we visited Kilimanoor Mar Thoma mission center where there is a congregation with 13 families. They have a nursery and tailoring school to assist the people in this area. We then went to the Jubilee Mandiram in Kottarakara which started out as a home for the aged. Currently, it also has a hospice with 23 patients cared for by trained nurses. A third wing is the Educational Care Project (ECP) providing housing and education to girls. Financial assistance is appreciated and they would welcome anyone interested in sponsoring daily food for the occupants. Zanoaha- is a senior citizen's assisted living home providing excellent accommodation, food and medical care. Members are given the opportunity to purchase a suite which will give them life time ownership and care from the staff and volunteers.

On July 18th, we visited the Neyyar Dam CDC/ Kattakada- This project was initiated by Theodosius Thirumeni to assist the economically backward families with the education of their children. Food, spiritual nourishment, tuition, extracurricular activities are provided to 302 children here. We were greatly touched by the love and excitement of these children who sang for us.

Later, we visited the "Open Jail" where there are presently 282 prisoners. The prisoners are involved in agriculture, farming and other activities for a daily wage. They also run a profitable business with the sale of fresh chappatis to the people in this area. We visited a small church in Kattakada that was built by the 30 families in this area. Although they are very poor themselves, they collected Rs 45000 to build houses for the poor. Such is the faith and commitment of these villagers. They require financial assistance to rebuild their Madhubaha.

We visited Kattakada Old age home where care is given to senior citizens who are homeless and orphaned. A couple of the ladies sang a few songs for us. Help can be provided to them by sponsoring lunches and providing financial assistance.



Peyadu Mission and de-addiction center helps by providing counseling services and organizing regular 10 day camps which has helped many families free from the wretches of drugs and alcoholism. They also provide home care and medical aid to mentally challenged people. On our return, Rt. Rev. Thomas Mar Timotheos Episcopa, Diocesan Bishop of the Thiruvananthapuram-Kollam Diocese was kind enough to spend some time with us. He talked to us about our mission responsibility and how we need to tithe our finances and time to help others. On July 18th, we visited the prestigious St. Thomas School and then visited the Mar Thoma Hospital Guidance and Counselling Center that helps the poor patients with decisions regarding the right hospitals, doctors and departments. They also provide food and accommodation to family members, financial aid and free ambulance facility etc. After a sumptuous lunch by K B Chacko uncle and Rosamma aunty, we met with Prince Adithya Varma who was kind enough to show us around Kavadiar palace. The palace was so beautiful and political figures like Jackie Kennedy, Mahatma Gandhi, and others have visited it. Next we went to the "Horse Palace" in front of Sree Padmanabha Swami temple. After a delicious dinner at K.A Abraham Achen's parsonage we left for the station to take the overnight train to Pollachi.

Experiences from Pollachi and area mission fields

July 20, early morning we arrived at Pallakad railway station where were met by Rev.

Shibu Samuel, the missionary achen in Pollachi. After a two hour road trip we arrived at the Nallur Mission Center, Pollachi. This was our base camp for the next 5 days. Rev. Shibu Samuel helped organize and co-ordinate our stay, meals and field visits. He accompanied us to all field sites providing support to us all through our stay in Pollachi. The Pollachi Mission field was established in 1983 by two evangelists. The seeds that were sown at that time has now become a big tree providing shade, shelter, life and hope to several people in the region. In addition to service to humanity, the Mar Thoma Church is seeing tremendous growth in its membership among the Tamil population. The hard work and dedication of missionary achen, evangelists, field staff, the leadership from our Bishops, prayers of the faithful has given the church several believers, seekers (those who actively and openly want to know about the life of Jesus Christ) and silent-seekers (those who want to know about Jesus Christ but do not feel comfortable to acknowledge it and for good reasons). In Pollachi, we were also fortunate to visit one of the founder members, Dt. T.T. Joseph, of the mission field. Dr. Joseph started work in this area as a very young doctor among the poor providing much needed medical help when none was available. Even at 97 years of age, he has the same passion, faith and desire to help.

On July 20, we visited the CDC (Child Development Center) at Nallur mission center. Interaction with small children was something our youths enjoyed. At the CDC our youths engaged the children with action songs. Later in the afternoon, Shibu Samuel achen gave us an overview of the various mission activities in the region. In addition to evangelization there are various centers that provide medical facilities such as a de-addiction center, HIV/AIDS awareness, tuition centers and schools. In the evening we attended a prayer meeting, in Tamil, at a small church in Vanchyapuram. Sunday (July 21), turned out to be a very special day for all of us. In the morning we went to Puthupalayam MTC where we all participated in a Tamil Holy Communion service led by Rev. Shibu Samuel. Here too, one of our members delivered a sermon in English that was translated to Tamil. We were also fortunate to witness the baptism of 7 new members into the Mar Thoma Christian family.

Lunch that day was at an evangelist's house, who is also a homeopathic doctor. The evangelist in these areas work under challenging situations with very little resources. They have to deal with a lot of hardships, especially with their lives. It's truly inspiring to see the dangers and sacrifices they make to spread the word of God. They use their creativity, talents and prayers to get started and establish in communities that are totally new to them. One of our youth members asked him how he calls people to God when he enters a new town. His simple answer was "the power of a smile". After exchanging smiles he'll strike up a conversation and then slowly build up a working relationship. His homoeopathic practice also came in handy to make inroads in the community. In the afternoon, we visited the Sethumadal MTC where we heard testimonies from two women. Next day, we went to a church in-Vallikapalyam. This church was built with help from



Dr. T T Joseph. The church also has a small children's school (kindergarten). There is a desire among many to offer classes till grade five but resources and space is a limitation. After the school visit we went back to Nallur to participate in a program called the Anpin Karam care and support. This program is to support HIV patients and to monitor progress among patients to determine if extra medications or care packages need to be given. At this program, we sang songs and had a message for our brothers and sisters. It was a huge blessing to see the love they shared with us and the excitement they had when they were with us. We then went to a mission area that has five tuition centers and a tailoring center for women. It was interesting seeing the tailoring school because the goal was to teach women a new skill to use in the workforce and many women have been blessed to pass the class with this new found skill. The evangelist in the area has been serving in the village for a couple of years. We ended the day with a prayer meeting that was conducted outside a little house, literally on a small pathway. It was amazing to see more than 40 people attend the prayer outside of the house and it was great experiencing the power of God among us despite the language barrier. Once again the youths sang the action song "Father Abraham had many sons" which by now had become the most popular song. On July 23, we combined sightseeing and church visit. In the morning we had breakfast at a restaurant, where most of us ate masala dosas of various shapes and sizes and started our journey to Valparai (located about 3,500 feet above sea level on the Anamalai mountain range). The drive was beautiful with 40 hairpin bends and we witnessed the majesty of God's creation (greenery, scenic beauty, waterfalls, mountain goats, bison and monkeys). We even stopped to record a video song, standing in the tea gardens and also drank the fresh tea from a roadside tea stall. At Valparai, we were met by an evangelist who looks after a small church in the town. At this church, Shibu achen provides Holy Communion service once a month. This church too is in need of repair. Later, we visited the Sholayar dam (an amazing site) near Valparai, had lunch at the church and headed back to Pollachi.

In the evening we had dinner at Achen and Kochamma's place along with their two small boys. On July 24, it was time for all of us to go different ways. In the morning, Achen and couple adults visited another school. Most of us woke up late in the morning and did our packing. A fascinating journey of 10 days had come to an end. We were all ready to leave but all had fond memories of travelling, singing, laughing and having meals together. In the afternoon of July 24th, the group from Canada left for Ernakulum. On July 25 afternoon they visited the Mar Thoma Guidance Center in Ernakulum and later that same night the Canada group was homeward bound from Kochi airport. Late afternoon, on July 24th the group from USA also left Pollachi for Thiruvanthapuram (night train from Pallakad to Tiruvanthapuram) and on July 25th were on their way to different locations.

Conclusions

As a group we came from various parts of North America, yet we functioned as one big family. We are especially proud of the youths that participated in the mission trip as they were able to work with each other effectively, were ready to take the challenges of singing and teaching action songs at short notice, willing to take turns to pray at various sites, playing with children, participating and sharing their experiences in an interactive session with youths and above all adjusting to the food that was prepared for us. They were no doubt an amazing group. We are sure the mission trip has touched the lives of each one of us. Perhaps, some of us would take up of the powerful concept of "Life Tithe Commitment (LTC)" that Timotheos Thirumeni challenged us to think about. His message was that the most difficult aspect of the mission work of the Mar Thoma Church is to be able to find volunteers. LTC would imply providing one month of volunteer service for every 10 years of the wonderful life God has given to each one of us.

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Diocesan MTVEA Conference in Dallas



The 10th National Conference of the Mar Thoma Voluntary Evangelists' Association hosted by The Mar Thoma Church of Dallas Farmers Branch Parish Mission from July 19 – 21, 2013 was a blessing to all the delegates attended the conference. The great leadership and inaugural address of our Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, inspiring messages of Rev. Dr. Martin Alphonse and Dr. Vino John Daniel, in-depth Bible study sessions of Rev. K. E. Geevarghese and mission awareness thoughts of Rev. John N. Abraham enlightened and gave profound insights to the delegates about the theme, 'Journey with Christ'. A total of 350 delegates from 24 parishes attended the conference. The high light of the conference was a special program depicting the life of Sadhu Kochunjupadeshi, the first General Secretary of MTVEA. The seminar, songs written by him and sung by the conference choir and video documentary about Sadhu Kochunjupadeshi made great influence among the delegates. The Diocesan Silver Jubilee Session held during the conference was an opportunity for the delegates to recollect upon, the history and growth of the Diocese for the past 25 years especially the video presentation of the history, growth and various missionary activities, with gratitude. The spiritual leadership of Rev. Jose C. Joseph Mathew, Vicar of the MTC Dallas, FB teamed up the members of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas Farmers Branch Parish Mission to explore their potentials and work for the conference with great enthusiasm and commitment. The Youth Fellowship, Savika Sangam, Yuvajana Sakhyam, Church Choir, Senior Citizens Group and the Executive Committee and members of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas Farmers Branch came forward to work with Parish Mission to make the conference a blessing to all the delegates and Glory and Honor to our Lord!

- *George Varghese (Jayan), Conference Convener*



The Horeb MTC of Los Angeles had two milestones recently. As a newly formed church, we held our very first church picnic at William R. Mason Regional Park on July 20th, 2013. It was a time of relaxation and fellowship amongst the members and

friends of our 41-family parish. We also conducted our first VBS. The children had fun learning about God's mission in the world. On the final day, the children brought school supplies, packed them into backpack, and later delivered them and volunteered time at Buena Clinton: Youth & Family Center – a local outreach center in our community.

- *Rev. Larry Varghese*

MATRIMONIAL

***** Marthomite parents settled in the US invite marriage proposals for their 31 yr old daughter. She was born and brought up in the US, is 5'5", fair, adventurous, God-fearing and currently practicing as a dentist. We welcome interested, compatible grooms that are God-fearing, professionally qualified and employed, and raised and settled in the US only. Please respond with recent photo and information to gmbk3494@gmail.com

***** Jacobite parents well settled in NY invite marriage proposal for their only daughter 39 years old, 5'2", CPA, currently working as Vice President in an investment bank. She was brought up in USA. We welcome proposals from interested and compatible groom, professionally qualified. Please respond with a recent photograph and bio-data to 20 Gordon Drive, Williston Park, NY 11596 or call 917-587-3870

***** Marthomite parents settled in US invite proposals for their son. He is 28 years old, 5' 8", MD. Currently he is doing his Fellowship program in a reputable Medical School. He is a God fearing person, caring and family oriented. We are inviting serious proposals from young-Christian girls preferably from Northeastern States of USA, with good moral and spiritual values, below 28 years with a MD degree. Interested parents please respond with details and recent photos to: gk28@outlook.com

***** Marthomite parents invite proposal for their US born daughter, 29 yrs, 5' 3", slim, attractive and God fearing. She has completed MPH and working as an epidemiologist in the public health department of the state. Also she is about to complete PhD in public health. We welcome God fearing & family oriented grooms professionally qualified between 29 to 32yrs. Please contact us at (954) 319-0929 or v84mph@gmail.com

***** Malankara Orthodox Christian parents living in New York invite proposals for their God fearing daughter, age 24, 5 feet 5 inches tall. She graduated with a Masters degree in Physician Assistant and is currently working in New York. Parents of interested Christian professional candidates born and brought up in the US, please respond with details to jp633618@yahoo.com

***** U.S. settled Marthomite family invite proposals for their son from any Christian denomination. He is 29 years old, 5'10" tall with Masters Degree in Engineering and is currently working at a top global company. He's active in church and is looking for someone who has a strong relationship with Christ. If interested, please send information and photos to malluproposal09@gmail.com

***** Marthoma parents settled in U.S since 1977 invite proposals for their son. He is 33 years old, 5'8", M.D, doing his final year fellowship in oncology. He is a strong, God fearing and family oriented Christian looking for a girl with similar values and in the same field or qualified other professionals. Interested parents please respond with details and recent photos to shalom0550@gmail.com or call at 201-400-4834 or 201-692-7753

Bible Crossword Puzzle

Chapters: II Samuel, Chapters 1-24 NIV

Deadline for Answers: November 15, 2013

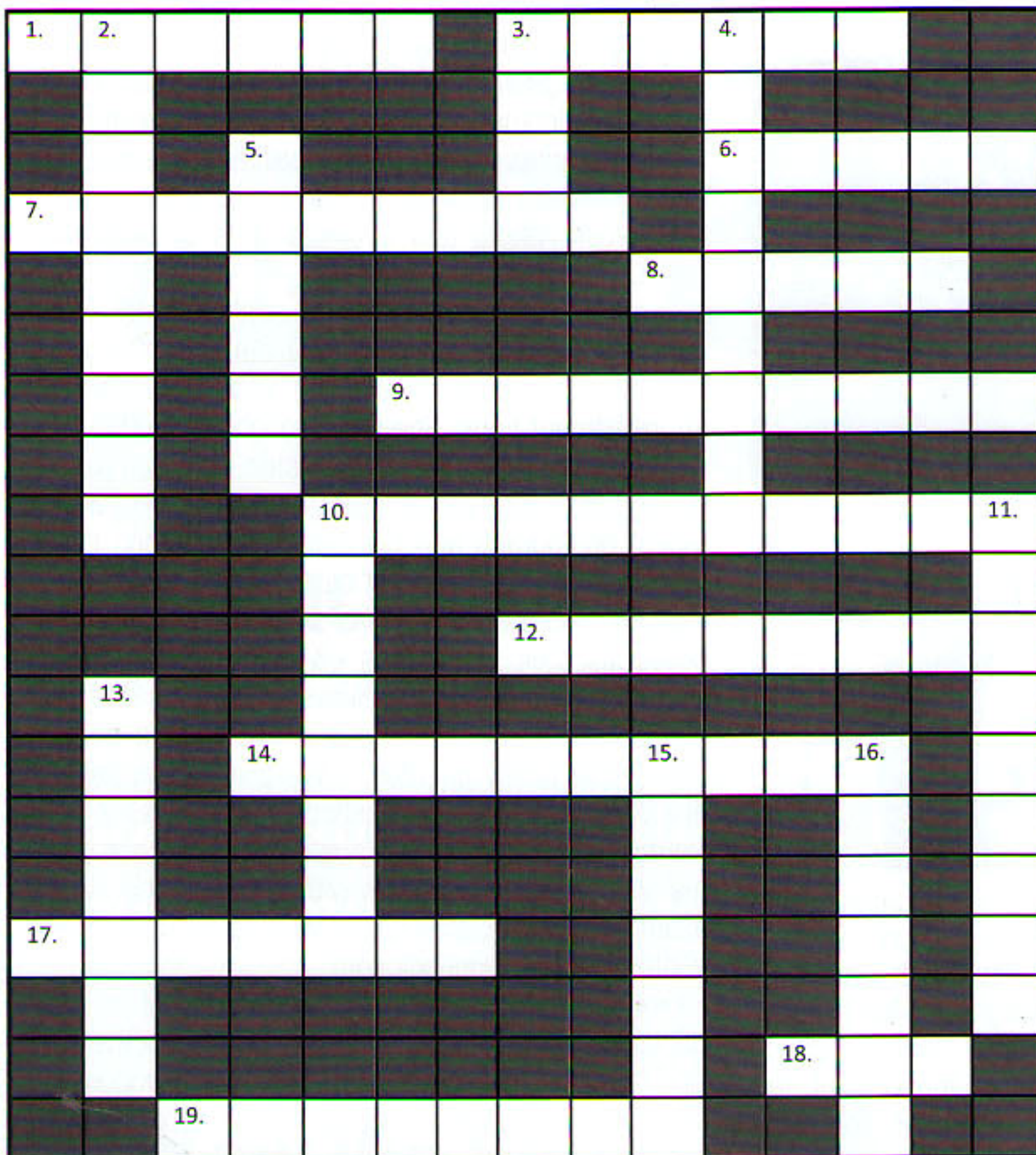
Mail to: **Philip Manuel**, 23 Lake Street, Billerica, MA 01821

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 & Mrs. Laila Anie Philip, Carmel, MTC Boston



Bible Cross Word Puzzle- Winner List For July 2013

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 01 Chiramel George | Ascension MTC, PA |
| 02 Hemant Anthony | Ascension MTC, PA |
| 03 Manju Mathews | Ascension MTC, PA |
| 04 Susan Alex, Dr. | Atlanta MTC, JK-TN |
| 05 Sharon Thomas | Canadian MTC, Markham |
| 06 Alice Kurian | Chicago MTC |
| 07 Susan Philipose | Chicago MTC, IL |
| 08 Lysamma Mathew | Christos MTC, PA |
| 09 Saramma Abraham | Detroit MTC |
| 10 Sneha Mathew | Detroit MTC |
| 11 Saramma Chacko | Epiphany MTC, NY |
| 12 Mrs. Jejo Joji | Herron MTC, UK |
| 13 Jeremy Abraham | Horeb MTC, CO |
| 14 Aleyamma Chacko | Horeb MTC, LA |
| 15 Aleyamma Mathews | Horeb MTC, LA |
| 16 Thankamma Paul | Horeb MTC, LA |
| 17 Sara Philip | Immanuel MTC, Houston |
| 18 Sosamma Varghese | Immanuel MTC, Houston |
| 19 Aleyamma Mathew | MTC Dallas Farmers Br |
| 20 Jency J Philip | MTC Dallas Farmers Br |
| 21 Mariamma Daniel | MTC Dallas Farmers Br |
| 22 Shailla Mathew | MTC Dallas Farmers Br |
| 23 Shaji David | MTC Dallas Farmers Br |
| 24 Sicily Skariah | MTC Dallas Farmers Br |
| 25 Dilin P Oommen | MTC Delaware, PA |
| 26 T C Zachariah | MTC Oklahoma |
| 27 Elsy Jacob | MTC, NJ |
| 28 Aleyamma Mathai | New Jersey MTC, Randolph |
| 29 Annamma Abraham | Philidephia MTC, PA |
| 30 Susan Mathews | Philidephia MTC, PA |
| 31 Allen Jiji | Phoenix MTC, AZ |
| 32 Alvin Jiji | Phoenix MTC, AZ |
| 33 Fiona A Thomas | Phoenix MTC, AZ |
| 34 Mercy Abraham | Phoenix MTC, AZ |
| 35 Santosh Skariah | RGB Prayer Group, TX |
| 36 Hannah Daniel | Salem MTC, NY |
| 37 Saramma Koshy | Salem MTC, NY |
| 38 Mariamma Titus | Seattle MTC |
| 39 Mariamma John | Sehion MTC, Dallas |
| 40 Saramma Varkey | Sehion MTC, Dallas |
| 41 George Thomas | South Florida MTC |
| 42 Marykutty Thomas | South Florida MTC |
| 43 Susan John | St. James MTC, NY |
| 44 Christine Philipose | St. John's MTC, NY |
| 45 Joel Philipose | St. John's MTC, NY |
| 46 Annamma John | St. Luke MTC, FL |
| 47 Nisha S Abraham | St. Luke MTC, FL |
| 48 Sheela Thomas | St. Luke MTC, FL |
| 49 Mathew Varghese | St. Mark's MTC, FL |
| 50 Elizabeth George | St. Mathew's MTC, Milton, ON |
| 51 Thomas John | St. Mathews MTC, Toronto |
| 52 Aleyamma George | St. Peter's, NJ |
| 53 Aleyamma Varghese | St. Peter's, NJ |
| 54 Annamma I Varghese | St. Peter's, NJ |
| 55 Annamma P John | St. Peter's, NJ |
| 56 Annamma Thomas | St. Peter's, NJ |
| 57 Elsie George | St. Peter's, NJ |
| 58 Mary Simon | St. Peter's, NJ |
| 59 Sosamma Varghese | St. Peter's, NJ |
| 60 Thomas George | St. Peter's, NJ |
| 61 Aleyamma M Thomas | St. Peter's, NJ |
| 62 Rachel Philip | St. Peter's, NJ |
| 63 Roy John | St. Peter's, NJ |
| 64 Aleyamma Ninan | St. Thomas MTC, NY |
| 65 Monica Abraham | St. Peters MTC, NJ |
| 66 Omana Rajee | Staten Island MTC, NY |
| 67 Reji Mathew | Staten Island MTC, NY |
| 68 Achamma Chacko | Trinity MTC, Houston |
| 69 Chinnamma L John | Trinity MTC, Houston |
| 70 Gracy P Vattakunnel | Trinity MTC, Houston |
| 71 Kunjamma Thomas | Trinity MTC, Houston |
| 72 Shawn Varghese | Trinity MTC, Houston |

ACROSS

01. The men of Judah came to _____ and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.
03. Saul's _____ was called Kish in whose tomb the bones of Saul and Jonathan were buried.
06. The Lord's anger burned against _____ because of his irreverent act.
07. The Lord had determined to _____ the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom.
08. David said to Gad, "Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his _____ is great."
09. David sang, "They _____ me in the day of my disaster, but the Lord was my support".
10. "He shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his _____ forever".
12. David became more and more _____ because the Lord God Almighty was with him.
14. The Lord told David that the three years of successive famine was due to Saul having put the _____ to death.
17. _____ was the brother of Jonathan and the son of David's brother, Shimeah.
18. The King said to Araunah, "I will not sacrifice to the Lord my _____ burnt offerings that cost me nothing".
19. David said to the Amalekite, "Why were

you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord's _____.

DOWN

02. "The Lord devices ways so that a banished person may not remain _____ from him."
03. David sang, "He parted the heavens and came down: dark clouds were under his _____".
04. The ark of the Lord remained in Obed-Edom's house for three months and the Lord blessed _____ h i m and his entire _____.
05. The three sons of Zeruiah were Joab, Abishai and _____ who was killed by Abner.
09. Michal _____ David because of his dancing before the Lord and she died childless.
11. David sang, "my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my _____".
13. The Lord gave David _____ wherever he went.
15. The anger of the Lord burned against Israel and he _____ David against them.
16. The wise woman asked Joab, "Why do you want to _____ up the Lord's inheritance."

EPISCOPAL VISITS

Los Angeles MTC



The MTC of Los Angeles was blessed and honored by the episcopal visit by Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa on June 2, 2013. The visit was in connection with the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Diocese in the Western Region hosted by the MTC, LA. During the Episcopal visit to the parish, Thirumeni celebrated the Holy Qurbana service and spoke on the theme of parenting based on Luke 2 referring to Joseph and Mary taking Jesus to the temple at Jerusalem. After the sermon there was dedication of the 3 first communicants followed by the dedication of five Altar Boys.

A large number of parishioners attended the service and took part in the Holy Qurbana. After the service there was time for interaction and Thirumeni focused the attention of the parish to grow into the new phase with commitment and determination. The service came to an end with Kaimuth Service. There was a fellowship lunch which enabled the parishioners to meet and interact with Thirumeni. The members of the Mar Thoma church of Los Angeles were blessed by Thirumeni's visit.

- Rev. Thomas John, Vicar

Atlanta MTC

The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius visited Atlanta MTC on June 16-17, 2013 and led the Holy Communion service. The sermon was based on Ephesians 6: 1-3 and Thirumeni spoke on the significant leadership of fathers in the respective homes. The youth fellowship members of the parish felicitated the fathers and gave them a gift as a token of their love and admiration.



There were 12 first communicants and Thirumeni blessed them during the Holy Communion after receiving their first Holy Communion. The parish also had parish day prayers and the Diocesan Episcopa reminded the parishioners about their mission and ministry. There were more than 20 young people who participated in the mission trip organized for the 11th year at Alabama among the Native American people. They stayed there for about 5 days and took VBS classes for children and Bible lessons for the adults.



The Diocesan Bishop interacted with the members of the parish and conducted the Kaimuth service. Every one participated in the luncheon fellowship. There was a meeting of the executive committee of the parish, where Thirumeni presided and heard the concerns of the parish. He gave the parish necessary guidance. Bishop Theodosius visited a few families before he went back to Sinai Mar Thoma Center on Tuesday. Almost all members of the parish came and participated in the Sunday morning Holy Qurbana service.

- Rev. P. S. Thomas, Vicar

Sehion MTC, Dallas

The Sehion MTC, Dallas, was graced by the presence of our Diocesan Bishop, H.G. Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa, the weekend of June 7-9, 2013. The parish conducted a half day seminar on June 8, 2013 at our church as part of the North America and European Diocese Silver Jubilee celebrations on the topics: Identity, Vision and Mission. Speakers were Mr. John Thomas, Dallas St. Paul's MTC - Identity; Mr. James Mathai, Dallas Sehion MTC - Vision and Mr. V. T. Abraham, Dallas Farmers Branch MTC - Mission. Afterwards, lunch was provided.



After the seminar, Thirumeni presided over a meeting of the Dallas project meeting as part of the silver jubilee celebrations of the North America and Europe Diocese. On Sunday, June 9, 2013 Thirumeni led the Holy Communion service in English. During the Holy Communion, Thirumeni conducted a special service for the first communicants. Also Thirumeni provided a special message that conveyed the significance of the first communion and responsibilities of the church members in supporting the new first communicants and the responsibilities of the first communicants in being members of the Mar Thoma church. Thirumeni also conducted a special dedication service for the altar boys.

Parish Day 2013 was also celebrated on June 9, 2013. Sevika Sangham recognized the new graduates and Sunday School prizes were also distributed. After the service, Thirumeni posed for photos with the first communicants, altar boys and their families. Lunch was then provided, and Thirumeni shared a special meal with the first communicants and their families. After the service, Thirumeni met with the Youth Fellowship



and the Young Families and discussed matters related to the church. He especially asked the youth to be part of the diocesan silver jubilee celebrations and the young families to have fellowship with young families of other churches in the area. It was an extremely enriching, uplifting, and stimulating experience for everyone who was fortunate to have spent the time with Thirumeni over the weekend.

- Rev. Saji Thomas, Vicar & Reni Ninan, Secretary

Long Island MTC, Merrick, N Y

The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Thirumeni visited the Long Island Mar Thoma Church on July 7, 2013. During the Holy Qurbana service dedication of Altar Boys and Covenant Girls from the parishes of the North East Region was held. This was the culmination of the special training program of the Altar Boys and Covenant Girls of the North East Region which was held at Long Island Mar Thoma Church from July 5 - July 7, 2013. 32 youths were dedicated from different parishes and Thirumeni gave them badge and entrusted them to the glorious ministry. The dedication service of the parish choir was also held during the service. Thirumeni gave an inspirational message.



After the Holy Qurbana service the parish celebrated its 26th Parish Day in which Thirumeni was the chief guest. Mr. Varghese Thomas, Sunday School Headmaster gave the welcome speech. Parish Secretary Mr. Benny Thomas presented the Parish Day Report. Lay leader Mr. Alex Mathew presented the vote of Thanks. Certificate to the life members of Messenger were presented during the occasion. Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese, and Diocesan Secretary Rev. K. E. Geevarghese blessed the occasion with their presence. A fellowship lunch was served to all. Thirumeni's visit was a blessing to the parish.

- Rev. A. B. Binu, Vicar

Epiphany MTC

32nd Parish Day of Epiphany MTC, New York was held on Sunday, July 14th 2013. The Holy Communion Service in English order led by our Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Thirumeni. Rev. Y. Mathai, Rev. Shibu Mathew and Rev. Sonu Skaria Varughese were



there to assist in the Holy Communion service. Thirumeni gave an enlightening message based on 1Peter 2: 9 & 10. The main theme of his message was "The ordained ministry of the Church." Around 400 people attended in the service. There was a commemoration worship service led by beloved Thirumeni along with Achens & youth members. There were programs by Sunday School, Youth Choir & Malayalam Choir. The parish day message was delivered by Diocesan Episcopa. It was an inspiring & challenging one.

The meeting was concluded with prayer by Rev. Sonu Skaria Varughese & benediction by Thirumeni. There was a fellowship meal after the meeting. The celebration of the 32nd parish day during the weekend became more significant with the historical ordination service that took place for the first time in Epiphany Mar Thoma Church. One of the members of the parish Sonu Skariah Varghese was ordained a deacon in Kerala and his Kasseessa ordination took place at Epiphany MTC. The Diocesan Bishop was the chief celebrant. A number of clergy from New York region and a large number of church members attended the function prayerfully. The Diocesan Episcopa on behalf of the Diocese and the parish congratulated the newly ordained Rev. Sonu Skariah Varghese.

- Rev. Shibu Mathew, Vicar

DIOCESAN NEWS

Visit of the Suffragan Metropolitan of the Church in the North American Diocese



Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, the Suffragan Metropolitan of the Church and the Diocesan Bishop of the Chengannoor - Mavelikara Diocese visited the Diocese of North America and Europe recently. His Lordship being the first resident Bishop of the Diocese of North America and Europe, his visit had a refreshing experience to the Diocese as a whole especially when the Diocese is celebrating its silver jubilee in 2013.

The Suffragan Metropolitan was the chief guest at the regional Silver Jubilee celebration of the Diocese held at Chicago Mar Thoma Church on April 12, 2013. Thirumeni gave a very blessed message on the meaning of journeying with Christ. There was a Holy Communion service on the following day for which His Lordship was the chief celebrant. Thirumeni also brought greetings to the Annual Clergy Conference of the Diocese and to the Annual Meeting of the Diocesan Assembly. The month long visit of the Suffragan Metropolitan included Episcopal visits to St. Mathews MTC, Toronto, St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Chicago

Trinity MTC, Houston; MTC, Atlanta, Long Island MTC, New York; St. John's MTC, New York and the like. Thirumeni's visit to Sinai Mar Thoma Center on May 1 gave an occasion for the Clergy and Laity in New York area to gather together to felicitate the Episcopal anniversary of the Suffragan Metropolitan who was consecrated on May 1, 1980. He recollected the guidance of God in his life and the support and love of the members of the Church and the experiences he had in the Ecumenical bodies. Thirumeni's stay at the Sinai Mar Thoma Center, Merrick Avenue, Long Island, New York was an occasion to add a new dimension to the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Diocese by planting a Japanese Maple Tree with the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius at the Sinai premise symbolizing the new life and growth of the activities of the Mar Thoma Diocese in the Western hemisphere.

Video Conferencing Facility at the Diocesan Center



The Diocese of North America and Europe installed the Video Conference Facility at the Diocesan Center, New York. This will enable the Diocese to conduct various meetings including various committees by video conferencing, since the parishes of the Diocese are geographically spread across North America, Canada and Europe. The Diocesan Episcopa inaugurated the Video Conference Facility by presiding over the first Video Conference on May 28, 2013 for the Regional Clergy Conveners from various places in USA and Canada. The IT fellowship of the Diocese gave all technical support for establishing the Video Conference Facility in the Diocese. This new initiative will strengthen the Diocese in gathering together for fellowship and various decision-making bodies of the Diocese and its organizations.

- Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

Metropolitan's visit to the Diocese

The Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma visited the Diocese of North America and Europe from June 1 to 26, 2013. Thirumeni visited the parishes of Epiphany MTC, New York; Trinity MTC, Houston; Immanuel MTC, Houston; Canadian MTC, Toronto and St. James MTC, New York. Thirumeni also took time to visit the members of the Church at different places. While in Houston, June 7-9, Metropolitan Thirumeni spoke at the graduation ceremony and birthday celebration at Trinity MTC, Houston. Thirumeni was accompanied by the chaplain Rev. Abraham C. Pulinthitta. On hearing the sudden demise of Mr. Patrick Maruthumootil, a young member of St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church, Dallas, Metropolitan Thirumeni came all the way to Dallas from Houston to conduct the liturgical prayers and to speak on the occasion of the wake organized on Friday June 7, 2013. The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar



Theodosius and a number of clergy of the Diocese participated in the service. Metropolitan Thirumeni celebrated Holy Qurbana at Immanuel MTC, Houston on Sunday June 9, 2013. In the afternoon Thirumeni found time to visit a number of people who are not keeping well. This was a relief and healing touch for those who were in sick bed or hospitalized. His pastoral touch was evident during these visits.

On the following weeks Metropolitan Thirumeni spent more days in Toronto and New York listening to the people in the two parishes of Canadian MTC, Toronto and St. James MTC, New York. Thirumeni assured them that he will remember them and guide them in future to settle the unsettled matters. Metropolitan Thirumeni stayed at Sinai Mar Thoma Center, Long Island, New York which gave occasion for the members of the Church to come and see him. The clergy in the North East region and some of the Sabha Council members and Diocesan Council members in the region found time to gather together to have a fellowship meeting with the Metropolitan Thirumeni and the Diocesan Episcopa. That was also an occasion to celebrate the birthday of the Metropolitan which falls on June 27.



Thirumeni found time to see the garden at the Sinai Center and to water the kitchen garden during the days. The visit of the Metropolitan to the Diocesan Center and to the parishes in the Diocese was a time of joy and blessing.

- Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

Diocesan Reception to Mar Stephanos Episcopa

The newly consecrated Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church Rt. Rev. Gregorios Mar Stephanos Episcopa made his maiden visit to the Diocese of North America and Europe by visiting the parishes in Canada in the month of June - July 2013. Mar Stephanos Episcopa is the present Diocesan Bishop at Malabar - Kunnamkulam Diocese, Kerala, India. He was consecrated along with Rt. Rev. Dr. Mathews Mar Makarios and Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Theethos. On his visit to Toronto, Ontario, Canada, the St. Mathews Mar Thoma Parish hosted a sit-down dinner on Saturday, June 22, 2013. The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Rev. Dr. P. L. John Panicker and Rev. Varghese K. Abraham, Vicars of the two parishes in Toronto and the Mar Thoma members over there were present. Youth members staged some variety entertainment programs as well.

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The Diocese of North America and Europe organized a reception to Mar Stephanos on Sunday June 23, 2013 after Thirumeni celebrated Holy Qurbana at St. Mathews Mar Thoma Church. The members of both the parishes gathered together at St. Mathews Mar Thoma Parish. The Diocesan Treasurer Mr. Chacko Mathew represented the parishes in USA. Both Mr. Chacko Mathew and the Diocesan Council member Mr. Zachariah Mulamootil spoke on the occasion where the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius presided. As a token of love, best wishes and prayers a gift was presented to Mar Stephanos by the Diocese and both the parishes.



On his response to the felicitation Mar Stephanos Thirumeni expressed his gratitude to the Diocese and thanked the members of the Church for their prayers before and after his consecration. Mar Stephanos will be visiting some of the parishes in Canada during his 4 weeks stay in the Diocese. Thirumeni also gave leadership at the Regional Family Conference held at Vancouver hosted by the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Parish.

- Mar Theodosius, Diocesan Episcopa

Meditation Blog

www.mtcreflection.com is a blog implemented by the IT Fellowship of the Diocese to publish the daily meditations of Christian Education Forum. This blog has all the archived meditations published so far. It is available in mobile format too which is good for people travelling. This blog offers free subscription. Those who are interested in getting the meditations in email format can subscribe to this by entering their email id in the subscription field of the blog. For details contact Mr. Reji Joseph, NJ, (201) 647-3836

- Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

Clergy Family Meeting of the South East Region



A meeting of the clergy and their families in the South East Region of the Diocese was held at St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church, Teaneck, New Jersey on July 16th 2013. Almost all clergy of the region attended with their families. The meeting was presided over by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, the Diocesan Episcopa. Rev. Roy Mathew, the

Vicar, welcomed everyone. After self-introduction Rev. Chris Phil Daniel, Vicar, St. Stephen's, NJ led the Bible Study based on Mark 10:35-45. Achen reminded that a minister is called to lead a life of submission, sacrifice, service and suffering and not for power, position and prestige. The love of Jesus Christ must be the driving force behind the ministry. The study was followed by a time for reflection in which there was lively participation of Achens and Kochmmas.

In the business session Thirumeni invited suggestions and responses regarding the Jubilee projects for their successful implementation. In his speech Mr. Shawn Rajan, Long Island MTC, highlighted the challenges the youth are facing and the need to help and mentor them. There was discussion on the 'Family Enrichment and Empowerment Program' undertaken by the region. Melodious group songs were sung by the children and the Kochmmas. The convener Rev. Roy Geevarghese expressed vote of thanks. The meeting came to a close after the prayer and benediction. A sumptuous lunch was arranged by the St. Peter's MTC.

- Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese, Program Manager of the Diocese

Canada Regional Family Conference at Vancouver



The first Canada Regional Family Conference of the Diocese of North America and Europe was held from 28th June to 1st July 2013 at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. The theme of the conference was "The Kingdom Experience in Family and Church", 173 delegates from all parishes in Canada and Seattle church participated. The St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Vancouver hosted the conference.



The Moroon Sacrament at St. Thomas MTC, Thiruvalla

Jubilee Celebration in North East Region held at New York



Altar Boys and Covenant Girls of North East Region

Training Program held in New York from July 5 to 7, 2013



Senior/Junior Conference of North East Region

At Ramapo College New Jersey. Inaugural Session on July 11, 2013



Senior/Junior Conference South East Region



The 2nd annual Junior/Senior Conference of the Southeast Region Sunday School was held at Ramapo College, Mahwah, New Jersey from July 25th through 28th. More than 260 delegates attended this four-day conference. The theme for the conference was "Abide in Me" taken from St. John 15:4. At the opening ceremony Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius delivered the inaugural address and Dr. Shaun Rajan, Mr. Jason John, Rev. Christopher Daniel, and Rev. Dennis Abraham delivered felicitations. Southeast regional president Rev. P.A. Abraham welcomed the leaders and dignitaries to the conference and secretary Mr. Thomas Philip gave the vote of thanks. The theme presentation was done by the students of Christos Mar Thoma Sunday School and the ice breaker was led by Dr. Shaun Rajan.

Main talks for seniors were led by Dr. Shaun Rajan, a dynamic youth speaker who is passionate about taking the Great Commission to the youths of our community. Main talks for juniors were led by Mr. Jason John from St. Thomas Mar Thoma church in Toronto, Canada. Rev. V.M. Mathew and Rev. Dennis Abraham, the youth chaplains of the northeast and southeast regions led Bible study sessions on Friday and Saturday. Some of the other highlights of the conference were Praise & Worship, "Q&A", Panel discussions, Group discussions, Prayer warriors, Talent night, and Basketball tournament. Thirty-eight of the delegates attended special sessions for Altar boys and Covenant girls on Friday and Saturday. The Witnessing and Dedication session on Saturday was the climax of the conference with more than 125 children witnessing, dedicating, and rededicating their lives to Christ. Witnessing session for the seniors had to be extended until 11:45pm.

On Sunday many parents arrived to join the Holy Communion service with their children. Rev. P.A. Abraham celebrated the Holy Communion service along with Diocesan Bishop and Dr. Shaun Rajan preached from the Word of God. Dedication service for the Altar boys and Sanctuary girls were led by the Diocesan Bishop during the Holy Communion service. In the closing program, a slide show depicting the highlights of the conference was shown. Plans to follow-up the children who dedicated their lives and to provide mentoring for them to abide in Christ were identified and announced in the closing program. Follow up plans include a website for submitting anonymous prayer requests, blogs and spiritual resources, accountability partner system and mentoring at local levels, conference prayer line for weekly prayer meeting, prayer warriors etc. Everyone held their hands together in unity as the Junior Senior conference 2013 ended with a melodious song from the Praise and Worship team followed by prayer and benediction.

- Rev P A Abraham, President & Thomas Philip, Regional Secretary

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(Approved by AICTE and affiliated to the University of Kerala)

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1.0 The St. Thomas Institute for Science and Technology (STIST) started in 2010 is the premier engineering education venture of Mar Thoma Church Educational Society (MTCES). It has excellent infrastructure facilities in a 19 acre campus in Trivandrum. The academic philosophy of STIST is to establish itself as a centre of excellence in the field of Science and Technology and to train young minds to become brilliant professionals with commitment to human values. STIST is affiliated to Kerala University and recognized by All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE).

2.0 The Institute is located at the newly acquired campus viz., the Mar Chrysostom Nagar, Chanthavila, Kazhakkuttom, Thiruvananthapuram 695 584. The College is near the Kerala University Campus at Kariyavattom and the IT hub at Technopark.

3.0 The Mar Thoma Church Educational Society, Trivandrum is a Registered Society and the major Educational Institutions managed by it are the St. Thomas Residential School (ICSE Syllabus), St. Thomas Central School (CBSE Syllabus) and St. Thomas Higher Secondary School (State Syllabus) and a Teacher Training College, The St. Thomas Training College. The Patron is the Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan and the President is Rt. Rev. Thomas Mar Timotheos, Bishop of the Thiruvananthapuram - Kollam Diocese of the Mar Thoma Church.

4.0 Branches of Engineering in STIST: The following branches with 60 seats each are being offered in STIST, out of which 50% seats are in the Management Quota. In addition a quota for Non-Resident Indians is also available.

- 4.1 Civil Engineering (CE)
- 4.2 Mechanical Engineering (ME)
- 4.3 Electronics and Communication Engineering (ECE)
- 4.4 Electrical and Electronics Engineering (EEE) and
- 4.5 Computer Science and Engineering (CSE)
- 5.0 Faculty: STIST has a well-qualified and experienced

Faculty including Principal and Professors with rich experience and expertise in engineering education, who are eminently qualified to provide academic leadership assisted by a team of young, dynamic and well qualified faculty, led by Dr. Usha Thomas, Principal and HOD of Civil Engineering (Former Professor of Civil Engineering, TKM College of Engineering, Kollam), Prof. K. Vincent, Head Mechanical Dept. (Former Professor of Mechanical Engineering, College of Engineering, Trivandrum), Dr. G. Krishnan, Head, ECE (Former Jt. Director, Technical Education, and Former Professor of Electronics Engineering, College of Engineering, Trivandrum), Prof. Vijaykumar P. G., Head EEE (Former Professor, College of Engineering, Trivandrum) Prof. G. Jayasankar, Head CSE (Former Principal of Govt. Engineering College, Barton oe Hill, Trivandrum, former Professor, College of Engineering, Trivandrum) and Prof. Rasheeda Beevi, Head, Mathematics Dept. (former Professor, College of Engineering, Trivandrum)

6.0 Eligibility for admission: Citizens of India who have passed the Higher Secondary Examination of Kerala or an equivalent examination and who have qualified in the entrance examinations conducted by the State Govt. are eligible for admissions. Candidates who apply for an engineering seat under NRI quota should have attained minimum of 60% marks and it is not necessary that they should appear for the entrance examination. Applicants should have completed 17 years of age as on 31st December of the applicable year.

7.0 The College has different professional societies designed to stimulate the creative interest of the students and staff in various Engineering subjects. The College has a programme of encouraging distinguished teachers and practitioners of Engineering profession abroad to spend time in the College during their visit to India on vacation or on a sabbatical assignment to meet with and interact with students and teachers on subjects of interest.

8.0 More details can be obtained from the website of the College www.stistvm.edu.in. The contact numbers are: 91 471 2410641 or 91 471 2410640.

Priestly Ordination of Rev. Sonu Skariah Varghese of Epiphany MTC, NY

Rev. Dn. Sonu Scariah Varghese, a member of the Epiphany Mar Thoma Church, NY, was ordained as a Kassissa (Priest) of the Mar Thoma Church at the Epiphany Mar Thoma Church, NY on Saturday July 13th 2013. The solemn service started with a ceremonial procession with the Clergy, Candidate and the Archdeacon (Senior Vicar) holding the Episcopal staff, respectively. Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Diocesan Bishop of North America & Europe, officiated the Holy Communion and Ordination services.



The service began at 8.00 am with Holy Communion conducted by Thirumeni. Rev. Shibu Mathew, Vicar, Epiphany Mar Thoma Church delivered the sermon. 14 Achens and members from the region and nearby parishes attended the ceremony.



The service ended with Lunch provided by the family of the newly ordained priest. Heartfelt chanting of liturgical prayers, leadership of the Clergy, singing of the Choir, responses of the devoted congregation, arrangements by the various sub Committees and ushers all contributed much flavor to the solemnity of the occasion.



The newly ordained priest officiated his first Holy Communion service on Sunday July 21st at the Epiphany Mar Thoma Church, New York, his mother parish. He has been appointed as the Asst. Vicar of the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Thiruvalla.



He is the first Mar Thoma priest ordained from and at the Epiphany Mar Thoma Church, New York, and the 10th from the second generation of Marthomites who are citizens of USA.

- Rev. Shibu Mathew, Vicar

Visit of Mar Stephanos Episcopa in Canada

Rt. Rev. Gregorios Mar Stephanos Episcopa, the Bishop of Kunnammkulam-Malabar Diocese has visited the Canada region of the North America and Europe Diocese in June & July 2013. The Diocese has arranged a reception at the St. Mathews Mar Thoma Church, Toronto on Sunday, June 23. The program of the day was started with the Holy Communion in which 17 children received their First Communion and the certificate from the Diocese.



After the communion service there was the Parish Day celebration in which Thirumeni was the Chief Guest. The Vicar Rev. Varghese K. Abraham welcomed the gathering. A brief report about the activities of the parish was presented by Mr. Eapen Cherian, the Secretary. The Rev. T. J. Abraham who completed 50 successful and fruitful years in his ministry was felicitated during the meeting. Lunch was served to all the participants after the meeting. The Diocesan Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Canada Region was held in the afternoon along with the members of the Canadian Mar Thoma Church. From Toronto Thirumeni went to Vancouver for the Regional Family Conference.

Thirumeni visited Calgary MTC after participating in the First Regional Family Conference in Vancouver. Thirumeni was the main speaker of the annual convention of the Calgary St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, which was held from July 5 to 7. The Holy Communion service on Sunday July 7 was conducted by Thirumeni followed by a meeting arranged to honor the Senior Citizens of the parish. Thirumeni presented them with mementos on behalf of the parish and offered special prayers. Mar Stephanos Episcopa also visited some of the sick and prayed for them. The visit was a blessing to the Parish and everyone enjoyed it.



Thirumeni visited Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Edmonton from Monday July 8th to Saturday 13th, 2013. Thirumeni was the main speaker at the Annual Bible Convention of the parish held from July 11th to 13th. In his messages Thirumeni emphasized the need to keep our family values and culture and encouraged the parishioners to make a sincere and earnest effort for it. The Annual Convention concluded with the Holy Communion service at 6.00 pm on Saturday in which the dedication service of the First Communicants was also held.

In the half day retreat of the Sevika Sanghom held on Saturday morning, Thirumeni gave the message based on John 20: 1-18. He spoke on the importance of giving our loyalty to Christ and to His Church. Thirumeni highlighted the missionary activities of Kunnammkulam- Malabar Diocese and asked the cooperation of the members. Thirumeni took time to visit the sick and the suffering in the parish and pray for them. Everyone was blessed by Thirumeni's visit and messages. He left for India on July 15th. It was an extremely joyful occasion for all the Marthomites in Canada to have Stephanos Thirumeni's leadership in the parish, regional and diocesan programs.

- Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese, Program Manager of the Diocese

PARISH NEWS

St. Mark's MTC, Tampa provides Relief to the Family of Sink Hole Victim



Love thy neighbor as yourself – Mark 12:31 has been one of the commandments that Jesus emphasized and it is on this belief that the members of St. Mark's Mar Thoma church, Tampa decided to help the family of Jeffrey Bush a resident of nearby town of Seffner who lost his life on February 28th 2013, when the earth literally opened up underneath his bedroom and swallowed him along with the bed he was sleeping in. His body was never recovered. His brother Jeremy and sister-in-law Rachel and niece Hannah who were living in the same house were spared. The Church members were able to collect \$1,900.00 and the Sunday School students raised \$311.00 for helping the family. It is noteworthy to understand that the collection the Sunday School raised was all from their own pocket money. The Church wanted to instill in its children the joy of giving and helping others and they responded with enthusiasm and by far surpassed the amount we had expected them to collect. The checks were handed over to the family on Saturday June 1st 2013 in an informal function held at the Church. The Church collection was handed over to the family by Rev. John Kuruvilla (Vicar – St. Mark's Mar Thoma Church) and the Trustees John V. Philipposse and Mathew Varghese. The check from the Sunday School students were handed over by the Sunday school students themselves. Norman Wicker (Father-in-law of Jeremy Bush), Jeremy Bush, Rachel Bush and Hannah Bush were present to receive the checks and expressed their gratitude for the help that was offered.

MTC DALLAS , FARMERS BRANCH Parish Day Celebration



The 37th parish day (17th on the present facility) of MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch was held on August 11, 2013 after the Holy Communion Service. Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese, the former Vicar of the parish and presently the Program Manager of the Diocese of North America and Europe was the chief guest. Rev. Jose C. Joseph Mathew, Rev. P. V. Thomas (retired), Rev. George Jacob (Youth Chaplain, Dallas) also was present during the Holy Communion service and parish day celebrations. The meeting began immediately after the Holy Communion led by Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese and assisted by other Achen's. The choir and praise and worship team sang beautiful songs during the parish day

program. Philip Varghese Achen reminded the parish members should be accommodative to people from other culture and also to pass on the legacy of the church to the second and third generation Marthomites, who are born and brought up here. Achen also emphasized the need to transform as a parish from a worshipping community to that of a sharing and caring community especially those around in our neighborhood. Secretary Aby George presented the parish report summarizing the history and growth of the parish, which began as a small prayer group in the early seventies, and approved as a congregation in 1976, purchased the first facility in 1994 and subsequently moved to Farmers Branch in 1996 and now became the largest parish of the diocese with 361 families. He also sought the prayers for the youths of the parish Rev. Alex G. Kolath, Vicar of Baltimore MTC, Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel, Vicar of St. Stephen's MTC, NJ and Mr. Arun Varghese, who has been selected for the ordained ministry and is undergoing theological at Mar Thoma Seminary Kottayam. The parish day celebration concluded with fellowship lunch for all those who attended.

MTC Dallas, FB Mar Thoma Fest Raffle Ticket Kick Off



The kickoff of the tickets for Mar Thoma Fest to be held on October 5, 2013 was held immediately after the Holy Communion Service by handing over the ticket books to the prayer group leaders and area committee members of the ten areas of the parish by Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese. Vicar Jose C. Joseph Mathew, Rev. P. V. Thomas (retired), and Rev. George Jacob (Youth Chaplain) were also present during the kickoff function. Mar Thoma Fest is conducted every year since 2000 to raise funds for the charitable projects undertaken by the parish in India.

MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch Family Retreat



The 11th annual family retreat of The Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch was held from August 16th to 18th at Camp Hoblitzelle of the Salvation Army in Midlothian, Texas. The theme for the retreat was "The Family, the Cradle and the Sanctuary of Life" (1 Cor. 3:16-19). The main speaker for the retreat was Rev. Sam Mathew, Vicar of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Carrollton. The retreat began on Friday evening with praise and worship led by Jose Cherian followed by welcome speech by retreat co-convenor Zachariah Mathew. Retreat Convenor, Skariah T. Philip presented the theme to the participants. Farmers Branch Vicar, Rev. Jose C. Joseph Mathew gave the opening speech and Dallas area youth Chaplain Rev. George Jacob gave the keynote address. The ice breaker session led by Jose Cherian was interesting and enjoyed by everyone. On Saturday, after breakfast, praise & worship, Rev. Sam Mathew had the main talk for the retreat. In the group discussions held, everyone participated and different topics were discussed. In the afternoon, everyone enjoyed the canoe racing in the lake and the basketball competitions. After the evening praise and worship, talent

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night was held led by Mrs. Nirmala Philip & Mr. Chacko Johnson. All were entertained by the songs sung by adults and children, dances & skits. After the talent show, the delegates took a short walk to the barn fire area, while few of the delegates led by George T. Mathew, stayed back and cooked Omelets, Dosas, Sambar and Chutney. Vicar Jose C. Achen led the dedication service after the barn fire, which was a time for rededication for many families. Everyone enjoyed the cooked meals after the dedication service. On Sunday, Rev. Jose C. Joseph Mathew celebrated the Holy Communion. After the reflection about the retreat, Skariah T. Philip expressed gratitude to everyone who participated and to those who have helped in different ways for a blessed family retreat. Brunch was served before all departed back to their homes.

GENERAL NEWS

Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese – Together in Ministry at Diocesan Center



Love thy neighbor as yourself – Mark 12:31 has been one of the commandments that Jesus emphasized and it is on this belief that the members of St. Mark's Mar Thoma church, Tampa decided to help the family of Jeffrey Bush a resident of nearby town of Seffner who lost his life on February 28th 2013, when the earth literally opened up underneath his bedroom and swallowed him along with the bed he was sleeping in. His body was never recovered. His brother Jeremy and sister-in-law Rachel and niece Hannah who were living in the same house were spared. The Church members were able to collect \$1,900.00 and the Sunday School students raised \$311.00 for helping the family. It is noteworthy to understand that the collection the Sunday School raised was all from their own pocket money. The Church wanted to instill in its children the joy of giving and helping others and they responded with enthusiasm and by far surpassed the amount we had expected them to collect. The checks were handed over to the family on Saturday June 1st 2013 in an informal function held at the Church. The Church collection was handed over to the family by Rev. John Kuruvilla (Vicar – St. Mark's Mar Thoma Church) and the Trustees John V. Philipose and Mathew Varghese. The check from the Sunday School students were handed over by the Sunday school students themselves. Norman Wicker (Father-in-law of Jeremy Bush), Jeremy Bush, Rachel Bush and Hannah Bush were present to receive the checks and expressed their gratitude for the help that was offered.

Messenger & Tharaka Booth at MTVEA Conference in Dallas



Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary, Rt. Rev. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Diocesan Episcopa, Mr. C. V. Samuel, Detroit, Tharaka former Managing Committee member, Mr. P. T. Mathew, Dallas, Tharaka Promoter in Dallas, Dr. Eapen Daniel, Chief Editor of Messenger, Lal Varghese, Esq., Dallas, Editorial Board member of Messenger at the Messenger and Tharaka Booth during the MTVEA National Conference held at MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch from July 19 – 21, 2013.

Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston Pearland Manvel Mar Thoma 'KarshakaSree' Award



Pearland and Manvel area prayer group of Houston Trinity Marthoma church conducted the 3rd annual Karshakasree contest successfully. Mr. & Mrs. Lukose Muttathu won the first place for this year. The 2nd and 3rd places were awarded to Mr. & Mrs. Baby Yohannan and Mr. & Mrs. A.S. Varghese respectively. The variety of vegetables, arrangement, and yield of the garden were the main considerations for the award. The majority of members in this prayer group are interested in making their backyard vegetable garden beautiful with different Indian vegetables and maintains our cultural heritage. The judges for this year were Thomas George, Mathew George and Robin Jose who spent their valuable time to make this a great success.

Rev. Kochukoshy Abraham, the vicar of Trinity Marthoma church congratulated the contestants and the winners.
- Sabu Philip (Area Committee Member)

The Mar Thoma Church

Diocese of North America and Europe

MEXICO MISSION

DEDICATION OF JUBILEE CHAPEL



Mexico Mission - uplifting the lives of many beyond the boundaries...

- 2003 - Initiated mission activities in Matamoros, Mexico.
- Built houses for the fisher families in the Ponte Norte and Fantasia islands
- 2005 - Hurricane Emily made landfall in Yucatan peninsula and devastated the Ponte Norte and Fantasia islands
- 2007 - The diocese purchased two parcels of land
- One property (7.4 acre) was developed to a housing project (Colonia Mar Thoma, meaning Mar Thoma Community)
- This housing development consists of 67 houses, three school buildings, a chapel, a mission house and a small store building.
- 2008 - The Colonia Mar Thoma housing project was completed as the part of Valiya Metropolitan's Navathy Celebration and it was inaugurated
- 2011 - The Diocese initiated programs to develop Colonia Mar Thoma as a stable, empowered, physically and spiritually nourished community.
- A nutrition program(Manna) was instituted

Mexico Mission today :

Infrastructure development: Security fencing and gates; Kitchen and bathroom facilities, running water, centralized sewer system and flood control measures, premises cleaning and approach road grading were completed. Provided a fruit tree as a gift for each family, and shade trees were planted along the sides of the main entranceway.

Nutrition Program: (Manna) Program: A grocery kit, consisting of basic nutritional needs is distributed to the Colonia Mar Thoma families in a regular basis.

Education program: A primary school (grades 1-4) in Colonia Mar Thoma compound. An education assistance program has been extended to 14 middle school students, 9 high school students, 5 vocational trainees and 1 medical student.

Economic development : Support has been given to families for self-employment, like raising livestock and also started small scale industries such as baking, tailoring, and embroidery

Basic health / Wellness: A primary health center (dispensary) has been added to the compound.

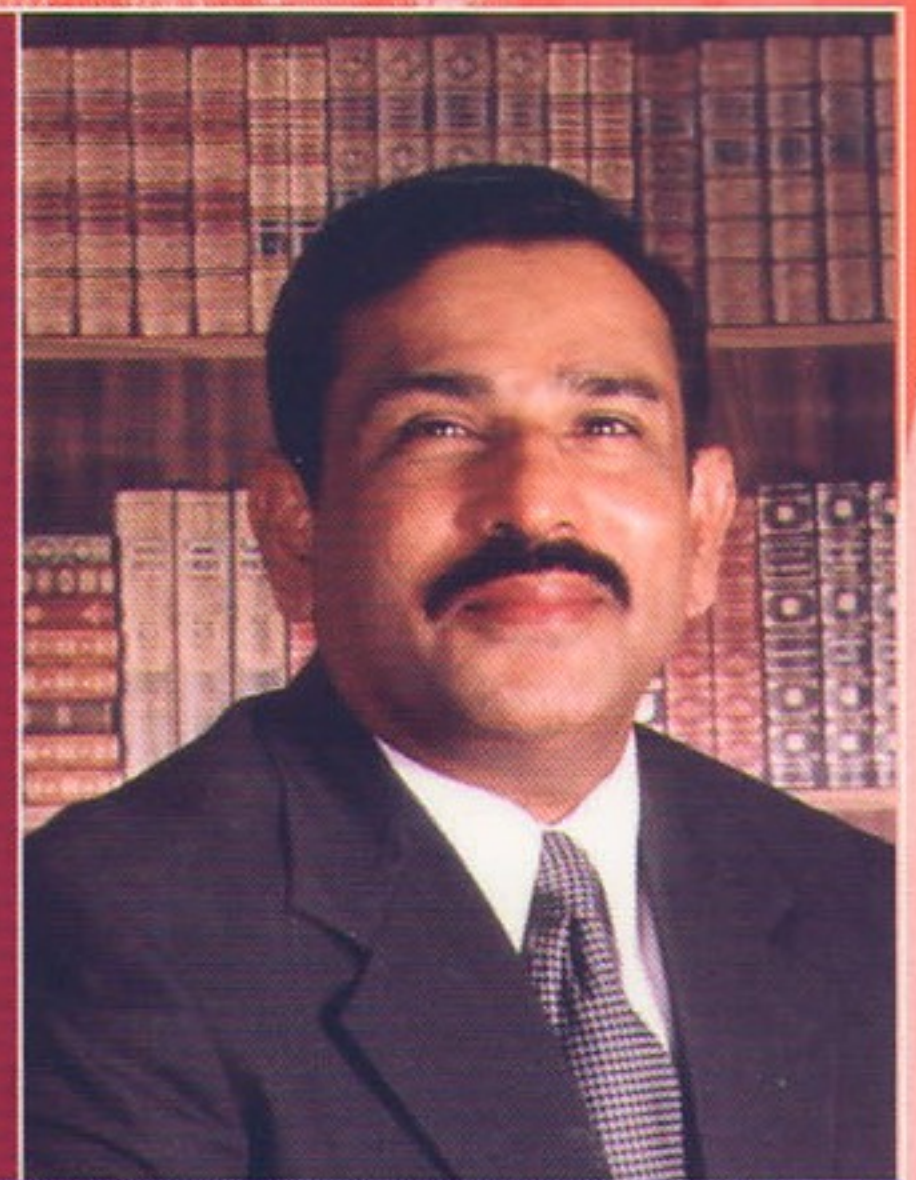
Spiritual Development: Spanish language VBS have been conducted in Colonia in 2012 and 2013. Christmas carol sessions are conducted during the Christmas season. Efforts are under way to start Spanish language Sunday school sessions on a monthly basis.

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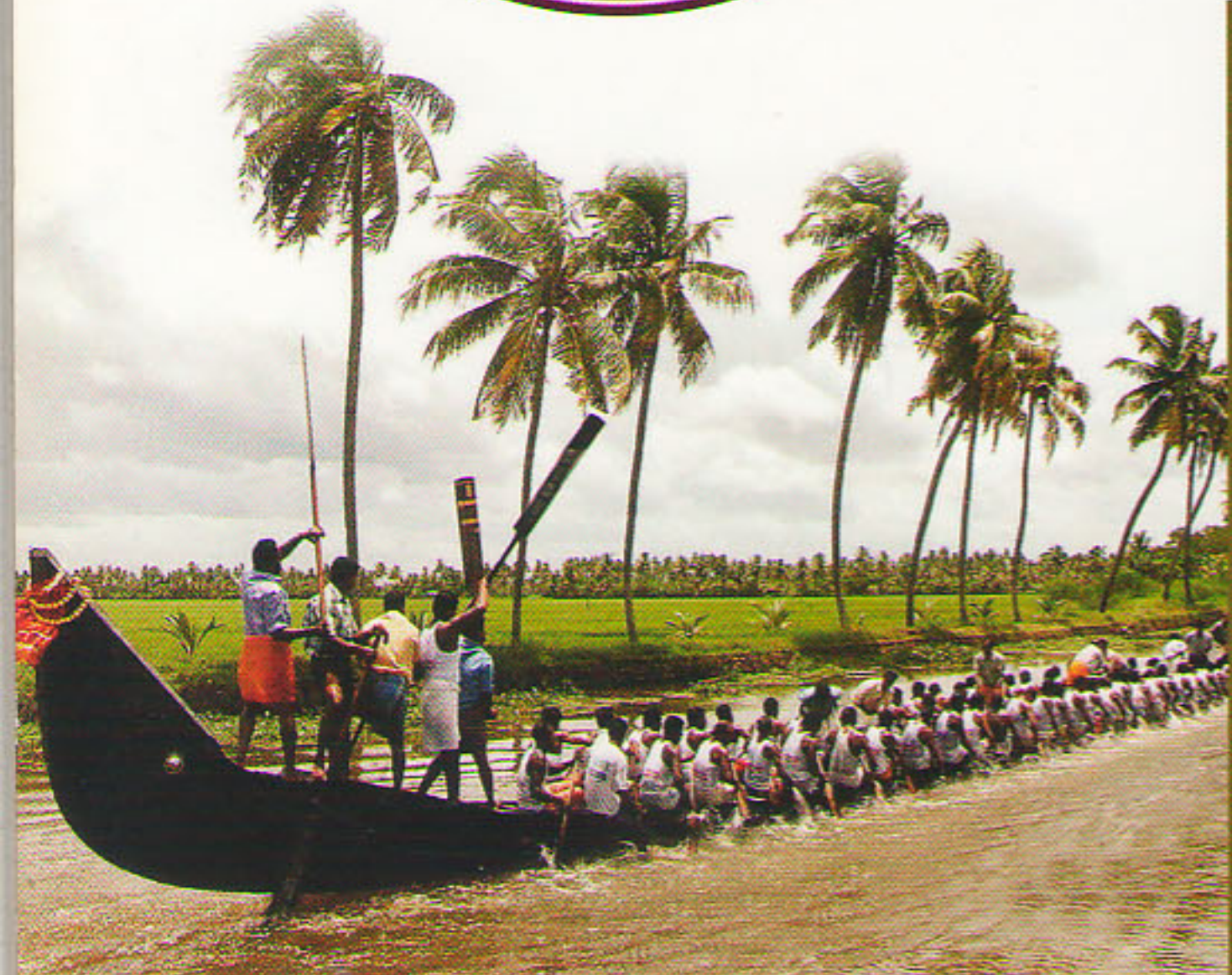
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