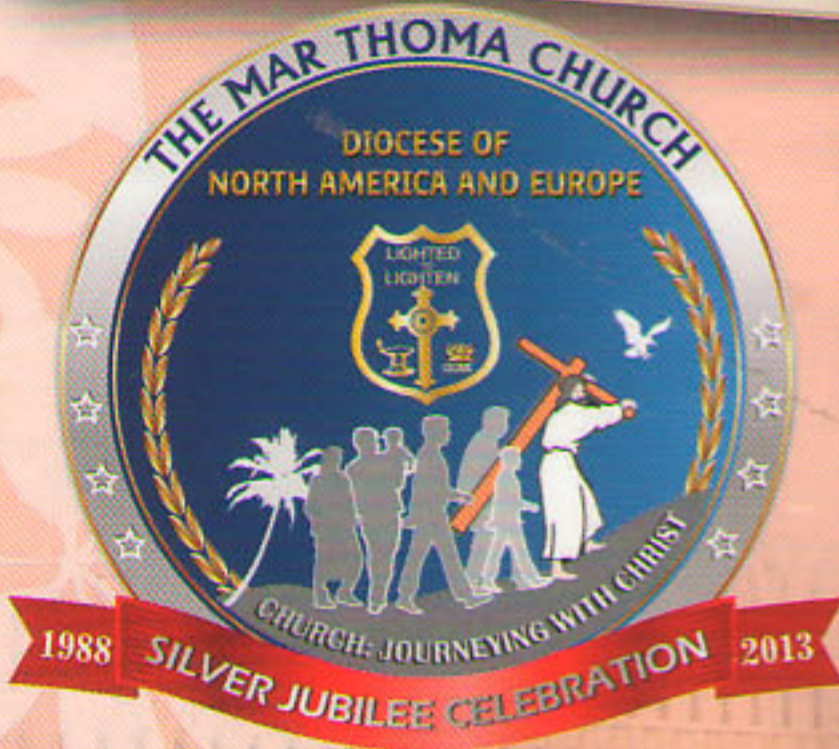




# MAR THOMA MESSENGER

A PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

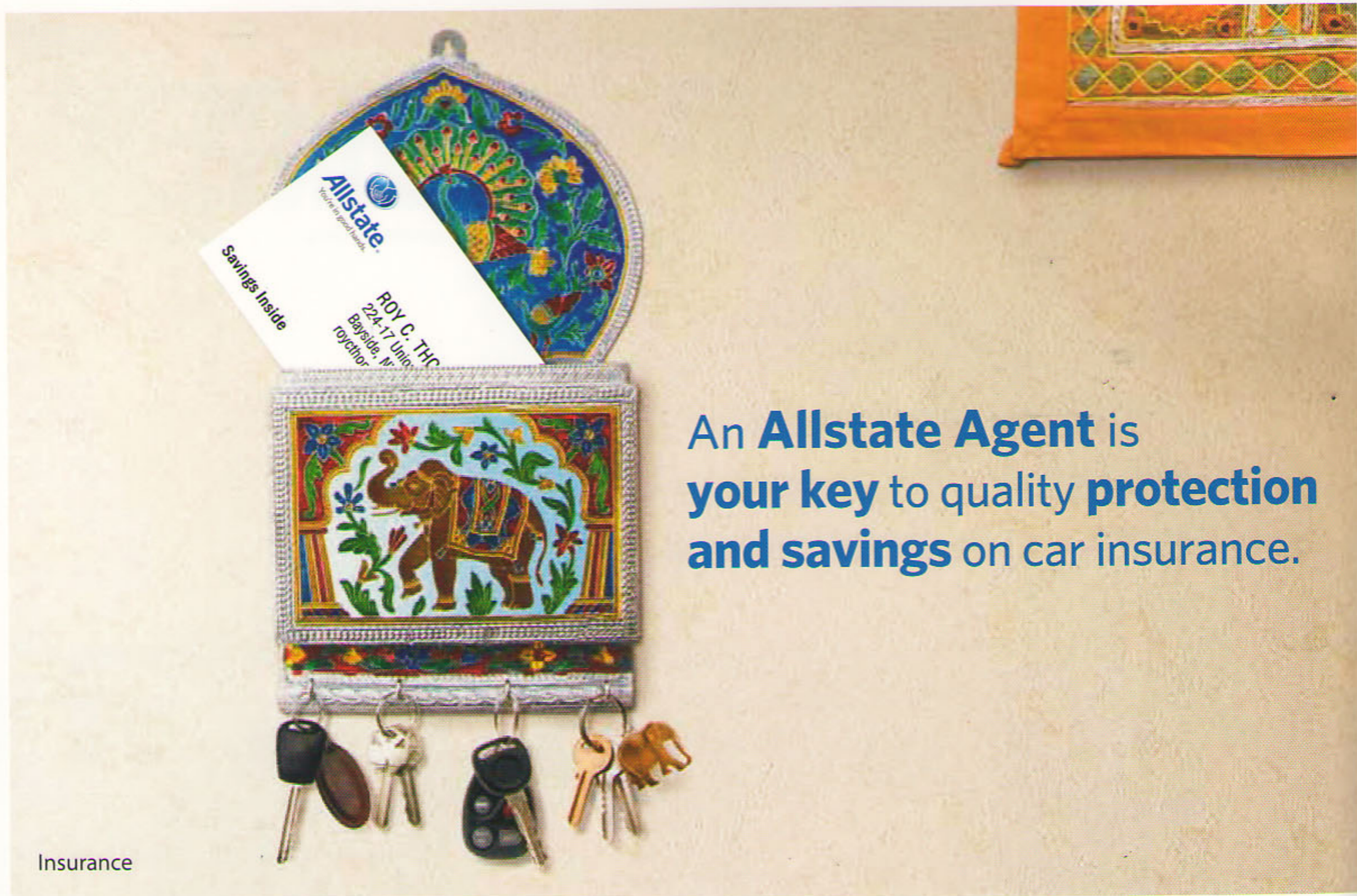
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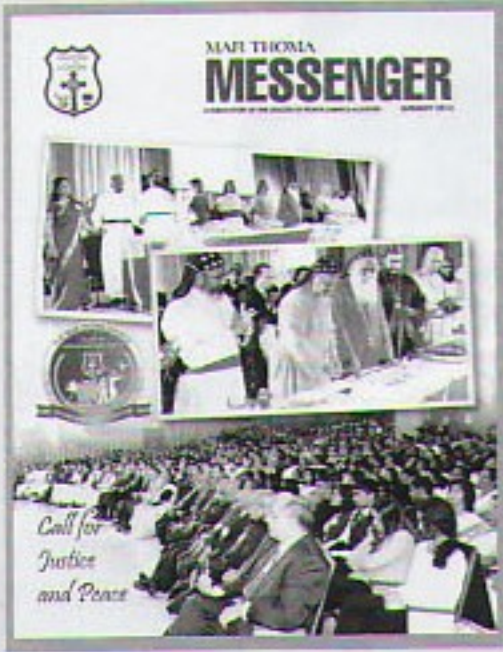


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# Message from the Metropolitan

Dearly beloved in the Lord,

Our Sabha Pradhinidhi Mandalam will begin on September 17, 2013. The members of the Mandalam need to participate in the meetings with prayerful hearts. We have to take many important decisions. This is the last meeting of the existing Mandalam. The new Mandalam will be constituted next year.

Our nation is now facing a very serious financial situation. The Indian Rupee has become very weak. The negative forces that work against the nation are very active now. So we should be very vigilant and careful. Those who are accused of bribery should be ousted. Our great festival namely Onam is fast approaching. It gives us new hopes and aspirations. Onam always calls forth peace and love. We celebrate Onam without any thought of race or caste, just like Christmas is celebrated by every individual in Kerala and India.

As a Church we are paving different ways in the area of education. The School for Deaf and Dumb at Kasarkodu, Kerala, is being raised to the status of a college. The Government of Kerala has issued orders accordingly. This institution had a humble beginning fifty years back. But God is great. Everybody is requested to contribute to the cause of improvement of this institution which focuses on the wellbeing of the children who are challenged and disabled. Rt. Rev. Dr. George Isaac, the Bishop of CSI, passed away. He had been undergoing treatment in the Velloor CMC for a long time. We praise God for his life and the contributions he did in the ecumenical spheres. Rev. T. J. Abraham Achen died in the USA. Achen had undergone surgery of the heart. I take this opportunity to convey our condolence as a Church to the bereaved family. The construction works of the new Pulateen is progressing steadily. We hope to finish the works within one year. Cooperation and prayers of each and every person is very necessary. Those who come to visit the Pulateen after the first of September must come to the newly constructed secretary's quarters where my office will be functioning temporarily.

The tragedy that occurred at the All Saints Church in Peshawar, Pakistan, has shocked the world. The bomb blast executed by a terrorist group took the life of 80 innocent worshipping people. Around 200 persons were injured. The two persons involved in this most heinous act, it is said, believed that they will attain heaven, undergoing martyrdom. This kind of belief shows the distorted nature of the thinking and teaching of such people. They lose commonsense. They have no respect for human life and God's plan for the earth we live. Terrorism is against God's plan. South India, is free from such atrocities. Our people will reject such moves from those ill-minded people and organizations, I am sure.

Martin Luther King Junior fought against the inequalities in society. The black people were being exploited constantly. He had a dream of a society based on equality, liberty, and brotherhood. His ideal hero was Mahatma Gandhi who upheld nonviolence for any kind of protest. This is the time when the people of America observe the 50th anniversary of King's most memorable speech namely, 'I have a dream'. His dream did not fail. We observe the continuation of this glorious dream through President Barrack Obama.

The Sabha Pradhinidhi Mandalam was held from September 17th of 2013. Everything went well with the blessings from above. But it was observed that some people engaged in publishing news without respecting truth. The sound and fury occurred during the constitution amendment discussion is an example. Those who propagate information having no truth in it must think twice before they act in such illegal and unchristian ways. Let us pray for them so that they may correct themselves in future.

The study book for this Mandalam was based on a theme, 'Justice and Peace for the fullness of life.' Each creation has the right to live in this world. Justice and peace must lead us to the wholeness of life. We were able to present this theme in a very simple manner. I expect our dioceses and parishes will take interest in organizing discussions and studies based on this book.

Rt. Rev. Abraham Mar Poulouse Episcopa's mother passed away at the age of 91. She was buried at Manganam St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church in Kottayam. Let us also join in the prayers for the bereaved family.

Salvation revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ is very clearly expressed in the gospel. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father," (John 14:9). We see God, the Father through Jesus Christ. When Zacchaeus became aware of his sins he volunteered to undergo changes in life. "Today salvation has come to this house," Jesus declared. Salvation is personal and at the same time restoration of relationships. Jesus calls everyone personally. Lazarus, Paul, and the thief on the cross are examples. And family is the divine interpretation of relationships. We must not forget this great truth. Who is Joshua? He declared the faith of his family bravely and clearly. He fought for the living God in whom he believed. And God gave him victory in the battle, though Joshua had few soldiers to fight. Each family must have this faith, and hope that Joshua expressed in his life.

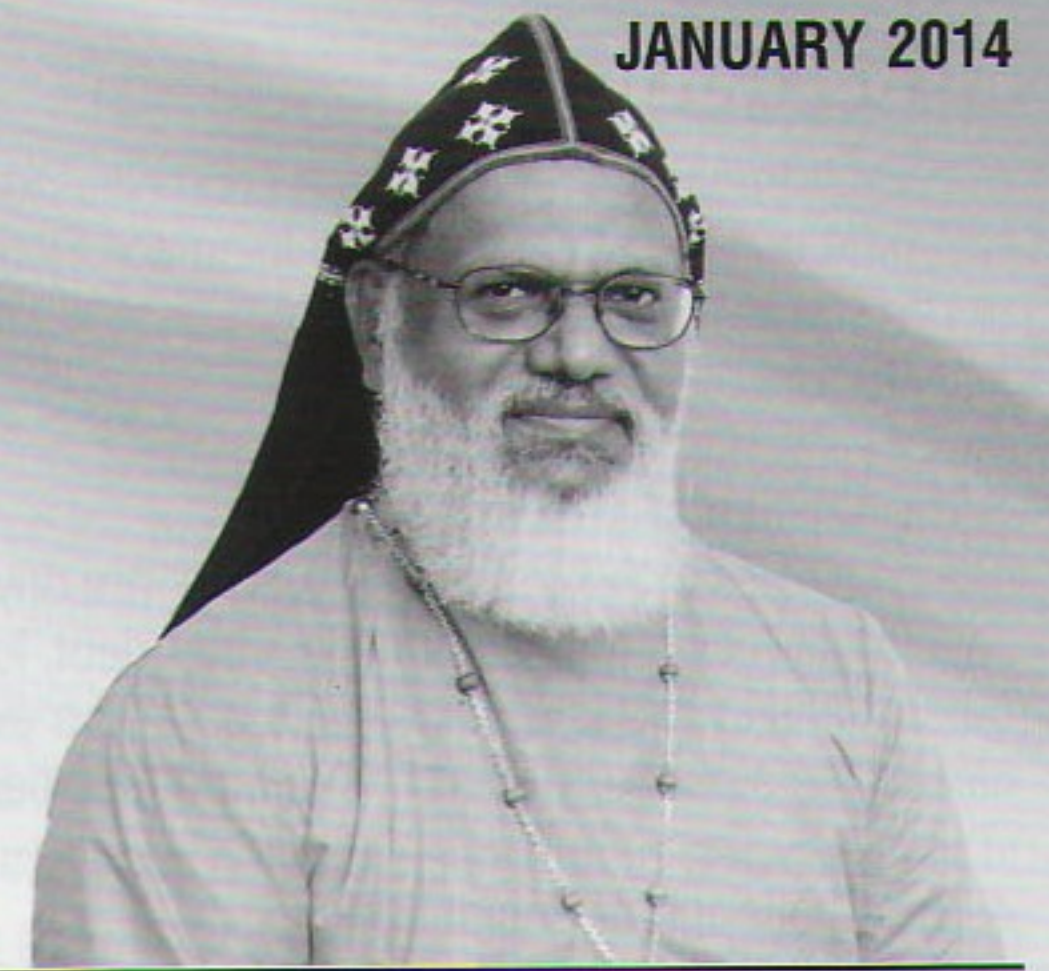
Grace be with you all

**Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan**

*Taken and translated from Malankara Sabha Tharaka  
September / October 2013 issues*



# Message from the Diocesan Episcopa



Dearly beloved in Christ,

In this New Year let us praise and thank the Almighty for all the blessings He has showered upon us in the past years, for binding us with His protection as families and as a diocese, and for strengthening us to see the dawn of another year. The year 2013 was an eventful year in which we celebrated the Silver Jubilee of the diocese. We started the celebrations with the Holy communion service on January 1st at the Diocesan Center and concluded with the Grand Finale program on November 23rd, which included a communion service and public meeting in New York.

We are grateful that our Metropolitan Thirumeni, who was in the US from 1964 to 1966, could come for the finale to address the gathering and bless us. The Bishops of the sister churches who are efficiently leading God's people in the USA blessed us with their presence and felicitations. I am glad that our people - the clergy, friends, and members of the church - from near and far came to attend the function.

While we commemorate the last 25 years, we cannot forget the years even before that, when early immigrants journeyed to the West from India more than 45 years ago. The formation of the diocese is the product of the hard work, fervent prayers and vision of many early immigrants and our church leaders. Hebrew 13: 7 says, "Remember your leaders who taught you the Word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives and follow the examples of their faith". We are grateful to all those who spent their lives, their talents, time and wealth for the formation and growth of our Diocese, parishes and congregations. We have to celebrate the past and together with the new generation move forward with a vision for the renewed future.

Now we have second, third and fourth generations of our members. If the challenge of the first generation immigrants was to remain loyal to the church, form religious communities, establish places of worship, and to have proper leaders, the challenges of the new generation has come from the contemporary culture, which presents a different scenario. While we nurtured our children who are born and brought up in the West in the language of the land and its culture, our immigrant faith community has lost a reasonable number of our younger members. We are called to be fishers of men, but somehow we were not fishing productively. We must admit that our church was not able to cope with the changes in our new land and become relevant. The lessons we have learned should help us focus on our children who ask the question: "Is our church a potted plant in the West or a church becoming relevant and growing in the West?" Without any debate all will agree that our roots have to grow and go deep into the soil where one day our bodies will also be laid to rest. Therefore, the question is not whether we have places of worship here, but whether we are being a church in the land and a church for all people. In other words, what is the difference that our presence is making in the life of the people here? If our church has to manifest its being and minister to this world, it needs the awareness of the diverse local population, the contemporary culture and the challenges that evolve in our time. So what are the challenges the faith communities face today? Let me identify five of them.

## 1. The Challenge of Globalization

Though we are tempted to confine ourselves to North America and Europe, we know intuitively that we live in a globally interconnected world. For example, the daily news comes to us live from not only North America and Europe, but also from Mexico City, Mumbai, Beijing and other faraway places. Our 'Starbucks Coffee' may be a blend of coffee beans grown at least on three continents. Likewise, Christianity today is a global Christianity. Instead of being introverts and thinking of only having an American or a European Church we need the openness to have a global church with its mission extending all over the world.

## 2. The Challenge of Cultural Diversity

The cities of New York, Chicago, Houston, Miami, Los Angeles, Toronto and London are known as ethnically diverse gateway communities. The availability of direct flights in these cities to and from other nations tells us not only stories of new immigrants coming in but also of citizens keeping in touch with developing countries. The religious and cultural diversity that results from immigration poses challenges that go beyond mere ethnic differences and the processes of assimilation. Our general tendency is



to compartmentalize and insulate ourselves from others that are different from us, but instead we need to develop an understanding of the real differences and find ways to integrate. Rather than tolerating inter-cultural and inter-religious marriages when forced to, we must learn to understand, accept, and accommodate such realities. Being a Christian has to be defined not based on merely our doctrinal terms but as followers of Christ.

### 3. The Challenge of Secularity

The pressures of the 'work-a-day world' are driving out any sense of what is 'sacred and eternally divine'. The average American has become secular as they struggle with consumer debt, low wages, housing foreclosures and inadequate health coverage. Accommodating people of other faiths in this land appears to be at the expense of giving up one's privilege of carrying the Bible or praying in public. We have to be clear: 'The aim of any church is to introduce people to God revealed to us in Jesus Christ'.

### 4. The Challenge of Social Ethics

The issues that define the culture wars since the 1970s - abortion and homo sexuality - continue to be discussed frequently in different forums. Today these issues are politicized and often taken to the polls where the voters are forced to say only 'yes' or 'no'. Christians should be doing what Jesus would do with such issues and what the Bible commands us to do.

### 5. The Challenge of Congregational Ministry

The present community is changing in form rather than declining. Today the members spend most of their time in places other than the Church. They spend time at places where they live, work, and interact with family and friends, e.g.: shopping malls, markets and other public places. Only very few have any idea about the work others do, or where they live, or who their families are, and what they enjoy doing in their leisure time. Take for example, single parents, children born out of wedlock, widows, children with special needs, divorcees, people with guilt and shame, etc. What is the ministry we can offer to them when they congregate in our Church? The aim of any church is to help her members to love Jesus and to live with God.

All these challenges demand us to understand or explain the meaning and relevance of the Church. In the changed scenario, youth and women are our newer resources. We have strength in them. The church is not a monument fortified by walls and campuses; rather it is an empowering and transforming experience that happens in the lives of the people who face complex life experiences. Here the church becomes an event in the life of the people. The church happens as fellowships of solidarity, love, care, compassion, justice and restoration that impact the lives of the people who go through tragic experiences of alienation in the Church and Society.

Dear friends, we are in a new land to stay, to grow, to thrive, to reach out and to move with Jesus. Hence to be a church requires a deeper and costly commitment. The present generation has the potential. I have confidence in them. There cannot be a true church with simply the continuity of existence in the world. Instead, the Church has to journey with the risen Christ. When Christ says 'follow me', as he said to Peter after the resurrection (John 21: 19, 22), it means to die and get resurrected. So the challenge before any church, particularly the Mar Thoma Church, the Diocese of North America and Europe, is to be on the road (street) with Christ (Lk. 24: 13-55). Let us continue this journey.

May the Church's journey today with Christ become relevant and meaningful! God bless all of us.

Wish You All a Happy and Prosperous New Year

God bless us all

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Mar Coorilos Episcopa  
Nov. 25th



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



Rt. Rev. Thomas  
Mar Timotheos Episcopa  
Dec. 13

**PRAYERFUL BIRTHDAY WISHES**





Once again, we are at the beginning of a new year, with hope and aspirations for a better and brighter future. Let all our aspirations be rooted in strong faith in our Lord. Let's not forget to thank God for the great things He has done in our past and supported us when we were totally down. We must ask Him to remind us of times past when He was there for us. Living thankfully is God's will for our life. Although we hope for the best, often times, we encounter life issues that does not make sense to us and does not fit our thought process. At such times, it's more important to trust God with our life and to choose to grab hold of the pearl of wisdom. Step by step, through the fog on our pathway, we can choose to trust that God has our best interest at heart and lean on His strength to get us through our day. Our ignorance may prompt us to choose to shrug Him off with little expectation and lean wearily on our own understanding. In Proverbs 3: 7-8 it is clearly stated: "Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones." Like a baby in the womb is dependent upon the mother for everything that is needed to sustain life, Christians are totally dependent upon God for everything. Similar to the baby being connected to the mother via the umbilical cord, we need to develop ways to be rightly connected to Him.

We have to believe that peace comes when we submit everything to God in prayer. The Bible says that we should cast all our cares on God because he cares for us. (1 Peter 5:7). Moving forward with total trust is of great importance in Christian life. In history, we see many examples of individuals who gave up self-interest and fought for the community or the nation they belonged to. While I was trying to write this editorial, the news concerning the death of Nelson Mandela came out. He was the first black president of South Africa who did fight for freedom with all his might. In fact, Mandela was originally inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, who was a similar freedom fighter and who started his career in South Africa. Such worldly figures have in fact inspired many to bring forth uplifting freedom to individuals and communities in all nations across the globe.

# Editorial

I am thrilled to see that the Diocesan Jubilee Celebrations ended well with newly acquired insights for a brighter future of the Mar Thoma Community in the western hemisphere. Discussions and deliberations during different events and dialogues point to more participation of the younger generation and women in our parish operations and administrative activities. 25 years as a Diocese and still growing in Christ, as a faithful community with strong believers, we can do many things for this nation and for the world at large. What is impossible in the minds of men is possible for sure in the eye of our Lord. We have to work together as parishes, regions, and Diocese with such God entrusted strength to bring forth reforms that will enhance peaceful and progressive coexistence for all humanity. With the Blessings from our Lord, as one of the most influential and affluent community of North America and Europe, Marthomites can very well afford to deviate from normalcy and achieve victory in aspects of fruitful Christian life. Let us take it as a challenge and work together. As Melody Beattie has stated; "The new year stands before us, like a chapter in a book, waiting to be written. We can help write that story by setting goals."

Once again I take this opportunity to thank our faithful readers and supporters for all the prayerful support in the past and hoping to gain stronger support as we grow together. Wishing everyone a blessed and prosperous new year!

**Dr. Eapen Daniel**



# 'The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace'

A Bible Study on James 3:13-18



Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel, Vicar, of St. Stephen's MTC, New Jersey



and activity in their lives. How are they (and we) to handle the pressures of devastating health or financial problems, loneliness, manipulative relationships, or the daily frustrations that pile up and so easily lead their (our) gaze away from the presence of their (our) heavenly Father? To know how to cope appropriately is to be wise. Thus, he places emphasis on pursuing or attaining wisdom from God.

Of course, James is clear from the start that the only true wisdom he believes exists is wisdom from God, or "from above." To the one who is wise and understanding, James says, "Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom" James (3:13). What is a good life? Is it one free of trial? No, it is a life that is lived out of the gentleness or meekness of wisdom. So, James is saying that wisdom is gentle. What does he mean by this? Well, if we look back to the first chapter, James encourages his readers that if they are ever lacking wisdom to ask God, "who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given to you" (1:5). God is the true source of wisdom and is always willing to give it to us when we ask. In fact, the beginning of wisdom, for James, is to be wise about the character of our good God and so to be willing to receive from Him.

## The Manifestation of Wisdom

This is why gentleness or meekness is associated with wisdom. We are not wise on our own. We are God's children, dependent on our heavenly Father to give us life, love, peace, joy, and wisdom to live. This is the wise thing to do, to recognize that we are children who receive our life from our Father. James touches on this point later in the first chapter when he encourages his readers to "rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word, that has the power to save your souls" (1:21). Thus, the word is already implanted in us, not by ourselves but by God. But we need to receive the word, make room for it, live by the truth of its living presence. And we should receive it with meekness. We are to receive from God what we know we cannot give ourselves. We should be trusting, not in ourselves, but in His good, generous, loving character. So the person who is wise is able to show his/her works in the meekness of wisdom.

The test of true wisdom is to look at a person's life. While the Greeks defined wisdom in terms of speculative knowledge and philosophy, the Hebrews defined wisdom as skillfully applying knowledge to practical living. So what James says here is certainly more in line with the Hebrew concept of wisdom. James indi-

## Introduction

"God of life, lead us to justice and peace" was the theme of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches which took place in Busan (Republic of Korea) from October 30-November 8, 2013. The Assembly focused on listening to the Word of God and discerning where and how God is leading His people to affirm abundant life for all through upholding justice and peace. The following Bible study aims at reflecting on this relevant topic by exploring a text which places emphasis on the pursuit of wisdom from God in achieving a meaningful life which manifests itself in "harvesting justice" as is "sown in peace."

## Selected Text

*13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. 15 Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, and devilish. 16 For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.*

## The Pursuit of Wisdom

Up until this point in the Epistle of James, the author has been writing at length about the destruction that can occur when the double-mindedness of people towards God and others is expressed through words. James now turns to the deeper issue of wisdom. Wisdom is not just the accumulation of knowledge. Wisdom is the God-given ability to apply the right kind of knowledge to each situation. Wisdom is the knowledge we need to live and to interact with our circumstances and with those around us. If we want to live life successfully in every realm of life, we need the wisdom of God. Thus, as James emphasizes in the selected passage, we need to pursue the wisdom that comes from God not the wisdom that comes from the world around us.

James has been focusing on how to live as a Christian in the midst of continuing, ever-present trials in a twisted and fallen world. The Christians he is writing to are struggling, and their struggles have led them to be tempted to even question God's presence, care,



cates that real wisdom is not found in a person's books; it is found in a person's life. The true test of wisdom is works, not words. James says if you want to see how wise a person really is, don't ask him/her how much he/she knows. Just observe him/her and see how he/she lives. In fact, he says that wisdom will be manifested in a person's "good life." The word translated "good" (kalos) means "beautiful" or "noble." It is the kind of life that even a non-Christian will recognize as good and commendable.

### Hindrances to Attaining True Wisdom

True wisdom is not just good advice, good ideas or ideals, or knowing which side of a debate is the right side. Wisdom is real when it is in motion. Wisdom should be manifested in each and every area of our lives including our relationships and how we approach and handle the ordinary tasks of the day. To live in the meekness of wisdom is to go about our lives in a selfless manner, knowing that we are not receiving our life and our identity from the relationships and tasks at hand. We are receiving, moment by moment, our life from God. We do not look to those around us or to our present circumstances or our life and livelihood to tell us who we really are or to give us a sense of worth.

To be wise is to see that our present circumstances do not and indeed cannot tell the story of our real worth or limit our real ability to receive full life from God even now. Such an attitude is considered to be quite radical and not at all easy in this world. It is always so tempting to notice all that is out of place in our lives and to feel, therefore, that we are not yet able to live in the fullness that we could be. And it is so very difficult not to compare our lives with others and to use those comparisons either to puff ourselves up or tear ourselves down.

James addresses these dangers in 3:14: "But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth." When we are jealous or selfishly ambitious, we are not trusting in God's ability to give us life in the midst of our trials and to lead us through these very trials to become "mature and complete, lacking in nothing" (1:4). Our jealousy and ambitious plans for ourselves do not reflect the real truth about who we are and where real life is to be found. Every day, the temptation to be jealous of someone else comes up. We can be jealous of another's spouse, looks, children, financial situation, personality, happiness, good health, even their faith! And it is so easy to maneuver ourselves in ways to make us look good, wise, humble, and attractive in the eyes of others.

James is aware of this. He knows that his readers are constantly bombarded by the temptation to compare themselves and so be jealous and selfish. He knows that when we are struggling with trials, this temptation is increased. So the first thing he is saying to his readers here is if you have these feelings in your heart, "do not be boastful and false to the truth." No wisdom, especially the wisdom of meekness, can come out of a jealous and ambitious heart. This will put a wedge between us and God and between us and others, especially those nearest and dearest to us.

### Worldly Wisdom

Another way James seeks to encourage his readers who are wrestling with these temptations of jealousy and selfishness is to state clearly where this kind of "wisdom" comes from and where it leads. "Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish" (3:15). The wisdom of the world which comes by way of comparison with others is really "anti-wisdom" as it leads to nothing but destruction and death even though it may be regarded as sophisticated and advanced as per worldly standards. James is clear, however, that there is nothing good that can come out of our trying to justify our jealousies. If we strive to justify our jealousies, this will prevent us from acknowledging the fact that God should be the source of our joy, peace, and life. James wants to remind his readers that this kind of thinking comes from the world and does not come from the Father. Thus, James encourages his readers to turn away from all thinking that is hindering their receiving wisdom from their always good and loving heavenly Father.

"For where there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind" (3:16). These are the fruits of worldly wisdom. And we have all seen and experienced the truth of this statement in our lives. There can be no good result when we are motivated to protect, advance, and focus on ourselves at the expense of others. There is no security or peace in an environment where everyone is primarily concerned to accomplish their own interests.

### Wisdom from Above

Now that James has exposed the true poison of worldly wisdom, he turns his readers' attention again to the wisdom God gives. This wisdom is part of the good and perfect gifts our Father wants to give us. James says that God's wisdom is pure. God's wisdom is not double-minded. He gives us all one thing – Himself. As He enables us more and more to grow in wisdom, more and more we are filled with His one real life. This perfection He is working out in us is perfection where there is no longer any double-mindedness in us either. We will be through and through pure, that is, which we were created to be. Wisdom from above is also peaceable. When we know and live in the truth that we receive our lives and identities from God, then we have nothing to prove or manipulate here. We can be in His peace and so be peaceable. God's wisdom is gentle, not violent. God's wisdom is open to reason, not threatened. And, the wisdom from above is "full of mercy and good fruits" (3:17).

This wisdom is from God because this is what God is. He is pure (not double-minded), peaceable, gentle, open to reason, merciful, and fruitful. He is wise in all these ways towards us, and His implanted word in us, that we are to receive with meekness, is at work to share His very heart with us.

### Harvesting Justice

James ends this section with this thought, "And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace." With this, James is summing up his whole point. Envy and jealousy can never lead to righteousness (justice), but only strife. True wisdom from God, given as the gift of God, bears fruit and that fruit is the harvest of righteousness (justice) which has as its roots peace with God and peace with others. Wisdom and peace always go together, for the wisdom of God always creates right relationships since God Himself is a triune communion of holy love. God shares with us Himself and His wisdom about right relationships which aims for reconciliation and restoration and so brings peace with God and with each other.

### Conclusion

In the midst of all the turmoil in the world, the Christian Church is called upon to nurture a just and peaceful environment for all. In order to fulfill this responsibility in this world, we must attain wisdom and exercise it appropriately. If we live according to God's wisdom, we sow righteousness (justice), and we reap peace and God's blessing. If we live according to worldly wisdom, we will sow sin and selfishness and reap confusion and every evil work. Worldly wisdom will result in continued pain, suffering, and oppression. Godly wisdom enables us to practice godliness in all areas of life so that justice prevails and so that peace will abound. Thus, we must pursue wisdom from God and no longer look to the world. We must be receptive to the God of life and His Word so that His transformative power enables us to understand our need for wisdom in order to ensure that we, as God's people, stand for and work for the abundant life of all people as manifested in justice and peace.





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# Restoring Bruised Reeds and Smoldering Wicks

## (A Theological Reflection on the Theme of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches)

### 'God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace'

(A Kenotic Perspective)



Rev. Dr. M. Mani Chacko, Ph. D, General Secretary, The Bible Society of India

#### INTRODUCTION

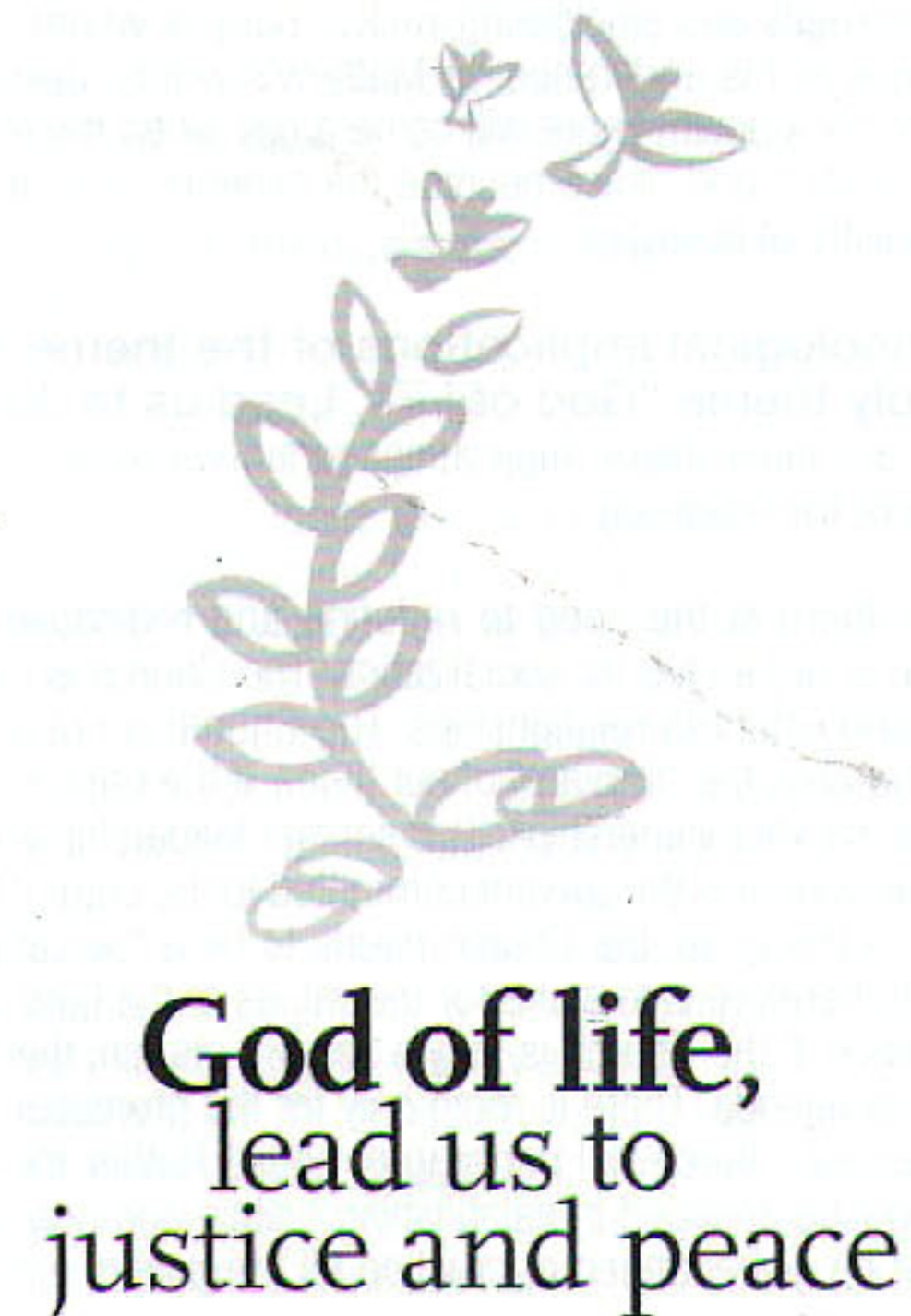
The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches took place in Busan, South Korea from October 30- November 8, 2013. The theme of the Assembly was "God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace". As the theme of the 9th Assembly held at Porto Alegre, Brazil was "God, in your Grace, transform the world", the theme for the 10th Assembly is also in the form of a prayer. The proposal of the theme was accompanied by the citation from a biblical text: Isaiah 42:1-4. In this text, the Servant of the Lord is introduced by the Prophet. The servant of the Lord neither breaks a bruised reed nor quenches a dimly burning wick and will not be crushed until he has established justice in the earth. The identity of the "servant" has been an issue in biblical scholarship. According to St. Mathew, the servant is none other than Jesus Christ, the Messiah. He endorses his view point by citing the same text in Mathew 12:15-21. According to some others, the "servant" is an historic individual; yet others would say the "servant" is a community and not an individual. The concern in this short reflection is not to dwell on the identity of the servant but rather to discover the qualities of the servant so that the servant becomes a model and a source of inspiration to the Church of today.

#### A. Isaiah 42:1-4 – A Theological Reflection

The prophet sees a time of hardship and suffering for the people of Israel. He tells the people that they will be taken as captives to a foreign land and will be subject to pain. They will experience spiritual emptiness; crisis of identity and fear of the future. In this context, the prophet talks about the servant who will intervene on behalf of them who are crushed and who will not rest until he has established justice and peace in the earth. The text begins with the phrase "Behold the servant". It is an invitation to behold the servant as to what he stands for and not simply to look at the servant. It is an invitation to perceive the servant and to discover him so that they are encouraged by the presence and the advent of the servant. This experience of beholding the servant is mandatory for the Church of today in order to be a servant in bringing about justice and peace in contexts of injustice and violence. In this experience of beholding, four qualities or characteristics of the servant can be noted which the Church could appropriate and act upon in her engagement in God's mission:

**Firstly, the person who is introduced in the text is a "servant".** He is not a slave. Rather he is a servant. The term "servant" is a dignified and powerful terminology because the servant is one who values relationships and is always there especially where there is suffering and hardship. He does not act as a master or as a task master despite the fact that he is the master. He is one who has got the power but does not misuse power in the exploitation of the other. Rather for him, power is a means for service. The servant in the text is described as one who is chosen and in whom God the Father delights. The servant only said and did what came from the Father and he could not be distracted from this. He could not be distracted by praise, by fear or by temptation. He is one who has offered completely into God's hands to carry out God's purposes and therefore God the Father delights in him.

**Secondly, the servant is one who is only interested in the Message and not in himself, the Messenger.** The servant is not a show man to gain name and fame. It is described that he will not cry out or raises his voice or make his voice heard in the street. Mathew identifying the servant with Jesus cites the passage from Isaiah and affirms with the prophet that Jesus the servant was not there to whip up a crowd for popularity. He never, ever drew attention to himself, put on a show or tried to please the masses. He was there solely to do



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the will of God. This is quite contrary to what we see today. Massive evangelistic campaigns are held promoting prosperity theology and praises are showered upon the messenger or the evangelist. The servant is only interested in the message and not in himself as the messenger. This is a warning and a reminder to the leadership of the Church today.

**Thirdly, the servant is one who has a perspective, a preferential option for the poor and the marginalized.** He ministers to "bruised reeds and smoldering wicks". The reeds grow by the river side and one of the things that the reeds were useful for is that they made good flutes. The Israelites would actually cut them down, hollow them out and make flutes out of them. If they came across reeds that were cracked or bruised they would just break it in half and toss it away. They look for reeds of a certain quality in order



to make a flute that would play well. Cracked or bruised reeds were worthless. But this is not the case with the servant. He sides with and looks for the bruised reeds. The other image that is used is of dimly burning wick or smoldering wick. The Hebrew homes did not have electric lights. They had to light their homes with oil lamps. Most had open tops and the bowls were filled with oil and they contained a wick made of flax or linen and as long as the wick stayed moist with oil it would burn. But occasionally when the oil would burn out the wick would smolder and burn and give off smoke and the only thing to do was to extinguish it and toss it away as there was plenty of flax where the first wick had come from. Again, this is not what the servant does. He does not throw smoldering wicks away or put them out. According to Mathew who identifies the servant with Jesus, there are problems that only Jesus can deal with giving us hope, strength and encouragement that we need.

**Fourthly, the servant is one with a clear vision and a firm determination.** The prophet says that the servant will not be disheartened or crushed until he has established justice in the earth. He is one with a clear vision to build up a new world order marked by justice and peace and he is firm in his determination to achieve the goal. There will never come a time when the servant will give up his task. The servant is in the business of restoring bruised reeds and smoldering wicks, many of whom the society had totally given up. He is unique in his endurance. In Mathew's words, Jesus the servant will not give up. He will not back down. There will come a day when the reign of God will be fully established where justice and peace become the experience of all. Till then the servant will continue his ministry of liberation.

### **B. Theological Implications of the theme of the "Servant" to the Assembly theme "God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace.**

There are three major implications when we reflect on the image of the servant to the theme of the Assembly.

**Firstly, there is the need to redefine and rediscover the identity of the Church.** The Church is not a club for socialization. The Church is not a meeting point to make friendships and establish relationships. The Church is not a body for the elite alone but for all. The Church is the "Servant" of our times. If the Church is the servant, then the need of the hour is "servant leadership". This servant leadership is primarily marked by the realization that the Church is the servant committed to the Lord of the Church who is a servant, Jesus Christ. If this is so, the Church needs to be a "servant church". The sole mission of the Church therefore is to stand for the values of the Lord of the Church, the values of justice and peace. If the Church is truly a servant church, then there is no room for promotion of personal agenda. There is room only for the promotion of the values of the Reign of God. The servant Church will not brag or boast. Rather the servant Church will silently, unassumingly be engaged in establishing justice and peace in the earth. The servant Church will not be disheartened or crushed till the goal of establishing a just and peaceful order is achieved.

**Secondly, there is the need to redefine who God really is.** Influenced by Hebrew and Greek thought many Christian traditions have constructed images of God in dualistic and hierarchical ways. Consequently, we have come to imagine God as an incomprehensible and all powerful being and this all powerful God is present everywhere, up there, beyond the realms of life here on earth. We have come to believe that God cannot be related to the material world because the world is created out of matter and therefore evil. We construct images of God metaphorically. We perceive God in terms of power and perfection as Ruler, Lord, King, Master, Warrior etc. We need to rediscover that our God is God Incarnate; that God belongs to the earth and reveals himself/herself as a person. In Incarnation, God does not remain remote and abstract in the world. Rather God is engaged fully with the vulnerable and the suffering masses enabling them to experience the salvific gift of life in all its fullness.

**Thirdly, there is the need to redefine what the Missio Dei or the Mission of God really is.** Engagement in God's Mission challenges us to go beyond the human to the entire creation of God. Justice and Peace are not for a life of prosperity but for creation of conditions so that human life and God's entire creation may have the possibility of life, here and now and beyond. Justice to creation becomes central to peace, human dignity and fullness of life. Witness to the God of Life is incomplete without resistance for justice and believing in the God of Life is to participate in life-giving activities. Mission of God is nothing but being in Solidarity with the victims of exploitation, violence and war. If the theme of the Assembly is to be realized, then we have to abandon idealistic views of justice and peace and locate these values of the Reign of God within social structures and resist or develop values col-

lectively for the liberation of the victims so that life in all its fullness would become a reality for all.

### **Conclusion**

The identity of the servant and the prayer theme of the Assembly calls us to go beyond our own comfort zones and be in solidarity with the struggles of peoples and communities and individuals- with the people of Bangladesh in their struggles against brutality and climate injustice; Bhutan in their struggle to affirm identities; India in their fight to eradicate inhuman practices such as caste and corruption; Maldives, in their struggle for climate justice and democratic governance; Myanmar, in their quest for democracy and nationhood; Nepal, in their search for peace and reconciliation; Pakistan, in their struggle against growing religious intolerance, persecution against religious minorities. It is our prayer that such biblical texts as Isaiah 42:1-4 and such themes as "God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace" will not remain merely as a base for discussion but rather the discussions would lead to concrete actions in the local and global context.

To conclude, the three powerful biblical images which the Sri Lankan Theologian Aloysius Pieris suggest warrant our attention:

A Home with One Table, where gifts of creation are enjoyed together by all its inhabitants, where some do not gorge while others starve (I Corinthians 11:21);

A Temple of Worship and a House of Prayer where mammon is given no chance to turn it into a "Den of Robbers" (Luke 19:46);

A Garden of Delight where Creation remains the enjoyable icon of the Creator and of the Created (Genesis 3:1ff.)

The above images reiterate the fact that we live in this planet not alone, but with other creatures created by God and together the world is our home. How can we live peacefully and with justice will depend on how we are able to appreciate each other despite the differences of creatures and how far we realize that all creatures are interconnected in a web of life and therefore interdependent. May such reflections as above lead us to this very significant needed message of our times that we are all interconnected and therefore we need each other as servants to one another. When this vision becomes a reality, we come to realize in a tangible manner that God is indeed God of Life; that God desires life marked by justice and peace for all, both human and non-human part of God's creation. It is up to the Church, the servant, which means all of us to make it happen.

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# Challenges and Vision of the New Generation in the Spiritual Journey of the Diocese

Rev. Dennis Abraham, Youth Chaplain, South East Region, Philadelphia



(Excerpts from the presentation at the South east region "Dialogue on the Journey and Growth of the Diocese" on Saturday, October 12, 2013 at St. Peter's MTC, NJ)

The Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church is celebrating its Silver Jubilee. The culmination of celebrations will be on November 23rd. But what happens thereafter? This is a time for thanking God for the witness, vision, and ministry of the diocese to this land over the past 25 years. It is a time to remember those who sacrificed themselves for the growth and development of the diocese, especially in the initial stages. However, it is a time to reflect on the vision of the diocese as it enters into a new phase in its journey. We are at the juncture of celebration and reflection.

As we celebrate this historical milestone, it is necessary to evaluate our vision, as the faith community. In our spiritual journey, a vision is necessary. Without having a vision, the journey ahead would be difficult. Having a vision is being able to see the present situation, and having the ability to look ahead and think about the future.

## Early Church

To prepare our minds for this task, is important to study the characteristics of the early church, how it was in character and mission. This can be seen especially in the Acts of the Apostles (2: 42-47). Several characteristics include:

- They followed the right teachings (that which the apostles of Christ taught)
- Communion / worship (corporate/public)
- Fellowship (ate together in their homes)
- Prayer
- They were all together and had everything in common
- Gave to those in need by selling their possessions – they lived for the 'other'
- Community, support system
- Corporate Spirituality – it's about "us and God"
- Experienced salvation

The history and development of the first church is significant in that it grew in the midst of persecutions and pressures from surrounding communities. The experiences of challenges and despair inspired them to move on together as a faith community.

## Early Challenges as a Diaspora Community

As history progressed, culture, traditions, values, norms, language, communication have all advanced and evolved. The same also goes for faith. As a diaspora community, the earlier question and challenge was: how to come to a new land and settle in a new part of the world. How to maintain and develop the church and its mission, as it is growing and spreading to different parts of the world? The agenda was to build churches and organize worshipping communities for spiritual growth and fellowship. Now that churches have been built, worshipping communities have been organized; the challenge lays in the relevance of the church in the day to day life of the faith community and the society at large. How to bridge the faith and the life, especially in the secular world? How can we defend our faith? How can we witness in a pluralistic world? What is the Christian response to the contemporary issues at hand? How do we develop an authentic and meaningful spirituality? The challenges faced by our first generation are completely different from what the second and third generations are facing, and it is important that we as a faith community pause and think about our present faith community. This is becoming more of a question especially in the onset of many new movements which challenge the importance of history and tradition of faith, which are essential elements to Christian faith itself.

## Spiritual Needs of the New Generation

When we think about the 'new generation' what comes to mind? I am sure we think about the youths, young couples, and our children. When it comes to their spirituality and faith, we must understand their needs. Their thought patterns, ways of communicating, expressing oneself, outlook on life, and overall personhood is different from that of early generations. The new generation looks for a faith that applies to them, challenges them in their life. A place where they see unity in the Body of Christ, answers to the various challenges of life, spiritual fulfillment and satisfaction, a fellowship and/or support group. Also, a creative and acknowledge space within the church and home, being able to express his/herself spiritually, and worship



in a tradition and language that we know.

It is our responsibility as a church to identify the spiritual needs of the new generation. We usually tend to say that "youth are the future of the church," and this has become a cliché. But I would like to further this argument and say, they ARE the church. We look to the future to give a space for spiritual growth and leadership of our youth, but already it is to be in their hands.

Church dropout and lack of attendance especially from the younger generation is a genuine concern not only in our church, but many churches around the world. Reasons may include that some many feel that they don't get anything out of it, lack of connection to the worship, lack of engaging and relevant music, sermons, and worship methods, and other reasons. This is something that we need to think about now. I once heard a convention speaker saying, "The dropout in churches is a starting to become a common phenomenon. Don't start searching for them when the pews are empty. Start at the beginning itself." Members of the faith community need to be able to feel connected to the church through its worship, but also through fellowship through other members of the faith community.

### **Sowing Seeds of Faith**

Each generation has its own responsibility. As far as the first generation individual is concerned, they immigrated to this country in the hope that a better life can be lived here. Any parent's greatest ambition was that their child could have a better/secure future through acquiring quality education. But at the same time, what is the attempt to ensure the child's spiritual life security? Many times hours and hours are spent on talking to children about what they should be doing in the future (education, occupation, etc.) we overlook and don't spend time asking about their relationship with Christ, and ensuring their spiritual security. Children are the gift of God, and we are not just responsible for making them 'cultural beings,' but also they should be 'spiritual beings.'

I remember visiting a home during my time studying in the Vaideeka Seminary in Kottayam, during my practical work in a particular parish (the family asked me to share this story with others). I had not seen the children for a while in the Sunday school, so I paid a visit to their home: When I visited, I asked the father the reason why their children were not coming to Sunday school. The father replied, "That is my wife's department." I turned to the mother and asked the same question. She replied, "That is my husband's department." Either parent was not willing to take responsibility for the faith education of their children, but they sent their children to one of the top schools in Kottayam district?

In the Hebrew community, there was a tradition of the heads of households to teacher the children in the faith. Only after being taught the faith, would they be sent into the world to do their responsibilities or make a living. Religious education was essential and they give importance to that even today. We can see this in Deuteronomy 6: 4-9. Oftentimes, we leave the spiritual matters to the church and the Sunday school teachers, but parents have a great responsibility.

Responsibility of the church is also to lay and sow its seeds in the present soil, and build up the next generation of youths. We started off as 'potted plants,' but we must keep in mind that now we are in this land. Many of whom settled here, and dreamed of going back to India to settle after retirement have changed their plans and are staying in the USA on a permanent basis. So the need to sow the seeds of faith in this land and our local community is essential for the mission and growth of the church. There will be many struggles and challenges on the way, but struggling is a part of growth and development of faith and the church. The contemporary issues need to be addressed. Issues (inside and outside the church) that were/are considered as taboo need to be addressed as many of our people are facing the same. Just because we avoid/ignore doesn't mean anything is going to be solved.

### **Diversity**

We as a church need to be open to the local community. The Mar Thoma Church is a global church. We have many worshipping communities in many parts of the world. There are many Marthomites who are outside of the Kerala culture. Certain diaspora communities have reached their 5th generations. Interracial marriages are becoming are being seen. What is our response to this? As we are catholic in nature, are we becoming more open minded and more welcoming in our faith community?

### **What we can do**

There are things we can do to make our faith life more meaningful. Lay ministry is vital. Building up of local leadership in the parish, center, region, and diocesan level is impor-

tant. More of our people must be leaders in the parishes through preaching of the word, mentoring, and taking up the roles and responsibilities in the spiritual and administrative capacities of the parish. Clergy also need to take a more active role and responsibility to facilitate the same in their respective parishes.

More candidates from this diocese need to accept God's call for the ordained ministry, and come forward to dedicate their lives for the church. Luke 6: 43-44a says, "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit." We need to bear fruit as a church and bring more into the ordained ministry of the church.

We also need to create a positive spiritual atmosphere in the home and the parish. Support the youth ministry of the parish; create a space where youths can spiritually grow in the parish. Give youths preference in the administrative, structural, and spiritual matters of a parish.

### **Conclusion**

As we are celebrating the Silver Jubilee of the Diocese, we are at the crossroads, and we need to think about the church, as it journeys with Christ. Let us recall the Reformation, and the struggle of Abraham Malpan & Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan. They struggled to make sure that the word of God is given focus, in worship, tradition, and culture of the church. Is their zeal for the reform of the church seen today? The church faces these challenges. What are we handing over to the next generation? What does the next generation say about us? Are we handing over torch with or without a flame? Are we upholding these characteristics just like our Church Fathers envisioned for us?

The church is Apostolic in origin, universal in nature, biblical in faith, evangelical in principal, ecumenical in outlook, oriental in worship, democratic in function, and episcopal in character. Earlier, I referred to the characteristics of the early church. Can we implement or promote these characteristics in the faith community life? Konrad Raiser, the former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches once said, "Being the Church – that means church is not a static monument. It is the manifestation of Christ in the life of the total community in each place and in time. This is where church "happens." – It becomes a transforming experience through fellowship.

As we conclude the celebrations of the Silver Jubilee of the Diocese, let us ask ourselves; are we a Church that is actively journeying with Christ? Do we own our church? May God bless us as we continue in this great journey together as a faith community?





# Diocese & Diaspora

Paper Presented by Mathew Athyal During Dialogue Session in Atlanta

Mathew Athyal, Diocesan Youth Fellowship Secretary, Atlanta



As we celebrate the Silver Jubilee as a Diocese, it is easy to overlook the history and struggles we have overcome to become who we are now. We have made progress, but there is still work to be done. When the elders started the churches in US, their aim and goal was to have a place to worship in their own native language and raise their children in the same church they grew up. They met the immediate need, but thoughts of the future might not have been in their sight and you can't blame them for it. They achieved great success with the limited resources and help they received from Thriuvalla to build a church in foreign country.

We, as a Diocese have traveled many miles, the first generation set up the foundation for the diocese. Having a place of worship to call their own was the dream of many and they have worked tirelessly to achieve that. Now almost all of our 60+ parishes have purchased or built their own property. The hard work and foundation laid by the first generation is to be recognized and admired. Like Moses, they have brought the church just across the Promised Land, now it's time to pass the reign to the Joshuas in our midst to lead Marthomites to living in the Promised Land.

As a diocesan youth fellowship secretary, I have had the privilege to serve the Dioceses and engage in dialogues with a large number of second generation Marthomites, and, I would like to address some their concerns along with what I have personally experienced while serving the church.

I had the privilege to attend regional conferences at various regions, and what shocked me at these conferences is the fact that teens/youths are going through so much in their life. From emotional and physical to even sexual abuse from church members who they trusted. They face all forms of violence in their homes, addictions, suicidal thoughts and tendencies, along with bullying at school and church. Our immediate attention and action is needed for these struggling youths. The Mar Thoma church has a great responsibility of taking on this burden and providing resources of help, prayer and healing for those who are suffering and struggling with these issues. Our churches must provide safe havens, where individuals can feel comfortable opening up about their struggles and seek help without the fear of condemnation or rejection. Our church is filled with qualified professionals, who know perfectly well how to handle these situations and we should facilitate such movements within our church, on a regional and diocesan level. The time for us to rise above the stigmatism of our culture to help the broken and needy is now. We often think that the story is from another church or another youth, but unfortunately truth and reality is not that far from home. We need to equip the leaders and promote the qualified professionals to address these issues to help heal the brokenhearted. Now these issues are not just limited to the youth, adults face similar struggles in life, but, as a community of fellowship what are we doing as a church to uplift someone? Our mentality is to isolate and kick someone down, not build them or bring them inside the community. It beats the purpose of what a church stands for.

The younger generation has a different set of expectations than previous generations, the current older generations view an Achen as more of a chaplain, but the new generation wants an Achen to be a leader, friend, guide and mentor. There needs to be an understanding of this paradigm shift and we should act quickly to address this before more people leave the church. The Achens I have spoken with often echo the same sentiment, often commenting that they are "buried within the politics of the church rather than focusing on the ministry of church". The attention span of the younger generation is less than of the older generation and often the commitment to attend week day meetings is much less for the younger generation. The spiritual nourishment they need to receive from sermons and services hence only happens on Sunday mornings. This time should be used wisely and Achens should have all the resources possible to connect with coming generation from the pulpit. The sermons should be geared toward their problems and issues, relevant to them and speaks to their heart. Using technology in the form of power point and slides has the potential to capture their attention. In the recent years, we have made progress in incorporating songs and changes in English services and it has been well received by the second generation. Churches should have either an English Holy Qurbana or con-



temporary service every Sunday. This will be a step forward in reaching the second generation and the generations to come. Additionally, from the diocesan side, it would be helpful if the Achens assigned to this diocese could be more receptive to the culture and can embrace the culture shock with grace. Achen's coming to USA should receive proper training and they need to have willingness to adapt to the change.

As I look across the dioceses, the regions that have had a youth chaplain, the second generation is often very much involved with church in all aspects. And often these thriving churches are making differences in community and in developing leaders of today and tomorrow are influenced by the youth chaplains. Each region should have a youth chaplain to serve and churches needs to take initiative in reaching that goal.

As an immigrant community, we are blessed to be able to establish our eastern traditions with western potentials. As Rev Kemper Krabbof Houston once said "Marthoma church is the best East could ever offer and what West could look up to". Our church is filled with people with different professional and educational backgrounds. We should tap into these resources available to us to make good use of it. Set up seminars focusing on picking which college to career choices, money management, and health fairs to reach out to own congregation as well as the community. We should use the resources available within our churches. As the second generation transitions from youth to young family, we should develop forums where young parents can interact with each other and mold the coming generation through serving in Sunday school and mentoring the youth. It is through mentoring and accountability we will be able to face the challenges and build a vision for coming generation in the spiritual journey.

One of the main issues I have heard is the Doctrinal issue for people to leave the church. Often remarks



like "MarThoma church never changes"... "MarThoma church doesn't believe in this or that" and I came to understand that it is not that they have a disagreement to the doctrine, but, rather lack the understanding of our doctrine. We not only need to teach them at a very young age (where Sunday school should play a big role), also make them understand why we are not following other beliefs out there. These issues must be addressed at an organizational level. And, those who are elected as office bearers and executive committee members should be aware, and know the doctrine and faith of our church. The teaching of our doctrine and faith has to start with Achens and Sunday school.

Speaking of Sunday school, this is another persistent topic for debate. Many of my peers and young leaders that I have spoken to greatly admire our Sunday school system, but often they say "Sunday school is focused more towards who scores the best marks in diocesan exams rather than developing a personal relationship with God". The current curriculum needs to be improvised to cater to the needs and applications of current generation. Many of the second generation marthomites are becoming Sunday school teachers and Sunday school superintendents who have dedicated their lives to Christ and want to help the next generation to build a personal relationship with Christ, but are often constrained by the stress of "following the book"... "diocesan exam", these entities are important and needed, but with more attention given to bible studies and teaching our faith and what our church stands for... we need to address the needs of these kids on a personal level as well and connect with them.

The second generation is a caring generation that lives for causes. Their actions and efforts are often geared toward a specific cause they believe in or a movement they stand for. I often hear from them that the Marthoma church does not spend enough resources or effort in reaching out to the community around them or building spiritual growth within the church. Often the church budgets are geared toward physical infrastructures rather than supporting or developing organizations within the church or supporting a mission work. The present and future of the Marthoma church depends on the support we give financially and morally towards developing and sustaining the Sunday school, youth fellowship, Sevikasagam and young family fellowship. Between the personal grudges and politics of the church, often these smaller organizations suffer the most without proper support from the Achens and executive committee. Also, our churches need to focus their attention towards causes worth fighting for. For example, recently a study came out showing that slavery was still an issue in 21st century, yet how many of our churches made an effort to raise awareness? A non-denominational church in Philly whose congregation mainly consists of youth and young families who left the Marthoma church is serving the community around them and one of the leaders told me "I wouldn't be able to do all that if I was in marthoma church, where the elders would shoot down our ideas and mock us when we say there needs to have spiritual growth".

Church and dioceses should encourage leaders from both the second generation and from women in church executive committees and on a diocesan level. I propose 30% of each church executive committee should consist of people aged 18-45, and 20% consisting of women. Additionally ¼ of the office bearers should be from one of those groups. Similar format should be followed for both diocesan assembly and Mandalam elections as well. I also propose that US born Achen's should be given vicar-ship that is not limited to just mere 3 years, but allow them to serve at least 5 years at each parish. It is only through initiatives like this we would be able to change our course and remove the black smudge currently on church.

There is plenty of access to Christian worship centers and churches outside the realm of the Marthoma church especially in a diocese like ours and it is the responsibility of the older generation to inspire and motivate the youth to stay in our church. And this will only happen if the older members of the church can set good examples of leadership, be supportive and most importantly set aside personal agendas for the greater good of the church. After all, a church without successive generations is similar to an extinct species. The politics of church is despised by the second generation and coming generation. It is one of the top reasons for youngsters to leave the church. We have a democratic system, yet we all know what takes place during our general body or executive committee meetings. It is not logic, reason or common sense that prevails, but rather who can shout the longest, loudest and hardest that wins an argument. Second generation and members with a proper vision for the church often avoid being a part of the executive committee let alone sit through the general body, because, these meetings are often hijacked by certain individuals who turn peaceful meetings into setting personal differences or shouting matches. Youth and women are often despised when raising concerns and are met

with objections during these meetings. Recently at an executive committee meeting I was told by the church secretary that "I was too young to know anything and don't have the experience to talk". And in another meeting the same church secretary bullied a female member of the choir (choir secretary) and harassed other members of the choir. Yet, there was no action taken against the individually by the vicar or from the diocesan level. We as a diocese and individual churches need to correct and prevent such abuses that would avert qualified leaders to step up.

There should be actions taken against such leaders and members who disrupt the decorum of church meetings with unrespectable manners along with verbal and physical abuses targeting the Achen, and fellow members. Bullying and harassment must be eliminated from the church and Diocese needs to take severe actions against such individuals. Our church needs to have leaders with Christ-like qualities and Christian leadership skills.

It has been noted that quite majority or so called "peace lovers" are not doing their Christian duty to rescue the church from the hands of known trouble-makers. The qualified and members with proper vision (which are in majority) have surrendered the church to questionable leaders (who are in minority). It is now the time for the silent majority to rise up and reclaim the church and move forward with vision. We need leaders from all generations along with Achens with the vision to face the challenges before us and move forward with a mission and vision of Christ that has been set before us. We don't need major reformations within our church, what we need is the silent, equipped and qualified majority to step up and answer the call that God has been asking them to answer. Yes, you will be attacked, yes you will be burned out, yes you will be mocked...but it is a worthy cause to fight for. If you don't step up to the plate, we will lose a generation, and if we lose a generation we lose our children, if we lose our children we lose our church, if we lose our church we lose our fellowship, if we lose our fellowship we lose faith, and if we lose our faith, what are we living for?

As President Obama said "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek" -

Are you ready to ensure the future of the Mar Thoma church in this diocese and willing to stand up against the bullying and abusive minority and rescue the church from their hands? Are you willing to be the next Joshua to step up? Are you going to be the change you have always hoped for rather than sitting there and complain? Time is now for you to answer that call and be involved with the church. If you are the Christian leader stated 1 Timothy 3: 1-13, rise up, then the vision and spiritual journey of our church in the coming generations would be in safe hands. Don't be afraid to face the challenges with God by your side. With HIM everything is possible!



# Keeping a 'Mar Thoma Sense'\*

Dr. Zac Varghese, London, UK



(\*The following is a talk given at the Diocesan Silver Jubilee celebration in the European region during the family conference on 30th August, 2013, in the presence of Rt. Revd. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Rt. Revd. Gregorios Mar Stephanos and Rt. Revd. Michal Hill of the Church of England, other distinguished guests and over 450 participants.)

Your Graces, Reverend Fathers, Distinguished guests, and Friends, my brief is to speak for 15 minutes about the history of the Diocese, and its milestones over the last 25 years. As you already heard from Theodosius Thirumeni, this is a vast diocese, spread over two continents, with 80 or so parishes and congregations, and with over 70 clergy. We are one of the 8 regions. I shall restrict myself to this region and its history.

This region has a much longer history; we had been here before the Diocese was formed. We celebrated our Silver jubilee in 1982 with late Archbishop Robert Runcie and Golden Jubilee in 2007 with Archbishop Rowan Williams and our Metropolitans and bishops. The Mar Thoma Community in Europe is the second oldest Mar Thoma Diaspora community in the world. The Community in Malaysia and Singapore is the oldest; they celebrated their 75th Anniversary last year. We also celebrated the 175th anniversary of our reformation last year; our Senior Metropolitan is 96 years old and celebrated the Diamond jubilee of his consecration as a bishop in May this year. In 1997, this Diocese had an earlier Silver Jubilee, which was about the first Mar Thoma Worship in New York with ten families in 1972. These constellations of Jubilees are significant moments in our history to express our thanks to our God for keeping us under his grace and blessings.

The comedian, WC Field, was once asked by a reporter, what he thought about God's involvement in the creation. He replied: "Well I do not know who created the water, but I know it wasn't the fish." I also know that we are here today not because of our merits, but because of God's blessings.

An Irish man asked another Irish man how to go to Donegal. He replied: "well I wouldn't start from here. I also wouldn't start from here, because the foundation for this diocese was laid a long time back in antiquity and in our handed down traditions. Today we are here to thank God for our pioneers and acknowledge their contributions. Let us fondly remember the blessings that we received through Late Thomas Mar Athanasius Suffragan Metropolitan, Bishop Easow Mar Timatheos, Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan, our other Metropolitans and Diocesan Bishops and ministers for their prophetic vision in establishing and serving this Diocese.

In the beginning, our pioneers did not hear the ten comforting words, 'I am from the Church I am here to help.' By this I mean that we did not have an organised Church when we first came to this part of the world; we had lay members with a 'Mar Thoma sense,' with a loyalty to the Church, its liturgy and its traditions. I shall return to this Mar Thoma sense later. The advice from Juhanon Metropolitan in 1973 was against the formation of ethnic Mar Thoma Parishes in the United States and Europe.

How did, it all, start then? In the beginning, we had a prayer-oriented mission, and a prayer burden and a concern about others. Some of us came here in those early days with just few schillings for postgraduate studies, and found other such people with a prayer burden; this laid foundations for local prayer groups; these prayer groups became congregations with an occasional Holy Communion service through a visiting clergy or bishop. From such humble beginnings, congregations and parishes were formed and then finally in 1988 a Diocese was created. During this period, there were so many grace-filled moments and miracles.

It is important to retain in our collective memory that all Diaspora parishes and congregations evolved out of the commitments of the lay people; it should be remembered that clergy from the mother church only came to the scene at a later stage. Within a span of seventy-five years, the Mar Thoma Church has become a global church. 'Scatter our people' was a prophetic prayer of Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan in the forties. Dias-



pora communities have contributed richly in elevating the status of a church confined within the boundaries of Kerala to a world-wide church, which is indeed 'the great new fact of our time.'

We need to believe that we are not just economic migrants, but we have been sent here for a purpose-driven life. We should have a vision of a 'sent-ness.' This 'sent-ness' is at the heart of our Diaspora spirituality which is necessary to establish a spiritual dimension in our lives. Therefore, our election as a Diaspora community is clear and unequivocal, which is to proclaim the Gospel through our lived out experiences in communities where we live and do our work. Usually, people are only interested in the macro-history. But it is important not to forget the micro-history of ordinary men and women and our clergy who helped in giving shape to our Diocese. They are the real people who organised prayer groups, Sunday schools, youth fellowships, family conferences, house visits, cared for the sick and the needy, raised funds, built or purchased church buildings, and extended hospitality for the new immigrants. Let us express our gratitude to all who have made sacrifices and contributed to the common good of our community and society.

Our silver jubilee celebration is a time for such reflections and stock taking. Psalmist helps us to raise a question: "How can I, repay the Lord, for all His gifts to me?" (Pslams116:12). The Old Testament mandate for Jubilee indicates the importance of emancipation, freedom and restoration.

From a small prayer group of six families and once a



month corporate worship at the Indian YMCA in 1957, with late Rev Alexander, we have grown now as a region of nine parishes and seven congregations. I would like to remember gratefully Late Bishop Mervyn Stockwood, Bishop Leslie Brown, Bishop Stephen Neil, who were giants of C-of-E and Bishop Dominic Walker and Bishop John Fenwick for giving us a helping hand in those early years. Let me briefly highlight some of our significant achievements in this region, but we should be mindful of not underrating our immense possibilities in Jesus Christ and also not to overestimate our achievements.

1. We established worshipping communities for giving glory to God in four areas in London, Peterborough, Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Aberdeen, Belfast, Dublin, Germany and Switzerland.
2. We established a unique travelling ministry for building solidarity with new immigrants arriving at various towns and cities.
3. Our parishes have neighbourhood mission schemes of helping in soup kitchens, food banks, hospices, prison ministries and new expressions of faith such as parish in the park, parish in youth clubs and playing fields. We also help many mission programmes in India, Mexico and with native Indian Mission in Oklahoma. Let us pause for a while and thank God for life and ministry of 26 year old Patrick who lost his life in a car accident while travelling to Oklahoma mission field. We should never forget this young man and his family and others who suffered in this accident.
4. We established family conference in 1983 for community building, strengthening contract between generations and finding safe places for communication, for rendering our stories, and confidence building.
5. We became a national Church in 2010 by a gazetting procedure in the London Gazette; we established ecumenical relationship through our membership of CTE and CTBI.
6. Now, we feel confident in answering the question our Valiya Metropolitan raised at the FOCUS seminar in 2001: Will the Diaspora community ever become the local community? This integration should be our goal for the next stage, and we are beginning to see green shoots of this at Bristol and North London. Building a Churches Together Covenanted Partnership in Bristol with St. Anne's, parish, is a major milestone in our ecumenical journey. Let us show our appreciation to Rev Jane Hayward and Rt. Revd. Michael Hill (Church of England), for making it possible for our community in Bristol. This is a very important model for us in this country.
7. Becoming active members of Churches Together group in north Harrow is a milestone. This conference with 450 delegates is another milestone too. I sincerely congratulate the Bristol parish and the organisers for such a magnificent conference, which we are about to enjoy.

Now to our future: our future is underscored, as it is written in Isaiah: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.' (1 Cor. 2: 9)

What should we do now? There is a word in Psalms and in Habakkuk, which we often ignore. This word is 'selah,' which means stop and reflect. Jubilee is a good time to stop and reflect.

Psalmist says, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat down; there we wept, when we remembered Zion." When those Israelites sat down they also hung their musical instruments and they could not sing anymore. Sitting down or standing still was one of their problems; as a Diaspora community we need to go forward. We started this journey together, and we are bound to find obstacles or comfortable wayside inns or other issues which may distract us from our pilgrimage.

At the beginning, we were a caring community. Now our affluence is directing us to an evolutionary cul-de-sac of isolation, detachment, inertia and indifference. Our affluence could inhibit our discipleship and our inclination to be part of a caring and praying community. Maybe, during this process of change, moving from bed sits to penthouses, travelling in buses to Mercedes; we also lost something very valuable about being in the community, community building and community cohesion. The way we use the word community today is a lie because some of us are now trying to distance ourselves from this community. I have a feeling that we are losing something very valuable in our affluence and growth.

The Booker prize-winning novelist Arundathi Roy wrote in 'God of Small Things,' I quote: "Though you couldn't see the river from the house anymore, like, a sea shell, always has, a sea- sense, the Iyemenam house still had a river sense: a rushing, rolling, fish swimming, sense." End of quote. My generation of Mar Thoma Christians in the Diaspora had a very special Mar Thoma sense, of caring, praying, singing, chanting, worshipping and witnessing-Mar Thoma sense, which is somehow lacking in our second, third and fourth generations. We should keep that Mar Thoma sense alive by telling and retelling them about our struggles, failures and successes. These stories are important for preserving our identity and traditions and these will give us confidence in integrating with host communities. This conference should be an ideal place for telling such stories.

It is up to all of us to stay together, pray together and keep the dynamic nature of our fellowship as a movement to reach out and find the true potentials of our spiritual journey. We should never forget that it was in the course of a journey from Egypt to Canaan that a Jewish nation was born; it was in the dispersion of the members of our Church that the Mar Thoma Church has become a global Church with a mission mandate.

In conclusion, I believe that our Church has an important role to play in helping us to focus on the Kingdom values and the cross. I further hope that our Community in the United Kingdom will help the people in this country to a better life in Christ. Our history in these islands is important; it has a 'sent-ness' about it. I am grateful to all our past and present members, our clergy and our bishops for their help and continued support for the growth of our community in Europe. I offer thanks to Almighty God for these years and pray for His blessings on the Mar Thoma communities throughout the world and our fellowship in Jesus Christ, our Lord, redeemer, and protector. Amen.

## SUBMISSION OF MATERIALS



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Dr. Eapen Daniel -  
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# God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace – A Prayer

George Sam, Immanuel MTC, Virginia



"God of life, lead us to justice and peace" – there is no better prayer or slogan for this year's WCC that met at Busan, South Korea, a region or a nation still dramatically divided, that for last six decades has lived under a permanent cease fire, but without a lasting and just peace, noted by Rev Dr. Walter Altmann in the Moderator's report. It also reminds us of the limitation with human efforts to restore peace in a troubled world; and the ultimate peace, which passes all understanding, can come only from the creator God. "Peace on earth" is the words of greetings by the angels bringing the good news to proclaim the birth of the Jesus, the messiah, also called as Prince of Peace by prophet Isaiah. Peace and Justice are like two sides of a coin. There is no peace without serving justice until and unless forgiveness comes to act. Not to deviate from the subject, but one needs courage to forgive others. Jesus himself portrayed forgiveness through his parable of unforgiving debtor when he was encountered by Peter with the question "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times? Jesus replied "Seventy times seven". Aren't we, Christians, called for restoring peace by this standard of forgiveness without invoking justice?

Now let's think of few aspects of how we, as Christians, can lead and partake in the mission of restoring peace in today's world:

## 1. Peace in self

We claim to be a fortunate generation to live in such a technologically advanced world, but how does we rate "quality" of life in terms of mental and physical health. Few weeks ago, we heard about the murder attempt of Virginia senator by own son and killed himself. The investigation revealed that his 24 year old son had undergone a mental health evaluation a day before the incident but was released because no psychiatric beds were available at the county hospital. When interviewed, the county health supervisor admitted this is a problem not only at the county but across the country - not enough beds to accommodate all psychiatric patients! This is a serious state. Are we at peace within? Isaiah says "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you."

Anxiety is a serious condition that prevents the peace within. I found it a perfect prayer in today's world which says "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." - Phil 4:6-7

The mental state also determines the physical state as the word says "A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones – Proverbs 17:22.

World diabetes day was observed on November 14. Let's also look at some statistics. The research showed that the diabetes population has increased to 8.4% to 382 Million people. With current rate the number will reach 592 Million by 2035, International Diabetes federation reports. Here are some serious questions to consider – Am I at peace within? Do I have some quite time or a time of devotion every day? Am I setting the priorities right? What is my attitude toward my fellow citizen?

## 2. Peace in family

Family is the basic unit or a building block to a nation. Unfortunately, we are living in a generation when the whole institution of family is challenged and is undergoing changes at a very alarming state. The gender relationship within an institution so sacredly authored by God, the creator, was unquestionable till the recent past. It is so unfortunate now that man is trying to redefine this sacred institution and turn his face against God. Let's look at some statistics. By CDC reports average divorce rate is 3.6 per 1000 Americans, which also represents more than 50% of marriages. In a recent Pew Trust Survey, the question was asked of unmarried people, a large sampling of unmarried people, "Do you want to get married?" 46% of those people said yes. 54% of the people in a national survey said no. We, undoubtedly, are living in a morally declining generation. As Christians, it is our

duty to stand firm for the truth and save the generation from a cultural disaster that ultimately leads to a Nation's ruin. As the saying goes "The ruin of a nation begins in the homes of its people". How are our relationships within the family? Are we struggling to find a balance between God, family and work? Do we pray together as a family? Are we investing sufficient time in our children? Or are they spending their time before a TV or video games or at a child care or under someone's care? Is your child excited or passionate or interested to talk to you as a parent? Can we communicate freely at home? What are the topics we discuss at home? Do we meet as family together for a meal? These are some serious questions to consider. The words of wisdom quietly instructed a generation ages ago "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." – Deuteronomy 6:6-7 Here is the challenge. Like Joshua can we all confidently testify – But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!

## 3. Peace in community

The early Christian church set a good example for all generations to follow. "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need" – Acts 4: 42-45

How, amid Japan's worst natural disaster in 100 years, could the Japanese seem so calm?

Food and water were both scarce. Electricity in the tsunami zone was nearly nonexistent. Survivors had lacked information about their missing loved ones. But unlike other disasters where the world has observed looting, rioting and public outbursts of sorrow and rage, it has seen a country quietly mourning, its people standing patiently for hours in orderly lines for a few bottles of water. At stores across the city, long, straight lines of Japanese tsunami victims had been waiting for rations in the city. No one was directing these lines; they were organized by the people themselves.

At the front, which took hours to get to in some cases, shoppers are limited to 10 food or beverage items. No complaints, no cheating. No one should complain, says Mitsugu Miyagi, standing in line at a store with his infant, 6-year-old and wife, Maki. Temple University Scholar Kingston calls the behavior of the Japanese "remarkable but not surprising." "The Japanese, from



a young age, are socialized to put group interest ahead of individual interest. Many criticize them for deference to authority, abundant rules and conformity, but this is the fabric of social cohesion that keeps Japan together," Kingston said.

Apostle Paul's exhortation to the church of Philippians is relevant here "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others – Phil 2:4 Dr. Ravi Zacharias was asked at a Princeton University gathering - what's different between the way things were in the original created order and now. He replied - In the dawn of creation, God walked with his creation in close proximity - the whole idea of presence and fellowship; but just with one condition or exception – You must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Why? In his words he interprets, one will play God and start defining good and evil. We broke the first law. Take a look at the world today. We have countless law firms today. Here is an illustration: We are familiar with this flight instruction – Do not tamper, touch, disable or destroy smoke detector. Why do you need four words when you can simply state "don't mess with it". In court of law, you can twist every little word. Thus thousands of pages are required to cover all aspects of a law along with hundreds of footnotes. It took Moses to make 613 laws to expand on one simple law God originally desired.

**What's the result?**

We, in US, are in the midst of a political turmoil now while recovering from an economic doom, and a series of environmental disasters or natural calamities. Debt ceilings, debts, unemployment, recession, gun violence fill the news headlines these days. What is the root cause? We are at a point of a moral decline. We are defining new standards and giving new definitions to good and evil. An evident sign of a nation forgotten by God is seen in its moral decline. Sodom is the best example. We, unknowingly, are fighting to obtain Sodom's standards. Turn back to God before becoming a nation of shame before the world. But the reality, unfortunately, is that we are already there; legalized same sex marriages, embracing all immoral acts; we are losing respect before the world, thus losing moral strength.

"I believe America has gone a long way down the wrong road. If we ever needed God's help, it is now." says Billy Graham after the Sandy hook elementary school shooting last year.

Isn't the above true for church as well? What is our responsibility? Stand firm in the midst of the storm like a light house guiding the lost lives. Let's stop and reflect. Remember, every Marthomite is a missionary. Else we reduce ourselves to a group where we gather in mass on Sundays only to meet and greet and go with the flow and live in mere comfort. Remember dead fish go with the flow, live one swim against. It is also noteworthy to mention 2011 Maramon convention' theme "Am I my brother's keeper?" in the con-

text of justice. Sin ruptures relationships whether they are between man and men or man and God. Every believer should overcome this impediment in life and come to a stage where they boldly proclaim their faith.

One of God's characteristics is that He stretches His hands out to lift the downtrodden and heals the brokenhearted. The same feature should be found in man, created in God's own image. The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us that truth. He went out of his way to help the wounded highway farer, says Nyameko Barney Pityana, principal and vice chancellor of the University of South Africa. We are subject to the temptation of power, as well. Throughout history this temptation has marked several levels of relations among people and nations and has led humanity to sinful practices such as racism, patriarchy, economic exploitation and multiple forms of exclusion and oppression, not forgetting sinful competition among churches and religions – sometimes to the extreme of using physical violence, war and terror. Our ecumenical commitment also becomes concrete in the shape of penitence. – WCC Moderator's report comments.

God of justice spoke through the prophet "Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place" – Jeremiah 22:3

Let me close with the words from Psalmist "Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other" – Psalms 85:10

Prayer: Lord, enable and strengthen us to partake in the mission of restoring peace and justice in this world and help us to fulfill the mission of our church, lighted to lighten.

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**Mr. Robin K. Roy**  
Son of Mr. Roy K. Cherian & Mrs. Susy K. Cherian from Chicago Mar Thoma Church - graduated from North side College prep High School, Chicago.



**Mr. Stanley G. Joseph**  
Son of Mr. George K. Joseph & Mrs. Valsamma Joseph from Mar Thoma Church of Dallas Farmers Branch - graduated from Plano East Senior High School Plano, Texas.



**Ms. Neeta A. Abraham**  
Daughter of Dr. Abraham George & Mrs. Sujatha Abraham from Chicago Mar Thoma Church - graduated from Warren Township High School, Gurnee, IL



**Mr. Mark J. John**  
Son of Mr. John Joseph & Mrs. Prassana John from St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church Vancouver - graduated from Regent Christian Academy, BC.

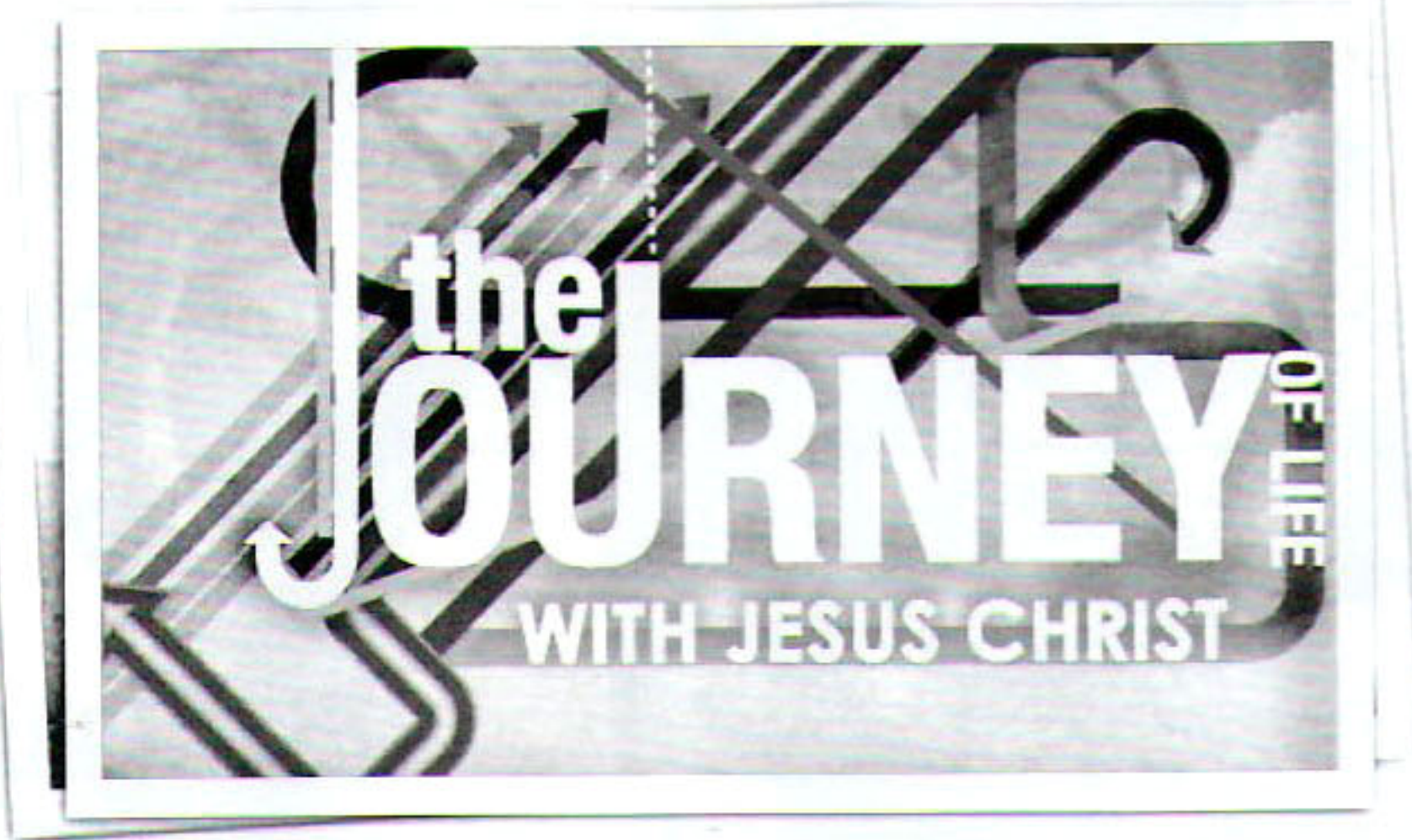


**Ms. Rinju Ann Philip**  
Daughter of Mr. Philip Mammen & Mrs. Mini Philip from Carmel Mar Thoma Church, Liverpool, UK - graduated from St. John Bosco Arts College, Liverpool.



# My Journey with Christ: Personal Reflections

Dr. John A Daniel, Emmanuel Mar Thoma Church, Lubbock, Texas



## Introduction

"The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14). The key word in this verse is "opened". Whose heart opened? Lydia, a successful business woman lived in the first century AD, is a great example of the significant role women played in the early church to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ around the world. The purpose of this article is to share with the readers my own journey with Christ in the context of Lydia's life and her contributions to the early New Testament church.

## Why am I a Christian?

In the late sixties, in an exclusive edition of "Illustrated weekly of India" this question was asked to many prominent Indian Christians. Many articles were published which included an interview with Mother Theresa of Calcutta. When Mother was asked this question, she replied "I am saved by the grace of God through faith; it is a gift of God (Rom 2:8)". Two words capture our attention right away. They are Grace and Faith. Both are foundational principles in our journey with Christ. Reflecting back to my early life, I was born and brought up in a strict fundamental and conservative Christian home. Like Lydia, my father had a Textile business and he was successful in this business which lasted more than 40 years. He was also a Bible teacher (Upadesi). My mother was very a hospitable woman like Lydia. She welcomed traveling evangelists regularly to our home and provided food and shelter as needed. But, in my teenage years, I began to doubt the claims of Christ as the "only way" for salvation. My best friends at schools were Hindus and they were better than my Christian friends and I used to wonder "what will happen to my friend, Madhu". Madhu hailed from a Nair family in central Kerala and we are still best friends. I am talking about the behavior and attitudes of my brothers and sisters in Christ. I do not think that I am the only one who experienced doubt and confusion in the early years of our journey with Christ. BUT GOD OPENED MY HEART and has been revealing Himself to me as my savior and friend for the last 65 ½ years!!

## Who was this Lydia and what are some of the qualities we may reflect upon?

Lydia, who was an Asiatic, derived her name from the country on the borders of which her native city, Thyatira, was situated. It was not an original Greek name, but probably Phoenician, and a common name meaning "bending." Readers of Horace will be familiar with Lydia as a popular name for women. There are those writers who think that it means "The Lydian," seeing Thyatira was a city of Lydia, and that her personal name is unknown. (Ref: Biblegateway.com) First of all, she was successful in her business as evidenced by

the fact that she owned a spacious home and had servants to care for. We may ask this question: what about all this talk about prosperity Christianity? I am not a great fan of preachers who ask for money and promise great rewards from the Lord in return. I do not believe that we give for Christian missions expecting big return from the Lord. At the same time, I strongly believe that we need money to participate in HIS mission on this planet earth. We are called to be the light of the world and salt of the earth. We do have social responsibilities which need money. Then what is the point? Let's consider Lydia's another quality which we may emulate. Lydia was a seeker of truth. Although sincerely religious, Lydia was not a Christian. She did, however, had a hunger for a deeper spiritual experience. The mind can be closed against the full truth either from ignorance or prejudice and cannot discern it, or from pride and perversity and will not admit it. Ignorance was responsible for Lydia's closed mind, but as she attended to the truth of Christ which Paul spoke of in conversational style in that small seated Jewish gathering, the light dawned, and her heart opened to receive that Christ as her Savior. As Chrysostom puts it, "To open is the part of God, and to pay attention that of the woman." Her faith was born through hearing the Word of God (Psalm 119:18,130; Luke 24:45) Reflecting upon my journey with Christ, I was not intellectually convinced of the claims of Christ in my early years of Christian walk. I simply said "Lord, I do not understand all the pros and cons of Christian life, but I surrender all my life to you and please reveal thyself to me if your are REAL' I cannot pinpoint a specific date or time when I made my surrender to Christ, but it was in my early teens prior to leaving my home for higher studies at the age of 19. I can share with you several landmarks in my life where like Abraham, I had to "hope against hope". When I landed in JFK airport on January 2, 1982, I put my feet on the US soil saying this prayer "Lord!, I have no one but you, take care of me" Looking back to my past 32 years and 8 months in the States, let me tell you the Lord who promised has been so faithful. At the same time I learned many lessons in my journey with Christ. I learned that my extremity is God's opportunity to intervene and perform miracles in my life. For example, my first job was a miracle from God and I ended up going to IOWA and there I was able to fulfill all my desires to complete graduate studies in the field of physical therapy and later on I completed my doctorate in education and I retired as a tenured associate professor at a prominent state university in West Texas. Reflecting back, I can only give full credit to my savior who opened my eyes and enabled me experience his presence and provision every step of the way.





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Finally, Lydia was a hospitable woman. She was woman of faith, she won her servants to Christ and she enjoyed hospitality. She received Paul and Silas into her home after their discharge from prison, bruised and battered from persecution. She was not ashamed of the Lord's prisoners (1 Timothy 5:10; Hebrews 13:2, 1 Peter 4:9). While benefiting from Lydia's generous hospitality Paul warned people gathered there of the trials and tribulations they have to endure for the cause their Master and Lord, and then said good-bye to godly Lydia, praising God for all she had meant to him and his companions.

Again reflecting back to my own mother, I learned from her life that we need to take care of poor and needy in our community. She welcomed everyone irrespective of caste or religion and served them food and shelter as needed. I am proud to be a Mar Thomite and I believe we have a balanced message emphasizing importance of personal relationship with Christ and dependence on the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us in our journey with HIM. At the same time we are a mission-centered church and that is the secret of our success. Let me conclude this article with a quote from Richard Wurambrand (Tortured for Christ) "God will judge us not according to how much we endured, but how much we could LOVE"

*Editor's Note: Dr. John Daniel is a retired professor from Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, Lubbock, Texas. He is currently working as a clinical faculty for UT Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas, Texas as well as practicing Physical Therapy in acute care setting. Dr. Daniel is a member of Lubbock MTC and regularly attending Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch.*

# വഴികാട്ടി

(ശുദ്ധർ സ്മൃതിക്കും വീട്... രീതി)



ബ്രഹ്മത്തിൽ ചരിക്കുവാനേ  
എന്നും ധർമ്മത്തിൽ രസിക്കുവാനേ  
എന്നും പരിലസിക്കും നർമ്മത്തിൻ മൊഴികൾ തുകി  
അതികുതുകാൽ കർമ്മത്തിൽ വ്യാപരിപ്പോൻ

മലങ്കരയിൽ വാഴുന്ന മാർത്തോമാ തിരുമേനി  
മാനവരിൻ വഴികാട്ടിയാം മാർ ക്രിസോസ്റ്റം  
എന്നെന്നും വഴികാട്ടിയാം നീതിയിൻ  
വഴികാട്ടിയാം, നൽ സ്നേഹത്തിൻ വഴികാട്ടിയാം

നീതിയിൻ സുര്യനാകും ശ്രീയേശുക്രിസ്തനുടെ  
കാന്തിയാൽ ശോഭിതമാ  
തവ വദനം പാരം വിളങ്ങീടുന്നു.

മലങ്കരയിൽ...

സൗമ്യവും ശാന്തവും വൻ സാഗര ഗാംഭീര്യത്തെ  
പാരം ഹരിച്ചീടുന്ന  
തിരുരൂപം എന്താശ്ചാര്യമേ...

മലങ്കരയിൽ...

ക്രിസ്തനെ വാഴ്ത്തും നാവേ, ദൈവ ദക്തിയിൻ കേദാരമേ,  
അതിൽ പൊഴിയും നർമ്മത്തിൻ മുത്തുകളേ  
അതികുതുകാൽ എന്നും ഞാൻ വാശിക്കുന്നേ

മലങ്കരയിൽ...

അടിമത്വം ഇല്ലാനാടെ, ദൈവതേജസ്സാൽ മിന്നും വീടേ,  
നമ്മൾ അപരനെ സ്നേഹിക്കുമ്പോൾ  
ദൈവം അവിടല്ലോ വാസം ചെയ്തു

മലങ്കരയിൽ...

മാതൃ പേരുംപൊയ്ക, ഫിലാദൽഫിയ

# The Dazzling Call for Justice and Peace



Prof. Elias Abraham  
Baltimore

when they elect their kith and kin.  
The angel from heaven brings the key  
to do justice, and drive away the crows.  
"A good conscience is a soft pillow."

We want to worship in God's temple,  
decorated with truth's precious stones.  
And I discoursed with my God,  
"Grief divided is made lighter."  
Cross is a symbol,  
giving us,  
new insights and covenants;  
Let's grasp it,  
"The proof of the pudding  
is in its eating."

It's the fight for the perennial radiant day,  
that makes a person  
nearer to God.  
Adam, not born in Paradise, lost it,  
can we regain it?  
Who will quench the scorching thirst  
of the cracked-up earth that causes birth,  
and for ever provide us  
the sylvan life's silver streams?  
The Lord of lords desires us all  
"to till and keep and dress the land."  
But here,  
people carrying sharpened stones  
stand around us to mar and kill  
the Stephens in our inner selves,  
each drop of blood  
gaining Pauls and Peters  
ever and ever for Jesus, the Lord.

Oh! For a draught of  
justice, peace, and love!  
Be in touch with the Spirit of the Lord,  
and be directed to the will of God.  
It will surely dazzle  
the fainted eye,  
and blaze incredibly brilliantly,  
the peace seeking soul...  
The waves are surging;  
Aren't we ready to stop the recitations,  
and enter the field of turbulent actions?



# Vision in the Annunciation Event

Mrs. Seena Sam, Carmel MTC, Boston



While we are entering the last month of 2013, the Church as a whole takes up her journey towards Holy Christmas. In the midst of many struggles and difficulties, 'this journey' once again invites us to renew our faith and hope in the Immanuel. All our readings these Sundays help us to prepare our hearts for waiting, hoping, and longing for God.

This advent season is marked by many annunciation stories. The first one is annunciation to Zachariah, described in the first chapter of Luke. In this reading, the priest Zachariah had a theophanic experience (the appearance of God) in which he got the message of the birth of John the Baptist. Zachariah and Elizabeth, both priestly couple, were just, righteous and delightful people who observed all the commandments of God, even in their old age. During their time, heavenly visions were very rare. However, God continued to be deeply concerned about Israel and the whole humanity. This divine encounter led to the birth of a new prophet.

Let us reflect on the theophanic experience of these priestly couple that may help our spiritual growth. Even in our drying circumstances, we can maintain a positive attitude and patiently await the work of God through us for the salvation and liberation of the people around us.

## Autumn of our life: A time to be an instrument in God's hand:

The Scripture introduces Zachariah and Elizabeth as a married couple advanced in years, but God has chosen them to be the parents of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ. In the Bible, there are many examples of elderly people who were chosen by God to fulfill His divine plan. We see Abraham and Sarah who became the parents of many nations. We also read about Moses, Simeon and Anna. The teachings and language of the Bible make it clear that there is 'No Age Limit' in God's plan. Whether we are young like Mary or elders like Zachariah and Elizabeth, God can still use us for His divine plans. Hence, the story of Zachariah and Elizabeth is also a message to the elderly, that God is not yet finished with you and your life. He can very well surprise you even in the autumn of your life.

## Waiting with patience for the Lord is an Art:

A culture of impatience is prevailing most everywhere. While living in this culture, we hear more about the expedited pace of life, where we do not have to wait for anything. This was not the case in the past. If we want to buy something, we would have to save our money until we had enough to get it. In the modern society, it is reversed and the new trend is, 'buy now; pay later'. This culture apparently has changed the mindset of people in the spiritual realm as well. We expect instant satisfaction for our needs and wants in spiritual matters also. Contrary to it, Zachariah and Elizabeth are the examples of waiting and hoping in the Lord. In them, we find the microcosm of the people of Israel longing for the arrival of the promised Messiah. As people, they were prepared to adjust to God's time scale, rather than expect God to fit into theirs. Through this annunciation, God fulfills both his promise to Israel and also the personal need of a righteous couple. Like Abraham, Zachariah and Elizabeth were "hoping against hope" and they did not weaken in their faith (Romans 4: 18, 19). In this special season, let us pray to the Lord to implant in us a spirit of patience for God's time.

## Worship Challenges the Faithful to Be Visionaries:

During this divine encounter of Zachariah with the angel of the Lord, we can see that the whole congregation and the priest were in a constant state of prayer and adoration. This worship was progressing with many symbols and chants, according to the custom of Hebrew priestly tradition. Both the priest and the faithful community should have to seek a new vision from God in every liturgical celebration and the church is the place where we acquire such a visions. Vision is the ability to accurately assess the current changes



and take advantage of them. A priest who has had the proper vision alone can direct the church in a Godly manner; in the absence of such a conviction, the worship service would become mere mechanical or ritualistic. We cannot lead the people to spiritual or moral heights that we have not climbed. The incredible inner energy of priesthood cannot be allowed to burn out. As worship is administered with solemnity, the people must hear the voice from above. Everything is possible with God. Today, the worshipping groups are overburdened with many problems and struggles. If they take prayers, chants, sermons, and other liturgical actions seriously, they will hear the voice, "Your prayer has been answered". After all, Zachariah and Elizabeth were faithful to the divine vision that they received and submitted their child to God's great plan for the salvation of humanity. God has chosen the precious baby for the restoration of Israel and to make a path for the Lord.

Such an 'annunciation' is relevant not only in this special season but it should challenge us all throughout our lives. That is because, "Our whole life is an advent season, a season of waiting for the last advent - the second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer). Let us pray to the Lord to help us to participate in our worship with this understanding and vision.



# God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace

WCC 10th Assembly, 30th Oct to 8th Nov 2103. Republic of Korea.



**Noble J. Mathew**

(A delegate of 10th Assembly of WCC and member of St. James MTC., London, UK)

Join the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace" is the title of the Message of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea, was convened on 30 October and drew to a close on 8 November 2013. An assembly, the highest governing body of the WCC, is held once every seven to eight years to endorse policies, review projects and point the future direction of the organization.

The "Message" of a WCC assembly is meant to report the spirit of the event as well as common commitments of representatives from 345 member churches, related religious bodies and partner organizations. It reflects the theme of an assembly, adopted by the WCC central committee. The theme of the Busan assembly was this brief prayer: "God of life, lead us to justice and peace."

The original WCC assembly at Amsterdam in 1948 sent a message to the churches and the world that included the phrase "We intend to stay together." The Message of 2013 affirms, in the context of the churches' invitation to the pilgrimage of justice and peace, "We intend to move together." This reflects how far the worldwide ecumenical movement have come. The fellowship is no longer concerned about the theological and doctrinal differences which divide the different confessions but focusing on what unites us as followers of Jesus Christ and the commitment to move forward addressing the issues, in the light of global political, economic, environmental and social changes, which challenges all of humanity.

Describing their time in Busan and other parts of the country, participants in the 10th Assembly offered this affirmation: "We share our experience of the search for unity in Korea as a sign of hope in the world. This is not the only land where people live divided, in poverty and richness, happiness and violence, welfare and war. We are not allowed to close our eyes to harsh realities or to rest our hands from God's transforming work. As a fellowship, the World Council of Churches stands in solidarity with the people and the churches in the Korean peninsula, and with all who strive for justice and peace."

The 10th assembly also addressed a number of contemporary issues.

The statement titled Politicization of Religion and Rights of Religious Minorities calls on the global ecumenical community to mediate with their respective governments "to develop policies of providing effective protection of persons and communities belonging to minority religions against threats or acts of violence from non-state actors."

The statement also calls for "concerted and coordinated efforts on the part of religious, civil society and state actors in order to address violations of rights of religious minorities and their freedom of religion and belief". At the assembly the delegates also expressed concern on "Christian presence and witness in the Middle East", the situation in

the Democratic Republic of Congo and commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of Armenian Genocide of 1915, themes in the minutes presented in Busan.

Through the statement on Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula, churches "call upon all foreign powers in the region to participate in a creative process for building peace on the Korean peninsula by halting all military exercises on the Korean peninsula, by ceasing foreign intervention, withdrawing foreign troops and reducing military expenditures".

Another statement titled Human Rights of Stateless People, calls on the "churches to engage in dialogue with states to adopt policies which confer nationality to stateless people and provide proper documentation". The text also encourages churches, civil society, human rights entities, United Nations agencies and regional organizations to collaborate effectively to reduce and eradicate statelessness.

On the Way of Just Peace was another significant statement, which affirms that "Peace constitutes a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God's love and care for the world and all God's creation". With this affirmation, it recommends concrete actions and invokes commitment to share "God's love for the world by seeking peace and protecting life".

"Together we commit to protecting human dignity, doing justice in our families and communities, transforming conflicts without violence and banning all weapons of mass destruction," read the statement.

The above provide some of the key highlights and outcome of the various ecumenical conversations and exchanges of the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Korea.

## Leadership Summit at Alabama

Sara Pritha Varghese, Atlanta Mar Thoma Church He always shows up. It is amazing to see Jesus every time. Whether coordinators invested months of planning or are expected to tend to needs as they come along, God shows up. And like



every other opportunity with the youth and children of the MOWA Choctaw Nation, He came. We began talking about transitioning leadership into the hands of rising Choctaw youth a few summers ago. Therefore, the leadership summit hosted on the weekend of November 8, 2013 focused on the Choctaw youth coordinating a meeting projected for

**Sara Pritha Varghese, Atlanta MTC**

early next year. During the meeting Mikey Weaver, a Choctaw community member, spoke to the youth about asking God for a purpose and understanding God's purpose for their life. This led to small group sessions where we focused on specific aspects of leadership summit meetings. They will be able to coordinate and conduct the meeting as we provide guidance and support. Sitting across from the youth as they explored each component allowed me to see talent and leadership through outlets we were nurturing over the years. I am secure in knowing God showed up eleven years ago as we first walked into the Choctaw community... and God showed up that weekend. I don't expect anything else from Him - He is faithful.



# Mar Thoma Church: Present and Future

Dr. Ron Jacob

This paper is not the opinion or personal agenda of just one person. The opinions of more than 50 people who were raised in the Mar Thoma Church were sought out. Some are active members and leaders, some are inactive and some have even left the church. The purpose was to make sure that all views were expressed with one goal in mind, to realize what the second generation envisions the Mar Thoma Church to be. Thank you to everyone who contributed.

History is only studied for one reason and one reason only - so that mistakes do not recur. We as a church must study our history so that the successes can be repeated and the failures avoided. At the onset of any new endeavor there must be a mission. There must be a purpose for beginning a task and ultimately goals which allows us to have a vision. When the Mar Thoma church began in the U.S, I think it would be safe to assume a purpose was established even if it was not necessarily written out.

It's been almost 60 years since the first Mar Thoma organization was set up and almost 45 years since the first Mar Thoma service was conducted here in the U.S. Next year we will celebrate thirty years of owning and building the first Mar Thoma churches in the U.S. With all that said, has the vision and mission of the church been achieved? I believe we have succeeded on many fronts.

We now have almost 70 parishes within the diocese, many of which have purchased their own property. This allows each parish freedom and flexibility in organizing events and setting up programs without hesitation. This is quite a blessing considering how difficult and inconvenient it is to not have a "home of your own." The first generation of Marthomites deserves incredible credit for this achievement.

The organizations within our parishes have been established to cater to our mixed demographics. Recently, the following question was posed to a group of people - "Which organization of the church do you believe is the strongest and best run?" Unanimously, Sunday school was the answer. There has been a shift in recent years of leadership and the Sunday Schools in many churches now have a core group of leaders with professional teaching and counseling backgrounds. These teachers have openly accepted Christ as their personal Savior which was not always the case in the early years of the church. Years ago, there were teachers more focused on discussing Hindu teachings than Christianity. The organization is often run efficiently with the focus clearly on spiritual growth and bringing children to Christ. Despite this, there is a strong call for the curriculum to be completely revamped to be more relevant and applicable to the next generation of students. More bible studies and relevant doctrinal teachings need to be incorporated into the lessons. It is good to know that the curriculum is currently being overhauled.

The youth fellowship has gone through some major changes as well. Before there were the youth fellowships as we currently know it, there was nothing. Yuvajana Sakhyam existed, but it quickly became an outlet for the youths who had come from India. Due to the cultural differences another channel was needed. The formation of Youth Leagues across the country addressed this issue. Soon Junior Youth Leagues began to creep up in various churches in order to address the needs of the Junior High School students. Everyone was seeking an opportunity for fellowship.

Once the Youth Chaplaincy was established, there was a clear and specific direction for the newly organized Youth Fellowship. The decision to establish the chaplaincy was not only a good choice, but one that literally saved a generation of Marthomites from leaving the church. The few active members between the ages of 30 - 40 can vouch for this. If imitation is the ultimate form of flattery, the Mar Thoma church should be honored since multiple denominations like the Pentecostal and Orthodox churches have attempted to or have established similar positions within their respective churches. As with every organization, the efficacy and strength of the group is usually dependent on the leadership.

Youth Fellowships should aim to model themselves after successful Sunday Schools and maintain consistent, committed and dedicated leaders who serve for decades. During this time they are to be discipling and mentoring the younger members. The idea is to add leaders to the flock, not replace.

The Mar Thoma Qurbana service has also seen its fair share of changes within the Diocese. In most churches, half of the services are in English. In response to the desires of the second generation Marthomites, contemporary music is now incorporated within the service. After initial resistance, most churches make use of instruments such as guitars, drums and pianos. The newly revised service has been shortened in length and Aghens have become more willing to prepare audio and visual presentations to accompany their sermons. The addition of short English services before Malayalam Qurbana services has been positively received as well. An additional offshoot of the Youth Fellowship is the Young Family Fellowship. This has been thriving in some parishes for years and in some it is still in its early stages. Now an annual YFF conference is held every fall.

Another successful achievement which should be credited to the Diocese is the continuing education programs which are available to everyone. The LEAD program, Lay Leader training and multiple dialogues/question answer sessions with the Bishop have enabled us to grow and solidify our foundation within the church. It has also opened up a line of communication that didn't always feel easily accessible.

The establishment of Missions projects in Mexico, India and among the Native Americans has begun to meet the desires of our second generation to serve those in need.

The positive attributes about the Church that were most often mentioned include the fellowship, family atmosphere and relationships that have been built. Families view it as a great blessing when three and sometimes four generations of a household pray and worship together. A grandchild seeing and hearing grandparents openly calling upon the Lord in worship is a lasting memory that will be embraced for the rest of their lives. Lifelong friendships have been forged through the church. It has also been noted that the ability to interact with people of the same cultural background is a significant attraction for young parents because it is not an opportunity that easily presents itself through other forums. This view is shared more with Young Families than the Youth Fellowship because of the desire to expose the children to their



culture. The Diocese and individual churches, as evidenced above, have succeeded on many fronts. As an immigrant community, we have successfully established an institution which should be seen as a blessed inheritance for many generations ahead.

We are blessed with members of different educational and professional backgrounds. We should try to make use of these individuals and their wealth of experiences. Suggestions were made in the past to establish centers and clinics – an idea which did not seem financially feasible. As an alternative, we should make the services of these professionals available to all our members. For example, counselors may be able to help individuals cope with issues of alcohol and substance abuse, sexual abuse and even marital counseling. A professional services directory for the Diocese would be helpful to those seeking assistance. Every year we see more couples divorcing, so setting up ministries for our growing number of single parent families and divorced members is now necessary. Establishing pre-college, parenting, career counseling and even financial management seminars have also been suggested. These are great ways to make use of our talented church members. We should also make use of the youths' desire to serve. Each parish should set up programs to care for their senior citizens. Volunteers should be made available to assist them with snow removal, grocery shopping, chores around their homes, and rides to church and doctor appointments.

Along the way however, some contend we have lost our primary vision. Some may even say we never had a vision, which will be addressed later. With all the successes, there have been some glaring issues which have caused nearly a whole generation of Marthomites from this Diocese to leave the church. It's easy to blame the Diocese, Bishops, Achens, office bearers, committee members and lay members of the church. I contend we as a collective group have brought this upon ourselves. A former Marthomite once told me he was, "never taught how to serve in the Mar Thoma Church." What's even more sad is that this person's father held multiple positions with the Executive Committee of his parish, but yet he was not able to teach how to love and care for others. The missions established by the Diocese begin to address this issue, but this must be dealt with on the parish level. The second generation has a desire to serve those less fortunate. Church budgets do not include a significant amount of money to local mission projects. There is not a designated person to coordinate a local mission for the parish. Many people within the second generation give less to the church because initiatives and programs to assist people in need are nonexistent. The second generation regularly supports many charities outside of the church. If the church were to begin financially supporting local causes, there would be an increase in financial support from the second generation.

Doctrinal issues have been cited as a reason for people to leave the church. We know that these core beliefs are the essence of our church and will never be changed, nor does it have to. Instead, we as a church need to do our best to teach our belief system to our children at a young age. Do not just teach it, but teach why we do not follow the opposing point of view. Too often our youths have entered college without any training and are easily swayed by those who've been brought up not just in the faith, but in their doctrine. They are ready and willing to attack our youngsters and unfortunately our youths do not have a defense system of their faith. This should be done from the pulpit, in Sunday School, prayer meetings and youth fellowship meetings. College should not be the first time we try to teach these things, because by that time it is often too late.

The next issue is a sensitive one but it must be addressed and I hope no offense is taken. As I mentioned earlier, I had sought out input from over 50 people and this was a point that was brought up by each person. The pulpit has been another major reason cited for people leaving the church. Unfortunately, Sunday morning is often the only chance for church members to actually learn and grow in the faith. For the first generation of Marthomites there were different organizational meetings, prayer meetings and bible studies as outlets for growth. However, this is not the case right now for the second generation. Attendance at prayer meetings by this generation is minimal because it is not geared toward them. Sunday mornings now serve as the primary opportunity for growth. The second generation needs sermons in English because this is our first language. Even during Malayalam service, incorporation of English into the sermon is necessary. We need to have some sort of service in English every Sunday, whether it is a contemporary service or Holy Qurbana. We need sermons which inspire us to serve and introspectively question our lives. We want to be taught the basic fundamentals of our doctrine & faith through Bible studies exposing the Word. We want the sermons to capture our attention and make us come back for more the next week. Purely reading from a piece of paper will not and does not work. The sermons must be conversations from the pulpit. The draw of Sundays for our generation will always

be the words shared from the pulpit regardless of the style of worship. An example I've given in the past is if Billy Graham was speaking at a church, it would not matter if the church had charismatic worship or liturgical worship- regardless, the church would be overflowing with people. If we are inspired by these words, we will be in attendance. We know Achens are very well educated and have proper training. We just need Achens to be confident in their language and skilled in their ability to teach and facilitate learning. We need the Synod and Bishops to identify these Achens and send them not just as Youth Chaplains, but as Parish Vicars. The second generation desires to have personal and intimate relationships with their pastors. This can only happen if the Achens are comfortable and confident in their capabilities. They must make a concerted effort to establish relationships. We are always appreciative of the Achen who went out of his way to befriend us. An Achen once asked me, "Why must I go up to them?" I responded, "Because you are the Achen, you are the Shepherd, you are the leader." The Vicar must view his parish as his mission field and immerse himself in our culture and lives. Too often there is an underlying feeling that some of our Achens are just looking forward to going back to India. We want to know that you are fully invested in us. We are not merely a time pass in your ministry. We yearn to establish those lifelong friendships. The Achens who have accomplished this have cemented lifelong bonds. Even though it may have been decades since they returned to India, Church members here would still do anything for them. There is plenty of evidence that this has occurred with several Achens who have served in our Diocese.

The vision of the church has been clearly stated in The Constitution of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, Division 1, Chapter 1, Declaration Part II, and clause 5: *"The ministry of the Church is the gift of the risen Christ. The responsibility to fulfill this ministry, in history, is entrusted with the Church. The Church affirms that the people of God are sent all over the world and that they partake in the salvation work of God, to unite everything in Jesus Christ through the ministry of reconciliation begun in Jesus Christ. The Church receives the power of the Holy Spirit, which enables the church to fulfill the redemptive work of God, who directs and controls the events in history. The Holy Spirit guides the offices of the Ministry, originated [through] divine plan and ordains the people of God to build the Church which is the body of Christ, in order that they may attain maturity, akin to the fullness of Christ, through faith and knowledge in the Son of God and the Unity of the Holy Spirit. The Church believes and proclaims the above basic principles of the Ministry of the Church."*

This is the vision for our revolution. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. It's been in front of our faces this whole time. We have a Bishop, Achens & leaders from ALL generations who are ready and willing to answer the call. Now it is our responsibility to realign every aspect of our church with the original mission and vision. To ensure the future of the Mar Thoma Church, are we willing to revolt and wrestle the church out of the hands of the aggressive minority?



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# Where do we go from here?

## Jubilee Reflection and Vision

Mar Theodosius, Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Dr. Mathew T. Thomas

During the Jubilee year the diocese held several dialogues within the Mar Thoma community in conjunction with the gatherings and celebrations throughout various regions. The inputs gathered from those regions are from people spanning many age groups. The focus of the discussions was to review our growth, evaluate our contemporary challenges and re-examine our vision for the future (at least for the next 25 years). In this article, we summarize the salient findings from the deliberations and informal discussions that took place during the Jubilee get-together and dialogue sessions in various regions, and many presentations made at national conferences. The objective of this article is for the community to take time to collectively appreciate our tremendous progress, tackle our challenges, and plan for our continuing journey with Christ.

### Progress:

In the past twenty-five years our most significant accomplishments include the following:

- The diocese has grown to comprise 68 parishes and 9 congregations, with 70 clergy (of whom 10 are US citizens).
- Ownership of land, churches and associated buildings in several cities.
- The growth in membership to about 8000 families.
- Establishment of the Youth Chaplaincy in 5 regions of the diocese to address the needs of the younger generation, and having the Vicars address the youth's needs in the other regions.
- Publication of a revised and shortened version of the English worship liturgy and inclusion of liturgical songs (for both the praise and worship services and the Holy Qurbana).
- Launching the training program for Altar Boys and Covenant Girls
- Establishing the Young Family Fellowship (YFF) and Senior Citizens Fellowship that have become a vital part of the Diocese.
- Nurturing the growth and productivity of organizations such as the Sunday School, Youth Fellowship, Yuvajena Sakhyam, Mar Thoma Voluntary Evangelists Association (MTVEA), Sevika Sanghom, and Choir in almost all parishes.
- Publications and study materials including the Mar Thoma Messenger, Besorah, digital video discs (DVDs) and books on selected topics.
- Annual leadership conferences, under the auspices of the Lay-Person Education and Development (LEAD) Program.
- Missionary activities in four areas, which include: work in Matamoros, Mexico; work amongst the Native Americans in Oklahoma, New Orleans and Alabama; mission work in the neighborhoods of our parishes in USA, Canada and Europe; and mission assistance to various missionary activities in India.
- Decentralization of the diocesan activities through the establishment of regional initiatives.
- Forum for special professional groups such as the IT Fellowship, and the Association of Physicians and Dentists of the Mar Thoma Church in North America (APDM).
- Establishment of the Diocesan web site with on-line devotions. Very active Facebook page and the use of video conferencing and social media web sites to enhance communication.

There are many more accomplishments to list. We leave it to the reader to think about all that we have accomplished to make us proud and feel blessed. Yet, it is inherently important to humble ourselves and acknowledge that all this was possible because of the grace of God Almighty and through the hands, minds, prayers, and hard work of our past Bishops and many lay people.

### Challenges:

As we bask in past glory, it is imperative that we recognized and confront the contemporary challenges such as:

- Religious disassociation and the silent exodus of church members.
- A survey conducted by the Religion and Public Life Project of the National Council of Christian Churches (NCCC) in USA shows that the religious affiliation of the Protestant community in the US has declined from 63% to 50% over a span of 40 years. At the same time, the proportion of people with no religion (the 'nones') has increased from 5% to 20%. Reportedly, the religious 'disaffiliation' is more among men than women,

university students than school going children, and in those earning a higher income, as well as those living along the Northeast corridor of U.S.A. It has also been reported that the percentage of adults leaving the church is more among the Protestants and Catholics. In keeping with these national surveys (perhaps not to the same extent) our church has also witnessed the silent exodus of our younger generation. The challenge at hand is to find ways to bring people back into the church's fold.

- Preserving timeless traditions while adapting to changes.

It is a challenge to preserve and propagate our Church's unique history and rich traditions while adapting to the necessary changes that are brought about by the society, the culture, the environment, the technology and many other driving forces that demand change.

- Easing tensions between the earlier and newer generations.

It is an established fact that our seniors have worked tirelessly for the church and for developing its infrastructures. However, rather than fighting to retain power and control in administrative matters, it is time for the seniors to use a balanced approach to groom the newer and younger generations to take on the responsibility of running the church. It is also important to note that many of our seniors are aging and are in need of care in their old age, but the newer and younger generations do not appear to have the wherewithal to cater to the needs of seniors.

- Initiating adequate counseling facilities.

The youth and young families in the new age and culture have a lot of questions regarding their faith and the church's practices. They live in a culture that is quite a contrast from the culture in which their parents and forefathers lived. There are not enough people who would listen to them, guide them through their concerns, and help answer their questions without being prejudiced.

- Enhancing communication.

Despite all the advances in technology there is no smooth and effective mechanism for communicating clearly and consistently between the parent church in Thiruvalla, the diocese in New York and a Parish or congregation within the diocese. The language used for our communication is also an issue. While the Mar Thoma Church is an indigenous church in Kerala, India, and the people are fond of their Malayalam language, our challenge is to find ways to communicate effectively and minister to the needs of those that speak and understand different languages.

- Negating identity crises from within and without.

A great amount of effort has to be expended to educate our own community as well as the communities around us about who we are, about why we call ourselves Mar Thoma Christians, and about how we



uphold our identity as the Mar Thoma Church. At one of the events attended by local community members (living in an 18 year old Mar Thoma parish's neighborhood) we learned that the people living around the church did not know that our church was a Christian church.

• Identifying mission in the neighborhood.

Our parishes will remain insulated, isolated and exclusive communities until and unless we identify the real needs in our neighborhood and begin to address those needs in practical and meaningful ways that offer comfort and care to those that we serve.

We could list many more contemporary challenges but urge the readers to identify their own and immediate challenges and find ways to deal with them. To face challenges we will require people with strong faith and courage who are willing to commit themselves and 'take up their crosses' for such causes. Fervent prayer to seek God's guidance will greatly help our community in this regard.

**Vision**

So what is our Vision? How should our church look in another 25 years? There is no simple answer to these questions. In addition, our vision would vary from person to person, and could lead us to diverse and at times opposing views. However, our challenge and success will be determined by our ability to align our vision in such a manner as to stay steadfast on the journey with Christ. The following thoughts were shared during discussions around the diocese.

**1. Regarding our Faith and Loyalty to the Church:**

- a. The members of the Church should develop clarity on which aspects of the faith and practices cannot be changed and on which aspects changes can be accommodated. In other words, the Church should identify and emphasize the areas where there is no room for compromise. This would enable our members to define the boundaries of their belief and religious practices as guided by the Sabha Constitution.
- b. Our members should develop a passion for the church. As Christ is essential for Christian life, church life is essential for the religious community. One's loyalty to the church is an expression of one's love for Christ.

**2. Regarding our Worship:**

- a. Use of English as or primary medium of communication.
  - i. Every parish should attempt to conduct regular English and Malayalam services each week by adjusting the timings to suit their convenience. In 2013, the Diocesan Assembly (that has representatives from all parishes) recognized this need and decided to inform all parishes to have regular English services. This is necessary because the new generation Marthomites in our Diocese are those who are not conversant in Malayalam. Many seldom visit India. Though some of them may understand colloquial Malayalam, many cannot read Malayalam or understand the liturgical language or the modern vocabulary used in the sermons preached in Malayalam. While understanding the need to have the liturgy in Malayalam for the first immigrant community, we cannot ignore the needs of our children who are in this land speaking English both at home and outside the home. Forcing them to learn Malayalam for the sake of worship is not a realistic option. Instead, for at least the next 15 to 20 years the younger and older church members will have to make sacrifices to accommodate Malayalam and English speaking people, and having two Malayalam services and two English services in a month is not the optimal solution.
  - ii. For sermons during both Malayalam and English services.
  - iii. For audio visual aids and multimedia presentations.
  - iv. For announcements, reading of Kalpanas, and for the conduct of special orders of worship and administrative meetings.
- b. For alternate or contemporary worship services the church should encourage the use of musical instruments for praise and worship, and allow youth to participate in the intercessory prayers.
- c. The Church should make the pulpit more powerful. Preparing a sermon and delivering it appropriately is very important in the life of a worshiping community. The members gather together to listen to a Biblical message which relates to their contemporary life situation. They see the preacher (whether the clergy or a lay person) as a person of God with a prophetic voice. Vocally or otherwise, they love to respond to the message with a spirit of dialogue. The church members come to the presence of God for assurance of salvation and renewal of spirit for leading a meaningful Christian life in the world. Therefore, it is necessary to have the messages delivered effectively with life applications that fit the contemporary culture.
- d. The liturgy should be amended to eliminate unnecessary repetitions and to incorporate contemporary prayers that are to be recited by both the congregation and the celebrant.
- e. The worship should include time for the members to reflect on the sermons and for

studying the word of God.

**3. Regarding our Administration:**

- a. The Church should become more relevant, contemporary, and appreciate:
  - i. The current context in which its people live and accommodate the assimilation of different cultures, languages and ideas.
  - ii. The impact of globalization amongst its members.
  - iii. The needs and challenges of the church members living in and outside of Kerala.
- b. Each Diocese should be empowered to respond to the challenges faced by the people under its respective authority.
- c. The Church should never be a static entity. It should always evolve and reform in relationship to the context and time, but it should always keep growing in line with the Kingdom of God. Some significant questions to address in this regard are: Are we the Mar Thoma Church in U.S.A.? Or Are we the Mar Thoma Church of U.S.A.? The new generations of the Marthomites in U.S.A. are willing to open up and understand other members of the same Church in different continents. They envision celebrating diversity but growing in unity because "We believe in one, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church."
- d. The Church should encourage and advance the involvement of lay people. Though our Church has a hierarchical system, the members of the worshiping community are equally important. Clergy and Bishops are required only if there are members who gather together for worship. Participation of the laity is to be ensured at all levels of church life and therefore equipping the members with various leadership roles is important. In addition to having lay involvement within the administrative setup we should consider expanding the lay involvement in our worship services and fellowship meetings.
- e. The Church should develop more clergy from within the Diocese. The ten clergy who are citizens of USA form only 1/6th of the total clergy in the Diocese. This suggests that we need a greater number of local citizens who would go for ordained ministry. There should also be greater interest on the part of the youths and their parents to respond to this need.
- f. The Church should encourage more involvement by youth and women at the parish, regional and diocesan levels: If necessary, the church should introduce reservations/quotas in its governing bodies for the second generation youths (ages 18-35) and for women. The Church is the family of families. Just as each member has a space for love and care in the family setup the local parish should provide the space for everyone. The role of a person in the decision-making bodies is important not for the sake of having a position and authority, but for the Church to minister according to the diverse needs of the worshiping community.
- g. The Church should consider providing equal rights to the women. Participation of women in decision-making bodies and in parish activities would enable the Mar Thoma Church to grow at par with many other church denominations in the U.S.A., Canada and Europe.

**4. Regarding our Mission:**

- a. The Church should place more emphasis on neighborhood ministry. The Church cannot be the Church



in a local area without understanding the concerns and challenges of the neighborhood community and responding to it in Christian love. It is also imperative that the Church teaches its younger members how to serve others. At present, this spirit of service to those around us is ignored and more passion is shown for our communitarian living. As a result, the local church becomes parochial and insulated, much against the spirit of being the Church.

b. The Church should promote mission awareness. The Diocese is sending a group of youth members to the mission fields in India every year. In 2013 we sent 42 delegates to five areas in India: Delhi, Mumbai, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. The purpose of these trips is for the young members is to get an orientation to the variety of mission activities that the Mar Thoma Church carries out in India despite the diversity of the people, their culture, religion, and language. We hope that upon their return from such mission trips the youth would be energized to strengthen the mission activities of the Diocese in their parish's neighborhood, in our Mexico mission field, and in our mission work among the Native Americans.

c. The Church should budget for mission activities. The administrative budget of parishes should include provisions for the mission and ministry to the local community both within and outside the Church.

**5. Regarding Study and Education:**

a. The Church should insist on a continuing education program for its clergy. As leaders of the church the clergy should be driven to learning so that they could efficiently and effectively serve the church.

b. The Church should educate adults and parents that they are the first-line Sunday school teachers for their children. Many of our adolescents who move from the homes to dorms and apartments for university education face a discontinuity of the religious practices that they used to have with their parents at home and in the local parish. c. The Church should study and evaluate if the "Silent Exodus" is a reality; if the younger members are interested in religion; if our traditional organizations are relevant and appealing; if the members have a forum for discussion on a variety of topics; if members are able to apply the knowledge that they have gained from the studies.

d. The Church should develop a strong curriculum for the Sunday school. Catechism is meant for teaching our children the faith and practices of the Church. We need a well-defined curriculum to cover the courses and also need competent teachers to teach the church doctrines systematically and with reverence. The purpose of such education is not simply to dump information, but to lead the children to say "I believe."

e. We should be open to employ modern electronic gadgets as tools for religious instructions.

f. The Church should teach its members on how to defend its Faith and doctrinal issues. Christian education should be seen as a continuous exercise and is needed for people of all ages. The Lay-Person Education and Development (LEAD) classes and leadership camps are meant for continuing education of the Sunday school graduates, so they would become mentors to the young ones and Sunday school teachers.

g. The Church should systematically teach its people about the liturgy, the sacraments, and the religious festivals. Lessons are to be taken to show the Biblical foundation for all our faith and religious practices.

h. The concept of altar boys and covenant girls is a welcome change, but the church has to educate them on how to witness and express their faith.

**6. Regarding our ability to Adapt – Accept – Adjust to the changing times.**

a. The church should be open to change and create new systems and operations which are relevant to the second and third generation.

b. While our parents carried their Bibles to Bible Study classes the youth may be carrying iPhones and iPads to read and study the Bible. This necessitates candidness on the part of the whole parish to understand why things are done differently by the newer generations.

**7. Regarding our Ecumenical involvements:**

a. The Church has to have a genuine openness to people belonging to other cultures and faiths.

b. Members of other faith who join our church should feel that they are welcome in our midst.

c. The church should empower its Christianity by enriching relationships. Just as Jesus sought out the lost, the least, and the last, the church should minister to the poor.

Proverbs 29: 18 states, "Where there is no vision the people perish." The question before us is, "What will the 4th or 5th generation Marthomites in the Diocese of North America and Europe look like?" There is no quick answer to this question, but the answer will depend

on what we envision and work for. Considerable study and dialogue will have to follow because the church is a living organization and its adaptation to change is an ongoing process. The matters listed above are not all inclusive. Readers should form working-groups within their own parishes to review these matters, identify matters that are not listed, select matters that ought to be studied and addressed, and prayerfully proceed in finding solutions and producing results that would set us steadily on The Way with Christ.

**പാഹിമാം പരമേശ്വരൻ**

പരിശുദ്ധ പരമെ  
പാരിൽ ഉടയവനെ  
പാഹിമാം; മൽപ്രിയനെ

പരിഭവം പറഞ്ഞു  
പലകുറി കരഞ്ഞു  
പലവുരി പിണങ്ങി  
പലമാത്ര ഇണങ്ങി  
പാമേയം വെടിഞ്ഞൊരു  
പാപിയാം പമികൻ ഞാൻ  
പാരം പ്രാർത്ഥിച്ചു തവ  
പദപങ്കജം മുത്താൻ

പറയുവാൻ എനിക്ക്  
പലതും ഉകിലും  
പറയുവാൻ ആകാതെ  
പരതുന്നു ഇരുളിൽ

പാരിൽ പൊലിഞ്ഞിടുന്നു  
'പഞ്ചപാവങ്ങൾ' ഏറെ;  
പാങ്ങിൽ തെളിഞ്ഞിടുന്നു  
പടുജന്മങ്ങൾ നീളെ

പഞ്ചഭൂതങ്ങൾ ദുവിൽ  
പരികർഷണത്താൽ;  
പരമന്റെ വരവു  
പറഞ്ഞുറഞ്ഞു പോയി.

പിന്നെയും വരുമെന്ന്  
പുതന്ന വാഗ്ദത്തം;  
പതിവായി സ്മരിച്ചുള്ളിൽ  
പതകൻ ഞാൻ കേഴുന്നു.

പാർത്തലം തന്നിലെന്നും  
പതനാതെ പാർത്തിടാൻ  
പാർത്ഥിവനെ പ്രാർത്ഥിച്ചു  
പാഹിമാം; മൽപ്രിയനെ



K. Shaji  
CMTC, Chicago



# Christ Centered Community

Written & Compiled by:

Suthin John, Anish Mammen, Sushil Mammen, Toby Mathew, Manna Samuel, Alex Thomas

## Introduction

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Acts 2:42-47. This passage in the book of Acts describes the community that the church of the past, present and future is supposed to emulate. This report is a discussion of the past, present, and future of the Mar Thoma Church, established in India many years ago and still continuing today all across the world. This report is written with a focus on the diocese of North America and Europe, as this is the region that has changed exponentially since its inception twenty-five years ago. Every aspect of the church is addressed, evaluated and discussed in this report in order to determine whether we as the body of Christ are truly emulating the aforementioned community of believers portrayed in Acts chapter two.

The conclusions in this report are based upon a variety of sources, one of which is a survey we conducted about various aspects of the Mar Thoma Church. It clarified whether or not people across the diocese are experiencing similar problems and issues in their own Mar Thoma parish. Thus, should there come a time that the church wishes to take action to adapt in accordance with the changing culture, the changes effectuated will be beneficial for a broad spectrum of people and not just for individual churches. There were a total of 201 participants in this survey, most of whom are active members that regularly attend the Holy Qurbana in their respective parishes. The age of participants in this survey ranged from as young as 12 years to as old as 60 years. However, the majority of survey participants are concentrated in the 18-35 age group, which is what our Mar Thoma Church constitutes as the youths. The conclusions in this report are also based on what we, the writers, have seen and experienced throughout the course of our tenure as active members, servers, and leaders in the Mar Thoma Church. This experience in the church has given us reason to make this effort to push for change to our adapting culture, because we want to see the Mar Thoma Church sustain and prosper in this country and society for years to come. This report speaks in depth about a number of topics. These topics include the vision of the past, present and future of the church, the missions and ministries, the worship service itself with a focus on the liturgy and sermon, as well as the role of women in the church. There is also a discussion about the administrative leadership of the church, including etiquette, term length for Achaens in our diocese, as well as the need for a changed mindset of the people in our church leadership and membership. Lastly, we look at our own parish, the Long Island Mar Thoma Church as a case study. We look at efforts that we as a parish have taken to make the church a better place for young children, youths, senior citizens and everyone else. We believe that through the discussion of these various factors as well as tangible suggestions for change, this report can give some insight on how to make the Mar Thoma Church, especially in the diocese of North America and Europe, adapt in the changing landscape of our modern society.

## Vision

The history of The Mar Thoma Church in North America and Europe represents the dreams and aspirations of the faithful members of the Church. Commencing as a small prayer group in 1972, the first approved parish was recognized in New York in 1976. From this humble beginning, the Mar Thoma Church began to grow. As per the decision of the Episcopal Synod, the decision was made to form the "Diocese of North America and Europe" to meet the specific needs of the parishes and its members in this area. As the need to truly ground the church into the reality of the "Western" world was felt, the Diocesan Assembly took steps to permanently house the Diocese. Hence, the Diocesan Assembly purchased property in Richboro, PA, in 1994, and later moved to its current location in Merrick, NY. Since the young diocese needed to be nurtured and developed, the Episcopal Synod appointed the first resident Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias 1Mar Theophilus starting



from October 1993. The Mar Thoma Church was first built to serve the Malayalee constituents. As time progressed, the Church started incorporating changes by blending traditional cultural and Christian values with positive Western influences. The Church began to incorporate accommodations to engage members of the Church by incorporating English services and more English Praise and Worship.

Starting in the early 2000's many youths started to express their concern that the church was not serving them. As a result, these youths started to leave Mar Thoma churches in large numbers. A concern for the vision to be transformed was displayed and a concept of a Christ Centered Community was advocated. A Christ Centered Community consists of a group of people that act as one unit, like a neighborhood or family. It works together, helps each other and guides each member in the right direction. When Christ is placed at the center of this community, we are fulfilling the purpose that God has set apart for us. This in turn imitates the community that was mentioned in Acts 2 which shows how the church should be run. The Mar Thoma vision includes a mission which states: "Lighted to Lighten". This logo consists of many different and significant symbols. Two of the symbols that stood out to us, was the Lamp and the Lotus. According to the church, the lamp represents each member of the Mar Thoma Church as a lighted lamp required to shine the light of salvation to others in their daily life. Matthew 28:19 says "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." As Christians we are called out to spread the gospel and be a light unto others.

And to achieve this vision of "Lighted to Lighten" we as a Church need to develop leaders within the Church to act as a light within the community and spread the good news. The Lotus Flower is a very attractive sacred flower that grows in the swamps and



dirty backwaters of India. It symbolizes the fact that we live in a dirty sinful world. As the lotus flower stands above the dirty water, our life should radiate God's glory and rise above the surroundings, filling it with fragrance as does a lotus. Such is a reminder that we are all to be sacred and holy in our daily lives. Living in America, exposes people to many different sinful desires. We find appeal in earthly materialistic items that take us away from the kingdom of God. Judah Smith expresses in his book, "Jesus Is" that "True happiness cannot be found in anything unless it is first found in God." We as a Church need to provide an atmosphere and an environment that engages our congregation, allows us to recognize our separation from the world, and teaches us how to be a minister of His name. We become the Lotus flower by presenting unto others our separation from the world and who we live for.

Both the Lamp and the Lotus flower fulfill the vision of the Mar Thoma Church. Matthew 5:14-16 states, "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Scripture tells us to let our light shine so that ALL may see the good deeds of the Lord. As a Church, we are entitled to provide an environment where we are taught to be a light in this world and where we can learn about the glory of His works to continue to spread the good news.

### Missions/Ministry

The Mar Thoma Church is known to be a church that places emphasis on the mission ministry, We have active mission fields in Mexico, India and the United States. These mission ministries encourage youths to participate year round. After speaking with many youths and going through the survey we believe that we can make these missions trips more effective by making it more accessible and sharing it in more interactive ways. Some youths have felt that there is a lack of mission awareness at parish level. However, in the Northeast Region we feel that Rev. V.M. Mathew and our respective Vicars have made missions more known and have consistently encouraged youths to become active by attending missions trips. Another concern from many youths is the fact that local missions are lacking. Missions in Mexico and India are always encouraged, but some youths would like our church to be more involved within our own community/neighborhood. It could be something as simple as a mission trip to provide sandwiches and clothing to the poor in New York City or attending a nearby soup kitchen every month. Another solution in making missions trips more visible and attractive to our youths is by inviting youths who have attended mission trips to share their personal experiences during the church service. They can even share their experiences through pictures and videos. Allowing the congregation to witness the fruits of mission trips through pictures and videos will encourage our congregation to provide more funds and support for these trips.

### Worship Service

The worship service is a crucial part of the Mar Thoma Church. The worship service, called the Holy Qurbana, is the one time a week where the whole congregation gathers together for a time of corporate worship. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as in the habit of some, but encouraging one another." God created us as worshipping beings, and we are meant to do that together in community. Based on the survey we conducted and what we have seen and experienced in our years as members of the Mar Thoma Church, we compiled a list of the pros, cons, and potential solutions for the three important components of the worship service: the liturgy, the sermon and the role of women in the worship service.

#### 1. Liturgy

A liturgy is a form or formulary according to which public religious worship is conducted. In our worship service, the liturgy we follow is written by St. James. There is a celebrant, or multiple celebrants, who leads the congregation into a time of call and response. This then leads up to the time of Communion, where the congregation receives the bread and the wine. Some people feel that they receive a lot through this medium of worship. They feel that the liturgy acts as a prayer between the participant and God throughout the service. Moreover, the fact that the whole congregation responds together fosters an environment of unity through this form of corporate worship. Elements of Indian culture and tradition are also incorporated throughout the service, and many people feel that those elements are a good reminder of where the roots of our church are from. There are other sentiments regarding the liturgy that are slightly more critical. Some feel that the weekly routine and repetitious nature of the liturgy causes a loss of significance for the participants. Many participants don't understand what they are saying and are instead simply reciting what

is in the book or on the projection screen. This is especially true for the youths of the church because the liturgy seems fashioned for an older crowd, therefore making it harder for the youths of the church to feel like it is applicable to them. Also, because the liturgy is very structured and is mostly call and response in nature, there is a sentiment that there is not enough prayer included in the service, and that takes away from a personal connection one could make with God during the service. Another very important aspect of the service that makes many people disinterested is the language. Across the country, we see that even people that are born here that have grown up learning Malayalam and speaking it fluently cannot understand and meaningfully participate in the Malayalam service. If the people that speak fluently can neither understand nor prayerfully participate, there is no chance for the growing number of individuals who do not speak or understand Malayalam. There was a recent change made to the liturgy to make it shorter. However, the length of the liturgy isn't what most people have an issue with. More youths, and even most adults based on our conversations with them, would be more engaged in the worship service if there was a less rigid structure in place and they had an opportunity for a more free-flowing style of worship. This could be addressed by including more musical worship and intercessory prayers in the service. If we were to allow the whole congregation participates in a time of intercessory prayer instead of having the celebrant lead the intercessory prayer every time, we would see more prayerful participation in the service. A time during the service where we could have more openness is during the Litany of Intercession, a time where the deacon reads out the same prayers every week and then the congregation responds with, "Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers." If we were to have a member of the congregation lead us in a time of prayer during that time, it would allow for more communication with God and more freedom in our worship service. We could also include a time of individual and corporate reflection and meditation during certain parts of the service, specifically after the sermon and before communion. Too often the words of a sermon go in one ear and out the other, or the significance of partaking in communion is lost to the members of the congregation. Giving this time of reflection would allow the participants to prayerfully and meaningfully reflect and understand the words they are hearing. Another change we could make is to the actual language and content of the liturgy. This is also important because liturgy can be incredibly effective when used in the right way. Unfortunately, many times it feels like the words being said in the liturgy are written for an earlier time period and earlier generations, and therefore gives youths no applicable meaning. If we were to edit the liturgy to apply to present day and age, it would bring about a positive response. Since the liturgy is based on biblical principle, it should be helping us grow in our knowledge of the word. However, most people do not know what passages are being used to create the words of this liturgy. If we were to have a book or PowerPoint that gives scripture annotations to where the words of the liturgy are taken from the bible, it would allow the participants of the service to have a real understanding of the words they are saying each week.



## 2. Sermon

The time allocated for the sermon in our worship service is the one part during which the congregation is being taught. The celebrant, or whoever is supposed to give the message for that day, is serving as a teacher for the congregation, and we think it is important that both celebrants and other people standing at the pulpit take that very seriously. However, it is important to understand that one can teach through a sermon without being completely academic in nature. Instead, we should have sermons based on scripture that address practical issues in life and help us grow in our faith and beliefs. Moreover, teaching is most effective when it is done in a small block of time. This allows the person learning to saturate all of the information given to him and then apply it after leaving the place of learning.

This small block of time, according to the survey should be 20 to 30 minutes max. We can also say from personal experience that the most effective sermons are not the longest ones, but the sermons that enlighten, convict, reawaken, encourage and motivate us to make changes in our daily lives. These effective sermons can be shared in a 20 to 30 minute time span. There are a number of practical steps that we can take to make sermons more engaging in our church. Firstly, preachers need to make strides themselves in terms of learning how to read their audiences and speak with a more dynamic and attention grabbing tone. The congregation pays attention when speakers sound like they care about the subject of the message. Another way speakers can make themselves and their messages more appealing to the congregation is the use of media. A nice Power Point, or video can make all the difference when giving a sermon. In addition, we could have a sermon series. A sermon series would mean that we could have a month or more dedicated to a specific topic. This will enable us to dive deep into a topic and apply it in our daily lives; (i.e. studying Proverbs to learn about wisdom and studying Philippians to learn about joy). Other topics that we can look at in sermon series about practical life include but are not limited to, "Building a Home God's Way", "Convicted about Purity", and "Family Matters." Right now the Mar Thoma Church has themes for each Sunday, of which we have taken notice. However, many of these themes are not applicable or engaging to the congregation (i.e. Diaspora Sunday and Unleavened Bread Sunday). If we changed these, we could see an increase in attendance as well as an increase in spiritual hunger and the desire to know more about Jesus. We could also spark some interest in our congregations if we allow for more people outside the Mar Thoma denomination to speak during service. Allowing more speakers of other denominations and even race to speak will break some of our cultural barriers as well as give us a more well-rounded understanding of the Gospel and how our doctrine is representative of the Gospel.

## 3. Women in the Church

In the survey we conducted, over half the responses that we received were from women. However, when we look at the Mar Thoma Church, we see a church completely dominated by men. For our purposes, we are not focusing on the idea of women in the clergy, but rather women playing an active role in the worship service. In the last 26 years of our parish, we have never once had a female deacon. But this is not because women do not want this role, rather it's because there seems to be some kind of unspoken and unwritten rule against women serving on the altar in the church. Even the new position of "covenant girl" instituted in the Mar Thoma Church does not allow these women to go on the altar. Instead, these girls are asked to greet people prior to the start of worship service, make sure the sanctuary is clean and to act basically as ushers for the worship service. Is it a cultural prejudice or is there biblical relevance to not having more opportunities for women to serve in our church? We need to let women play more of an active role in our church, especially in regards to being on the altar and deaconing. In the Mar Thoma Church, the deacon also plays an instrumental role by holding the censer and being behind the Madbaha which is a holy place that represents God the Father, Jesus in divine nature, human nature, and the Holy Spirit, which has twelve bells representing the twelve disciples. Out of that comes incense, representing our prayers going up to God- all while standing on what we symbolize as Holy ground. Why should only men be given the privilege to experience the presence and magnitude of God's power in this way? There is no reason culture should deny women the opportunity to serve and become deacons. Having women take up these roles would be reflective of women's increasing role in society and in our community.

## Administration

### 1. Achen's Ministry

This is a topic that many members of the Mar Thoma Church feel very strongly about. In the words of a concerned member of the church, "I believe the current model of 3 to 4 year limits for an Achen's term leads to parish and organizational instability. Can an Achen truly establish relationships with his constituents and enact long-lasting reforms or prac-

tices in the worship and functioning of a church if he only has 3 years to do it? If an Achen is effective and beloved by the congregation or the groups he works with, does it make sense to pull him away in a fixed amount of time? The analogy is clear: Take a shepherd away from his sheep and bring in a new shepherd. The sheep are forced to adjust to new commands and re-familiarization to new leadership. The sheep need time to adjust. By the time they've adjusted, here comes another new shepherd." An Achen's position within a Parish is one of the most important roles within the church. The Achen is not only required to lead the Church administratively, but to also develop meaningful relationships with the members of the church as a counselor and mentor. It's important for the members of the church to know they have someone who they can trust and build a true relationship with. The trust built from this strong relationship would allow members of the church to openly share their struggles and hardships. It makes sense to extend the term to 5 years: The Diocese provides funding for a 30-month religious Visa that allows an Achen to serve in America. The Diocese then spends more money to buy another 30-month term religious visa but only 6 months out of this Visa are used to complete the 36-month (3-year) term. Why not extend the term to the remaining 24 months and have an Achen serve for a full 5 years? This would be a smarter use of funding and would give Achens more opportunities to foster positive growth in their parishes. Many issues regarding terms are over financial indifferences, but should money be a restraint from the amount of people who could be touched by the presence of God delivered from a relationship with an Achen.

"Jacob was a cheater, Peter had a temper, David had an affair, Noah got drunk, and Jonah ran from God, Paul was a murderer, Gideon was insecure, Miriam was a gossip, Martha was a worrier, Thomas was a doubter, Sara was impatient, Elijah was moody, Moses stuttered, Abraham was old and Lazarus was dead. God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called!" We believe everyone is called for a specific role in God's Kingdom. Everyone is blessed with many different talents that could be used for several specific areas of ministry. Each Achen specializes in a different area. We believe that these specialties should be taken into consideration when placing an Achen in a specific area. (i.e. don't place an Achen that specializes in missions as the head of a parish.) Achen selection is very important when being sent to the United States. The youths and families of America consist of a wide span of cultures and living environment which require good leadership and direction to lead a church. The Achen needs to be able to come and direct the church with passion and a vision to spread the Glory of God. Achens who are coming to America for the first time are unaware of the culture and the hardships that people face on a daily basis. A major concern of the youths in churches across the United States is to have a Youth Chaplain in different regions. This is crucial because a youth chaplain is very important to the initial development of a strong youth fellowship base in our parishes. Money should not be the determining factor in what churches a youth chaplain is very involved in. That should be determined by the need



for the chaplain's ministry in that Parish. Areas of the West, Canada and South-Eastern Region are in need of this leadership for their youth to stir them in the right direction and show leadership within the church for upcoming generations. This could aid in the interest for younger youths to rise and be future leaders of our church. Bishops and Thirumeni's should be more involved in general church activities to serve as role models and show that they are also part of the body of Christ that we all share in and not so far above us. God views all humans the same because we all fall short of his glory, grace and mercy, and it would be helpful to create a more approachable relationship between Bishops and youths or parishioners.

## 2. Etiquette

It is sad that this is a topic that must be discussed in this report; However, based on our conversations with others and our own personal experience, having proper etiquette is a lost art in our church today. Etiquette is a word that is meant to describe the way that individuals conduct themselves in their interactions. For our purposes, we are going to look at the adults of the church as well as the leadership of the church. We reflect a Christ Centered Community when we help one another and serve one another regardless of social status.

## 3. Funding

The church will crumble if there is no funding from its members. Currently, most of the expenses are being paid by adults ages 40 and up. They are the ones who have taken membership in the church, monthly subscriptions and donating to causes. There are many families that come to the church and have not taken up membership which helps pay for the church services and expenses. What is the cause of this? After speaking with many young families about this issue several reasons were pointed out. Some of which include the fact that these families and members do not come to the church often, they are still under membership of their parents, and there is nothing about the church that motivates these non-members to contribute their money to it. Let's highlight the last reason that is listed. In a growing church, its members give funds freely without paying much attention to the amount given. The problem with our church is that members are too concerned about how much they give. One reason why this is occurring is because the church is not meeting the needs of the people. As addressed in the previous sections, the worship service, the sermons, and the vision are not in line with what the people are looking for. There is no attraction. And based on it's vision and mission, the church should be doing as much as it can to create an atmosphere where people are able to freely worship.

## 4. Redeemer

Presbyterian Church, located in New York City, is a traditional church similar to ours. It runs services, sings traditional hymns, and has long sermons. However, this church is growing exponentially. Why? Because it sticks to the vision of the church and its members are able to apply the church's teaching to their daily lives. It runs projects that support it's surrounding communities and focuses on external growth. When services are catered towards the members, funds are provided instantly because the church is giving their members what they need and what they want. Other problems that have been witnessed in the Mar Thoma Church are that much of its funds are being used to repair the church building itself. Most of our general body matters deal with repair. If our money is going towards the structure of the church and not its members then why should anyone continue to provide funds for the church? Yes, organizations are being provided with budgets and events are being held throughout the year. But that is not the primary focus of where the church funds are going towards. To attract young families and youths to donate to the church and attain membership, we need to find ways in which we can cater more towards these generations. The church is also doing a poor job in notifying its members on where all the money is going. Again, this all goes back to creating an environment where people can worship freely. As mentioned previously, we need to establish a Christ Centered Community within our church. An established vision is what is going to drive the growth of our church. When people enjoy the atmosphere that is established, the money will follow. We won't second guess where our donations are going and what they are being used for because we are able to see the results. When we freely give to God, we freely receive from God.

## 5. Change in Mindset/Culture

As we have become more involved within our church ministry, we have learned that we cannot change the mindset or hearts of the people because only God can do that. But we as a church need to be able to accept people for who they are and assist them in any of the struggles they are experiencing. We come to church because we are sinners and

we need Jesus in our lives. Church is not a museum for Saints but a hospital for the sinners and a hospice for healing. Many people within the church put themselves on a pedestal, displaying judgment and criticism which ostracizes many people away from the church. Romans 3:23 states "for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." We as the body of Christ, should come together to love and provide support for all just as Jesus did. Let us not judge those that are struggling with sin, but embrace them and work together to sharpen one another as described in Proverbs 27:17. A major concern which has been made evident to us is determining how to provide for members of the church that are struggling with substance abuse, marriage problems, addictions, etc. We live in a very diverse world where many issues occur, but not enough is provided for help. As Malayalees, we have a mindset of being separate from these issues of the world like divorce and sexual and substance abuse. Creating more opportunities for counseling individuals, couples, and families should be a major concern for all generations of our church. We should have a counseling center within our church, staffed by volunteer mental health professionals who can provide support and help to those experiencing difficulties. Professionals that have some degree of education in this field should conduct such counseling. Having licensed professionals work in this area, will allow for more accountability and trust to keep conversations private within the practice.

## Conclusion

The Mar Thoma Church is an institution that has existed in North America and Europe for about 40 years now, and has had an official diocese in the area for the past 25 years. While there are still currently many members actively participating in the church, we believe that the church is currently at a crossroad. If we as a church choose to take the necessary steps to adapt to the changing landscape of our society and culture, we have the chance to succeed and flourish in today's day and age. However, if we choose to be idle and refuse to make changes to our church, then we will surely see a decline in membership and an eventual absolvment of the Mar Thoma Church as a whole. Throughout this entire report, we have attempted to outline and describe the problems that our church is currently facing, and the potential solutions that could rectify these issues. But, it is crucial that the leadership of the Mar Thoma Church acts upon these solutions, otherwise the words of this report will remain empty. Much like how the bible teaches us that faith without works is dead, words without works are also dead. If strong, visionary action is not taken soon, we will see our church slowly falter and crumble in the coming years. We believe that there is a future for our church, one where we see our family based Indian society come together to worship our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In order to do this, we must choose to stand together, unite and strive to become a beacon of light for the rest of the world. We must look to adapt our traditional Indian ways to the Western culture that we have fused with as citizens of this country. We must set up a plan and infrastructure that will allow the eldest generations and the youngest generations to work together and worship God together. We must become a Christ Centered Community.





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# India Mission Trip: Karnataka

Mr. George Thomas

An exciting journey into the mission activities of the Mar Thoma Church in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh began for a dozen student volunteers from the Mar Thoma Churches of the Diocese of North America and Europe on August 1, 2013. Thanks to the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius and members of the Diocesan Council for including India Mission Trips as one of the events for the Diocesan Silver Jubilee Celebrations.

Karnataka Andhra India Mission Trip Team (IMTT) had thirteen members, eleven from St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church, one from Long Island Mar Thoma Church and a guest student: Members did not want to be just visitors and spectators of the mission fields. Preparations for the trip began months in advance. Arrangements were made for a mass marriage, announcements were made for eligible couples, purchased dairy cows, practiced local language songs, scheduled our daily programs etc. IMTT members considered this trip to be a blessing and a once in a life time experience. Funds for most of the projects were raised by the IMTT members from various sources like bake sale, VBS children's contributions and individual donations.

We realized a mission trip never has an ending; to continue the spirit of the mission, we as a team have launched the 'SALT' program. What is 'SALT'?

## Mission Field Projects:

IMTT members visited Devenahalli, Siddlaghatta, Jangamkote, Vijayapura, Melur, Hoskote, Chickballapur, Mushtoor, Bijjawara and other mission fields. Meeting new believers, playing games with the children, watching them show off their various talents, singing and worshipping with them was an experience that can never be duplicated. IMTT members sang Kannada, Malayalam, English and Telugu songs which the kids loved. We had a special Telugu song, which became a hit with the local kids.

## IMTT & Hostel Kids - Devenahalli Mission



Mission team considered it a privilege to be with these simple hearted believers, it was a blessing that cannot be explained. The mutual feeling of a common bond between the team members and the local new believers was amazing in spite of language/cultural barriers. Almost every day it was a struggle for me to get IMTT members back into the bus on time; these local kids had a magnetic effect on our youth members. Every day we were in the mission fields past 8:00PM interacting and dancing with the kids. The one day Safari trip that we sponsored to Bannerghatta about 2 hours from Devenahalli was the best memory we could ever leave back for these kids. We will never forget the dance, claps, songs, in the safari and the high level excitement in the bus. We arranged competitive games for the hostel kids and had surprise gifts for winners.



## Opportunity School:

The one day visit to the Opportunity school run by Mar Thoma Church at Krishnarajapuram, Bangalore made us realize how a very slight variation in a person's brain cells can make him/her mentally challenged and spin a life upside down. Most of us take our eyes, ears, limbs and mental stability for granted. These children have no idea as to what they are missing in life; we thank God for the life He has given us. The sacrifice and dedication the staff members put into taking care of these challenged children moved our hearts. We saw young adults being hand fed by staff members, some of these kids are 18 -20 years old, but their brain stopped developing after 3 or 4 years, some of them even need help with taking care of their personal basics like going to bathroom etc... IMTT sponsored a special lunch for the children and joined them all for lunch after a dance and talent show performance by the children. Opportunity School Children and Staff with IMTT Members

## Mass Marriage:



The biggest excitement for IMTT members on this mission trip was the involvement and participation in the mass marriage. Mass marriage for six couples was arranged for August 8, 2013. Due to issues beyond our control only three marriages could be solemnized on that day. One marriage was put on hold because the groom whom we all had met 2 days prior ran away on the wedding day. A second couple had to get married two weeks before our arrival and the third was forced to wait till October 2013, a standard policy in the mission fields not to rush a baptism for the sake of marriage, groom needs to be baptized and admitted into the Mar Thoma Church before the wedding. We met this yet to be married couple at Devenahalli Church, funds for the two marriages that are on hold are entrusted with the local Vicars. We are grateful to



God for allowing us to be physically present at the Mass Marriage and participate in the ceremony. It was a blessing and a feeling of accomplishment that filled each one of us with mixed emotions.

Marriage was conducted in Kannada by Rev. A.C.Kurian, Rev. Philip Kuruvilla & Rev. James John simultaneously according to Mar Thoma liturgy, a very rare sight and an image that is hard for us to forget. IMTT members sang a Kannada wedding song for the new couples that surprised everybody. Reception followed the marriage ceremony; food was served on plantain leaves for about five hundred guests. We want to thank God for allowing us to bring these couples together, give them a source of income and a livelihood for their new family life. We wish each one of them a long happily married Christian life.

After the marriage reception ceremony IMTT members whisked away all the four couples (3 + 1 that got married two weeks prior) for a joy ride in our mini bus to a nearby farm along with Rev. A.C.Kurian & Rev. James John. We were thrilled to see the excitement and surprise on the faces of these new couples on learning that they were getting dairy cows as their wedding gifts. Each couple had to pick a number from a lot, based on the number picked, they were allowed to choose their cow. It was fun to see these brand new husbands and wives making the first joint decision of their life – black cow, brown cow, cow with a calf etc....

Wedding Gifts



**Blind School:**

IMTT members visited 'Snehadeep', a blind school in Bangalore managed and run by two blind men Mr. Paul Muddha & Mr. K.G. Mohan, a visit that opened up our eyes to the world of the blind. We were touched to see 40 blind youths with bright smiles sing and dance with hope in their dark world, a humbling and shocking experience to each one of us. When we asked Paul & Mohan why they took upon this big responsibility? They replied 'People with eyes are blind to our needs – nobody will ever understand a blind man's world.' He challenged us you close our eyes for just one hour and go about our daily chores, a statement that hit us hard. IMTT members donated a camera and a laptop to be used for the Blind School's administrative needs.

**Blind School Activities**

**SALT (Skip-A- Lunch-Testimony)**

IMTT members did not want the conclusion of the mission trip to be the end of our passion for the missions. We realized God put us all together as a team for a bigger purpose.



Rev. P.V. Philip warned us: 'If you are not a Missionary – you are a Mission field', every Christian has been commanded by the Lord to be a Missionary. We met two girls Tulasi & Durga, 4 and 5 years old, whose father deserted the family few years ago. Mother got into bad company, became an alcoholic and eloped with another man abandoning the two girls. Our hearts sank at their innocent smiles – no fault of theirs, they have nobody.

We decided to support these two kids for all their needs. We have decided to skip a lunch once a month and save that money as a Testimony to help these two children keep smiling and provide them for their basic necessities like food, clothing and school needs. 'Skip A Lunch-Testimony' or 'SALT' is a simple thought put to action. We seek your prayers and are praying that God will help us expand this program to brighten more lives in the future.

**Mydukur Mission Andhra Pradesh:**

Our trip to Andhra Pradesh was cancelled due to disturbances in that state. All the roads to Mydukur were closed for traffic. We were fortunate to meet The Diocesan Bishop of Chennai- Bangalore, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philexinos at Chickaballapur instead of Andhra as originally planned. Funds to buy six goats and 4 sewing machines for new couples in Mydukur mission was transferred to the mission account since we could not go to Andhra.

**Conclusion:**

This Mission trip was very personal to me; I was born and brought up in Devenahalli, a village where there were no Christians. As a seminary student at South India Bible School (SIBS) Kolar, my father, Mr. T.E.Thomas visited Devenahalli to preach the gospel where he was beaten, insulted and told never again to return back – that day he made a promise to God that he is not afraid and will return with God's message. In the year 1970 my father, along with his friend C.A.Thomas returned to Devenahalli and started God's ministry by preaching and practicing Christian love amongst the local people. The approach was very simple, 'practice before you preach'. Many social programs and a nursery school headed by my mother, Grace Thomas was started which provided opportunities to inter-act and communicate with the local people. It was my desire for the team to meet my dad, God's plans were different; my dad was called to the Lord in April, three months before our visit. Members of the team were fortunate to witness the results of the mission work started in the 1970's. Seven thousand lights, a big number are lit in this area, thanks to prayers, dedication and commitment of pioneer missionaries and the Mar Thoma Church.

IMTT members identified the needs for a new church in Doddaballapur and a house for a new believer family in Sadahalli village for St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church to consider as their silver jubilee mission project if approved by the General body.

God has transformed this land; we enjoyed spending time with these simple folks and did not want to leave. This mission trip has etched memories in each one of us that will last a lifetime. We want to thank God for allowing us to see His kingdom grow and for giving each one of us a Vision of the Mission, to shape our thoughts for a well-defined 'Vision for the Mission'. God Bless.

George Thomas (Georgie4christ@gmail.com)



# Who's Going to Make the First Move?

Alabama Mission: November 7-10, 2013  
George Mathew, St. Thomas MTC Delaware Valley



I have always made note of trips planned by our diocese and encouraged others to go, but I never seemed to find time to attend myself. This time however, I had no excuse. "Someone needs our help, can you come?" This trip was not listed on the calendar. I didn't know who this someone was. The person posing the question was OC Abraham, mission's coordinator for our diocese's interaction with Native Americans across the United States. I have had the chance to spend time with OC Uncle and Nirmala Aunty after moving to Delaware in 2012, hearing their first-person accounts of our mission fields. If he was asking for help, I knew it was sincerely needed. The second push came from my friend Sam Mathew, a fellow member of St. Thomas MTC of Delaware Valley. Sam had been part of the original team kicked-off the first session of VBS organized by volunteers from the Marthoma church and local (Mt. Vernon, Alabama), Native American community twelve years ago. Later on I learned that Sam personally knew the woman we'd be helping from his previous trips, but it was his enthusiasm in joining OC Uncle on this trip to help that finally convinced me to participate. Driving from the airport to the home we'd be working at, we were briefed. Our goal was to help renovate an old trailer home (the normal standard of living for most in Mt. Vernon, Alabama) for a woman, "Miss June", who had lost her previous trailer in a fire. But on meeting her, I would have never known that she had met with such misfortune. What struck me the most was the warm greeting she gave not just me, a stranger, but her instant recognition of Sam along with his genuine response of "Hello Miss June!". It was like he was back in VBS after 12 years. She was so happy to see us, and we hadn't done anything yet! I was told of how supportive and helpful she has been during VBS. She would regularly open her home for Marthoma volunteers to sleep in regardless of limited space. And after spending only a few days with her, I knew it was all true. And though she never asked for our help, we were now there and she was nothing but grateful.

As day two began, I started to pay more attention to who our team was actually comprised of. The Marthomites were OC Uncle, his wife Nirmala Aunty, Sam, Levan Thomas (St. Thomas MTC, NY), and myself. Working alongside us were June, and her husband, Kenny. Kenny was a painter by profession, but proved to be an all-around handyman and gentleman. Lastly, there was arguably the most lighthearted of our group, my now friend, "Tommy Uncle". His most obvious contribution was his van, filled with seemingly every tool imaginable (and an endless supply of Famous Amos cookies!) which he had driven from his home in Baton Rouge, LA, nearly three hours away. More interesting to me was how he came to join us. A Catholic, Navy veteran, and retiree of the postal service, Tommy Uncle had met and worked with OC Uncle during several Marthoma mission efforts in Louisiana. Only later did I come to know that he received the same, seemingly obscure call from OC Uncle for this trip; "Someone needs our help, can you come?" In his own words, this call was not just a request, but an opportunity to share the love of Jesus that is so freely given to us. I have no idea how we wouldn't have done any work without his tools, or without his personality.

On Saturday, we were joined by youths from the Atlanta MTC who had driven six hours for a leadership session with some of the local Native American youths from the local Methodist Church. I myself have made similar drives to serve my own youth group, but to make a trip like that for someone else's church? It didn't make sense. But after some time with them it clicked -- this was also their church. These young adults were once their VBS students. Now, they were shaping them into young leaders so six hour drives would

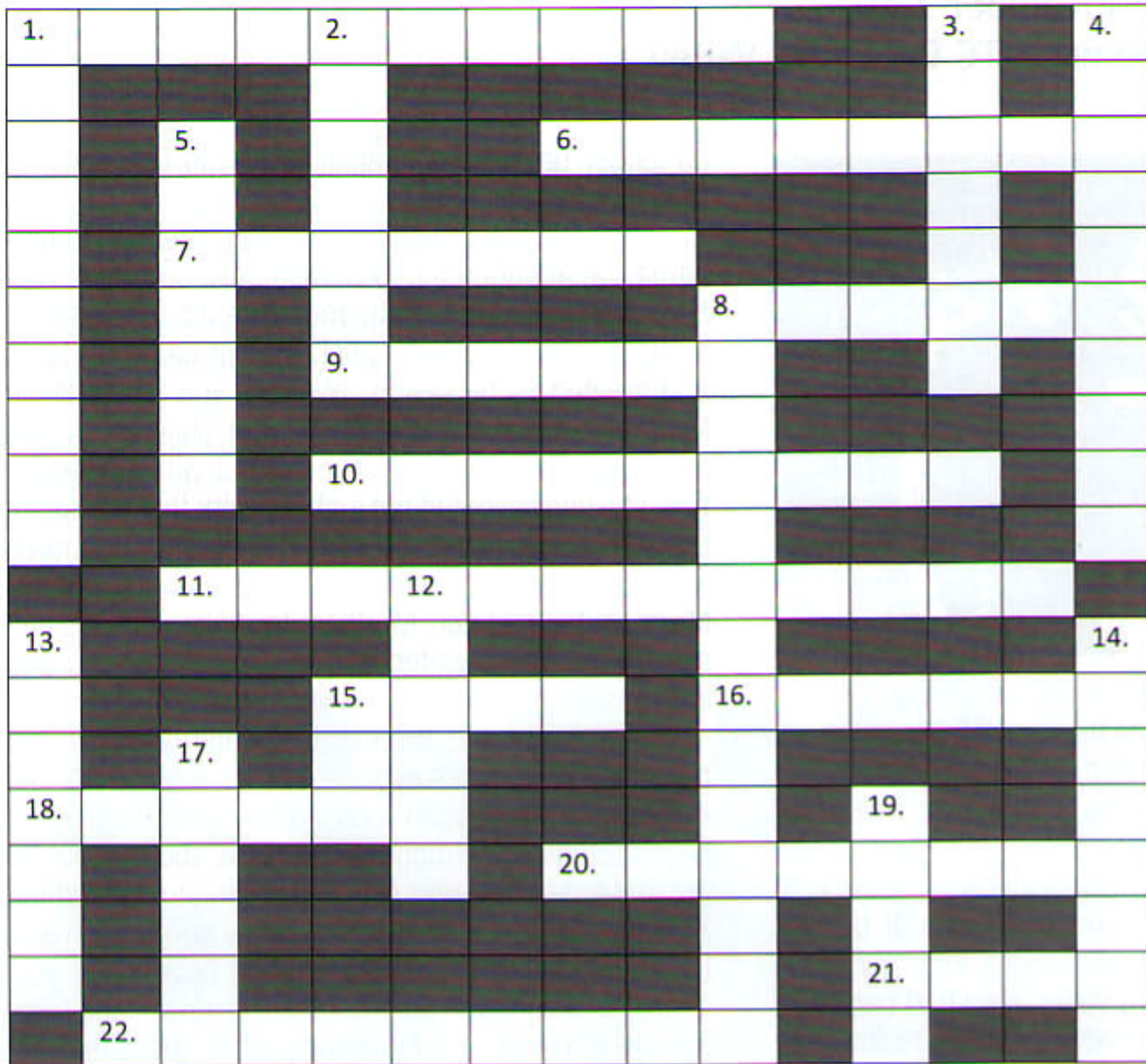
no longer be needed. "Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

For the last day of our long weekend in Alabama, we attended the local Methodist service. It was here that I heard one of the most beautiful statements made during my trip. A parish mother came up to us and greeted us by saying, "We love you for what the Marthoma Church has done for our children." I had never met this woman in my life, but without hesitation, she had validated not just our work that weekend, but the impact of our church. The Marthoma church was no longer just my church. It was a church for Marthomites and non-Marthomites alike. This woman saw us as Marthomites and as Christians, and she loved us for it.

Being the weekend of Veteran's Day, the pastor drew from his experiences as a Marine to set the stage for a sermon focused on Agape love. I had heard countless sermons and lessons about it, but for the first time, I felt I was really beginning to understand it. John 15:12-13 says, "This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (NLT). Unfortunately, we often find ourselves waiting for others to do something for us before we even consider helping them. What happens when one day we are the ones in need of help? Will others be willing to lay down what they have for us? Whether it be our money, our time, or our lives, are we waiting to see if someone else will make the first move? What if God said he would love us only if we loved him first? Who's going to make the first move? No conditions. No limits- agape love. By the end of our trip, we had remodeled a bathroom, replaced a set of kitchen cabinets and counter tops, and installed a new wood floor. Though we left the remaining work in the capable hands of June and Kenny (flooring for two small bedrooms, plumbing, painting, etc.), I couldn't help but feel that we hadn't finished our task. But as Sam and I traveled back to Philadelphia, I started to view it differently. We had helped to give them back a home. We had helped to bring joy back to their faces. As I reflected more, I understood that they were not the only ones that had gained from our visit. I had new friends, a greater understanding of the Marthoma Church's impact in the US, and a first hand encounter with what agape love really looked like. I have written this account because I strongly believe that our words have weight. If we do not share what we have seen, heard, or experienced, we are forsaking an opportunity to encourage and inspire others to do the same. Missions work doesn't have to be done somewhere far away, but stepping out of one's comfort zone is almost always eye-opening. I also better understand that our actions convey what words cannot. Supporting the church and being the church are no longer the same in my eyes. There are emotions and a level of understanding that can only be found while in the presence of others. God's love may be a mystery, but it is not out of reach.



# Bible Crossword Puzzle



**Chapters:**

**NIV Bible- I Kings - Chapters 1-22**

Deadline for Answers: February 15, 2014

Mail to:

**Philip Manuel**, 23 Lake Street, Billerica, MA 01821

Phone: 978-663-3203

By Email (pdf format only): [Varampath23@msn.com](mailto: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 October 2013

- |                     |                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Santha Varghese     | Ascension MTC, PA        |
| Hemant Antony       | Ascension MTC, PA        |
| Manju Mathews       | Ascension MTC, PA        |
| Susan Alex, Dr.     | Atlanta MTC, JK-TN       |
| Paul Isaac          | Carmel MTC, Boston       |
| Lysamma Mathew      | Christos MTC, PA         |
| Sneha Mathew        | Detroit MTC              |
| Saramma Abraham     | Detroit MTC, MI          |
| Saramma Chacko      | Ephany MTC, NY           |
| Ardra Giboy         | Hermon MTC, UK           |
| Mrs. Jejo Joji      | Hermon MTC, UK           |
| Aleyamma Chacko     | Horeb MTC, LA            |
| Thankamma Paul      | Horeb MTC, LA            |
| Mrs. Jency J Philip | MTC Dallas Farmers Br    |
| Aleyamma Mathews    | MTC Dallas Farmers Br    |
| Ajitha George       | MTC Dallas Farmers Br    |
| Mariamanna Daniel   | MTC Dallas Farmers Br    |
| Sicily Skariah      | MTC Dallas Farmers Br    |
| Shaji David         | MTC Dallas Farmers Br    |
| Sheila Chandy       | MTC San Francisco        |
| Aleyamma Mathai     | New Jersey MTC, Randolph |
| Elsy Jacob          | New Jersey MTC, Randolph |
| Allen Jiji          | Phoenix MTC, AZ          |
| Alvin Jiji          | Phoenix MTC, AZ          |
| Hannah Daniel       | Salem MTC, NY            |
| Omana Titus         | Seattle MTC, WA          |
| Mariamanna John     | Sehion MTC, Dallas       |
| Jovesh M Zachariah  | Sehion MTC, Dallas       |
| Marykutty Thomas    | South Florida MTC        |
| George Thomas       | South Florida MTC        |
| Annamma John        | St. Luke MTC, FL         |
| Sheela Thomas       | St. Luke MTC, FL         |
| Maria Stephen       | St. Mark's MTC, FL       |
| Annamma P John      | St. Peter's, NJ          |
| Thomas George       | St. Peter's, NJ          |
| Annamma Varughese   | St. Peter's, NJ          |
| Aleyamma M Thomas   | St. Peter's, NJ          |
| Aleyamma George     | St. Peter's, NJ          |
| Sosamma Varghese    | St. Peter's, NJ          |
| Mary Simon          | St. Peter's, NJ          |
| Elsie George        | St. Peter's, NJ          |
| Dilin Prince Oommen | St. Thomas MTC Delaware  |
| Reji Mathew         | Staten Island MTC, NY    |
| Omana Rajee         | Staten Island MTC, NY    |
| Kunjamma Thomas     | Trinity MTC, Houston     |
| Achamma Chacko      | Trinity MTC, Houston     |
| Gracy P Vattakunnel | Trinity MTC, Houston     |
| Mariamanna K Thomas | Trinity MTC, Houston     |

**ACROSS**

01. The man of God \_\_\_\_ with the Lord and the king's hand was restored.
06. It was at Horeb, the mountain of God, that the Lord made a \_\_\_\_ with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.
07. Solomon asked of the Lord " So give your \_\_\_\_ a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.
08. The Lord gave Solomon \_\_\_\_ just as He had promised him.
09. The power of the Lord came upon \_\_\_\_ and he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.
10. Baasha, his son Elah and their whole family was killed because they provoked God's anger by worshipping \_\_\_\_ idols.
11. \_\_\_\_ by that food, Elijah travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb.
15. After the great and powerful \_\_\_\_\_, earthquake and fire, Elijah heard a gentle whisper.
16. Elijah prayed, " \_\_\_\_ me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you are turning their hearts back again"
18. \_\_\_\_ was the name of the son of Rehoboam as well as Jeroboam.
20. Solomon made "the golden altar; the golden table on which was the bread of the \_\_\_\_\_".
21. Elijah told \_\_\_\_, "I have not made trouble for Israel, but you and your father's family have".
22. The Lord said to Solomon, " If you walk before me in \_\_\_\_ of heart and uprightness, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever.

**DOWN**

- 02."01. The Lord said to Solomon, "I will live among the \_\_\_\_ and will not abandon my people Israel".
02. The Lord said to Elijah, " Yet I \_\_\_\_ seven thousand in Israel - all whose knees have not bowed to Baal".
03. Elijah cried to the Lord," O Lord my God, have you brought \_\_\_\_ also upon this widow I am staying with".
04. The Lord had told the Israelites" You must not \_\_\_\_\_ with the nations around you as they will surely turn your hearts after their gods."
05. All Israel saw that Solomon had wisdom from God to administer \_\_\_\_\_.
08. Solomon prayed, "O Lord, God of Israel... you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue \_\_\_\_\_ in your way."
12. Elijah went up to \_\_\_\_, the son of Shaphat, and threw his cloak around him.
13. \_\_\_\_ was named after Shemer, the former owner of the hill on which the city stood.
14. Solomon spoke three thousand \_\_\_\_ and his songs numbered a thousand and five.
17. The Lord appeared to Solomon the first time at \_\_\_\_\_.
19. Ahaziah walked in the ways of his father and mother and in the ways of Jeroboam son \_\_\_\_\_.



# Episcopal Visits

## Edinburgh Congregation, Scotland



His Lordship, Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa, the Diocesan Bishop of the Diocese of North America and Europe, visited the Edinburgh Mar Thoma Congregation, Scotland on Sunday, August 25, 2013. The Congregation organized Holy Communion Service at the Holy Cross Church, Quality Street, Davidson's Mains, Edinburgh. Thirumeni led the celebration of the Holy Communion assisted by Vicar Rev. Sam John. Thirumeni also delivered the devotional message during the Holy Communion service. During the service 6 boys and 2 girls were dedicated and had their first Holy Communion and Thirumeni presented Holy Bible to the first communicants. Around 100 members were present for the Holy Communion service including members from Aberdeen Mar Thoma Prayer Fellowship and Newcastle Mar Thoma Prayer Fellowship. After the Holy Communion service, Thirumeni addressed the members of the congregation and elaborated the various projects of the Diocese, especially about the Mexico Mission, Diocese Jubilee Celebration and the Family Conference in UK and Europe. Rev. Sam John expressed the gratitude to Thirumeni for leading Holy Communion service, Episcopal visit and support for the Congregation. There was a fellowship dinner arranged after the service, hosted by the first communicant's families. Rev. Sam John Vicar, Mr. Biju Thomas, Secretary

## St. Mathews MTC, Toronto



The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa visited the St. Mathews Mar Thoma Church, Toronto, Canada on Sunday, Aug 4, 2013. After attending the National Youth Fellowship Conference at University of Toronto from Aug 1-4, Thirumeni conducted the Holy Communion service at the parish. Thirumeni thanked all the parish members for their support for the youth fellowship conference and at the same time congratulated the youth members for their hard work. As we are celebrating the Diocesan Silver Jubilee, Thirumeni highlighted the need for starting a project on a regional basis in Canada. After conducting the Holy Communion service, Thirumeni blessed the foundation stone of the parsonage to be built in the parish property. The parish general body approved the proposed plan and plan is to accomplish the task by the end of this year. All the parish members attended the foundation stone blessing ceremony. In order to share this joyful occasion, the parish arranged barbeque for all the members after the ceremony. The parish as a whole expressed their sincere gratitude to Thirumeni for his support and guidance to the parish. Rev. Varghese K. Abraham, Vicar

## St. Luke's Mar Thoma Church, FL



Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius visited the St. Luke's Mar Thoma Parish from November 15 to 17, 2013 and stayed with the Vicar Rev. Binu Thomas. On Saturday there was a session in the Church to meet the covenant girls and to give them necessary instructions. It was followed by a Sandhya Namaskaram. The Diocesan Bishop reminded the members of the parish regarding the significance of the Jubilee year and discussed with them the need for commitment to take positive steps for the growth of the parish and Church in USA. On Sunday November 17, 2013 the parish observed the family Sunday and there was a special service for it. The Diocesan Bishop celebrated the Holy Communion. During the service, Thirumeni dedicated three Covenant girls from the parish, and presented them badges to the Covenant girls and six Altar boys. The tithe offering was collected as part of the family Sunday observance. The devotion was based on the life of Zachariah and Elizabeth as is given in Luke 1. After the Qurbana, Parish arranged a simple function to celebrate Episcopal Silver Jubilee of Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Thirumeni. In that function the parish felicitated Thirumeni, presented plaque and gave a gift. A cake was cut to share the joy of the occasion. In his reply Thirumeni expressed gratitude and requested prayers of the Parish for his ministry. Thirumeni presented certificates and gifts to the Sunday school students and teachers. After that Thirumeni released a new English song book, which is to be used during prayer meetings and worship services. Rev. Binu Thomas, Vicar

## St. Paul's MTC, Dallas

Episcopal visit and parish silver jubilee celebration meeting of St. Paul's Mar Thoma church, Dallas was held on Sunday, July 21, 2013. The meeting started followed by the Holy Communion led by Diocesan Bishop. Vicar Rev. O. C. Kurian presided the meeting and Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa was the chief guest. The meeting started with opening prayer by Mr. Easow Chacko followed by opening song by Choir. In the welcome address, Vicar Rev. O. C. Kurian applauded the guidance and leadership of the diocese during the past 25 years in the growth of the parish. Secretary Mr. Liju Thomas presented the 25th parish day report. St. Paul's Mar Thoma church was founded by 32 families and inaugurated on July 25th, 1988, by His Grace, the Late Most Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan along with former vicar of the church, Late Rev. T.I. Joseph. On July 16th, 1994, His Grace, the Late Most Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan along with the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar



Theophilus Episcopa dedicated the church building in the presence of the Vicar Rev. Eapen Cherian and other clergy. As the parish continued to grow to 100 plus families, 3 acres of land was purchased to build a new parish facility. Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa did the groundbreaking ceremony on November 18th, 2007 along with the Vicar Rev. C. K. Koshy. The church building was completed and consecrated on March 20, 2010 by the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa along with the Vicar Rev. A.P. Noble



In the report, secretary acknowledged with gratitude the leadership and guidance received through previous vicars of the parish (Rev. T.I. Joseph, Rev. P.J. Alex, Rev. Ninan Jacob, Rev. Eapen Cherian, Rev. Kuruville Philip, Rev. Thomas Mathew, Rev. Saju Zachariah, Rev. P. V. Thomas, Rev. C.K. Koshy and Rev. A.P. Noble, the previous youth chaplains Rev. M.O. Oommen Jr., Rev. Saji Joseph, Rev. Ninu Chandy and Rev. Jaisen Thomas, the current Vicar Rev. O.C. Kurian and the current youth chaplain Rev. George Jacob. The report concluded thanking all the founders, previous committee members and all members who helped the church in various means and reminded to serve as the light to others with God's grace. Thirumeni told that the silver jubilee should be a time to remember the past, urged to see it as a time for repentance, re-dedication and also to give thanks to God for the abundant grace showered in the past.



During the meeting, senior citizen Mr. A. P. Kuruville who reached 70 year in his life was honored. Felicitation of 27 new high school and professional graduates were done and Diocesan Episcopa handed over the plaques. Trustee Mr. Rajankunju C. George handed over the amount of the parish jubilee project for housing aid to Diocesan Episcopa for one house. The leadership through bishops and vicars, the founders, the building committee and conveners, and the members of the church were acknowledged in the felicitation speeches by Rev. Mathew Joseph, Mr. Matthew Babu (Vice president) and Mr. James Mepurathu, Meeting concluded with vote of thanks by Jubilee Convener Mr. Thomas George followed the prayer by Rev. George Jacob and benediction by Diocesan Bishop. At the worship service and Holy Communion led by Thirumeni; the dedication of altar boys and covenant girls were done. The executive committee met the Diocesan Episcopa later in the evening for meet and greet session.

Liju Thomas, Secretary

## St. Thomas MTC, Indianapolis



Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, the Diocesan Bishop visited the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Indianapolis on September 22, 2013. Thirumeni led the Holy Communion service at the Savior United Methodist Church. In his sermon based on St. Mark 10:1-12 Thirumeni stressed that marriage is a sacrament instituted by God and reminded that man and woman, created by God are joined by Him through marriage to love one another and to build up a community founded on love. The sacrificial love of Christ as seen on the cross of Calvary is the model for

all families on earth. We need to discern God's purposes for our lives in relationship with God and with each other. Through families God desires to bring hope and healing to a fragmented and broken world. Vicar Rev. George Cherian welcomed Thirumeni and recounted Thirumeni's valuable contributions in the building up of the Diocese. Achen congratulated Thirumeni in authoring the book "Churching the Diaspora, Discipling the Families" based on Thirumeni's study and experiences in ministering to the Diaspora community. After the Kaimuth, fellowship dinner was served and the members got an opportunity for fellowship and interaction with Thirumeni. After the dinner there was a meeting of the executive committee, wherein the need for a resident vicar stationed in Indianapolis to meet the growing pastoral needs of the community was presented and discussed. The parish members were blessed by the presence of Thirumeni. It was a joyous occasion for all.  
Rev. George Cherian, Vicar

## Salem MTC, Eastern Long Island



The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa visited the Salem MTC, Eastern Long Island on Sunday, October 6, 2013. Thirumeni led the special service of MTVEA according to the special worship order as the first part and then His grace celebrated the Holy Communion and 113 people participated in the Holy Communion. After the service and fellowship lunch, there was a special meeting with the executive and the building committee members of the church. Thirumeni also visited the sick and senior members who could not attend the worship service and admitted in the Nursing Homes. The visit to the Salem MTC was a blessing to the members of this church. The Salem MTC expressed its sincere thanks to Thirumeni for his blessings, prayers and encouragement to the Church.

Rev. Mathew George, Vicar



## Immanuel MTC, Houston



The Immanuel MTC, Houston celebrated 19th parish day on Oct 13, 2013. The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius was the chief guest and led the Holy Communion on parish day. In his message Thirumeni focused on attention to be given to people who are differently abled and his concern that the parish should grow into the new phase with commitment and determination. After the sermon he conducted a special service for 15 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 first communicants and responsibilities of the first communicants in being the members of Mar Thoma church. Parish day programs were held followed the communion. This was followed by Diocesan directory fund inauguration & kick off of India Fest 2013. Rev. Philip Varghese, Rev. K. V. Mathew (Jr.), Rev. Kochu Koshy Abraham, Diocesan treasurer Mr. Chacko Mathew & Diocesan Council members were also present, which was followed by fellowship lunch and Thirumeni also participated in the lunch with first communicants and families. The fellowship lunch enabled the parishioners to meet and interact with Thirumeni. The parish was blessed by Diocesan Episcopa's visit. Rev. Saju Mathew, Vicar

## Philadelphia MTC



The Philadelphia MTC was blessed and honored by the annual visit of the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa on 19th and 20th Oct. 2013. On 19th Saturday evening, Thirumeni attended the cultural program of the parish, which was conducted by the Yuvajana Sakhyam and Youth Fellowship. Thirumeni gave the inaugural address. On 20th Sunday, Thirumeni conducted the Thooyaba (preparatory) Service along with the Altar Boys and Covenant Girls followed by Holy Communion service. Thirumeni gave an inspiring message based on Luke 19: 1-10. After the service, parish day celebration



was also held. Parish secretary Mr. M. G. Thomas presented the 37th parish day report. Thirumeni gave a thought-provoking message. Thirumeni presented the certificates to 14 members of the parish who have completed the first phase of the LEAD program of the Diocese. Thirumeni also distributed the merit certificates to the Sunday school children who have academic excellence in the Diocesan examination of 2012. Certificates of Sevika Sangham Bible Quiz Competition were also distributed to the Sevika Sangham members. After that Thirumeni interacted with the parish members. More than five hundred members attended the service and joined in the fellowship meal. The Episcopal visit was a blessed and graceful occasion for the parish. Rev. P. A. Abraham, Vicar

## Christos MTC, Philadelphia



Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Diocesan Episcopa of North America & Europe Diocese visited the Christos Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia on December 1, 2013. The Parish arranged First Communion of four Youths during the blessed occasion of Episcopal visit. Mar Theodosius celebrated the Holy Communion in English at 10 a.m. Rev. M. John and Rev. Roy Geevarghese assisted the Holy Qurbana along



with three Altar boys. During the service, special offertory collected for the relief work in Philippines.



**SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATION OF THE EPISCOPAL ORDINATION OF THE RT. REV. DR. GEEVARGJESE MAR THEODOSIUS**

Rev. Roy Geevarghese, Vicar of Christos Mar Thoma Church presided over the meeting after the Holy Communion. The meeting started with the prayer by Rev. M. John, member of Christos MTC. Mr. C. G. Daniel, secretary of the parish extended welcome speech. Christos Choir dedicated a beautiful song to Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, who is celebrating Silver Jubilee of his Episcopal ordination. Tirumeni released Christos Parish Photo Directory, distributed Plaque to the people who contributed generously at the parish Sale & Auction and distributed Greeting Cards and Certificates to the First Communicants. Mr. Shaji Mathai, Diocesan Council member from Christos church and Mr. Aju Mathew, representative of Youths of the Parish presented felicitation speeches. Mr. James Abraham and Mr. K. C. Varghese, Trustees of the parish presented Greeting and Silver Jubilee cake to the Jubilarian Bishop. After cutting the Jubilee cake, Tirumeni distributed it to the first communicants and to the Achans. In his response speech, Tirumeni expressed his thanks to Christos church for rendering every help to the Diocese and to Tirumeni and invited the prayers of the believing community in the faith journey with Christ. After the prayer by Mr. Samuel Koshy, Parish Vice President and benediction by Tirumeni, there was a photo session for the first communicants. Parents of First Communicants arranged Fellowship lunch for all. The Parishioners experienced the divine fellowship and the parish rejuvenated very much through the Episcopal visit.

Rev. Roy Geevarghese, Vicar

**Ebenezer Mar Thoma Church, NY**



The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius visited the Ebenezer Mar Thoma Church, New York on Sunday, November 24, 2013. The programmes of the day started with a Holy Qurabana Service in English by Tirumeni at 9.30 am. Rev. Abraham Oommen, Vicar and Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary also assisted in the service. In his devotional message based on Luke 1: 26-38, Tirumeni exhorted the congregation to dedicate their lives for a greater ministry as Mary dedicated herself to the will of God. During the worship service Tirumeni dedicated 5 First Communicants and enabled them to enter into the



full fellowship of the Church through the participation in Lord's table. Immediately after the worship service, the parish arranged a felicitation meeting for the Diocesan Episcopa, as his lordship enters into the 25th year of Episcopal ministry on December 9, 2013 along with other two Bishops of the Church. The Vicar, Rev. Abraham Oommen welcomed all. The parish secretary Mrs. Susan Kurian gave felicitation speech. The Trustee of the parish Mr. John Samuel presented the Jubilee gift and invited Tirumeni to cut the Jubilee cake to mark the celebration. In his reply, after cutting the cake, Tirumeni thanked the parish for arranging the felicitation and praised the Lord Almighty for His benevolence throughout his life, particularly in the Episcopal ministry. There was time for the parishioners to interact with Tirumeni. After the meeting Tirumeni inaugurated the 'Tree of Giving' placed at the entrance of the sanctuary, to honour the members of the parish who gave substantial contribution to the church building fund. The meeting came to an end with closing prayer by Rev. K. E. Geevarghese and benediction by Tirumeni. There were luncheon fellowship for the parishioners with the Diocesan Bishop. The Episcopal visit was a blessing to the parish. Rev. Abraham Oommen, Vicar





# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Seminar on Identity, Vision and Mission of the Diocese, San Francisco MTC



As part of the Diocesan Silver Jubilee celebrations, the San Francisco Mar Thoma Church conducted a one-day seminar on the Identity, Vision and Mission of the Diocese under the leadership of Rev. T. K. Viji on Nov 9, 2013. Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese was the key speaker of this program. The theme of the seminar was 'Understanding the Depth of Mar Thoma Church History and Liturgical form of Worship'. Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese talked about the birth of Christianity in India and its progress and evolution through the past centuries. Achen explained in great detail the history of the Mar Thoma Church, the meaning and significance of the church practices and how liturgy can make our worship more meaningful. This was followed by a lively and interactive discussion. Dr. M. M. Ninan also gave valuable inputs during this discussion. Rev. T. K. Viji gave some musical training in the chanting of some of the liturgies. Mr. John Chandy gave a brief presentation on the growth of the Diocese, our parish and future of our church. Mr. John Geevarghese presented the video on the Mar Thoma Church liturgy. Lunch and refreshments were provided to the participants and meeting ended with prayer and benediction.

Anita Sujit, Diocesan Council Member

## Mid-West Region Seminar



A Seminar on the "Challenges and Vision of the New Generation in the Spiritual Journey of the Diocese" was held on November 2, 2013 at 10a.m at the Bethel Mar Thoma Church, Frankfort. This was the 4th seminar held in the Mid-west region to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of the Diocese. The Seminar began with prayer by the Rev. Biju P. Simon, Associate Vicar and Youth Chaplain of the Chicago Mar Thoma Church. Rev. George Cherian, the Vicar of the Bethel Mar Thoma Church welcomed the participants. Achen highlighted the importance of the 2nd and 3rd generations in the growth of the Diocese and called upon the young people to love the Church just as Christ the Lord loves her. He exhorted them to be strong in their faith and seek God's guidance in facing the newer challenges and never lose sight of the hope to which they were called by God. Mr. Joe Thomas, Superintendent of the Chicago Mar Thoma Sunday School presented a paper on the aforementioned theme. Joe with the help of the participants enlisted the various chal-

lenges that young people face daily in their spiritual journey. He called upon the young people to identify the root of the challenges, engage in the challenges and with a vision, sustained by faith in God turn the challenge into a blessing. Citing the example of Job from the Old Testament, Joe encouraged the participants to be reconnected with God and thus realize that their calling is for a holy purpose. He urged them to be an example to others and thus leave impressions that last a lifetime. Reba Varghese from Chicago Mar Thoma Church and Sanil Thomas from Bethel Mar Thoma church shared their reflections on the topic. There were a total of 19 participants. The participants were divided into groups and there was a discussion on the challenges and the vision of the new generation. At the end of the group discussion, Alex Philipose, Kevin Joseph, Nithin Isaac and Jerin John presented the group discussions. Mr. Binu D. Johnson proposed the vote of thanks and Eipe Varghese offered the concluding prayer. The notable feature of this seminar was the attendance of the 2nd and 3rd generation from the mid-west region. A few seniors also participated and shared their insights. The seminar ended on a positive note with the participants suggesting that more such seminars need to be organized in this region with the 2nd and 3rd generation coming together along with the seniors to discuss, share and find out solutions to the challenges faced by the new generation. There was a fellowship meal after the seminar. The seminar was indeed a blessed experience for all the participants.

Rev. George Cherian, Vicar, Bethel MTC, Frankfort

## Dialogue in South West Region



A Dialogue on the Journey and Growth of the Diocese, as organized by the Mar Thoma Churches in Dallas Center in connection with the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Diocese of North America and Europe, at the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas Farmers Branch on Saturday, November 02, 2013. The meeting was presided over by Rev. Saji Thomas, the Clergy convener of Dallas Centre, and began with a song and the prayer by Rev. O. C. Kurian. Rev. Jose C. Joseph Mathew welcomed all the participants and the leaders of the dialogue. Rev. Sam Mathew and Rev. George Jacob were also present in the meeting. Mr. Thomas Mathew, member of Mar Thoma Church of Dallas took the leadership to present a paper on "The Challenges faced by the Diaspora Community during the formative period" and Mr. Bobby C. Mathew, member of Sehion Mar Thoma Church Dallas, presented spoke on the topic "Challenges and vision of the new generation in the spiritual Journey of the Diocese". 13 members participated in the discussion and there were not less than 100 people in attendance from different parishes in Dallas area. Rev. Saji Thomas extended the vote of thanks. The meeting ended with prayer and benediction by Rev. Jose C. Joseph Mathew and the parish provided lunch to all.

Rev. Jose C Joseph Mathew



## Book Release - 'Churching the Diaspora, Discipling the Families'



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 Meeting) at Thiruvalla by handing over a copy of the book to the Valiya Metropolitan Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Thirumeni. Mar Theodosius, the author of the book spoke on the significance of the theme of the book to the Mandalam members. Copies of the book were distributed to all the bishops on that occasion. The Diocese congratulates Theodosius Thirumeni on behalf of the parishes, organizations of the Diocese of North America and Europe.  
Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

## COMPE Meeting in London, England



The Council of the Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe (COMPE) met at the St. John's Mar Thoma Church, London on Saturday, August 24, 2013 at 10 am. This was the 4th annual general body meeting of COMPE and was presided over by the Diocesan Episcopa, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius.



Visit of Gregorios Mar Stephanos Episcopa and Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa to the Diocesan Center

## Installation of the Rev. Dr. M. Craig Barnes



The inauguration and installation of the Rev. Dr. M. Craig Barnes as president and professor of pastoral ministry of Princeton Theological Seminary was held on October 23, 2013. Diocesan Bishop Geevarghese Mar Theodosius participated in the function representing the Mar Thoma Church and on behalf of Alumnae from Mar Thoma Church. Dr. Craig Barnes is the 7th president of Princeton Theological Seminary.

## NE Regional Clergy Meeting in NY



The North East Regional Clergy Conference was held at St. John's Mar Thoma Church New York on Monday October 14, 2013. Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius chaired the meeting. Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos was the chief guest. Rev. K. K. Samuel, Vicar of St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, New York gave devotional address.

## Episcopal Silver Jubilee Celebration, Tampa, FL



The Rt. Rev. Geevarghese Mar Athanasius, Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius and Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos were ordained as Rambans on November 4th and consecrated as Bishops of the Mar Thoma Church on December 9th in the year 1989. The family Conference and Jubilee Celebrations in the Southern region, which was held at the Christian Retreat center, Tampa from November 1- 3, 2013 was an occasion for the clergy and laity in the region to praise and thank God for these leaders of the church who are entering into the 25th year of Episcopal ministry during the public meeting held on Sunday after the Holy Communion, felicitations were offered for the Bishops and prayers for God's blessings upon them for the continuation of blessed ministry in the Church. Mar Theodosius and Mar Coorilos, who were present on that occasion, joined together by cutting the cake. Also the meeting wished birthday greetings to Mar Coorilos who is entering into a new year on November 25th.  
Georgy Varghese, Diocesan Council Member



## Southern Regional Jubilee Celebration



The Silver Jubilee of the Diocese of North America and Europe was celebrated by the parishes of Southern region along with the Regional Family Conference at the Christian Retreat Center, Tampa on Sunday, November 3, 2013. Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episocpa was the chief guest on the occasion. The programs of the day started with Holy Qurbana service at 8 a. m. by Mar Coorilos. Achen and members from all the parishes in the southern region attended the Jubilee Celebration. The public meeting started immediately after the Holy Qurbana. The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius presided over the meeting and gave presidential address. Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary welcomed all. The chief guest Mar Coorilos Episcopa gave keynote address. Mr. Georgy Varghese gave vote of thanks. All the parishes in the region were represented. The leaders and delegates shared fellowship lunch after the meeting.  
Georgy Varghese, Diocesan Council Member

## Sothern Regional Family Conference



The Southern Regional Family Conference was held at the Christian Retreat Center, Tampa from Friday, November 1 to Sunday November 3, 2013. 87 families from different parishes of the region attended the conference all throughout. The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, inaugurated the conference and exposed the theme 'Family: Journeying with Christ'. Rev. Fr. Antony Thekkeneth and Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary led the Bible Studies and main talks. All the Achens from the region attended the conference and led worship services and devotions. Mr. Georgy Varghese, Diocesan Council member from Southern region coordinated the whole event, as the General Convener. The South Florida Mar Thoma Church was the host parish.

Georgy Varghese, Diocesan Council Member & General Convener

## Dialogue on the Journey, Growth and Future Vision of the Diocese

As part of the Diocesan Silver Jubilee celebrations, a 'Dialogue on the Journey, Growth and Future Vision of the Diocese' was held at Atlanta Mar Thoma church on October 26, 2013. The meeting started at 7:00 pm. After prayer by Rev. Skariah Varghese, Rev. P.S. Thomas, Vicar of Atlanta Mar Thoma Church welcomed everyone. Rev. K. E. Geevarghese,



Diocesan Secretary was the main speaker and moderator. First paper was presented by Rev. Skariah Varghese on "The Challenges Faced by the Diaspora Community During the Formative Period of the Diocese". Achen looked back at the history of Mar Thoma Church in the USA in its early days. The Talk focused on challenges faced by the early immigrants and how they wanted to retain their identity.

The presentation titled 'Challenges and Vision of the New Generation in the Spiritual Journey of the Diocese' was done by Diocesan Youth Fellowship secretary, Mathews Athiyal. The paper took a quick glance at the history of the paths the diocese covered and appreciated the struggles and challenges overcome by the first generation to establish the Mar Thoma church in the United States. The talk stressed on the need for teaching the doctrine and faith of the church to all generations and starting it at a very young age itself. Athiyal shared the expectations of younger generation from their pastors and their ministry in the church. The talk proposed initiatives to encourage leaders from both second generation and from women to take up positions as members of the executive committee and as office bearers in the parish and in the diocesan council as well.

Rev. K.E Geevarghese's talk focused on 'The Milestones of the Dioceses: Challenges, and Vision'. The milestones included achieving a Diocese with 68 parishes and 9 congregations as worshipping units, 70 clergy and 8,000 families. Achen explained the steps taken by the diocese to cater to the needs of the second and third generations. He focused on the vision of a church that is relevant and contemporary to the context and giving greater emphasis on mission work, especially neighborhood missions. The talk also focused on improving the quality of worship in the church by using chants, multimedia and English, and on giving a strong Christian foundation to younger generation in order to fulfill our vision for the future. There was an open forum for questions and answers after the three presentations. The meeting came to a close after prayer and benediction, at 9.10 pm.

Mathews Athiyal, Secretary, Diocesan Youth Fellowship



A fellowship meeting between Mar Theodosius, the Diocesan Bishop of Mar Thoma Church North American Diocese and Mar Eusebius, Bishop of Syro-Malankara Catholic and Apostolic Exarchate at the Catholic Bishops house on Tuesday, October 29, 2013.



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South West Regional Clergy Conference held at the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Carrollton on Monday, October 14, 2013

## Jubilee Night Organizers Meet



The organizers of Jubilee Night, Youth Fellowship members in North East region, had a fellowship and interaction with the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius on August 20, 2013. Youth members of New York with the leadership of the chaplain Rev. V. M. Mathew expressed the desire to have a mission activity in New York region. They expressed that the conversation will continue in the future.



Mar Theodosius visited the St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church on Hewlett Avenue in Merrick, which was partially burned and the worshipping community is now worshipping outside in a tent.

## IV Annual Mar Thoma Young Families Fellowship Conference

The fourth annual Mar Thoma Young Families Conference, hosted by St. John's MTC, NY, was held from Friday, October 25th to Sunday, October 27th at the Clarion Hotel & Conference Center, Islip. Theme of the conference was "Hand in Hand – Journeying with Christ" based on Genesis 2:24. The conference was blessed to have several leaders including Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa, Rev. V. M. Mathew, Rev. Joji K. Mathew, Dr. P. C. Mathew, and Ciby Mathew. Inaugural session was held on Friday night with a welcome program from the children of



St. John's Young Families and worship led by St. John's YFF. Rev. Joji K. Mathew, Vicar, welcomed all the leaders and delegates to the conference. At the inaugural address, Thirumeni reminded delegates that young families are not only the hope of the future but also the strength of the present.

Bible study was led by Rev. V.M. Mathew, youth Chaplain of North East Region, based on Song of Songs 2:15 titled "Vineyard and Little Foxes". Achen reminded delegates about the beauty of vineyard in the spring season and that family life is the combination of all expressions of love we observe in the vineyard. Achen warned delegates to identify the "little foxes" that come and destroy the vineyard in our own family lives. Main talks were divided into four sessions. Dr. P.C. Mathew and Mrs. Ciby Mathew led all four sessions with real life examples, role-plays and Biblical foundation. Topics for these sessions were 'Purpose of the Journey of Family Life', 'Facing the Challenges of the Journey', 'Making the Journey a Legacy', and 'Completing the Journey Through Deeper Intimacy'. All talks were informative, concise and practical guides to strengthen family lives.

A unique panel discussion was held under the vision and leadership of Rev. V. M. Mathew. Topic for panel discussion was "Role of Young Families in the Church". Three papers were presented on three aspects of "Role of Young Families." Dr. Ron Jacob (LI MTC) presented a paper on 'Young Families' Role in the Spirituality of the Church'; Mrs. Suja Thannickal (St. Thomas MTC) presented a paper on 'YF's Role in Leadership'; and Mr. Melvin John (St. John's MTC) presented a paper on 'YF's Role in Finance'. Several delegates participated in the discussion by raising questions and sharing their views on the role of Young Families in the Church. Thirumeni had several comments and challenged the delegates to get involved in the various programs of the Church. He encouraged the delegates to participate in the general body and executive committee of the Church. Thirumeni asked the YFF to work with Achens to come up with a team of members to prepare special prayers to be used during intercession in the Holy Communion and other occasions. Thirumeni also asked the delegates to start neighborhood missions at their local parish to reach community around them.

Children of young families were engaged in several fun filled learning activities planned by Children's Program Committee. They had an opportunity to meet Thirumeni and ask questions. All the children participated in several activity stations and Hallelujah night program and they enjoyed an entertainment program by a Magician. Holy Communion service on Sunday was led by Rev. V. M. Mathew. Conference concluded with the last main talk and closing ceremony. Rev. Joji K Mathew, St. John's MTC, NY



## Sevika Sangham National Conference, Lubbock



The fourteenth National Conference of the Diocesan Sevika Sangham was held at the Holiday Inn Hotel and Towers, Lubbock from October 3-6, 2013. This was hosted by the Emmanuel Mar Thoma Church, Lubbock. The Conference was started on Thursday evening with a procession. The opening worship was led by the host parish under the leadership of the Vicar Rev. John N. Abraham. The conference convener, Mrs. Dr. Annie Lincoln welcomed all leaders and delegates.

The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa presided over the inaugural session and gave presidential address. The chief guest of the conference, Rt. Rev. Gregorios Mar Stephanos Episcopa inaugurated the function and gave the main talks. Mr. Glenn Robertson – Mayor of Lubbock, Most Rev. Placido Rodriguez, Bishop of Catholic Diocese in Lubbock, Mrs. Suma Cherian, Dr. Elsy Mathew and Rev. K. E. Geevarghese offered felicitations at the time of inauguration. Mrs. Suma Cherian led Bible Studies. Conference choir led the singing sessions. Various regional Sevika Sangham groups led morning and evening worship services. There were special sessions on medical concerns and mission awareness. The dedication session was led by Rev. John N. Abraham. The conference came to end on Sunday, October 6, 2013 with a Holy Qurbana and closing message by Mar Stephanos.

## Reception to Mar Stephanos & Felicitation to Rev. Jose Punamadam



A meeting was held at the St John's Mar Thoma Church, UK to felicitate the newly consecrated the Rt. Rev. Gregorios Mar Stephanos, Bishop of the Kunnankulam- Malabar Diocese and Rev. Jose Punamadom, the new Vicar of the parish on Monday August 26, 2013. The meeting was after the Holy Qurbana service that was held in the evening at 4.30 pm.

## South East Region- The Dialogue on the Journey & Growth of the Diocese

A Dialogue on the Journey and Growth of the Diocese took place on Saturday, October 12, 2013 at St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church, New Jersey. The meeting began with a song and opening worship led by Rev. Roy Mathew and prayer by Dr. C. G. Abraham. A welcome to all who gathered was given by Rev. Roy Mathew, Vicar of St. Peter's MTC, New Jersey. Rev. Roy Geevarghese, convener of the South-East region, gave an opening talk, where he highlighted the importance of the dialogue and the need to strengthen our parishes and region. Mr. Tom Philip, (Diocesan Sunday School Secretary) presented the topic: "Challenges



faced by the Diaspora Community during the Formative period of the Diocese." He discussed about the definition of Diaspora, its features, various forms of Diaspora, characteristics of Diaspora, Diaspora communities and Kerala Christians, common ethnic identity. He also explained the challenges of the parishes of the Diaspora communities.

Rev. Dennis Abraham presented two topics. "Challenges and Vision of the New Generation in the Spiritual Journey of the Diocese," and "Role of the Local Parish in the Formation of a Witnessing and Serving Community." Achen highlighted the vision of the Diocese and the necessity to look ahead. He emphasized the needs of the new generation of youths and senior citizens, and the importance of family when it comes to faith development. Achen also discussed about the various challenges, and the need to address these issues. Also, it was mentioned that our parishes should go on a "missionary diet" and "missionary budget" and give focus to mission both in the local, and also diocesan levels. Parishes should be open to the community, which is part of the mission. Thereafter, Dr. Eapen Daniel (Christos MTC, Philadelphia), and Mrs. Checha John, Diocesan Council member (Staten Island MTC), served as moderators for the discussion that took place in light of the presentations. A very fruitful discussion took place. Most of the participants actively participated in the discussion. The senior participants suggested that the parish as well as Diocese should give attention to the seniors who faced the challenges in the past for the growth of the churches in United States. The meeting suggested to continue the discussion in the local parish level. A vote of thanks was offered by Rev. Jacob Varghese, Vicar of Randolph Mar Thoma parish. Prayer and benediction was offered by Rev. Jacob Varghese. There were about 40 people who were present from parishes in the South East region. The meeting came to close at 1.30 PM with lunch.

Rev. Roy Geevarghese, Regional Convener

## Dialogue on the Growth and Development of the Diocese



On Saturday, September 28, 2013, the North East Region conducted a dialogue between the seniors and young families in the region at the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, New York. The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius moderated the session and explained the intention of meeting. Rev. Joji K. Mathew was the convener. The sessions began with a song and opening prayer by Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary. Rev. K. K. Samuel, the Vicar of St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church welcomed all. The presentations were conducted by Mr. Mathew P. George, who represented the seniors, and Dr. Roy Jacob, who represented the young families and Youth Fellowship. The dialogue provided an outlet for both groups to provide their vision for the Mar Thoma Church in the North America and Europe Diocese as well as share their input as to what they desire to have implemented in the Diocese in the coming years.

Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary



# PARISH NEWS

## St. Peter's MTC, NJ

### Silver Jubilee & Parish Day Celebrations



St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church, Teaneck, celebrated its Silver Jubilee on Saturday, September 29, 2013 with a public meeting, followed by cultural programs at Teaneck Benjamin Franklin School Auditorium. Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa and Teaneck

Mayor Ahammed Hameeduddin were the chief guests at this function. The program started with an opening prayer by Vice President Mr. T.S. Chacko followed by an introductory speech by Vicar Rev. Roy Mathew, and welcome speech by Saji T. Mathew. In the keynote address, Thirumeni emphasized the need of church's involvement in the community, and the need for a transformation in the new era by reaching out the community and the world in a meaningful way.

Clergy from sister parishes and local churches were present and delivered felicitation speeches at this occasion. Silver Jubilee celebration convener Mr. Thomas George presented the jubilee report. Silver Jubilee souvenir was released during the public meeting by presenting a copy of the souvenir to the Teaneck Mayor by Thirumeni. Secretary Mr. Abraham Mathew delivered the vote of thanks. Cultural programs from different organizations of the parish made the evening a memorable and colorful one. Parish day and family Sunday were celebrated on Sunday September 29th with Holy Communion service in English. Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa was the chief celebrant. In the meeting held after the worship service, senior member Mr. P.T. Chacko delivered the opening prayer followed by songs by Sunday school children and the presidential address by Vicar Rev. Roy Mathew. Edavaka Secretary Mr. Abraham Mathew presented the parish day report. Thirumeni delivered a thoughtful and inspirational parish day message. In commemoration of the ordination silver jubilee of Vicar Rev. Roy Mathew, Thirumeni presented Achen with a plaque on behalf of the parish. Edavaka trustee Mr. Samuel M. Varghese delivered the vote of thanks. The meeting concluded with a prayer by Mr. M. K. Thomas and benediction by Thirumeni. Fellowship lunch was served af-

ter the meeting. The Jubilee year of the parish coincided with the Silver Jubilee of the Diocese of North America and Europe. As part of the celebration of the Diocese, teams were sent to the Mission fields in places like Delhi, Mumbai, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Among the 13 members group that went to Karnataka 11 members from were from the St. Peter's Mar Thoma Parish, Teaneck, New Jersey and Mr. & Mrs. George Thomas led the team. The mission exposure was an enriching experience for the participants.

Mr. Abraham Mathew, Secretary

## Parish Retreat of Seattle MTC



A family retreat of Mar Thoma church of Greater Seattle was held in Black Lake Bible camp, Olympia, Washington, from 23rd of August to 25th of August 2013. The theme of the retreat was "Church Journeying with Christ." The main speaker was Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary. The attendees had an in-depth study on the theme, which was followed by lively discussions. A seminar on the topic "Vision and Mission of Mar Thoma church in North America & Europe," led by Mrs. & Mr. Joseph Manaloor, talk by Mr. Tom George based on "gift of words," Bible study by Mrs. Anitha Santhosh - "Power of a Faithful Life" for young families, motivational talk by Mrs. Marykutty Chacko for Sevika Sangham, Bible quiz show "who wants to be a Bible scholar" based on Acts of Apostles by Annie Kochamma are some of the programs other than the main talks. Rev. Mathew John led dedication service, and many shared their experiences. The retreat was blessed with Malayalam praise and worship. Talent shows, sports and games and campfire added color to the retreat. The retreat ended with Holy Communion fold by a concluding session.

Rev. Mathew John, Vicar

## Sehion MTC, Dallas



First communicants from Sehion MTC, Dallas with Diocesan Bishop



## Christos MTC, Philadelphia



Welcome to Stephanos Episcopa and First Communicants Service



South-East Region Clergy Conference  
Christos hosted the Regional Clergy Conference on Monday Oct 21st.



Rt. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa visited Christos parish on Oct 29th and conducted Evening worship service at the church. A fellowship dinner was also arranged



South East Region Youth Fellowship Fall Conference at Christos on Nov 30th 2013

## Horeb MTC, Los Angeles



By God's grace the Horeb Mar Thoma Church of Los Angeles 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

## Immanuel MTC, Virginia



Our Diocesan Episcopa, Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, visited the Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Virginia on Saturday, July 27, 2013 at 9:30am. Thirumeni celebrated the Holy Qurbana service in English. The clergy, Rev. Dr. A.V. Thomas, Rev. Binoy J. Thomas and Rev. Jaisen A. Thomas, as well as, lay leaders Ashish K. Thomas, Shaun Joykutty assisted Thirumeni in the Holy Qurbana service. Theodosius Thirumeni meaningfully communicated that our material possessions may pose as a real hindrance to truly knowing and serving God. Thirumeni commended the dynamic growth of the parish in just a few years and encouraged all to fulfill our true potential as a faith community. During the worship service, three children, Aaron Pappy, Tom and Jonah Thomas were welcomed as communicant members of the church through the first communicant service led by Thirumeni.



### 4th Annual Convention and Parish Day

The 4th Annual Convention and Parish Day of the Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, VA was held from Thursday, October 10 through Sunday, October 13, 2013. It was a blessed occasion as the faith community gathered from near and far to meditate on the convention theme, Awake and Arise, based on Revelation 3:2, "Wake up and strengthen what remains for I have not found your



works perfect in the sight of my God". The preacher was Rev. Y.T. Vinaya Raj Achen who through humor and deep Biblical insight powerfully communicated the Word of God. Additionally, coordinated prayer sessions and fellowship truly allowed the convention to be transforming experience for all. It was also a memorable experience as the IMTCVA Parish Mission released the 2nd edition in hard cover of the, "Songs and Hymns" parish song book. As part of the convention, two special workshops were arranged separately for parents, as well as, youth and children. The workshops were Get Connected: Christian Parenting led by Mr. Joseph Abraham and God, You and I: Workshop for Youth and Children led by Rev. Jaisen A. Thomas. These very important sessions characterized a "head-on" approach to relevant struggles and issues that both parents and children encounter. There was also an open forum where candid discussion allowed for growth and learning despite challenging situations. The parish mission took noted leadership to organize the convention, workshops and welcome all to the sessions.



On Sunday, October 13, 2013, our Parish Day celebration began with Malayalam Holy Qurbana service and a challenging sermon led by Rev. Y.T. Vinaya Raj Achen. Rev. Jaisen A. Thomas, Mr. Aji Jacob assisted in the worship service. The celebration continued with various programs from all the organizations of the parish including songs, poem and other creative presentations. Of particular note, four of our elder members were honored and adorned with a ponnada as a token of our love for their sacrifice and service to the church. It was also a joyous occasion as four new members were added to the parish on that day. Afterwards, an parish anniversary cake was cut and a fellowship meal was shared as we reminisced the miraculous way God has led our parish in past four years. We move forward in great faith as God continues to reveal His amazing plans for us in the days ahead!

Rev. Jaisen A. Thomas, Vicar

## St. Thomas MTC Youth Fellowship Yonkers, NY



The St. Thomas MTC Youth Fellowship has been very active over the past few months, with two major community outreach activities.

### AIDS Walk NY

On May 19th, 24 youth from our parish participated in the 2013 AIDS

Walk New York, held in Central Park, NYC. Our Youth Fellowship raised over \$5,000 to help in the fight against AIDS through donations of friends, family and church members. The highlight of the day was spending time in fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ as we walked 6.5 miles in the rain, getting soaked and muddying our shoes for a great cause!

### Labor Day BBQ

For eight years, it has been an annual tradition of St. Thomas to serve the community around our church with food, music, outdoor games, face painting and other fun activities on Labor Day. We use this opportunity to spend time with the residents in our neighborhood, tell them about our Church, and also give away free food, Bibles and school supplies.

A few highlights from this year's BBQ:

1. 250+ residents of South Yonkers came and enjoyed food, fellowship and fun with us
2. 100+ bags full of school supplies (pencils, pens, notebooks, notepads, binders, etc) were given to the children in the community, to help prepare them for the upcoming school year
3. All of the items for the BBQ were donated by Youth, Young Families, Sunday School and church members - We received donations to cover ALL of the School Supplies, ALL of the Bibles, ALL of the Prizes/Gifts, ALL of the printing, ALL of the food, as well as all other miscellaneous expenses!

In all of these activities, God is being glorified by the hard work and collaboration of the various organizations of this parish. Our prayer is that our Mar Thoma Church continues to be more engaged with the communities around us.

A special thank you to the conveners for these events, as well as 4th Soil (the outreach arm of STMTC Youth Fellowship), Sunday School, Young Families, Church Exec Team, Youth, Parents, our Youth Chaplain and our Achen, and every single person that has come to our activities and/or donated to help us make an impact in our community!

To learn more about activities of our Youth Fellowship, please visit [www.stmtcyf.org](http://www.stmtcyf.org)

Mr. Blessen Kurian, VP, Youth Fellowship      Rev. K K Samuel (Vicar)

## MATRIMONIAL

● Proposals are invited for a fair, beautiful girl 30 years old working as a consultant in Minneapolis, MN. She had her B Tech degree from Anna University, Chennai and MBA from SP Jain Institute of Management. Interested parties, please call 919605091384 / 919947442278 or E-mail at [kochuparet@yahoo.com](mailto:kochuparet@yahoo.com)

● Marthomite family settled in the USA since 1986 invite marriage proposal for daughter aged 30 and height 5' 1". She is M.D. and completing her fellowship. She is God-fearing and family oriented. We are seeking a boy with similar values and comparable qualifications. Please respond with recent photos and details to [mathewa707@gmail.com](mailto:mathewa707@gmail.com) or call (312) 633 9934

● Marthoma parents settled in U S invite proposals for their daughter . She is 30 years old, 5'3" M.D , doing her fellowship in New York and will complete in June 2014. She is a strong, God fearing and family oriented girl looking for a boy with same faith and in the same field or qualified other professionals. Interested parents please respond with details and recent photos to [shalom0550@gmail.com](mailto:shalom0550@gmail.com) or call at 201-692-7753, or 201-400-4834

● Marthoma parents in NJ invite proposal for their daughter, 25 years, 5'6", Doctor of Physical Therapy, family oriented, God fearing from professionally qualified God fearing, non smoking, non alcoholic boys with good Christian values. Interested parents may email with details and picture to [goldenoryx2329@yahoo.com](mailto:goldenoryx2329@yahoo.com)



# GENERAL NEWS

## Jubilee Chapel Dedication in Mexico Mission Field

The Diocesan Bishop of the Diocese of North America and Europe, Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa in commemoration with the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Diocese, dedicated the new worshipping facility in the 'Colonia Mar Thoma' and it was named as the "Jubilee Chapel." Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese (Diocesan Projects Manager), Rev. Saju Mathew (Vicar, Immanuel MTC, Houston), Rev. Kochu Koshy Abraham (Vicar, Trinity MTC, Houston), Rev. Jose C. Joseph Mathew (Vicar MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch), Rev. O. C. Kurian (Vicar, St. Paul's MTC, Dallas), and Rev. Saji Thomas (Vicar, Sehion MTC, Dallas) were co-celebrants for the consecration service. Spanish language participation was also ensured in the consecration service.



Ms. C. P. Veronica Salazar Vasquez, secretary of the city social welfare department (DIFH) and the sister of current Mayor of Matamoros Ms. Lic. Norma Leticia Salazar attended the consecration service and the public meeting, representing the City of Matamoros and the Mayor.



About 400 people, including members of Mar Thoma Churches from New York, Philadelphia, Dallas and Houston, local Mexico mission members, Diocesan treasurer Mr. Chacko Mathew and Diocesan council members - Mr. George Samuel, Ms. Arlene Mathew, Mr. Shaji Mathai and Mr. Varghese P. Varghese - attended the services and the public meeting that followed the consecration.



The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa presided the public meeting. Ms. C. P. Veronica Salazar Vasquez was the chief guest. Mr. P. T. Abraham led the opening prayer. Rev. Saju Mathew welcomed the guests. Mr. John Thomas presented a report of the Mexico Mission activities. In the presidential address, Thirumeni emphasized that the grace of God was always present in Mexico Mission activities. Thirumeni asked the Mar Thoma community for their prayers and support as we continue to make strides in to Mexico Mission. Thirumeni also paid tribute to Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos

Episcopa, the former Diocesan Bishop who has laid the foundation for the Mar Thoma Church's mission activities in Mexico, a decade ago, among the fishermen families in the coastal areas of Matamoros.



Thirumeni recognized Mr. Pat L. Pace, coordinator of the "Manna" (nutrition program) as well as the graduates of the Mexico mission education program. In her remarks, Ms. C.P. Veronica Salazar Vasquez expressed the appreciation of the City Government for the humanitarian efforts undertaken by the Mar Thoma church in the Matamoros coastal fishing community and promised the continued support from the City Government. She also shared her experience of visiting several of the (Colonia Mar Thoma) mission homes and the difference the Church is making in their lives.



The residents of the Colonia Mar Thoma sang Spanish and Malayalam songs in the public meeting. The Malayalam song "Ithratholam Yahova Sahayichu" sung by the adult residents of the 'Colonia Mar Thoma' was a heartwarming experience for many in the audience. Thirumeni recognized of the mission field coordinator, Mr. P. T. Abraham and the local Mexico mission coordinator Mr. John Thomas for their services, in the overall development of the Mexico Mission, and presented mementos on behalf of the Diocese. Rev. O. C. Kurian and Ms. Arlene Mathew delivered felicitation remarks. The Diocesan treasurer Mr. Chacko Mathew expressed the vote of thanks. The meeting was adjourned with the closing prayer of Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese. The Jubilee Chapel consecration is the culmination of the decade long mission activities of the Diocese among the fishermen families in the coastal areas of Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico. The Jubilee Chapel is located at the Mexico mission residential community, 'Colonia Mar Thoma', at the 18.5 KM mark on Highway Carretera a El Mezquital (Highway 5), Tamaulipas, Mexico - about 45 Kilo Meters from the US border.



There are 45 mission-supported families currently living in Colonia Mar Thoma. The residential community also includes three school buildings, a congregation hall (old chapel), a small store, parsonage, two evangelists' quarters, a dispensary and training institutes. The Mexico mission activities include nutritional program (Manna), education support, economic development, basic healthcare/ wellness support and spiritual development programs. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose". Romans 8:28.

Mr. John Thomas, Local Coordinator, Mexico Mission



## Visit to Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT

On Wednesday, November 6, 2013, Rev. Dennis Abraham (Youth Chaplain, South East Region), Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel (Vicar, St. Stephen's MTC, New Jersey), and Mrs. Neethi Prasad paid a visit to Yale University Divinity School at New Haven, Connecticut. There was a luncheon meeting with Fr. Dr. Bryan D. Spinks, the Bishop F. Percy Goddard Professor of Liturgical Studies and Pastoral Theology, and chair of the program in liturgical studies. Thereafter, Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel presented a paper in the liturgy class of Fr. Dr. Bryan D. Spinks, on the historical development of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, which emphasized the reformation movement and its impact on the church. Also, he discussed the Holy Qurbana liturgy of the Mar Thoma Church, focusing on the structure and meaning of the liturgy. The students present asked questions, and there was an open discussion concerning the same.



After the lecture, the team visited the Overseas Ministries Study Center (OMSC), which is located next to Yale Divinity School and works with the school to bring students from around the globe and also provides study abroad programs for present theological students at Yale Divinity School. The team had tea with the Rev. J. Nelson Jennings, Ph.D., who is the director of the institute, and the possibility of providing opportunities to students of the Mar Thoma Church was discussed. The Holy Qurbana using the revised liturgy of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar was conducted at 6 PM in the divinity school chapel. Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel (Vicar, St. Stephen's MTC, NJ) celebrated, and was assisted by Fr. Dr. Bryan Spinks (Professor of Liturgical Studies, Yale Divinity School), and Rev. Dennis Abraham (South East Region Youth Chaplain). The service was followed by a fellowship dinner at the Berkeley Center with all those who had attended and taken part in the Holy Qurbana service.

Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel, New Jersey

## Mandalam Members from Diocese



Mandalam Members from NAE Diocese with Metropolitan and Diocesan Episcopa

## World Sunday School Celebrations by UK Regional Sunday School

The 2nd all UK Regional Sunday School meeting was held at Christ the King Learning Center, Liverpool on November 2, 2013 to celebrate the World Sunday School Day. The meeting was hosted by Carmel Mar Thoma Church Liverpool. 3 Achens and almost 300 adults and children from 6 parishes and a prayer group attended the meeting.



The program began with a Holy Communion service celebrated by Rev. K. P. Johnson, the Sunday school president for this region. Rev. Sam John, Vicar of Carmel Mar Thoma Church welcomed everyone present on the day. This was followed by separate retreats for both Sunday school students and teachers. The retreat for students was led by Mr. Sajeev Abraham and Mrs. Reena Abraham and the teachers' retreat was led by Rev. Jose Punnamadom. Jose Achen highlighted that 'Education is Enlightenment and that there is Spiritual Vacuum and we should fill Jesus Christ in our children.' The singing session on the day was led by Mr. Stanley John, Mr. Subin Mathew and Mr. Vineet Abraham.

After a delicious lunch, the Sunday school children from different parishes performed various cultural programs. Venerable Archdeacon Ricky Panter of Liverpool Diocese was the Chief Guest for the program. After the program the Europe regional Sunday school secretary Mrs. Suja Biju gave the vote of thanks. The Europe Region Sunday School was thankful to Almighty God for giving them an opportunity to gather as Regional Sunday school and worship and praise His Holy name. The Sunday school also expressed their gratitude to all leaders and also to the executive committee and all the members of Carmel Ma Thoma Church for hosting this blessed event.

Rev. K. P. Johnson, President, Europe Regional SS  
Mrs. Suja Biju, Regional Sunday School Secretary

## WCC Delegates from the Mar Thoma Church



The Mar Thoma delegates attended the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches. The Assembly with the theme, "God of life, lead



us to justice and peace" was met in Busan, Republic of Korea, from October 30 to November 8, 2013. The Mar Thoma Metropolitan led the delegation. Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Suffragan Metropolitan and Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos were also in the team. Ms. Arlene Ann Mathew, Diocesan Council member represented the Diocese as part of the team. Mr. John Titus and Mrs. Kusum Titus (Seattle MTC) participated as observers from our Diocese representing Mar Thoma Church. Philoxenos Thirumeni was elected to the Central Committee of the WCC for a second term. The Diocese of North America congratulates Thirumeni and prays that our Lord may shower His grace upon Thirumeni in the new position. The Assembly has the mandate to set the future agenda of the council, to elect governance officials and to speak with a public voice on behalf of the churches. It is also a unique moment for the whole fellowship of member churches to come together in prayer and celebration.

Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

## APDM Annual Retreat 2013



The APDM 2013 retreat was held at the Sheraton Mahwah Hotel, Mahwah, New Jersey on September 27, 28 & 29th. The theme for this year's retreat was "Let Your Light Shine Before Others" Matthew 5:16. Dr. Mathew Chacko welcomed everybody to the retreat. Dr. Thomas Abraham gave a brief overview of APDM. Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa inaugurated the retreat with a very inspiring message. Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese gave messages during the retreat based on the theme, which were enlightening to everyone. He spoke in detail as to how as Christian doctors, we can shine the light before others and be witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ. Besides devotional messages, there were also medical seminars by Dr. John Abraham, Dr. Alex Thomas and Dr. Sam Thampi on Saturday the 28th, which was highly informational and educational.

On Saturday evening the Talent Night event was a truly enjoyable affair with everybody participating. The witnessing led by Dr. John Abraham, on Saturday night was a truly inspiring occasion as participants came forward and rededicated themselves. The retreat concluded on Sunday with Worship service and Holy Communion led by Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese. Everyone who attended the retreat felt truly blessed in having been part of this event. During the general body meeting, new office bearers were elected. Dr. Mathew Chacko- President, Dr. Mohan Abraham-Vice President, Dr. Lena Ann Mathew-Secretary, Dr. Kurien Abraham-Treasurer and Dr. Sam Thampi-Joint secretary. The APDM expressed their special thanks to Theodosius Thirumeni and Philip Varghese Achen for their guidance and leadership.

Dr. Mathew Chacko, President

## 'Patrick Mission' in Native American Mission Field

As part of the eight regional projects approved by the Diocesan Assembly, the Southwest Region A RAC consisting of representatives from parishes in Dallas, Houston, Austin, Lubbock, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Kansas had decided to undertake 'Patrick Mission' project among the



Choctaw community of the Native Americans in Broken bow, OK. Patrick Cherian Maruthmmotil, 26 years old, and a member of St. Paul's MTC, Dallas had met with a car accident and was called to eternity while taking part in the Native American mission project at Camp Folsom, OK on June 4, 2013. This was his 6th mission trip to Native American community in Oklahoma. He was the only one child of Mr. Cherian, and Mrs. Jessy Oommen, Al Alain, U. A. E.

The Mc Gee Chapel Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Broken bow, OK has agreed to lease up to 4 acres of their property for 'Patrick Mission' project. The Southwest RAC has agreed to undertake the project upon recommendation of the Diocesan Council. The plan is to build a facility of about 3,000 sq. ft., at a cost of about \$300,000 in 2 acres of property to be leased for 99 years in favor of Southwest RAC. Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma, Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church handed over two checks totaling \$1,000 as first contribution for 'Patrick Mission' to Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa during the Silver Jubilee finale program of the Diocese held on Nov. 23, 2013 at New York. While delivering the checks to Diocesan Bishop, Metropolitan said that it is his privilege and honor to inaugurate fund raising for this great project and wished all success. Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa by receiving the checks thanked Metropolitan for the generous contribution and informed that all proceeds from the book titled 'Churching the Diaspora, Discipling the Families' released during the 2013 Sabha Mandalam meeting held in Thiruvalla, authored by him will be used for 'Patrick Mission' project.



The plan is to build the facility in dorm style for about 40-50 volunteers to stay and work during the mission trips undertaken among Native Americans. The facility will also have a kitchen, separate toilets and bathrooms for boys and girls, meeting room cum dining area for about 40-50 people. The facility will be owned and administered by the Southwest RAC. The facility will be also used on a daily basis for after school activities of Native American children living around the facility. There are 13 Native American communities, consisting of around 4,000 people including children and youths, who will be able to use this facility for their community activities also. The plans are to begin fund raising with immediate effect and to begin construction immediately and to dedicate the same upon completion. Both Metropolitan Joseph Mar Thoma and the Diocesan Bishop Mar Theodosius appealed to all believers to contribute generously to the 'Patrick Mission' project so that this mission project can witness the presence of Mar Thoma Church among Native Americans in Oklahoma.

O. C. Abraham, Philadelphia, Native American Mission



# Diocesan Silver Jubilee Finale Held at NY

The yearlong celebration of the Silver Jubilee of the formation of the Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church concluded with the finale programs at the Benjamin Cardoza High School Auditorium at Bayside in New York on Saturday, November 23, 2013. This was also an occasion for the inauguration of the Silver Jubilee of the Episcopal Consecration of the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius. The Metropolitan of the Church, Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma was the chief guest of the finale event.



The programs of the day began with a thanks giving Holy Communion Service in English led by the Jubilarian Bishop at the St. John's Mar Thoma Church, Queens Village in New York at 8 a. m. A large number of believers from various parishes of the Diocese, especially from North East and South East regions participated in the Holy Communion service.

The public meeting started at 10.30 A. M. with a procession at the Benjamin Cardoza High School Auditorium. To mark 25 years of blessed ministry of the Diocese in this hemisphere, 25 persons from each group representing children, youths, couples, ladies, seniors, and clergy participated in the procession. Diocesan Council members and Sabha Council members both past and present also joined the procession. An young boy with an open Bible led the procession in the very front, symbolizing the future generations of Diaspora Marthomites of the Diocese continuing the faith journey of the Church in this Diocese. Each group in the procession stood facing the audience and greeted them as they came in front of the dais as part of the procession. The audience received each group with loud applause. Towards the end of the procession, the dignitaries including the Metropolitan and Diocesan Bishop joined and they were received and invited to the dais by the Altar boys from the North East region. The believers stood in ovation till the Metropolitan and other bishops entered the dais and occupied their seats. Former Diocesan Treasurers, present council members and other dignitaries were also seated in the dais. The instrumental music by Ms. Anisa Kurian and team added special attraction for the procession.

The opening prayer was led by Mrs. Nirmala Abraham, the lady representative from the first diocesan council. Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary and General Convener of the Jubilee Finale, welcomed the Metropolitan, Diocesan Episcopa, all other Bishops, leaders, dignitaries and participants of the meeting. In his welcome speech, he congratulated the Jubilarian Bishop and prayed for God's blessings upon him. In his presidential address, the Diocesan Episcopa remembered that the formation of the diocese is the product of the hard work, fervent prayers and vision of many early immigrants and our church leaders. His lordship also highlighted the challenges faced by the faith community today like challenges of globalization, cultural diversity, secularity, social ethics and congregational ministry. The choirs from North East and South East regions (both senior and junior) sung melodious songs.

The chief guest, Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan, gave the inaugural address. He recollected the days when he came to the US and the struggles faced by the people during that time. The progress made by the Mar Thoma community in the western hemisphere and the ecumenical



community around the world were also pointed out by His Grace. The meeting was blessed with the presence and leadership of Bishops from sister churches. Most Rev. Eldo Mar Titus, Archbishop and Patriarchal Vicar of Malankara Archdiocese in North America; Most Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Eusebius, the Bishop of Syro - Malankara Catholic Apostolic Exarchate in USA; The Rt. Rev. Johncy Itty, the Associate Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island and the Chairman of the board of directors of the Church World Service, and Rt. Rev. George Ninan, the Bishop Emeritus of the Church of North India gave felicitations on behalf of their respective Dioceses.



The Jubilee year was marked with the release of seven publications by the Diocese.



Extending a helping hand to the people in need is a significant gesture of Jubilee in the Old Testament. To make that message meaningful in the life of the Diocese, the Diocesan organizations collected a substantial amount for various charity programs. The Diocesan Sevika Sangham collected US \$44,000 to give marriage aid for 22 girls in various Mar Thoma Dioceses in India. This amount was handed over to the Metropolitan by Mrs. Anju Bijili, the Diocesan Sevika Sangham Treasurer. To support 11 houseless people, Diocesan Yuvajana Sakhyam collected US \$22,000 and the same was handed over to Metropolitan by Mr. John Varghese, Diocesan YS Secretary.



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The Diocesan Sunday School arranged a program, 'Kids for Kids', to support the higher education of deserving students in Kerala. They could collect US \$13,450 for this purpose and it was handed over by the Secretary of Diocesan Sunday School Mr. Tom Philip.



The MTVEA of Diocese could collect US \$19,000 to support Social welfare institutions in Kerala, namely, the Asha Bhavan (the Mar Thoma School for the physically challenged), Pidavoor; Nava Jyothi (the Mar Thoma School for the mentally challenged), Thelliyoor; Jyothis (the Mar Thoma School for the mentally challenged), Mavelikkara; Opportunity School (the Mar Thoma School for the mentally handicapped), Bangalore and the Mar Thoma School for the Deaf, Kasargod. Dr. Alex Thomas, Secretary of Diocesan MTVEA handed over the amount to Metropolitan.



The Diocesan Choir collected US \$3,300 to support the mission fields in Mumbai diocese to purchase their own musical instruments. The amount was handed over by Mrs. Grace John, the assembly representative from Choir and Diocesan Council member. Mr. George Jacob handed over US \$2,500 on behalf of the Senior Citizen Fellowship to support two Vayojana Mandirams in Kerala. The India Mission convener of the Diocese Mrs. Laila Anie Philip handed over US \$4,615 to support Maharashtra Mission, to which she led a team of 10 youths for an exposure in the Jubilee year 2013. Likewise four more teams visited different mission fields in India and supported its activities in different capacities as a part of their Jubilee contributions. Mr. Georgy Varghese, Diocesan Council Member, handed over check for US \$17,500 to support Metropolitan's 'Snehakaram' project, Uttaraghand Housing project and Kuttanadu Housing Project. Apart from all these, Diocese set apart amounts to support the renovation of four houses which were destroyed in a wild fire in Narasapuram Mission in Andhra Pradesh and Medical aid to deserving people in India. Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma, Metropolitan handed over two checks totaling \$1,000 as first contribution for 'Patrick Mission' to Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius.

Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Suffragan Metropolitan, Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa, Rt. Rev. Isaac Mar Philoxinos Episcopa, Rt. Rev. Dr. Abraham Mar Paulos Episcopa, and Rt. Rev. Gregorios Mar Stephanos visited the Diocese during the Jubilee year and gave messages as chief guests at the regional Jubilee celebrations. In turn the Diocese through the parishes helped the respective dioceses for the various needs.



The Diocese of North America and Europe is blessed in a special way to have the privilege of celebrating the finale of Silver Jubilee of Diocesan formation and the inauguration of the Silver Jubilee of the consecration of its Diocesan Bishop. Mr. Alan John, Diocesan Council Member, felicitated the Jubilarian Bishop on behalf of the Diocese and invited Thirumeni to celebrate the occasion by cutting a cake. It was an occasion for all assembled there to praise and thank God for the leaders of the Church namely Mar Athanasius, Mar Theodosius and Mar Coorilos who are entering into the Silver Jubilee year of their Episcopal consecration.



The dignitaries were honored with a gift from the Diocese. Ms. Arlene Mathew invited the dignitaries to receive the gift. The Diocesan Council and Sabha Council Members handed over the gifts to the dignitaries. Mr. Chacko Mathew, Diocesan Treasurer expressed vote of thanks to all and Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese, program manager led the closing prayer.



Before benediction everybody stood up and joined hands together sang the song 'Bind us together Lord....' led by Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan. This was followed by benediction by the Metropolitan. Dr. Mathew T. Thomas, Diocesan Council member was the master of ceremonies for the finale program.

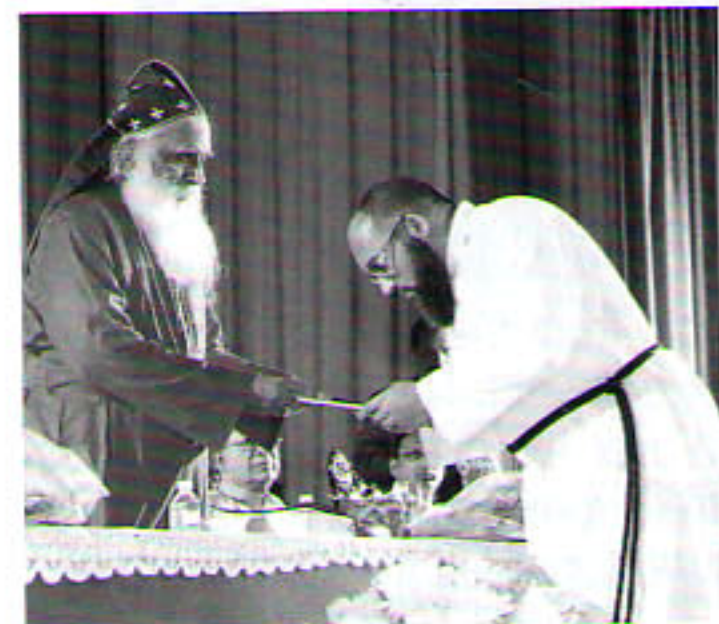
Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary



# Diocesan Publications in the Jubilee year

The Diocesan Silver Jubilee year was eventful with a lot of publications. Various books, centered around the theme: Church - Journeying with Christ, played a vital role in continuing the theme discussions, to document the history and to create a vision for the future. The following seven publications were released during the Jubilee Finale on November 23, 2013 by the Mar Thoma Metropolitan Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma. Rev. Joji K Mathew, the joint convener of the Jubilee Finale, invited the dignitaries for the book release.

**'Churching the Diaspora, Discipling the Families'** written by the Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius. This book speaks about the human migration and the challenges of it for the Christian Diasporic communities. We This book was released by the Metropolitan on the first day (September 17) of Sabha Prathinidhi Mandalam Meeting at Tiruvalla. 'Church: Journeying with Christ'. This is the Jubilee Volume prepared by the Diocese. This documents the significant mile stones in the history of our Diocese from its very beginning. Rev. K. E. Geevarghese served as the chief editor of this publication. There are 38 articles in 370 pages written by a group of people both young and old, men and women, ordained and laity. Rev. Jaisen A Thomas, Diocesan Council member, handed over the book to Metropolitan and Dr. John Lincoln, former the Diocesan Treasurer received it.



**'Focus on the word: Journeying with Christ':** This is a Bible study book containing 12 Bible studies written by people from various walks of life. Dr. Mathew T. Thomas, Washington served as the chief editor of this publication. Rev. Roy A Thomas, Diocesan Council Member handed over the book to Metropolitan and Kuruvilla Cherian, former diocesan treasurer received it.

**Diocesan Jubilee Memoir:** This is a unique publication of the Jubilee year. The intention was to record the leadership provided by our members (both the ordained and laity) for the growth and development of the parishes / Diocese and to honour the early immigrants by providing space to share their memories. Mr. Varghese P Varghese served as the chief editor, who handed over the book to Metropolitan and Mr. John Titus, Seattle received it.



**'Diocesan Directory'** The Diocesan Directory helps us to connect and communicate with the people within the Diocese. This is the fifth

edition and a Jubilee Special issue. The Diocesan Treasurer Mr. Chacko Mathew served as the convener of this project. Mr. T. A. Mathew, former Diocesan Treasurer handed over the book to Metropolitan and Mr. M. K. Thomas, former the Diocesan Treasurer received it. 'Word for the Day: Vol II. This is the devotional notes, prepared and published by the Christian Education Forum of the North East Region of the Diocese. It contains devotion for a full year. This is the second volume of the devotional book. Rev. V. M. Mathew served as the convener and CEF committee was the editorial board. Rev. V. M. Mathew handed over the book to Metropolitan and Mr. C. V. Simonkutti, the treasurer of literature society received it.



**Mar Thoma Messenger** is the official magazine of the Diocese of North America and Europe. During the Jubilee year Mar Thoma Messenger was a very good medium to discuss the Jubilee theme and to share the news and events of various Jubilee programs with the readers of the magazine worldwide. The chief editor Dr. Eapen Daniel handed over a copy of the Messenger to Metropolitan and Mr. P. T. Mathew, Philadelphia received it.



**Silver Jubilee Souvenir** Rev. Joji K Mathew, the General Convener of North East region, invited Mr. Renu Varhghese to hand over the first copy of Souvenir to Metropolitan and Mr. Varghese Tiruvalla to receive it. Copies of these books are available at Literature Society and the Diocesan Office.



Malankara Darshan is the official Television Programming of Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church. It started broadcasting on Saturday, August 3, 2013. Please see the time and information below.

Malayalam IPVTV broadcast Malankara Darshan TV on Shaolom TV India Time

Time:  
Every Saturday - 8:00 AM Eastern Standard Time (7:00 AM CST)

Every Tuesday - 9:30 PM Eastern Standard Time (8:30 PM CST)

For more information, please contact:  
T.A. Mathew (General Coordinator for USA)  
Tel: 713-436-2207 E-mail: tamathew47@gmail.com



## Episcopal Silver Jubilee Year of Mar Theodosius— 2014



Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa, the Diocesan Bishop of Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church is completing 25 years as an Episcopa of the Mar Thoma Church on Dec. 09, 2014. Mar Theodosius was consecrated as Episcopa of the Mar Thoma Church on Dec. 9, 1989 along with Rt. Rev. Geevarghese Mar Athanasius (Ranni – Nilackal Diocese) and Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos (Kottarakara – Punalur Diocese) by Most Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma, Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church. As a tribute to Mar Theodosius, the Diocese is celebrating 2014 as Episcopal silver jubilee year by conducting various programs at regional levels.

During the silver jubilee finale program of the Diocese held at New York on Nov. 23, 2013, Mar Theodosius cut the cake as a mark for the inauguration of the Episcopal silver jubilee program in the presence of all dignitaries including Metropolitan Joseph Mar Thoma of the Mar Thoma Church. A book titled 'Churching the Diaspora, Discipling the Families' written by Mar Theodosius was also announced during the occasion. Mar Theodosius informed that all the proceeds from the sale of the book will be used for the 'Patrick Mission' project among the Native Americans in Oklahoma.

Mar Theodosius is serving as Diocesan Bishop of the Diocese of North America and Europe since January 2009. Mar Theodosius was ordained as 'Kasseesa' in the year 1973. In 1979, he studied at Visva Bharathi University and in 1980 he proceeded to McMaster university Canada for his post graduate studies. His thesis was based on 'Change and continuity in the religious life of Ezhavas of Southern Travancore.' From 1973 onwards, he was in charge of several parishes including Mumbai, Calcutta, Toronto, Nanthancode, and Kozhiokode, and also served as the first Director of Thomas Mar Athanasius Orientation Centre, Mangalam. He served as Episcopa at Madras – Kunnamkulam Diocese (1990-1993), Kunnamkulam – Malabar Diocese (1993-1997), Trivandrum – Kollam Diocese (1997-2005), Chennai - Bangalore Diocese and Malaysia - Singapore - Australia Diocese (2005-2008) of the Mar Thoma Church. He is a good administrator and has deep knowledge in theology and has published several books including the most recent book mentioned above. He celebrated his 60th birthday in 2009 and a Festschrift volume titled 'In Search of Christian Identity in Global Community' was published during that occasion by the Diocese of North America and Europe.

He has the vision of giving administrative participation on the regional level in order to increase the participation of the members of the Church and to strengthen the growth of the Diocese. He has keen interest in responding to the concerns of the New Generations in the local context and is trying to give new initiatives as a church leader to find more relevant and meaningful ministry in the community.

Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

## Kottarakkara - Punalur Diocese 13th Diocese of the Mar Thoma Church



The Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church, Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma as per Kalpana No: 175 dated Oct. 21, 2013 and under the authority vested in Clause 57 of the Sabha Constitution, re-organized the Trivandrum – Kollam Diocese and formed a new Diocese with the name Kottarakkara – Punalur Diocese in consultation with the Sabha Council and Episcopal Synod. The new Diocese also includes two centers namely Punalur and Thalavoor from Adoor Diocese and the new Diocese will have 90 parishes under its jurisdiction, while the Trivandrum – Kollam Diocese will have 89 parishes under its jurisdiction. This is the 13th Diocese of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the same was inaugurated on Dec. 1, 2013 at Kottarakkara by Most. Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma, Metropolitan by lighting the lamp at the new Diocesan Center in Kottarakkara, followed by other Bishops and Clergy.



The dedication service began with Holy Communion service at Kottarakkara Mar Thoma Church at 7 AM on Dec. 1, 2013 led by Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos, the Diocesan Bishop of the newly approved Diocese. Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Valiya Metropolitan, Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma, Rt. Rev. Thomas Mar Timotheos, Diocesan Bishop of Trivandrum – Kollam Diocese, Rt. Rev. Gregorios Mar Stephanos, Diocesan Bishop of Kunnamkulam – Malabar Diocese, Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Theethos, Diocesan Bishop of Mumbai Diocese were also present during the dedication of the Diocesan Center. The Holy Communion service and dedication of the Diocesan Center was also attended by several clergy of the church and also by believers from various parts of the new Diocese and other places. After completing his degree and post graduate studies from Sacred Heart College, Thevara, Cochin and Christ College, Irinjalakuda, Mar Coorilos joined Mar Thoma Seminary, Kottayam for theological education. In 1978, he was ordained as Kasseesa and subsequently served as parish priest at Jalahalli, Palarivat-tom, Colaba and Staten Island, and other parishes. On December 9, 1989, he was consecrated as Episcopa along with Geevarghese Mar



Athanasius, and Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopas. Mar Coorilos served as Diocesan Episcopa in Adoor - Mavelikara, Ranni-Nilackal Diocese, Kottayam – Cochi, North America and Europe and also as Sahaya Methran of Niranam – Maramon Diocese. It was during his tenure as Diocesan Bishop, that the Native American Mission and Mexico Mission have been started by our Diocese. The Diocese of North America and Europe wishes that our Lord may guide the new Kottarkkara – Punalur Diocese to continue the faith journey of the Mar Thoma Church. The Diocese also wishes and prays that our Lord Jesus may continue to keep Thirumeni in His providence especially at a time Thirumeni is taking charge of the new Diocese.

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## Bethel Mar Thoma Church Sunday School Achievements-2013

The year 2013 was a remarkable and blessed year for Bethel Mar Thoma Sunday School. For the Diocesan examination conducted on May 5th, 2013, out of 25 students appeared in the exam, there are 11 winners, five plaques and six certificates. Anjali John, Amal Mathew, Christin George, Ajay Oommen, Jerin George are the plaque holders. The Certificate winners are Chaitanya Alexander, Rosemary Thomas, Nevin Chacko, Reuben George, Ashley Abraham and Anisha Oommen. The Bethel Mar Thoma church congratulates these children for their remarkable achievement. The teachers and students work hard for this great honor. It is especially noticeable that all the six grade 5 students appeared in the exam received plaques and certificates, to be precise, four plaques and two certificates. The teacher Mrs. Susan Abraham deserves the credit for this. All these awards were distributed to the students on our Family Sunday on October 27th, 2013 by our beloved Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa.



Another great achievement is in the South East Regional Competition conducted in Ascension MTC on October 26th, 2013. Our Sunday school children won six individual prizes in English solo competition. The prize winners are Joel Abraham (First), Amal Mathew (Second), Anjali John (Second), Reuben George (Second), Alisha Joseph (First), and Justin James (Second). The Bethel Mar Thoma church congratulates these children for their remarkable achievement. There is a special effort of Rev. Alexander Varughese and Mr. George Jacob in taking time and effort for practicing these children for the Malayalam and English songs. These awards were also distributed to the students on our Family Sunday on October 27th, 2013 by our beloved Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa. At this juncture, as the Superintendent of Bethel Mar Thomas Sunday School, I want to thank our vicar Rev. Alexander Varughese, Mrs. Elizabeth Mathew (secretary) and Mr. John Philip (treasurer) for their valuable contribution to the Sunday School. Many of the members of the church are helping the Sunday School directly or indirectly. I thank all members of church for considering Sunday school as an essential part of church and supporting in many ways.

Rev. Alexander Varughese ( Vicar)  
Varughese N. Mathew ( Superintendent)

## 2013 U. K. – Europe

# Family Conference of the Mar Thoma Church



The lovely conference center at Swanick, Derbyshire was the venue of the 31st Family conference of UK & Europe, held from 30th August to 1st September. 440 delegates came from all over the UK and abroad. The Inaugural session started with introduction of the speakers by the convener, Mr. Jaffey Chacko followed by a talk on the chosen theme – 'Come...let us walk in the light of the Lord' by Rev. K. P. Johnson, the Vicar of the host parish, St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Bristol. The Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, welcomed the delegates and gave the inaugural address, setting out the need for walking in the light in the increasingly 'dark' world. Speakers for the conference were Rt. Rev. Gregorios Mar Stephanos, Rev. Dr. David Wenham,

Rev. Dr. Jacob Thomas, Rev. Joseph Daniel and Rev. Alwyn Pereira. The Silver Jubilee of the formation of the Diocese of North America and Europe was celebrated by a lunch and a meeting, which was addressed by the Diocesan Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Gregorios Mar Stephanos, The Bishop of Bristol, The Rt. Rev. Mike Hill and by Dr. Zac Varghese. Each of the speakers spoke of the need to remember the ways God has led us thus far and Bishop Mike spoke about 6 tools that are vital in the journey of faith with the risen Lord Jesus. His talk was both inspiring and challenging.

Jaffey Chacko, Convener

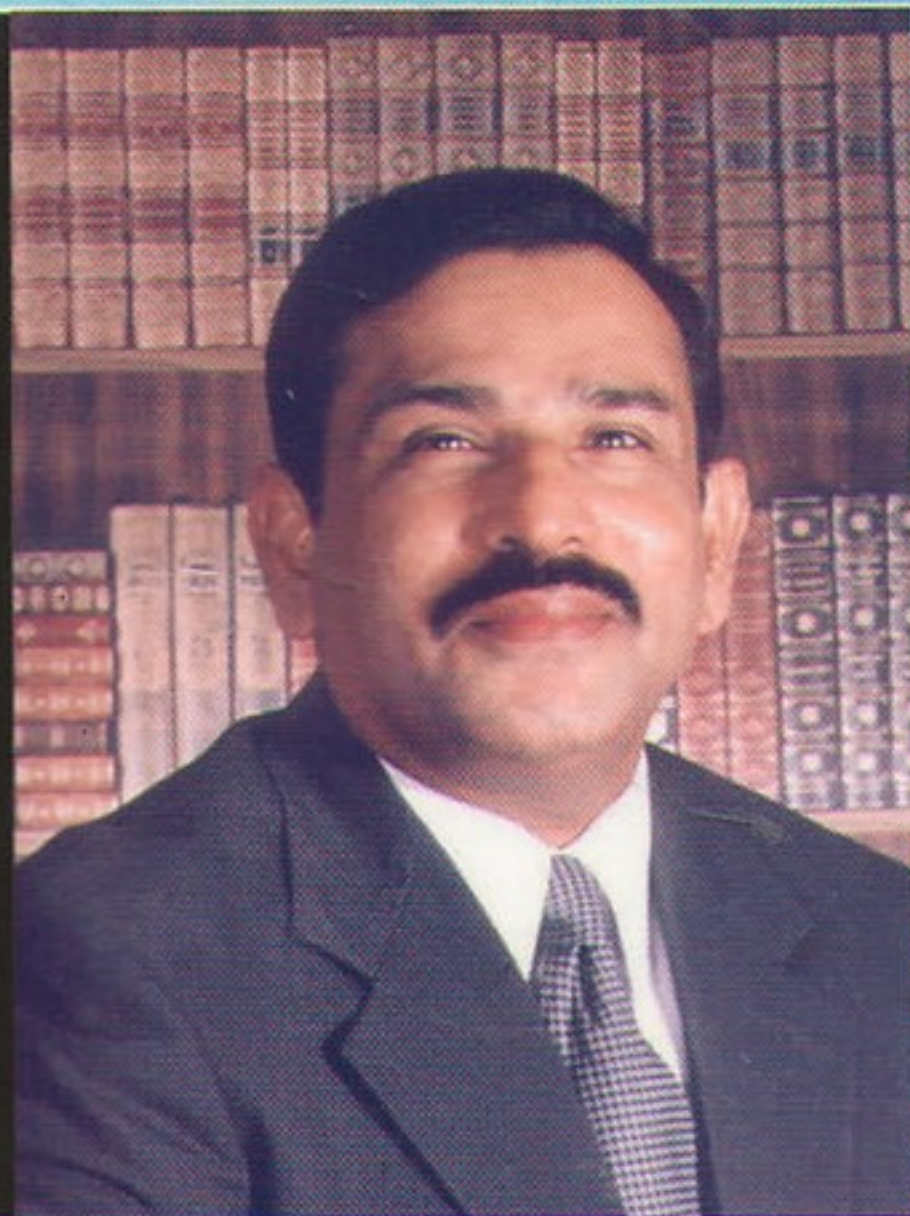


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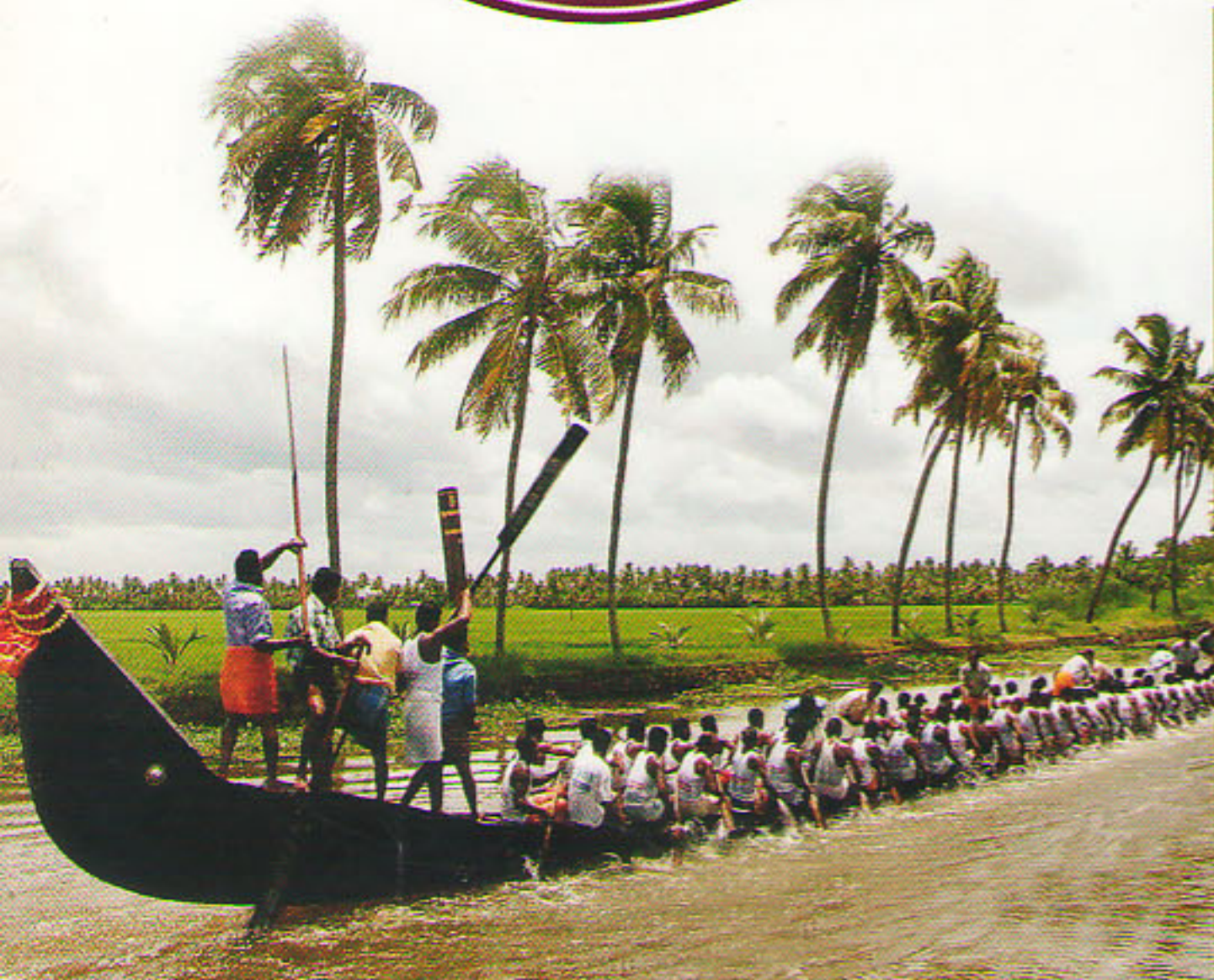
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