

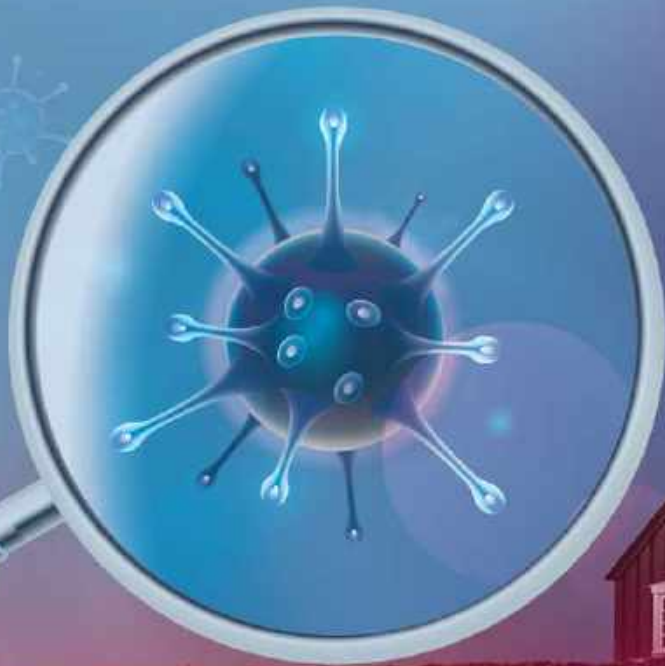


# MAR THOMA MESSENGER

A Publication of the Diocese of North America & Europe

JULY - AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2020

Vol. XXXIX. No: 3



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(PANDEMIC)



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A publication of the Diocese of North America & Europe

**JULY - AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2020**



A Publication of the Diocese of North America & Europe (For private circulation only)  
Vol. XXXIX, No: 3

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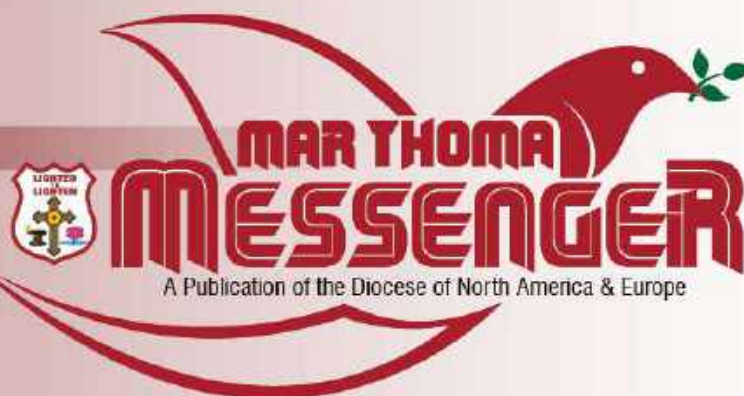
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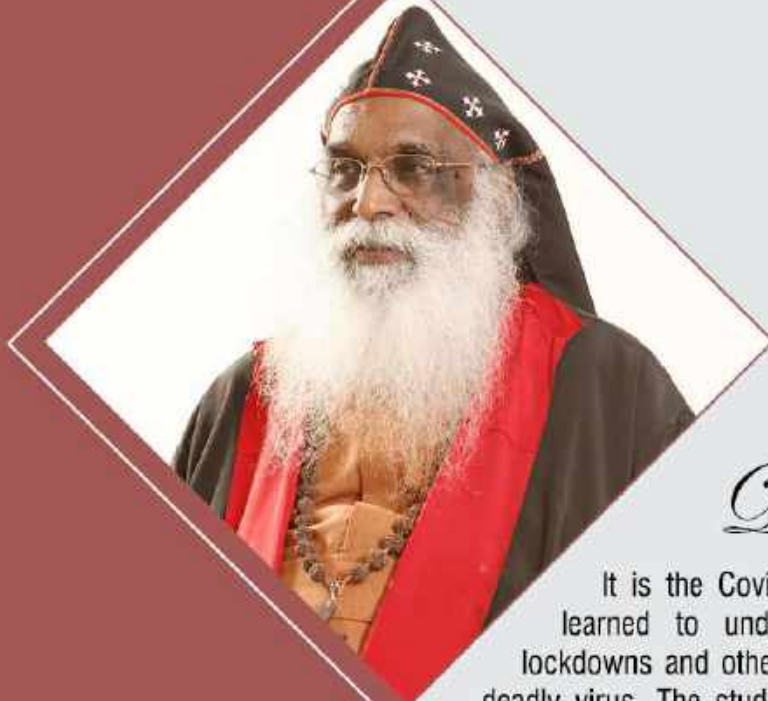
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## Message from The Metropolitan

*D*early beloved in Christ,

It is the Covid-19 period. People have learned to undergo the restrictions of lockdowns and other situations related to this deadly virus. The students who are expected to begin their new school year are trying to manage with online classes at home. The technology and its vast avenues are now open before children. They should not misuse these instruments. Parents, teachers, and students should come together in the same platform for the students to tap the full use of technology.

We see that the nations of the world are struck by the attack of the virus. The death rate is increasing day by day. The economy is being crushed. Today many powerful countries are engaged in a warfare of words, blaming each other. Unity, peace, and coordinated efforts are what we need now to drive away this virus from our planet.

It is a matter of joy that many of our people can come back to their native land during this pandemic times. The airline companies are now actively engaged in bringing back those who want to return from their workplaces, especially in the Middle East.

Our Episcopal Synod met two times through video conferencing. All our Bishops participated in this meeting. This was the first time in the history of our Church that we conducted the Episcopal meeting in such a manner.



We participated in a meeting conducted by the Chief Minister of Kerala, to discuss the chances of reopening worship places, which were closed due to the lockdown. We expressed the view of the Mar Thoma Church in this regard, and it was generally accepted and much appreciated. We also expressed our wholehearted support to the government approach for bringing back the diaspora community to Kerala. We handed over a cheque for Rupees 35 lakhs to the Chief Minister as our contribution to the CM's Relief Fund. The Chief Minister expressed his thanks to the Mar Thoma Church.

In connection with the construction program of our Church, two foundation stones were laid. We laid the foundation stone for the more needed secretariat complex on June 27<sup>th</sup>. Another foundation stone laid was for the Mar Thoma Press. The construction work of the Nilackal Church under the guidance of Nilackal Ecumenical Trust is almost completed. We held a meeting of the Trust at our Synod chamber. The members discussed the possibilities of collecting the money that is needed for the completion of the Church. We also thought about the consecration of the Church. This Church, when completed will be one of the most beautiful churches in India reflecting the beauty of the traditional church-architectural construction that Kerala proudly holds for centuries. We need some more money to finish this project that culminates in the unity and strength of various Churches in India. I invoke the financial help of willing persons in this regard.

Our universally honored, the Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Valiya Metropolitan completed 67 years in Episcopal Ministry on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. I visited Thirumeni on that day and offered prayers. I praise God for all the grace bestowed on him by the Almighty so that Thirumeni spends his time pleasantly every day.

The annual Sunday Service of CCA (Christian Conference of Asia) was conducted on May 24<sup>th</sup> through a video zoom conference. We used a special liturgy for this service. Rt. Rev. Dhilo Raj Canagasbey, Bishop of the Anglican Church of Colombo, delivered the message. There were 36 participants. The Armenian Bishop in Iran did the opening prayer. The meeting ended with my prayer and benediction. In connection with the Divine Music

Sunday of our Church, a virtual musical worship was arranged by DSMC. It was a joyful experience. I got an opportunity to take part in it by delivering a message. The program ended with my prayer and benediction. This was a hearty musical treatment, and I appreciate everybody who participated in it.

Lockdown became inevitable, owing to Covid-19, and we are not able to open our churches to worship these days. But instead of cursing darkness, we must try to light at least one candle. So, we began to worship online, making use of modern technology that is available nowadays. We were able to arrange worships through Poolatheen Chapel, Diocesan Centers, and various other churches. I praise God for His mercy in enabling me to lead the Holy communion Service and to share the word of God every Sunday from the beginning of Lockdown without any hazard, broadcasting the services live, so that many of our members along with their families, could participate in these services virtually. Around one hundred thousand people become participants in these services, and it brings all of us happiness and joy. Let us glorify God for His kindness in showering His blessings during these difficult times.

Personally, I went through His abundant blessings these days. I am entering the age of 90, after experiencing God's grace for the last 89 years. I went through different exposures and experiences. But I was never alone. The One who called, set apart, guided, and brought me to the service of the Church was always with me. I praise God for His grace and blessings when I enter the 45<sup>th</sup> year of my Episcopal Consecration. On my birthday, June 27<sup>th</sup>, I led the Holy Communion Service at 8:00 a.m. at the Poolatheen Chapel. This was broadcast live as usual. A felicitation meeting was held on behalf of the Church at 11:00 a.m. as an online program. Through a message online, Mr. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, inaugurated the meeting. I inaugurated the newly constructed gate at the Sabha Center area, where it touches the highway's bypass. The great Metropolitan Juhanon Mar Thoma, in 1975, on the eve of episcopal consecration, called me to the Poolatheen and told me that the name given to me is "Irenaeus." He gave me a letter which I kept even to this day. The letter carried this message - "Of into the maddening range of things, tossed by



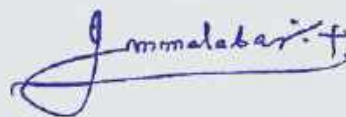
floods and storms, cling your heart to a fixed point and go ahead, tasting God who is good always." This God is good even in the midst of turbulence. I taste this truth even today and live accordingly. I remind you to hold me in your prayers in the days to come.

Rev. M. John, one of our senior priests, died of Covid-19 in Philadelphia. The burial service was conducted observing the norms. Mr. Koshy John, son of Rev. V. T. John who is the brother of our late Rt. Rev. Easow Mar Thimotheos Thirumeni passed away in Chicago owing to a massive heart attack. Mr. V. T. George from Kuriyannur was taken to the eternal abode in Philadelphia. He was an educationist and my classmate at U. C. College, Aaluva. He was my intimate friend. The Mar Thoma Church expresses its condolences to all the bereaving families. The Church prays for the solace of the members of all the families.

The Church enters its meditations in June with Trinity Sunday. The devotions lead our visions to ennobling heights. We get an insight into the eternal and unique nature of the Almighty Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The next Sunday, we observed as Environment Sunday. The Creation praises the glory of God. After this came the subject- "Worship: celebration of the faith of the people." We meditated on "Discipleship" on Sunday, June 28<sup>th</sup>. We learned that it is a calling for witnessing. July devotions began with the remembrances of Apostle Thomas, who is considered the founder of Christianity in India. The declaration of St. Thomas, "My Lord and My God," remains one of the most valued and unique acceptance of God in the history of mankind.

It is the Truth. We who boast of the tradition of St. Thomas must be able to say in our life situations without any shadow of a doubt, "My Lord and my God." We meditated on the stewardship of resources on July 5<sup>th</sup>. The next Sunday, our deliberations were about priests who are set apart for Divine Ministry. They should become part and parcel of the Church in building the Church on the rock of Faith. The laity also is not an exception. "We all are ambassadors of Christ," was the subject of meditation on July 19<sup>th</sup>. St. James Day was on July 25<sup>th</sup>. James is the first martyr among Christ's disciples. Apostle James and his glorious life remind us of the words written by the famous theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "When Christ calls a person to be his disciple, he calls him to die on his self." On July 26<sup>th</sup>, the Church meditated on "Theological Education for equipping the people of God." We must be witnesses for Christ. Theology should help people in giving right direction. Let us live in Christ. And let Jesus live in us. Through us may He provide fruits for the world in plenty. "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4).

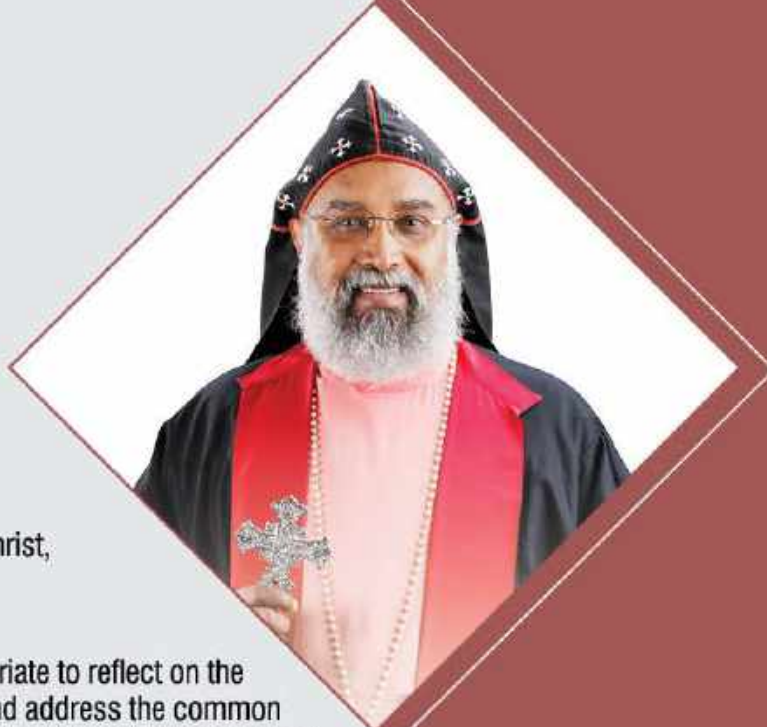
Grace be with you always!



## **DR. JOSEPH MAR THOMA METROPOLITAN**

(Translated by Prof. Elias Abraham, Baltimore Mar Thoma Church, from the June, and July 2020 issues of Tharaka)





*D*early beloved in Christ,

It is important and appropriate to reflect on the present-world scenario and address the common crisis facing everyone. This issue of the Messenger takes the theme “Church in the midst of the Pandemic,” to identify the role of the faith community at this critical juncture of uncertainty that continues to cripple the day-to-day life and functioning of the society.

Humanity all over the world look for a remedy for a tiny virus that threatens as a dreadful killer of the century. How to tide over this crisis is the question everyone asks, irrespective of the status or position one holds in society. People in almost every nation suffer from anxiety and stress, caused by the need for physical safety, economic security, and psychological stability. No one knows where we are heading to, while thick dark cloud is still covering every nation and the whole world. Doctors and medical personnel on the frontline of this war are working overtime with alarming shortage of medical equipment while risking their own lives. The efforts to come out with a medicine and to get a vaccine for the disease is yet to find results. Statistics of people getting infected, becoming symptomatic and succumbing to death are increasing in numbers every day.

This “enemy virus” crosses all boundaries whether it is of nations, race, gender, culture, age, and social status. The usual concept of power, the power of

## Message from The Diocesan Episcopa

wealth, military, titles, and positions, have all bowed down to dust before this puny little organism - coronavirus. We are forced to submit to the truth in Ps. 103:15-16, "As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him."

Though there still remain many unanswered questions with regard to the origin of the virus and where it will take us to the future, it also turns out to be a time to learn new lessons for humanity in order to live healthily and harmoniously. Nations are learning in a new way how we are all interdependent and interconnected, and how we need one another. Everyone is aware that putting aside geopolitical squabbles we all must work together to save as many lives as possible to develop medicines and vaccine for COVID-19.

It is not surprising that amid this crisis that is causing helplessness, agony, and anxiety, so many people seek for a power from beyond them and turn to God. The power of prayer is once again validated. Also, with the closing down of places of worship many have come to realize that religiosity and rituals are in themselves no substitute for true spirituality. Virtual worship replaced the vacuum created by social distancing, to join together for meaningful worship and fellowship.

The current environment is also enabling all generations to go back to the basics and to enjoy the small and simple things in life. People are adapting to the new life style of eating simpler food (we learn to eat what is only necessary), cherishing our environment, and doing things such as, dreaming

about our future and may be making definite goals, appreciating colors, flowers and birds around us, discovering delightful things amongst our stored items, and learning new things about the use of technology (internet, mobile applications, Zoom platform, and ways to conduct online business).

The need for emotional intelligence to deal with the pandemic is felt. While people may feel depressed and frustrated, it may also cause instability and delusion. Proper care and support are essential to individuals to overcome such emotional imbalance. There is a need for caregivers with the ability to demonstrate authentic concern for people. Of course, the church has a greater responsibility in addressing these concerns. How can we be of help to those who feel isolated and want to relate to someone at a time of distress and helplessness?

I appreciate the involvement of our parishes for providing the necessary assistance to the needy according to the local context. The Diocese continues to reach out to the families and parishes and remains connected through online programs, motivating our community to overcome this grave situation. We are called to be the salt of the earth and light to the world. I pray that God may continue to strengthen us to do our part with the hope that a better world will emerge from all these events that we currently experience.

With prayerful regards,



Mar Philoxenos





## EDITORIAL

**Dr. T. (Dr. Mathew T. Thomas)**  
Chief Editor

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has significantly impacted the church globally. For varying time-periods, church facilities and places of worship were locked down. Some still are and some are gradually reopening. Many have developed innovative and alternative ways for offering services. This issue of the Messenger will discuss several aspects pertaining to the church, particularly the Mar Thoma Church, amidst the pandemic.

The pandemic and lockdown of facilities have afforded opportunities for the church to experiment with innovative ways to serve the faith community. It has now become the norm to observe Holy Communion worship services that are live-streamed through YouTube and Zoom platforms, when in-person participation is impossible or unsafe. Conducting regular worship services through Zoom has become commonplace. Prayer meetings, organizational meetings, and committee meetings are now conducted either through conference calls, via telephone or Zoom. Extravagant wedding services and receptions have been diminished to socially distanced, small-scale, immediate-family-only events. Funerals have scaled down to online wakes, while memorial services and funeral services are live-streamed and held with just the immediate family in attendance.

There is considerable psychological stress and emotional strain as a direct result of this pandemic. The restrictions on congregating for worship,

shopping, travel, visiting friends and relatives, eating out, attending classes in schools and colleges, visiting nursing homes and hospitals, and many other aspects of everyday life, have possibly irreversibly changed our society. Working from home is the new norm for many. Juggling between office work and family care from the confines of the home are presenting new challenges. In this issue, we have mental health professionals and scientists offer us advice on how to cope with some of our current challenges. Our clergy share their insights on how humanity can continue to meet God online, seek comfort and fellowship, and offer meaningful worship. We can learn of how our mission work could extend to communities in dire needs within the U.S. While many have succumbed to this deadly disease, a few that survived share their reassuring experiences of renewed health and revived faith in God.

COVID-19 continues to infect and kill people around the world. Despite being perhaps the most advanced country in the world with about four percent of the world's population, until the time of publishing this issue of the Messenger, the United States of America has recorded about 25% of the world's COVID-19 infections and about 20% of the deaths. In India, the number of infected people is the third highest in the world, and number of deaths are the fourth highest in the world. The number of infections and deaths keep rising worldwide. It is intriguing that many smaller countries with lesser



resources appear to efficiently manage COVID-19 and prevent its spread, while the advanced countries are struggling.

COVID-19 has caused immense suffering to hundreds of thousands of people in all spheres of life, leading to a global economic crisis in which the rich are getting richer and the poor are defenseless. One would expect common sense to prevail amidst such a devastating pandemic, and that people would unite to fight this global threat. Yet, we see that people disagree, and have difficulty complying with healthy guidelines of wearing face masks, practicing good hygiene, and following physical and social distancing. It is appalling to see that many let their personal beliefs and preferences guide their thinking and actions even amidst such a data-driven crisis. It is also enraging that some are using these tragic times for financial and/or political gain. The lack of unified approaches to combat the dire condition leaves the entire world grappling to contain the disease and its collateral damage to the world community.

Opinion within the church is also divided. There are many who think they are invincible, and they choose to defy science. They prefer to live their life and continue to worship without restraints or fear. Some unfortunately have paid the price for careless attitudes. There are others that feel vulnerable and scared and sense the immense potential this invisible virus has to destroy life, relationships, and our sacred institutions if the society is unrestrained from spreading the virus.

We, as the church, have an immense responsibility and opportunity to offer leadership and solace amidst this pandemic. Many people are yearning for

spiritual and practical comfort amidst this pandemic. This time – when our hectic lives have slowed down a little, when we can take the time to deeply engage, both spiritually and emotionally – should be taken as a God-given opportunity when the global Church can make great inroads into transforming their sheep and strengthening faith. We must seize the moment to renew and optimize our mission by uniting the people and offering a path forward. This maybe time when the church can take timely, long-term, bold, honest, and Bible-based decisions that adapt to the challenges presented not only by this pandemic but other crises we face or may follow. Engaging in open consultation with experts, dialogue within the faith community, and re-evaluation of practices and policies could lead to timely reformation and revival that reaffirm our faith and reliance on God. The church's engagement with its people during this crisis will stand in good stead for times to come.

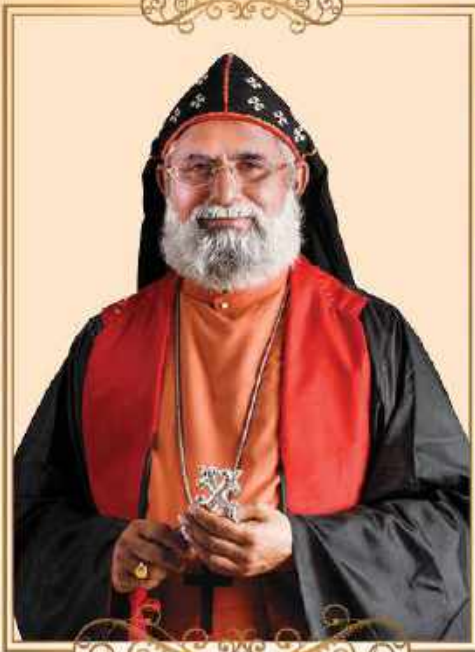
The Messenger Editorial Board extends greetings, best wishes, and prayers to the Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan who entered Navathy (the 90th year of his birth anniversary) on June 27, 2020, and to Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius who was installed as Suffragan Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church on July 12, 2020. The Editorial Board also expresses heartfelt condolences to Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Diocesan Episcopa, whose mother was called to eternity in July.

The pandemic has greatly impacted the timeliness of publishing the Messenger magazine. We regret the inconveniences caused to our faithful subscribers and hope and pray that normalcy will return soon. Please continue to send us your feedback and suggestions for improvement.



## Birthday Greetings

The Diocese of North America & Europe Wishes our Bishops  
God's Choicest Blessings on their Birthdays



**Rt. Rev. Joseph Mar Barnabas**  
Sep-08<sup>th</sup>



**Rt. Rev. Dr. Abraham Mar Paulos**  
Aug-16<sup>th</sup>

## Prayers and blessings on the 27<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ramban Ordination



**Very Rev. Thomas George, Very Rev. Dr. A. I. Isaac, Very Rev. Joseph Jacob**  
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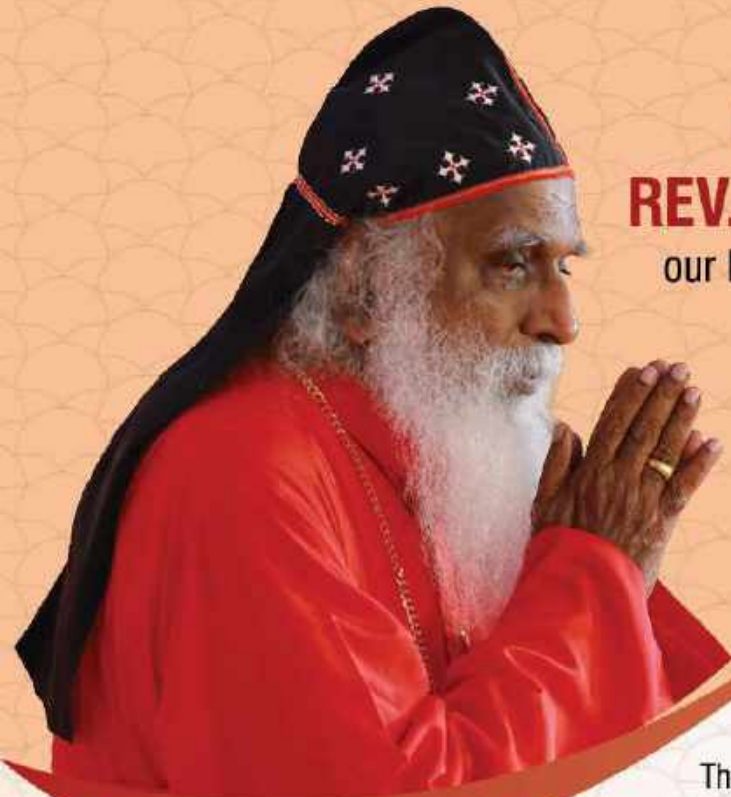
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Best Wishes to  
**HIS GRACE THE MOST  
REV. DR. JOSEPH MAR THOMA**  
our Metropolitan, in the Fullness of Ninety...



**Elias Abraham**  
Baltimore

The twenty-first Mar Thoma, like the sun of Summer,  
leads the Church in the twenty-first century,  
holding spiritual power with cross and crozier,  
making every step as a prudent visionary.  
Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma, now a nonagenarian,  
adorns the throne of the Mar Thoma Church,  
with dignity, humility, and steadfast faith.  
The silver clouds when innocent chantings sing,  
and the suffering humanity looks with eyes amazing,  
and life's hurting hardships cause us sorrows,  
Thirumeni patiently takes control, and remedies offers.

The flowers of the moonlit skies, he loves,  
the smiles of trees and plants delight him.  
The hills and rivers, the folklore of the village,  
everything that God entrusted man,  
this Guru holds dear and wants to preserve!  
Oh! the great charioteer of the Church,  
lead us to the towers of light.

Here, when in immense faith and hope he moves,  
at the wholesome age of fourscore and ten,  
let's wish Thirumeni the best, and sing in joy,  
"May the King of kings kindly shower on him,  
from heaven afar His blessings day by day."





Best Wishes to  
**RT. REV. DR. GEEVARGHESE  
MAR THEODOSIUS**  
Our Suffragan Metropolitan...



**Elias Abraham**  
Baltimore

The stars are bright and spicy,  
and the fragrant night is calm and sweet,  
the day light brings delight and mirth  
it's happiness and joy on earth.  
God, in heaven, smiles,  
the angelic choir sings,  
thousand rainbows beauty spread,  
the heavenly Father blesses Thirumeni  
to lead the Church to hope and victory.  
Now, as the earth confronts the turbulent tides,  
and man's agonies reach their zeniths,  
God's generous love beckons the dear prelate  
to protect and guide the flock of the Church.  
With proven expertise in many a field,  
grand scholarship, and excellence,  
love for the needy, and with universal empathy,  
this servant of God captures our yearning hearts.  
Oh! our dear Thirumeni, now the Suffragan  
Metropolitan,  
we are on our knees,  
our eyes look beyond the blues,  
our hearts are filled with awe and joy,  
from our throats rise prayers for you,  
and thousand lips now together say,  
"Best wishes to the Suffragan Metropolitan."





## BLESSINGS OF VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE

Rev. Dr. Ipe Joseph

***The Church Amidst the Pandemic*** is a very timely and appropriate theme. Now, for several months, due to the attack of COVID-19, we are unable to meet for regular worship services and fellowship in our churches. We are depending on virtual technology and thus we have become a *virtual Church*. It will be good to examine the validity and authenticity of virtual religious experiences and how they have become a blessing and viable means to gratify our spiritual aspirations, especially when we are in a situation like the present one, unable to meet together physically as a community.

### Defining Human Experience

To start with, it is necessary to define *human experience* since it is one of the key words in the title. Experience is a construct of the human mind. That is, if there is no mind there is no experience. An experience is generated with the participation of three foundational elements. First one is the *mind* itself; the other two are the *senses* and *memory*. The mind is the energy and intelligence behind life. Using computer language analogically, the mind is the browser, search engine and the screen of mental images. The five senses are the windows through which the mind receives information and data. Senses help us also to make the experience energize our being. The third foundational element, memory, is the storage of the mind. A person's experiences from birth are stored in his/her memory. With the help of the browser and search engine, the mind is able to deposit into or retrieve from memory facts, figures, and experience as a whole.

### Memory and Virtual Experience

Now let us examine how virtual experiences use memory for their appropriation. Let us look at the

primordial exercise of *prayer and meditation*. We close our eyes and shut out the world to concentrate fully in the activity of prayer. Then, the browser and search engine of the mind become active. They bring out images of God from the lessons we have learnt in Sunday School, the image of Jesus on the cross or the picture of Jesus on our wall, or we see the Lord God seated on the glorious throne lifted on high as we read in Isaiah chapter 6. Again, in our intercessory prayer we bring our neighbor Mrs. Titus before Jesus like the four friends who brought the paralytic to Jesus. She is taking treatment for terminal cancer in a Chicago hospital miles away. In the process of intercessory prayer all these happen on the virtual screen of our mind. Is this mental activity authentic? Let us quickly shift to our livestream worship service from Sinai Centre. We have stored in our memory the experience of hundreds of such services in which we have participated physically in the past. Our mind's browser and search engine would bring them to our experiential level and synchronize with the livestream service to give us the satisfaction of having attended a usual worship service. All this is possible only if you have previous experiences stored in your memory. Imagine a situation when a person who has never attended a Mar Thoma service watches a livestream Mar Thoma service. For that person it will not give the desired level of satisfaction. For him/her it will be like a file he/she is trying to open, and the computer says, "Sorry, this file is not supported".



## Physical Basis of the Virtual

True virtual experience is possible only if we have a rich content of physical experience in our memory. How do we get this rich content? It is from prior physical experience: from attending worship service regularly and participating in the Holy Communion service; from community hour after the service when we get an opportunity to enjoy rich fellowship; and, from attending the sacraments of baptism and marriage. All these experiences are stored in our memory. It is this memory that helps us “enjoy” our virtual religious experiences. So, it is important for us to train our younger generation to participate in regular worship services on Sundays, Bible study groups, camps, and regional and national conferences so as to develop a rich content in their memory of religious experience. Let us hope that we will come out of this present crisis and God will give us more days of sunshine to enable us to resume our ignored priority of training our younger generation.

## Visions, Dreams and Virtual Experiences

Throughout the Bible we see many occasions when God communicated great messages to kings and prophets through the virtual method. In Biblical language we call them dreams or visions. In these visions and dreams, God provided the images and audiovisuals. They interacted with the mental faculty of those who saw them, and the experience became complete without the help of external senses. It seems complicated. However, we know that those experiences were real to those who experienced them. Let us list some cases. Pharaoh had a vision of seven fat cows and seven bony cows emerging from the Nile and the seven bony ones eating up the fat ones (Genesis 41). Joseph interpreted the dream and warned the King of the great famine for seven years to come. In the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, the vision was that of a giant statue whose head was gold, shoulder and chest were silver, waist and hip were bronze, legs were iron and feet were a mix of iron and clay (Daniel 2). A stone from the cliff rolled down and hit the feet and because the feet were made of iron and clay the statue fell and shattered. Daniel interpreted the vision and informed the king about what would happen to future kingdoms. Another example of vision is from the New Testament. Peter had a vision of a big basket coming down from heaven

filled with clean and unclean creatures (Acts 10). God asked him to get up, kill and eat. For Peter, an ardent Jew, eating unclean creatures was *anathema*. Peter refused. God admonished, “Do not consider anything unclean that God has cleaned.” Peter got the answer for the question he was struggling with – whether to admit gentiles to the Church without circumcision. In Christ there is no Jew nor Gentile. All are cleansed with the precious blood of Jesus. Then, take the case of Revelation. John had a long vision starting with the gorgeous king holding seven stars in his hand and ending with the New Jerusalem coming down to earth like a decked bride. All these visions had to be interpreted. Thank God, present day virtual media provides these “visions” in simple colourful audio-visual forms!

## Virtual Techniques

Virtual techniques have developed swiftly in recent years. The simplest form of virtual techniques is a telephone call. We are tempted to think that the voice of friends we hear over our telephone is the original voice of the speaker. It is not so; it has undergone a few transformations. The speaker's voice is converted to electrical pulses and transmitted through communication towers and reconverted to sound energy in the receiver's telephone. Then came television and tele-evangelism came along with it. Now the internet has come in its multiform enabling us to have video calls, webcasting, livestreaming, and zooming. As we know, many forms of social media like email, Facebook, YouTube, and twitter emerged with the help of the internet. A good majority of the world's *citizens* have become *netizens*.

## Dignity of Digital Images

During the COVID-19 period we have been participating in worship and Holy Communion services livestreamed from Sinai Centre or from other places. We are using Zoom services for holding committee meetings and conducting prayer meetings as well as youth and women retreats. The virtual Church demands a new understanding about the dignity and value of digital images. Though we do not see the participants physically, we need to recognize that digital images are the extension of real physical forms. In this kind of virtual reality, we are applying only our senses of sight and hearing but not the senses of touch (kiss of peace), smell (of incense) or taste (of the Eucharist). So, we are



required to experience reality without the senses of touch, smell, or taste. Our mind has to provide extra dimensions to our experience in order to make it complete. As the virtual is the extension of the real, the real will always be the foundation of the virtual. The greatest challenge is to find ways and means to “reform” the mind of our Church and members in this virtually saturated world without losing the kernel of our faith.

### **Training and Practice in Participation**

Our generation is addicted to watching news, movies, and serials on our screens. We have no roles to play in watching these shows other than engaging our eyes, ears, and mind into them. Our young people spend most of their time using their smart phones to communicate and transact all their business from bank to bakery. For them, the digital world is an integral part of their lives. Participating in a virtual spiritual experience is vastly different from watching things happen on the digital screen or transacting business with smart phones. There is an ocean of difference between simply watching and fully participating. We must train ourselves to involve our full being in the livestream worship services. It is a spiritual exercise and it needs much conscious practice. For example, giving responses promptly, singing along with the celebrant and those who assist, making the sign of the cross and passing the kiss of peace to our family members should come naturally to us.

### **Virtual Techniques Have Come to Stay**

In this COVID-19 situation, virtual techniques are helping us keep the community together in fellowship. Message groups, WhatsApp, livestreaming, Facebook, emails, conference calls, video conferences and webinars have become handy for all communities. Even after we come out of the COVID crisis and lockdown restrictions these gifts of technology will continue to be of great help in the ministry of the Church. Of the recently available techniques the most useful ones will be message groups, video conferences and webinars. In the latter two the participants are visible and audible to each other and so transactions will be easy. The greatest advantage is that video conference and webinars will reduce the huge travel expense of bringing together participants from far and wide, and providing them accommodations and hospitality.

### **Virtual World Demands Changes in Attitudes**

Like good habits, we must cultivate attitudes, internalize them, and constantly practice them. We need to accept the authenticity of virtual experiences. This requires a revised definition of the Church. The Church is understood as a community of “called out” people. *Koinonia* (fellowship) so far had a visible form: a community physically coming together, worshipping together, sharing Holy Communion together and enjoying fellowship. The virulence of COVID 19 and its attendant complications have resulted in the proliferation of virtual communities that would likely continue to grow strong as faith communities. Accordingly, the revised definition of Church will require space to include virtual communities also in *Koinonia*.

### **Virtual Experience is a Blessing**

During this COVID-19 season virtual techniques have come to our rescue. The world has made the best use of these God-given resources. Yet, there may be some people who think of them as a necessary evil. This is where we have to train ourselves to use virtual media as our handmaid in communication. The greatest blessing of virtual media is that it has brought the whole world together. We share the pain of the whole world together, cry with those whose dear ones have died, and rejoice with those who have been healed. We are able to witness the front liners in health care sacrificing their lives for us, teaching us lessons in overcoming selfishness.

A few years ago, there was a popular television show called *Star Trek* in which they could teleport from one spaceship to another. Future generations might be able to do so! For us right now, with the help of virtual media, we are able to transport our mind and spirit anywhere in the world to meet our dear ones, attend weddings, participate in funeral services or hold a business meeting. We can also transport the sacred space of our Church and altar to our living room and make our own home a sacred place for God to dwell in. What would you call it if not a blessing!

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Note. Endnotes are not included; browsed many authentic web sites.





## Slowdowns in Life with God.....

**Reference: Genesis chapters. 37 to 41**

*"...yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph but forgot him. After two years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile...."*  
(Genesis 40: 23 - 41:1)

What must be our approach towards slowdowns in life? If we compare with Jesus' life, he never rushed. He waited 30 years for the beginning of His ministry. He was not overwhelmed by life, even though He had an enormous mission to complete in a noticeably short period. Jesus never rushed because he moved at God's pace. COVID-19 has made a very deep impact in our lives. We seem to experience several months (almost a year) that does not look productive. Is there anything called a fruitless or infertile period in a believer's life?



**Rev. Sam Philip**  
MTC Seattle

Joseph expected deliverance from prison after the chief cupbearer's release and return to Pharaoh's palace. But chief cupbearer forgot him, and he had to be in prison for two more years. But when God's time came, Joseph was not only released from prison, but elevated to a high position. *"My times are in your hands"* (Psalm 31:15a) must be our faith affirmation.

### **Strengths of Joseph**

- Rose in power from slavery to the status of a ruler in Egypt
- Was known for his personal integrity
- Was a man of spiritual sensitivity
- Prepared a nation to survive famine
- God's presence had been with Joseph throughout
- Pharaoh recognized God's spirit in Joseph
- Possessed a Spirit of Forgiveness
- Humility to accept that God makes things for good

### **Slowdowns in Life**

In 1966, Time magazine (April 8 issue) had a debatable caption "Is God dead"? Many triggers were found in the background of the question. World



Wars, Hiroshima & Nagasaki, financial depression, cultural issues, racism, John F. Kennedy's assassination, Mohammed Ali's conversion and the Vietnam War were some of them. Theologians, including Karl Barth and Jurgen Moltmann, had answers for the question. Barth said, "be reminded that things are ruled out not just in Moscow, Washington and Peking (now Beijing), but finally from heaven above."

COVID-19 has challenged the whole world and reminded us that, humans still need to fear many things in life. People who are against faith and religion, utilize the time to attack religion. As believers we have no instant answers for this present crisis. The sacraments and fellowships, which are considered as most essential in the faith journey too face challenges. Things that are considered as "holy of the holies" too are under scrutiny.

The book of Isaiah reminds readers that slowing down before God is a better option (30: 15-16 & 52: 12). Going in haste and doing innumerable things may not make us successful. A slowing-down in life and willingness to spend time quietly with God will lead us to a treasury of blessings.

Let us answer a few questions which we often experience when driving: a) Why do we wait at the Rail crossing when the gates are closed? b) Why do we slow down our cars at the school zone when the flashing lights are on? c) What is the purpose of humps and bumps on roads? All these questions have some common answers; a) Things are not in our control. So, we must slow down or wait. b) This is for our safety and the safety of the children in the area. c) This is for others' safety too.

Therefore, such slowdowns are not waste of time. But those arrangements are intended for the safety of all and hence are very essential. Canadian writer, Oriah Mountain Dreamer says, "*Sometimes I think there are only two instructions we need to follow to develop and deepen our spiritual life: slow down and let go.*"

### **Biblical Characters and Quarantena**

Biblical book of Leviticus describes the procedure for separating infected people for 7 days to prevent the spread of disease. This is considered as one of the earliest methods of quarantine. Persian scholar of medicine, Ibn Sina (980-1037), suspected that

some diseases were spread by micro-organisms. To prevent human to human contamination, he came with the method of isolating people for 40 days. Traders from Venice heard of his success and took this knowledge and called it *quarantena* in Italian.

### **Acts 9:1-19: The Experience of Blindness and Paul's Conversion.**

Saul was a zealous Jew and enthusiastic about his religion. He did many things for his religion. He was extremely fast and travelled long distances for the protection of his religion. But at an unexpected moment, he faced blindness and God quarantined him for three days and three nights without food. He had to depend on others to complete his travel. He was healed by someone, whom he thought of as his rival. That compulsory rest was a good occasion to have a rethinking of his life. It struck his pride. His helplessness, ill-health, and vanity made him realize certain realities of life. He used this slow down, to know Jesus and to find out the vision and mission of his life. After he was healed, he went to Arabia (Galatians 1:17) and spent time with God. From being a busy Rabbi, God made him to slow down and taught him great lessons.

### **Exodus 2: Moses: Transition from Prince to a Shepherd**

One day, Moses the prince of Egypt, had to flee to a desert. Moses had excellent education (Acts 7:22). Possessed royal status, power, wealth, and influence and was served by many. But in the desert, he was just a shepherd. A person who takes care of the sheep of another person. But this demotion in life and getting away from the crowd in the Egyptian palace to a place of loneliness had become a blessing for Moses. He was alone in the desert. Except the sheep, no one was with him. This loneliness equipped him to truly experience God's companionship. God molded him and shaped him. The forty years of desert-life trained Moses for the future task.

God uses every experience to make it good for those who love God and those who have been called for His purpose. Our God is an everlasting God. God can save the world from a chaotic disorder and put it into the right shape. Let us wait for His time. David affirms his faith "*I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*" (Psalm 27: 13).



## Lessons from Joseph

After spending 27 years in prison Nelson Mandela witnessed that his waiting did not become in vain. *"I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not ended."*

Joseph has been put into prison though he was innocent. God's presence with Joseph encompasses human abandonment and prison. It was the sins of people around him that leads Joseph into prison. The book of Genesis offers no evidence that sin-generated events are the will of God for Joseph; sin is always against God. God does not always get God's way in the world. Divine presence does not mean "preventive medicine" or a "quick fix" of whatever may befall a person of faith. There are implications here for how God works in the world. God does not act in God's overwhelming power, but in and through the ambiguities and complexities of the relationships of integrity God has established.

Success and prosperity are not a necessary or inevitable result of either God's presence or Joseph's faith or action. Joseph appears genuinely vulnerable and could have failed even with God's presence and the divine intention for success. Joseph's success

depends not simply on his own devices, but on God's engagement in the situation. God protects his people in times of plague and disease. This does not mean that those who trust God would never die from infectious disease or suffer from an enemy's plot. Those who trust God are habitually delivered from such dangers. Children of God are not always immune from physical plague and pestilence; but they are ever guarded from destructive spiritual forces as they dwell in the secret places of the highest (Morgan on Psalm 91).

"In God we trust" is the official motto of USA and an inscription given on US currency and on coins. In 1956, President D. Eisenhower officially declared it as the national motto of USA. This was initially proposed during the civil war. In 1864, Abraham Lincoln's Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase has said "no nation can be strong except in the strength of God, or safe except in his defense" and engraved the inscription on US coins. CNN, USA Today and Gallup combined survey conducted in 2003, showed 90% of Americans still support the inscription; let this be our personal faith affirmation "In God we trust."

I conclude with a quote from Abraham Joshua Heschel, *"The sense for the miracles which are daily with us, the sense for the 'continual marvels,' is the source of prayer."*





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## The Church Amidst the Pandemic (Mental Health Impacts)

### Introduction

One of the words that many people recently learned and started using is the word “pandemic.” In Greek, the term *plaga* (strike, blow) can refer to any kind of sickness; in Latin, the terms are *plaga* and *pestitis*; in biblical context, the word ‘plague’ has given us the closest mental picture of what it entails, until now. In this modern era, where we can identify the pathogen more precisely, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS of 2003), middle east respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV), novel influenza A virus (H1N1), Ebola virus, or corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19), we are still battling to get control of this virus as we witness suffering, losses, complications, and the strain on our own mental health during these

difficult and uncertain times.

### Pandemic and Isolation in the Bible

Some well-known examples of plagues ever recorded are those in the Bible, in the Old Testament. The book of Exodus mentions a series of plagues to strike the Egyptians before the Israelites, held in captivity by the ruler of Egypt, Pharaoh, are finally released. Some of those plagues are clearly of an infectious biological kind. Throughout the Bible, pandemic outbreaks are the bookends of human existence, and a part of the very ending of humanity in Revelations. In the scriptures, pandemics are framed as punishments for our sins, the diseases stigmatized in the olden days, such as leprosy, caused isolation of the sick due to our fear of the infectious.

### A Historical View of the Pandemic and Human Response

Throughout history, medical doctors were severely affected by the plague. Due to shortage of doctors, young training physicians were commissioned as



'plague doctors' to keep public records of those who died of the plague. Later, the church allowed them to perform autopsies to study the cause of death which advanced the practice of medicine as they managed to learn the human anatomy. In western history, there have been a series of pandemics that influenced our history and our society. They also have led to the formation of the very basic practices of modern health sciences such as quarantine, wearing of masks, and use of antibiotics. As science has advanced our fight against contagions, so has the development of modern psychiatry as it is more focused on addressing the public mental health burden in our society.

### **Pandemic and Mental Health**

Mental health during pandemic outbreaks contains parallel processes that seem related and exclusive. The psychological process that reflects in thoughts, behaviors, and emotional responses is just as similar to the infectious process where the pathogen incubates, disseminates through vectors and modes of transmission to overpower the host and spread to new hosts. The psychiatric sequelae of surviving the illness, public perceptions, fears, misconceptions, and hopes are dependent on our individual spiritual strength or resilience. Those who are not able to filter the misinformation, the fear of uncertainty and doubt spread through sources of mass media have created individual or mass panic, increase in substance use, manifestation of depression, anxiety, paranoia, and even psychotic symptoms.

It is promising to see that the community at large and our malayalee community overcoming stigma are seeking mental health services. Through our ongoing webinars and educational outreach to help the public and healthcare professionals cope, we are noticing mental frailty and a need to increase resiliency. In the face of such threats, that overpower the coping resources of an individual or an entire community, the church has stepped in to provide the beacon of light. I have seen churches reaching out to the families who are sick, providing them with protective masks, organize fund raising drives to financially help families who have lost loved ones due to the pandemic, collect and distribute food and other supplies to food pantries, hospitals, nursing homes, and police stations across the county. The generosity shown through monetary donations, time, and effort to help our neighbors, while risking

exposure to meet and extend a hand in this time of need has outshined all local mission projects undertaken by the church. As an avid supporter of missions, I have always wanted our younger generation to be involved in mission work. I sincerely hope the youths of our church have witnessed the motto "Lighted to Lighten," in our faith community.

### **Faith Communities' Role in Mental Wellbeing**

The Mar Thoma church has taken the lead to address the burdensome stigma and isolation of mental illness and substance abuse that otherwise would not have been a topic that could have been easily discussed in large forums. Our communities can tolerate sporadic cases of illness amongst individuals, hardships of caring for the sick as nurses, doctors, and other healthcare professionals because of the prayer support and our faith borne resilience. Still, within our communities we need to safeguard from the doubts of doom or being damned for our sins during this testing time that can lead the lukewarm and feeble astray. I have seen in our church, the fears and doubts that gripped us in the initial months of the pandemic were quelled by regular outreach and strong leadership of our Vicar, Rev. Mathew Varghese, who kept the church family connected through Zoom and other platforms. He led us through his communication via text messages, phone calls, sermons, prayers, and empowered us through intercessory prayers for our brethren and country that brought forth witnessing of miracles all around us.

The relationship between religion, spirituality, and healing is indeed a long philosophical and historical one, as well as a body of evidence showing the beneficial effects that traditional religion and spirituality have on physical and mental health. Most physicians, including mental health care professionals, have seen these benefits for many patients under their care even though there is valid criticism of the methodological limits and difficulties in establishing causality in some studies. A study published in the American Journal of Psychiatry indicated that people who endorsed religion and spirituality as being of "great importance" in their lives were at less risk for depression which held true even more firmly if someone had a depressed parent, and when compared with those for whom religion was of less or no importance.



The results from a recent survey showed the negative psychological effects of the current pandemic and the important position of religious faith in addressing these effects. The survey indicated that 48%, almost half surveyed, were worried about the likelihood of contracting COVID-19, 62% are fearful about the likelihood of family and loved ones contracting COVID-19, and about 40% are frightened about dying or becoming seriously ill. Department of Health and Human Services cites research that “one in four people who seek help for mental health concerns turn to faith leaders before they seek help from clinical professionals.” A recent Gallup Poll has found that this pandemic has enhanced spirituality and religion for many Americans (19%), and certainly it is noticeable in our own families and faith communities of Eastern traditions. Healthy religious and spiritual expression has offered solace in difficult times, consolation in bereavement, hope in sickness, and peace in death. I believe that church must work together with mental health professionals to help persons of faith toward an authentic understanding of spiritual practice and breakdown the stigma and misconceptions that can harm the wellbeing of those who need mental health support.

It is common for sick patients in isolation to experience loneliness, social deprivation, loss of control, anxiety, irritability, anger, insomnia, depression, and hopelessness as they may experience less care and attention from their providers. The isolative experience may cause trauma and lay the groundwork for Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Similarly, for healthcare workers, anxiety about getting infected while caring for infected patients, not having enough time to help each patient to recovery, seeing several deaths have caused acute stress disorder, depression, panic, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Many people, including healthcare workers, who were neglectful to do the necessary self-care and were struggling to care for their own families during these stressful times have succumbed to increased alcohol intake and other substance use. Let us not forget the children who have lost a parent or loved one, burdened with new fears about their health or their parent’s health after being separated due to quarantine, or those who have had to deal with new stressors of a lack of social contact or outlets. Referrals to help those suffering complicated grief reactions after having lost loved ones without the ability to see and say “farewell,” have also surfaced among those aforementioned.

### **A Roadmap for the Recovery**

The importance and the need for community and connection is even more significant during the times of quarantine and a possible second wave. As a faith community we have had to serve in unprecedented ways and the only way any institution is able to survive is if it can learn to pivot fast enough and significantly enough to serve the needs of its community.

What can we do as a faith community amidst the pandemic? We can pray for those suffering, reach out to those who need emotional support, or refer those in need to seek more professional help to achieve the needed emotional or behavioral change. We can face the challenges together as a faith community by inviting others to maintain spiritual self-care while supporting beliefs and practices that nurture hope and resilience to prevent maladaptive behaviors stemming from boredom, fear, guilt, and stress. Let us stay connected with our friends, family, and encourage our community at large to work together in helping others remain hopeful and healthy in the upcoming months.







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1/28/17





# COVID-19

P e r s p e c t i v e



N. M. Philip, Chicago

The storm that came with no warning  
Don't know where it came from or  
How it came over or who brought it  
Panic attacks that stopped everything.

The storm that changed the way we act  
The way we look or treat each other  
The unseen guest that brought us down  
They called it Corona, Covid or Pandemic.

Symptoms are different and varied  
Mild, moderate, severe and even deadly  
Hit all ages, the weak and healthy equally  
Showing no mercies to the young or old.

Way of life as we knew came to sudden halt  
Didn't know whether to go out or stay put  
Whether to wear masks, gloves or goggles  
Confused to self-treat or seek medical help.

Authorities started imposing restrictions  
Stores closed, supply chains disrupted  
Land, air and sea transportation halted  
Built barriers, called it 'social distance'.

Many lost jobs; hence their livelihood  
Loans and handouts were inadequate  
Stress levels shot up with unpaid bills  
Causing mental anguish and breakdown.

Charities were inadequate to meet needs.  
Scrambled to find fund to feed the hungry  
People wandered all over to find food  
Waiting long hours at food handout lanes.

Mobility curtailed, restrictions imposed  
Couldn't go anywhere without masks  
Hand gloves, goggles and disinfectant  
Handshakes replaced with elbow bumps.

Schools, worship places, sport arenas,  
Entertainment facilities and gyms closed  
Imposed restrictions on all public events  
Everything is live stream, virtual and zoom.

Death rate started going up day by day  
No one came to claim many deceased  
Families watched funerals from distance  
Sobbing with loud and quiet outbursts.

Looked everywhere to find consolation  
Listened to the prediction by experts  
The mighty, powerful and the scientists  
Pundits' analyses didn't calm the troubled.

Tensions high, frustration uncontrollable  
Tired of 'lock down and social distance'  
Can't go near loved ones and hug them  
But take comfort this is for common good.

In my distress turned to the Word of God  
Like the Psalmist cried out to heavens  
For help comes from the Almighty God  
Who will never 'sleep or let our foot slip'.

Almighty God said, "do not fear, for I am  
With you; do not be dismayed, for I am  
Your God. I will strengthen you and help you  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Take note of the consoling words of Jesus  
"Don't let your hearts be troubled; only believe  
Take heart for I have overcome the world"  
Revealing the way, the truth and life eternal.





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# Finding Faith During Uncertain Times

Dr. Shiby Abraham, St. John's MTC, NY

"This too shall pass," - poet Rumi.

What a year 2020 has been for us all! Never in our lives would we have imagined that something like COVID-19 would hit us. Our world has forever changed, from closing schools, businesses, churches, to quarantine and losing loved ones. How can we stay strong physically, emotionally, and spiritually? What about essential workers who have gone into work with fear, anxiety, and watch multiple people die. There is a rise in anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other mental illnesses, and not just in adults but in children. People turn to alcohol/drugs or other forms of unhealthy outlets to help them cope during these times. However, these are all just temporary escapes, which only add another problem. How do we cope with all this, and where does our Christian faith stand with all this suffering and uncertainty around us?

The first aspect is acceptance. Our God is all-knowing, and nothing happens without His knowledge. Hence, we need to accept our new

norm and expect that things may never go back to the way they were. We have to anticipate that this problem will be with us for a while and learn how to work through the difficulties and problems. Let us look at similar situations in the Bible, during Noah's flood, God told Noah about the flood and asked him to build an Ark for him and his family. Noah did not refuse to believe God or argue with Him, instead, he began building the ark and accepted God's plan. Another example is during Moses's time with the plague and pestilence. God commanded Moses, and he accepted and followed through with what he was told to do. In a similar way, we need to accept that this is beyond our control and accept God's plan, seek His mercy, and keep moving forward in faith.

The second aspect is healing. Healing happens in three domains – physical, emotional, and spiritual, which are interconnected. There are many people who suffered losses during this pandemic whether it is through death, loss of a job, marriage, poverty etc. During this isolation and despair, if we can turn to God and reconnect with Him spiritually, we



can renew our spirits. This isolation away from our usually busy lives is a time to meditate and draw near to Christ. As it says in Isaiah 40:31 "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint." However, every individual is different, as is their needs. I will strongly emphasize that people who need additional emotional or mental health support must seek professional help. In the Bible, we can see many instances when Christ laid hands on people to heal them physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He used the healing of the hands, healing of the mind, and healing of the soul. In the same way, God appoints people on Earth to help others, and when there is help, seek it.

The third aspect is helping. When we help others, we find a purpose in our lives, which becomes our strength and drive to keep facing the struggles ahead. During COVID-19, we have seen many people become selfish, hoarding food and supplies, and forgetting their neighbors. However, we have also seen goodness in many people. Essential workers, especially health care who are sacrificing their own health and lives to care for others. Communities are coming together to help the homeless and unemployed. From my own experience, I have seen my church take active leadership in continuing multiple virtual or phone prayer meetings, Sunday services, Sunday school activities, and providing emotional support for healthcare workers in our parish. In addition, I have seen my church take an active role in helping the nearby community by raising money and food for health care workers, families affected by COVID-19 needing financial assistance, and much more. As an essential health care worker seeing the work done by our Achen and parish members was an inspiration and strengthened my spirit. I am positive many of the other parishes have done similar acts of kindness, which encourages us to keep our faith rooted in Christ. In helping others, we learn to be more Christ-like, for it is says in Isaiah 58:10 "If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday."

The final aspect is renewal. Renewal in Christianity means to make new or restore freshness, life, or quality. Some people are waiting for COVID-19 to end to feel happy and renewed again. We as Christians are reminded to renew our faith, spirit, and strength in Christ, not only in times of joy but also in times of despair. Every day we wake up, we need to remember to praise God for our lives, our families, our health, and we need to continue to ask for His Mercy on us all. We need to remember to see goodness and light even when we feel its only darkness around us. We must remind ourselves to find enjoyment and joy in our surroundings. In the Bible, we can see instances when God cleansed the land through destruction of mankind due to the sin, He saw around Him. In the same way, many innocent lives were lost during COVID-19, and it may seem impossible to see any sign of hope. Interestingly through COVID-19 and quarantine, many parts of the world are reporting a reduction in air pollution, clearer skies and overall healing of the Earth. In Genesis, we see that God gave Adam dominion over all the Earth but with the instructions to cultivate and replenish it. Thousands of years later, many of us have forgotten God's instructions and neglected to care for our Earth.

COVID-19 is one of the worst pandemics in history, and despite this virus's destruction of mankind, it has also been an opportunity for the Earth's healing and our renewal in God. Although we cannot always understand God's plan and purpose, we can take comfort in knowing that our God is a loving God who is always near to us. "Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure." Psalm 147:5

**Dr. Shiby Abraham**  
St. John's Mar Thoma Church

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Chief of Inpatient Psychiatric Unit  
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NY State Representative for Early Career Psychiatrist*





# MISSION BOARD HELPS NAVAJO NATION TO COMBAT COVID -19



**O.C. Abraham and Nirmala Abraham**  
Philadelphia

The Navajo Nation lies among the four sacred mountains between Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona. Navajo Land is one of the most photographed places in the United States. About 180,000 people live in the Navajo Nation, which covers more than 27,000 square miles (almost the size of Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New Jersey put together).

In Navajo land, there are more Corona virus cases per capita than in any State in the US. The Navajo Nation reported a total of 9,103 confirmed cases and 461 deaths from the virus as of August 1, 2020. There are situations like eleven deaths on one day and in a family of eleven, eight had contracted COVID-19, several were hospitalized and two of them died.

The Navajo Nation is doing their best to combat the situation. The Navajo Nation has implemented by far, the strictest closure laws in the nation: a 57-hour weekend lock down, curfew every night, closure of non-essential businesses and a \$1,000 fine for violating those ordinances. Because of the strict rules, the situation is now plateaued recently. Recently there were several reports in news media

that Navajo Nation is one of the worst hot spots in the country for Covid-19. New Mexico Governor Grisham even warned that the Corona virus could wipe out some tribal people like the Navajo Nation. Responding to this crisis with the Navajo tribe, Mar Thoma Church Diocese of North America and Europe sent funding for supplies like masks, wipes, cleaning materials and other essentials to the Navajo Indian Community. Funds were handed over to the San Juan Mission of the Episcopal Church in Navajo Land, Farmington, New Mexico. Arrangements are being made with the San Juan Mission volunteers to purchase the supplies from Walmart or Sam's club, pack it and distribute it to the community.

Up to 40 percent of Navajo households do not have running water making it hard to wash hands. Cell phone service and Wi-Fi are limited, 60% of the Navajo family does not have Internet access, hence it's difficult to keep in touch and to get information about the epidemic and to take precautionary measures. Over 50% of the Native Americans who live on the reservations are unemployed. To find work, many are forced to move away from the reservation and leave their families behind. Their most important need is food and drinking water. One





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in four Navajo families who live in the reservations do not have enough food or water.

The Navajo Nation is also a “food desert” with only thirteen grocery stores in the whole area. There are only ten Indian Health service Centers (Clinics) and three hospitals with 30 ICU beds. People have to travel roughly twenty miles to get water, food supplies or services such as medical care, a Post Office, or a gas station.

Average precipitation on the reservation is about 10 inches. The entire area is subject to winter snow and temperatures below freezing; summer temperatures may top 110 degrees with extreme aridity. Systemic poverty on the reservation and the lack of critical infrastructure make things even more difficult. Their focus is survival. Their constant worries are about food, hauling water and getting gas for their generator.

Given that the Navajo Nation is 27,000 square miles — seven people per square mile — social distancing may seem easy. But, while the population is spread out, they live in cluster communities, multiple generations often live under one roof or within the same small group of homes. Isolating a loved one, especially if they are sick, is not part of Navajo culture. In addition to dealing with lack of

specialized medical staff and hundreds of miles of roads that remain unpaved, it can take up to three hours to get a sick person to a nearest hospital.

The higher COVID-19 rates on the Navajo Nation are driven by staggering health disparities and lack of running water in homes, but Dr. Laura Hammit with Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health said the issues run even deeper than that. “This isn’t a matter of race, but a matter of institutional racism that has made people at higher susceptibility for infectious diseases and kept them susceptible for many, many years,” Dr. Hammit said.

It is believed that Native Indians or Native Americans came to this western hemisphere several thousand years before Christ. Records show that before the arrival of European settlers in 15th century over one million indigenous people lived in North America. Presently there are only less than five million of them or 1.60 percent of the nation’s entire population. (Number of Asian Indians in the USA is over 1%). Currently, there are about 570 Native Indian tribes in this country.

European colonization of the Americas began in 1492 and the Native American population declined precipitously due to introduced diseases, warfare including biological





warfare, territorial confiscation and slavery. The United States, as part of its policy of settler colonialism, waged wars and perpetrated massacres against many Native American tribes, removed them from their ancestral lands, and subjected them to one-sided treaties and to discriminatory government policies into the 20th century. (Wikipedia)

Navajo Indian tribe had already settled in the Colorado Plateau, centuries before Christopher Columbus landed in the Americas in 1491. Beginning in 1830 with the Indian Removal Act, the policy of the United States was to forcibly remove the Native Americans from their fertile, cultivated ancestral lands and relocate them to far away regions "reserved" only for American Indians.

Colonel Kit Carson instituted a scorched earth policy, burning Navajo fields and homes and stealing or killing their livestock. After starving the Navajos into submission, Carson rounded up every Navajo he could find - 8,000 men, women, and children - and in the spring of 1864 forced his prisoners to march some 300 miles to Fort Sumner, New Mexico. Navajos call this "The Long Walk." Many died along the way or during the four long years of imprisonment. In 1868 after signing a treaty with the U.S., the remaining Navajos were allowed to return to designated lands currently occupied in the four corner area of the Utah, New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado.

"The Trail of Tears" is another atrocious event in the history of America. In 1831, the Choctaw and Cherokee tribes were forced off their land in the Alabama Mississippi area and compelled to walk during winter, a long trek of five hundred miles to Oklahoma. Of the 21,000 Choctaws who started the journey more than half perished from exposure to adverse conditions, malnutrition, and disease. They were forced to settle within an area of only 40 square miles in arid places unsuitable for agriculture, isolated from towns, transportation, supplies and jobs.

Uncertain times like the COVID-19 pandemic can be some of the best and fruitful times for the gospel. The COVID-19 virus causes people to grapple with fear and uncertainty while thinking and talking about death. Many are looking for outside resources to help them to overcome this pandemic, but the help is still not easily reachable.





Though we, as believers, have faith rooted in Christ, many of us may also have reason to re-think our faith. The coronavirus has stripped away the stability of our jobs, our churches, and our friendships. We are no longer congregating to worship our Lord in our sanctuaries. Our living rooms have become the sanctuaries for us during this pandemic season. This shows that our faith must overflow the four walls of our sanctuaries and should run into the streets and neighborhoods around us.

Many believers are spending more time re-prioritizing the Lord, as we now realize that He is the only constant in our lives. This is an excellent time to ask Him if He might be calling us to do something different. This is the time to tread the less frequented roads and less visited Samaritan wells in our continuing faith journey.

The rising death toll from COVID-19 spotlights the fact that billions of people around the globe stand in danger of dying without having a chance to hear the gospel. When we consider their souls, our everyday cares and concerns don't seem so important. Our shattered routines give us opportunities to look outside of ourselves, our homes and our sanctuaries.

We who are settled in this hemisphere enjoy the abundant blessing of this land. We forget the Native

Americans who are the poorest people in this land and have the highest need. Poverty is at its extreme, people live in rundown houses and trailers many of which are without electricity, telephone, running water or a sewage system.

Since 2015 Mar Thoma Church has led mission initiatives for the Navajo Indians, in cooperation with the Episcopal Church in Navajo land. In 2018 and 2019 mission teams from the Mar Thoma church worked with the Episcopal Church at Fort Defiance in Arizona, Bluff and Monument Valley area in Utah. Organizing and providing leadership for Vacation Bible School for the Navajo children, networking with community leaders, renovating the parsonage are some of the activities the volunteers were involved in.

For the last eighteen years the Mar Thoma Church has been serving the Choctaw tribe both in Alabama, from where they started the Trail of Tears, and in Broken Bow, Oklahoma, where the journey ended and with the Houma Indians in Louisiana. The Navajo Mission is comparatively new and the tribe's needs are greater. It is our duty as Christians to be a blessing to these proud Nations who are our brothers and neighbors.

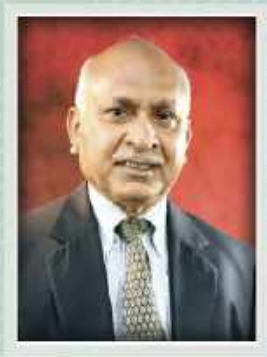


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# HOPE



There, there! Do you see it?  
The bright, shining light coming,  
From the dark, black door,  
A ray of hope.

Some can't reach it,  
Some can't see it.  
Some don't believe it is there,  
But it is there.

Run to it as fast as you can,  
Before they strike.  
Before the pain and sorrow  
Block you from the door.

Many see it, yet walk away from it,  
But you must go to the door.  
Push away all the obstacles  
Far, far so it can't reach you.



**By, Manna Annam Oommen**  
Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston

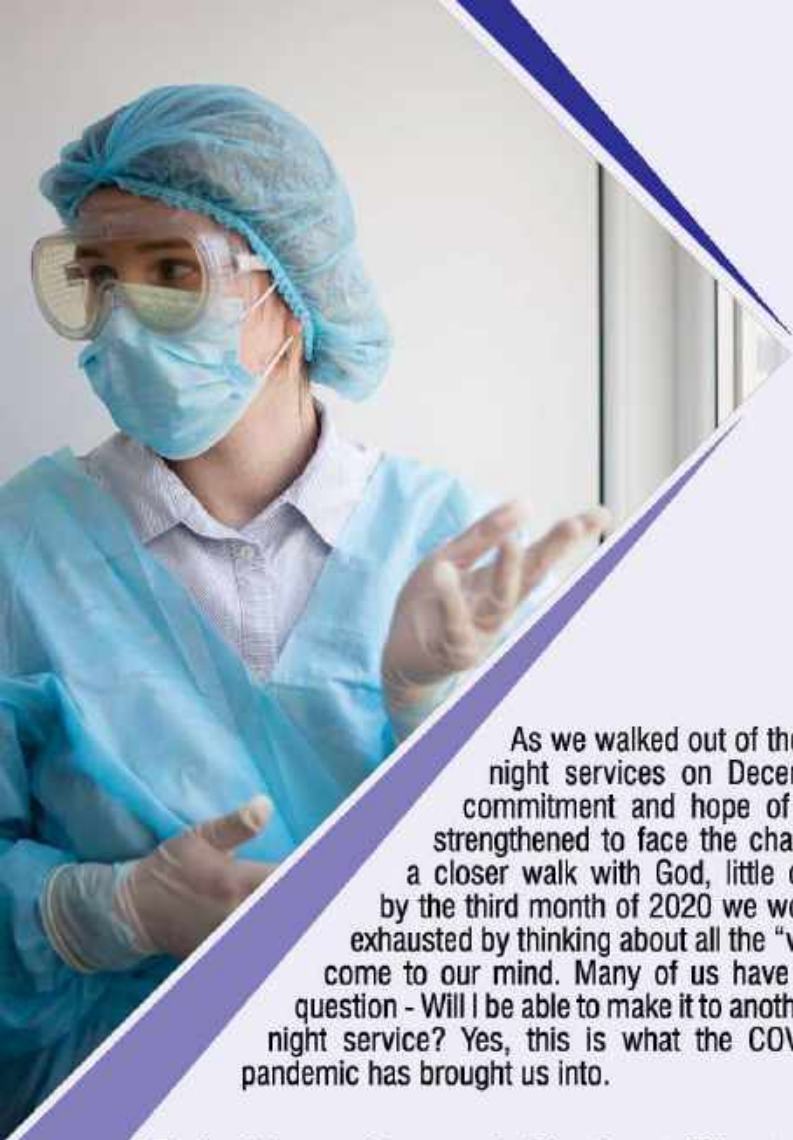
There, that's it, you're almost there!  
So close to your victory!  
Oh, but wait, just wait.  
A big black object is in front.

How are you going to move it?  
You touch it, you get infected  
But don't you frown  
For you will find a way.

You always do.  
It may take days, maybe months,  
But never lose your faith.  
One day, the dark, black block will break.

And that is the day the whole world is waiting for.





# Pandemic & Emotional Fatigue



**Ms. Reena John**

Counsellor & NLP practitioner  
St. Thomas Mount MTC,  
Chennai.

As we walked out of the sanctuaries after the watch night services on December 31, 2019, with the commitment and hope of new possibilities, and strengthened to face the challenges of 2020 with a closer walk with God, little did we realize that by the third month of 2020 we would be mentally exhausted by thinking about all the “what ifs?” that come to our mind. Many of us have a lingering question - Will I be able to make it to another watch night service? Yes, this is what the COVID-19 pandemic has brought us into.

The lockdown and the spread of the virus at different phases have changed the lives of people at different levels. No doubt, we have always adapted ourselves to the changing world, but this time the change is rapid, unexpected, and unplanned. Never before have our physical strength, mental strength and resilience been tested to their limits and to this extent.

As the physical fatigue is experienced when our body is continuously exposed to physical activity without any relaxation time, in the same way we experience emotional fatigue by having a continuous stream of challenging emotions. According to Lisa Feldman-Barret (neuroscientist), “Emotions are our brains’ attempt to give meaning to our physical sensations in the context of the world around us.” The current situation around us seem to be bombarding us with challenging thoughts and emotions and we are prone to experience emotional fatigue. The anxiety due to uncertainty of life returning to normalcy that we were used to, the loneliness due to isolation, the frustration and anger due to the lack of freedom to make use of the resources, and the helplessness because of the restrictions in planning our dream events are like a tsunami of emotions drowning us.

How do we survive? Here is the ABC survival kit:

- 1) Acknowledge our insufficiency and God’s supremacy; Remember the first conversation of Satan to Eve where he convinces Eve to believe in a competition with God (Genesis3:5), and Eve gives in to the offer. Time and again, Satan has been playing different tactics in terms of inventions, discoveries, philosophies and ideologies which make us feel that we are the God of our lives and that we have things under our control and at our fingertips. A tiny virus which cannot be seen has forced us to believe in its existence because of the repercussions we are facing, and apparently it can be kept out of our lives by simple washing of hands regularly with soap. What a contrast! This has brought all of us including the superpowers to their knees and forces us to accept and acknowledge, “I am nothing, unless the Lord protects.”

For a believing community, we may have experiences like the disciples who had Jesus in their boat, yet they had to face the storm and they had a strong question to their master, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are



perishing” (Mark 4:38). The response of Jesus is not only calming the storm but also bringing their focus back to evaluate their faith, not on the size of the faith but the confidence through assurance of His presence in their lives. Yes, the faith community is not exempted from the suffering and tragedies of this world; but the confidence that we gain by acknowledging and surrendering to His will should remind us this slogan for our daily walk in life - “In God I trust, for this too shall pass” (Romans 8:35).

2) Balance the planning and investments in my life; Just because the surety of tomorrow is not in my hands, do I remain idle, withdrawn and leave everything to fate or destiny. The Bible reminds us about planning and working hard by learning from the lives of ants. The Bible also gives clear guidelines of what and how to plan. In the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:20&21) a clear warning is given to a self-sufficient person who probably has earned through hard work but in that race for wealth failed to understand the purpose of the race and also probably got into the wrong track while running. There is another parable in which Jesus talks about the wise and foolish men building their houses (Luke 6:46-49), where the foundation of the house of the wise man was strong and hence the flood and storm could not destroy it.

During this pandemic, we can regulate our emotions by evaluating our foundations and principles that we live by. Some questions for self-reflection are - Am I wasting my limited income in satisfying my cravings and addictions? Do I need to buy this nonurgent thing during this time of crisis? Am I utilizing my time and resources in the best possible way? Do I need to go out of the house during this time, just because I am feeling bored and return anxious about being infected? Do I still need to be extravagant in my son's or daughter's wedding by not following the norms suggested by health workers and government orders, and by putting so many lives at risk and wasting the money on extravaganza, which could have benefited the married couple financially for their life together amidst the job insecurities? It is all about bringing alterations in things under our control. It is about creating a new culture by checking our foundations and the principles that we live by so that we can avoid the emotional fatigue that could lead to breakdown when we think of loans to pay, medical bills and other day-to-day living expenses that we have to face. Here comes another slogan as a guiding principle - “One day at a time, wisely.”

3) Connect with, and Care for others; The lockdown has limited us with physical distancing and so all social gatherings and meetings that gave us mutual emotional strength are totally missing from our lives. This isolation has led people to sadness, anxiety, and frustration. Realizing the importance of physical distancing for the safety of ourselves and others around us, is the need of the hour. At the same time emotionally charging each other by safe means of interaction is important. It is also important to avoid negative conversations during such interactions. We must also avoid people who consciously drain our energy or add stress to our already existing stressful state.

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has affected each one of us in some way or the other. For some of us the situation has not affected the basic necessities of daily life whereas for many others they are struggling to meet their basic daily requirements. Here comes our role of sharing the resources in whatever possible ways we can. I feel honored to mention that so many members of my parish community have personally called my husband (Achen) to find out how they could support the people in need who could have lost their regular incomes due to this pandemic and, once they are guided, they are doing what they can (maintaining anonymity) to support their fellow beings.

When we read the book of Nehemiah, chapter 3, it seems like a dry account of who did what in rebuilding Jerusalem's broken walls, which happened to be a common need of the community. Yet a detailed account is given. This pandemic also demands the same from us as a community, to do our part whether small or big in our own ways, be it through financial assistance, service as health professionals, counselling as mental health professionals, or spiritual support or any other help that the situation demands. Here comes another slogan for each day - “We shall overcome this together.”

Conclusion: Yes, there are enough reasons for us to experience emotional breakdown if we fail to manage or cope with the fatigue that this pandemic brings; and we do not have anyone to blame like Eve did.

Let us make a conscious decision to strengthen our thoughts and emotions by reaffirming: “In God I trust, for this too shall pass”; “One day at a time, wisely”; and “We shall overcome this together.”





**Mercy Sam Michael**  
MTC of Greater Washington

## Quarantine.... A period of spiritual growth!

I remember the days when my family and I were sitting around the dining table and discussing a new virus that had started taking the valuable lives of people in China. Those days, I never thought this particular virus was strong enough to affect us by making us wear masks and changing our social as well as personal lives. In fear, everyone considered this strain of corona virus to be THE AGENT OF DEATH as it took so many lives.

By the 3rd week of March, the nursing facility in Pennsylvania, where I work, set up a COVID-19 unit to isolate the patients who had pre-existing respiratory issues and I was assigned to their care from the very first day. I was comfortable working there. As the days passed by, the number of cases started surging in our country, and an unknown phobia started haunting me. By that time the lock down also started in Maryland. Even if I decided to go

back to Maryland, where my husband and children lived, I had to be in quarantine at home for 14 days. This would have made it almost impossible for me to meet my family. Due to the stress, I could not sleep properly. I used to frequently wake up from my sleep and I started terribly missing my husband and children. I used to think that if anything happened to me, I would be dumped in one of the bare lands in Pennsylvania. My anxiety escalated. I did not want to communicate my feelings to my family as they were already worried about me and were helpless. As Asaph says in Psalms 73:2, "But as for me my feet had almost stumbled."

I am pretty sure, almost all the health care workers had gone through such a situation, but mine was a bit extreme because I was staying alone in an apartment in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and being a recent immigrant to this part of the world, I didn't



have any close friends in PA. I shared my concerns with my close friends, and they instructed me to call them even in the middle of the night when I need to speak to anyone. They used to call me at night and pacify me, but that was temporary. I spent time praying and slept with the bible at my side. During the daytime, I felt relieved as I frequently talked to my people over audio/video chat. After the 3rd or 4th day, a song came into my heart; "Nithya thejassin ghanam orthidumbol laghu nerathekkulla kashtangal saramilla." That song is one of my favourite songs, but I had not sung it for a long time. Suddenly I started thinking, why I should worry? Even if I die, I have an eternal life, where there is no suffering (Rev. 21). From that very moment, I never worried about COVID-19 or its consequences. I genuinely believe that it was the Holy Spirit who brought that song to my heart.

By then our unit had approximately 25 COVID-19 cases, and I had duty on almost all the days due to less manpower, but nothing affected me, and I worked fearlessly all those days. By the first week of June, I started getting symptoms of COVID-19. I had fever, throat pain and cough for a day and then those symptoms subsided, though the headache persisted. I was alone in my apartment and my family insisted that I should come to Maryland. Initially I refused. Later, I started getting nausea, dizziness, loss of appetite, and more cough than usual. Then when checking for symptoms of pneumonia, I realized something was wrong. On the 4th of June around 5:30 a.m., I called my husband and told him that I was quite sick. By 11:00 a.m. my husband and son came to Pittsburgh and took me back to Maryland. We enjoyed our whole trip, and nobody had any tension throughout the journey. On our way back to Maryland they took me to the hospital, got swabbing done for COVID-19 and a CT

scan was done to rule out pneumonia. I was correct! I had already developed changes in my lungs. They sent me home with medication and advised home quarantine. After 3 days, the COVID-19 swab also tested positive. As I had nausea and vomiting, they admitted me and started I/V fluids and kept me for observation the whole night.

At that time, I thought of all the known people from our facility. Some people had died recently with COVID-19, and I remembered how the funeral home took the bodies of our patients who died of COVID-19. But nothing could change my attitude towards this deadly disease or death. So, I started smiling and thought to myself, "Corona, we are unique people; you can't scare us." For me, my quarantine period was like a celebration. I was extremely busy with zoom meetings from Dubai and online meetings from US and interacting with people who were attending prayer meetings and replying to phone messages. So, I did not get time to think about the disease. The difference between me and many other corona patients was that I had a battalion of people behind me, earnestly praying for me and my family.

Thank you to everyone for the phone calls and messages from all parts of the world from the time corona broke out in the US until the present. Your love and concern never cease to amaze me! Last but not the least, a huge THANK YOU to my husband who took me to Maryland by car and took care of me for a whole month (food, steam inhalation, the list is endless). Front line workers wear personal protective equipment (PPE) when they take care of the COVID patients, but his PPE was real faith in God and the N95 mask! Above all, Glory to the Lord Almighty for strengthening me beforehand and taking me fearlessly through my COVID days.



## TESTIMONY



**Rev. K.A. Varghese**  
St. Andrews MTC, NY

I praise God for the opportunity to share my testimony in the Messenger magazine, as per the request of our Diocesan Secretary, Manoj Idiculla Achen. Testimony lays a strong base for one's faith. I hope my testimony will help you grow in your faith during these times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I hail from a small town in Kerala, Chungathara. At present, I am the vicar of St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church, Yonkers, New York. As far as I am concerned the COVID-19 infection was just another noteworthy event in my 27 years of service for Christ. My Lord has shed his mercy and grace on me to serve as an evangelist and a missionary of the church for almost three decades of my life. I am thankful to God almighty, my Savior, for blessing me to be in His service despite the limitations of my circumstances and abilities. I have had diverse experiences and difficulties both in my personal life and in my faith and have known God's loving care during all those situations. The intensity of faith among the many commoners and illiterate believers of our church has influenced my life as a missionary.

It was while I was engaged in the ministry at St. Andrews Parish, towards the end of March 2020, I developed a cough which I did not take seriously as there were no other difficulties. Since it was Lent time, I was doing online evening prayers and other sermons. COVID-19 did not bother me at all because I did not go anywhere except for going to an Indian shop on March 14, 2020. On March 31, 2020, I experienced shortness of breath and went to bed. On the morning of April 1<sup>st</sup> at about 4:00 a.m. my wife notice that I was not responding adequately to her attempts to wake me up. I opened my eyes but could not speak or breathe properly. Due to the timely intervention of my wife, she called 911, the paramedical unit rushed me to the hospital emergency by about 5:00 a.m. I was hospitalized for the next 12 days. For the first time in my life, I was admitted in a hospital. Psalms 39:5, "How short you have made my life! In your sight my lifetime seems nothing. Indeed every living being is more than a puff of wind." I remembered the scripture that says, "each man's life is but a breath."

The various scriptures I had always read seemed to give me new definitions now. Psalms 118:8-9, "It is





better to trust in the Lord than to depend on human beings. It is better to trust in lord than to depend on human leaders." It was the moment when I realized the fact that no power in the world can pacify or comfort us; the moments when I faced death without being able to breathe the God-given air properly. I was able to experience the presence of God which was closer than the breath.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul says that the answer to his prayer was, "My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak. I am most happy then, to be proud of my weaknesses in order to feel the protection of Christ's power over me, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." These words gave me more courage, comfort, and hope. It is only when the disease becomes a part of our life one realizes its severity. From time to time, God prepared for me, many who had never seen me and cared for

me in a place where no one could come in to help. Even if the water in the Kerith stream dries up and the crow stops coming, the God who prepared the widow of Zarephath for Elijah had prepared many for me. As I passed through the shadow of death, the Lord gave me a vision of hope and strengthened me.

I visualized my beautiful Lord as noted in Revelation 1:13-16, "And among them there was what looked like a human being, wearing a robe that reached to his feet, and a gold belt round his chest; His hair was white as wool, or as snow, and his eyes blazed like fire; his feet shone like brass that has been refined and polished, and his voice sounded like a roaring waterfall. He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came out of his mouth. His face was as bright as the midday sun." I was able to see our hopeful heavenly port.

Psalms 18:4-6, "The danger of death was all round me; the waves of destruction rolled over me.

The danger of death was round me, and the grave set its trap for me. In my trouble I called to the Lord; I called to my God for help. In his temple he heard my voice; he listened to my cry for help."

God heard my prayer and extended my life. God heard the attentive prayers of many from the different parts of the world. I thank everyone who prayed for my recovery. Especially I thank our Diocesan bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxinos Episcopa for consoling and giving courage to my family through calls and prayers. I also thank other Bishops, Diocesan Secretary Manoj Idicula Achen, and my fellow Achens, believers, and especially my St. Andrews family.

It is important to understand that the world's resources are not enough to sustain human life in these days of global anxiety and fear. This is the time when we are confined to our homes for the fear of disease. The echo of fear and despair is heard everywhere. We can rely completely on God whom we can depend on amidst all our crises. You can experience the beauty of daylight only when you pass through the darkness of night. Let God control our lives. Let us continue our journey with courage and hope. May God help all of us.



# A Tribute to My Roommate and Classmate

at The Mar Thoma  
College, Thiruvalla

Jacob Thomas (Soman)  
MTC Austin, Texas



On July 12, 2020, Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa was installed as the Suffragan Metropolitan of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church. For three years, Mar Theodosius was my hostel (dorm) roommate and classmate as we studied and completed B.Sc. Physics at the Mar Thoma College, Thiruvalla. This is a short tribute to my roommate based on my recollections.

Over five decades ago, just the day before I started my first year at Mar Thoma College, I was randomly assigned a room in the men's hostel with three other teenagers. I was happy to learn that, like me, one of them was also majoring in Physics. Thus, I got a classmate as my roommate. During the course of a month, my roommate confided that he wants to pursue graduate studies, become a Mar Thoma priest, and fully dedicate his life for the church and missionary work. He basically outlined the roadmap for his life. As a sixteen-year-old, I was amazed that someone at that age knew exactly what he wanted to do with his life.

In a few weeks, we found out that we had one thing in common – a life goal of pursuing higher education. Both of us understood that a good education (graduate degree) is required for success in life. Other than that, I believe, we did not have much in common. My roommate was reserved, serious, seldom laughed and talked in measured sentences. I was exactly the opposite. Even today, my roommate is reserved and talks in measured sentences! Getting a smile out of him takes some effort!

My roommate was a disciplined, hardworking, highly motivated person with a life goal of becoming a Mar Thoma Church priest and dedicating his life for Christian ministry. His focus during this period was towards achieving these goals. He regularly attended the prayer meetings in the hostel. Our hostel held voluntary morning prayer in Malayalam and mandatory evening prayer in English on a daily basis. Many mornings, my roommate led the morning prayer. His favorite Hymn was:



Shuddhikkaai nee Yesu Sameepay poyo

Kulichoch kunjattin rakthathil.

In addition, every school day started with a voluntary prayer in the college auditorium (later years in the chapel) at 9:25 a.m. My roommate would not miss that prayer meeting for any reason. Due to these qualities he was nicknamed "Malpan." Nicknames, such as Thirumeni and Ramban were already assigned to other students. A more common nickname for my roommate was "Ashtamudi," the name of his home village in Kollam district. In the Mar Thoma College, it was a practice for most students and professors to get nicknames. By the way, my nickname was Kottarakara. Towards the end of our first year, we decided to be roommates for the next two years. First and second year, we had four kids in a room and in our final year we were able to secure a two-person hostel room.

Since we both were Physics majors, almost all our classes were the same. In most Physics classes, we both sat in the front row. We are the first batch of Pre-degree (equivalent to the plus two, Grades 11 and 12) program introduced in 1964. Thus, all students who joined the degree program in 1966 were kids who passed Pre-degree on the first attempt. Thus, our classmates were competitive.

One of the memories that stands out during our second year is about our roommate Aniyam (Chemistry major), who was from a Syrian Christian family. Everyone knew him, since he kept his uncut long hair tied like the Sikhs. Aniyam was a nerdy character – soft spoken, intelligent and fearless. He was smarter than both of us. He had a few bright ideas like rearranging the periodic table of elements. I expected Aniyam to become a successful scientist. Later, I found out he became a lawyer and died at an early age. Like actor Morgan Freeman in the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, I wish I could go back in time and talk to Aniyam!

My roommate Ashtamudi was not an introvert. He played hockey and was the team captain in our final year. He was a football player who usually played goalkeeper position, captain of NCC, member of college choir, and the list goes on. The Mar Thoma College provided a nurturing environment for future priests and church leaders. I believe T. C. Thomas Achen (College Principal) and many professors mentored such students. The College has produced many priests. Rev. Dr. T. J. Thomas (our senior and hostel resident), Rev. P. M. Thomas (our contemporary, Economics major, now lives in N.Y.), and Rev. P. G. George (a pre-degree student and hostel resident, Sinai Mar Thoma Church, London) are a few examples.

As mentioned earlier, Ashtamudi and Kottarakara did not share many traits, but had a common goal



RESIDENTS OF THE MEN'S HOSTEL

Photo from Mar Thoma College Men's Hostel 1967. Author and Thirumeni – Kottarakara and Ashtamudi

to achieve a good education. During our formative years, I believe, we both benefited from our friendship. We encouraged and helped each other in our studies. A few times, I benefited from my

roommate. I had a habit of going to sleep at our 9:00 to 10:30 p.m. study time, especially in our final year. I would get up after midnight, take a shower, study until 5 a.m. and then go back to sleep. I



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was violating the 9:00-10:30 p.m. study time on a regular basis. Our hostel warden, Abraham-Sir (nickname: Appachan) used to make the rounds for roll call during this time. Appachan was a retired High School Headmaster with 100% gray hair. Since my roommate had good credibility, he was able to assure Appachan that there was no need to worry about my studies. Thus, my roommate saved me from Appachan's wrath. Also, other times, I got lenient treatment for petty mischiefs.

In 1969, we both graduated in B.Sc. Physics with first class (Honors). Two first classes from the same room is a record for Mar Thoma College Men's Hostel. A few years later, the men's hostel was converted to a ladies' hostel. Thus, our men's hostel record holds forever!

Ashtamudi went on to complete his degree in theology and was ordained as a Mar Thoma priest in 1973. I attended the ordination held on SCS Campus, Thiruvalla. Although we had kept in touch through occasional letters, that was the first time I was meeting my former roommate since we left college.

I applaud the Mar Thoma Church leadership for taking an interest in developing leaders. The Church accommodated my roommate's desire to pursue advanced degrees. Achen completed his M.A. from Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan in 1980 and Doctorate from McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada in 1986. While studying in Canada, he served as the vicar of the Toronto Mar Thoma Church. My siblings were members of this Church. During this time, we re-established our connection and stayed in touch. In 1984, Achen baptized Kiran, our son, in the historical St. James Episcopal Church, Hyde Park, NY.

In 1989, the Mar Thoma Church Bishop selection committee sent me a long questionnaire requesting a reference for my former roommate. That is the time I realized that my roommate was going to be considered for the position of bishop. My roommate was consecrated as a bishop on December 9, 1989. Thirumeni served several dioceses, including the Diocese of North America & Europe. In addition to

the official responsibilities, Thirumeni has authored several books and serves as a socio-economic and religious reformer.

Thirumeni was our diocesan bishop from January 2009 to March 2016. As part of the Austin Mar Thoma Church leadership, Jessie and I had the opportunity to work with Thirumeni. Thirumeni took special interest in interacting with U.S. church leaders, especially Episcopal Church leaders. Thirumeni had a good personal relationship with the Seminary of the Southwest, Austin, Texas. Because of Thirumeni's personal relationship with the seminary President, The Very Rev. Douglas Travis, the Austin Mar Thoma Church was able to conduct Sunday Service and Sunday school in the seminary chapel and classrooms for several years. Thirumeni has a good relationship with the current Seminary President, The Very Rev. Cynthia Briggs Kittredge. Both Seminary Presidents have remarkably high respect and admiration for our Thirumeni. Thirumeni made it a point to invite these leaders to Mar Thoma services and functions.

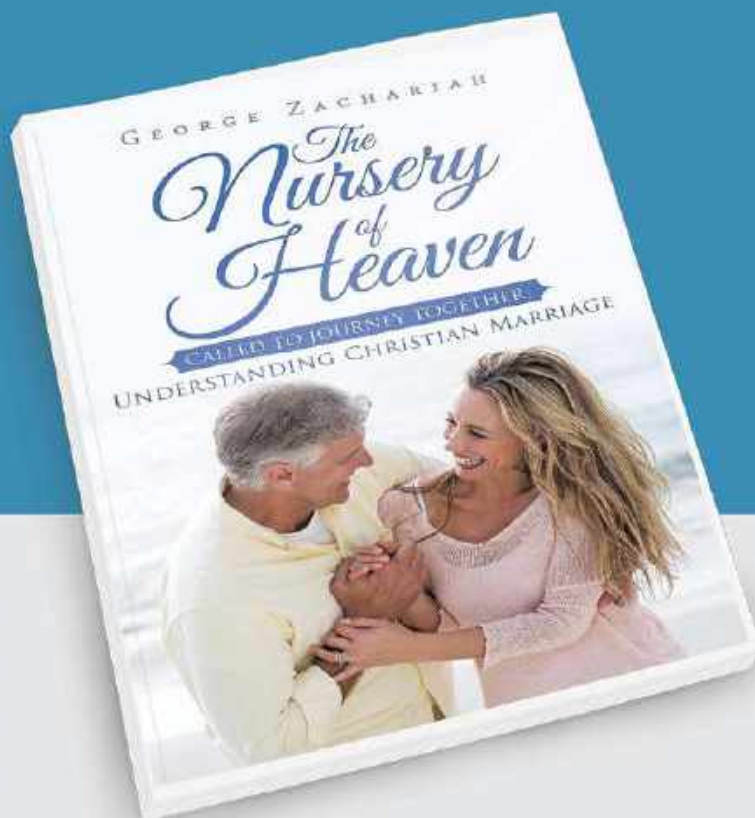
Jessie and I have observed Thirumeni to be a calm, thoughtful and consistent leader; a good listener, open to new ideas, and interested in learning and adopting technology. Thirumeni is a person who thinks out of the box. Thirumeni comes across as an innovative executive, who is talented and genuinely interested in taking Mar Thoma Church to new heights.

On July 12, 2020 Thirumeni was installed as the Suffragan Metropolitan of Mar Thoma Church, the second highest position in the church hierarchy. My roommate went on to travel the roadmap he outlined as a teenager. I learned that many great leaders knew what they wanted to do with their life at an early age. President Franklin Roosevelt and President Bill Clinton are good examples.

Jessie and I express our congratulations and we pray for Thirumeni's good health and continued leadership in the church.

*Jacob is a retired IBM Senior Engineer/Scientist and lives in Austin, Texas.*





# The Nursery of Heaven

**CALLED TO JOURNEY TOGETHER:  
UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE**  
Dr. George Zachariah



**Thomas Ninan,**  
M.A., LL.B., MSW., Ph.D., LICSW, ACSW  
MTC of Greater Washington

The familiar claim, “Christians are just as likely to divorce as non-Christians” is often attributed to a 2008 study by the Barna Research Group. The study report that the divorce rate among Christians equals that of non-Christians builds upon the common assumption that 50 percent of all marriages end in divorce. But, according to more recent research, those statements about the divorce rate among Christians, in particular, are untrue. Harvard-trained social researcher and author Shaunti Feldhahn, in her book *The Good News About Marriage* (2014) says that the data reveals a different story about the divorce rate. Feldhahn states that the “50 percent” figure was not based on hard data; rather, the number came from projections of what researchers thought the divorce rate would become after states passed no-fault divorce laws. According to her study, the overall divorce rate is

around 33 percent and those who attend church regularly have a significantly lower divorce rate than those who do not. The actual divorce rate of those who regularly attend church, according to her study is approximately 25-50% lower than the general population. Whether we admit 50%, 33% or less as true findings, Christian couples today need help and look for Godly wisdom and blessings to maintain their life together.

Dr. George Zachariah’s recently published book (2020) on Christian marriage, entitled, *The Nursery of Heaven*, is filled with timeless godly wisdom and guidance to preserve and protect Christian marriage. It would be a valuable addition to the library of biblical students, pastoral counselors, marriage therapists, young adults preparing for marriage, newly married couples, and couples who struggle to navigate through the challenges of everyday life.



In my opinion, this skillful piece of work would help discover how one can have a wonderful, fulfilling, and pleasant Christian married life in the midst of life's varying trials!

The fundamental understanding of the purpose of marriage in this book is Biblical. As the subtitle fittingly indicates, the main theme of the book is that in a divinely instituted marriage, two people, a man, and a woman, are CALLED TO JOURNEY TOGETHER. Dr. Zachariah greatly enriches this scriptural awareness with his readings of renowned authors, over 60 years of his blessed married life experiences, and similar experiences shared with him by his contemporaries.

In the PREFACE, the author convincingly makes a sensible, pragmatic statement: "How our children will develop healthy and happy life is to a larger extent dependent on how the parents demonstrate through their married life the significance of the quality of marriage. The state of their (parents') marriage often decides the attitude of the children toward their own future life." I have known Dr. Zachariah and his family personally for almost 44 years. I am pleased to say this statement is a testament to his own family life.

In chapter 7 the author characterizes marriage as a sacrament, a mystery, and a covenant. Most importantly, here he provides a brilliant, scholarly analysis of the Biblical account of the three essentials for a successful marriage mentioned in this verse: "Therefore, a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). The three essentials identified and discussed superbly are: Leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh.

Chapter 8 emphasizes the importance of faith - placing Christ at the center of marriage life to make it enduring and permanent. Here he succinctly highlights the Central role of Christ in marriage in these words, "Christian marriages are blessed at the altar of the church and then are worked out in the lives of two earnest people who are adequately prepared for the experience ... and who take God

with them into this new life together. Christ ought to be at the center of every Christian marriage, when one (Christ) goes off the center, the life (marriage life) becomes eccentric." We often observe that people who keep God at the center of their home and family stay married at far greater rates, and even thrive within those marriages.

According to the author, marriage life can be compared to a well-blended, synchronized duet instead of a duel between two people (Chapter 9). It can be an exercise in building bonds of love in the midst of many destabilizing encounters and experiences that may cause disintegration of the marriage.

In the remaining Chapters, this book deals with key topics such as communication (Chapter 10); Crisis and Suffering (Chapter 11); Family and Family Relations (Chapter 12); and Values in Marriage (Chapter 13).

Being well-read and having taught education, psychology and philosophy for 60 years in colleges and universities in India and the United States, prior to retiring as a full Professor, throughout the book, Professor Zachariah quotes liberally from subject matter experts in support of his points of view. Here the readers are exposed to and become the beneficiaries of the best and deep thoughts of scholars on marriage and family stated in their own words.

It may be noted that in the FOREWORD, written while this book was in pre-publication manuscript, the late Most Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan described this work a "masterly study on Christian marriage."

In my opinion, this book would make an ideal gift for newlywed Christian couples.

Paperback edition of this book in 259 pages with a beautiful cover page, organized in 16 chapters for the ease of reading, is published by Christian Faith Publishing, Inc., 832 Park Avenue, Philadelphia, PA, USA, 16335. It is available at Barnes and Noble and Amazon.



# Profile

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# Bible Crossword Puzzle

## Winners List for April 2020

1	C.G. George	Ascension MTC, PA	37	Shabu Abraham	Salem MTC, NY
2	Manju Mathews	Ascension MTC, PA	38	Mariamamma K John	Sehion MTC Dallas
3	Dr. Susan Alex	Atlanta MTC, JK-TN	39	Saramma Varkey	Sehion MTC Dallas
4	Laly Elias	Baltimore MTC, MD	40	Alice Thomas	St James MTC NY
5	Abraham Varghese	Carmel MTC, Boston	41	Mariamamma Ninan	St James MTC NY
6	Ethan Abraham	Carmel MTC, Boston	42	Sheela Thomas	St Luke's MTC FL
7	Mercy Simon	Carmel MTC, Boston	43	Dr. Prathik M Philip	St Luke's MTC Florida
8	Landen Phillip Aguiar	Carmel MTC, Boston	44	Liba Thomas Phillip	St Luke's MTC Florida
9	Paul J Isaac	Carmel MTC, Boston	45	Phillip Mathew	St. Johns Cong, MI
10	Jessy Phillip	Detroit MTC, MI	46	Phillip Mathews	St. Mathews, Canada
11	Jiji Alex	Detroit MTC, MI	47	Saramma Alexander	St. Mathews, Canada
12	Nancy Varghese	Detroit MTC, MI	48	Annamma I Varughese	St. Peter's MTC, NJ
13	Usha Sara Thomas	Detroit MTC, MI	49	Elsie George	St. Peter's MTC, NJ
14	Mathew T Mathew	Epiphany MTC, NY	50	Jibi P George	St. Peter's MTC, NJ
15	Saramma Chacko	Epiphany MTC, NY	51	Mary Simon	St. Peter's MTC, NJ
16	Aleyamma Mathews	Horeb MTC, LA	52	Sally George	St. Peter's MTC, NJ
17	Annamma John	Immanuel MTC, TX	53	Thomas George	St. Peter's MTC, NJ
18	Sara Phillip	Immanuel MTC, Houston	54	Annamma P John	St. Peters MTC, NY
19	Sosamma Abraham	Long Island MTC, NY	55	Sosamama Varghese	St. Peters MTC, NY
20	Saramma Mathew	MTC Dallas Farmers Br	56	Andrew A Abraham	St. Thomas MTC Chicago
21	Ben Thomas	MTC Greater Washington	57	Jeena Mary Mathai	St. Thomas MTC Delaware
22	Joanna Zachariah	MTC Oklahoma	58	Checha John	Staten Island MTC, NY
23	T.C. Zachariah	MTC Oklahoma	59	Elsy Philip	Staten Island MTC, NY
24	Mary George	MTC San Francisco	60	Omana Rajee	Staten Island MTC, NY
25	Mathews George	MTC San Francisco	61	Regi Mathew	Staten Island MTC, NY
26	Mini Abraham	MTC D, Carrollton, TX	62	Sara George	Staten Island MTC, NY
27	Aneyamma Thomas	Philadelphia MTC, PA	63	Saramma Rajan	Staten Island MTC, NY
28	K.C. Jacob	Philadelphia MTC, PA	64	Lilly Varghese	Trinity MTC Houston
29	Kunjamma Jacob	Philadelphia MTC, PA	65	Thomas Varghese	Trinity MTC Houston
30	Reny Mary Joseph	Philadelphia MTC, PA	66	Achamma Chacko	Trinity MTC, Houston
31	Susan Mathews	Philadelphia MTC, PA	67	Gracy P Vattakunnel	Trinity MTC, Houston
32	Susila Joy	Philadelphia MTC, PA	68	Kunjamma Thomas	Trinity MTC, Houston
33	Tharamel E Alexander	Philadelphia MTC, PA	69	Liby Saji Varghese	Trinity MTC, Houston
34	Hannah P Daniel	Salem MTC, NY	70	Reni George	Trinity MTC, Houston
35	Lissha Ann Varghese	Salem MTC, NY	71	Shawn Varghese	Trinity MTC, Houston
36	Saramma Koshy	Salem MTC, NY			

### Winners List for January 2020 Bible Crossword Puzzle(Continued)

66	Usha Sara Thomas	Detroit MTC, MI
67	Eipe Skariah	MTC Dallas Farmers Br
68	Sicily Skariah	MTC Dallas Farmers Br
69	Paul J Isaac	Carmel MTC, Boston

1.C	2.O	M	3.P	A	S	S	I	4.O	N		5.N	A	6.M	E
	F		I					X					A	
	7.F	A	T	E			8.J				9.C		K	
	S					10.C	O	M	F	O	R	T	E	D
	11.P	O	M	P			Y				I		R	
	R				12.D						E			
13.R	I	G	H	T	E	O	14.U	S	15.N	E	S	16.S		
	N				C		N		E			T		17.F
	G				I		D		E		18.A	R		A
			19.J	E	S	S	E	D			E		I	
	20.P				I		R		Y			N		T
21.G	L	O	22.R	I	O	U	S		23.S			G		H
	A		U		N		24.T	H	W	A	R	T		F
	G		L		25.S	E	A			V		H		U
26.Q	U	I	E	T			N			I				L
	E		R		27.R	O	D			O		28.L		N
			S		A		I		29.P	R	A	I	S	E
					G		N					V		S
30.K	N	D	W	L	E	D	G	E			31.S	E	E	S

### Answers for April 2020 Bible Crossword Puzzle





# I AM THANKFUL



**By Joel Prince Philip**  
(MTC Sacramento)

The Lord has given me plenty,  
More than enough to fill my heart.  
His words are never empty,  
So meaningful I learn them by heart.

God is my teacher,  
I learn new things everyday.  
To understand his word he has sent us preachers,  
Who leads us in the right way.

Even when I am alone and sad,  
He protects me from all danger.  
What a wonderful heavenly dad,  
To me he is no stranger.

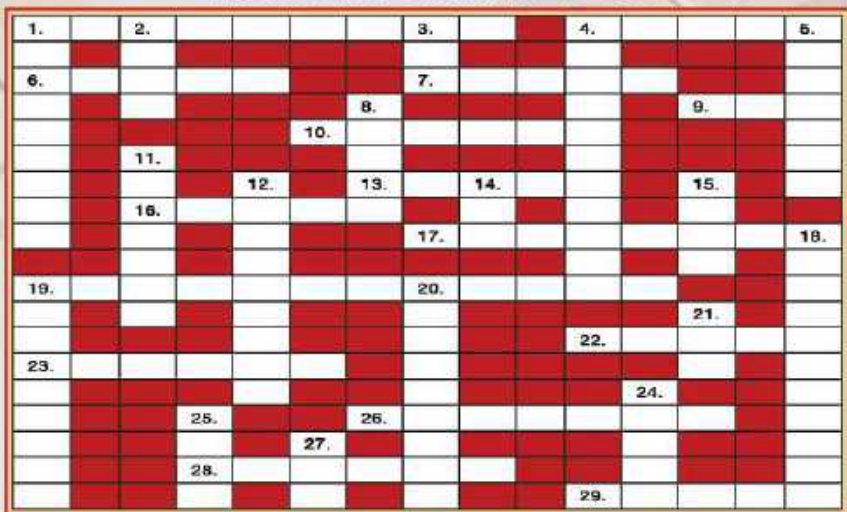
His words are kind and merciful,  
His love is slow and sweet.  
The Lord's righteousness is plentiful,  
Even when we are weak.

My Lord and my Savior,  
I would like to thank you.  
For keeping me from danger,  
And always seeing me through.



# Bible Crossword Puzzle

## as in NIV Isaiah 21-30



### ACROSS:

1. The Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel says: " In repentance and rest is your \_\_\_\_\_".
4. The people disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broke the everlasting covenant. Therefore a \_\_\_\_\_ consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt.
6. Therefore give glory to the Lord; \_\_\_\_\_ the name of the Lord.
7. Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not \_\_\_\_\_ righteousness.
9. Elam takes up the quiver, with her charioteers and horses; \_\_\_\_\_ uncovers her shield.
10. You have been a \_\_\_\_\_ for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress.
13. Their worship of me is made up only of \_\_\_\_\_ taught by men.
16. The Lord will place on Eliakim's shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut and what he \_\_\_\_\_ no one can open.
17. The Lord Almighty planned it, to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble all who are \_\_\_\_\_ on the earth.
19. Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have \_\_\_\_\_ you have done for us.
22. O Lord, our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone do we \_\_\_\_\_.
23. These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips but their \_\_\_\_\_ are far from me.
26. The Lord \_\_\_\_\_ those who dwell on high, He lays the lofty city low.
28. O upright One, You make the way of the righteous \_\_\_\_\_.
29. The Lord Almighty will \_\_\_\_\_ on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem.

### DOWN:

1. You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is \_\_\_\_\_, because he trusts in you.
2. " in that day the peg driven into the firm place will give way and will fall, and the \_\_\_\_\_ hanging on it will be cut down".
3. Get up you officers \_\_\_\_\_ the shields.
4. See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious \_\_\_\_\_ for a sure foundation, the one who trusts will never be dismayed
5. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the \_\_\_\_\_ from all faces.
11. The Lord is a God of \_\_\_\_\_. Blessed are all who wait for Him.
12. When your \_\_\_\_\_ come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness.
14. We have made a \_\_\_\_\_ our refuge and falsehood our hiding place.
15. The Lord is coming out of His dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their \_\_\_\_\_.
18. Turn away from me ; let me weep bitterly. Do not try to console me over the \_\_\_\_\_ of my people.
19. The Lord Almighty says: "I will clothe Eliakim with Shebna's robe and fasten Shebna's sash around Eliakim and hand Shebna's \_\_\_\_\_ over to Eliakim."
20. His God \_\_\_\_\_ him and teaches him the right way to farm.
21. "Within one year, as a servant bound by contract would count it, all pomp of Kadar will come to an \_\_\_\_\_.
24. Or else let them come to me for refuge; let them make \_\_\_\_\_ with me.
25. The wisdom of the \_\_\_\_\_ will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.
27. The farmer, when he has leveled the surface, does he not \_\_\_\_\_ caraway and scatter cummin?

**Deadline for Answers: September 25, 2020**

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

Contact Phone: 978-663-3203

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Please include your name, phone number, email address, name of your Parish and State of residence. (Children - Grade in School)

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



# NEWS & EVENTS



Ms. Alana, Ms. Ava, and Ms. Alexa Abraham daughters of Mr. Titus Abraham and Mrs. Teena Abraham of the Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston sewed over 200 masks and provided them to underserved communities in Brazoria County, Tomball, The Star of Hope, and the Houston Food Bank. Congressman Pete Olson heard about their efforts to help during the pandemic and gave them a service award. May God bless them and make them serve in more effective ways for the edification of His kingdom.

Rev. Jacob P. Thomas  
Vicar, Trinity MTC, Houston

**Ms. Alana, Ms. Ava, and Ms. Alexa Abraham**  
Trinity MTC, Houston

On May 31, 2020, Danielle Verghese, a Jefferson University Hospital resident, led residents and medical school students in a demonstration "Moving together to fight against racial injustice" to draw attention to the role of systemic racism in African American health. Danielle Varghese is a member of the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church of Delaware Valley, PA.



Rev. Abraham Kuruvilla  
Vicar, St. Thomas MTC, Delaware Valley, PA

**Danielle Verghese, St. Thomas MTC, Delaware Valley, PA -**



Ms. Sheeja Mathews is one of the three exceptional educators chosen for the 2020 Swing Education Substitute Teacher Hall of Fame from among the many nominations received across the United States of America. She is also serving as Yuvajana Sakhyam Southeast Region Center A Secretary and is a member of St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church, New Jersey.

Swing Education is a web-based platform on which highly qualified teachers are connected with prospective schools for short- or long-term assignments. Swing Education works with 2500 plus partners including district, charter and private schools and helps over 5 million students across the country.

**Sheeja Mathews, St. Peters MTC, New Jersey**



Swing Education invited the schools across the nation to nominate inspirational teachers who made a difference in the lives of their students and the school community. Swing Education in its press release announced that after receiving nominations from across the country, the educators—Sheeja Mathews (NJ), Jennifer Rutledge (IL), and Jim Strang (OH)—were selected based on their outstanding work and their impact on students and the greater school community, going above and beyond, reliability, and more.

Sheeja Mathews received a prize package that includes a \$500 cash award, \$250 for professional development and a commemorative plaque. She enters the 2020 inductee class of exceptional educators of its Substitute Teacher Hall of Fame and is also profiled on the Swing Education website. “I

feel blessed & honored to receive this recognition and award, and would like to dedicate it to my family especially, my parents.”

“As long as I can remember, I wanted to be a teacher to empower young minds and positively influence their lives and witness the development of their thinking,” said Sheeja Mathews, who has more than 10 years of experience in teaching culturally-diverse student populations in various classroom settings. “To see a student’s journey from obliviousness or ignorance to a state of insight and comprehension is like watching a caterpillar grow into a beautiful butterfly.”

Rev. Sam T. Mathew  
Vicar, St. Peters MTC, NJ.

## Seniors Meeting



A meeting of the Senior members of the Diocese was held on Sunday, May 24, 2020 at 7.00 p.m. via Zoom conference. About 700 families joined the meeting. The main presentation on the theme, “Post Trauma Issues facing the Seniors due to Pandemic” was given by Dr. M. V. Mathew, Chicago. A lively

discussion ensued. Everybody was happy that such a conference was arranged because they could see and interact with old friends from different parts of USA and Canada.

Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese  
Vice President





# MATRIMONIAL

A decorative graphic of a bride silhouette in purple, holding a bouquet of flowers, positioned above the letter 'A' in the word 'MATRIMONIAL'.

1. Marthoma parents settled in the US invite marriage proposals for their 29-year-old daughter, born and brought up in the US. She is a god-fearing girl with high moral values and healthy habits, strong in faith, and involved in many volunteering and mission works. She is 5 ft. 1 in. tall, beautiful, smart, and family oriented. She received her Bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences and Master's degree in Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Management from reputed Universities. Currently, she is working in business development for a tech start-up based in New York City. She is interested in entrepreneurship and music. Writing is her passion, and she is working on writing a Book. Looking for a well-educated, intelligent boy with strong Christian values. If interested, please respond to [saab666489@gmail.com](mailto:saab666489@gmail.com) with a recent photograph and detailed profile.
2. Mar Thomaparents settled in the U.S. invite marriage proposal for their 26-year-old daughter. She was born and brought up in the U.S. She holds MS in accounting and works as a CPA with a private company. Proposals are invited from parents of God fearing and family-oriented boys (27-31). If interested please respond with recent photograph and personal profile to [ch147887@gmail.com](mailto:ch147887@gmail.com)
3. Our family would like to invite proposals for our youngest daughter. We are well-settled in the U.S. for almost 15 years and attend the Mar Thoma church in NY. Our daughter is 25 years old, born in Dubai and went through the education system here in the U.S. She has completed her Bachelor's & Master's degrees in Industrial & Operations Engineering from a very well-reputed university and is currently working as an Engineer at an aerospace manufacturing lab. She has a strong faith in our God, is caring and is passionate about various activities. If interested, please email [mathews789@gmail.com](mailto:mathews789@gmail.com) with detailed information.
4. Mar Thoma parents settled in US invite proposals for their son (27) working as a Pharmacist. We are looking for a professionally qualified suitable girl settled in US with strong Christian faith and values. Interested parents, please contact with details to [koykkathu@yahoo.com](mailto:koykkathu@yahoo.com)
5. Marthoma Parents settled in the USA, invite Marriage proposal for their 28-year-old daughter, currently doing Pediatric Residency. She is fair, tall, beautiful, born and brought up in U.S.A. Seeking a professionally qualified, God-fearing, family-oriented person. If interested please email recent photographs and details to: [roundcreek1@gmail.com](mailto:roundcreek1@gmail.com)





# സ്നേഹാദരങ്ങളോടെ ഒരു യാത്രാമൊഴി....

**Elias Abraham**  
Baltimore

നൂറിൻ നിറവിൽ ഒരു നിറതിരി പോൽ  
ചൊരിഞ്ഞീയമ്മ പ്രകാശം ധരയിൽ.

കടന്നു പോയിന്നു നമ്മിൽനിന്നെങ്കിലും,  
സ്നേഹത്തിൻ സുര്യ പ്രഭയായ്,  
മാതൃത്വത്തിൻ മഴവില്ലുകായ്,  
ജീവിക്കുന്നു ജന മനസ്സുകളിൽ,  
സ്വർഗ്ഗത്തിൻ പൂവാടികളിൽ,  
സന്തോഷിപ്പു വിശുദ്ധർക്കൊപ്പം.

സുഖങ്ങൾ സർവവും തൃപ്തിച്ചീയമ്മ,  
മക്കൾക്കായ് സ്വയം സമർപ്പിച്ചമ്മ,  
ചട്ടം ചിട്ടകളോരോന്നായി  
ചെറു മനസ്സുകളിൽ ചാലിച്ചി  
ട്ടെന്നും നടന്നവർ നേർവീഥികളിൽ.

ഉള്ളമുരുകി പ്രാർഥിച്ചമ്മ,  
കർത്തനിൽ ശരണം വച്ചു മക്കൾ,  
അനുദിനമവരെ നടത്തി ദൈവം,  
അനുഗ്രഹങ്ങൾ കോരിച്ചൊരിഞ്ഞു,  
അനുഗ്രഹം നേടി നമ്മുടെ സഭയും  
തിരുമനസ്സിൻ പ്രിയ സാന്നിധ്യത്താൽ.

മാതൃപ്രിയം പൂജാവനം,  
നിസ്തുല സ്നേഹത്തിൻ കേദാരം.

നന്ദയും കരുണയും ദക്തിയുമെല്ലാ  
മമ്മയിൽ നിത്യം കളിയാടി മുദാ.  
നല്ലപോൾ പൊരുതോട്ടും തികച്ചുവീ  
ശതാദിഷ്ടിതയ്ക്കു വന്ദനം, പ്രണാമം!  
വിട ചൊല്ലുന്നമ്മെ സാദരം ഞങ്ങൾ  
ഓക്കരെ നാട്ടിൽ കാണും നാൾ വരെ.

(നമ്മുടെ ഭദ്രാസനാധിപൻ, അഭിവന്ദ്യ ഫിലക്സിനോസ് തിരുമേനിയുടെ ദിവംഗതയായ പ്രിയ മാതാവ്, ശ്രീമതി മറിയമ്മ ഐസക്കിന്റെ ധന്യ ജീവിതത്തെ സ്മരിച്ച് ഏഴുതിയ കവിത)





# OBITUARY



*"If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord". Romans 14:8*

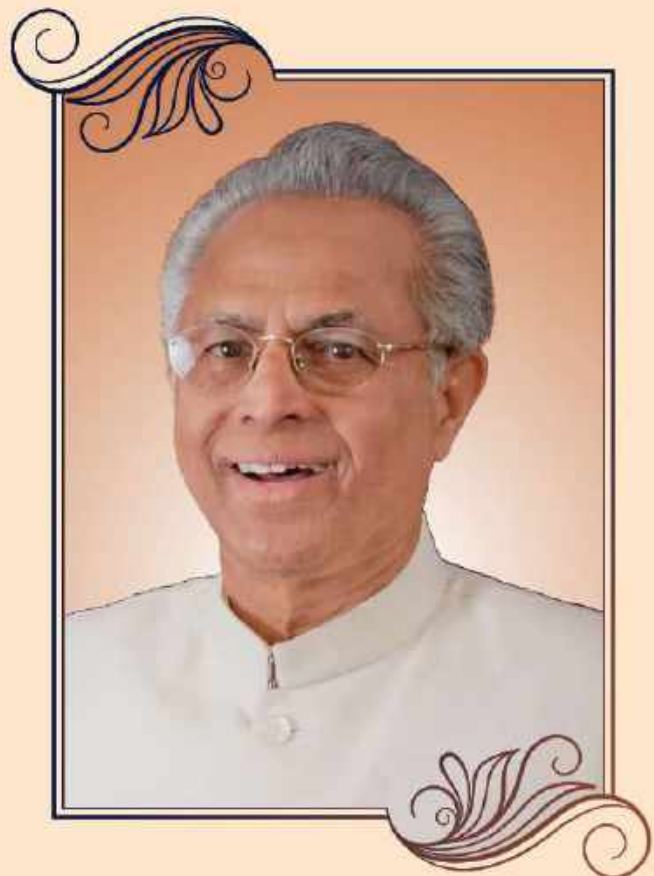


## Dr. P John Lincoln

Dr. P. John Lincoln, member of the Emmanuel Mar Thoma Church, Lubbock was called to eternity in the early hours on June 15, 2020.

He was instrumental in helping the Church to establish parishes and was generous with his time and resources for the church. He served as the Diocesan Treasurer during the periods 1987 - 1990, 1993 - 1996 and 2002 -2005. He also served as a Sabha Mandalam Member, Sabha Council Member and Episcopal Nomination Board Member. He attended all the Family Conferences held in this diocese. His love for the church and the diocese strengthened him, despite his physical weakness, to attend the Dedication and Inauguration of the Carmel Mar Thoma Center, Atlanta in December 2018 and this was the last public event that he had attended.

Dr. Zac Varghese from the UK states, "Dr. Lincoln was a distinguished dentist, a family man, God-





centered gentle giant, a church-man, a community builder and a dear friend to all of us. To the very end of his life, he maintained an angelic innocence, and a heart-warming smile, which is unusual, because we live in an age which lost its innocence. There was nothing complicated about 'Lincolnchen', as he was known to his close friends, he was pure and simple, an honest gentleman, a very dear friend."

Dr. Lincoln's life was an open book. He was a special gift to our community to build and stabilize its various structures, mission fields and institutions for the faith formation of our people. He knew that friendship is living within the life of the other. He found a perfect loving partnership with Dr. Annie and created a model Christian family at Lubbock with his children. Dr. Lincoln was a true vintage pioneer, a great lay leader with great respect for priesthood and Episcopacy and an ambassador to the diaspora communities across the world through the work he has done in the Diocesan Council, Mandalam and the Sabha council. He is leaving a rich legacy to build on.

A Thanksgiving service was held via Zoom on June 18, 2020 from 8:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. His Grace

The Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan, Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Sabha Secretary Rev. K. G. Joseph, Diocesan Council Members and members representing all the regions shared their reminiscences and condolences.

The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Diocesan Secretary, Diocesan Treasurer, Diocesan Council Members, Assembly Members, Mandalam Members, Achens and Members of all Parishes and Congregations in the Diocese of North America and Europe express our heartfelt condolence to the bereaved family members. He is survived by his wife Dr. Annie Lincoln, Sons Anil & Sunil and Daughter Lina and their families.

Let us praise God for the life of Dr. P. John Lincoln and remember with gratitude the services rendered to the Mar Thoma Church and the Diocese and for being instrumental in its growth and mission.

Rev. Manoj Idiculla  
Diocesan Secretary

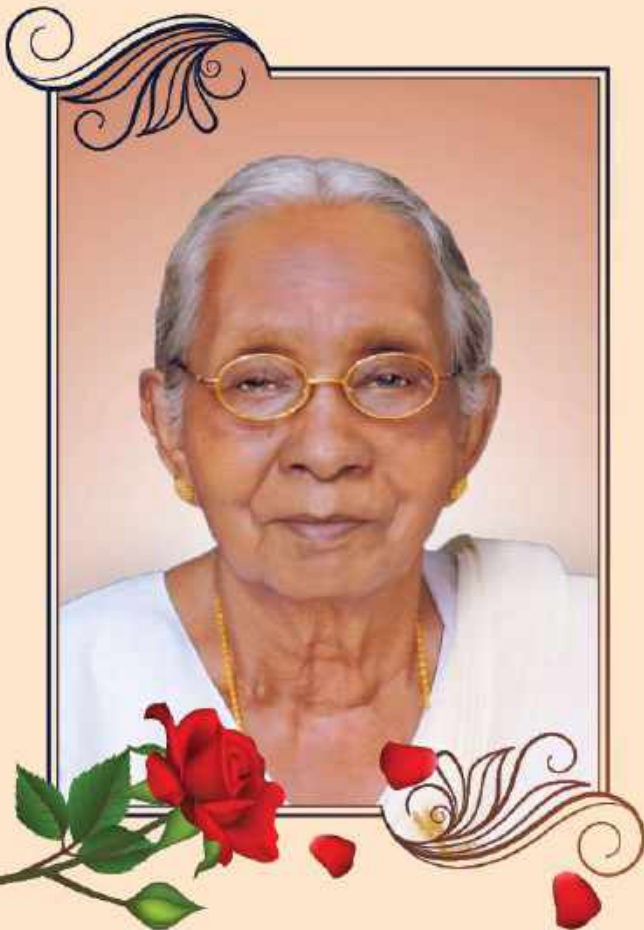
## Mrs. Leelamma John

Mrs. Leelamma John, age 83, member of the Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington, was called to eternity on August 1, 2020. She had worked at Safdarjung Hospital, New Delhi, then worked in Denmark, and came to the United States in 1973. She worked as a registered nurse in Brooklyn, NY, and then moved to Fairfield, Connecticut. She retired from Bridgeport Hospital, Connecticut in 2000 and moved to Virginia. Prior to retirement, she and the family were members of the St. Thomas MTC, Yonkers, NY. She was a woman of great faith and started and ended her day with Bible reading and prayers. She is survived by her husband Mr. John T. John, her son Dr. John Thatamanil and his wife Kate, her daughter Rachel Cherian and her husband Dr. Dennis Cherian, and her grandchildren Kate, Priya, and Moses.

Rev. Anu Oommen  
Vicar, MTC of Greater Washington







## **Mrs. Mariamma Isac**

**100 Years - Mother of Our Diocesan Bishop**

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God".*  
2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Mrs. Mariamma Isac mother of Our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos was called to eternity on July 16, 2020. The funeral service was held at the Cherukole Mar Thoma Church on Wednesday July 22, 2020 in a befitting manner officiated by Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan along with Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Suffragan Metropolitan and other Bishops. There was a special Grace of God that could be seen and experienced during the service.

Ammachi was God fearing, devoted, dedicated and led a disciplined life. Her passion to help those in need and to feed the hungry was commendable. She was hospitable. Nobody coming home especially

during meal time was allowed to go without enjoying ammachi's hospitality. Achens, evangelists and neighbors bear witness to this fact. She contributed generously to the needs of the church, helped the poor and needy. Her life was an inspiration for her grandchildren. To quote her grand-daughter Bindhu – She was a good daughter, a good sister, a good wife, a good mother, a good daughter in law, a good grandmother, a good great grandmother and above all a good Christian.

She was regular in attending Sunday worship and Sevika Sanghom meetings. She was a woman of prayer and was particular in having personal meditation and family prayer. She loved music and enjoyed singing.

A thanksgiving service was held Via Zoom Video/ Tele conference on Friday July 24, 2020 at 9:00 PM (EST) to praise God for the life and witness of Ammachi and express our condolence and prayers to Tirumeni and the bereaved family members.

His Eminence Mor Titus Yeldho the Archbishop of Malankara Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church in North America, Very Rev. Dr. Cherian Thomas, Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese, Rev. Sajeew Suku (CSI), Senator Kevin Thomas, Mayor Saji George, Achens, Diocesan Council, Diocesan Assembly, Sabha Council, Mandalam Members, Parishoners and dear ones from all over the world participated in the thanksgiving service.

The Diocesan Secretary, Diocesan Treasurer, Diocesan Council Members, Assembly Members, Mandalam Members, Achens and Members of all Parishes and Congregations in the Diocese of North America and Europe express our heartfelt condolence to Tirumeni and the bereaved family members. Ammachi is survived by Mr. Isaac Mathew & Family, Mr. Isaac Varghese and Family and Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos.

No matter how old we are, losing a mother is one of the deepest sorrows a heart can know. But her goodness, her caring, and her wisdom will live on, like a legacy of love that will last forever. *"May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"*. Philippians 4:7. May our Lord bless and comfort Tirumeni and all dear family members during this time of grief.

Rev. Manoj Idiculla  
Diocesan/Bishop's Secretary





### Prof. Philip Thomas CPA

(Retired professor of accounting and a tax practitioner for over 37 years in the United States. He is a member of American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, Texas Society of CPAs and Dallas Chapter of CPAs. He is also a Chartered Global Management Accountant.)

## TAX UPDATES FOR 2020 & BEYOND

President Trump signed the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief & Economic Security) ACT on March 27, 2020 as government's response to the pandemic by providing financial assistance to businesses, no-profits and individuals.

### 1. CARES ACT: 2020 RMD WAIVER

CARES ACT will have a significant effect on many estate and retirement plans and the implications vary by taxpayer. Retirees who are otherwise required to take minimum distributions (RMD) in 2020 need not take those distributions in 2020. Leaving the required distribution amounts in the retirement accounts help many retirees as their retirement accounts have suffered losses due to impact of corona virus on world economy.

But these points should be noted:

- RMDs from defined contribution plans and IRAs, but not defined benefit plans, are waived for 2020.
- This includes distributions with a required beginning date in 2020, such as the initial RMD that was due April 1 if someone attained age 70-1/2 in 2019. If the distribution had a required beginning date in 2020 and was not made before January 1, then the minimum distribution rules shall not apply for such distributions.
- However, for participants who took their RMDs prior to January 1, 2020, the new waiver does NOT apply to them, and they will be taxed on the RMD they took in 2019, though it was not technically due until April 1.
- For those participants who took their RMDs on or after January 1, the waiver DOES apply to them, even if the distribution was taken prior to the enactment of the CARES Act.

- IRS Notice 2020-51 allows an amount that would have been treated as an RMD under prior law that was made at any time since January 1, 2020 to be repaid and treated as a tax-free rollover if the rollover is completed by August 31, 2020.
- Alternatively, these distributions could be treated as COVID-19 distributions for those individuals qualified to receive such distributions under the CARES Act.
- Qualifying individuals would have a full three years from the time of distribution to repay the former RMD back to the retirement plan from which it came, or roll over the distribution to another retirement plan or IRA and thereby avoid tax on the distribution.
- If the individual qualifies for a COVID-19 distribution, he can claim these tax benefits even if he does not have actual financial need. ( See next section )

### 2. CARES ACT AND RETIREMENT PLAN WITHDRAWALS

Taxpayers can take up to \$100,00 in coronavirus-related distributions ( CRD ) from retirement plans until Dec 31, 2020 without being subject to Sec. 72(t) 10% additional tax for early distributions. Coronavirus-related distributions may be repaid within three years. CRDs receive three special tax benefits:

- 1- A CRD is exempt from the 10% early distribution penalty.
- 2- Income on a CRD can be spread ratably over three years.
- 3- All or part of a CRD can be repaid to an IRA or company plan within three years



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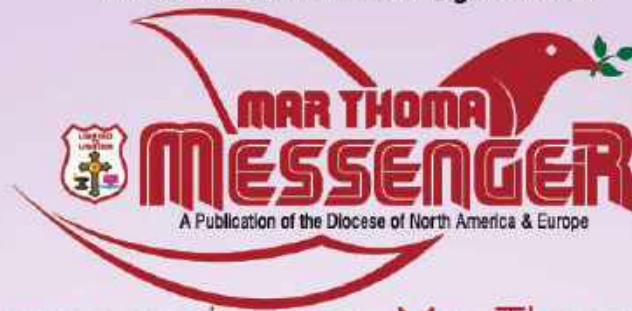
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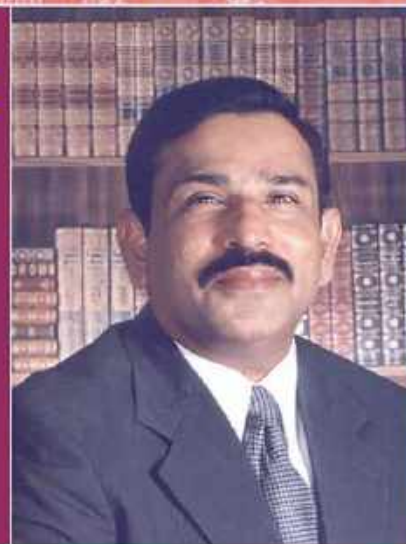


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