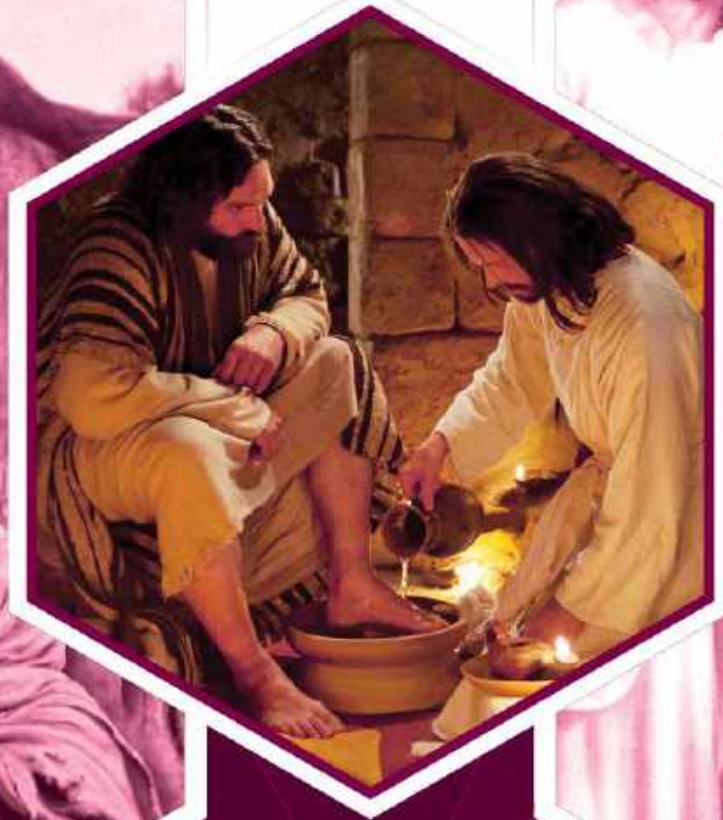




MAR THOMA MESSENGER

A Publication of the Diocese of North America & Europe



DIACONIA MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

APRIL-MAY-JUNE-2021 | Vol. XXXX. No: 2

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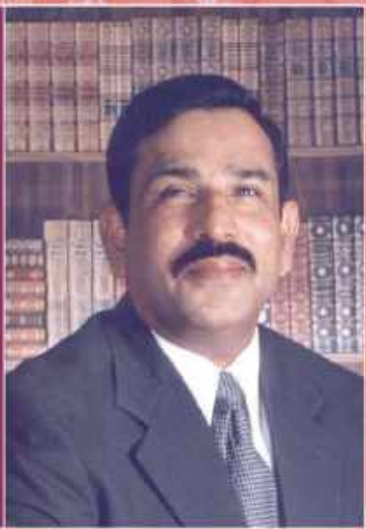
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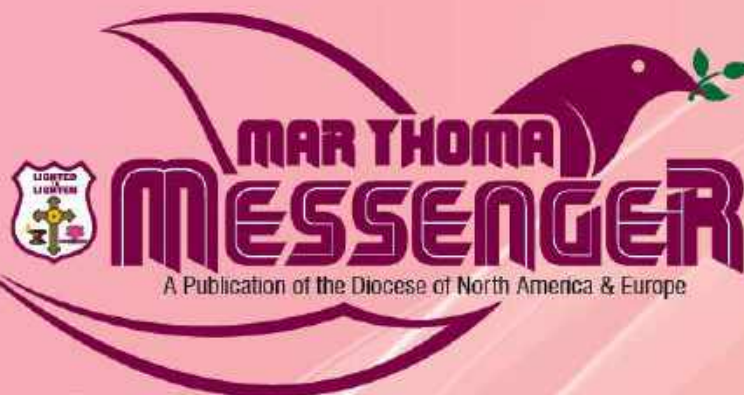
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Message from The Metropolitan

*D*early beloved in the Lord,

Greetings of love to all in the name of Jesus Christ.

In the midst of Covid-19 came another Easter. The plague that people thought to have calmed down is playing havoc in doubly redoubled measure. The world is looking forward eagerly for a relief during the Feast of Resurrection.

Resurrection offers life's buoyant celebration beyond death. We must be able to observe the hopeful rays that Easter transmits in the middle of sickness and death.

Those who care for the seriously sick people, sacrificing their own safety and the safety of their family, and those who transport food, water, and other essential things to the helpless ones due to Covid-19, are truly the rays of Resurrection. I pray that we can make the power of Resurrection a reality in our daily life. I hope everyone had a Happy Easter!

I praise God with joy for the successful conduct and completion of the 126th Maramon Convention even amid the Pandemic. This year's Convention was a true example of survival. We were able to deliver many messages, visuals, and songs of the convention by utilizing the possibilities of the digital media, thereby strictly observing the Covid-19 protocols set by the Government of Kerala. It is praiseworthy that the members of the Church cooperated fully and wholeheartedly with the arrangements. I, with gratitude acknowledge the Church congregation's tolerance, discipline, and positive interaction, that are the reflections of God's love. Congratulations to the Mar Thoma Evangelical Association that gave leadership to the well-ordered arrangements of the Convention, and to DSMC for broadcasting the events of the Convention with quality and effectiveness. The Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam also deserves appreciation for arranging the Yuvavedi program efficiently.

We passed the period of Conventions. What impact did the word of God create in us? Was there any serious change in us? Christ is the Gospel. Christ interacted with us through gospel. Let us continue the journey in the company and acquaintance of the resurrected Christ with our eyes open. Those who intervened with Christ have always undergone transformation. They witnessed

MESSAGE

Christ in their respective workplaces. This should happen in the present-day world too. We should become users and carriers of the Word. A new family culture with a spiritual base should come into existence. We should strive to save the coming generations from the evils of this world, and from the vicious drugs and the destructive clutches of alcohol. Our society and our families must become drug-free. Maramon Convention happens to be a fruitful platform for many to dedicate themselves to Christ. Many persons from this Church should stand up and submit themselves before the voice of God, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us." Let each one of us answer like the prophet, "Here am I; send me." Embracing that which is true, let us move forward as a witnessing community through the path of love, compassion, and empathy.

The first day of the month of March was the World Civil Defense Day. This day aims to stir the human conscience against the discrimination in the world order. We must be aware that innumerable people are distressed owing to the discrimination in caste, religion, color, sex, and language. Through our deeds and perspectives, we make many a person prey to prejudices and distinctions in our everyday life. Economic inequalities make the situation worse. March 8th was International Women's Day. The tendency to impose class bound rules on women is undesirable. We must live in this world sharing love and respect. What Christ taught us to do, we have to bring into action. Our responsibility is to bring about a peaceful life order emphasizing strong sense of justice in our society.

In Atlanta, USA, a racist white man shot and killed eight Asian Americans recently. Meghan, the wife of Prince Harry, left the British royal family because of the influx of racism. Discrimination in religion, race, and caste will thwart and destroy the essence and meaning of the word, "Nation." Some Christian nuns who were traveling in a train from New Delhi to Odisha were attacked and thrown off from train. It is high time that we give up the ideology of hatred and discrimination.

The Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church gives leadership in the Light to Life Program, which aims at the comprehensive development of children who belong to the lower strata of life. Through other Dioceses in India, and organizations such as CARD, and STARD of the Mar Thoma Church, this program is successfully conducted. According to the decision taken by the Sabha Council and the Episcopal Synod, a Society was formed in India for the effective management of the Light to Life program. We hope that this venture will make a total change in the social life of

the villages in India. On February 27th, the new office of the Light to Life in India was started. The office functions in a building adjacent to the Sabha Office.

There was a military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, and they toppled the democratic government. This has caused severe anxiety among nations of the world. For the last many years, we do hear so many occurrences connected with human right violations from Myanmar. The Rohingya genocide is notorious. The democratic government of Myanmar also played a part in it. The military imprisoned many important leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the ruling party. The Christians in Myanmar are a minority. They are also under threat. We pray that the peace talks led by the UNO become fruitful and put an end to violence and hatred.

Rev. Dr. Samuel Kamaleson, the world-famous Christian leader and a constant speaker at the Maramon Convention passed away on 28th February 2021. He was a close friend of the Mar Thoma Church. Through the Christian organizations namely, Friends Missionary Prayer Band, and World Vision, he proclaimed the gospel visiting many countries in the world. He lived for the Lord all throughout his life. Let us praise God for the life of Rev. Dr. Kamaleson. We express our deep-felt condolences and prayers to the bereaving family members.

The vaccines to defend and fight the Corona virus are now out. We hope that this will bring an end to the pandemic. We must live by taking good care of ourselves and must accept the precautions identified by the authorities when we move about in public places.

On March 7th, in the Great Lent the Church meditated on the topic, "Salvation for all in Christ." The Syrophenician woman pleads for healing. She requests healing for her daughter who was possessed with a demon. This woman is the symbol of pity and helplessness. She has immense faith. Jesus heals her sick daughter seeing her great faith. On the fifth Sunday of the Lent (March 14th), we meditated on "Healing through worship." Jesus heals a woman with kyphosis (curvature of the upper back) in the synagogue on a sabbath day. The woman enters the fullness of worship when she glorifies God owing to her healing. Real worship must be the celebration of liberation from the factors that prohibit glorification of God. March 21st, the sixth Sunday in the Great Lent, had the topic, "Kurie-Elaison: Enlightening Faith." When Jesus was passing through Jericho, a blind man cries out for healing. The blind person, unlike those who had eyesight, is aware that Jesus is the son of David. He is declaring his faith in Jesus. Also he is making a

meaningful prayer to God through the utterance, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" He is seen following Jesus, glorifying God. The Lent should equip us to grow in faith fighting the powers of darkness. On 28th of March we meditated on, "Hosanna: Christ the eternal King." Jesus has a different way of entry into Jerusalem as a king. He wants this world to come back with obedience unto God for which he tries to set the city accordingly. He is the King of kings. The Hosanna Sunday makes the call to accept Christ and succumb to his kingly authority.

The Great Lent came to an end on April 4th, Easter Sunday. We meditated the Celebration in New Life. Just like the women who saw the resurrected Christ, we also are called to witness him. Our Lord wants us to be his announcers of new life in this post covid world. After Easter Sunday came the New Sunday. "Jesus Christ, our Lord and God," was the topic for our meditation. Apostle Thomas in whose name we stand, is the main character of study. His reply to Jesus, "My Lord and my God," is the ultimate result of perfect faith after a true repentance. The wounds on the body of Jesus lead the apostle to God's deep love. The Church should become a tool to serve. Then only the meaning of the expression, "My Lord and my God," becomes real. On 18th of April, we contemplated the theme, "Jesus Christ who restores." Even after seeing the resurrected Christ, the disciples swerve from their mission owing to, probably, the realities and intricacies of life. But we see here a Christ who walks towards those persons

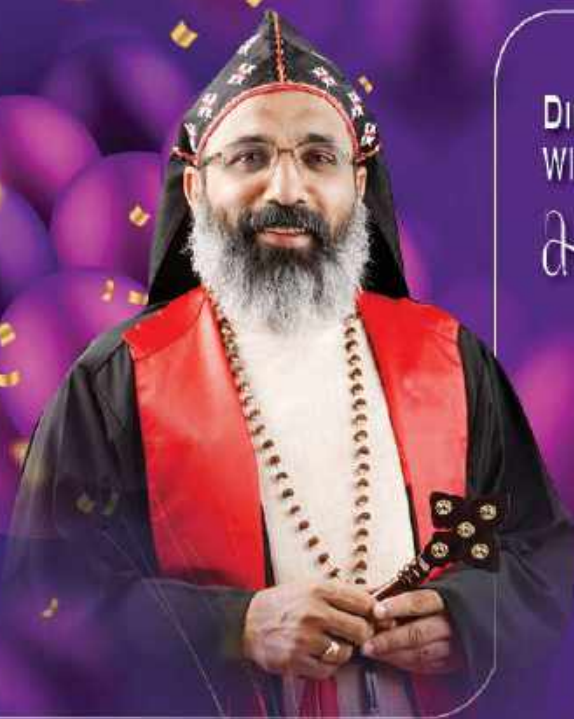
with compassion and love. This is the greatness of God's love. This is the searching love. The third Sunday after Easter, (April 25th), we meditated on the topic, "An invitation to Christ's Hospitality." The journey of the disciples from Jerusalem to Emmaus is disappointing. Because of extreme hopelessness and despondency, they could not recognize the person who was their fellow traveler. Though they forget everything, Jesus invites their attention to the scriptures. They recognize him only when Jesus becomes the host from the role of guest, and their sense of cognition works. Then there is transformation. Disappointments become hopes that open new horizons. They become visionaries and missionaries. Each Holy Communion must essentially bring the faith congregation to the Lord's hospitality and strengthen everyone in the exhilarating experiences of resurrection.

The grace of our Lord and Savior be with you all.



**Dr. Theodosius Mar Thoma
Metropolitan**

(Translated by Prof. Elias Abraham, Baltimore Mar Thoma Church, from the March- April 2021 issues of the Sabha Tharaka)



**DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE
WISHES OUR BELOVED BISHOP**

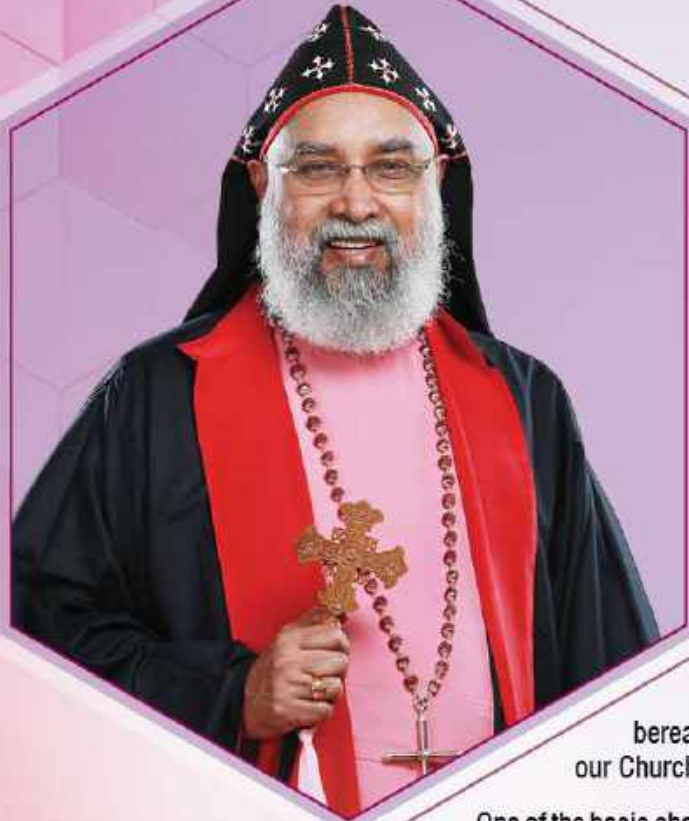
a Happy & Blessed Birthday

Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Theethos Episcopa

S/o. Mr. P.N. George & Mrs. Aleyamma George
Kottackattu Pulhen Veetil, Adoor, Kannamcode

Date of Birth	-	1959, May 10
Deacon	-	1985, June 01
Kassissa	-	1985, June 14
Ramban	-	2011, May 07
Episcopa	-	2011, August 13

*Happy
Birthday*



Message from The Diocesan Episcopa

*D*early beloved in Christ,

Greetings to all in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

It is with sadness that we received the news regarding the demise of our Valiya Metropolitan Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Thirumeni. His life, vision and service to humanity stands unparalleled and will be cherished and remembered forever.

We express our deepest condolences at this time of bereavement. May God provide peace and divine grace to our Church to overcome this great loss.

One of the basic characteristics of the church is its commitment to service.

Jesus called the disciples "to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message and to have authority to cast out demons" (Mark 3:14). The message is typically carried out through worship, witness, and service. These acts to honor God and fellow human beings should reflect devotion to Christ. Therefore, diakonia should be regarded as the essential element that connects the church with the oikoumene (the entire cosmos). The very being of the church must be expressed through its diakonia to the entire oikoumene or the household of God. It is timely and appropriate for this issue of the Mar Thoma Messenger to focus on the theme "Diakonia – Ministry of the Church."

Often, diakonia is considered as service that makes the celebration of life possible for all people. It is faith-effecting change, transforming people and situations so that God's reign may be real in the lives of people everywhere and always. Therefore, diakonia, as an act of God's love, must strive to transform people, systems, and cultures. In other words, diakonia is truly a response of the church to the suffering in the world.

Jesus Christ reminds the disciples regarding the need to serve rather than seek power and position when ministering to the world. Jesus says, "Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Through His teachings and life, Jesus Christ demonstrated the "Servanthood" model of ministry to the world. The Servanthood model needs to be emulated in the life of the church, as it witnesses Christ in the world, and serves in all spheres of its ministry and mission.

MESSAGE

We are still in the midst of a devastating COVID-19 pandemic that continues to cripple life in many nations. The people of India are suffering through a second wave of the virus that has made life miserable in many Indian states. As the North America and Europe Diocese, we should render financial help as well as prayerful support at this time of dire need. Individuals and parishes are urged to extend continued assistance for the wellbeing of the people and the healing of nations. Our responsible engagement and joining hands during the COVID crisis are surely new ways for diakonial actions. Our support to the suffering and vulnerable people will definitely be understood as our journeying with the "other."

Many of our clergy are transferring to various places at this time and we wish them the very best for their future ministry. We also welcome the clergy who are joining parishes in the Diocese. We thank God for our recently

ordained priests: Rev. Jeswin S. John (Ascension Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia), and Rev. Stanley Mathew John (St. John's Mar Thoma Church, London). We offer congratulations to them and appreciate their parents and parishes for providing the necessary spiritual nurturing for their growth.

With prayers and regards,



**Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos
Episcopa**

**GOD INTENTIONALLY ALLOWS
YOU TO GO THROUGH PAINFUL
EXPERIENCES TO EQUIP YOU
FOR MINISTRY TO OTHERS.**

RICK WARREN





Editorial



Dr. T. (Dr. Mathew T. Thomas)

Everyone who knew, or knew of, His Eminence Padma Bhushan Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom, the late lamented Valiya Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church, is saddened that he is no more with us here on earth but comforted by the faith that he now enjoys a life of eternity with God the Father. He was one of the noblest souls that traversed planet earth and he lived an honorable and blessed life. The name, Chrysostom, which he assumed when he was consecrated as a bishop derives from the Greek name Chrysostomos meaning “golden-mouthed.” It was a name that perfectly fit his acclaimed humor and eloquence. He enriched the lives of innumerable individuals with his spiritual insights and pragmatic solutions for addressing their concerns. He led the Mar Thoma Church with grace and poise. His passing away is a profound loss for the Mar Thoma Church, the Indian community, and the worldwide ecumenical fellowship. Mar Chrysostom’s life must be celebrated and shared with future generations. I am deeply honored and humbled by the God-given opportunity to have met and worked with such a great man and church leader. On behalf of the entire editorial board of the Mar Thoma Messenger I express heartfelt condolences to Dr. Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan, all our Thirumenis, and Achens, and we join all those who are grieving the loss of Chrysostom Thirumeni.

The theme for this issue of the Messenger is *Diaconia – The Ministry of the Church*, and the articles focus on pertinent matters related to ministry. Diaconia, alternatively spelt diakonia, is derived from the Greek language and conveys a Christian theological expression that incorporates the call to serve the poor and oppressed. Over time, the ministry of the church has expanded in many ways. For example, spreading faith through sharing the Word, inspiring souls through music, comforting the downtrodden, feeding the hungry,

healing the sick, educating and uplifting the marginalized, and communion at God’s table, to name some, are all forms of ministry that the church has undertaken. Such ministries of the church may be offered through the service of clergy, the service of a worker, the collective forms of worship, and any individual’s inward devotion to God.

Some key questions to consider are: Is the ministry of the church forced and unjust, or is it voluntary and righteous? Is the ministry guided by a true care for others? Does the church meet the people where they are? Does the church enable people to see possibilities amid hopelessness? Does the church encourage and enable communication and empower the voiceless? Does the church enhance the ability of individuals to realize each one’s self-worth? Does the church strive to preserve human dignity and make conscious efforts to integrate with other social structures? Does the church rise to protest unfair and unjust social situations? Does the church find ways to balance professional and scientific knowledge with its acts of humanity and its Christian mission?

The true ministry of Christ happens when the service offered builds a mutual relationship and fellowship between the person that is serving and the person that is served, and they together glorify God the Father. The individuals called to ministry (to serve as priests, pastors, workers in non-profit establishments, lay leaders, workers in any field or work) who commit to do God’s service must commit to doing much more than following rituals. Their ministry ought to cover the work of God everywhere – in the home, in various fields of work, in the justice systems, in lives of the poor, etc. In addition, service to God and service to humanity and the environment ought to be considered synonymous.

Like all previous generations, we are living in unprecedented times except that the pace of change appears to be so rapid that we can barely keep up. In addition, society is being bombarded with conflicting political, faith-based, and scientific ideologies, thereby leaving human beings confused and divided. Many are striving to survive and stay afloat, others are depressed and giving up, while some are exploiting the situation for their own advantage. This is an opportune time for the ministry of the church to step up in earnest to uplift the downtrodden, to serve the needy, and to revive the faith.

COVID-19 appears relentless. This global pandemic seems to serve as another major reason for dividing people rather than uniting them to combat an illness and to advance human welfare. We are well into the middle of 2021, and it is more than 18 months since this viral disease gained notoriety. Like the waves of an ocean, each recurring wave of COVID-19 is eroding our space and our time. Many countries and its leaders are baffled to find meaningful solutions. The vulnerable, without respite, are left to fend for themselves and many succumb to the disease and its economic impacts. Scientists have identified vaccines that appear to be working, yet many refuse vaccinations for fear of side-effects and the fear that all these events are plots to manipulate and control humanity.

The global church is also caught in a divisive debate. While the faithful passionately believe that this is God's way of communicating to His creation that He is in control as the master of the universe, there are

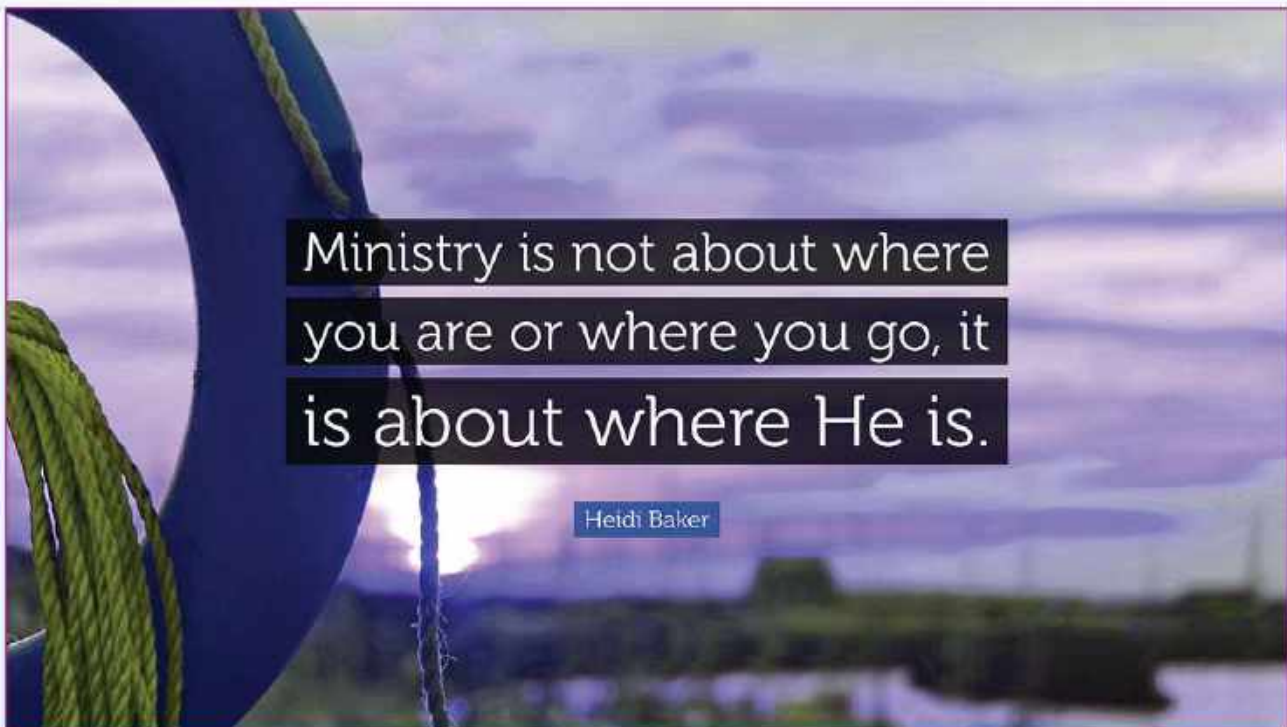
others who challenge the faithful and their beliefs. The church is also challenged to maintain its relevance and modify its practices and rituals while balancing its faith, its traditions, the evolving scientific knowledge, and governmental instructions.

The Gospels clearly demonstrate Jesus' servant role despite the oneness He shared with God the Father. Service to God and service to humanity is inseparable. When our concept of service and ministry covers all of life, it becomes a unified duty. The Diaconia – The Ministry of the Church must flourish as it is much needed in our times.

I wish to point out that our Diocesan Episcopa, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, and the Diocesan Council have added new editorial board members. I welcome them. I thank Philoxenos Thirumeni for his continued leadership, and I thank all those who have served and continue to serve on the editorial board with their valuable contributions. I am also thankful to all those who continue to send their valuable feedback regarding the quality and content for each issue of the Messenger. Your input encourages the Messenger editorial board and managing committee to strive for excellence.

With all best wishes and prayerful regards,

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





MOST REV. DR. PHILOPOSE MAR CHRYSOSTOM MAR THOMA VALIYA METROPOLITAN

(April 27, 1918 – May 5, 2021)

The Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church is deeply saddened by the demise of His Grace the Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan. Thirumeni was taken to eternal rest to be with our Lord at 1:15 AM (IST) on May 5, 2021 at the Fellowship Mission Hospital, Kumbanad. His Grace Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan served as the Supreme Head of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church as the 20th Malankara Mar Thoma Metropolitan from 1999-2007.

His Grace Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan was an outstanding personality with an inborn sense of humor. He was born in Adangappurath Kalamannil, a family of priestly tradition. He was born as Philip Oommen, the son of Very Rev. K. E. Oommen Kassessa, Vicar General of the Mar Thoma Church, and Sossamma of Nadukkeveetil family of Karthikappally on April 27th, 1918. Philip Oommen was known as Dharmistan at home. His character fully justified that name. Right from childhood, he accepted, as his life's

principle, to fully support the cause of justice and to lead an ethical and principled life. After schooling in Maramon, Kozhencherry, and Eraviperoor, he obtained BA Degree from Union Christian (UC) College, Alwaye.

His commitment to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ encouraged young Philip Oommen to be involved in missionary work in Ankola, Karnataka. After working there from 1940 to 1942, he began theological studies at United Theological College, Bangalore. He was ordained as a Deacon on January 1st, 1944 and as a Kassessa on June 3rd, 1944. Along with theological studies, he ministered in the Bangalore parish. After serving the Ankola Ashram, he served as Vicar of Kottarakkara, Mylom, Pattamala, Manganam St. Peters, and Thiruvananthapuram parishes.

Rev. Philip Oommen along with Rev. Dr. M. G. Chandy and Rev. P. Thomas were ordained as Rambans on May 20th, 1953 and as Episcopas on May 23rd, 1953. Rev. Philip Oommen was consecrated with the name

Philipose Mar Chrysostom Episcopa. Thirumeni indeed proved that he richly deserved the name of St. Chrysostom for his golden tongue. He joined St. Augustine's College, Canterbury, England to pursue further theological studies. On his return in 1954, he was given responsibility of Kottayam-Kunnankulam Diocese and the Mar Thoma Vaideeka Seminary. During this period, Thirumeni represented the Mar Thoma Church in the Evanston Conference of the World Council of Churches.

When Thomas Mar Athanasius Episcopa completed his tenure as the Missionary Bishop, Mar Chrysostom took up this responsibility with his office and residence at Olivet Aramana, Chengannur. He played a pivotal role during this period to widen the mission activities of the Church by visiting the parishes, Ashrams and mission

centers outside Kerala, thereby giving fellowship and spiritual leadership to the people there. He paid special attention to the spiritual nourishment of youths as well.

On completion of service as the Missionary Bishop, he served as the Diocesan Episcopa of Adoor-Kottarakkara Diocese. During this period, he was the President of the Sevika Sanghom, Sunday School Samajam, and Kerala Christian Council. He was also the President of Christian Auxiliary for Social Action. In 1975, Thirumeni served once again as a Missionary Bishop and was the Diocesan Episcopa of Thiruvananthapuram-Kollam, Adoor-Mavelikkara, Ranni-Nilackal, and Chengannur-Thumpamon Dioceses thereafter. Thirumeni's special concern for socially and economically disadvantaged parishes is note worthy. He formulated and implemented projects to improve the social, economic, and cultural condition of several parishes in South Travancore. He was in the Central Committee of the World Council of churches and president of Kerala Council of churches and many other ecumenical bodies.

Thirumeni was also instrumental in the formation of what is now known as the Diocese of North America and Europe. Chrysostom Thirumeni was the first Diocesan Bishop of the Diocese of North America and United Kingdom which has thus expanded and grown in tremendous ways. It is also noteworthy to mention that during the tenure of Mar Chrysostom as the Diocesan Bishop, the Mar Thoma Literature Society began its ministry of distributing worship books, church publications, and Sunday School materials to parishes throughout the Diocese.

Thirumeni was designated as Suffragan Metropolitan on May 1st, 1978, Officiating Metropolitan on March

15th, 1999, and as Metropolitan on October 23rd, 1999. Thirumeni's spiritual leadership and sense of direction has been a great blessing for the Church and society. Considering Thirumeni's contributions to theology, Serampore University honored Thirumeni by awarding him a Doctorate Degree. He attended the 2nd Vatican Council summoned by Pope John XXIII as the official observer from the Mar Thoma Church.

Chrysostom Metropolitan was unparalleled in his touching style of speech, full of humorous statements, communicating his broad-minded love of humanity. After voluntarily retiring from administrative responsibilities of the Church on October 1st, 2007, Thirumeni was bestowed with the title of Valiya Metropolitan. Thirumeni continued to lead a very active life, reaching out not only to believers but also to those from various religious and cultural backgrounds.

On the occasion of Thirumeni's 90th birthday, the Mar Thoma Church decided to build houses for 1,500 homeless people, and in connection with Thirumeni's 100th birthday, the Church decided to construct 100 homes for the homeless and also implemented a project among transgender people, which itself was a unique and novel venture that had not been taken up by any other Christian churches in Kerala. On the eve of Republic Day in 2018, considering Thirumeni's services to society, the nation of India decided to award Padma Bhushan to Thirumeni, and on March 20th, 2018, Mar Chrysostom received the award from the President of India, Sri. Ram Nath Kovind.

Let us praise and thank God for the life of Late Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan. The Mar Thoma Church will ever remember with gratitude the commendable and dedicated leadership of our beloved Valiya Metropolitan Thirumeni during the past seventy-seven years of priestly ministry. The Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Clergy, Diocesan Council, Assembly Members, and members of all parishes in the Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church, express our heartfelt condolences.

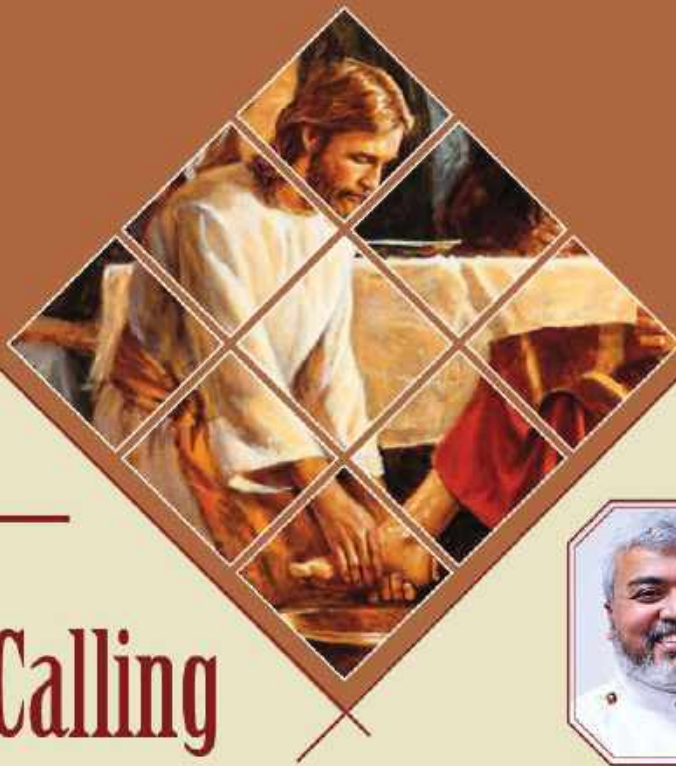
On behalf of the Diocesan Council,

Rev. Aju Abraham

Diocesan/Bishop's Secretary

Mar Thoma Church, Diocese of North America & Europe

Servant Heart — Our Calling



Rev. Thomas K. Mathew
Youth Chaplain, Philadelphia Region

There is an interesting illustration of the life of Marion Mill. She was born in a royal palace in Hungary. She was sent to the best schools and colleges in Vienna. She fell in love with a young medical student named Otto, and the fairy tale life continued. Otto and Marion married and migrated to the United States to live in Hollywood, where Marion would pursue her dream of being an actress, and he eventually became a director. But Marion, it turned out, couldn't handle the fast life of Hollywood. She began to drink and take drugs. She had numerous affairs. Eventually, her life and lifestyle became so sordid, even by Hollywood standards, that Otto divorced her. Marion then went into a depression that led to her attempting suicide three different times.

In a final attempt to get her life together, she moved back to Vienna. There, at a party, she met another well-known medical doctor, a man named Albert Schweitzer. Schweitzer was home on leave from his hospital work in Lambarene, Africa. Marion was so fascinated by this man who gave up a potential for great honor and fortune to work in an obscure African village that she asked to meet with him. Over the next six months, they met regularly as Schweitzer shared about his desire to make a lasting difference with his life. When it was time for Schweitzer to go back to Africa, Marion begged him to let her go with him. To everyone's surprise, Schweitzer agreed. Marion, the princess, born in a palace, went to a little village in Africa and spent the rest of her life emptying bedpans and tearing up sheets to make

bandages for the putrid sores on the poverty-stricken African nationals.

Marion wrote an autobiography that she titled, *All I Want is Everything*. When she died, Time magazine quoted these words from that book: "Albert Schweitzer says there are two kinds of people. There are the helpers and the non-helpers. I thank God that He allowed me to become a helper, and in helping, I found everything."

A Servant's heart is a heart whose first response is to help, give, and love. When you abide in God's love, it creates a desire to provide selfless love to others. The life and ministry of Jesus were purely based on this attitude of servanthood that he had, and he was constantly teaching and showing his disciples this was the calling that he had for them.

In Matthew 20: 25–28, we read, *Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

So, God designed us to serve. Yet, like the disciples, we have a difficult time getting the message that this is God's call for our lives. Jesus took the time, as this passage

makes clear, to teach the disciples on servanthood. The need of the hour is to realize this calling that God has for us, no matter what we do or where we are; as a child of God, we are to be people who are serving those around us in His love.

1. Being aware of our Motives.

First, if you are going to be a servant-hearted person, you should be aware of your motives. A motive is simply the reason you do what you do. What is behind your action? The disciples, of course, had left everything to follow Jesus. He was mentoring them to become leaders in the future church, and in that process, they were being taught to preach and care for people. But sometimes, their motives got a little messed up. In Matthew 20, we see how the mother of James and John approached Jesus for the positions of her sons to be significant and of a greater order. The motive was honor and glory.

When you think about being a servant, you should be aware of this: do you have within you the deep desire to be honored, to experience glory, to be important, and to be served? It is a natural desire, at least natural for sinners like us. It is so natural we see this phenomenon of vying for position and prestige in nature. This is the thing we must fight within ourselves. If you are going to improve your ability to serve, check your motives. Do you want to make a positive difference and contribution to the others in your world because of your love for Jesus Christ?

2. Determine our Model.

The second important thing is how we choose our model. Jesus calls his disciples together and gives them a principle different from the natural way of the world: authority, power, glory, honor. In the world's system, we should be expending as much energy as possible to get to the top. But among us, the followers of Jesus, He says, a different value should be at work. We should be people who serve. In verse 26, Jesus says, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave." A slave is someone who has no rights and no honor. The whole purpose of the life of a slave is to serve his or her master. In other words, our purpose is to serve Jesus. Our whole being should be directed to the cause of Christ, and the way we do that is by serving other people. Our primary mission is to minister to people, not be admired by them.



To make his point even more forcefully, Jesus points to himself as the model. He says, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." The life of Jesus explicitly gives us a view into what the life of a servant is. In John 13, the scene where the disciples all arrive for a meal. The disciples are so concerned about who is greater that none of them volunteer to do the servant's work and wash the others' feet. So, Jesus gets up and, going from one to the other, washes and dries their feet. Then He says, "If this is the way I, your master, your teacher, act, then know that you should do the same."

The earliest Christian hymn that we know about was a hymn about Jesus. It is found in Philippians 2. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross."

3. Strive through adversities.

The call for a servant life is not easy; it is not smooth, it is not well accepted, it is always filled with unexpected challenges and painful moments. The servant calling does not give us the luxury of picking and choosing what we can do or what we like to do. Instead, it is to accept the least favored duties and the least appreciated ones. Christ taught His disciples that it was the narrow path, and that fewer people will take up this path to journey since it is hard and challenging, and we are also required to take up the cross and follow him.

Christ, Himself could only fulfill the Father's will through suffering. But even in agony, He prayed, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

As Dr. Paul Chappel, in his article *God works through adversity states*, "When we walk in circumstantial sunshine, we are quick to embrace the Father's will. But in dark valleys, we tend to hesitate. In fact, if we

are completely honest, we would admit that there are times we really don't want God's will—we are afraid of it."

Charles Spurgeon commented, "I am afraid that all the grace that I have got of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable.... Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house. It is the best book in a minister's library."

In suffering, God's purposes in our lives flourish like at no other time. He is glorified, we grow, and His will for us advances. And in the midst of it all, He promises His presence and comfort to sustain us through the storm.

The servant who is aware of his motives, and determined to follow the model of Christ, will surely need to strive through the adversities which will come our way each day. However, the fulfillment of the calling brings forth the glory of God, and that is the very purpose of our lives as his servant.

I conclude by quoting this poem by Janet Mullaly – *A Servant's heart*

I strive to have a servant's heart,
That will heed my Father's call.
To do the things, He ask of me,
Be it big or be it small.
It doesn't matter what it is,
If He asks, I will respond.
With cheerfulness, I will do the task,
Giving of myself above and beyond.
You see, my Father knows what's best for me,
He would never lead me wrong.
So, I can put my total trust in Him,
For to Him, my life belongs.
I find joy when serving and doing His will.
It gives me peace and comforts me,
No matter what things may look like, feel, or appear,
With Him, I have nothing to fear.
So, I'll put Him first in all that I do,
Serving Him with my whole heart.
When I think of all He's done for me,
It's easy to serve Him with a servant's heart.

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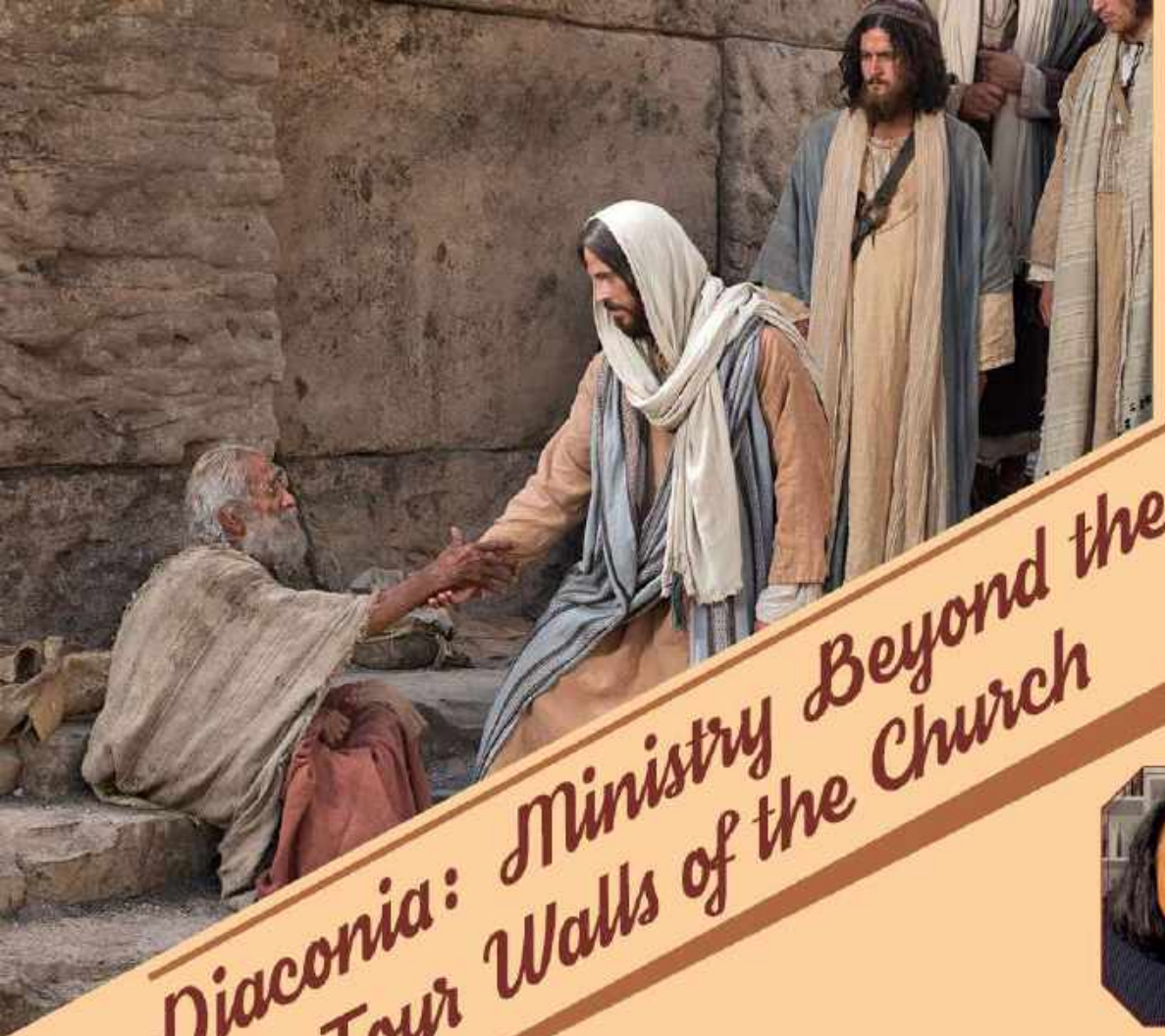
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Diaconia: Ministry Beyond the Four Walls of the Church



Shiji Alex

Mar Thoma Church, Chicago

“As many churches clamor to reenter their buildings, it is worth noting in the book of Acts how infrequently an experience of the Divine takes place in a designed “religious” location.

The Holy becomes most strikingly palpable on roads and rooftops, in deserts and prison cells, even through dreams and visions. In our haste to reopen our sanctuaries, we may miss the very landscapes of theophany in which the spirit is manifesting.” - Unknown

Today, India is going through a terrifying and unimaginable situation. As the COVID-19 crisis in India spins out of control, we are closer to the tragedy, even with the 8,000 miles that separate us from our family and friends back home. As I am writing this on April 29th, per media reports, more than 380,000 tested positive, which is more than any country has seen in a single day. The death rate is so high, and the capital city runs out of wood to burn the bodies; they are now

making temporary crematoriums in parking lots. This is happening not only in Delhi but also in big cities like Chennai, Bangalore, and Mumbai; our fellow humans are in dire need of oxygen and hospital beds. Volunteers and family members are banging on the hospital doors with critically ill patients for life-sustaining medications and treatments; several of them lost their lives without appropriate intervention. The authorities have failed to provide basic necessities for the lives of the citizens.

A huge felt need in the COVID-19 pandemic is for relationships and collective real-time community. We are experiencing isolation, a lack of fellowship and physical contact with friends and family. More than ever before, we need our church family and the body of believers. As a global church, we need to be clear about our ecclesiology and values during this pandemic.

Princeton social psychologists John Darley and Dan Batson conducted a notable study in the 1970s that was encouraged by the Good Samaritan parable on time pressure. They experimented with how students carried themselves when asked to deliver a sermon on the Good Samaritan parable. The students were asked to prepare the sermon and go to another studio building across the street to deliver the message. As

each student finalized their preparation, the evaluators imposed time constraints which made them hurry and present the message. When these students walked from the classroom to the studio for the presentation, they all encountered an isolated 'victim' in the pathway, just like the wounded traveler in the parable. This 'victim' was crying loud in pain and trying to get attention from the seminarians who were in a hurry to present. The seminarians were thus offered a chance to practice what they prepared to preach. The researchers were amazed by the findings from this experiment. Remarkably, only 10% of the students in the high-hurry situation stopped to help the victim compared to the rest. This study is a direct parallel to the predicament in practicing the Gospel today.

As the followers of Christ, we cannot live as though these things have nothing to do with us. Christ moves us closer to suffering, not farther away. We cannot walk around obvious suffering, ignoring it and denying it like those who preceded the Samaritan down the road to Jericho. We cannot mourn about how somebody ought to do something. We cannot merely lift those who suffer in prayer, but we should also uplift them through thoughtful action.

Where are we as a church serving humanity? Most people around us live with incredible uncertainty because of the pandemic, lack of employment, poverty, hunger, natural calamities, political unrest, or war. Our noisy surroundings and busy lives constantly force us to rush as if somebody is always looking for us. We constantly hurry from place to place, and we dash while doing just about everything. We are at the mercy of commitments often forced by others. We like to do services that are predictable, convenient, certain, and comfortable. This approach does not describe the ministry of Jesus, who said: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, those who lose their life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:24). Serving the Lord is not an easy task but rather a road filled with risk.

The church's existence is evident from its ministry. Ministry is the responsibility of the entire church and must be visualized in a larger picture rather than as a priestly ministry. In other words, ministry can be related to the earthly life of Jesus Christ. The ministry of Christ is described as a missionary, ordained, and diaconal. The word diaconal is used interchangeably with 'servant like', derived from the Greek word *diaconia* which means service. In Mark 10:45, Jesus states about His ministry, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many." I am influenced by the servant leadership of Jesus, where

I try to do meaningful and value-added interactions based on the Word of God. I consider myself fortunate to proclaim the Gospel in churches across America. True discipleship helps us accept and serve our fellow humans without any barriers, including their gender or race. We must be the translators of the Gospel in any situation. Our churches can be a sanctuary, hold the community, feed the hungry, and they can inspire us. Outside the church walls, God is already at work, and now we are responsible for stepping out and joining in to be the catalysts of change.

At what level does Christianity actually provide the foundation of human rights and freedoms? This is a question raised by Slavoj Zizek, the philosopher and theologian, in his book *The Fragile Absolute*. Recently, I heard the story of an African American taxi driver who left Christianity because of the class division and lack of brotherhood in his church family. His experience reminds me of how crucial it is for a church to serve its purpose of diaconia.

People know that the church's mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ, but the people are seeking to understand how to fit this larger mission into their lives and to their churches in a practical way. God uses congregations to make disciples, and congregations offer an invitation of Christ so that people experience a sense of belonging. God shapes souls and changes minds through worship, creating a desire to grow closer to Christ. With increased spiritual maturity, people identify their calling to help others through mission and service, and God inspires them to give generously.

To fulfill the ministry of Christ, churches must change, grow, and adapt in ways that are purposeful, thoughtful, and faithful. Change is not easy, and people do fear change as much as they fear loss. Transformation in Christian life is giving up comfortable and familiar patterns, behaviors, and attitudes by repeating, deepening, expanding, and improving upon the service lifestyle showed by Jesus Christ. The church is both a physical space and a community with whom we have prayed, praised, offered thanksgivings, shouted with joy, and cried tears of pain while sharing our experiences. Churches are now looking for ways to navigate the new terrain. We are like lost sheep due to the confusion and fears generated by the pandemic. In our lostness, we try to do all that we can to make us a vital congregation. We created small groups, online platforms for prayer and worship, and made video calls to those confined to bed. In other words, churches are getting out of the building's four walls to fulfill the mission as 'worship on wheels, kitchen as a pulpit, and bed of sick as altar'.



We should demand grace and fruits in our ministry. We must ask ourselves these questions, "Is there faith? Is there a fire? And are there fruits?". These are the questions asked by the Methodist Bishop John Wesley to his Congregation.

This last portion was written while I sat in a community vaccination clinic, where the Chicago Mar Thoma Church partnered with other organizations in the community. The church is not only a building but an event that happens at the margins of our daily life. Church evolves in our lives where His presence is revealed and experienced in pain, loss, struggles, confrontations, and fellowships of our ordinary life. Church happens when we motivate, influence, and inspire each other to transform experience amid tragedies. The church is the one before us, where the Spirit breathes and blows where it pleases. Overall, we fail to recognize the unexpected ways with which the Holy Spirit works among us. The Bishop-elect, Deon K. Johnson, of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Missouri, wrote the message below on his social media wall on May 23, 2020. He writes, *"The work of the church is essential. The work of caring for the lonely, the marginalized, and the oppressed is essential. The work of speaking truth to power and seeking justice is essential. The work of being a loving, liberating, and life-giving presence in the world is essential. The work of welcoming the stranger, the refugee and the undocumented is essential. The work of reconciliation and healing and caring is essential. The church does not need to "open" because the church never "closed." We who make up the Body of Christ, the church, love God and our neighbors and ourselves so much that we will stay away from our buildings until it is safe. We are the church."* In short, Diaconia spreads the faith by manifesting the compassion, mercy, and justice of Christ in the world.

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for ministry is to glorify God.

George Barna



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പുതിയ ലോകക്രമത്തിൽ ദൈവിക ശുശ്രൂഷയുടെ നവരചനങ്ങൾ



റവ. സിബു പള്ളിയിറ
Epiphany Mar Thoma Church, New York

താൻ സൃഷ്ടിച്ച ലോകം നശിച്ചുപോകാതിരിക്കാൻ തന്റെ ഏകജാതനായ പുത്രനെ നൽകുവാൻ തക്കവണ്ണം ലോകത്തെ സ്നേഹിച്ച പിതാവിന്റെ വാത്സല്യമാണ് ദൈവിക ശുശ്രൂഷയുടെ അടിസ്ഥാനവും അളവുകോലും. ശ്രീകുമാര്യയിലെ ഡയക്കോണിയ എന്ന പരംകൊണ്ടു അർത്ഥമാക്കുന്നതും ഇതുതന്നെ. ഈ പദത്തിൽ നിന്നുമാണ് ഡീക്കൻ (മെമ്മാഴ്/ശുശ്രൂഷകൻ), റിയാക്കോൻ, അർക്കദിയാക്കോൻ എന്നീ പദങ്ങളും ഉളവായിട്ടുള്ളത്. ലോകത്തെ രക്ഷിപ്പാൻ ദൈവം തന്റെ പുത്രപ്രകാരം നിരൂപിച്ചവരും നിയോഗിച്ചവരും നിലനിർത്തിയവരുമാണ് ഡീക്കന്മാർ (ശുശ്രൂഷകന്മാർ) വേദപുസ്തകത്തിൽ ഈ ദൈവിക ശുശ്രൂഷയിൽ പങ്കുകാരായിരുന്ന അനേകം വ്യക്തിത്വങ്ങളെ നമ്മുടെ കാണുവാൻ സാധിക്കും. ദൈവത്തിനു വേണ്ടി ദൈവിക നിയോഗത്താൽ ദൈവകരമായിത്തീർന്നുള്ള അവരുടെ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളാണ് ദൈവിക ശുശ്രൂഷ എന്നതുകൊണ്ട് അർത്ഥമാക്കുന്നത്. ചുരുക്കത്തിൽ, രക്ഷ അവശ്യമായിരിക്കുന്ന ലോകത്തിൽ, മരണാനിലും രക്ഷയില്ലാതിരിക്കുമ്പോൾ ദൈവിക ഇടപെടലിന്റെ ചാലകങ്ങളാകുവാനുള്ള വിളിയോ നിയോഗമോ ആണ് ഈ ശുശ്രൂഷ.

ദൈവിക ശുശ്രൂഷ വിവിധങ്ങളും വ്യത്യസ്തങ്ങളുമാണ്. അവ സാഹചര്യങ്ങൾക്കനുസൃതമായും നിയോഗങ്ങൾക്കനുസൃതമായും വ്യത്യാസപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. ഉദാഹരണമായി, നോഹയുടെ ശുശ്രൂഷാരംഗമല്ല അബ്രഹാമിന്റെത്, അബ്രഹാമിന്റെതല്ല ജോസഫിന്റെത്, ജോസഫിന്റെതല്ല മോശയുടെത്, ഒരേ ശുശ്രൂഷാ രംഗമെങ്കിലും

മോശയുടെ ശുശ്രൂഷകളല്ല അഹരോന്റെത്. എന്നാൽ ഇവയെ കോർത്തിണക്കുന്ന ചടങ്ങ് ദൈവത്തിന്റെ രക്ഷാകര പദ്ധതി ശിക്ഷിക്കുവാനുള്ളതല്ല; പകരം, രക്ഷാകരമാകുവാനും രക്ഷിക്കുവാനും ഉള്ളതാണ് ദൈവിക പദ്ധതിയും ദൈവിക ശുശ്രൂഷകരും. ഈ കൊറോണക്കാലത്തെ ശുശ്രൂഷകരും ശുശ്രൂഷയും ഇതിന്റെ ദൗത്യവയൽ തന്നെയാണ്.

ബാധയും വ്യാധിയും ദൈവത്തിന്റെ ശിക്ഷയായി വേദപുസ്തകത്തിൽ പലയിടത്തും കാണുവാൻ കഴിയും. എന്നാൽ ശിക്ഷയിൽ മാത്രം ഒതുങ്ങുന്നതല്ല ദൈവത്തിന്റെ പദ്ധതി. ആവർത്തന പുസ്തകം 28-ാം അദ്ധ്യായം 58 മുതൽ 62 വരെയുള്ള വാക്യങ്ങൾ, കൊറോണ കാലത്തെക്കുറിച്ച് മുന്നമേ കുറിക്കപ്പെട്ട ഭാഗമെന്ന് നമ്മുടെ തോന്നിപ്പോകാം. 'നിന്റെ ദൈവമായ യഹോവ എന്ന മഹത്തും ഭയങ്കരവുമായ നാമത്തെ നീ ഭയപ്പെട്ടു ഈ പുസ്തകത്തിൽ എഴുതിയിരിക്കുന്ന ഈ ന്യായപ്രമാണത്തിലെ സകലവചനങ്ങളും പ്രമാണിച്ചനുസരിച്ചു നടക്കാത്താൽ യഹോവ നിന്റെ മേലും നിന്റെ സന്തതിയുടെമേലും നിങ്ങളുനീലിക്കുന്ന അപൂർവ്വമായ മഹാബാധകളും നീങ്ങളുനീലിക്കുന്ന വല്ലാത്ത രോഗങ്ങളും വരുത്തും. നീ പേടിക്കുന്ന മിസ്രയീമിലെ വ്യാധികളൊക്കെയും അവൻ നിന്റെമേൽ വരുത്തും. അവ നിന്നെ പറ്റി ടിടിക്കും. ഈ ന്യായപ്രമാണ പുസ്തകത്തിൽ എഴുതിയിട്ടില്ലാത്ത സകല രോഗവും ബാധയും കൂടെ നീ നശിക്കും. വരെയഹോവ നിന്റെമേൽ വരുത്തിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കും. ആകാശത്തിലെ നക്ഷത്രം പോലെ പെരുകിയിരുന്ന നിങ്ങളുടെ നിന്റെ ദൈവമായ



യഹോവയുടെ വാക്കു കേൾക്കാൻകൊണ്ടു ചുരുക്കം പേരായി ശേഷിക്കും.'

കൊറൊണക്കാലത്തിന്റെ അനുഭവങ്ങൾ ഒരു നെടുവീർപ്പോടെ നാം അനുസ്മരിക്കുന്നു. ആവർത്തന പുസ്തകം 28 : 66-ൽ വായിക്കുന്നതുപോലെ എല്ലാവരും പ്രാണദയത്തിൽ ആയ ഒരു കാലം; എല്ലാം ഉണ്ണ് ചിന്തിച്ചവർ പോലും ഒന്നുമില്ലാത്ത വരദേശോലെ ഞരങ്ങിയ ഒരു കാലം; വീഞ്ഞിന്റെ നാടായ കാനാ എന്ന പട്ടണത്തിൽ കല്യാണത്തിന വീഞ്ഞിനു ദൗർലഭ്യം ഉണ്ടായതു പോലെ ആരോഗ്യമേഖലയിൽ മുൻപന്തിയിലായ പട്ടണങ്ങളിൽ പോലും ഒരു മാസ്കിനു പകരം മരണാനു ലഭ്യമല്ലാതിരുന്നോരു കാലം; ഒരേയൊരു വെന്റിലേറർ ഒന്നിലധികം പേർക്ക് വീതം വച്ചു നൽകിയ ഒരു കാലം; ദക്ഷ്യ സുരക്ഷ ഉണ്ടെന്നു കരുതിയ നാട്ടിൽ പോലും ആഡംബര കാറുകളിൽ വന്ന് ഭക്ഷണത്തിനായി ഇരണ ഒരു കാലം; ഫ്യൂണറൽ ഹോമുകൾ കുമിൾ പോലെ മുളച്ചിരുന്ന ദേശങ്ങളിൽ പോലും മുതന്ദേഹങ്ങൾ വഴിയിൽ സൂക്ഷിക്കേണ്ടി വന്നൊരു കാലം; അന്ത്യോടും ആർദ്രാടത്തോടും ശവസംസ്കാര ശുശ്രൂഷകൾ നിർവ്വഹിച്ചിരുന്ന കാലത്തു നിന്നും മുതന്ദേഹങ്ങൾ സൂക്ഷിപ്പാൻ കഴിയാതെ കൂട്ടമായി ചിതയൊരുക്കിയ ഒരു കാലം; നാലംഗ കൂടുംബത്തിൽ

മൂന്നുപേരുടേയും മരണം നാലാമത്തവനെ അറിയിച്ച് മരണാനന്തര ശുശ്രൂഷകൾ ക്രമീകരിക്കുവാൻ രണ്ടു മാസത്തോളം കാത്തിരുന്നു വിഫലമായിപ്പോയ ഒരു കാലം; സ്വതവെ വിലയറിയാതെ ശ്വസിച്ചിരുന്ന പ്രാണവായുവിനായി പൊന്നും വിലനൽകി കാത്തുനിൽക്കേണ്ടി വന്ന ഒരു കാലം; വെന്റിലേറർ നൽകുവാൻ ഇല്ലാതെ വന്നപ്പോൾ പ്രായം ചെന്നവരിൽ നിന്ന് യൗവനക്കാരിലേക്ക് അത് മാറി നൽകിയ ഒരു കാലം; അപരന്റെ സാന്നിദ്ധ്യം ജീവന്റെ ഭീഷണിയായി തോന്നിയ കാലം; കൊറൊണ വാർഡിലെ ഏകാന്തതയിൽ നേഴ്സിന്റെ ഒരു കാലൊച്ച ഒന്നു കേൾക്കാൻ കൊതിച്ചൊരു കാലം; കൂട്ടിലടച്ച കിളിയെപ്പോലെ നാം വീട്ടിലടക്കപ്പെട്ടോരു കാലം; എയർപ്പോർട്ടുകളും റോഡുകളും പൊതു ഗതാഗതങ്ങളും നിഷ്ചലമായൊരു കാലം; ആരോഗ്യമേഖലയിൽ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നവർ ജോലി പൂർത്തിയാക്കി മടങ്ങി വരുമോ എന്നു നിഷ്ചയമില്ലാതെ വീട്ടിൽ നിന്നും വിടപറയേണ്ടി വന്ന ഒരു കാലം; മുലയീട്ടിയുരുന്ന അമ്മമാർ പോലും കുഞ്ഞിനെ ഒന്നാശ്ശേക്കിക്കുവാൻ കഴിയാതെ പലമുറിയിൽ ഉറങ്ങേണ്ടി വന്ന ഒരു കാലം. ഇവയുടെ തീവ്രത വാക്കുകൾകൊണ്ട് വിവരിക്കുവാൻ പ്രയാസം. ഇങ്ങനെ പ്രാണദയത്തിലായ ഒരു കാലത്തിൽ ദൈവിക ദൗത്യവും ശുശ്രൂഷകളും എന്താണ്?

കൊറോണക്കാലം ഒരു ആത്മരോധനയുടെ കൂടി കാലമാണ്. ദൈവം സൃഷ്ടിച്ച ലോകം ആരോഗ്യദായകവും രോഗമുക്തവുമാണ്. എന്നാൽ നാം അതിനെ വികലവും രോഗഗ്രസ്ഥവുമാക്കിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. ദൈവം സ്വപ്നം കണ്ട ലോകത്തിൽ നിന്നും, സൃഷ്ടിപ്പിന്റെ ഉദ്ദേശ്യത്തിൽ നിന്നും, എത്രയോ കാതം മാറിയാണ് നാം സഞ്ചരിക്കുന്നത്. മലിമസവും രോഗാതുരവുമായ ലോകം നാശത്തിലേക്കുള്ള പ്രയാണത്തിലാണ്. ഇവിടെയാണ് നശിച്ചു പോകുന്നവരെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള ദൈവത്തിന്റെ പുഴയവേദന വെളിവാക്കപ്പെടുന്നത്. 'മിസ്രയീമിലുള്ള എന്റെ ജനത്തിന്റെ കഷ്ടത ഞാൻ കണ്ടു കണ്ടു; ഊഴിയവിചാരകന്മാർ നിമിത്തമുള്ള അവരുടെ നിലവിളിയും കേട്ടു; ഞാൻ അവരുടെ സങ്കടങ്ങൾ അറിയുന്നു.' (പുറം 3:7). ദൈവത്തിന്റെ ഈ പുഴയവായ്പിന്റെ പങ്കുകാരാണ് ഓരോ ക്രിസ്തീയ ശുശ്രൂഷകരും.

യിസ്രായേൽ മക്കളിൽ ബാധ പൊട്ടിപ്പുറപ്പെട്ട് അനേകർ മരിച്ചു വീഴുമ്പോൾ (സംഖ്യ. 16) മോശയും അഹരോനും ചെയ്ത ശുശ്രൂഷകൾ കൊറോണക്കാലത്തെ ക്രിസ്തീയ ശുശ്രൂഷകൾക്ക് മാതൃകയാണ്. ജനത്തിന്റെ നാശത്തിൽ നിസംഗരായി ഇരിക്കുന്നതല്ല, ഓടിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നതല്ല, പകരം ക്രിയാത്മകമായി പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നതാണ് ക്രിസ്തീയ ശുശ്രൂഷ. മേൽപ്പട്ടക്കാരനായ അഹരോൻ യുപം കരങ്ങളിലേന്തി, ജീവിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നവരുടെയും മരിച്ചവരുടെയും നടുവിൽ നിന്ന് പ്രാർത്ഥനകളാകുന്ന യുപം ഉയർത്തി ദേശത്തിനു സൗഖ്യം വരുത്തിയതു പോലെ കൊറോണക്കാലത്തെ ശുശ്രൂഷയ്ക്കായി ദൈവം നമ്മെയും വിളിക്കുന്നു. മൂന്നാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിൽ നോമ നഗരത്തിൽ പ്രതിദിനം 5000 പേർ വീതം മരണപ്പെട്ട പ്ലേഗ് ബാധയിൽ അലക്സന്ദ്രിയയിലെ ബിഷപ്പായിരുന്ന മാർ ദിവന്ത്യാസ്റ്റോസ്, കാർത്തേജിലെ ബിഷപ്പായിരുന്ന സിപ്രിയൻ എന്നിവരുടെ നേതൃത്വവും ശുശ്രൂഷകളും, പതിനാലാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിൽ യൂറോപ്പിലെ വിററൻബർഗിലുണ്ടായ പ്ലേഗ് ബാധയിൽ ക്രിസ്തീയ ശുശ്രൂഷകരായിരുന്ന മാർട്ടിൻ ലൂഥർ കിംഗും അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ ഗർഭിണിയായ ഭാര്യ കാതറിന്റെയും സേവനങ്ങളും, പത്തൊൻപതാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിൽ ലണ്ടൻ നഗരത്തെ ബാധിച്ച കോളറ കാലത്ത് ക്രിസ്തീയ പുരോഹിതനായിരുന്ന ചാൾസ് സ്പർജന്റെ പ്രസംഗവും പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളും, തെക്കൻ തിരുവിതാംകൂറിനെ ഗ്രസിച്ച കോളറ ബാധയിൽ ക്രിസ്തു കരമായി ചെന്നെത്തിയ സായു കൊച്ചുകുഞ്ഞു ഉപദേശിയുടെ സേവന സരണികളും ഇന്നിന്റെ ശുശ്രൂഷകൾക്ക് ചുണ്ടു പലകകളാണ്.

ഈ രക്ഷാകര ഭൗത്യ ശുശ്രൂഷകൾക്ക് വേദപുസ്തക പശ്ചാത്തലത്തിൽ ചിന്തിക്കുമ്പോൾ ത്രിമാന തലങ്ങൾ ആണുള്ളത്: 1. മേശ മേൽ ഉള്ള ശുശ്രൂഷ (ministry at the table), 2. വചനത്തിന്റെ ശുശ്രൂഷ (ministry of the word); 3. ലോകത്തിനുള്ള ശുശ്രൂഷ (ministry to the world) അപ്പത്തിന്റെ വീട്ടിൽ (ബേത്ലഹേമിൽ) അപ്പമായ് തീർന്നവന്റെ ശുശ്രൂഷയാണ് മേശമേലുള്ള ശുശ്രൂഷ.

'അവൻ അപ്പം എടുത്തു, വാഴ്ത്തി, നൂറുകി, ശിഷ്യർക്ക് കൊടുത്തു' എന്ന തിരുവത്താഴ സ്ഥാപന വചനത്തിൽ കർത്താവിന്റെ ശുശ്രൂഷയുടെ 4 ക്രിയാപദങ്ങളും (എടുത്തു, വാഴ്ത്തി, നൂറുകി, കൊടുത്തു) ഉൾപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. കൊറോണ കാലത്ത് എത്രയോ പേർ അന്നത്തിനായി ഇരക്കുന്നത് നാം കണ്ടു. എന്നാൽ എത്രയോ സുമനസ്സുകൾ ശുശ്രൂഷകന്റെ (ശൈമാശന്റെ) കുപ്പായമണിഞ്ഞ് അനേകർക്ക് അപ്പം എത്തിച്ചു നൽകിയ നല്ല ദൃഷ്ടാന്തത്തിനും നാം സാക്ഷ്യം വഹിച്ചു.

വെൻറിലേറ്ററിനു വേണ്ടി കാത്തുനിൽക്കുന്ന കുവിൽ വന്ദ്യവയോധികനായ ഒരു വൈദികൻ തന്റെ പിറകിൽ നിൽക്കുന്ന യൗവനക്കാരനായ സഹോദരനെ കണ്ട് തനിക്ക് ലഭിക്കേണ്ട പ്രാണവായു അവന് നൽകി സ്വയം മരണം വരിച്ച പൗരോഹിത്യ ശുശ്രൂഷ, ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ സ്വയം നൂറുകി നൽകിയ ശുശ്രൂഷയുടെ തുടർച്ചയല്ലാതെ മറ്റൊന്നാണ്.

രണ്ടാമതായി, വചനത്തിന്റെ ശുശ്രൂഷ. വചനം ജഡം ധരിച്ച വനാണ് ക്രിസ്തു. നിരാശയുടെ പടുകൂഴിയിൽ വീഴുന്ന ജനത്തിന് പ്രത്യാശയുടെ കിരണം വചനമാകുന്ന വിളക്കാണ്. വാക്കുകൾ ജീവന്റെ വചനമായി, ജീവനുള്ളതും ജീവൻ നൽകുന്നതുമായ വചനമായി, രൂപപ്പെട്ട സന്ദർഭമായിരുന്നു കൊറോണക്കാലം. ഇത്രയധികം വചന ധ്യാനവും പഠനവും പ്രഘോഷണവും നിർവ്വഹിക്കപ്പെട്ട മറ്റൊരു കാലം ഉണ്ടോ എന്ന് സന്ദേഹിക്കുന്നു.

വചനം വിദഗ്ധിക്കുക മാത്രമല്ല ധ്യാനിസ്തമാക്കി ബലം സംഭരിച്ച നിമിഷങ്ങളെ ഇന്നെന്ന പോലെ ഓർക്കുന്നു. 121-ാം സകീർത്തനം, 91-ാം സകീർത്തനം, 46-ാം സകീർത്തനം, 23-ാം സകീർത്തനം തുടങ്ങിയ വേദഭാഗങ്ങൾ എത്രയോ ആവർത്തി ചെയ്തിട്ടുണ്ടാലിരിക്കുകയായി വീടിനു പുറത്തേക്ക് ഇറങ്ങിയ സന്ദർഭം മറക്കുവാനാവില്ല. 'പലകയും പരിച്ഛേദിച്ചുമായുള്ള ദൈവസാന്നിദ്ധ്യം, 'അത്യന്തമറ്റു മറവും സർവ്വശക്തന്റെ നിഴലും', 'തന്റെ ദക്തന്മാർക്കു ചുറ്റും പാളയമിറങ്ങി വിടുവിക്കുന്നത്' കർത്താവ് തുടങ്ങിയ വാക്കുകൾ വചനത്തിന്റെ പവിഴമുത്തുകളായി നമുക്ക് അനുഭവേദ്യമായി.

മൂന്നാമതായി, ക്രിസ്തു തന്റെ ഭൗത്യം നിർവ്വഹിച്ചതും പൂർത്തിയാക്കിയതും ലോകത്തിൽ തന്നെയും ലോകത്തെ രക്ഷിപ്പാൻ വേണ്ടിയും ആണ്. ഓരോ ശുശ്രൂഷകനും ഈ ക്രിസ്തു ഭൗത്യത്തിന്റെ കരം ആവുകയാണ്. കൊറോണ വാർഡിൽ രോഗികളെ പരിചരിക്കുവാൻ പോകുന്ന ആരോഗ്യപാലകയായ ഒരു അമ്മയുടെ ആത്മീയ വിശാലത ഇന്നും കോരിത്തരിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. മരണത്തെ മുന്നിൽ കണ്ടു കൊണ്ടുള്ള പ്രവർത്തന മേഖലയിൽ നിന്നും കുറച്ചു ദിവസം അവധിയെടുത്ത് വീട്ടിൽ സുരക്ഷിതമായി ഇരുന്നു കൂടെ എന്ന ചോദ്യത്തിന് ഞാൻ പോയാൽ എനിക്ക് എന്ത് സംഭവിക്കും എന്നതിലുപരി ഞാൻ പോയില്ലായെ



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കിൽ എന്റെ ശുശ്രൂഷ കടപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്ന രോഗികൾക്ക് എന്തും സംഭവിക്കാം എന്ന ആത്മ വിവരതയിലാണു ഞാൻ എന്ന മറുപടി ഇന്നിന്റെ നല്ല ശമദ്യാക്കാർനെ വെളിപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു.

നൂറുണ്ടിയ ലോകത്തിനു വേണ്ടി അപ്പമായും വചനമായും നൂറു ക്കപ്പെടുന്ന ശുശ്രൂഷ ദൈവിക രക്ഷാ പദ്ധതിയുടെ ആവിഷ്കാരമാണ്. (Breaking of the bread, breaking of the Word for the broken world).

മേൽപ്പറഞ്ഞ മൂന്നു ശുശ്രൂഷാതലങ്ങളും ഏറ്റവും ശ്രേഷ്ഠമായും പ്രോജലമായും നിർവഹിക്കപ്പെട്ട കാലമാണ് ഈ കൊറോണ കാലം. പതിവ് ആരാധനാ ശൈലികളിൽ നിന്നും ഓൺലൈൻ സംവിധാനങ്ങൾ ഉപയോഗിച്ചുള്ള അസാധാരണ ആരാധന ശൈലികൾ സാധാരണമായി തീർന്ന ഒരു കാലമാണിത്. ഇസ്രായേൽ മക്കൾ പ്രവാസത്തിൽ ആയപ്പോൾ ആരാധിക്കുവാൻ ദൈവാലയത്തിൽ കൂടി വരുന്നതിനോ മുഗങ്ങൾ ലഭ്യമല്ലാതിരുന്നതിനാൽ യാഗങ്ങൾ അർപ്പിക്കുന്നതിനോ കഴിഞ്ഞിരുന്നില്ല. എന്നാൽ പരിമിതികളുടെ മദ്ധ്യേ, ഉടമ്പടിയുടെ മക്കളായി നിൽപ്പാനും ന്യായപ്രമാണത്തിന് കീഴെ നടപ്പാനുമായി അവർ ക്രമീകരിച്ച നൂതന സംവിധാനമാണ് സുനഗോത് ആരാധന. എന്നാൽ പ്രവാസത്തിനു ശേഷം ഇസ്രായേൽ മക്കൾ ദൈവാലയത്തിലെ ആരാധന പുനർജീവിപ്പിച്ചു. കൂടാതെ പ്രവാസകാലത്ത് അവർ ആരംഭിച്ച സുനഗോത് ആരാധന അവർ നിർത്തിയതുമില്ല. അങ്ങനെ കർത്താവിന്റെ പരമ്പര ശുശ്രൂഷ കാലത്ത് മുന്നൂറിലധികം സുനഗോഗുകൾ യെറുശലേമിൽ തന്നെ ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നതായി ചരിത്ര രേഖകൾ സാക്ഷിക്കുന്നു. അത് ദൈവാലയത്തിലെ ആരാധനയ്ക്ക് പുരകമായും ഭവിച്ചു.

ഇവിടെ നാം ശ്രവിക്കേണ്ട ഒരു വിഷയം സുനഗോത് ആരാധന ദൈവാലയത്തിലെ ആരാധനയ്ക്ക് പകരമായി അല്ല, പുരകമായാണ് തീർന്നത്. കൊറോണകാലം എണ്ണമറ്റ ഓൺലൈൻ ആരാധനകളുടെ വേദിയാകുന്നത് നാം കണ്ടു. കാലത്തിന്റെ ആവശ്യങ്ങൾ മനസ്സിലാക്കി സഭയും സംവിധാനങ്ങളും ലഭ്യമായ എല്ലാ സാങ്കേതിക വിദ്യകളും ഉപയുക്തമാക്കി ആരാധനാ ജീവിതത്തെ സംപൂർണ്ണമാക്കി എന്നത് തീർച്ചയായും പ്രശംസാർഹമാണ്. എന്നാൽ ഒരു ഉത്തര കൊറോണകാലം (post-corona period) നിരവധി സാധ്യതകളും വെല്ലുവിളികളും നമ്മുടെ മുമ്പിൽ ഉയർത്തുന്നുണ്ട്.

കൊറോണകാലം നമ്മെ പല കാര്യങ്ങൾ ഞങ്ങൾ പുതുതായി ശീലിപ്പിച്ചു. ആഴ്ചകളോളം കൊറോണ വാർഡിൽ ശുശ്രൂഷ ചെയ്ത ഒരു മാതാവ് തന്റെ കുഞ്ഞിനെ വെർച്വൽ ആയി ആശ്രയിക്കുന്ന രംഗം നമ്മുടെ കണ്ണുകളെ ഇഴുനണിയിച്ചു. കറൻസികൾ പോലും വെർച്വൽ ആകുന്ന ഈ കാലത്ത് പ്രാർത്ഥനകൾ, വചന ധ്യാനം, ആരാധനകൾ ഇവയെല്ലാം വെർച്വൽ ആകുന്നത്

നാം ശീലിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു. അതു നൽകുന്ന സാധ്യതകളും സൗകര്യങ്ങളും വളരെയധികമാണ്. എവിടെയിരുന്നും ഓൺലൈനിലൂടെ ആരാധനയിൽ പങ്കുചേരാം എന്നുള്ള സാധ്യത നമ്മുടെ മുൻപിൽ തുറക്കപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. ലോകത്തിലെവിടെയും ഉള്ള വിഭവശേഷിയെ ഉപയുക്തമാക്കാൻ അവസരങ്ങൾ നൽകപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. ഏകാന്തതയുടെ പടുകൂഴിയിൽ ഒറ്റപ്പെടുവാൻ സാധ്യതയുള്ളപ്പോൾ പരസ്പര ബന്ധത്തിന്റെ സ്പ്രെഹെന്റ് പരിമിതമായെങ്കിലും അനുഭവിക്കുവാൻ സാധ്യതകൾ ഒരുക്കപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു.

എന്നാൽ എല്ലാ സൗകര്യങ്ങളും നന്മയ്ക്കായി ദവികണമെന്നില്ല. ചില അപകടങ്ങളിലേക്കും അത് നമ്മെ കൊണ്ടെത്തിച്ചേക്കാം. പള്ളി ആരാധനകൾ പുനർജീവിപ്പിക്കപ്പെട്ടിട്ടും ഓൺലൈൻ ആരാധനകൾ കൊണ്ട് തൃപ്തിയടയുന്ന ശൈലി ഒരു അപകടമാണ്. Without physical, there is no virtual, Medium is the message എന്നീ സിദ്ധാന്തങ്ങൾ നാം മറന്നു കൂടാ. പള്ളി ആരാധനയിൽ നാം നേരിട്ട് പങ്കെടുക്കുന്നതിന് ഒരിക്കലും തുല്യമാവില്ല വെർച്വലായുള്ള പങ്കാളിത്തം. ഇവ രണ്ടും തരുന്ന അനുഭവതലങ്ങൾ അജഗ്ജാന്തരം ആണ്. കൂട്ടായ്മയിലൂടെയും ഒന്നായിരിക്കുന്നതിലൂടെയും ലഭ്യമാകുന്ന ദൈവസാന്നിദ്ധ്യം ഒരു വെർച്വൽ അനുഭൂതിയല്ല; പകരം, അത് യാഥാർത്ഥ്യമായ അനുഭവവും രുചിച്ചറിയാവുന്നതുമാണ്. ലോകത്തെ രക്ഷിപ്പാൻ ഭൂമിയിൽ അവതരിച്ച കർത്താവ് ഒരു സാങ്കല്പിക സാന്നിദ്ധ്യം (Virtual Presence) അല്ല ലോകത്തിനു നൽകിയത്, പകരം യാഥാർത്ഥ്യമായതും ഭൗതികമായതും ചരിത്രത്തിൽ സന്നിവേശിപ്പിക്കപ്പെട്ടതുമായ സാന്നിദ്ധ്യമാണ് (Physical Presence). മൊബൈലിലൂടെയും മറ്റ് നവമാധ്യമോപാധികളിലൂടെയും വേദപുസ്തകം, ആരാധനാ ക്രമം, ഗീതങ്ങൾ, ധ്യാനങ്ങൾ, പ്രാർത്ഥനകൾ എന്നിങ്ങനെ എല്ലാം ലഭ്യമാകുന്ന ഈ കാലത്ത് അവയുടെ വിരുദ്ധിയും പാവനതയും നഷ്ടപ്പെടാതെ സൂക്ഷിക്കുക എന്നത് ഒരു ആവശ്യകതയും അതിന്റെ സത്താപരമായ ഉദ്ദേശ്യശുദ്ധിയെ ഹനിക്കാതെ ഉപയോഗിക്കേണ്ടത് ഇന്നിന്റെ വെല്ലുവിളിയുമാണ്.

ഓൺലൈൻ ആരാധനാ സംവിധാനങ്ങൾ പള്ളി ആരാധനകൾക്ക് പുരകങ്ങളായി ദവികേണ്ടതും സാങ്കല്പിക ലോകത്ത് നിന്നും നേരിട്ടുള്ള അനുഭവത്തിലേക്ക് കൊതിയോടെ നോക്കിപ്പാർക്കുന്നതിന് ഉത്തേജിപ്പിക്കുന്നതുമാവണം. എന്നാൽ വെർച്വൽ ലോകത്തിലെ ശുശ്രൂഷകളുടെ നവമാനങ്ങൾ നാം തിരിച്ചറിയാനും ഗൗരവത്തോടെ അതിന്റെ ശുശ്രൂഷകരാവുകയും ചെയ്യേണ്ടത് ഇന്നിന്റെ അനിവാര്യതയാണ്. ഈ കൊറോണ കാലത്ത് (Post-Corona Time) കർത്താവിന്റെ രക്ഷാകരഭൗത്യം കർത്തൃകരമായി നിന്ന് ശ്രേഷ്ഠതയോടെയും അർത്ഥപൂർണ്ണമായും നിർവഹിക്കാൻ അത്യുന്നതനായ ദൈവം നമ്മെ സഹായിക്കട്ടെ.



Diaconia — How Do We Become One?

Sophy A. Alex

Mar Thoma Church of Philadelphia

By definition, *diaconia* is the physical establishment located near a church building offering various services to the poor. The Greek root defines it as the overall call to serve the poor. The words *deacon* and *diaconate* are derived from this root and it is a church-appointed position for individuals to distribute alms and to take care of the poor. So, what does this mean for us? The early church has numerous examples of service by the apostles and Jesus. We can easily say we can do similar services in our milieus. While there may be an occasional opportunity to serve, or an initial hype about our services, we often revert to day-to-day routines. We usually wait for an opportunity to join the bandwagon but fail to take the initiative for ministry. Is this what Jesus expects of us?

As we all know, the United States has faced a revolutionary year in 2020, in light of social & racial justice, politics, the pandemic, and the overall increased awareness of the flaws and gaps in our society. We are bombarded with statements from all perspectives and all platforms, shaping our views in the process. As Christians, regardless of what we read and hear, we should go back to the Word of God, to understand what Jesus said and did.

One thing I appreciate about the Mar Thoma Church in the US is that, while we have varied perspectives on specific issues, with heated debates and discussions, we are able to come together quickly whenever there is a cause or a need. As a member of the Mar Thoma

Church of Philadelphia, I know that although we differ in views about politics, justice, and such topics, we can come together for productive conversations and actions when it matters. We unite for a common cause and include everyone regardless of our disagreements. This is what a family looks like, we debate, we love, and we stay together. It reminds me of the early church, where members had conflicts and Paul would write letters and make visits to reprimand them, encourage them, and provide the needed wisdom to work together.

Regarding diaconia, I think we could do more as a church. We are quick to donate money and supplies to various charities during certain times of the year and may attend a community service event once in a while, but only a few are committed or regular. We have individuals who use their school and work platforms to serve regularly. However, we have not systematically initiated service projects at the parish level so far, even though we have the people, time, skills, and resources.

For practical purposes, let us expand the definition of diaconia to include any form of service that requires some level of personal sacrifice. This can range from regular visits to the local shelter every weekend to donating a percentage of your paycheck to a faith-based non-profit organization. So, how can we, as Marthomites, as Christians living in the US, be an active diaconia? What are some steps we can take right away? How can we ensure that they are consistent with the teachings of the Bible? I outline below the key steps

for the Diaconia mission for the church, with examples from Philadelphia.

1. Identify a need in your immediate community.

There will always be a need within and outside the church community. Find one that the church as a whole can address. To put this into context, during the 2020 Summer civil unrest, Philadelphia had a strong reaction to the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, ranging from peaceful protests to destructive riots. This led to many heated debates between individuals within the same families, church, schools, and workplaces. During one of the Youth Fellowship (YF) Bible studies, several youths expressed frustration and concerns about the events, from both sides. We organized a meeting to address the issue and decide where we stand as Marthomites at the very least, if not do something about it.

Another example was the COVID-19 pandemic and personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies. One of our youth members expressed concerns regarding the lack of PPE in nearby hospitals. As a result, we communicated ideas throughout the week, at all hours, for addressing the PPE needs.

Since 2020 was an exceptional year, our Bible study team identified the need to address challenges related to mental health. The Church had limited in-person attendance capacity, school and work were mostly work-from-home, and everyone was practically stuck at home. We missed seeing each other and having regular face-to-face contacts and therefore used the Zoom platform for regular meetings and Bible study.

2. Identify talent, skills, ideas, and delegate.

Once a need is identified, find skilled and talented people to join the effort and delegate responsibilities to address the need. This has unlimited possibilities. With the civil unrest issue discussed earlier we found that some individuals were well versed in social activism and racial justice, some were connected to Christian leaders from local African American churches, some were good speakers, some were skilled in creating graphics for social media, and some were good communicators.

For the PPE need, individuals who had connections to supplies and hospitals, those who were experts in finding good deals on Amazon, and those who were generous with their resources all came together.

For the Bible study, a group volunteered to prepare and lead weekly sessions on mental health topics, ranging from loneliness, anxiety, depression, and addiction.

In all contexts, when the Youth came together, the extent of support and the resultant success was incredible, particularly for uniting the Church during a challenging time.

3. Go for it!

Once people come together, and ideas and resources are confirmed, it is time to act, and stay committed. Keep communication open, address hiccups, and keep going. Ask for help and advice as needed; talk to Achen, the Youth Chaplain, and the Church officials. Reach out to local sister parishes and collaborate.

Regarding the civil unrest issue, once we realized that there were differing views about the protests in Philadelphia and nationwide, we decided on panel discussions as the most suitable approach. The need for an open discussion to ask questions and learn more about the recent events was clear. There was also significant interest from other Youth Fellowships, particularly from the Midwest region and Christos and Bethel Mar Thoma churches in Philadelphia, where they had similar discussions with Kerala and African American Christian community leaders on how best the Church can support local social justice movements. The Diocesan Leadership Conference also provided valuable support and advice on addressing the issues in the broader national context.

For the PPE need, once word got out about the fundraiser, people came forward without hesitation to provide financial support. Within 48 hours, our Youth Fellowship raised over \$3500, which was used for meeting the PPE needs of six local medical centers.

The Bible study team remained committed, holding Zoom sessions every Sunday afternoon, with varying attendance levels. Bible passages were pared and analyzed, with the discussions useful and relevant for us. During the process, we learned more about each other and our struggles and understood how people in the Bible handled similar challenges. As a result, the Bible became the go-to source for peace and advice, instead of Google and/or other Social Media resources.

4. Whatever the need or cause, always view it from a biblical perspective.

We are LIGHTED to lighten, as the Mar Thoma Church logo reminds us. How are we lighted? Through the Word of God, by regular study and meditation on the Bible, and developing a personal relationship with Jesus. If there is a tug in your heart or have questions related to a cause/issue, do not feel discouraged or give up. Search the Bible for clarification, talk to Achens and teachers, and



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commune with God in prayers. You will be enlightened and encouraged.

Often, we find people twisting scriptures to justify specific views, which of course is dangerous. With regard to the BLM movement, there was conflict since the organization is not fully aligned with our faith and beliefs. However, there are plenty of other Christian organizations and activists that we can partner with, which is useful for providing a sound biblical foundation for the effort.

As for the PPE fundraiser, we are all taught that God loves a cheerful giver. The fundraiser provided a great opportunity for us to be generous during a desperate time. Everyone contributed what they could, from college students donating \$12 to working adults donating hundreds. We expressed our gratitude to the givers, as well as experienced the "cheerfulness" of the giver.

5. PRAY! PRAY! PRAY!

No matter the need or the cause or who is involved, always pray about it. We are so quick to plan events, raise funds, and post on social media, but often fail to

stop to kneel and pray to God our Father. While there is no standard approach for prayer, it may be formal and scheduled or informal and private. For all the examples we discussed, every single time we met, we began and ended with a prayer, for the panel discussions, planning meetings, and bible studies. We also made collaborative efforts to hold monthly prayer and fasting sessions, while praying for specific causes, which proved vital for encouragement and leading.

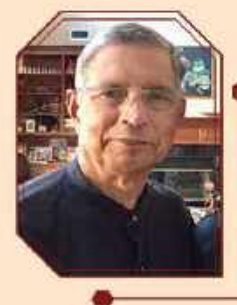
In conclusion, I like to suggest that if there is a need in your community for your parish to address, talk to a group of interested people, and pray on it. If it is in God's will, God will open a way for you to address it. Do not feel discouraged, seek advice, and help, and just do it. Be the Diaconia Jesus wants us to be. Never forget that We are LIGHTED to LIGHTEN!

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet." – John 13:14 NIV

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." – Mathew 5:16 NIV



Why God sent a surgeon to Subirana, Honduras, with a Construction Team?



K.E. Mathew, MD; FACS.
Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston

I woke up hearing someone calling my name. I was taking a nap on the back seat of the bus as it slowly climbed the winding road leading to Subirana, Honduras. The bus had come to a stop leaning to the right off the road. From my seat I could see the steep valley on the left! As I got out of the bus, and I saw this young man lying on the road in front of the bus, his bicycle all banged up under the fender.

One look at him made me realize the seriousness of the situation. Large gaping wounds on his face, several teeth hanging on the broken jaw, deformed left thigh from broken femur, and markedly swollen and deformed left arm. Back in the United States, or any other developed nation, this patient with multiple injuries would be transported by emergency medical technicians (EMTs) to a level two trauma Center. He was in danger of going into shock from bleeding and in extreme pain from all the injuries. He could choke on his own blood that was profusely pouring into his mouth from the wounds around his mouth. He was still conscious and groaning: one glimmer of hope, he has no major head injury!

We were in Honduras on a construction mission. Fourteen of us went there on a one-week assignment

to help construct a church building in this sparsely populated mountain village. After working there for a day, we had to take a break the next day due to shortage of building supplies. We decided to take a trip to Yoro, the district headquarters, for some souvenir shopping and sightseeing. We spent several hours in Yoro, did some shopping and were on our way back to Subirana. The narrow two-way winding road up the mountain was hard for this old school bus with fourteen of us on board to climb. Fortunately, the traffic was not busy at all. The scenery was beautiful; deep green hills with tall trees all around. The weather was cool and pleasant. Only scary sight was the depth of the valley on to the left side of the road with no barriers to protect!

What am I doing on this construction mission in Honduras? A general surgeon by trade, with no experience in construction work and not able to talk a word of Spanish. When I heard about the mission trip, I put my name in. On the day before the trip, there was a meeting for the team at the church. Everyone was asked to write down on a piece of paper what he or she is most worried about on this trip. I remember writing down "the unexpected" and folding that paper and depositing it at

the altar. Truly I was not worried about leaving my wife and children for a week and was least worried about the short flight. Going to a new culture and environment was exciting. Somehow, I was worried about, "The unexpected." May be this was it!

I asked the driver several questions in one breath: police? Ambulance? 9-1-1? Hospital? and many more. This was the worst place to be in an accident; no phone, no ambulance, no 9-1-1 and no hospital nearby. The nearest hospital was in Yoro, where we came from. It was three hours by bus. The only transportation available is our school bus, and the "construction team" from USA is now the EMT, the Paramedics, as well as the transport team!

We pulled out a seat from the bus onto the road and laid the young man on it. We cut some tree limbs and used them as splints to immobilize his broken thigh and arm using towels and sheets we had. Thank God for the belt from our team leader, it was long enough to go around the patient and the seat! We lifted him up and placed him along the aisle at the back of the bus. Three of us from the team decided to go with him while the rest of the team decided to walk the remaining three miles up the hill to Subirana.

I sat at the head end of the young man applying gentle pressure over his facial wounds. The local pastor who accompanied us was asked to ride with us as our interpreter. He was assigned to carry on conversation with the patient to keep him from falling asleep and choking. But when he saw the gruesome and bloody face the Pastor closed his eyes and went on praying. Our attorney friend and team leader Glenn rose to the occasion as my interpreter. Glenn did a fantastic job in instructing the young man to spit out or swallow the blood so that he would not choke on it. I wanted to keep him awake until we reached the hospital. Glenn could not believe what he was doing on that trip. He was a person who used to be afraid of the sight of blood. Later, he narrated the story of taking his son John to the emergency room and how he ended up getting hospitalized that day! Seeing the surgeon putting a stitch on John's head, Glenn fainted and fell on the floor at the hospital. When Glenn's wife called the ER to see how John was doing, she got to talk to the surgeon who said, "John is fine, but Glenn has to stay in hospital!"

Our 11-member team was walking up the hill toward Subirana carrying the five-gallon water bottles and souvenir packages when a pickup truck with a cow on its bed stopped. The driver offered the team a ride on

the back of the truck. Now there were eleven Americans surrounding a Honduran cow on the bed of that pickup truck that was climbing the hill. Obviously, this was a novel experience for the Americans as well as the Honduran cow. She lifted her tail and before anyone could say or do anything, relieved herself. Everyone on the bed of that truck had no choice but to put up with the mess.

We reached Yoro at about 7:30 p.m. I was so glad to see a Honduran woman doctor in the emergency room. Holding my American College of Surgeons ID card, I approached her and introduced myself as a general surgeon from USA and started talking about the injuries our patient had. In broken English she informed me that all that they could do for our patient in Yoro was to put a better splint, give some pain medications and send him to San Pedro Sula to get surgical care. This main hospital for the district of Yoro did not have the ability to take care of major injuries from a road accident!

We were directed to report the accident to the office of the chief of police. We walked across the street to the office of the chief of police and there we listened to this tough police officer talking to us for several minutes in Spanish. Finally, our team leader Glenn turned around and gave us the summary. As follows: "as foreigners who got involved in a traffic accident in Honduras, I can retain you all for several days for questioning. Because you did the right thing in bringing the injured person to this hospital, and as your driver has agreed to me to transport the victim to the referral hospital in San Pedro Sula tonight and bring back a receipt from the hospital by tomorrow, I am letting you all go free." I was thinking; "oh, he is not going to punish us for our good deed this time!"

As we walked back to the hospital, we saw the patient on the bed of a pickup truck with an intravenous (IV) line and ready to be driven off through the night. Thank God he reached the hospital over a hundred miles away, got operated on and survived. When we returned to Subirana in the early morning hours, our team was still sitting there and praying for us.

Was there a reason for God to put a surgeon on a construction team to Subirana, Honduras? Yes, He had that young Honduran cyclist on His mind. Yes, He had to reveal the pathetic state of health care system in the underdeveloped countries to the surgeon and challenge him for future medical mission trips and carry-on God's ministry!

Profile

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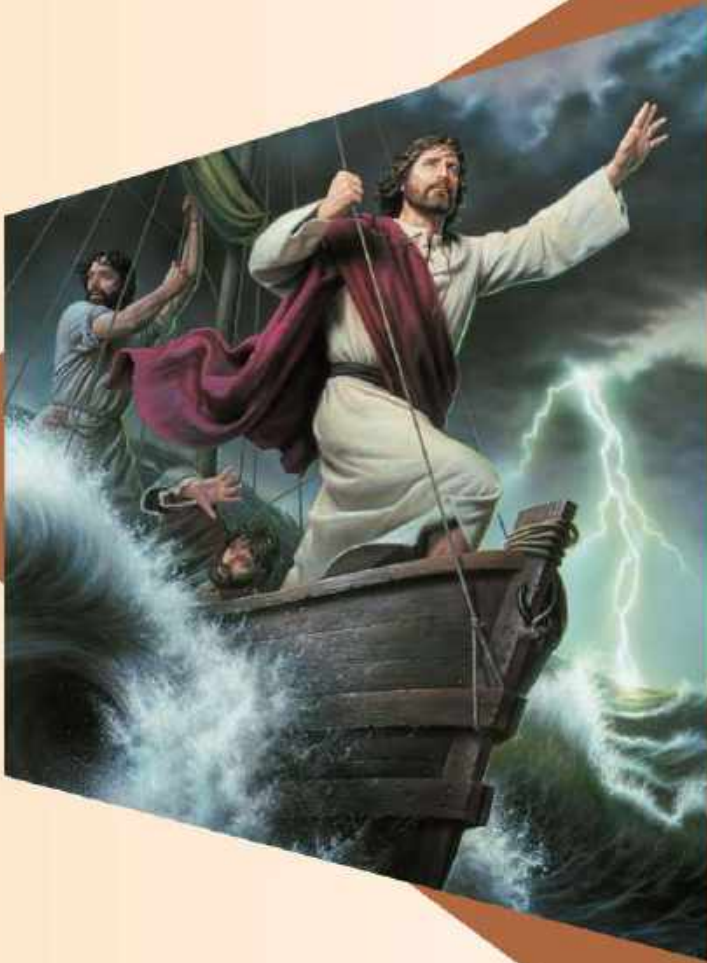
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BEND, BUT DON'T BREAK



Shannon D. Jones
Christos Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia

Greetings my dear brothers and sisters in Christ! It is truly an honor and privilege to be sharing what God laid upon my heart with you, and I hope and pray you will be blessed! Over the past year, many of us have experienced some challenges, sickness, anxiety, depression, loss of a loved one, loss of a job, and the list goes on. The world as we once knew it has drastically changed. The world continues to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and as of April 29, 2021, more than 149 million cases have been confirmed worldwide. In addition, more than 3 million deaths worldwide have been attributed to COVID-19, making it one of the deadliest pandemics in history. There is currently a surge in the number of coronavirus cases not only in the US but also an alarming, record-setting surge in

India. Furthermore, people around the world continue to deal with poverty, unemployment, racial injustice, civil unrest, inequitable voting laws, inequitable farming laws, increased gun violence, etc.

Not only adults, but children of all ages have also been deeply impacted by the pandemic and other issues facing our nation and the world. Many of our young people have not been able to spend time with their peers in the classroom and in social settings. Some of our youngsters were already trying to navigate pressure from school, peer pressure, the demands of parents, anxiety, depression, and other “normal” challenges that develop as they begin to become young adults. If children we view as being raised in stable households are

dealing with difficult situations, how are the youngsters that are in less than stable households faring? Many youngsters are dealing with all types of abuse, neglect, hunger, poverty, and violence, just to name a few of their challenges. And even with the pandemic and everything else going on in this world, God continues to be faithful, and He showers us with His unmerited grace and mercy daily.

I am reminded of Psalm 91 (NKJV), which says:

“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

² I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress.
My God, in Him I will trust.”

³ Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler,
And from the perilous pestilence.

⁴ He shall cover you with His feathers,
And under His wings you shall take refuge.
His truth shall be your shield and buckler.”

Psalm 91 reminds us that God has a secret place for His children who choose to abide under his shadow. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary lists several definitions for shadow including: “the dark figure cast upon a surface by a body intercepting the rays from a source of light; partial darkness or obscurity within a part of space from which rays from a source of light are cut off by an interposed opaque body; an inseparable companion or follower.” So, if we apply the definitions of shadow here in our text, shadow signifies that there is a closeness or nearness to God. In order for a shadow to fall on us, we need to be close to a companion or some other object; therefore, for God’s shadow to fall on us, we must walk close to Him.

In order for us to walk close to God, we must have a genuine and intimate relationship with Him. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God wants us to give Him our all: our hearts, our minds, our souls, our time, and our talents. Our purpose here on Earth is to be His hands, and feet, and to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). Sometimes we tend to care more about what people think of us, than what God thinks of us. Every chance we get we need to ask God to forgive us our sins, cleanse us from all unrighteousness, come into our hearts, and endow us with His spirit. And when we are true followers of Christ, we can be confident that God will protect, comfort, and care for us, because He

is a mighty refuge and fortress for His children. And as our relationship and faith in God grows, we begin to get closer to Him and acknowledge Him, and He directs our path (Proverbs 3:6).

Psalm 91: 3 speaks of how God will deliver us from the snare of the fowler and from perilous pestilence. Here the psalmist describes specific ways God protects and cares for His children, beginning with rescuing us from people or circumstances that would trap us as a fowler snares birds. A fowler is a professional bird catcher. Birds were sometimes captured with nets spread on the ground, referred to as traps or snares. Fowlers used the method of taking young birds from a nest and raising them by hand; when they were tame, they were confined in hidden cages so their calls would bring other birds of their kind to the selected area; the birds that came to the area would then be killed by the arrows of concealed bowmen or the use of a throw-stick. So, fowlers work in secret and they vary their methods of capturing birds by enticing them with pleasure and at times, using decoys.

God also protects His children during times of plague and disease. This does not mean that those who trust God will never die from disease, but it means that those who truly trust God have repeatedly been delivered from dangers, seen and unseen. Throughout the Bible, in our own lives and through the testimonies of our brothers and sisters, we can point to countless times when God has delivered His children from plagues, diseases and other perils.

Psalm 91: 4 speaks of how God shall cover us with His feathers, and under His wings we shall find refuge. The psalmist used a metaphor to represent God as a bird, sheltering young chicks under His wings. David also uses a similar metaphor in Psalm 61: 3-4: “For You have been a shelter for me, A strong tower from the enemy.
4 I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings. Selah”

Psalm 91: 4 ends with God’s truth being our shield and buckler. God’s protection, or His truth, is described here as a shield and buckler. All of us know what a shield is; however, buckler is not a commonly used term. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a buckler as: “a small round shield held by a handle at arm’s length.” In ancient times, a buckler was an important weapon as it was small, maneuverable, and great for deflecting swords or other weapons; however, it could also be

used as a weapon itself. So when you put the shield and buckler together, you pretty much have double the protection, or double the armor, and the psalmist uses this metaphor to emphasize the extent of God's protection of His children.

Let us switch gears a bit and think about hurricanes and palm trees. Some of you probably live in areas surrounded by beautiful palm trees, and I would imagine some of you have also experienced hurricanes in the areas in which you live. We have all seen photographs of communities in the aftermath of hurricanes; homes completely destroyed, damaged vehicles, uprooted trees, and debris all over. What is strange is that in some of those same images you will see that the palm trees are still standing. Palm trees are designed to bend, and when a strong storm or hurricane hits, palm trees can bend quite a lot, even to the point of being horizontal to the ground. I have seen videos and images of live storms and hurricanes and a palm tree lying against the ground, appearing to have been broken. But when the storm starts to calm and move out of the area, the palm tree is able to stand upright again. Scientists have found that palm trees are stronger after a storm or hurricane than they were before the weather event. Apparently, when a palm tree bends, its roots begin to spread wider and deeper, which allows the palm tree to bend, but not break!

I do not know what storms or hurricanes you may be facing in your life right now, but I do know that we serve a God who cares for us and will never forsake us. So, when the storms of life start to weigh you down, be like a palm tree: Bend, But Don't Break! Pray, read your bible, fellowship with your Christian brothers and sisters, and let that strengthen your roots, strengthen your resolve, and strengthen your faith in God! If you put your trust in the Lord, the difficult situations you face will help you to grow stronger and become more resilient, and enable you to stand back up like a palm tree.

Sometimes we struggle and question God as we do not always understand why Godly people have to suffer. But dear friends, we must trust and believe that God loves us and has an ultimate plan for glorifying His name in the very situation we find insurmountable. God wants us to rely on Him when we face obstacles and know that He is right there with us. We are human and sometimes we allow ourselves to enlarge or magnify the struggles we may be facing, but we must remember

that we serve a sovereign God, who is larger than any struggle or situation we may face. We need to discern what God is saying to us even in the midst of adversity. And sometimes God is using the challenging situations we face to help increase the faith of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Some of you, even as you are reading this, are facing some challenging situations in your life, or may be trying to assist someone else with challenges they may be facing. I urge you to give your burdens to the Lord, begin to praise Him in advance and He will take control of the situation. God already knows what is going on in our lives and He has the power to deliver us from any situation. Furthermore, we should not only pray and praise the Lord when things seem bleak, but praying to God and offering Him worship should be a lifestyle for us.

As I begin to conclude this message, I want to share with you some of my favorite verses. James 1: 2-4 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

II Corinthians 4: 8-9: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

I Corinthians 15: 57-58: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

As a child growing up with my grandfather, the late Bishop John L. Roberson, as my pastor, my family would sing several songs that would create an atmosphere of praise and worship. One of the songs we would sing was Hallelujah Anyhow by the Miami Mass Choir. It went like this:

"Hallelujah anyhow, never let your troubles get you down.

When troubles come your way, hold your head up high and say, Hallelujah anyhow."

Trust God! Bend, But Don't Break!



Do Not Forget 5 Things When Filing Your 2020 FEDERAL INCOME TAX RETURN

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.)



1. CHARITABLE GIVING

When you file your 2020 federal income tax return, you can claim a brand new "above the line" deduction of up to \$300 for donations to charity you made in 2020. This deduction is in addition to standard deduction for those who do not use itemized deductions. Also, the CARES ACT allows qualified cash contributions up to 100% of adjusted gross income (up from 60%) for the year 2020.

2. STIMULUS PAYMENTS – PHASE 1 & PHASE 2 (\$1200 & \$600)

Those who are eligible and still did not receive the stimulus payment will be able to claim it on their 2020 income tax return. Stimulus payments are considered advance tax credits against the 2020 income tax and are not taxable income and are not to be paid back. If you received stimulus payment, but not the correct amount you are eligible, the remaining amount may be claimed on your 2020 tax return. This is termed "Recovery Rebate Credit" on Line 30 of 2020 form 1040. The amount of your actual stimulus phase 1 and phase 2 payments you received is reflected on Notice 1444 and Notice 1444-B sent to you by the IRS. If your income for 2020 is less than 2019 you may be eligible for additional stimulus if full amount was not already received. This is the main reason the IRS moved the filing start date to February 12.

3. INCREASED STANDARD DEDUCTION

For single taxpayers and married individuals filing separately, the standard deduction rises

to \$12,400, up \$200 from 2019. For married filing jointly the standard deduction rises to \$24,800, up \$400 from 2019. For Head of households, the standard deduction rises to \$18,650, up \$300 from 2019.

4. INCREASED TAXABLE INCOME LEVELS FOR MARGINAL TAX RATES

10% - for taxable income up to \$9,875 for single filers (\$19,750 for married filing jointly)

12% - for taxable incomes \$9,876 to \$40,125 for single filers (\$19,751 - \$80,250 for filing jointly)

22% - for incomes \$40,126 to \$85,525 for single filers (\$80,251-\$171,050 for filing jointly)

24% - for incomes \$85,526- \$163,300 for single filers (\$171,051 - \$326,600 for filing jointly)

32% - for incomes \$163,301- \$207,350 for single filers (\$326,601 - \$414,700 for filing jointly)

35% - for incomes \$207,351- 518,400 for single filers (\$414,701- \$622,050 for filing jointly)

37% - for incomes over \$518,400 for single filers (for incomes over \$622,050 for filing jointly)

5. EXPENSE DEDUCTION FOR TEACHERS

Teachers have another "above the line deduction" of \$250 for unreimbursed educational expenses. This could be books, classroom materials and computer supplies. Educators may be able to include costs of hand sanitizers, masks, and other personal protective equipment in 2020 as they are supplies the teacher deems "ordinary and necessary" for the conduct of the profession.



New Clergy Assigned to the Diocese of North America and Europe

WELCOME

Rev. Byju Thomas, St. Thomas MTC, Kulashkaram
Wife: Anu Susan Abraham, Bethel MTC Mallasseri
Parish Assigned: MTC of Greater Washington, Maryland



Rev. Eappen Varghese, Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Mepral
Wife: Neena Varghese
Daughter: Rebecca Mary Varghese, Grade 8
Son: Ephraem Eappen Varghese, Grade 5
Son: George Hanok Varghese, Grade 3
Parish Assigned: Immanuel MTC, Houston, Texas



Rev. George Abraham, St. Thomas MTC, Kallooppara
Wife: Preema Mary Cherian
Daughter: Prarthana Susan George, Grade 4
Daughter: Emima Mary George, Kindergarten
Parish Assigned: Austin MTC, Austin, Texas



Rev. George Varghese, MTC Pattamala
Wife: Saumia Mariam Thomas
Son: Reuben George, Grade 5
Son: Joshua George
Parish Assigned: St. Thomas MTC, Delaware Valley



New Clergy Assigned to the Diocese of North America and Europe

WELCOME



Rev. Renny Varghese Philip, Salem MTC, Mundugod

Wife: Jenny Rachel Samuel

Daughter: Diya Gladis Renny, Grade 6

Son: Aaron Varghese Renny, Grade 3

Parish Assigned: Immanuel MTC, Virginia



Rev. Sam Lukose, St. Thomas MTC, Kulakkada

Wife: Sheeba Sam Lukose Mulakkazha St Thomas

Daughter: Anugraha Mary Sam, Grade 6

Parish Assigned: Orlando MTC, Florida, & St. Mark's MTC, Tampa



Rev. Shaji Kochummen, Christos MTC, Karippuram, Kundara

Wife: Susan Kuttiedayil Thomas

Son: Abel Plavara Shaji, Grade 7

Son: Aiden Plavara Shaji, Grade 2

Parish Assigned: Long Island MTC, New York



Rev. Thomas Mathew, St. Thomas MTC, Kozhencherry

Wife: Mereen Grace George, Ebenazer MTC Valanjavattom

Son: Manuel Thomas Mathew, Grade 5

Daughter: Mabel Mariam Mathew, Grade 3

Son: Marvel George Mathew 2 years

Parish Assigned: Kansas MTC & St. Louis MTC



MATRIMONIAL

1. Mar Thoma parents who have settled in the United States for 30 years are looking for potential partners for their 25-year-old daughter. She has a Master's Degree in Physician Assistant Studies and is a full-time Physician Assistant at a University hospital. She is a God-fearing, family-oriented, 5'4" woman. She is looking for a man between the ages of 25-29 with height at least 5'8", raised in the USA, has a stable job, good family values, and is also God-fearing. Interested parents can message wtig823@gmail.com.
2. Mar Thoma parents, settled in the US, are inviting proposals for their daughter, 27 years old, 5 feet 4 inches tall, medical doctor, currently pursuing Residency in Family Medicine in Pittsburgh. She grew up in the US, has a strong faith in God, is family-oriented and caring, and has a cheerful outlook. We are seeking proposals from parents of God-fearing, family-oriented boys in the US. Please call 678-250-5355 or email smathews122@gmail.com
3. Marthoma parents settled in US invite proposals for their American born daughter 34 yrs. old, 5 feet 4 inches tall, completed her study Pham D currently working as a pharmacist. Seeking suitable alliance from professionally qualified Marthoma pharmacist, doctors or engineers, born and raised in the US. Who are God fearing and family oriented. Interested parties please respond with details and recent photos to J6234871@live.com

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Offer ends 11/30/21

Bible Crossword Puzzle

Winners List for Jan/Feb/Mar 2021 - Isaiah 41 to 50

- 1 C. G. George Ascension MTC, PA
- 2 Manju Mathews Ascension MTC, PA
- 3 Dr. Susan Alex Atlanta MTC, JK-TN
- 4 Laly Elias Baltimore MTC, MD
- 5 Abraham Varghese Carmel MTC, MA
- 6 Ethan Abraham(Gr1) Carmel MTC, MA
- 7 Gianna Sage Aguiar(Gr2) Carmel MTC, MA
- 8 Landen Philip Aguiar(Gr5) Carmel MTC, MA
- 9 Mercy Simon Carmel MTC, MA
- 10 Paul J Isaac Carmel MTC, MA
- 11 Sheba Susan Aguiar Carmel MTC, MA
- 12 Jessy Philip Detroit MTC, MI
- 13 Nancy Varghese Detroit MTC, MI
- 14 Usha Sara Thomas Detroit MTC, MI
- 15 Mathew T Mathew Epiphany MTC, NY
- 16 Saramma Chacko Epiphany MTC, NY
- 17 Annamma John IMTC,Houston
- 18 Sara Philip IMTC,Houston
- 19 Sosamma Abraham Long Island MTC
- 20 Saramma Mathew MTC Dallas F. B.
- 21 Joanna Zachariah MTC Oklahoma
- 22 T.C. Zachariah MTC Oklahoma
- 23 Mary George MTC San Francisco
- 24 Mathews George MTC San Francisco
- 25 Annamma Abraham PMTC, PA
- 26 K.G. Jacob PMTC, PA
- 27 Kunjamma Jacob PMTC, PA
- 28 Prabha Thomas PMTC, PA
- 29 Sangeetha Thomas(Gr 5) PMTC, PA
- 30 Susan Mathews PMTC, PA
- 31 Tharamel E Alexander PMTC, PA
- 32 Susila Joy PMTC, PA
- 33 Hannah P Daniel Salem MTC, NY
- 34 Lissha A Varghese(Gr 7) Salem MTC, NY
- 35 Liza Joe Mathew Salem MTC, NY
- 36 Saramma Koshy Salem MTC, NY
- 37 Shabu Abraham Salem MTC, NY
- 38 Sharty Thomas Salem MTC, NY
- 39 Mariamma K John Sehion MTC Dallas
- 40 Saramma Varkey Sehion MTC Dallas

- 41 Alice Thomas St James MTC NY
- 42 Mariamma Ninan St James MTC NY
- 43 Sheela Thomas St Luke's MTC Florida
- 44 Dr. Prathik M Philip St Luke's MTC Florida
- 45 Liba Thomas Philip St Luke's MTC Florida
- 46 Philip Mathew St. Johns MTC, MI
- 47 Philip Mathews St. Mathews Canada
- 48 Georgena Skariah St. Mathews Canada
- 49 Saramma Alexander St. Mathews Canada
- 50 Annamma I Varughese St. Peter's MTC, NJ
- 51 Annamma P John St. Peter's MTC, NJ
- 52 Elsie George St. Peter's MTC, NJ
- 53 Jibi P George St. Peter's MTC, NJ
- 54 Mary Simon St. Peter's MTC, NJ
- 55 Sally George St. Peter's MTC, NJ
- 56 Sosamma Varghese St. Peter's MTC, NJ
- 57 Jeena Mary Mathal St. Thomas Delaware
- 58 Elsy Philip Staten Island MTC, NY
- 59 Omana Rajee Staten Island MTC, NY
- 60 Checha John Staten Island MTC, NY
- 61 Mary Varghese (555) Staten Island MTC, NY
- 62 Regi Mathew Staten Island MTC, NY
- 63 Lilly Varghese Trinity MTC Houston
- 64 Thomas Varghese Trinity MTC Houston
- 65 Achamma Chacko Trinity MTC, Houston
- 66 Gracy P Vattakunnel Trinity MTC, Houston
- 67 Jessy Baboo Trinity MTC, Houston
- 68 Kunjamma Thomas Trinity MTC, Houston
- 69 Liby Saji Varghese Trinity MTC, Houston
- 70 Nikhil Mathew(Gr 7) Trinity MTC, Houston
- 71 Reni George Trinity MTC, Houston
- 72 Saramma Sleeba Trinity MTC, Houston
- 73 Shawn Varghese Trinity MTC, Houston
- 74 T.A. Mathew Trinity MTC, Houston
- 75 Vishal Mathew(Gr 5) Trinity MTC, Houston

Winners for Oct/Nov/Dec 2020 continued:

1. Saramma Sleeba Trinity MTC, Houston
2. Checha John Staten Island MTC, NY

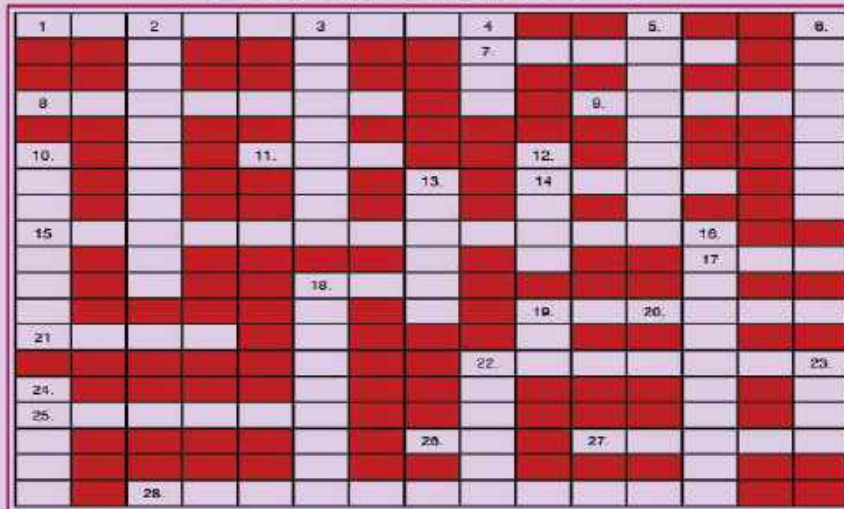
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Answers to Bible Crossword Puzzle Jan-Feb-Mar 2021

Issue: Isaiah 41-50

Bible Crossword Puzzle

as in NIV Isaiah 51-60



ACROSS:

- Says the Lord "for a brief moment I _____ you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back."
- "Though in _____ I struck you, in favor I will show you compassion."
- So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, _____ cannot enter.
- Those who walk uprightly enter into _____; they find rest as they lie in death.
- See, my servant will _____ wisely, he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.
- Their (wicked people) thoughts are _____ thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways.
- They are shepherds who lack _____; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain.
- "Give _____ and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live."
- Therefore I will give him a portion among the great ... For he bore the _____ of many and made intercession for the transgressors.
- How beautiful on the mountains are the _____ of those who bring good news.
- "_____ the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.
- "All who keep the _____ without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant- these I will bring to my holy mountain."
- He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the _____ of salvation on his head.
- My word that goes out from my mouth; it will not return to _____ empty but will accomplish what I desire.
- The Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your _____.
- (Why do) you forget the Lord your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the _____ of the earth?

DOWN:

- "Our offenses are ever with us and we _____ our iniquities."
- "Build up, build up, prepare the road! Remove the _____ out of the way of my people"
- (If your fasting is acceptable to the Lord) Then your light will break forth like the _____ and your healing will quickly appear.
- "Shout it aloud, do not hold back, Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their _____."
- The Holy One of Israel is your _____; he is called the God of all the earth.
- "For my thoughts are not your _____, neither are your ways my ways."
- Their (wicked people) deeds are evil _____ and acts of violence are in their hands.
- Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen : to loose the _____ of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke.
- "But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all _____."
- "My righteousness draws near speedily, my _____ is on the way and my arm will bring justice to the nations.
- "Was it not you who dried up the _____, the waters of the great deep?"
- He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is _____ so he did not open his mouth.
- If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my _____ day, then you will find joy in the Lord.
- (a fast acceptable to the Lord) Is it not to _____ your food with the hungry and provide the poor wanderer with shelter?

Deadline for Answers: July 25, 2021

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

Contact Phone: 978-663-3203

Scanned - via Email: Yarampath23@msn.com

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

HOLY ORDINATION

**Rev. Dn. Jeswin Simon John and
Rev. Dn. Stanley Mathew John**

Rev. Dn. Jeswin Simon John was ordained as a Kassessa (priest) of the Mar Thoma Church on Saturday, April 10, 2021, at the Ascension Mar Thoma Church (Philadelphia),



and Rev. Dn. Stanley Mathew John was ordained as a Kassessa (priest) of the Mar Thoma Church on Saturday, May 1, 2021, at the St. John's Mar Thoma



Church (London). The Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, served as the chief celebrant during the sacrament of Holy Ordination on both occasions. Both ordination services were conducted with a limited number of in-person participants due to the pandemic and were live streamed across the globe. It is noteworthy to mention that both Jeswin Achen and Stanley Achen are the first members from their respective home parishes to accept the call of Christ to serve as ordained ministers of the church. Let us pray that God Almighty may abundantly bless both Jeswin Achen and Stanley Achen as they serve in the Lord's vineyard for His glory.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

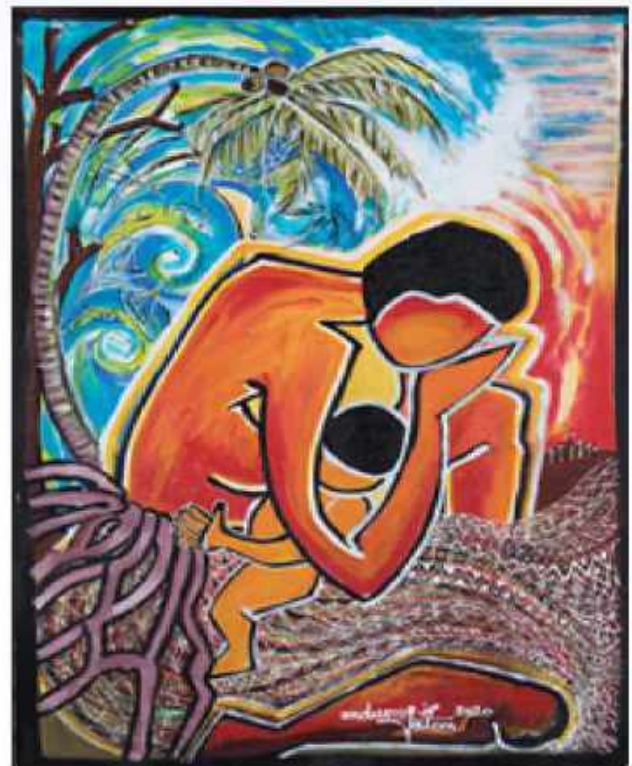
2021 World Day of Prayer Reports

Reports compiled and consolidated by
Mrs. Neethi Prasad
(WDP USA Board Member)

INTRODUCTION

World Day of Prayer (WDP) is a global ecumenical movement led by Christian women. The motto for WDP is "Informed Prayer and Prayerful Action," and WDP is celebrated annually in over 170 countries on the first Friday in March. The movement aims to bring together people of various races, cultures, and traditions in a yearly common Day of Prayer, as well as in closer fellowship, understanding, and prayerful action throughout the year.

WDP 2021 COUNTRY OF FOCUS, THEME, AND ARTWORK



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The country of focus for 2021 was the Republic of Vanuatu, which was founded on traditional values, Christian principles, and the people's faith in God. Vanuatu is a beautiful country of many islands and has people of many ethnic groups and languages. The islands have black and white sandy beaches and beautiful coral reefs with tropical colored fishes. The forests are full of lovely birds, flora and fauna, and spectacular cascades. Vanuatu is prone to earthquakes, cyclones, volcanic eruptions, and rising sea levels. Thus, due to the terrain and climate of this nation, choosing the land on which to build a house is an important decision for people here. This reality is very much related to theme this year, "Build on a Strong Foundation," which is based on Matthew 7:24-27 where Jesus tells a parable about the kingdom of heaven using the image of a house and the land on which the house is to be built. Vanuatu's susceptibility to cyclones is highlighted in the painting chosen to represent WDP 2021, which depicts a mother bending and praying over her child as the waves crash over her and a palm tree bends protectively over them.

WDP REPORTS

Despite the continued challenges the pandemic imposed, many of our Mar Thoma parishes celebrated WDP at the parish or regional level, and ecumenical forums. We are thankful to God Almighty for enabling us to do so and pray for the healing and renewal the world awaits.

MAR THOMA CHURCH, ATLANTA – GEORGIA

The Edavaka Mission and Sevika Sanghom of the Mar



Thoma Church, Atlanta, organized the WDP service as an ecumenical gathering on Friday, March 5, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. The event took place both in-person and via the Zoom platform. Rev. Skariah Varughese, Rev. Manoj Idiculla, and Rev. Jacob Solomon gave leadership for the

service. Rev. Jacob Solomon, Vicar of The Emmanuel CSI Congregation (Atlanta), delivered an inspiring message. Around 55 people participated in-person and many others via Zoom. The offertory was collected and will be used for the betterment of the people of Vanuatu. The meeting ended at 8:30 p.m., and snacks were provided.

Mrs. Blessy Philip & Mrs. Bobina Titus (MTC, Atlanta)

BALTIMORE MAR THOMA CHURCH – MARYLAND



The Sevika Sanghom members of Baltimore MTC celebrated WDP on Saturday, March 6, 2021, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The meeting was conducted virtually and around 20 members attended. The Vicar Rev. Shiju Thomas presided over the meeting and offered prayer and provided opening remarks. Sevika Sanghom members participated in the WDP service and celebrated the women of Vanuatu through various programs. The opening song was led by Mrs. Anila Varghese, which was followed with a Bible reading by Mrs. Manu Sajan. Participants also viewed two videos on the life of the women and children in Vanuatu. The monologues (women's voices from Vanuatu) were read by Mrs. Julia Mathew, Mrs. Susan Thomas, Mrs. Jancy Mathews, and Mrs. Tessy Mathew, which was followed by intercessory prayer led by Mrs. Susan Thomas and Mrs. Gracy Abraham. Mrs. Grace Abraham led a special session on how to prepare "achappam." Then Mrs. Smitha Benson read the report, which was followed by the closing prayer offered by Mrs. Ann Mathews. It was a great privilege that Baltimore MTC Sevika Sanghom was able to be a part of this noble cause.

Mrs. Smitha Benson
(Baltimore MTC Sevika Sanghom Secretary)

CHICAGO ECUMENICAL – ILLINOIS



The Chicago Ecumenical Community celebrated WDP on Saturday, March 13, 2021, at St. Gregorios Orthodox Church in Elmhurst, IL. The Ecumenical Choir, led by Mr. Jacob George, sang a hymn. Ecumenical Vice President, Rev. Dr. Bhanu Samuel, led the opening prayer, and after that Rev. Fr. Raju Daniel, Chairman of the WDP Committee, welcomed all to the gathering. Next, the President of the Ecumenical Council, Rev. Fr. Ham Joseph delivered the keynote address. Prayer Committee Convener, Mrs. Sujatha Abraham, gave an introductory speech and a brief description of the country of Vanuatu. Mrs. Nisha Kuruvilla read the selected passage from Matthew 7:24-27. Following this, the clergy led the Kauma and other prayers. Mrs. Sheeba Mathew, Mrs. Molly, Mrs. Joyce Cherian, Mrs. Baby Mathew, Mrs. Susamma Kuriakose, and Mrs. Aleyamma Punnose of the Women's Forum led the intercessory and prayer of thanksgiving. Mrs. Sushila Johnson, Mrs. Susamma Thomas, and Mrs. Agnes Mathew shared stories from the women in Vanuatu. The children presented the culture, history, landscape, and way of life in Vanuatu. Mrs. Saritha Mathew delivered the main message on the theme "Build on a Strong Foundation." The children's skit based on the theme was impressive. The program also included the Vanuatu national anthem sung by St. Gregorios Orthodox Church children in the Vanuatu language. To conclude, the Ecumenical Council Secretary, Mr. Anto Kavalakkal, thanked the audience. The meeting concluded with a prayer by Rev. Dr. Bhanu Samuel. Mrs. Lisha John served as the MC. We thank God Almighty for His blessings.

Rev. Fr. Raju Daniel

(Ecumenical Council Chairman for WDP 2021)

KERALA ECUMENICAL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP (KECF) – DALLAS, TEXAS

The parishes of the South West Center A participated in the WDP celebration arranged by the Kerala Ecumenical

Christian Fellowship in Dallas, Texas. The program was held on Saturday, March 6, 2021, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 Noon via Zoom and was hosted by St. Alphonsa Syro Malabar Catholic Church (Coppell, TX). Rev. Mathew Mathews, Vicar of Sehion MTC and the VP of KECF, gave the presidential address. KECF Secretary, Mr. Alex Alexander, welcomed everyone. The Ecumenical Choir led the singing session. Mrs. Sujatha Joseph was the Coordinator. Women representatives from different parishes led the worship session. The main speaker was Mrs. Shijy Alex from Chicago MTC, who spoke on the theme: Build on a Strong Foundation. Mrs. Jolly Babu (Diocesan Sevika Sanghom Assembly Member/Diocesan Council Member) proposed the Vote of Thanks, and the closing prayer and benediction was offered by Rev. Fr. Reny Kappel. A total of 21 churches participated in this meeting.

Mrs. Jolly Babu (Diocesan Council Member/Diocesan Sevika Sanghom Assembly Member)

NORTH EAST REGION SEVIKA SANGHOM CENTER B ECUMENICAL GATHERING

NERSS Center B WDP celebration was held on Saturday, March 13, 2021, from 10:00 a.m. to 12 Noon via a Zoom meeting hosted by St. Thomas MTC, New York. Around 155 participants and families attended from various churches including the Center B Mar Thoma Churches – Jerusalem MTC Connecticut, Carmel Mar Thoma Church Boston, Hudson Valley CSI Church NY, St. Mary's Orthodox Church Boston, Catholic Church Boston, and the Jacobite Church of Connecticut. Rev. Biji Mathew, the president of NERSS Center B, presided over the meeting. Mrs. Jessy Jose welcomed the gathering. Songs were sung by participants from St. Mary's Orthodox Church. The theme song was sung by Dr. Elizabeth Abraham and closing song by Ms. Melanie John. The monologue was done by the Hudson Valley CSI Church. Main message was by Mrs. Merlin Mary Mathew Kochamma from St. Mary's Cathedral Church, Puthencavu, Kerala. Prayers were offered by different ecumenical churches. All Center B Vicars of the NERSS attended the WDP celebration. Mrs. Soosan Philip of Boston Carmel MTC provided a virtual tour of Vanuatu with a custom-made video set to traditional folk music. The Vote of Thanks was proposed by Mrs. Thankam Vinu George.

Mrs. Thankam Vinu George (NERSS Center B Secretary)

NORTH CAROLINA MAR THOMA CHURCH

WDP was celebrated at North Carolina MTC on Friday, March 5, 2021, at 8:00 p.m. via Zoom. Rev. Sam Oommen Mathews led the special order of worship which was written by the women of Vanuatu. Sevika Sanghom members assisted and participated in the virtual WDP



worship service. Rev. Sam Oommen Mathews delivered a devotional message which highlighted the theme that the Word of God is to be the foundation of our lives. We thank God for blessing us with the opportunity to join with millions of men, women, and children around the world to celebrate WDP.

Rev. Sam Oommen Mathews (Vicar) and
Mrs. Viji Mathew (Sevika Sanghom Secretary)

NORTH EAST REGION SEVIKA SANGHOM

North East Region Sevika Sanghom observed WDP on Saturday, March 6, 2021, from 10:00 a.m. to 12 Noon. Regional President, Rev. Mathew Varghese, presided over the meeting. The participants took part in the worship order written by the WDP Committee of Vanuatu. Sevika Sanghom members from 13 parishes of the North East Region, including the Young Women's Fellowship, actively participated in the prayer service. The meeting was blessed by the presence of Rev. Aju Abraham (Diocesan Secretary), Rev. Manoj Idiculla (former Diocesan Secretary), senior retired clergy – Rev. P. M. Thomas and Rev. T. K. John, and Vicars from all parishes. The main message was given by Rev. Manoj Idiculla based on the theme "Build on a Strong Foundation" from Matthew 7:24-27. The offertory that was collected will be sent to the WDP Office. The meeting was a blessed one and was well attended.

Mrs. Mercy Roy Thomas (Regional Secretary)

PHOENIX MAR THOMA CHURCH AND COLORADO HOREB MAR THOMA CHURCH

Phoenix MTC and Colorado Horeb MTC Sevika Sanghom organized a combined WDP meeting via Zoom on Saturday, March 13, 2021 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 Noon. Rev. Geevarghese Kochummen, the Vicar of Phoenix MTC and Colorado Horeb MTC, presided over the meeting. Mrs. Shijy Alex, Executive Director, AMITA Health, Chicago, was the guest speaker. Around



37 participants from both the churches attended the meeting. Rev. Geevarghese Kochummen opened the meeting with prayer. After introductory remarks, an educational documentary video about Vanuatu was presented. Mrs. Minimol Mathai, the Secretary of Phoenix MTC Sevika Sanghom delivered the welcome speech. All sections of the prescribed worship order were led by various members of the Sevika Sanghom of both parishes. Mrs. Shijy Alex delivered a powerful devotional message based on the theme "Build on a Strong Foundation." Mini Kochamma offered prayer after the message. Mrs. Bindu Prasad, Secretary of Colorado Horeb MTC Sevika Sanghom, delivered the Vote of Thanks, followed by closing prayer and

benediction by Kochummen Achen. All in all, it was a blessed experience.

Mrs. Bindu Prasad
(Sevika Sanghom Secretary of Colorado Horeb MTC) &

Mrs. Minimol Mathai
(Sevika Sanghom Secretary of Phoenix MTC)

ECUMENICAL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP OF NEW JERSEY



Ecumenical Christian Fellowship of New Jersey (ECFNJ) hosted the WDP at St. Peter's MTC on Saturday, March 6, 2021. ECFNJ is a Christian Fellowship of NJ and a registered religious charitable organization in USA, comprised of around 20 South Indian, Kerala origin, episcopal churches. All twenty churches from various denominations participated in the WDP program. The meeting was broadcast live, and in-person participation was limited to organizers and the choir. The meeting was presided by ECFNJ President, Rev. Thomas K. Thomas (Vicar of St. Stephen's MTC) and was also attended by Fr. Anthony Pullukatt Xavier (St. Thomas Syro Malabar Catholic Church), Rev. Sam T. Mathew (Vicar of St. Peter's MTC), Rev. Babu K. Mathew (Vicar, St. Stephen's Indian Orthodox Church, Midland Park, NJ), Rev. Jaisen A. Thomas (Vicar, Redeemer MTC, NJ), and Rev. Joby Joy (Vicar, Immanuel CSI Church, Elizabeth, NJ), who was also the keynote speaker.

Mr. George Thomas (ECFNJ Secretary)

DETROIT MAR THOMA CHURCH – MICHIGAN

The Sevika Sanghom members of Detroit Mar Thoma Church (DMTC) celebrated WDP on Sunday, March 21, 2021. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, a maximum of 50 people could attend the worship service that day. DMTC



Sevika Sanghom members took the leadership to arrange the WDP celebration and collected a special offertory to support the women of Vanuatu. Opening prayer was led by the Vicar, Rev. Varghese Thomas, followed by a devotional message given by Mrs. Saramma Varghese, based on the theme "Build on a Strong Foundation." The worship concluded with benediction by Rev. Philip Varughese. Our Sevika Sanghom members included young women to seniors, who all participated in meaningful ways, including singing songs, leading worship, and offertory collection.

Mrs. Jessy Philip (Sevika Sanghom Secretary DMTC)

AUSTIN MAR THOMA CHURCH – TEXAS

WDP 2021 was celebrated in Austin MTC on Sunday, March 21, 2021, amidst the Holy Communion service. Sevika Sanghom members led the WDP special order of service on the virtual platform. Sevika Sanghom Secretary, Mrs. Sherill Varghese, coordinated the worship service. Mrs. Jeny Oommen delivered the sermon. This year's WDP service was a unique blend of in-person and virtual participation. About 100 people attended the service.

Rev. Biju P. Simon (Vicar)

SAN ANTONIO MAR THOMA CONGREGATION – TEXAS

San Antonio Mar Thoma Congregation celebrated this year's WDP virtually as part of the divine service on Saturday, March 20, 2021. Mrs. Elizabeth Thomas preached from the Word, and the Sevika Sanghom led the special order of worship coordinated by Dr. Mary George, Sevika Sanghom Secretary. A total of 50 people attended the service via Zoom virtual platform. WDP this year focused on praying for the country of Vanuatu and offered the opportunity to learn about this island nation along with the challenges its people face.

Rev. Biju P. Simon (Vicar)

MAR THOMA CHURCH OF GREATER WASHINGTON

The Sevika Sanghom of the MTC of Greater Washington celebrated WDP on Saturday, March 13, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. via the Zoom platform. Forty-five participants attended the event, including several non Sevika Sanghom members. The meaningful worship service, written by the women of Vanuatu, was led by our members. It was very encouraging to see many of the young members participating in the service with great enthusiasm. The WDP service was led by the Vicar, Rev. Anu Oommen, and Mrs. Ashley Oommen. The keynote speaker for the event was Mrs. Jency Anish Thomas, the Baskimo of Rev. Anish Thomas from the Christos Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia. Jency Kochamma spoke on the theme "Build on a Strong Foundation." Our members sang many melodious songs which made the WDP worship service a true blessing. The offertory collected will be used to advance the kingdom of God through several mission projects for the betterment of the women and children in Vanuatu. May God's grace be on all the participants and officials who worked tirelessly to make the WDP event a great success.

Dr. Elizabeth Thomas
(Secretary Sevika Sanghom MTCGW)

HOREB MAR THOMA CHURCH, LOS ANGELES – CALIFORNIA

Horeb MTC of Los Angeles celebrated this year's WDP on Sunday, March 14, 2021. The parish members joined together from their homes via Zoom for the WDP Sunday Worship Service, which was a Mar Thoma Divine Service that integrated special prayers prepared by the women of Vanuatu. A special video presentation on the country of Vanuatu was shown at the very start of the service. Sevika Sanghom members assisted in different parts of the worship service. Mrs. Mercy Abraham delivered a challenging message based on this year's theme: "Build on a Strong Foundation." Special offertory was collected on behalf of WDP USA, to be distributed to projects helping needy communities in Vanuatu as well as women and children in need around the world. All in all, the WDP celebration was a blessed occasion which enlightened and enriched us through the faith experiences of Vanuatu.

Rev. Arun Varghese (Vicar)

MAR THOMA CHURCH OF GREATER SEATTLE – WASHINGTON

The WDP at MTC of Greater Seattle was celebrated on Sunday, March 7, 2021, during the worship service. The Sevika Sanghom members of the church gave leadership in assisting for the WDP service. Sevika Sanghom Secretary, Mrs. Mary George, gave the message based on the theme "Build on a Strong Foundation" (Matthew 7:24-27). The parish Senior Choir (only women) and Junior Choir presented two Virtual Choir songs for the Diocesan World Day of Prayer program held on March 20, 2021. It was an opportunity and a great privilege for our Choirs to be a part of the WDP celebration.

Mary George
(Sevika Sanghom Secretary MTC of Greater Seattle)

ECUMENICAL WDP CELEBRATION – STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

An ecumenical WDP celebration was held on Saturday, March 27, 2021, at 10:00 a.m. via the Zoom platform hosted by The MTC Staten Island. The following seven churches: The MTC Staten Island, Tabore MTC, St. George Malankara Orthodox Church (Staten Island), St. Mary's Orthodox Church (Staten Island), Mar Gregorios Syrian Church (Staten Island), Blessed Kunjachen Syro Malabar Catholic Church (Staten Island), and Mar Gregorios Orthodox Church (Staten Island) actively participated in the various programs of the day. Rev. Saju Thekkineth from Syro Malabar Catholic Church offered the opening prayer, and Rev. Jacob Thomas from Tabore MTC presided over the meeting and delivered the presidential address. Rev. Vijay Abraham (St. Basilos and Gregorios Orthodox Church) gave the main message. An offertory was collected which will be sent to the WDP Office in New York. Dr. Sheeja Thomas projected some slides showing different activities of the women of Vanuatu. Mrs. Reena Sabu welcomed the audience, and Mrs. Annie Jose, Secretary of the Sevika Sanghom of the MTC Staten Island, expressed the Vote of Thanks. Miss Aksha Babu was the master of ceremony of the program. Rev. Johnson P. Abraham, Vicar of the MTC Staten Island, concluded the meeting with prayer and benediction.

Annie Jose
(Coordinator and SIMTC Sevika Sanghom Secretary)

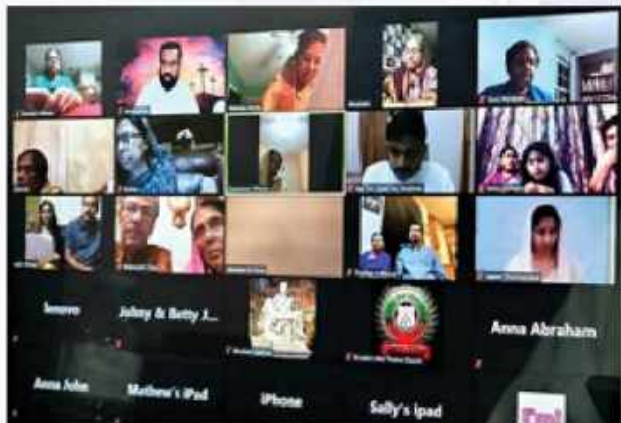
EMMANUEL MAR THOMA CHURCH, LUBBOCK – TEXAS



Emmanuel Mar Thoma Church, Lubbock, celebrated this year's WDP on Sunday, March 14, 2021, during the Holy Communion service. As a parish, we remembered the country Vanuatu in prayers. Dr. Annie Lincoln did a presentation on the topic "Build on a Strong Foundation" and gave an inspiring message about how to build an authentic foundation in Christ.

Rev. Sonu Varghese (Vicar)

ST. LUKE'S MAR THOMA CHURCH, FLORIDA, AND JACKSONVILLE CONGREGATION



A WDP celebration was organized by the Sevika Sanghom members of St. Luke's MTC and Jacksonville Congregation via Zoom. A blessed devotional message was shared by Rev. Jayan Joy Varghese from Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The message was based on the theme "Build on a Strong Foundation." Achen shared his own experiences of living on an island and related these to the people of Vanuatu. There were 48 families who

attended the worship. This service was made possible due to the effective leadership and faithful prayer of our Vicar, Rev. David Cherian. The Vote of Thanks was proposed by the Sevika Sanghom Secretary. The service concluded with prayer and benediction and was a great blessing for both churches.

Sarah Mathew

(St. Luke's MTC Sevika Sanghom Secretary)

DIOCESAN SUVISESHA SEVIKA SANGHOM

2021 World Day of Prayer Celebration
Diocesan Suvishesha Sevika Sanghom

The Diocesan Suvishesha Sevika Sanghom (DSSS) conducted a virtual World Day of Prayer celebration via Zoom on Saturday, March 20, 2021. The meeting began with a prayer by Rev. Aju Abraham (Diocesan/Bishop's Secretary), and introductory remarks were given by Mrs. Neenu Varghese. The opening song was led by the Long Island MTC Choir. Our Diocesan Bishop, along with women representatives of the Diocese, Mrs. Nini Mary Koshy, Mrs. Golda Manoj, and Mrs. Sherly Thomas, took part in the lighting of the lamp to inaugurate the meeting. Thirumeni led the Kauma, and the worship order prepared by the women of Vanuatu was led by Sevika Sanghom members from Canada, Detroit, and California.

The virtual gathering was welcomed by Rev. Shiby Varghese (Vice President, DSSS), following which our Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa, delivered the Presidential Address. A presentation on the country of Vanuatu was presented by Mrs. Nirmala Abraham who provided a virtual tour of the islands of Vanuatu. Nearly 40 members of the DSSS participated in a virtual choir and rendered a melodious song based on the theme. Felicitations were offered by Mrs. Rosangela Oliveria (Executive Director - WDP International Committee), Ms. Andrea Miskow (Executive Coordinator WDP USA), and Mrs. Neethi Prasad (WDP USA Board Member). Monologues, from four different women from parishes in Houston and New York, representing the voices of the women of Vanuatu were shared as videos. The devotional message was delivered by Dr. Annie Philip Jacob (MTC of Greater Washington). Dr. Jacob spoke with clarity and



conviction leading us in reflecting upon the foundation and structure of our lives built upon Christ.

We were overjoyed to see our children be a part of this service by singing a song titled, "Jesus You're My Firm Foundation." It was sung by the Junior Choir from the MTC of Greater Seattle. A choreography with narration and wonderful background music was arranged by Mrs. Jency Anish Thomas and Mrs. Neenu Varghese and performed by the young women of the Philadelphia region. This production brought to light and created

awareness regarding the different social issues that plague the women and children in Vanuatu.

Special greetings from the National Council of Churches in India were extended by Mrs. Leena Thomas (Vice President of NCCI, WDP – India). The Senior Women's Choir from the MTC of Greater Seattle led the closing song "In Christ Alone." Acknowledgments and Vote of Thanks were proposed by Mrs. Suma Chacko (DSSS Secretary). The meeting concluded with prayer and benediction by Rev. Manoj Idiculla. The meeting was

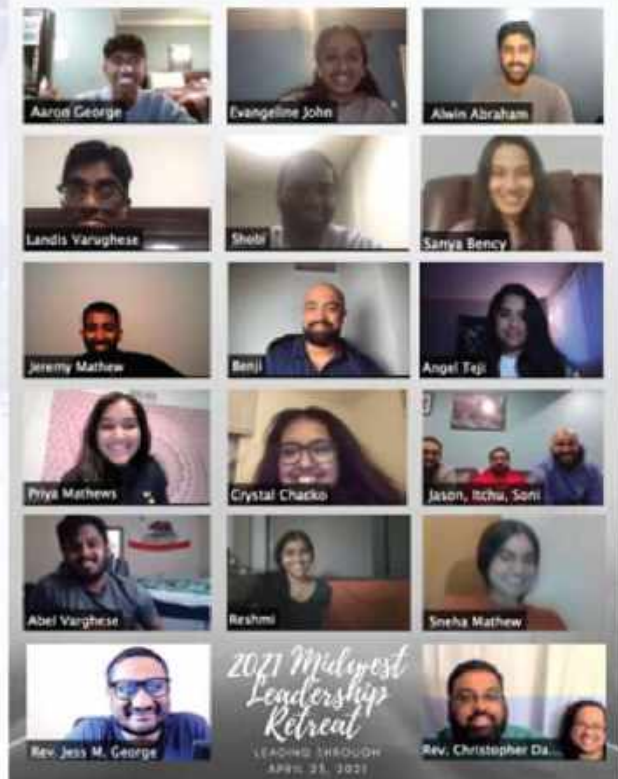


well attended by over 500 participants on Zoom and viewed by over 300 participants via YouTube. The program was indeed a blessing and was well organized and well received. A special word of appreciation to Mrs. Suma Chacko, Mrs. Nirmala Abraham, and Mrs. Neethi Prasad for their earnest efforts in coordinating and arranging this program.

MIDWEST REGION YOUTH FELLOWSHIP

2021 Midwest Regional Leadership Retreat

The 6th Annual Midwest Regional Youth Leadership Retreat was held on Friday, April 23, 2021, via Zoom. The retreat was jointly hosted by Detroit MTC and St. John's MTC, Michigan. The theme for this year was "Leading Through," based on John 14:27. The retreat was organized for youth leaders of the parishes in the Midwest Region. Rev. Varghese Thomas (Vicar of Detroit MTC) offered the opening prayer, while the youth members of Detroit MTC led Praise & Worship. Rev. Jess M. George (North East Youth Chaplain) was the main speaker, and Achen delivered a meaningful message based on the theme. Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel led a track based on the topic "Civil Righteousness" which was followed by small group discussion and an exciting round of Bible Jeopardy. Mr. Shobi Mathew (STJMTC) then led a session for intercession and prayer. The retreat concluded with Praise & Worship, vote of thanks, and prayer and benediction. Approximately twenty-five



youths from Chicago MTC, St. Thomas MTC (Lombard, IL), Detroit MTC, and St. John's MTC (Michigan), attended. The Midwest Regional Youth Fellowship Committee expresses its appreciation to our clergy and to the host parishes, and it is also grateful to Ms. Sanya Bency (DMTC), Ms. Evangeline John (DMTC), Ms. Sneha Mathew (STJMTC) for serving as Conveners.

Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel (Midwest Youth Chaplain)

EPISCOPAL VISITS

IMMANUEL MAR THOMA CHURCH, HOUSTON

Houston Immanuel Mar Thoma Church was blessed and privileged by the esteemed presence and leadership of our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa during the Passion Week.

On April 1, 2021, Thirumeni led the Maundy Thursday Holy Qurbana Service in English which began at 6:30 p.m. and shared from the Word of God. Our Vicar Rev. Abraham Varghese and Assistant Vicar Rev. Saji Albi assisted Thirumeni in the Holy Qurbana Service.

On April 2, 2021, Thirumeni led the Good Friday Service which began at 9:00 a.m. Rev. Abraham Varghese and Rev. Saji Albi assisted Thirumeni. Good Friday Service



had three parts. Part 1 & 3 was in Malayalam. Part 2 was in English. Thirumeni delivered the message during the 2nd Part of the Service.

During the episcopal visit Thirumeni formally met and had an informal lunch meeting with the newly elected 2021 Executive Committee members. Thirumeni had positive dialogue with the Committee Members pertaining to their concerns regarding the Parish activities & related matters. At Thirumeni's direction, the Executive Committee proposed the following 2 new members to the Messenger Promotion Committee: Mr. Rajan Daniel (Assembly Member) and Mr. M. A. Varughese (Sabha Prathinidhi Mandalam Representative) in addition to the existing Messenger Promotion committee member Mr. Mathew P. Varghese.

May the Good Lord continue to shower His blessings upon our beloved Thirumeni to lead this diocese that His Lordship is entrusted with now, to lead the Mar Thoma Sabha at large and attract masses to the Kingdom of God for the glory and extension of His Kingdom.

Christopher George
Secretary

ASCENSION MTC, PHILADELPHIA

Ascension Mar Thoma Church (AMTC) was blessed with the visit of His Grace Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa, the Diocesan Bishop of North America & Europe, from Friday, April 9, 2021, until Sunday, April 11, 2021. During Thirumeni's visit, His Grace celebrated two major sacraments, the Holy Kassessa Ordination, and the First Holy Communion Service, which earned the hearts of the members and will ever be remembered as golden events in the parish's history.

a) Holy Kassessa Ordination: On Friday, April 9, 2021, Thirumeni conducted a special devotion to prepare Rev. Dn. Jeswin S. John towards the Kassessa Ordination. Clergies of the region, Deacon's family and church officials attended the session. On Saturday, April 10, 2021, AMTC was thrilled to witness its first member entering the Priesthood. The service began with the procession of Clergies and then Holy Communion service in English. The Kassessa Ordination sacrament was conducted during the Holy Communion Service. It was done with limited in-person participants due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. The entire service was livestreamed around the globe via DSMC Media & Ascension MTC live. At end of the service when Thirumeni introduced the new priest Rev. Jeswin S. John to the congregation it brought tremendous gladness and solemn praises from the audience.



b) First Communion Service: On Sunday, April 11, 2021, His Grace celebrated the Holy Communion, which was a heavenly experience for the gathering. Nineteen children from the parish declared their faith and received their First Holy Communion. We AMTC members praise God and congratulate each one of the new Holy Communicants. Dedication service for the Executive Committee members of 2021 was also conducted during the Holy Communion Service.

c) Southeast RAC: In the afternoon on Sunday April 11, 2021, Thirumeni chaired the RAC General Body meeting of the Southeast Region, hosted by AMTC. Presentation of the annual report, accounts, budget, and election of the Office bearers were conducted during the session.

Rev. Jinson K. Mathew
President & Vicar AMTC

MTC DALLAS FARMER'S BRANCH



EASTER SUNDAY AT MTC DALLAS FARMER'S BRANCH

Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos arrived in Dallas on Saturday, April 3, 2021. He presided over the General body of SWRAC, which was held at The Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch. Thirumeni appreciated the efforts of the outgoing SWRAC office bearers and thanked them for their service. The office bearers for the new term were elected and the future goals of the SWRAC were discussed. During this meeting, Thirumeni recognized the outgoing Achens from the SW Region and presented a gift to each one of them.

On Easter Sunday April 4, 2021, Thirumeni conducted the Holy Communion service at the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch, and celebrated Easter with us. Thirumeni during his sermon, emphasized the need to find Christ in others and make our life a pleasant smell for others. Thirumeni also highlighted some of the activities and the mission work undertaken by the Diocese and how the mission work is helping the people in need. After the service, Thirumeni met briefly with Youth Fellowship members and the church office bearers. On Sunday afternoon, Thirumeni attended the consecration of the new sanctuary of the Crossway Mar Thoma Church.

Thirumeni's visit was a blessing to all the members of the parish. The members of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch express their gratitude to Thirumeni for his visit.

Aby George, Secretary

AUSTIN MAR THOMA CHURCH, TEXAS

March 31, 2021 - EPISCOPAL VISIT, FIRST HOLY COMMUNION AND PARSONAGE DEDICATION

Diocesan Episcopa, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Thirumeni visited the Mar Thoma Church of Austin, Texas on March 30 and 31, 2021. Philoxenos Thirumeni provided leadership for Holy Week Sandhya Namaskaram on Tuesday evening, met with parish executive committee and spoke to first holy communicants. On Wednesday afternoon at 5 PM a newly constructed parsonage of the Austin MTC was dedicated and blessed by Thirumeni. Ecumenical clergy from St. Thomas Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church and Syro- Malabar Catholic St. Alphonso church was present. Following the Holy Communion Service was conducted. Five young people of the parish received the



First Communion. A short felicitation meeting was held after the communion service. During the meeting, the parish honored parsonage construction subcommittee members, first holy communicants' families gave a thanksgiving offering to Mission work of the Diocese. Sunday School Children sang a special song virtually. Rev. Biju P Simon welcomed everyone and vice president Dr. Varghese Mathew, read the Parish report providing an overview of the church activities. Thirumeni in his response message acknowledged the need for

witnessing Christ contextually and exhorted the parish to grow in Christ Jesus and participate in the mission of the Kingdom of God. The meeting opened with prayer by Rev. M. P. Yohannan achen and ended with prayer by Mr. Jacob Thomas (Soman) and benediction by Thirumeni. During the Episcopal visit the Parish experienced enthusiasm and energy.

Submitted by
Rev. Biju P. Simon
 (Vicar)



*Jesus said,
 "Let the little children come to me
 and do not hinder them, for to such
 belongs the kingdom of heaven."*

Matthew 19:14

CHURCH DEDICATION

JERUSALEM MAR THOMA CHURCH, CONNECTICUT



Under the leadership of the Diocesan Bishop, His Grace Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, and Vicar, Rev. Biji Mathew, the dedication service of the Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church, Connecticut, was held on March 21st, 2021. Also in attendance were Rev. Aju Abraham (Diocesan Secretary) and Rev. Manoj Idiculla (former Diocesan Secretary and former Vicar). In 2020, the members of Jerusalem MTC were able to purchase their own church building located at 115 W. Main Street in Plainville, CT. Since the purchase, the church has undergone renovations in preparation for the dedication service. The dedication service was followed by Holy Communion service and a public meeting. Jerusalem



MTC is the first Mar Thoma Church to be established in the state of Connecticut. The parish has over 30 member families who are actively involved in Choir, Youth Fellowship, Edavaka Mission, and Sevika Sangham. The Office Bearers, Executive Committee members, and all parishioners are congratulated and appreciated for coming together in such a short period of time to make all necessary arrangements for a blessed dedication service. May the parish and its members continue to strive for the glory of God.

Mr. Jacob V George
Secretary

CROSS WAY MAR THOMA CHURCH, DALLAS, TX



The dedication service of Cross Way Mar Thoma Church was held on April 4th, 2021 at 5001 Ben Davis Road, Sachse, Texas. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Diocesan Episcopa, was the chief celebrant. Rev. Sonu S. Varghese (Vicar) and other clergy from the Dallas area were also in attendance and provided leadership on this blessed occasion. Cross Way Mar Thoma Church, the newest Mar Thoma parish in the Dallas area, initially became a congregation on December 21, 2015. The



congregation grew to reach 40 families, and on May 28, 2019, the Episcopal Synod of the Malankara Mar Thoma



Syrian Church recognized the congregation as a parish. On January 24, 2020, the church acquired a building and 2.5 acres at 5001 Ben Davis in Sachse, Texas. The renovation was completed in time for the consecration.

Rev. Sonu S. Varghese
Vicar

OBITUARIES



Mr. Gheevarghese John

Mr. Gheevarghese John was born on December 10, 1919, in Mavelikara, Kerala, India. He served in the Indian Army during World War II and raised his family while working for Brunei Shell Petroleum until his retirement in 1980. After his beloved wife, Kunjamma, passed way in 1992, he joined his son in Minnesota and became an active member of the Mar Thoma Congregation of Minneapolis. Mr. Gheevarghese John was called to eternity on March 19, 2021 at the age of 101. He leaves behind his two children: George (wife - Debbie) and Elizabeth (husband - Alok); five grandchildren: Anil (wife - Claire), Ajay (wife - Caitlin), Ashwin (wife - Autumn), Sara, and Matthew, and five great grandchildren: Anjali, Lila, Liam, Nicholas, and Matthew. He will be greatly missed by his family and friends in India, Brunei, and the USA. The funeral service was held on March 27, 2021 at the Gearty-Delmore Funeral Chapel in Plymouth, Minnesota.



Mr. Varughese Mathew (Georgekutty)

Mr. Varughese Mathew (Georgekutty) was called to eternity on May 10, 2021, at the Lankenau Hospital Center, Wynnewood, PA. He was 74 years old. He is survived by his wife Elizabeth Varughese, and daughters Dimple Thankom Varughese, Deepa Thankom Varughese, and son Joju Mathew Varughese. Son in laws/Daughter in laws: Shibu Thomas, Shibu Paul, Saisy Esthappan, and grandchildren: Allen Shibu Thomas, Irene Liza Shibu, Josiah Shibu Paul, Joeliyn Sara Paul, and Gabreilla Maria Joju.





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