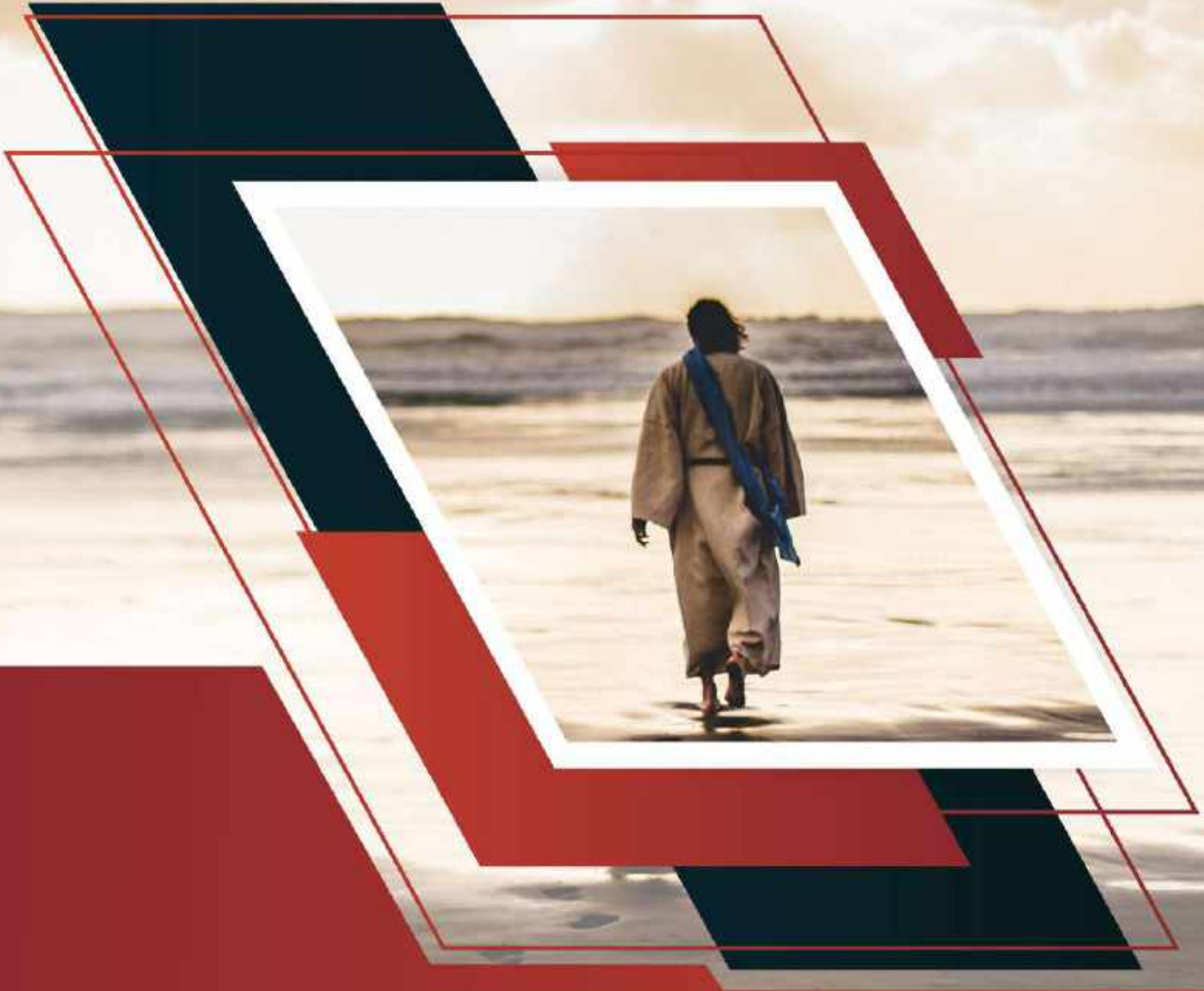




MAR THOMA MESSENGER

A PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

April-June 2020



PASSION OF  CHRIST
FOR RECONCILIATION



**The Diocese of
North America and Europe**



90th
Birthday

**Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma
Metropolitan**

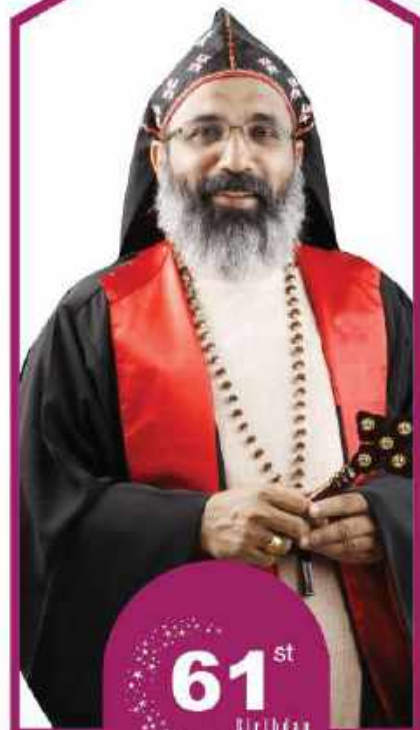
June 27



103rd
Birthday

**Most Rev. Dr. Philipose
Mar Chrysostom
Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan**

April 27



61st
Birthday

**Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Theethos
Episcopa**

May 10



**WISHING OUR DEAR TIRUMENIS
GOD'S CHOICEST
BLESSINGS**



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April-June 2020

PASSION OF  CHRIST
FOR RECONCILIATION

A Publication of the Diocese of North America & Europe
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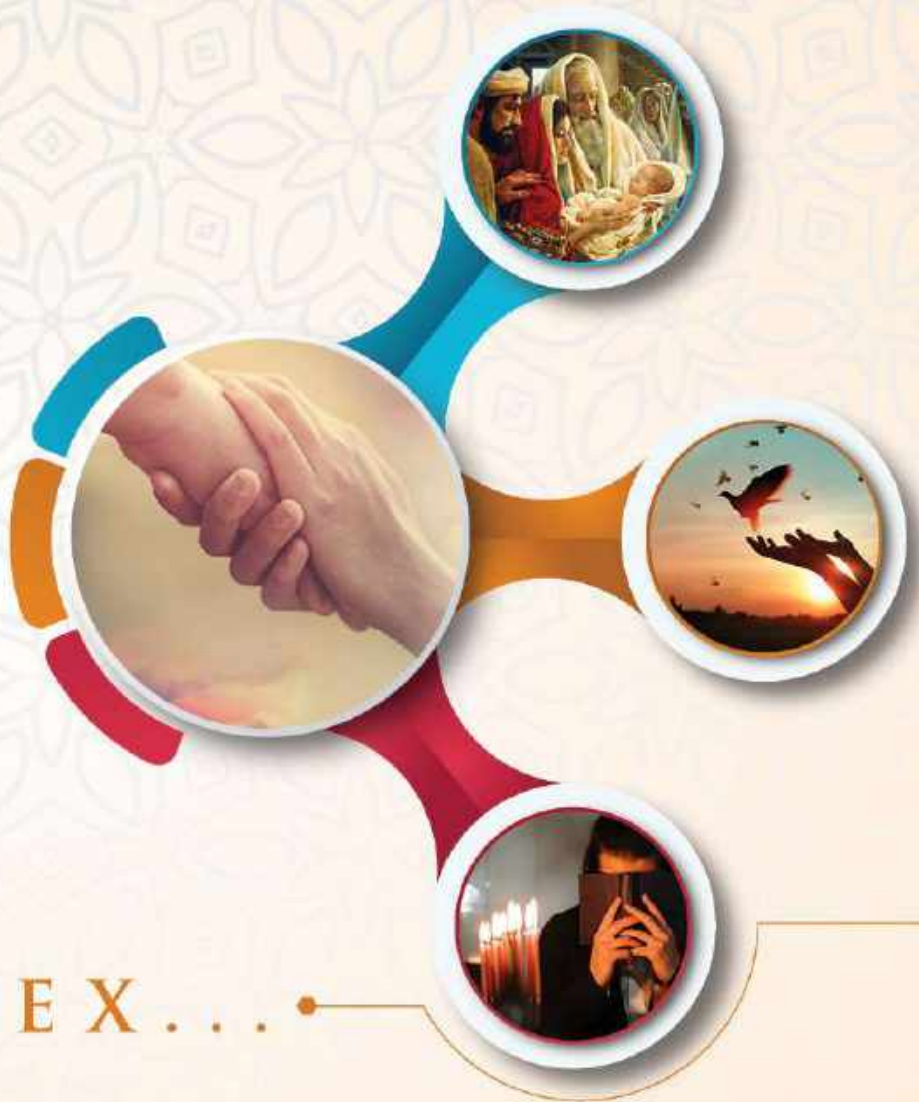


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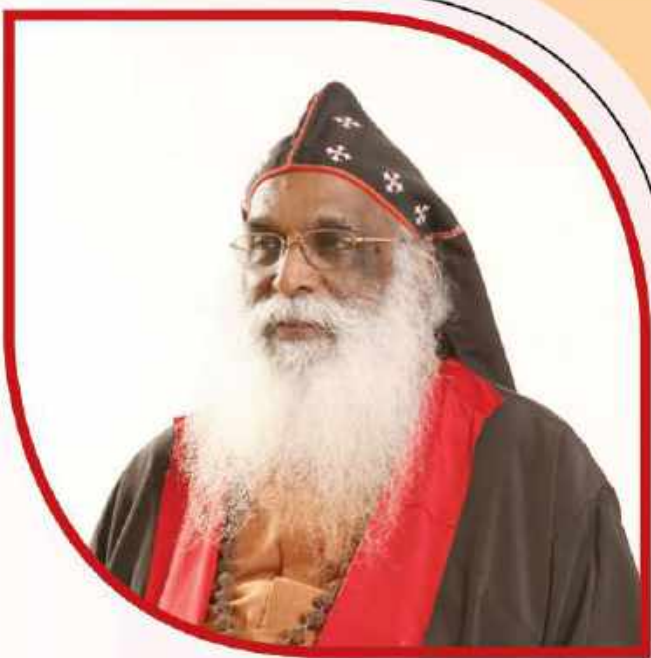
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Message from
The Metropolitan

Message

*D*eearly beloved in Christ,

The month of April is gone. We had strange and unusual experiences. We were under restraints. We had to limit the meditations of the great the Passion Week, and the joyous moments of the Resurrection. By what is offered through modern technology, each family could participate, within the family, in the common worship services. The pandemic caused havoc, confusion, and sorrow in people of all countries of the world. Man, using the intelligence and talents given by God, is trying his best to find a solution to prevent the spread of this virus. God created this universe. He wanted everything to exist in the natural way. But man's selfishness caused imbalance in nature. The ultimate result is the pandemic. When we underwent the restraints, the polluted atmosphere was purified. Water and air got the original freshness. Let us pray to God for healing and transformation of earth through His grace and mercy. Just as in the critical period of the floods, and other

calamities, let us join hands to eradicate this virus from our midst.

As our nation is under immense stress and undergoing financial difficulties, so is the Church. It is only through the wholehearted and prayerful cooperation of the members of the Church, we would be able to overcome this crisis. I have made some suggestions through Circular Number 366. Hope the parish administrators and members act positively, so that we can overcome these hurdles.

We remember with admiration the selfless services of the respected clergy who are retiring this year. We praise God for their services which made the Church more invigorating and enriching. New appointments of the priests are not possible now. The members of our Yuvajana Sakhyam, at many places in Kerala volunteered to cooperate with people connected with communal kitchens and other service areas. The works done under our organization, namely CARD, also are admirable. I appreciate all who worked in the forefront. Today Kerala stands unique in the world in fighting the corona virus.

Our Valiya Metropolitan Thirumeni entered the age of 103 on April 27, 2020. On that auspicious day I conducted Holy Communion Service in a specially arranged room in the hospital. Valiya Thirumeni joyfully participated in the service and shared the bread and wine. Because we must observe strict discipline these days, until the lockdown days come to an end, we will not allow any visitors for Thirumeni.

Dr. T. M. Thomas was a great personality. He came to the USA in 1963. He worked in the field of education incessantly for very many years. His contributions and leadership to the North American Diocese in its formative years are memorable. In those days I was also there for higher studies. The friendship we had from those days still remains. I praise God for the glorious life of Dr. Thomas.

One week after Easter, I felt like having a vomiting sensation but I did not vomit. I went for a medical checkup at the Kumbanadu Fellowship Mission Hospital and thereafter at the Ernakulam Lizi Hospital. On the very first day, after drinking tea that vomiting sensation disappeared and I have not had any recurrence. Now I am having usual meals. There is no stomach illness, but some people are bent

upon spreading rumors about my health through social media. They have not come to see me, and I understand that they did not directly inquire about my condition. This condition of spreading rumors is also a virus attack in human nature in the modern age. I attend to all communications every day and keep replying to the letters I receive.

With awe and reverence, we enter into the meditations of the month of May. We begin with the responses of environmental awareness. We think about the "Partnership of man in God's plan: sowing and harvesting." Then we observe the two disappointed disciples of Christ, running away in fear from Jerusalem where they lived, to Emmaus. They are not able to imbibe the reality of Resurrection. But Jesus becomes their fellow traveler. Later they go through various kinds of experiences provided by the Lord such as the experience of being with Christ, of being broken, of being collected, of being in glory, and being part of sharing. This all happened when the risen Lord gave them the bread and wine after consecrating them. The next Sunday we meditate the Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. This is followed by the topic "Mission as sharing Christ." Towards the last Sunday of May, we understand the greatness of the day of Pentecost. We become aware of the promise of the Holy Spirit.

Let us live in hope. Though the pandemic is horrible, let us hope it will pass on and a new dawn of peace and healing would settle. The light of the Holy Spirit will give light to all of us.

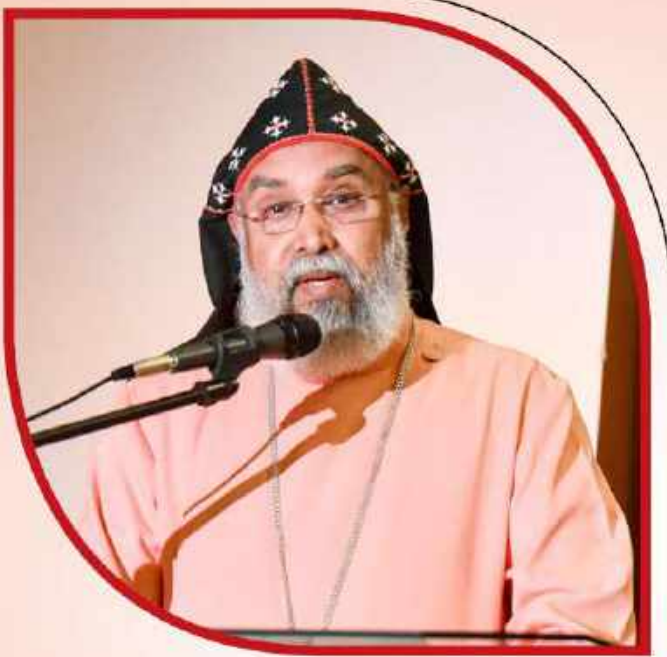
"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15: 57, 58).

Grace be with you always!



DR. JOSEPH MAR THOMA METROPOLITAN

(Translated by Prof. Elias Abraham, Baltimore MTC, from the May, 2020 issue of Tharaka)



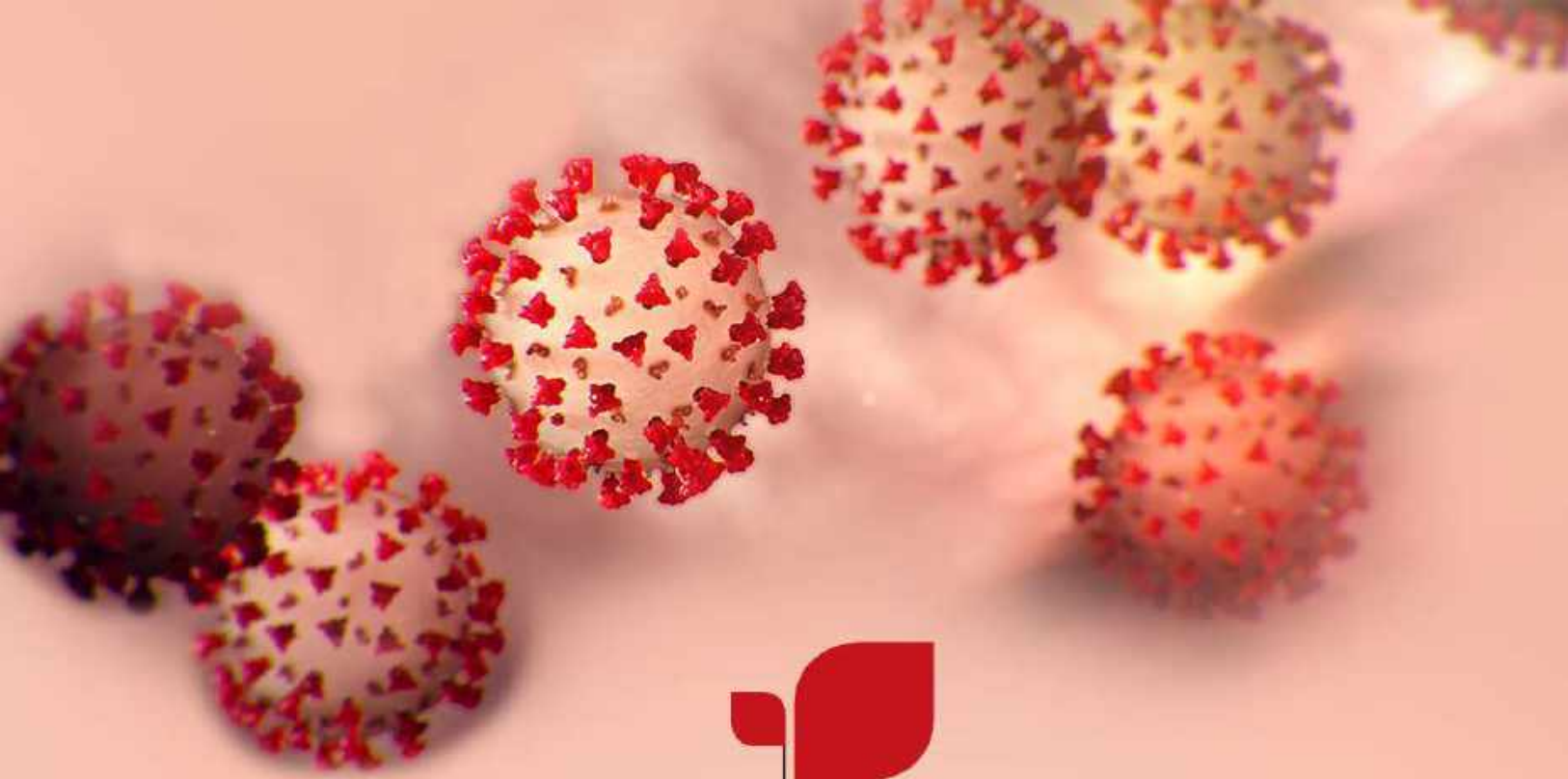
Message from The Diocesan Episcopa

Message

*D*eearly beloved in Christ,

Humanity all over the world is facing a great threat through the COVID-19 Pandemic, the invisible killer. Uncertainty and chaos prevail everywhere, no matter where one lives or what status one has or what position one holds. It has affected human life in all respects. It has affected the economy of nations and the security of every person and moved everywhere crossing the all borders. While scientists work tirelessly to find remedies to eradicate the virus that created the havoc, health professionals struggle hard to provide necessary medical care to the ailing patients. Every human being feels the need of the other, while practicing the social system of self-promoted isolation through 'social distancing' or 'physical distancing.'

Religious communities have evolved new ways of spiritual fellowship avoiding in-person gatherings and instead adopting 'virtual worship forms.' With all churches closed, the Christian community is adapting confined and adapting to home worship. Virtual worship has taken the role to stay connected and to keep relationships in place. Our clergy was well prepared for such an initiative, since we had an in-depth discussion in the Diocesan clergy conference last year on the theme, "Virtual



church of the future: possibilities and challenges." I appreciate all parishes that kept on-line prayer fellowship as an ongoing program, and for encouraging one another at this critical time. The lent prayers and the Holy week services were well organized at the parish level and Diocesan level and all could participate in a meaningful way.

During this Lent season, while people went through pain and suffering, it was an opportunity to recollect the life of Jesus Christ and the suffering and the agony on the cross for the redemption of humanity. The passion of Christ for saving the world and to reconcile the world gave newness to humanity. For Christ, the sole purpose of undergoing the suffering was to redeem humanity from their sins. It reveals the passion for preserving life and restoring the lost relationship of human beings with God. Through the sacrifice of his life Jesus Christ was doing the will of God the Father for saving the world. As St. Paul put it, "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2Cor: 5.19). God has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this ministry of reconciliation was given to the church to continue.

We live at a time when it is more relevant to show the forgiving and reconciling message to the world and live with the passion of Christ for saving humanity. This is the time we feel the loss of many of our loved ones, those who served the church and society with commitment and were faithful to the Gospel. The services of Dr. T. M. Thomas, one of the pioneers who

contributed much for the establishment of the Mar Thoma Diocese in North America and worked hard for a steady growth in the spiritual life of the Mar Thoma community, will ever be remembered. We express our deep condolence to the bereaved families.

Since there is still uncertainty and restrictions for meetings and free movements of people in many states in North America, we are forced to postpone some of our major events to later dates. The Diocesan Assembly proposed for April will be held on August 15, 2020 and the Diocesan Family Conference that was planned for the first week of July 2020 is rescheduled from July 1 to 4, 2021, and will be held at the Carmel Mar Thoma Center, Atlanta. I do appreciate all our members who made arrangements for attending these programs and wish that God may keep everyone safe for a meaningful participation. I also appreciate our members who keep up the financial commitment to the parishes, in these difficult times, in order to keep the parish life viable and active.

Let the presence and power of the risen Lord give renewed strength to everyone.

Prayers and wishes,

Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos
Diocesan Bishop



EDITORIAL

This issue of the Messenger comes to you amidst unprecedented events that are impacting the entire world in which we live. The COVID-19 infection is wreaking havoc in many countries. World economies are crashing. The lives and lifestyles of people around the world are changing. Experts predict the worst and envisage a challenging future and impending recession.

Our message to you, our readers, and our community is: "Don't lose hope." "Don't give up." This is a time for each one of us to reflect on our life and reconcile our differences with God, with all human beings, and with our environment. Aptly, the theme for this April 2020 issue of the Messenger is "Passion of Christ for Reconciliation."

Dictionaries define reconciliation as: (1) reconciling of people by ending conflicts and renewing friendly relationships; (2) achieving consistency and compatibility between apparently conflicting principles, ideas, and data; and (3) the act of a person seeking God's absolution of sins (typically through confession and penance). Christ passionately calls everyone for reconciliation in the above-mentioned areas and in every aspect of our lives. He calls us to reconcile - now.

There are several instances in the Bible where Jesus' spirit of reconciliation is displayed. When Simeon takes Jesus in his arms at the temple and praises God, he foresees a child who would reconcile the Jews and the Gentiles, and he declares that the baby is "...a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel" (Luke 2:32). Jesus reconciles the "unclean" man with leprosy and restores him a life amongst the "clean" (Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-44; Luke 5:12-15). Jesus reconciles the conflict between His personal will with the will of His heavenly Father by praying, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Again in John 6:38 He reconciles and proclaims, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me." At the time of utmost pain and anguish on the cross, He reconciles with His aggressors by praying, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

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Jesus demands reconciliation through forgiveness in Mark 11:25, "...if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." He invites us as he invited the young ruler, "...sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22).

We are living through a time when religious worship services are cancelled indefinitely in many parts of the world. Gatherings of all forms are discouraged to prevent the spread of disease. Our nations are in the grip of fear and panic. Our advancements in science and technology, our stock-market successes, and our lavish lifestyles were all being taken for granted; we considered ourselves invincible and now we are witnessing how fragile everything is in the face of a viral pandemic. What else does one need to recognize the power of the Master of the Universe?

Almost everything around us is shutting-down and people are left hoping that they would come out of this crisis alive. There is nothing more to hope for. Every tomorrow is unpredictable and uncertain. What we

have is today. Hence, it is time to let go of any ego that is left within us and surrender to His will. Reconcile!

As we come up with renewed forms of worship, especially during this Lenten season, let us make every effort to reconcile with God Almighty, with all people, and with the environment which he has entrusted to us. Christ beckons each one of us to reconcile. It ought to be a personal reconciliation, a reconciliation which resets our relationship with God and all people. May God guide us all as we wade through this crisis and every other crisis that we face in life.

Our hearts go out to all the people in America, in India, and around the world. Let us uphold one another in prayer. May God grant us His grace to survive and thrive.

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

Method of Reconciliation

 **Dr. Vino Daniel**
Philadelphia MTC



Definition.

The word “reconcile” means “to win over to friendliness...to compose or settle a quarrel, differences, etc., to bring into agreement or harmony.” Doctrinally it is the work of God toward man which makes possible and actual man’s fellowship with God. Provisionally, reconciliation was made once and for all by Christ on the cross for the whole world. Experientially, reconciliation became the possession of the believer when he believes.

Need for Reconciliation

Why do we need to be reconciled? Because of sin (Rom. 3:23). The world is out of balance. It doesn’t conform to God’s standard. See Rom. 5:6-10; “Without strength” – weakness, unable to conform to His



standard. Sin is not only a problem of justice; it is a problem of a broken relationship with God. Sin is a condition. At the cross, God reaches out to us to restore a life-giving relationship with himself. The cross brings reconciliation.

Method of Reconciliation

Through the death of Christ, through the Passion of Christ reconciliation has been provided for all. It is through Christ (Rom. 5:18; Rom. 5:10-11; Eph. 2:16). It is through His finished work at the cross. It is by the precious blood of Christ (Rom. 5:11). Jesus took our place (II Cor. 5:20-21): He became sin for us. He took our sins and bore them on the cross. He was the only acceptable substitute. He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. His great desire for all those to whom he speaks is to see them live, and live not for themselves, but for Jesus Christ.

The Messengers of Reconciliation

We have a story to tell (II Cor. 5:18-20). We are His "Ambassadors" = a personal representative. He has given to us a message, ministry and mandate. He didn't give it to the angels but to us. We're on a mission

from God. The motivation for our mission is the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ. The message of our mission is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The magnificence of our mission is that God has made us his ambassadors to carry this precious message to the world. This is a message our generation needs to hear. We see people all around us seeking to find a way to God. Following all sorts of spiritual advisors in the hope of finding a way to make themselves worthy of God or seeking some sort of experience of God's presence in their lives. But the good news of the gospel is that God has done it already. He has already made the way clear for us to be reunited with God. Christ has died in our place. His death and resurrection have broken down the barriers that have separated us from God ever since Adam and Eve first rebelled against God's command. He's given us his own Holy Spirit to bring us new life and made us his ambassadors to take that good news to our friends, family and to the whole world. Let's pray that we would be able to fulfill that mission in the world.

Conclusion

Are you reconciled? If not come to Jesus by faith in His work at the cross. If so, what kind of ambassador are you?



The Reconciling “Passion” of Jesus before the Passion: A Legacy for the Church to Enliven



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

Jesus’ passion is not to be reduced to his sufferings on the cross. Jesus’ passion is his intense willingness to fulfill his Father’s will reflected throughout his earthly ministry. His passion is an intense historical expression of the eternal passion of his heavenly Abba to redeem and reconcile the world into His purposes. Benjamin R. Wilson calls this “the passion” before the passion.¹ The Gospel of John depicts this passion as, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” The Psalmist expresses the beauty of this divine passion in these words, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long” (Psalm 23:6, NRSV). An ever pursuing and ever enduring goodness and mercy of God to the world is the foundation of Jesus’ passion to reconcile the sinful world to his heavenly Father. His passion was the totality of his devotion to the will of his Father. The devotion that made him roam around the Roman Palestine to seek, find and redeem the lost sheep of Israel and the sheep of other folds too.

It was in conjunction to the passion that was reflected in all God’s anointed in the history of salvation; Moses, Samuel, the judges, the prophets and the apostles. Moses’ repeated climbing of the Mount Sinai to know the will of God in his people’s life and to connect them to that will is an exemplary embodiment of this passion. Elijah’s passion was to express the incomparable love and might of Yahweh to his people in the midst of the perversions in their worship life. Prophets urged the ruling class and the common folk alike to pursue the will of God in the political, social, economic and religious life of the whole Israel. Apostles passionately preached the all reconciling love of God revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Another important aspect of his passion was that it was his deliberate choice. The synoptic gospels records Jesus’ prediction of passion for three times in his ministry (Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33-34). The gospel of John has recorded three statements of Jesus where he is mentioning about the “lifting up” of the Son of Man - a veiled reference to his crucifixion (Jn. 3:14, 8:28, 14:32). He knew he will be sharing the fate of the prophets of the

1. Benjamin R. Wilson, *The Saving Cross of the Suffering Christ: The Death of Jesus in Lukan Soteriology*. Berlin: Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, 2016.

ancient who passionately stood for the fulfillment of God's will in the life of God's people. It is interesting to note the ironical observation Jesus makes when he says, "it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33). A city that is in obsession with the "ritual holiness" fails to understand Jesus as the reconciling presence of God. But despite the predictions of his death, he also expresses his confidence that he will emerge victorious through his passion because of his trust in the Abba God (Mark 10:34). Thus passion was his choice to reconcile the world with God. Jesus says, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

This article is an attempt to closely examine four main aspects of this passion that paves the way for the reconciliation among the earthlings and between earth and heaven.

Passion for righteousness brings reconciliation

Jesus exhorted his disciples to "seek first His kingdom and its righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). He defined all his relationships in the light of the understanding of righteousness. He taught his hearers the scope of righteousness was far more than simply being nice to all. It's not about loving a harmless neighbor but more about "loving ones enemies and praying for those who persecute" (Matthew 5:44). It is more than being simply fair or in a clearer term it is more about being just in all relationships. Jesus was striving hard to the point of laying down his life for the realization of righteousness in human to human and human to God relationships. Even at the cross he stood for the fulfillment of righteousness. His passion for righteousness was so infectious even Pilate, the Roman governor, was impressed at its radiance. He tells the Jews during Jesus' trial, "I find no case against him" (John 18:38). Pilate understands it was Jesus' passion for truth and righteousness that brings him to that time of trial. His passion for righteousness continues through his passion on the cross. Jesus absolves the thief on the cross and grants him a place in his glory; "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). He intercedes for the people on the cross, who were instrumental for his crucifixion. He prayed, "Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). This made the centurion to comment, "He was a righteous person" (Luke 23:47). His commendation was not about his innocence but about his righteousness. Righteousness is a quality far more passionate than the neutrality of innocence. It involves a readiness to be hurt or bled or lay down the life for the wellbeing of others and for the fulfillment

of will of God. His sense of righteousness prompted him to challenge the injustices of the political and religious establishments. He publicly called Herod a fox (Luke 13:32). He also warned his hearers to be beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod (Mark 8:15). He condemned the unholy alliance of the political and religious establishments of his time, which were self-servient rather than serving and fulfilling the intentions of God in the life of the community. For Jesus reconciliation for a sinful world had no other way but to embrace this high standard of righteousness.

Passion for obedience brings reconciliation

What can bring people together and at peace with each other is nothing but obedience to God. The disobedience of Adam and Eve expels them from a place assigned for them by God to live in wellbeing and in just and mutually enriching relationship with the whole nature. The consequence of disobedience is estrangement from the love of God and the wellbeing of the creation. Sin snaps the life giving connection with the divine easily. The Babel incident depicted in Genesis chapter 11 tells us how the recalcitrance of the human beings brings dispersion and division among people. The passion to usurp the power of God as is expressed in Babel is the exact antithesis of the passion of obedience to God. Babel was an attempt to ignore and dispel God through the inflation of human might and pride. Abraham's obedience is an alternate possibility in this context that brings God's reconciliation on nations. God speaks to Abraham, "and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Moses' obedience reconciles the erratic Hebrew tribes in the wilderness with God and helps to avert the wrath of God on them. Jesus defines obedience to God as the binding force that effects reconciliation in the divided contexts of human life. For him the relationships in the Kingdom of God is defined in the light of this obedience to God; "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:49-50). The greatest temptation Jesus faced from the tempter was to disobey his heavenly Abba. The Tempter communicates to him the cost he has to pay for being obedient to his Abba and also of the lucrative benefits of him choosing otherwise to become a mass leader of the Jews. But he replies quoting the scripture and strongly affirms his intention to be in strict obedience to his Father; "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him" (Luke 4:8). Gethsemane was another testing time and he was tempted to evade the cup of passion

his Father willed for him. But Jesus stayed focused. The intensity of his passion to obey his Abba is reflected in the narration of the gospel writers who say, "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground" (Luke 22:44).

Passion for forgiveness brings reconciliation

One of the greatest contentions the leaders of the religious establishment in Jerusalem had with Jesus was regarding his authority to forgive sins. Jesus was so moved by the suffering of the world to instantly announce God's forgiveness in people's life. Jesus tells the paralytic man who was brought to his presence by his well-wishers that his "sins are forgiven" (Matthew 1:2). He is encouraged to take heart and live his life in hope of God's redemption. The scribes label Jesus as a blasphemer. Because, he is alleged to have taken the position of God to forgive sins. Prophet Isaiah presents God as one who "blots out the transgressions" of His people and one who would not remember their sins (Is. 43:25). In fact, Jesus represented that forgiving presence of God in people's life that blots out the guilt of transgressions. The paralytic stands up from the crippling guilt of his sins and walks away. Jesus' daring willingness to forgive the woman who was caught in adultery and brought to him by the scribes and Pharisees is a glaring example of his outflowing acts of forgiveness. Jesus tells the woman "neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (John 8:11). Jesus' hanging on the cross at Calvary is not a picture of a defeated hapless victim but of a forgiving God. Jesus' intercession seeking forgiveness on people who perpetrated violence against him is noteworthy. He prays, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Jesus' forgiveness is something rooted in the steadfast love and goodness of his Father God in His relationship with the world. He introduces His Father as the perfect good "for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). He is the only one who is perfect in the practice of forgiveness. He exhorts his disciples to imitate his Father; "Be perfect, therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48).

Passion for sacrificial self-giving is the way to reconciliation

St. Paul presents Jesus as the paradigm of self-emptying for the glory of God. "Though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself..." (Philippians 2:6). He exhorts the Philippians to have the same mind of Jesus in them. When Jesus invites people to be his

disciples, he exhorts them to take up their crosses and follow him. Cross for Jesus meant nothing but a complete self-giving of oneself. Therefore he says, "and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Mt. 10:38-39). Self-giving is not about losing oneself, but finding oneself in an authentic way in the light of the incarnation of God in Jesus. Jesus finds himself in life threatening circumstances, because of his self-giving devotion for the glory of his Abba in heaven. He goes to Bethany when he hears the news of Lazarus' death putting his life at risk knowing it was a place that tried to stone him. The disciples were trying to prevent him from going to Bethany. But Jesus sees it as an occasion to glorify his Father. Jesus had always been a man for others in the self-giving devotion to his Father God. Evangelist St. Mark tells his readers that the final journey of Jesus to Jerusalem was a journey with a clear intention of self-giving for the glory of God (Mark 10:33). Finally, the self-giving of Jesus on the cross is an event every Christian has to meditate continuously in his/ her journey to fulfill God's will in life. The last loud cry of Jesus on the cross is recorded by Luke in this way; "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Church is called to emulate the passion of Jesus for reconciliation

Church is not a place where people are judged according to their deeds. Church is not a place where the sinners are condemned. Church needs to be an agent of Jesus the Christ that mediates God's reconciliation with a broken world. When the angel is writing to the churches in Ephesus and Laodicea in the revelation of John in Patmos, he rebukes the Ephesian church (Rev. 2:4) for forsaking the love they initially had and the Laodicean church for being lukewarm (Rev. 4:15). In both cases the churches have lost the passion and excitement of being the churches of the Lord. Churches are called to expand the scope and the righteousness of God's kingdom into communities and individual lives. Churches are called to inculcate renewed habits of obedience in the changing contexts of life in the world. Churches are called to extend the unconditional forgiveness of God to the world around it that reels under the consequences of sin. And of course the churches are called for the ultimate sacrifice of it's self for the glory of God in every contact it makes with the world. Let us as Christ's church, humbly make this stronger resolve during this Easter season to emulate the passion of Jesus to reconcile ourselves and the world to God in all aspects of our ministry.

103rd

Birthday Celebration



Prof. Elias Abraham
Baltimore

A Birthday Anthem on **Mar Chrysostom**, Our Valiya Thirumeni

April makes us happy,
when Spring sings songs of joy;
and we feel honored to celebrate
another year with our Valiya Thirumeni,
who, completes five score and three,
and moves with vibrant spiritual force
in graceful ease and heavenly bliss.

The velvet Nature charioted by beauteous stars
moves in elegance to greet the great one in prayers,
the night in unequal delight fills the trees with flowers,
the heaven's choir, the birthday anthem sings,
while His Grace with great sense of humor
enjoys the theme of a distant thought,
brought to light by a passionate visage.

Oh! Mar Chrysostom, an immense tower of glory,
apart from being our spiritual leader,
a philanthropist, a lodestar of the ordinary,
an upholder of God's love, enlivening thousands,
bearer of Padmabushan, bestowed on those with greatness,
pride of the Mar Thoma Church,
golden tongued, and humor filled;
'Happy Birthday, and many returns of the day.'
Our humble hearts make this request, Your Lordship,
'Lead us, guide us, and bless us too.'



THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY OF HOPE

Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham

Community is to be understood as a web of human relationships and not a collection of individuals. The Christian church is a community of faith, a community of communities. The search for a community of faith should always be within the framework of the wider human community. The basic search here is for the dignity and self-identity of human communities cutting across religious, caste, linguistic, and communal affiliations.

1. Christian community within the human community

Here the role of the church is to be understood as a community within the wider community. Our parishes are not to be narrow, communal, ethnic and parochial entities. The Bangkok Assembly of the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC) in 1964 rightly chose as its theme "The Christian community within the wider human community." The document of the Assembly

challenged the Asian Christians to become aware of the meaning and implication of the Christian presence in the situations and occupations in which they and their fellow men are placed by God. The challenge here is to do away with the narrow and parochial loyalties. Any unity at local levels should not be the cause of disunity at higher levels. For instance, many of our narrow linguistic and ethnic communities such as Hindutva and Khalistan in India, or perhaps, the Jewish and Christian Zionist movements in the West, very often threaten the very fabric of a "the wider community" in our times. Instead of homogenization of culture and language; as it was done during the Nazi regime in Germany and the Hindutva regime in India; what we need today is the recognition and promotion of diversity within our social milieu. No culture is static. What is to be underscored is the interpenetration of cultures in our search for the wider human community.

2. Faith response to crises of life

Let me attempt to evaluate three recent events: The Tsunami, the Delhi riots and the Coronavirus disease (COVID 19). The first is a natural catastrophe, the second a human-made violence, and its aftermath and the third, an epidemic. In the Tsunami, several thousand lost their lives and live-stock. The worst affected places were Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and India. The recent Delhi riots were in the context of peoples' response to the new Citizens' Amendment Bill of the Government of India. The worst affected people are Muslims, especially the poor ones. It was reported on media that in some places in Delhi the culprits even asked for the religion of the people at their doorsteps before setting their houses ablaze. At the time of writing this article, the causality due to the coronavirus epidemic is massive, and the worst affected places are China and Italy. The efforts of the Kerala Health Department are commendable. These involve home quarantine, isolation departments in hospitals, etc. According to media reports, the Government is setting up huge isolation facilities near all airports in the state which can accommodate up to 10,000 people. These are for those who are coming from overseas. Food and medicines are supplied to them for free! In the world over, the quarantine period is 14 days; whereas in Kerala, it is 28 days. Due to this kind of vigilance, not a single corona death has occurred so far in the State.

Now, let me bring out five responses to the issues mentioned above:

One: The agnostic, atheist response.

This leisure-time kind of response is mainly in social media. Some have asked: Where is your God? What is the validity of religion and rituals? How dare you cancel your worship services and other rituals? Don't you think at least now that only science has the solutions to these kinds of issues? Well, the question here is whether this is a creation of our science and technology, especially in the field of biological weapons. The U.S and China are blaming each other as to who is primarily responsible. I am not trying to make any value judgments here. As pointed out earlier, several of the ministers in the Left Front ruling Government are either agnostics or atheists. Nevertheless, they are not trying to prove or disprove anything here. They are busy working for people through vigilant preventive measures, awareness programs, support systems at different levels, etc.

Two: The market, corporate response.

They are worried that the markets and their profits are going down. A person in Calicut in Kerala was taken into custody by the police for hoarding masks

and sanitizers! Now the Government of India took the initiative to fix the maximum price of masks and hand sanitizers!

Three: The Biblical literalists' response.

As usual, for them, these are all signs of the end! There is nothing that can be done in this context, except prayer and fasting so that the Lord would do something.

Four: The moralistic response

There are media reports about some kind of "moral policing" in the State of Maharashtra. There, surprisingly, the suspected Corona patients are given some kind of a mark on their bodies which says, "On Corona Isolation!" The Government's logic is that it is for community health. Nevertheless, the fact is that the infected individuals are stigmatized in the community; and in some places, they find it difficult to travel for their essential needs; not even to the hospitals!

Five: The Kingdom response.

For example, I am reminded of an inter-religious prayer, a Remembrance Day in the context of the Tsunami in New York in which a special collection was taken for the relief work in Indonesia. This amount plus the collections from the churches were sent for relief work through the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A (NCC-USA). I was on the Executive Board of the NCC-USA, especially on the Justice and Peace Commission during this period, representing the Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church. In the context of the Delhi riots, the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) initiated an inter-religious prayer and visited the families of the victims and in collaboration with CASA, distributed food and other essential items to the victims. Several churches offered their buildings as refuge centers.

In Kerala; now church youth groups are engaged in the distribution of food and medicines to those who are in isolation camps. What we need in situations such as this is not abstract philosophical or theological responses but concrete and passionate actions. Let us remind ourselves that the presence of God is to be sought in our response to tragedies and not necessarily within the tragedies. Along with that, we have to do away with the usual "disciplinary evil" kind of approach in our response to these issues. Because such approaches can cause more harm to those who are affected or those who are the victims. For example, in communal riots always some are victims and some

are the culprits. In this sensitive situation of crisis let us be reminded of the reassurance of Rabindra Nath Tagore: All crises are situations of grace; when you are in a crisis, the depth dimension of your life is revealed.

Besides the above, does the corona epidemic teach us anything?

Perhaps, a few lessons are the following:

One: Our life is inevitably in the community. No one is an island and we are not on our own. It is not just my health that matters but the health and well being of the community.

Two: All of us are inter-dependent. All our actions affect the lives of others.

Three: Despite all the developments in the field of science and technology, notwithstanding the contributions of them in the area of health and medical field, there are also threats to human life at different levels. Rajeev Bhargava sheds light on this paucity of modern science in his article "Revisiting scientific temper": How can modern science be valorized after awareness of the devastation it has caused? Nuclear destruction, industrial pollution, climate change, and a technologically induced sedentary life-style are all undeniable facts (Hindu, March 18, 2020).

Despite all the achievements of modern science and technology, human beings are limited and science

doesn't have answers to some of the ethical issues within its framework.

Four: Re-discovery of our family time. Some of our family counselors have always been telling us to set apart quality family time. It seems, those exhortations almost fell on deaf ears as we were too busy with our work, business and so on. Surprisingly, the Government of India declared Sunday, March 22, 2020 as the "People's Curfew Day," and all were challenged to stay at home! Now, we have come to our senses; and all were at home. Well, there are several creative things that we could do during this time to promote the quality of our life such as reading, writing, cleaning, gardening and so on. Since many in the IT field are working from home, parents were available to their children.

The need of the times is to promote signs of hope at different levels. As C. S. Song, the Taiwanese author writes so poignantly: What we need is a strong faith in tomorrow despite the bitter disappointments of yesterday and the cruel realities of today. This is possible only through God who is always the source of life, love, and grace.

(The author is the former Diocesan/Bishop's secretary of the Diocese of North America and Europe. This is part of a manuscript being prepared by the author for his upcoming book: Rethinking Hope)

World Day of Prayer 2020

Compiled by
Mrs. Neethi Prasad (Chicago, IL)
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 action throughout the year.

WDP USA Board

The current WDP USA Board operates from New York and is comprised of several women coming from different denominations, consisting of both ordained and lay members. The USA Board works in coordination with the international WDP Committee to promote and plan for WDP services across the USA. It is also the responsibility of the WDP USA Board to determine the use and distribution of the offertory collected during WDP services in America. The general practice is to utilize the funds collected to support the needs of women and children across the globe to bring about healing and to overcome barriers.





WDP USA Board Members: Sitting left to right: Susan S. Kim (United Methodist Church), Susan Skoglund (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)) **Secretary**, Esther Stephens (United Church of Christ), **Treasurer**, Mary McKee Martin (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)), Marilyn Pagán-Banks (United Church of Christ). Standing left to right: Neethi Prasad (Mar Thoma Syrian Church), Gall Logan Strange (Baptist), **Vice-Chair**, Fanya Burford-Berry (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), **Chair**, Shanell Allen (The Salvation Army), Mary Jorgenson (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)), Arvella Austin Strong (African Methodist Episcopal Church), Susan Hattel (United Methodist Church).

WDP 2020 Country of Focus – Zimbabwe



The country of focus for WDP 2020 was Zimbabwe, and the women of the WDP Committee of this country prepared the materials and selected the theme for this year. The theme “Rise! Take Your Mat and Walk” is based on Jesus’ encounter with an invalid at the pool of Bethesda as found in St. John 5:2-9a. Our sisters from Zimbabwe are taking Jesus’ encounter as a call to action in love for peace and reconciliation. The artwork for this year was created by Nonhlanhla Mathe. This painting portrays the lives of the people

in Zimbabwe as transitioning from one with a dark and difficult past to a more prosperous and promising future. The painting is also a display of love, healing, and reconciliation.

WDP Reports

Despite the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, many of our Mar Thoma parishes celebrated World Day Prayer at the parish or regional level and many others ecumenically. We are thankful to God Almighty for enabling us to do so as we pray for the healing the world awaits.

Atlanta Ecumenical

The Sevika Sangham and Edavaka Mission members of the Mar Thoma Church, Atlanta came together at the Carmel Mar Thoma Center on Friday, March 6th to celebrate World Day of Prayer, under the leadership of Vicar, Rev. Aju Abraham. The service was conducted as an ecumenical service, with the participation of CSI and Evangelical Churches. Rev. Georgekutty Oommen (St. Thomas Evangelical Church) offered the opening prayer, while Sevika Sangham members assisted in the worship service led by Rev. Aju Abraham. Rev. Jacob P. Solomon (CSI Emmanuel Congregation) was



the main speaker. Achen's message was based on the WDP theme. Dinner was arranged for everyone after the prayer. Approximately 60 believers took part in the service.

Austin Mar Thoma Church (Austin, Texas)

The World Day of Prayer was observed at the parish level in Austin Mar Thoma Church on Sunday, March



15th. The women led the WDP special order of service. The sermon was based on the WDP theme and was delivered by Mrs. Sherill Varghese, who is currently serving as the Sevika Sangham Secretary of the parish. The WDP slides were displayed during the sermon. Mrs. Susan George gave a brief presentation about the country of Zimbabwe. The WDP service was a blessing for all those who attended.

Chicago Ecumenical

World Day of Prayer was celebrated by the Ecumenical Council of Kerala Churches in Chicago, comprising of 16 parishes belonging to various denominations.

meditation based on St. John 5:2-9. Mrs. Rupa John, Diocesan General Secretary of the Vanitha Samajam, Malankara Orthodox Church, was the main speaker, and she gave a meaningful message. A very informative video presentation was done about Zimbabwe. A play



This year, St. Thomas Orthodox Church of Chicago hosted the event on Saturday, March 7th. The worship order was led by the Clergy and host parish. Mr. Anto Kavalackal, Ecumenical Council Secretary, welcomed the gathering, and the inauguration was done by the lighting of the lamp. The Presidential Address was given by Rev. Ham Joseph. Rev. Dr. Bhanu Samuel (CSI Christ Church of Chicago) gave a thought-provoking

showing the lifestyle in Zimbabwe was presented by the women, men, and youth of the host parish. Also, a choir of about 20 women led the songs. Mrs. Susamma Thomas was the convener. Mrs. Aleyamma Punnoose, Joint Secretary of the Council, thanked all the participants. About 250 people attended. Breakfast and lunch were provided for all.

Horeb Mar Thoma Church (Los Angeles, California)

Horeb MTC celebrated World Day of Prayer on Sunday, March 8th under the leadership of the parish's Sevika Sangham. The celebration began with the WDP worship order led by the Vicar, Rev. Arun Samuel Varghese, and assisted by Dr. Mini Thomas and Mrs. Sharon Mathew Kochamma. A special offertory was collected during service on behalf of WDP USA, to be distributed to projects helping needy communities in Zimbabwe. The main speaker for this year's WDP celebration was Mrs. Sherly Saji, the founding Sevika Sangham Secretary of the parish. She started with a brief PowerPoint presentation, providing insights about the country of



Zimbabwe, the struggles of the people there, and the progression of the community as one with hope and a better future. The theme was based on the ability of each person to act on the opportunities presented to them. As WDP was conducted in conjunction with the Holy Qurbana service, it was a blessed occasion which included the presence and participation of parish members, from young to old.

Kansas Mar Thoma Church

World Day of Prayer was celebrated on Sunday, January 19th during the Holy Communion service. Rev.



Christopher Daniel (Vicar) led special intercessory prayers for Zimbabwe focusing on the various needs of the country. Mrs. Neethi Prasad spoke from the Word of God and gave a message based on the WDP theme. She spoke about the healing of the man with infirmity and mentioned three different scenarios and three different kinds of people that are found in the theme passage.

Mar Thoma Church of Silicon Valley (San Jose, California)

The Mar Thoma Church of Silicon Valley gathered on Sunday, March 8th at the church to celebrate the World Day of Prayer and to pray for the country Zimbabwe. Rev. Larry Varghese (Vicar) and Sevika



Sangham volunteers led the congregation through the WDP Liturgy. The choir sang the song "Take Your Mat and Walk" as the opening song and "Jesu I Dwala" during the offertory. Special offertory envelopes were provided to everyone for making their contribution towards WDP. The sermon was given by Roshin Kochamma (wife of Rev. Larry Varghese). Kochamma gave a brief introduction on WDP and the writer country Zimbabwe. The message was based on the WDP theme, giving importance to the three action verbs.

Mar Thoma Congregation Minneapolis (Minnesota)



World Day of Prayer was celebrated on Saturday, February 1st during the Holy Communion service. Rev. Christopher Daniel (Vicar) led special intercessory prayers for Zimbabwe focusing on the various needs of the country. The children of the congregation took great effort to make preparations to sing the theme song. Mrs. Neethi Prasad spoke from the Word of God and gave a message based on the WDP theme, highlighting the healing of the man at the pool at Bethesda.

Mar Thoma Congregation of Rio Grande Valley (Mc Allen, Texas)

World Day of prayer was observed at the Mar Thoma Congregation of Rio Grande Valley on Sunday, March 8th. The special order of service was led by the Sevika Sangham members. Rev. Biju P. Simon (Vicar) gave the sermon focusing on the WDP theme. The service was a blessing to all those who attended.

New Jersey Ecumenical

World Day of Prayer 2020 was observed by the Ecumenical Christian Fellowship of New Jersey (ECFNJ) on Saturday, March 7th at St. Stephen's Mar Thoma Church (East Brunswick, NJ). The meeting was well attended by over 250 people from several



Kerala Christian Churches in New Jersey. Rev. Thomas K. Thomas (Vicar, St. Stephen's MTC) and Mrs. Mini Cheriyan welcomed the gathering. ECFNJ's President, Rev. Joby Joy (Immanuel CSI Church), delivered the Presidential Address. The Keynote Message on the theme was delivered by Rev. Sam T. Mathew (Vicar, St. Peter's MTC, Teaneck, NJ). The NJ Ecumenical Choir, under the able direction of Rev. Dr. Jacob David, sang several Christian songs in English and Malayalam. Women from various parishes helped to lead the worship service, and the Sunday School children of St. Stephen's MTC led the children's worship service. Mrs.

Remany Joseph made a presentation on the country of Zimbabwe. The ECFNJ Program Coordinator, Mrs. Sajini Sachariah, delivered the Vote of Thanks. The event ended with a closing prayer and benediction, followed by a time of fellowship with snacks.

New York Center B

World Day of Prayer was held on Saturday, March 8th at Hudson Valley CSI Church. Mar Thoma Churches of North East Region Centre B and the CSI Church of Hudson Valley participated in the meeting. Rev. Joby Varghese (CSI, Hudson Valley), Rev. Biji Mathew (NY Ebenezer MTC & CT Jerusalem MTC), Rev. Jacob Thomas (NY Bethany MTC), Rev. Santhosh Joseph



(NY St. James MTC) and Rev. K. A. Varghese (NY St. Andrew's MTC) attended and gave leadership in the meeting. Mrs. Elizabeth Jacob (wife of Rev. Johnson P. Abraham, Vicar of Staten Island MTC) was the chief guest and gave the main message. WDP worship order was conducted and leadership was given by the Sevika Sangham members of various parishes. CSI Women's Choir of Hudson Valley led the songs. Around 70 members attended the meeting. Lunch was also provided by the CSI Church. It was a blessing for everyone who attended the meeting.

North Carolina Mar Thoma Church



World Day of Prayer 2020 was celebrated on Friday, March 6th at the North Carolina Mar Thoma Church. Rev. Sam Oommen Mathews led the special order of worship along with Sevika Sangham members. Rev. Sam Oommen Mathews led a devotional message on physical and spiritual healing that is needed in this world today. At the end of the service, volunteers were requested to pray daily for current issues in Zimbabwe, India, the USA, and the world at large which is facing the outbreak of COVID-19.

Oklahoma Ecumenical

World Day of Prayer 2020 was observed in Oklahoma as an ecumenical gathering under the leadership of the Mar Thoma Church of Oklahoma's Sevika Sangam.



It was held on Sunday, March 1st at the Oklahoma MTC. More than one hundred women from four Kerala episcopal churches attended the service. The meeting started with a procession of the Clergy and Choirs. The worship was led by women representatives from each of the churches along with the Clergy and Catholic nuns. Three young girls dressed in yellow, white and red also participated in leading the service. For the worship, both the English and Malayalam version of worship order was used. Mrs. Bindu Sunil, from the Catholic Church, delivered the sermon. Choirs from all the four churches and our Mar Thoma youths sang one song each during the service. The church was decorated with the national flag of Zimbabwe, lighted candles, placards, an ornamented lectern with the four Zimbabwean colors, and lily flowers. Special appreciation to the following Achens for their prayerful presence: Very Rev. V. M. Thomas (Vicar, St. George Jacobite Church), Rev. Fr. Paul Kudakarakkaran (Vicar of the Catholic Church), Rev. Fr. Cherian M. Kunnel (Vicar, St. Thomas Orthodox Church), and Rev. Thomas Joseph (Vicar, Oklahoma MTC).

Philadelphia Ecumenical

The Ecumenical Fellowship of Indian Churches in Pennsylvania (EFICP) hosted World Day of Prayer

2020 on Saturday, March 7th at Christos Mar Thoma Church (Philadelphia). The main speaker for this occasion was Mrs. Neethi Prasad who currently serves on the WDP USA Board since 2017. She delivered the message based on the WDP theme. A special guest, Mrs. Nyevero Ruth Manokore, representing the host country Zimbabwe, shared her childhood memories about her country and also sang a gospel song in her native language. The event consisted of two parts. The first part included the worship service along with songs by the choir, while the second part consisted of a public meeting which included a presentation on Zimbabwe, a monologue, a theme song presentation by children, a skit, and a dance honoring the country of focus. Approximately 500 people attended this



blessed event. Offertory was also collected and will be donated to WDP ministries. The event concluded with prayer and benediction followed by lunch for all the attendees.

St. John's Mar Thoma Church, Michigan (Troy, MI)

World Day of Prayer was celebrated on Sunday, March 1st during the Holy Communion service. Special prayers of intercession were led by the Vicar, Rev. Christopher Daniel, focusing on the country of Zimbabwe and the various concerns of the people there. Mrs. Neethi Prasad shared from the Word of God and spoke about



the background of the healing of the man with an infirmity. She also encouraged everyone to not be afraid to act on Jesus' words and also mentioned the

various struggles the country of Zimbabwe continues to face, seeking everyone's continued prayerful support for the country of focus.

Staten Island Ecumenical (New York)

World Day of Prayer was held in Staten Island on Saturday, February 29th at St. Mary's Orthodox Church (Staten Island). WDP was celebrated ecumenically with the participation of eight churches in Staten

and the WDP 2020 slideshow was shown, followed by the Bible reading. Mrs. Elizabeth Jacob (wife of Rev. Johnson P. Abraham), gave the message for the day which was followed by a special intercessory



Island. Rev. Bobby Varghese presided over the prayer meeting and gave the presidential address. The service began with songs sung by the ecumenical choir, led by Mr. Roshin Mammen and Mrs. Shyla Roshin. This was followed by the order of worship led by Rev. Johnson P. Abraham and women representatives from the churches. The WDP 2019 report was presented,

prayer led by Mrs. Zenat Ann Varghese (wife of Rev. Bobby Varghese) and Mrs. Lekha Reji for people and countries affected by the coronavirus. Offertory was collected, and the meeting ended with prayer and benediction by Very Rev. Fr. Paulose Adai Corepiscopa. All attendees then participated in the fellowship lunch after the meeting.

“NOWHERE PHYSICALLY IS SPIRITUALLY EVERYWHERE”¹



Dr. Zac Varghese, London

The Covid-19 global pandemic from the beginning of 2020 caused large scale death, anxiety, fear and extraordinary disruption to very many routine activities people became used to and took for granted across the world. What is certain is that the world in which we shall emerge post-coronavirus will be different to the world of pre-coronavirus. There's a saying attributed to Winston Churchill, 'Never let a crisis go to waste.' These challenging times provide an opportunity for us to consider more deeply what kind of world that we wish to see emerge out of this global crisis. The enforced lockdowns, social and physical distancing is opening up new streamed worship and virtual fellowships to give support to each other. It is a comma, a semicolon or a period from our busy, hurly-burly, lifestyles of busyness and frantic running around for often unnecessary, unachievable objectives and ambitions. Therefore, this pause could be an opportunity to deepen our spiritual, devotional and intellectual practices. If we strive to transform our isolation into an opportunity for communal solitude, we might discover that it is, as it has always been, the seedbed for growth in holiness and wholeness, for communion and connection, for renewal and transformation.

The title of this short article is taken from the book, 'The Cloud of Unknowing'. This spiritual classic was written by an anonymous author toward the end of the fourteenth century. The early manuscript was in

Middle English and there are many modern revised editions of this amazing book, but even these also require time and effort to understand. This almost forgotten classic is particularly relevant to us today as we face the Covid-19 pandemic. The world in the 14th century had to face many catastrophic events which killed millions of people in Europe and elsewhere because of the Great Famine (1315-1317), the Black Death (1346-1351) and the 100 year war (1337-1453). When I hear that more and more people are now engaged in prayer and participating in virtual interactions, I feel that the 'Cloud of Unknowing' is written for us to overcome our fear and have a much closer relationship with our all-knowing and all caring God of love and compassion.

This book teaches the value of contemplation and prayer in which the person participating in meditation does not use words or images but simply expresses his love for God, not in word but in his being. The person standing before God stands before a very slowly revealing mystery who is 'beyond' clear images and who is beyond sight; yet this clouded mystery shrouds a presence which is powerful, creative, healing and loving. This mystical realisation of God is beyond all our words, images, theological and intellectual understanding. Moses in realising the appearance of God in the burning bush is an example of such a mystical revelation (Exo 3:1ff). It is simply the love of God which helps us to understand this mystery. The

book is all about a prayer centred-life and begins with a familiar prayer used in the liturgy of the Eucharist: **"Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden; . . . through Christ our lord, Amen."** It is really wonderful to see this devotional classic opening with such a beautiful prayer. Bishop Stephen Cottrell of Chelmsford Diocese (England) defined prayer in this way: **"Prayer is the lover coming to the presence of the beloved and saying, 'I love you. "** Prayer is not something that we do, but what God does in us. At the heart of our faith is the message of God saying to us, "I love you." God is a great romantic, he is the lover and prayer is our response to God. Our response should be simply: **"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."**

As Jesus was telling the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12: 13-34) whose harvest was so abundant, he put a sting into the tail and the punch line goes like this: **"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'"** Then Jesus goes on to speak about the meaninglessness of worrying about food and drink or about provision for the future. Seek the Kingdom of God and leave the worrying and provisions of material needs to Him. War mongering attitudes of powerful nations of the world and their weapons of mass destruction have no defence against this spiky virus with its crown of thorns. Together with God-given scientific means, we need humility and international co-operation to fight his virus. It is not the time for accusing others about from where or how coronavirus originated and spread. We need spiritual strength for our journey towards wholeness, but we cannot store up spiritual supplies as we store food for winter months and other emergencies of life with PPE and such. We need new strength for each day and a fresh experience of God at each step of this spiritual journey. There are no spiritual capitalists, but there are capitalists who made fortunes out of trading spirituality of a kind. But those who have no such entrepreneurship, there are spiritual exercises that are helpful in renewing our strength; silent meditation is one such important exercise for opening up to God's continual grace. No 'password breakers or code breakers' can enter into this silence.'

Silence is a wonderful medium for spiritual replenishment. No amount of methodical organisation of learning the Scripture or liturgical busyness is a substitute for a silent conversation with the Lord. The devil knows the Scripture inside out, but it does not do him any good! I have been a workaholic all through my life and also even after my retirement; but

lately I have realised this is due to my inability to say "no" when a "no" is what is required to gain a little bit of peace and tranquillity in life. This is also due to the desire to be liked, which is always exhausting. Religious people are not most relaxed; they have a fear of silence because of the need to wear the faith on their sleeves by continually attending functions after functions, conventions and prayer group meetings. This pious fussiness or busyness is an indication of a lack of interior stillness and strength in the unmerited loving acceptance of God's amazing grace. We are often self-congratulating over the past or dreaming or pessimistic about the future; we should always remember that we live in the present; it is in the 'now' we experience the amazing interaction with our Lord. It is in the 'now' we experience love. We make our decisions in the present, and the present exists out of time. It is a fraction of time, in a very tiny moment, where two periods meet – the past and the future. Therefore, in the 'now' a person is always free to make his choice. 'Now' is the God-given moment in which divine nature may be revealed, so let us experience this moment in utter silence and reverence.

If we want to understand silence in action we must look at Jesus, our Lord and our God. In Jesus we see a perfect balance between inner silence and outer activity; in Jesus we see **silence in activity and activity in silence.** It is to this balance and this diffusion of one with the other that we aspire, and to the gaining to which our lives should be directed. Alternation between activity and the silence is set in motion in all physical and metaphysical dimensions such as day and night, wave motions of peak and trough, high tide and low tide, sleep and wake patterns, seasonal changes and setting up of the circadian rhythm. Lack of silent sleep can cause health-related issues. Thus silence is the centre of our existence. In this amazing world of silence, movement is not necessarily the direct physical movement from one person to another but from the silence in one person to the silence in the other.² It is in silence we feel the grace and power of the indwelling Christ. It was this awareness which prompted the Psalmist to say, **"Be still, and know that I am God."** Silence should always be regarded as one of the blessings of a Christian lifestyle, for it prepares the way for the union of the soul with the will of God.

According to the author of 'The Cloud of Unknowing', in every God-directed life there are four-fold developments and these could be seen in terms of common, special, solitary and perfect. The common call begins at baptism, for a Christian, and grows through grace, until we are drawn to make a conscious

decision to live in accordance with baptismal pledges and our faith formation through the help of parents, Godparents and the faith community. All Christians are called through baptism to a total commitment to the service of God. In other religious traditions this common call may be acknowledged by other initiation ceremonies. However, from this common call some people will grow to a particular call to become a teacher, lawyer, doctor, businessman or a priest. But in addition to the common and particular call there is a unique call that is a call to develop a unique relationship with God in solitary meditation and a prayer-centred life which should lead to perfection with time. We can only hear this unique call in our silent meditation before God. It is here we are given sufficient knowledge about God. It is at this point we may pray silently with St. Paul and hear the assurance from God: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"** (2Cor 12: 9). Here is the importance of the revelation in Psalms, **"Be silent and know that I am God."** This is indeed the way to perfection in Christ Jesus under the power of the Holy Spirit.

A person who has responded to the particular call can become stuck in his role in a repetitive sort of way if that person does not understand that there is more to life than being a priest or a doctor or a teacher. We may even get frustrated in a particular call when we begin to think that we have done all by simply filling in a vacancy, but it is important to remember that there is yet another call to answer, a unique call for a solitary focused life towards perfection. We will be able to respond graciously to our particular call when we also hear our unique call in the context of the particular. However, abandoning the particular call in pursuit of the unique would be a sheer illusion. Therefore, it is right for us to be identified with our particular call, but to fulfil our particular call we need a personal intimate relationship with our saviour.

Through the grace of God, I have been able to do meditation over the last forty years or so. I became interested in meditation after reading an article by 'Palampdam Avarachan' in the 'Tharaka' about the prayer life of late Juhanon Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church. Then I came across John Main's 'Maranatha Movement of Meditation', Anthony de Mello's book on meditation-'Sadhana', St. John of the Cross and the Dark Night of the Soul, Julian of Norwich, Evelyn Underhill and other writers of spiritual classics. The cloud of unknowing is also a great source for contemplation. Thomas Merton's life and writings were also a great help to me. There are many 'how-to-

do-it' meditation books available today for us to dip into. Meditation is not a problem solving exercise; de Mello says, "Prayer is to be made less with the head than with the heart. In fact, sooner it gets away from head and from thinking the more enjoyable and more profitable it is likely to become. Most priests and religious equate prayer with thinking. That is their down fall."

There is a distinction between personal and private prayer; personal prayer is about our self-centred, I-centred needs and interests. Finding the privacy of the mind and praying with others corporately for the common good of the community is a good practice too. In our Eucharistic liturgy we pray: "Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising and saying; . . . Hosanna in the highest." Therefore, corporate prayer in the company of all believers of all ages and the whole company of heaven and on earth strengthen us to face our problems of life and make us aware of our God-given social responsibilities. A private meditative lifestyle should not prevent us from thinking about our corporate responsibility. It is also clear that we cannot ignore the needs of our neighbours or be unconcerned about social issues; a contemplative lifestyle should not be centred around private or personal prayer alone; the Gospel of Jesus Christ has definite social implications.

Therefore, our life must have theological, social and contemplative domains. The integration of a set time of silence for meditation into our routine is more necessary now than ever before because of the lockdown and social distancing. Without silent meditation we can become either a social activist or dogmatic religious fanatic. A relaxed Christian lifestyle mediated through silent meditation and prayer should be the foundation from which theological affirmations and social concern should evolve and operate. We should learn to pray with the rhythms and patterns of everyday life and routines. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced us into virtual spaces for prayers. Let us find holiness in such virtual spaces and remove all external claddings and pretensions because the place we are standing is holy. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exo 3:5). The whole life and our work should become a prayer. This is what I mean by 'silence in activity and activity in silence'. "Nowhere physically is spiritually everywhere." This would help us to enjoy 'God's future in the present' through the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1. The cloud of unknowing, edited by Halycon Backhouse, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1992, page 97.

2. Sister Edmee SLG, 'Silence in Prayer and Action', Fairacres Chronicle, Vol.13. (1), 1980.

CANADIAN MAR THOMA CHURCH TORONTO



Thirumeni blessed the foundation stone for the fellowship hall on March 08th 2020.

On March 8, 2020, at 10:00 a.m. our beloved Diocesan Episcopa, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos led the Holy Communion worship service in English and 17 first communicants received the Holy Communion for the first time. The first communicants were awarded the by Thirumeni, as arranged by the diocese. The parish is indebted and thankful to our Philoxenos Thirumeni for the leadership and prayers.

By God's Grace the Canadian Mar Thoma Church Toronto entered a new phase in the journey as a believing community. In 2017 we constructed a new church building under the efficient administrative leadership of His Grace Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar

Thoma Metropolitan and the timely guidance of Mar Philoxenos the diocesan bishop. Our parish's General Body decided to construct a fellowship hall attached to the current building that included banquet facilities, gym and Sunday school rooms. The foundation stone blessing of the proposed fellowship hall was led by Mar Philoxenos Episcopa on March 8, 2020, after the Holy Communion worship service. The office bearers and the building committee convener, Mrs. Susan Thomson, were present. A big gathering of the church members witnessed the function.

Rev. Sunil Mathew
Vicar



Episcopal Visit Canadian MTC First Communicants

2020 EPISCOPAL VISIT REPORT

ST. JOHN'S MAR THOMA CHURCH MICHIGAN



St. Johns MTC Michigan - 2020 First Communicants

St. John's Mar Thoma Church, Michigan was indeed blessed by the visit of our Diocesan Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa, from Friday, February 28th to Saturday, February 29th, 2020. This was our Thirumeni's first visit to St. John's MTC after the congregation was officially formed in April 2019. Thirumeni was warmly welcomed by the Office Bearers of the parish at the Detroit Metropolitan Airport on Friday afternoon. Thirumeni met with the First Communicants and the Executive Committee on Friday evening. On Saturday morning, Thirumeni celebrated Holy Qurbana at Evanswood Church (Troy, MI). During the service, seven youths took part in their First Holy Communion. Following the Holy Communion service, a Parish Day program was arranged to commemorate the faith journey of the congregation and also to celebrate being recognized as a parish of the Mar Thoma Church from January 1st, 2020 onward. Ms. Sneha Mathew served as the emcee for the Parish Day program, and the Vicar, Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel, welcomed the gathering. Parish Secretary, Mr. Shine Eapen, presented the report of the parish while visiting Clergy offered their congratulatory wishes and words

of felicitation. The parish choir and Sunday School students also performed melodious songs on this blessed occasion. Rev. Philip Varughese, Rev. P. Chacko, Rev. Varghese Thomas (Vicar, Detroit MTC) and Rev. Christy David Daniel (Vicar, CSI Congregation of Great Lakes) were present for both the service and program. Philoxenos Thirumeni addressed the parish members and all those gathered with words of encouragement and challenged the parish to be a blessing to the wider community for the glory of God. Mr. John Varughese, parish Vice President, proposed the vote of thanks on this occasion. The Parish Day program concluded with a fellowship meal that was arranged by the First Communicants and their families. St. John's MTC would like to express its gratitude and appreciation to our beloved Thirumeni for his prayerful presence and admirable leadership.

Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel
Vicar, St. John's Mar Thoma Church, Michigan

EPISCOPAL VISIT JERUSALEM MTC, CONNECTICUT



Jerusalem MTC, CT - 2020 First Communicants



Episcopal Visit Jerusalem MTC Connecticut

Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Diocesan Bishop visited our parish on February 23, 2020 and celebrated the Holy Communion. 6 of our children received their First Communion. Diocesan and Bishop's Secretary Rev. Manoj Idiculla was also present. A public meeting was arranged after the Communion Service followed

by fellowship dinner. The Episcopal Visit was a blessing to the parish and all its members.

Rev. Biji Mathew

Vicar, Jerusalem MTC, Connecticut

EPISCOPAL VISIT THE MAR THOMA CHURCH OF NEW JERSEY



HONORING ELDERLY WITH DIOCESAN EPISCOPA



FIRST COMMUNICANTS WITH DIOCESAN EPISCOPA

Our Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos visited our parish on January 19, 2020. Thirumeni led the Holy Communion Service in English at 9:30 a.m. and shared from the Word of God. Five of our children received their first communion. After the Holy Communion service, Thirumeni recognized four of our senior church members with Ponnada.

Rev. Simon Kurien
Vicar, MTC NJ

2020 Midwest Regional Youth Leadership Retreat



The 5th Annual Midwest Regional Youth Leadership Retreat was held on Saturday, March 8th, 2020 at the Chicago Mar Thoma Church (Des Plaines, IL). The theme for this year was “LIVE, LOVE, LEAD” based on Ephesians 5:1-2. The retreat was organized for youth leaders of the parishes in the Midwest Region. Rev. Shiby Varghese (Vicar), Rev. George Varghese (Assistant Vicar), and the Youth Fellowship members of Chicago MTC made all necessary arrangements for the retreat. Youths from Chicago MTC provided leadership for various sessions such as Praise & Worship, Icebreakers, Application Activities, YF Updates, Round Table Discussions, and Intercessory Prayer.

It was a blessing to have the prayerful and encouraging presence of Rev. V. T. John, who not only inaugurated

the Leadership Retreat but who also was in attendance from beginning to end. Rev. George Varghese, Rev. Shiby Varghese, and Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel (Midwest Youth Chaplain) led the three Main Talks based on the theme topics of Living, Loving, and Leading, respectively. Approximately twenty-five youths from Detroit MTC, St. Thomas MTC (Lombard, IL), and Chicago MTC attended the retreat. The Midwest Regional Youth Fellowship Committee expresses its appreciation to our Clergy and to Chicago MTC for hosting the retreat and also is grateful to Ms. Lexine Varughis for serving as the Convener.

Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel
(Midwest Youth Chaplain)

Diocesan Stall at Maramon Convention Centre



Bible Crossword Puzzle

Winners List for January 2020



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

Winners List for October 2019 Continued:

Mathew T Mathew
Maneejo Koshy

Epiphany MTC, NY
Philadelphia MTC, PA

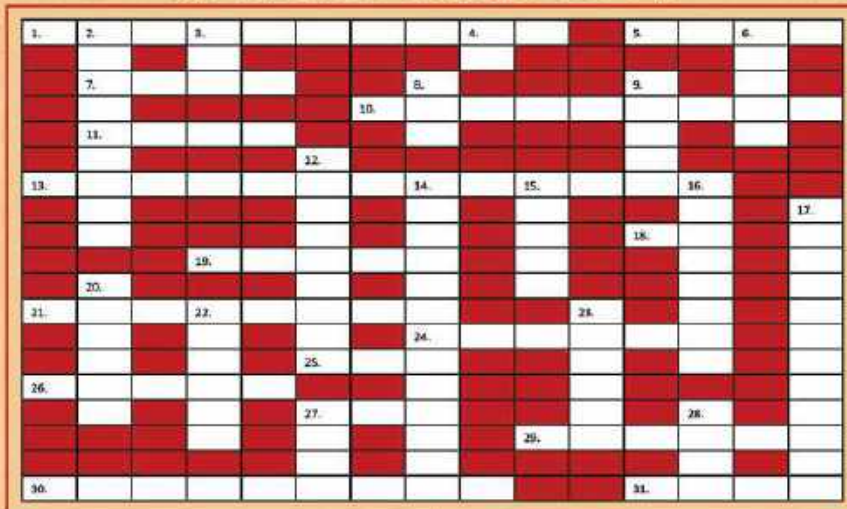
Answers for January 2020 Bible Crossword Puzzle

1.T	R	2.U	S	T	I	N	G		3.P	4.E	R	I	S	5.H	
E		Z						6.C		N				A	
S		7.Z	E	8.A	L			9.R	O	D				U	
T		I		C		10.J	O	Y			11.C			G	
I		A		Q		U			12.V		U			H	
M		H		U		D			I		R			T	
O				I		G			N		13.D	E	14.N	Y	
N		15.F	16.A	T	H	E	R	L	E	S	S		O		
Y			L			M			Y				S		
		17.H	D	U	S	E	S		18.A	T	O	N	E	D	
19.S			N			N			R						
20.U	N	21.D	E	R	22.S	T	A	N	D	23.I	N	G		24.A	
R		I			P					N				R	
V		25.S	E	A	L		26.S			F				R	
I		T			27.E	Y	E	S		L		28.S		O	
29.V	I	R	G	I	N	E			30.C	A	L	M		G	
O		E			D	K				M	O			A	
R		S		31.W	O	E				E		K		N	
32.S	A	S	H		R			33.O	B	E	D	I	E	N	T



Bible Crossword Puzzle

as in NIV Isaiah 11-20



ACROSS:

1. The Lord will have ___ on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel.
5. Give thanks to the Lord, call on his _____.
7. Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your _____.
10. O Lord, although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have _____ me.
11. All your _____ has been brought down to the grave.
13. _____ will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.
18. A prophecy against Moab: _____ in Moab is ruined, destroyed in a night!
19. A shoot will come up from the stump of _____; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
21. Sing to the Lord, for he has done _____ things; let this be known to all the world
24. For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can _____ him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?
25. The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian _____; with a scorching wind he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates River.
26. This is what the LORD says to me: "I will remain _____ and will look on from my dwelling place.
27. The Lord will strike the earth with the _____ of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
29. In that day you will say "I will _____ you, O Lord".
30. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the _____ of the Lord.
31. He will not judge by what he _____ with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears but with righteousness and justice.

DOWN:

2. The _____ of the wicked will never be mentioned again
3. But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the _____.
4. The lion will eat straw like the _____.
6. In that day men will look to their _____.
8. With _____ you will draw water from the wells of salvation.
9. My heart _____ out over Moab; her fugitives flee as far as Zoar.
12. With justice he will give _____ for the poor of the earth.
14. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of _____.
15. The poorest of the poor will find pasture, and the _____ will lie down in safety.
16. The Lord, the Lord, is my _____ and my song; he has become my salvation.
17. In love a throne will be established; in _____ a man will sit on it— one from the house of David— one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness
20. The Lord will strike Egypt with a _____; he will strike them and heal them. They will turn to the Lord, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them.
22. The Lord has broken the rod of the wicked, the scepter of the _____.
23. You have forgotten God your _____; you have not remembered the Rock, your fortress.
27. Oh, the raging of many nations-- they _____ like the raging sea.
28. The wolf will _____ with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat.

Deadline for Answers: May 25, 2020

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

Contact Phone: 978-663-3203

Scanned - via Email: Varampath23@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





MATRIMONIAL

1. Mar Thoma Parents settled in the U.S. invite marriage proposal for their 34-year-old daughter. She is born and brought up in the U.S., 5 ft. 6 in. tall, fair and God-fearing. She graduated from a prestigious university with a degree in Psychology (counseling), and is currently employed in a reputable University Medical Center in Dallas as a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC). If interested, please respond with a recent photograph and personal profile to alhjda20@gmail.com
2. Mar Thoma parents settled in the U.S. invite marriage proposal for their 30 year old son. He is born and brought up in the U.S. He holds MS in accounting and works as a CPA in Dallas metropolitan area. He is a God-fearing and family-oriented young man. If interested, please respond with a recent photograph and personal profile to alhjda20@gmail.com
3. Mar Thoma parents settled in the U.S. invite marriage proposals for their son 29 Y/O, CPA. Currently working as an auditor for the Government and an active member of his church. Proposals are invited from parents of God fearing girls (25-29). U.S. born or permanent residents are preferred. If interested, please email marriageproposal1961@gmail.com with information and a recent photograph.
4. Mar Thoma parents settled in the U.S. invite proposals for their 5' 4", 24 year old God-fearing, family-oriented daughter, who completed her Masters degree in Physician Assistant Studies and is currently working as a PA-C in a reputable University Hospital, from parents of men aged 24-29, preferably with equal qualifications, who is God-fearing, family-oriented, tall, outgoing, and humble. Interested parents please contact with information to wtig823@gmail.com.
5. Professionally qualified parents (U.S. citizens) in Houston, Texas, invite marriage proposals for their daughter 30yrs, 5 ft. 4 in., Corporate Lawyer in Texas (JD), from qualified professionals who are U.S. citizens. Contact: **Ph:713-907-5527; thomasmoam@yahoo.com**





Dr. T. M. Thomas
(August 20, 1933 – April 21, 2020)

Dr. T. M. Thomas, a member of the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Yonkers, New York, passed away on April 21, 2020, of natural causes at his residence in Suffern, New York. He was born on August 20, 1933 and was 86 years old.

Dr. T. M. Thomas hails from the Thanikapurathottu family in Kurianoor, Kerala. His wife, Mrs. Annamma Thomas (Leelamma), passed away in June 2018. He is survived by his brother Rev. Dr. T. M. Philip who is a retired Mar Thoma Achen and served for many years in the CLS Book Store at Thiruvalla; and his children Mr. Mathews Thomas (Shaji) and Elizabeth Thomas (Reni) who are members of the Mar Thoma Church of New Jersey in Randolph, NJ, and Mr. Daniel Thomas (Danny) who is a member of the Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington (MTCGW), and grandchildren (Suzanne, Rajive, Philip, Mira, Sara and Nina) and great grand children (Emily and Alyssa).

The entire Mar Thoma Church and the Diocese of North America and Europe owe a lot of gratitude to Dr. T. M. Thomas for his services to the entire church. Dr. T. M. Thomas migrated to the U.S.A. in 1963 for higher studies. Prior to that, he worked as a teacher at the Ashramam High School in Perumbavoor, Kerala. He earned three masters' degrees with concentration in psychology, philosophy, and sociology. His Doctor of Education Degree from Boston University is in foundations of education. He was a Professor at the University of Bridgeport, Connecticut, teaching courses in sociology and education until his retirement.

Dr. T. M. Thomas was one of our pioneer church members who had a close relationship and constant communication with the bishops and clergy of the Mar Thoma Church. He was one of the leaders of the Mar Thoma congregations that formed in New York in the 1970s, and one of the founding members of the Mar Thoma Diocese in North America which was established in 1988. He also significantly engaged in the Mar Thoma Church's ecumenical relationships with the Episcopal Church and the National Council of Christian Churches in U.S.A. He actively promoted the Mar Thoma Student Conferences since the late 1970s which later became the Annual Youth Conferences and gave origin to the Family Conferences. He was the convener of the Building Committee that purchased the first Diocesan Center at Richboro, PA in 1994. Amongst his numerous contributions was services as the convener for the development of a Mar Thoma Sunday School curriculum which was released as a series of 12 volumes in 2005.

Dr. T. M. Thomas authored several books: (1) Indian Educational Reforms In Cultural Perspective - 1970; (2) Images Of Man: A Philosophic And Scientific Inquiry – 1974 (co-authored by J. B. Chethimattam); (3) Kerala Immigrants In America: A Sociological Study Of The St. Thomas Christians – 1984 (co-authored by Annamma Thomas); (4) Joyful Vocation Of A Teacher: Autobiographical Reflections On Life and Teachings - 2011. Dr. T. M. Thomas also served as convener and editor for the Diocesan Sunday School Publication, The Mar Thoma Church, Our Foundation and Vision – 2001; and co-edited with Mr. Abraham Mattackal the book titled: In The Beginning: Formative Years of Mar Thoma Parishes in North America - 2008. He contributed many thought provoking articles to the Mar Thoma Messenger and other publication of the Mar Thoma Church.

The depth of his faith is echoed in one of his books where he said, "When death is accepted as a fact of life, living itself will be enriching". He also expresses his hope pointing to the Crown of Righteousness" in the Kingdom of God, saying "Eternal life begins in this world and continues in the next". So it's not the question of dying, but the concern of living a worthy life. This was exemplified through his loyalty to the Church and commitment to the Lord till the last.

The Funeral Service was held on April 25, 2020. A Condolence was organized by the Diocese of North America and Europe and people from all over the world participated and expressed their condolences and shared the contribution rendered by Dr. T. M. Thomas to the Diocese and church.

The Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan and the former Diocesan Bishops conveyed their condolence to the bereaved family.

The Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church remembers with gratitude the contributions and praise God for the life and witness of Dr. T. M Thomas. The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Diocesan Council, Diocesan Assembly Members, Clergy and members of the Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church praise God for the life and witness of Late Dr. T. M. Thomas and express our heartfelt condolence to all the grieving members of the family. May God's peace be with you!

Rev. Manoj Idiculla
Diocesan/Bishop's Secretary





Rev. M. John
(09.15.1932 – 05.02.2020)
Christos MTC, Philadelphia

Rev. M. John 87 Years was born to V.M. Mathew & Mariamma, Kalluparambil House on September 15, 1932. Achen was Ordained as Deacon on February 02, 1960 and as Priest on April 10, 1960 and for the past 60 years was always faithful to his call. He was in active service and served the church for 28 years from 1960 – 1988. He served in many of the parishes in India - Kulashekaram, Anchal, Valakom, Patamala, Kottarakara, Thalavur, Mannady, Elambal, Punalur, Kollam Perunad, Mannur Mankod, Chengamanad and was on special assignment as the Missionary in Thrissur Mission and served as the Superintendent of the Ravi Varma Mandiram.

He was an outstanding personality. He loved all and was loved by all. A person who respected everyone whether young or old and was respected by everyone. He was a friend of everyone and was fondly called as "suhuruthu achen". We have lost a great person who was very simple and humble. We thank God for M. John Achen's life and witness.

Achen was called to eternal home on May 02, 2020. The first part of the funeral service was held on

Thursday, May 7, 2020 07:30 PM ET led by Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Diocesan Bishop from Sinai Mar Thoma Center, Merrick, New York – Via Zoom and the second and third part of the funeral service was held on Friday May 8, 2020 05:00 PM ET at Lamb Funeral Home, Philadelphia led by Clergy of Philadelphia Center. The fourth part of the funeral service was held on Saturday, May 9, 2020 12:00 PM ET at the Christos Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia led by Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Diocesan Bishop.

Achen is survived by Baskiomo: Annamma John and Children: Suja, Jaya, Aby, Asha. He was residing with his son Aby in Philadelphia.

The Church and especially the Diocese of North America and Europe remembers with gratitude the contributions rendered by M. John Achen and I on behalf of the 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 sincere condolence to Kochamma and Children. May God almighty strengthen the family members during this time of difficulty.

Rev. Manoj Idiculla
Diocesan/Bishop's Secretary

REMEMBERING WITH THANKSGIVING THOSE WHO HAVE DIED

The psalmist wrote, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit".

As we wrestle with so many questions during this pandemic where we have lost many of our members some affected by Covid-19 and some with natural causes during the past 1 ½ month, the word of God says in the book of Hebrews, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." It is with great sadness that we had received the news of the passing away of all our dear members.

The word of God reminds us, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare

a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." John 14:1-3

I on behalf of the Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Diocesan Clergy, Diocesan Council, Assembly Members and Members of all the parishes in the Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church express our sincere condolences to the dear and near ones. May God almighty comfort and strengthen all of you during this time of grief. Let us live our life with hope that we will meet our dear ones who have departed from us on that beautiful shore one day.

Rev. Manoj Idiculla
Diocesan/Bishop's Secretary

OBITUARIES

1. Mrs. Aleyamma Chacko, Oklahoma MTC

Mrs. Aleyamma Chacko was born on May 28, 1929, in the Karrotte House, Kezhuvaipur, Kerala, India, and married the late M. V. Chacko from Madathikulam House. She was called to the Lord on April 20, 2020. She was 91 years old. She became member of the Oklahoma MTC, in mid 1980s. She was very active in all the church activities, prayer group and Sevika Sanghom. She was a prayerful Christian who devoted all of her time and energy to her family and to the church. She is survived by her two children, four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. The funeral service was held on Saturday, April 25, 2020.

Rev. Thomas Joseph
Vicar Oklahoma MTC



2. Mr. Mathai T. John, St. John's MTC, Michigan



Mr. Mathai T. John, a retired civil engineer, was born in Pullad, Kerala, India, on January 8, 1936, to Mr. T. J. Yohanan and Mrs. Achamma Yohanan. He was called to eternal rest peacefully on April 22, 2020. He earned a degree in civil engineering and worked for the Public Works Department (PWD) in Imphal, Manipur from 1957 to 1976. He married Aleyamma Abraham in 1963 and the family lived in India until his wife came to the U.S. in 1975. He came to Detroit a year later and started his job at General Electric in 1976. He was known by many as Mathaichayan and respected amongst his peers. Mathaichayan was an integral part of the formation of the Mar Thoma Church in Detroit. He held positions as a prayer group leader and in the Edavaka Mission. Even with the strenuous illnesses he faced in the latter years of his life, his joyous and loving personality never changed. He is survived by his wife Mrs. Aleyamma Mathai; children and their spouses - Gracy & Sabu, Jossy & Jaya, and George & Sansu; and grandchildren - Priya, Jacob, Brendan, Benjamin, Joshua, David, Daniel, and Divya.

Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel
Vicar St. John's MTC, Michigan

3. Mr. John Koshy (Peace) Chicago Mar Thoma Church, Des Plaines, Illinois



Mr. John Koshy (Peace) - 54 years was called to eternal home on May 06, 2020 at Des Plaines, Illinois. Late Mr. John Koshy was the second son of Rev. V. T John Achen & Kunjamma Kochamma; husband of Mrs. Daisy Koshy, father of Angela, Anita & Austin, brother of Mr. John V. Thomas (Panchi) and Mr. John John (Prakash). The Viewing was held on May 11, 2020 at the Chicago Mar Thoma Church, followed by interment at the Maryhill Cemetery, Illinois.

Rev. Shiby Varghese
Vicar, Chicago MTC

4. Mr. Kurian Varghese Panampadical (Johny), Christos MTC, Philadelphia



Mr. Kurian Varghese Panampadical (Johny), 69 years old, was called to eternal home on May 04, 2020. He is survived by his wife Elsy Kurian and children: Jason Kurian and Janisha Kurian. The viewing was held on May 11, 2020 at the Lamb Funeral Home followed by Internment.

Rev. Anish Thomas Thomas
Vicar, Christos MTC, Philadelphia

5. Mr. Abraham Kunchandy, Bethel MTC, Philadelphia, PA

Mr. Abraham Kunchandy, 83 year old, was born on August 27, 1936 at Ayroor House in Kottarakara, Kerala, India. Babychayan was called to his heavenly Father on Tuesday, April 14, 2020. In 1980, he migrated with family to the U.S. and settled in Philadelphia, PA. He spent most of his career working at Penn Reels Manufacturing Company. After his retirement, he enjoyed going on walks, attending church and spending time with his family. Babychayan was always very caring and personable. He had a signature smile and enjoyed making people laugh with his delightful sense of humor. Although the last few years of his life were challenged by health issues, he persevered with the strength and love of his family members. He is survived by Susamma (wife), Jubi (son), Reji (daughter-in-law), Janessa and Alyssa (grandchildren), as well as John Kunchandy (brother), Aleyamma "Ammini" Philip (sister), Philip Kunchandy (brother), and Kuryan Kunchandy (brother).

Rev. Saju Chacko
Bethel MTC, Philadelphia



6. Mrs. Marykutty Thomas, St. Thomas MTC, Yonkers, New York

Mrs. Marykutty Thomas (Leelamma) loving wife, mother and grandmother, and a dedicated follower of Christ, was called to her heavenly abode on Wednesday, April 8, 2020. She was born in Kottanad, Kerala, India, to Mr. Andrews George and Mrs. Annamma George of Charivukalayil house. Mrs. Marykutty Thomas had served as the Diocesan Secretary of the Mar Thoma Suvishesha Sevika Sangham. She is survived by her mother Mrs. Annamma George, her husband Mr. P. T. Thomas, her daughter Dr. Listy Thomas, her husband Mr. Shinu Simon and their children Luke Simon, Thomas Simon and Selah Simon; her son Mr. Litten Thomas, his wife Dr. Betsy Thomas and their children Nicholas Thomas, Jeremiah Thomas and Natalie Mary Thomas; her daughter Attorney Lincy Jacob, her husband Mr. Sony Jacob and their daughter Anna Marie Jacob; and her son Mr. Levan Thomas, his wife Dr. Tina Mathew and their daughter Evangeline Marie Thomas; her sisters Mrs. Annamma George and family in Gujarat, Mrs. Susan George and family in Kerala, Ms. Rachel Mathew and family in Pennsylvania, Mrs. Mercy George and family in Connecticut and Mrs. Mini Jacob and family in Pomona, NY.

Rev. Saju C Pappachen
Vicar, St. Thomas MTC, New York



7. Mr. George Vadaketh, Ascension MTC, Philadelphia, PA

Mr. George Vadaketh, 89 years old, member of Ascension MTC, Philadelphia passed away on April 18, 2020 due to heart attack at Philadelphia. He hails from Kuriannur Vadaketh family and was a member of Kuriannur St. Thomas MTC. He retired from Manifold Investment Bank of Lusaka, Zambia as managing director. After his retirement he settled with his wife at Trivandrum and they were members of Trinity MTC. In 2005 he and his wife moved to Philadelphia and were active members in Ascension MTC along with his three sons and their families who were already well settled in Philadelphia. He



served the parish as Vice President, executive committee member and Senior Fellowship Vice President. He had a passion for Evangelism and would share the gospel with anyone.

Rev. Jinson K. Mathew
Vicar, Ascension MTC, Philadelphia



8. Mr. Lalu Jose Pratap, Ascension MTC, Philadelphia, PA

Mr. Lalu Jose Pratap, 64 years old, member of Ascension MTC, Philadelphia, passed away in Philadelphia due to Covid-19 on April 7, 2020, and the funeral was held on April 13, 2020. He hails from Kozhencherry Perakath family and was a member of Kozhencherry St. Thomas MTC. He and his wife Mrs. Rachel Jose came to U.S. in 1982 and he was working for the New York Subway (MTA) as transport controller. They have two children. He was one of the founding members of Ascension MTC, Philadelphia. He represented the parish in Sabha Prathinidhi Mandalam and Diocesan Assembly. He served the parish as Vice President, Trustee, Account Trustee and Prayer group representative.

Rev. Jinson K. Mathew
Vicar, Ascension MTC, Philadelphia



9. Dr. K. M. George, Detroit MTC, MI

Dr. K. M. George (August 8, 1924 – April 23, 2020, 95 years) was in the British Indian Navy during WWII, where he served until the end of the war. He then worked in the Persian Gulf serving with the oil companies of the time. Later, he trekked up the Mediterranean to England where he eagerly accepted an opportunity to study in London and then in the United States. As a child and young man he was influenced by his meeting M. K. Gandhi and was always a proponent of peace and learning. He was a devoted teacher, advocate, friend, husband, and father. He left the world better than he found it and felt we all had a higher calling. He passed away at his home in Farmington Hills, MI, on April 23, 2020 surrounded by family and friends. He is survived by his wife Annamma (Molly) George (Karukayil Maliyil, Edathua), his son Ivan George, and his grandsons Jonathan George, and Joshua George and his wife Dr. Sierra George.

Rev. Varghese Thomas,
Vicar Detroit MTC, MI

10. Mrs. Mariamma Thomas, Christos MTC, Philadelphia, PA

Mrs. Mariamma Thomas was the member of Bethel MTC, Philadelphia. Recently, she took membership in Christos MTC, Philadelphia. Mariamma Thomas was 69 years old and left us to be with the Lord on Monday, April 20, 2020. She passed peacefully in her house surrounded by family. Mariamma was born on June 4, 1950, in Ranni, Pathanamthitta District, India. She was the daughter of the late K. G. Varughese and Aleyamma Varughese at Karimkuttiyil House, Ranni. Mariamma is a mother to two daughters, Princy and Gladis, son-in-laws Sabu Mathew and Deny Varghese, and a grandmother of 7 beautiful children. She is survived by her siblings Annamma Philip, K. V. George, and Abraham Varughese.

Rev. Anish Thomas Thomas
Vicar, Christos MTC, Philadelphia



11. Mrs. Thankamma Scharia, St. James MTC, New York

Mrs. Thankamma Scharia, (1925 to 2020, 95 years old) from the Murickolil House, Punthala, Kerala was called to her eternal home on April 16, 2020 in New York at the age of 95. She was chronologically the oldest, but the youngest member in mind and spirit of the St. James MTC, New York and actively participated in Church services. While in India, she was continually active in the Punthala MTC. She returned to the U.S. in 2007 after the sudden death of her husband, M. E. Scharia. Her three children, M. S. Eappen, Aleyamma Mathew, and Raichel Jacob with their respective families are residents of New York and also are the members of St. James MTC. She lived her life with an unwavering faith in God. She had a very generous heart for the needy, empathetic and compassionate to the poor. Her deeds matched her words. While in India, as Proverbs 31: 20 says, "She opens her arms to the poor and extended her hands to the needy." She will be greatly missed by her children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, family and extended family members, friends and relatives in India, USA, Canada and other parts of the globe. Her eulogy prayer was held on Sunday, April 19, 2020 by the St. James MTC and her mortal body was buried in Historical Tappan Cemetery, NY on Monday, April 20, 2020.

Rev. Santhosh Joseph,
Vicar of St. James Church, NY



12. Mrs. Sosama Mathai (Podiamma), St. Paul's MTC, Dallas

Mrs. Sosama Mathai, 96 Years, member of St. Paul's MTC and wife of Late M. M. Mathai was taken to heavenly abode on April 16, 2020.

In 1982, she immigrated to Dallas, Texas in the United States. She was an active member of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas-Grand Prairie since 1982 where she served as a diligent member of the parish's Sevika Sanghom. She was instrumental in the formation of St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church of Dallas in Mesquite where she is one of the founding members. She has served in various roles at St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church such as Parish Mission Secretary, Prayer Group Leader, Sevika Sanghom Secretary, Sevika Sanghom Treassure and Sevika Sanghom Vice President.



She was an ardent believer in Jesus Christ, a learned theologian, biblical scholar, a servant to her community, and a kindhearted, gentle soul. She is survived by her children and grandchildren: Anil, Mini and Asish; Ancil and Justin; Anisha and Nobin; Annie, Sam, Chris, Joshua and Kripa; Alice, Raju, Sanu and Anu; Sonaj and Rose; Phil, Joice, Jamie, and Jobin; Joel and Pearly.

Rev. Mathew Joseph
Vicar St. Paul's MTC, Dallas



13. Mr. Babu C. Mathew, Chicago MTC, IL

Mr. Babu C. Mathew, 65 years, passed away on March 27, 2020, due to a Stroke. The funeral service was conducted on March 31, 2020. He is survived by his wife Molly Babu and two sons Bibin & Mithin and daughters-in-law Namaratha and Sara.

Rev. Shiby Varughese
Vicar Chicago MTC



14. Mr. P. D. Joshua, St. James MTC, New York

Joshua Puthuprampil was born in Elanthoor Kerala on 2/6/39 to the late Chacko Daniel and Sosamma. At the age of 81 he entered into heavenly dwelling on Jan 23rd, 2020 in Elanthoor, Kerala during his yearly visit. He was a teacher in the Marthoma schools and the last one being the Pathanamthitta Marthoma Schools. He was involved in all the activities of the Marthoma Church especially the Sunday School and music ministry. He migrated to the US in 1985-he raised his family by working in a variety of occupations - a substitute teacher, mental health assistant and as a realtor. In the US he continued his passion for the Marthoma Church and was one of the founding members of the St James Marthoma Church. He served the local church in many capacities and the diocese as a council member. He is survived by his wife Mrs Mariamma Joshua (Kadavil house), and daughters Suja & Jeena, daughter in law Rency, sons in law Reji and Joe along with six grandchildren and four sisters. Joshua Sir was very passionate about teaching children not only school work but also about everyday living though the Bible. He had great faith to endure difficulties which arose in his life. He was a dedicated man who loved God and his family. He cherished the time that he spent with his grandchildren. He enriched the lives of people who came in contact with him by his welcoming smile and genuine concern. His love and compassion for others will be missed by all who knew him.

Rev. Santhosh Joseph,
Vicar of St. James Church, NY



LATEST TAX UPDATES – FOR 2020 & BEYOND – IMPACT OF CARES ACT



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.)

President Trump signed the SECURE (Setting Every Community Up for Retirement Enhancement) ACT on December 20, 2019 as part of government's spending bill and it has numerous provisions affecting many taxpayers.

STIMULUS PAYMENTS

The CARES ACT provides for stimulus check of \$1200 for each taxpayer, \$2400 for a married couple, and \$500 for each dependent under 17 years. But this amount decreases after adjusted gross income gets higher than \$75,000 for individuals and \$150,000 for married couple and zeros out at \$99,000 for individuals and \$198,000 for married couple. The decrease in the amount is \$5 per each \$100 over \$75,000 for individuals and \$150,000 for married couple. Now as of the guidelines available now, the IRS makes the determination based on 2019 tax return and 2018 tax return if 2019 tax return is not filed yet as the due date is already extended to July 15, 2020. Those whose bank information is not in IRS files can go the IRS website and provide the bank information using the "GET MY PAYMENT" tab. 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 tax credits and are not taxable income and are not to be paid back.

CARES ACT AND RETIREES

The CARES ACT will have a significant effect on many estate and retirement plans and the implications vary

by taxpayer. Retirees who are otherwise required to take minimum distributions (RMD) in 2020 need not take those distributions in 2020. Leaving the required distribution amounts in the retirement accounts help many retirees as their retirement accounts have suffered losses due to impact of corona virus on world economy.

CARES ACT AND CHARITABLE GIVING

Before CARES ACT, only those who use itemize deductions instead of standard deduction, can use charitable giving to reduce their tax liability. When you file your 2020 federal income tax return (the one you file in 2021), 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. Also, the CARES ACT allows qualified cash contributions up to 100% of adjusted gross income (up from 60%) for the year 2020.

CARES ACT AND RETIREMENT PLANS

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





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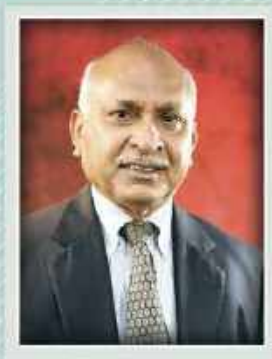
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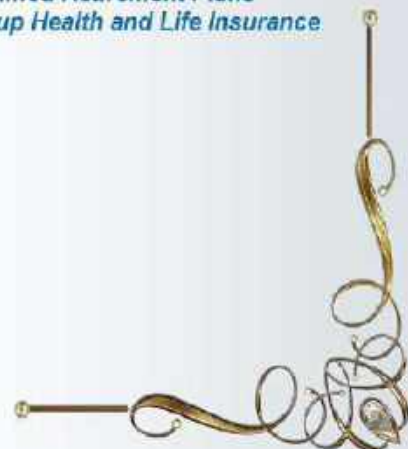
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