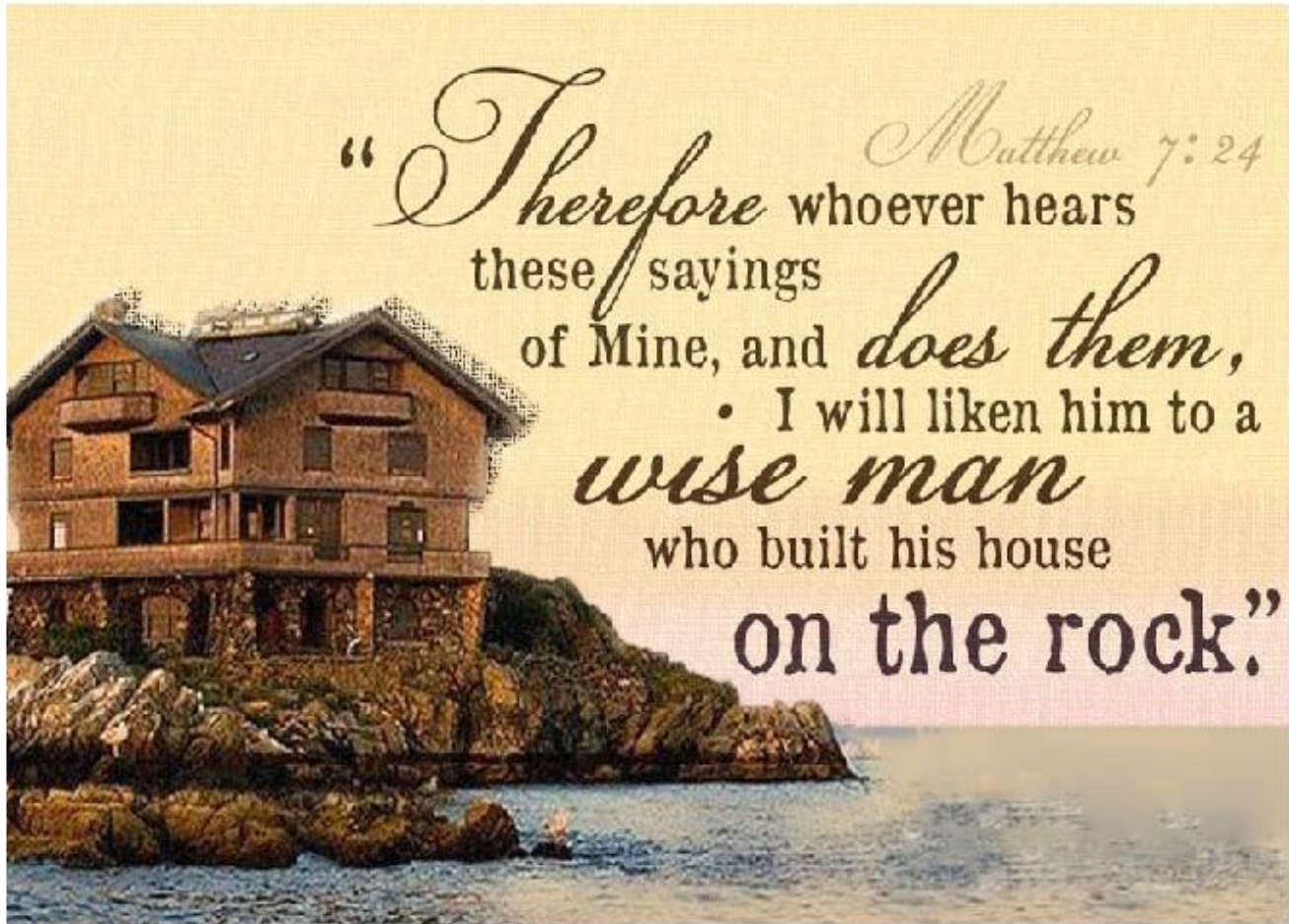




# The Mar Thoma

# ECHO



A Publication of the Council of Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe





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**Table of Contents**

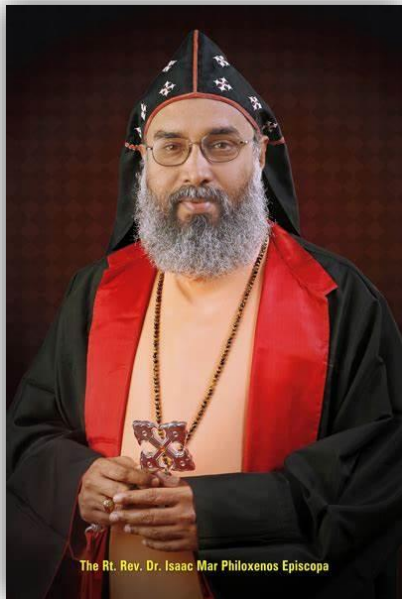
Message from the Diocesan Episcopa .....	3
EDITORIAL .....	4
“Youths are the Now of God” .....	5
KNOW YOUR CHURCH .....	8
REFLECTIONS FROM YOUTH CONFERENCE .....	14
Achievements .....	15
GOD WHO MAKES EVERYTHING GOOD .....	16
Zonal Sevika Sangham Conference .....	18
News & Notices .....	19
Family Conference 2019 .....	21
Photo Gallery .....	22

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## Message from the Diocesan Episcopa



Dearly beloved in Christ

Greetings from *Sinai Mar Thoma Centre!*

We are happy to see the development of the UK & Europe Zone of the Mar Thoma church and experience the fellowship of the faith community. Glad to note the progress in the community formation with a renewed vision and especially the participation of our members in various programmes of the Zone. The meeting of the Zonal Assembly on July 13 and the deliberations during the meeting were a clear indication of the interest in the common programs and keeping the spirit of fellowship among the members of the parishes and congregations. The Youth Conference held from July 19 to 21 also proved the interest and commitment of our youths for the mission of God through personal involvement in the life of the church.

Jesus Christ is the very foundation on which the church is being built. The faith declaration of Peter 'you are the Messiah, the son of the living God', is a response to the closeness the disciples experienced in their being with the Lord. This made Jesus to proclaim how firm the faith should be and it is none other than the heavenly Father

who revealed it through ordinary human beings. The church is commissioned to exist on the rock of faith and Peter and the other disciples were asked to continue their ministry in that faith. The concern is often raised in the present context, how to face the life-threatening forces in the world that destroy humanity. The pressures and the dehumanizing powers of the world may challenge the existence of noble thoughts and actions of the faithful people. Often it comes to us with the question, Are we on a shaky ground or are we strong enough to face the worldly pressures? How strong is our faith in God? The words and actions matter very much in expressing the faith in our life. It is necessary to affirm the faith in Christ and to grow as child of

God with the spiritual nourishment that one receives through constant communion with the Lord.

We are glad to see the changes in the mindset of our members in the Zone towards overall development of the life of the church. Special consideration need to be given for their commitment in imparting spiritual nurturing to the next generation. The family that is rooted in Christ will definitely be a place for providing good lessons for the younger ones to emulate. Remember that the limited space a family uses can either produce persons who can be similar to material objects that may satisfy one's needs in a limited way or can produce diamonds from the raw materials within a person that becomes more valuable which leads to eternity. God provides skills and talents to everyone. Using the skills for the good of humanity is the responsibility to everyone.

Pray that God may use us to be instruments in furthering the Divine plan of transforming the world. Let the glory of God shine upon everyone and continue the life with strong foundation in Jesus Christ.

With prayerful regards,

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

Diocesan Bishop

## EDITORIAL

***“.....built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”***

(Ephesians 2:20)

**F**rancine Rivers, the American author quotes ‘Love one another, Jesus said. Sometimes it took a lifetime to learn how. Sometimes it took someone to hit rock bottom to make someone reach up and grasp hold and be lifted from the mire to stand on a firm foundation’.

Throughout the history of Christian church, people who stood up to their faith have endured persecution in varying forms. Many leaders have tirelessly worked to uproot Christianity; but history has proved that amidst the pain and suffering, Church grew from strength to strength. Jesus himself came to be a servant of the Most High God and through suffering brought redemption for all humanity who put their faith in Him. Hence, It is with great joy that we outline our articles of this issue based on the theme ‘firm foundation’; which was the same theme for our 5th Mar Thoma youth conference.

In this nation, we witnessed the exit of Teresa May and election of Boris Johnson as the new Prime Minister of UK. In these times of political unrest over Brexit and policies regarding that, it is time our churches come together in prayer and raise our voice on this issue. The world also

witnessed protests in Hong Kong over new extradition laws and mass shootings in various places in US. This has to be a time to analyse, as people of the ‘way’ where our foundation is based upon. Is our faith based on certain traditions or in the person of Jesus Christ? Ultimately that will decide how we will stand when tested in the fire of afflictions.

The upcoming 37th family conference has taken its theme ‘My Redeemer Liveth’ from Isaiah 60:16b, where God promises a redeemer, the Messiah, upon whom the Church will be built. This is a great time to reflect the surety of our faith in Him and acknowledge our dependency on Him to meet all our needs as we work together to bring glory to our Lord, our stronghold.

As we strive together in progressing as UK and Europe zone, it is apt to remember Apostle Paul’s words in his letter to the Corinthian church ‘...but each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Christ Jesus. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is...’(1 Corinthians 3: 10-13). We should be encouraged by the fact that Mar Thoma community has grown so much in this nation promoting positive influences in the places where God has planted and established us. May His strength continue to help us all to build our faith upon Christ, our sure foundation.

*Editorial Board*

## “Youths are the Now of God”

*Dr. Zac Varghese, London*

**O**n the day of the Pentecost, at 9 AM, St. Peter stood up with eleven apostles and repeated the prophecy of Joel in the following way: **“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, young men will see visions, and old men will dream dreams. . . . (Acts 2: 17: Joel 2: 28).** This is a statement that St. Peter made circa AD30 and he was repeating a prophecy Joel made many centuries earlier. Eckhart Tolle wrote a superb book under the title, “The Power of Now” in 1999; in which he describes that our obsession with the future is a mental disease. We live ‘under the implicit assumption that the highest good lies in the future and therefore the end justifies the means. The end is an idea, a point in the mind-projected future, when salvation in whatever form – happiness, fulfilment, equality, liberation and so on – will be attained.”<sup>1</sup> We continue to destroy our God-given present with the hope of creating a future heaven and in the process create a present hell. Have we got our eschatological theology and expectation wrong? Through the grace of God we should be able to visualize God’s future in the present.

But a faith that the future will be better than the present is not always an illusion. Many dreams have come true for millions of people across the world and at the same time, many more millions lives also have been shattered. Everything belongs to God including the time and space and we should be careful how to use these two precious entities. We claim ownership of what God has merely entrusted to us. We slip into patterns of self-indulgent living and waste time and realise very late in life that we misused many precious God-given time and opportunities. There is still time for the youths of today to realise the importance of the time that they have to make their dreams come true in the ‘now of God’. Tomorrow is an obsession or a mere

procrastination; it is just an unsatisfactory escape from an unfulfilled today. A spirit-controlled living in the present in God’s own time is a blessing to all.

The precious gift of life is gift-wrapped around time and space. Time and space are the contexts in which the mystery of life is given to us in its manifest complexities. If we take a brief moment to reflect on the time that passed by, we will realise that every event that we are able to recollect has occurred at a particular time and space under particular circumstances. Happiness evolving from that recollection is entirely due to using the time wisely under the grace of God and regrets are entirely due to wasting God’s-time and desecrating God’s sacred space.

At the International Youth day celebration on 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2019, Pope Francis said, “This is the now of God. It becomes present with Jesus; it has a face, it is flesh. It is not a merciful love that does not wait for ideal or perfect situations to show itself, nor does it accept excuses for its acceptance. It is God’s time that makes every situation and place both right and proper. In Jesus, the promised future begins and becomes life.” Pope went on to say: “You, dear young people, are not the future, but the now of God. He invites you and calls you in your communities and cities to go out and find your grandparents, your elders, to stand up with them to speak out and realize the dream that the Lord has dreamed for you . . . We are on a journey, keep walking, keep living the faith and sharing it. Do not forget that you are not the tomorrow . . . you are the now of God.” There is indeed a timeless world of God’s own space for us to interact and live.

The older people always complain that young people have lost their ability to think deeply and analyse the complexities of living in a gadget-dependent internet culture. However, we also have seen green shoots of social- media –induced revolutions for challenging political and social structures through the Jasmine revolution in

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<sup>1</sup> Eckhart Tolle, “ The Power of Now” , New World Library, 1999,P.49

Egypt, the Sunflower movement in Taiwan, and the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong and other protest movements engineered by the young people in various parts of the world.

A remarkable young girl from Pakistan, Malala Yousafzai, won Nobel Prize in 2014 for her bold leadership for girl's education in her country and other countries; she said: "One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world."

Grete Thunberg, the 16 year old Swedish girl who galvanised world-wide protest against climate change had an incredible global impact and she said, "I was fortunate to be born in a time and place where everyone told us to dream big; I could become whatever I wanted to. I could live wherever I wanted to. People like me had everything we needed and more. Things our grandparents could not even dream of. We had everything we could ever wish for and yet now we may have nothing. Now we probably don't even have a future anymore because that future was sold so that a small number of people could make unimaginable amounts of money. It was stolen from us every time you said that the sky was the limit, and that you only live once."

Amika George is a nineteen year old second generation British-Indian girl living in London, whose family are originally from Kerala. Amika started the 'Free Periods' campaign at the age of 17 from her bedroom, calling on the British government to provide free menstrual products for all students after learning that girls in the UK were routinely missing school because of 'period poverty'. Her sustained and energetic campaigning resulted in the Chancellor of the Exchequer announcing funding for all schools to provide period products from early 2020. Amika has been listed by TIME magazine as one of the 25 Most Influential Teenagers in the world and has been awarded the 'Goalkeepers' Award from Bill and Melinda Gates in conjunction with the United Nations. Amika is now studying at Cambridge University.

Such are the amazing contributions and insights of some outstanding young people, but the unfortunate reality is that often we do not listen to the young people's voices. Young people are highly motivated and capable of cultivating God's kingdom values in the present. They have a longing for relationships, justice, love and truth. Pope Francis has highlighted this in his illuminating and revolutionary phrase, "Youth are the now of God".

The dynamics of God's time and humanity's time are different, it is not rigid, it is elastic and stretchable. St. Peter wrote, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 2: 8; Psalm 90: 4). The promise God made to Abraham took generations to fulfil! God remembers! We forget because we change. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Heb.13: 8). God is our reference point for navigating our lives and fulfilling our God-given dreams. There was a morning and evening in the creation story of Genesis. There was a dream of 'Let there be . . .' By the evening that dream was fulfilled and that fulfilment was very satisfying and good. It is in the 'now of God's time' that it was done. A thousand years of man's time are like an evening of God's time. Time matters to God! God is sovereign over time. All of time belongs to Him; and He pays minute attention to every moment of time. In that sense, to begin with, a thousand years are 'like an evening gone'. We human beings are keen to postpone in actualising our dreams and visions. We waste time and not follow God's master plan given to us in our visions. We must begin now. St. Paul spoke to Athenians, Epicureans and stoics philosophers, "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Therefore, we are to live according to this pattern of moving from our time zone to God's time for a 'purpose driven life'.

Greeks had two concepts of time: firstly, *chronos* or chronological time, the time that can be measured on a clock. It is the kind of time based on earth's rotation around the sun. From such

understanding we calculate that a year has 365 days, 5 hours, 49 minutes and 12 seconds. It has a precision about it. The Greeks had a second concept of time, which they called Kairos. This time is measured in certain type of special experiences. This is the kind of time spent on giving birth to a child; it is the time spent on reading good books, painting, creating music, writing poetry and other creative activities, meditating, and having an intimate conversation with God, walking, climbing mountains, playing with innocent children, and so forth. In these and other similar human experiences we create the miracle of turning ordinary time into extraordinary time. This is a miracle. In these experiences we do not think of chronological time at all, there is no measure of time for this experience. An evening in the company of a good friend has no definite limit. We do not measure such an evening in hours and minutes. The romantic moment we met our spouses might have changed our lives forever, we do not count them in seconds, minutes or hours. Such small moments could be eternity itself. We are slaves of chronological time, but striving for the ultimate liberation in finding kairos in every encounter with God.

Does this also mean that human actions are very slow as compared to God's actions? What we do in a 1000 years God does in a single evening or a second? How long is one evening for God? Who has 1000 years on earth? Man's lifespan is restricted to seventy or eighty years. But we have a pragmatic way of looking at time. We are told to be the Light of the world. One of the qualities of Light is the speed with which it travels. An evening is equivalent to 1000 years probably also indicating the speed with which things happens in God's time.

Certain important biochemical reactions inside a living cell only take milli- or nanoseconds or even less. We have no way of capturing the speed of these reactions, but they are there so that we can breathe and react to danger signals. Margins of danger and safety are thin; it only takes a split

second to avoid a tragedy. Therefore, it is important to make 'now' the primary focus of our life. It is in the 'now' we love and live. It is important to realize that the present moment is all we ever have. One look or one word is more than enough to destroy a friendship.

We say 'God is patient', but God is only patient in man's time. He has no time to be patient. He does not wait. He does things according to His nature. But in our terms and in our time scales He may appear to be patient. He deals with our past and future on the level of the present. Our ordinary life may take millions of steps needing millions of minutes, but our spiritual journey may need only one magical step, the step that we may take now to have a real union and relationship with God. We cannot love anyone yesterday or tomorrow, we need to love others at this moment, if we were to wait, waiting could turn our love to hate. When God intervenes in our lives we begin to understand the importance of now and every second of it could become important and action-packed. In that time frame our life becomes meaningful because we begin to realize that someone needs us and makes us feel very special and so on.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is our role model of living in God's time zone. She dared to say 'yes' to participate in God's dream/plan in the now of God and said with utter humility: "I am Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said" (Lk. 1: 38). We have a shared dream in front of us for making "... your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10). It is a great dream and a dream for which Jesus died on the cross. We now live in a 'kingdom is here-but-not-yet' reality. It is a challenge for everyone for actualising this dream. We need to learn how to say 'yes' to God in order to become kingdom-workers for actualising the dream in the now of God. Now is indeed the time, now is the time and day of our salvation in Christ Jesus.

# KNOW YOUR CHURCH

## SERIES 1

### THE IDENTITY OF THE MAR THOMA CHURCH

*Dharma Jyoti Publication*

*Rev. Dr. Alex Thomas\**



**W**e are introduced to and exposed to various forms of Christianity and faith confessions. While respecting the diverse expressions of faith confessions, it would be helpful for the members of the Mar Thoma Church to know about their church so as to have a meaningful engagement with the community within the Mar Thoma Church and that of the outside. The inspiration to write this booklet came from the discussions that I had with the seminary students and the participants of various conferences organized by the church. Rev. Dr. P. G. George, the Principal of the Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth also encouraged me to write this book. Thanks to my faculty colleagues in Dharma Jyoti for their valuable support. I hope that this book may encourage others to deal this subject in a better way so that our young generation may feel proud of this ancient church in India.

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<sup>2</sup> See Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books 1997), 7.

### **Basic Aspects that Defines its identity**

Mar Thoma church had a given identity as a church that was began by the evangelistic activity of St. Thomas and strengthened by the East Syrian missionaries by an indigenizing principle.<sup>2</sup> Indigenization is allowing gospel to take root in any culture to which it interacts. Incarnation is the best example of this indigenizing principle. When God chooses to become human, it does not happen in a vacuum; rather he assumed all that is human, thus God in Jesus became full human. This is the pattern when gospel encounters cultures, i.e., allowing the gospel to take root in a given culture as Jesus Christ accepts us as we are. Though Mar Thoma church has this given unique identity, its encounter with other faith confessions in a way eclipsed this identity. Often some people misunderstand the Mar Thoma Church as a Protestant church for its concern for the mission and the Biblical emphasis that the church preserves both in its worship and its life. Mar Thoma Church is an Indian Church holding Eastern forms of worship and theology and at the same time underwent a reformation for a biblically oriented life and giving equal emphasis for liturgy and the Bible.

The intention of this book is to make clear that though the church has come in contact with various streams of Christianity it never sacrificed its given identity, but at the same time redefined its mission according to the Biblical truths to have a meaningful engagement with the changing scenarios.

#### **1. Its identity as an Indigenous church**

The spread of Christianity in India and other places have generally had taken place mainly in two ways: first, by the evangelistic activities of the disciples of Jesus Christ and their disciples,



St. Paul and his co-workers, and the members of the early Christian community. The disciples or the Apostles traveled to various known places in their time and witnessed to the life ministry of Jesus Christ and organized the first Christian communities in various places. According to the Acts of Apostles the scattered believers due to persecution spread their faith where ever they went (Acts.2.4; 11.19). It is believed that the faith community in Rome was begun by the people from Rome who shared the Pentecost experience (Acts: 2.10). It is believed that one such evangelistic activity had taken place in the southern most part of India (at present Kerala) through the evangelistic activity of St. Thomas. Though there were doubts about whether St. Thomas came to India or not, the presence of St. Thomas Christians bearing the name of the apostle right from the beginning of the Christian era is an evidence of this indigenous nature of this community.

The second wave came through the western missionary activities of both Catholic and Protestant missionaries during the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Unfortunately in this period Christianity was introduced as a Western religion, meaning the gospel was imposed on the natives along with the western culture with assumption that The European culture was superior and that of the others were inferior. The non-Western cultures were considered as pagan, uncivilized and not capable for communicating the Gospel. The mission also intertwined with colonialism, i.e., not only the westerns conquered the lands they imposed Christianity as the invader's religion. Though all missionaries were not colonial agents, the spread of Christianity at this period seemed as the colonial agenda. But during the last century there were attempts within Western Christianity to regain the indigenizing principle in its cross-cultural mission.

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<sup>3</sup> T. V. Philip, *East of the Euphrates: Early Christianity in Asia* (Delhi: CSS& ISPCK, 1998), 112

2. The early movement of Christianity in India and elsewhere was indigenous for two reasons. First, the Apostles and evangelists attempted to an incarnational pattern of mission. When the apostles began their evangelistic activities they allowed Gospel to take roots in the given culture. The pro-Jewish sympathizers like Peter attempted to impose their customs on the Gentile Christians resistance from people like Paul, and the intervention of the Holy Spirit in the case of the encounter between Peter and Cornelius enabled Gospel to be taken root in the receptive culture (Acts:15&10). The early spread of Christianity exhibits this indigenizing principle.

Second, evangelization was not a colonial agenda both for St. Thomas and the East Syrian missionaries who came after St. Thomas. We could assume that St. Thomas brought the Gospel message to be incarnated in the Indian soil. From cursory evidence and oral tradition, we get the picture of a church that was relatively free of the control of the hierarchy and was indigenous in structure. The first converts were from Jewish community. The discovery of Gospel of Mathew in Hebrew character suggests that the earliest Christians were the Jewish converts.<sup>3</sup> Apostle Thomas established not a Syrian Church but a church in continuity with the early church. Thomas gave a way of worship more or less adapted to local needs.<sup>4</sup>

When we study the Pre-Portuguese period of the St. Thomas Christians, they lived in the same socio-cultural life of their native brethren. They lived in a very cordial relationship with their neighbors and respected their faith and religious

<sup>4</sup> A. M. Mundadan, *Indian Christians Search for identity and Struggle for Autonomy* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1984), 23.

practices. The Christians of this period were not forced to abandon their native identity in order to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> When the Portuguese Christians came in contact with St. Thomas Christians, they could not understand and accept this indigenizing principle. So they convened the Synod of Diamper in 1599 prohibiting all such indigenizing principle.<sup>6</sup> The Protestant missionaries were also unsympathetic to the culture of the Indian people. They had an opinion that the religious forms and the cultures of the non-Christians did not conform to the biblical world and hence termed it as pagan. Mahatma Gandhi once commented: "I developed a sort of dislike for it. And for a reason. In those days Christian missionaries used to stand in a corner near the High School and hold forth, pouring abuse on Hindus and their gods. I could not endure this."<sup>7</sup>

Due to the influence of the Protestant missionaries the believers of the Mar Thoma Church were somehow unknowingly encouraged to abandon all those seemed as pagan in nature. The Reformation within the Mar Thoma church with its encounter with the Protestant Missionary movement again in some way became an obstacle for the Gospel to take root in its cross-cultural mission activities outside Kerala. We always tried to impose our missionary culture (*Malayalee*) and worship forms, which in turn do not relevant to the people we evangelized in those parts of India. How can we be relevant in the context of our cross-cultural mission activities? Only by regaining our given identity during the Pre-Portuguese period would empower the Mar Thoma church to venture for continuing our indigenous identity in the context of our cross-cultural mission.

### **3. Identity expressed in its autonomy**

<sup>5</sup> Refer Placid J. Podippara, *The Thomas Christians* (Bombay: St. Paul's Publications, 1970); A. M. Mundadan, *Indian Christians Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy*.

<sup>6</sup> Placid J. Podippara, *The Thomas Christians*, 80-85

The Church of St. Thomas Christians maintained its autonomy in its administration, faith and practice.<sup>8</sup> Though the church came in contact with various streams of Christianity it maintained its autonomy and resisted any attempt to corrupt its identity. The Church had its autonomy in the following things:-

- a. During Pre-Portuguese period the St. Thomas Christians had a self awareness that their church was established by St. Thomas and they were following the law of Thomas. So they neither adhered to the faith and doctrines of any other churches nor dependent upon any church. So they rejected the doctrine of Transubstantiation, they condemned the adoration of images, they had no knowledge of the intercession of saints as well as masses and prayers for the dead, they had no extreme unction, for all questions of doctrine they took the authority of the Scripture as decisive.
- b. The church also evolved its own indigenous leadership. During the time of the friendly relationship between the Mar Thoma Community and the Persian Church, the Persian bishops used to look after the spiritual needs of the Mar Thoma Christians. India. The Christians used to elect a Jathikku Karthyvan from the family of Pakalomattom to represent the Christian community in political, economic and social matters. He wielded authority over the entire Christian community. Thus he had the right

<sup>7</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *Christian Missions: Their Place in India*. Ed, Bharatan Kumarappa, Reprint (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1960, c1941), 3.

<sup>8</sup> K.K.Kuruvilla, *A History of the Mar Thoma church and its Doctrines* (Madras: CLS, 1951), 8-11.

to convene the Palliyogam of the Christian community and presided over it. It is believed that the kattanars as well as the jatik karthyvan had no special dress code; they might use the same dress of an ordinary lay person. So the Persians could only accept him as an Arch deacon, a lower rank in their ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>9</sup>

- c. The awareness of this autonomy was expressed in two movements: one that taken place in 1653 to resist the imposition of Roman doctrines upon the church and to regain its independence from foreign control. The second was the reformation movement initiated by Abraham Malpan and others to regain the faith and practices of the St. Thomas Christians and its autonomy as the Indian church.

#### **4. Five streams that flows into the church**

- a. St. Thomas tradition and from 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards through the East Syrian Church.
- b. From 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards with the Roman Catholic Church
- c. After Coonen Cross Oath (1653) through the Jacobites
- d. From 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards through the Anglicans/CMS
- e. The Ecumenical Movement/WCC  
Through its contact with the East Syrian church the Mar Thoma Church received its eastern identity in its life and practice. The celibate episcopacy, the liturgical worship, signs and symbols in the worship as son on. When their identity was questioned and the attempt to force the Roman faith and practice resistance in the form of a revolt was taken place known as the Coonen Cross oath. The

Coonen Cross Oath of 1653 was actually the assertion of the autonomy of the St. Thomas Christians and their commitment to preserve the given identity as St. Thomas Christians. The self awareness was the motivation behind the elevation of Archdeacon Thomas as the Mar Thoma I as their bishop. Mar Thoma I was the first native bishop of the St. Thomas Christians. Before him we have the help of East Syrian bishops for dedicating the church buildings, for ordaining the priests and so on. We should always remember that before Mar Thoma I the indigenous leader of the St. Thomas Christians was the Arch deacon. The office of the present Mar Thoma Metropolitan Joseph Mar Thoma falls in line with this unbroken ecclesiastical leadership, and thus one of the unique evidences to prove the autonomy of the Mar Thoma Church as an Indian Church.

Through the Jacobite connection we received the St. James liturgy which we use today for our Holy Qurbana. The contact with the Anglican Church /Church Missionary Society during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Abraham Malpan and others were reminded of the need to regain the identity of the Mar Thoma Church in its faith and practice. The Open Bible (translation of the Bible into Malayalam and its availability for reading) and the Protestant emphasis of the scripture for all matters of faith, facilitated to evaluate the life of the St. Thomas Christians and their faith and practices. So Abraham Malpan and other reformers attempted to remove all that were contrary to the Biblical teachings from the St. James liturgy and the practices of the church. That does not mean that Abraham Malpan and the reformers accepted a Protestant system of faith and practice. It will be discussed below.

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<sup>9</sup> Refer A.M.Mundadan, *Indian Christians Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy*.

It is interesting to note that though the church had been interacted with these streams to shape the faith and practices of the church and its mission perspectives, it never sacrificed its individuality and identity. It always accepted biblically sound doctrines, faith and practices. This freedom is one of the unique features of this church.<sup>10</sup> Thus Mar Thoma Church is a church that combines the Eastern as well as the Western forms of church traditions. At the same time Mar Thoma church is an Indian church, neither, Jacobite nor Protestant. The history of the Church is the history of its shaping all through these 20 centuries. The Mar Thoma Church is the only church of this kind.

## 5 The Liturgy

Though a reformation took place within the Mar Thoma church, the church never sacrificed its given identity as an eastern church. We continued our liturgical worship, but with a revised liturgy and its translation to Malayalam so that the worshipping community could understand what they believe. **For the Mar Thoma church Bible and Liturgy (accepted written orders of worship) have equal importance.** It can neither be substituted for the other nor be replaced by the other. This equal emphasis of both is the unique identity of the Mar Thoma church.<sup>11</sup> The Declarations of the Mar Thoma Church about its faith and practices are found in the beginning of its Constitution. It affirms: "The Holy Bible consisting of the sixty-six books comprised in the Old and New Testaments accepted by the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian church as the basis for all matters of doctrine and

faith, and the Nicene Creed formulated in accordance with the Holy Scriptures shall in no wise be altered in any manner by any one. Likewise, the ministry of Deacon, Priest and Episcopa, the rites of the Church Dedication, Church consecration, Holy Baptism, Holy Communion (Qurbana), Holy Matrimony, Unction of the Sick, Funeral (burial) Service as well as the observance of Sundays, Lents, and Dominical Feasts, shall not at any time be abolished."<sup>12</sup>

### a. Origin of Liturgies<sup>13</sup>

Christians used to gather for public worship since apostolic times for prayer and for breaking of bread. New Testament and the early Christian writings endorse these liturgical assemblies. Due to persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire and the heresies (wrong teachings) that developed within the early church the early church was forced to defend its faith in the triune God and to affirm the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus. The creeds (doctrines of faith) were also produced by the general ecumenical councils such as Nicea, Ephesus, and Constantinople etc. The Nicene Creed which The Mar Thoma Church believes to be formulated in accordance with the Bible explains the Trinitarian doctrine, theology, Christology and the ecclesiology.

The Bible was not available to all members of the Christian church in early times. It was through the liturgy they learned about the

<sup>10</sup> Juhanon Mar Thoma "A call to the churches of Christ in India" Appendix I, in Christianity in India and a Brief History of the Mar Thoma Church (Madras: K. M. Cherian, 1968),44

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See *Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar Constitution*, Part I, Chapter I, Declarations, Section I

<sup>13</sup> Refer Paul Meyendorff, "Liturgy" in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications,1991), 623-626.

Christian faith. Liturgy embodied the faith of the church, thus the source of theology. That is why we see so many repetitions of prayers in the liturgy, so that the worshipping community should be instructed of the orthodoxy (right doctrines). Thus liturgy became a teaching tool for the church, in other words it explains the teachings of the Scriptures.

When we study our sacramental liturgies it unveils and explains the Christ event, the importance of the Cross of Jesus Christ for humanity and their relationship with human and the created order. Unfortunately, the so called Free Church tradition, the emphasis is more on scripture and an emphasis on congregational autonomy in ordering its liturgy. One weakness of this model is that it curtails a continuity of the Orthodoxy (right doctrines) that was developed by the early church, and thus detaches the worshippers from the traditions of the church, which in turn had developed from its authentic

engagement and encounter with contemporary world.

So participating in the liturgy of the Mar Thoma church for the members of the Mar Thoma church means, they are helping themselves to be oriented in the faith of the church, a faith that was tested and proved biblically sound by its living through centuries. The members of the Mar Thoma church and their families are to make earnest effort to engage with the Mar Thoma liturgy, so as to be built on the foundations laid by the early Church, and that had been preserved by the subsequent generations by withstanding all challenges that came in their way.

*\*Rev. Dr. Alex Thomas, a Church historian currently serves as vicar of St. Singapore Mar Thoma Church. Formerly Achen was the Professor at Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam and Dharma Jyothi Vedyapeeth, Faridabad.*

## REFLECTIONS FROM YOUTH CONFERENCE



*By Serene Binu Sam.*

### **Reflection on 'Firm Foundations' - Mathew 7 :24-27**

**D**uring the duration of our 5th Youth Conference, we have covered the aspect of what a firm foundation is and how we can attain it. We know that foundations are the basis of what we do in life and that fake, funny or false foundations only deter us the path we should be following.

Therefore, who is our foundation? The answer to that is Jesus Christ and with belief in him, we are able to overcome continuous troubles and temptations. We have a loving and living God in which we're able to see a rock, fortress and redeemer. A rock as our foundation, a fortress as our safe haven where we can run into when times are tough and our redeemer to deliver us from our problems. In addition to creating a firm

foundation there also needs to be a way of fuelling it. This is through the Bible and by fellowship and with fellowship comes criticism and correction of our attitudes, beliefs and behaviour, which leads us to experience the wholesome love of Jesus Christ. In our group sessions, we covered the 4 fundamental elements of the big picture of what a firm foundation is. These are sin, curses, cross and new world. Sin and curses are the problems. The solution to sin is the cross and solution to curses is the new world.

Allow me to explain this in a little more depth. As we all know, sin first entered through man-eating the forbidden fruit and with that began the rebellion of man and the urge for control. But what we know now is that we shouldn't take control from the creator and try to be the ruler but to instead be the creation that we are.

As Adam and Eve rebelled against God humanity has been cursed by God in relationships and work. God also introduced death and banished us

from his presence and we are bearing the consequences.

BUT, even though there are these problems we have something to work towards which is the new world. In which there are no tears, injustice or danger. When learning about the cross we understand that we should value the sacrifice Christ had made and reflect upon that every day. As groups, we acknowledged that in our day to day lives this was something we found hard to accomplish but with a conviction of Christ getting through experiences like these We'll be able to do so.

So by understanding these 4 elements, we are able to see where we are going wrong and with more time and dedication in the word, we'll be able to reinforce our foundations in Christ. Through this I was able to understand where I need to adjust my ways of worship and how to trust more in what the Lord does so that my foundations cannot be jolted and I will stand firm.

## Achievements



On behalf of Mar Thoma Community in UK & Europe, ECHO would like to congratulate, Sharon Mathew, who completed her Doctorate in Counselling Psychology from Teesside University. Her clinical specialisations included working with drug and alcohol services, neuropsychiatry, children's and adult mental health services. Her doctoral research work was on the concept of 'post traumatic growth' in people faced with adverse life challenging situations. Through her research study, she developed a model of processes which facilitate post traumatic growth in clinical as well as non-clinical population. Having registered as a practitioner-chartered psychologist with the health and care professions council and the British Psychological society, Sharon now works as a Clinical Counselling Psychologist with the Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust, within Adult mental health.

# Children Corner

## GOD WHO MAKES EVERYTHING GOOD

By Andria Sam – Year 4

**T**heir hearts sang and they turned to each other trembling and said "what is this that God has done to us?"(Genesis 42:28)

I have a story based on these Bible words. There was a young man who was energetic and enthusiastic. He had a great adventurous spirit and was very capable and courageous.

One day he thought of making a journey around the world. He embarked on his journey to go around the world on a ship. This ship was sailing at sea when a grave calamity struck. In the middle of the deep and endless ocean the ship hit a huge iceberg and a crack developed on the ship hull.

Everyone started screaming and wailing. The ship sank in very short time. somehow this young man survived. He was not sure how, but when he opened his eyes he realised that he was on a small deserted island. He drank water from small streams in the forest and ate fruits and berries that he could get hold of from the climbers and shrubs. He was very dejected and felt that his life

was going to end there. He even thought that it would have been better if he had died in the ship wreck, rather than living alone.

After a few days he managed to build a small hut on his own. As a day's went by, he became increasingly anxious. He could see ships appearing as tiny. He tried shouting at the top of his voice and jumping to attract the attention of ships, but in vain.

But then one day, when he returned to his hut, he was totally shocked and dismayed. He found his little hut in flames. everything ablaze and the smoke drifting up to the sky. He experienced a crushing sadness, started beating his chest and said " Oh God, such a fate has come to me. God, how could you do this to me? I struggled a lot and worked so hard to make this my hut. How many times did I plead with you and pray that ship come to find me and rescue me? That did not happen and now even worse.

This young man stood there in total despair. Suddenly he heard a sound like siren. He saw a boat coming towards him. what a miracle and what a surprise! The people on the boat signalled him to come on board and they brought the boat as close as they could, nearer to the shore so that he could get in.

Once his rescuers took him to the ship, the young man was full of relief. As soon as the captain of the ship saw him, he told this young man "Son, we came to realise that someone out there on that island needed help, only because you lit the fire so high. We saw your smoke signal. It was good that you thought of lighting a fire there!"

In reality, he did not light the fire. But the blaze that happened became favourable for him. The small hut which he made by toiling for days, which burned down in to ashes, ultimately turned out for his good. The moral of this story is " God is always with you wherever you go, and that you should always have faith in God" .





Sketch by  
Andria Sam (Yr.4)



Sketch by

Ataliah Santosh (Gr.3)



## Zonal Sevika Sangham Conference

*Compiled by Mrs. Subin Modit*

**1**st Zonal Suvishesha sevikasangam conference UK and Europe Zone- A journey to remember

There are some things we experience in our life that gets engraved in our mind, our Dublin trip was one of them. We were so excited when we got the opportunity to represent Hermon Mar Thoma church in the Sevikasangam conference in Dublin.

Our journey began from Birmingham airport on the 27th of June 2019. After the struggles and juggles through the security at the airport we managed to board the flight. When we landed the beautiful city of Ireland, we thanked God almighty for enabling us to make the trip. One of our team member even had a 25 page print-out of the possible quiz questions from Acts of the Apostles. Yes, we had come prepared for the quiz which was to be held on the day of the conference. It was interesting to watch the preparation of each team member. It was a true example of the proverb 'unity is strength'.

On the second day of our arrival we had the opportunity to enjoy the architectural wonders of the city and have a good tour around Dublin. It was truly an enjoyable experience.

On the third day, 29th June 2019, we arrived at the Venue, St. Maelruain's Church, Tallaght on time for the conference. The hospitality of the Nazareth Mar Thoma church, Dublin members were amazing. Sevika Sangham conference began with Holy Qurbana led by 3 Achens. Other programme started at 12pm with an opening song followed by a prayer. There was a welcome speech and felicitation. We had a group discussion after the Qurbana. The main talk and discussions were based on Christian parenting in this multicultural world.

After a delicious Kerala meal we faced the big elephant in the room and that was the quiz completion. We had 5 ladies in each group from 6 various churches around the UK. The questions were taken from book of Acts. After completing all the questions, Hermon Mar Thoma church, Birmingham, emerged victorious. The second prize had gone to Nazareth Mar Thoma church, the host of the conference. The conference ended around 4pm with songs, testimony, reflection, vote of thanks and benediction. The hard work the Nazareth Mar Thoma Church was much appreciated in conducting this event. The team worked really hard behind the success of this event.

To summarise, it was thought provoking and brought so many good memories to cherish. We were inspired by the stories of many ladies who remain strong in the face of challenges. It was hard to bid farewell as we made some good friendships in the short span of time.

We were so proud to hold the trophy we won for the quiz competition while boarding the flight and it was fun to share our story with few inquisitive ones in the airport. We got back home safe with the grace of God. Events like these are spiritually uplifting and we look forward to more of the same in the future.

P.S. Congratulations Hermon marthoma savinies for winning the ever-rolling trophy for the quiz competition.

## News & Notices

*"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."*



# BADMINTON TOURNAMENT

Venue:  
Hounslow Badminton Centre (The Dome), 237 North Hyde Lane, Heston, UB25TZ

Organised by  
St John's MTC Youth League

Food sale by  
St John's MTC Sevika Sangham

**Saturday, August 10th 2019**

For more details, pls contact:

**Rev. Binu J. Varghese**  
Vicar & President  
St John's MTC, Hounslow  
07307 758049

**Reneeth Eipe Mathew**  
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**P. J. John**  
Convener  
pj@stjohnsbadminton.com  
020 85703019 / 07933 015463

**Shruti Rose Varghese**  
Director  
shruti2002@hotmail.com  
07486 385333

Reporting Time: **9am**  
**10am - 5pm**

Fees:  
**£10** each member for each event  
**£25** for three events  
**£45** for family (min. 3 members per family)

St. Johns Badminton



**Nazareth Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam**

# BADMINTON Tournament 2019

5<sup>th</sup> August 2019, 9am - 4pm | St. Maelruain's Church Hall, Tallaght

Registration fee is € 20 per team  
 Doubles only (Mixed allowed)  
 All participants must be church members  
 Last day to register is 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019  
 16 teams is the limit

*for further details please contact*

**Aju Varghese**  
Convener  
0870660585

**Jeffrey Jacob Joji**  
Convener  
0892521525

**Sharon John**  
Secretary  
0873643427

Nazareth Badminton



Nazareth Mar Thoma Church  
Dublin-Ireland

# Annual Convention & Parish Day - 2019



Evg. Johnson David  
Main Speaker

Aug. 14, 15, 16 (6.30 pm-9pm)

St. Maelruain's Church, Tallaght

Parish Day : Saturday **17<sup>th</sup>** August

Holy Communion Service @ 10 am

Rev. Varughese Philip  
Vicar

Joji Abraham P. Jacob  
Parish Secretary

Alex P. Thankachan  
Convener



Nazareth Mar Thoma Church  
Dublin - Ireland



## Ireland Mar Thoma Family Conference

Conference Leader



Rev. Shaji Thomas  
(Aluva)

Date : **4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

Venue : **Kippure Estate,  
Blessington, Co. Wicklow**

ALL ARE WELCOME

*pray.. participate...& be blessed....*



Rev. Varughese Philip  
Vicar

Joji Abraham P. Jacob  
General Convener & Parish Secretary

# 37<sup>th</sup> Mar Thoma Family Conference 2019



Don't Miss the  
**DEADLINE!**

**REGISTER  
NOW**

Greetings from the Family Conference Team. Hardly a month to the much anticipated 37<sup>th</sup> Mar Thoma Family Conference. We are eagerly looking forward to welcoming you all at the conference.

#### Registration Deadline

With a change of management at Yarnfield Park Conference Centre, they have asked us to provide the final named list of delegates by 8<sup>th</sup> of August. In order to meet this deadline, we request all our members to please register for the conference latest by 31<sup>st</sup> of July. This will massively help us to complete the data entry, room allocation and submit the named list to the centre on time. Please cooperate.

Thank you if you have already registered. If not, please find attached the registration form in editable pdf format. You can type directly into the form and save. Once completed, please send it back to our conference email id at: [familyconference2019@gmail.com](mailto:familyconference2019@gmail.com).

Please refer to the registration form and follow the instructions on how to pay the conference fees. The registration form is also available to download from our website:  
<http://www.carmelmtc.org.uk/familyconference2019/>

#### Quiz Competition: Part-3

Thank you for your active response to Part-1 & 2. Please see the Part-3 questions on page 3. The quiz is open to all members of the Mar Thoma Church living in the UK and Europe Zone. Please email your answers to [familyconference2019@gmail.com](mailto:familyconference2019@gmail.com) indicating the question number and your answer to each question. Please remember to write your full name, address and name of your parish or congregation. Please note that only one entry per household is allowed. The deadline to receive answers to these ten questions is 31/07/2019, 6:00pm.

All organising teams are diligently working on various aspects of the conference. Please do pray and partake. This conference will be enriched by your participation. In the meantime, if you have any questions please feel free to get in touch.

Rev. Jacob K A  
Vicar - Carmel MTC Liverpool  
07876073573

Dr. V S Varughese  
General Convenor  
07775712103

Mr Raji Mathew John  
Convenor - Publicity & Registration  
07889217641

## Photo Gallery



*(Above) Blessed and Memorable moments for Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church & Marthomites in Ireland as Most. Revd Michael Geoffrey St. Aubyn Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin and Bishop of Glendalough in the Church of Ireland visited His Grace Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan, Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos, Rt. Rev. Joseph Mar Barnabas, Rt. Rev. Thomas Mar Timotheos, Rt. Rev. Dr. Abraham Mar Paulos, Rev. K.G. Joseph (Sabha Secretary) & Rev. Jose Punamadam (Director Animation Centre) in POOLATHEEN, Thiruvalla, Kerala*

*(Below) Participants from 1<sup>st</sup> Zonal Sevika Sangham Meet on 29th June 2019, St. Maelruain's Church, Tallaght*





*(Above) Rev Dr P G George, Vicar of Sinai MTC London, Rev Jacob K A, Vicar of Carmel MTC Liverpool, Choir and members of Carmel MTC attended the Liverpool Diaspora Consultation event held at the Liverpool Hope University on Wednesday, 5th June. Our achens led the worship and choir sang beautifully that was greatly admired by the audience. It was an honour for the Mar Thoma Church to be a part of this blessed Ecumenical Diaspora event attended by various Christian groups from around the world.*

*(Below) First set of 15 Irish delegates on their way to 5<sup>th</sup> Mar Thoma Youth Conference at Yarnfield, Stone, Staffordshire.*





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*Winners of the Zonal SS Quiz Competition , Hermon MTC Sevika Sangham members with ever-rolling trophy*

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