

current status of the mission organizations and activities, see “Mar Thoma Sabha” at www.marthoma.in and the latest edition of the Diary of the Mar Thoma Church.

Review Questions:

1. What are the outreach activities of your parish today? What are the types of outreach activities of the Mar Thoma Church in India?
2. Identify the various outreach activities of American churches and show how we can be creative in introducing some of them in our Church.
3. After reviewing several types of outreach activities in India and in America, select one you recommend. Give your reasons in selecting it. Explain the activity and show how we can put it into practice as a Sunday School or as a parish.
4. Discuss outreach activities as part of mission of Jesus, more than social service type of activities.

GRADE TEN
MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE
MAR THOMA CHURCH

Lesson 5

CURRENT MISSION EFFORTS AND
CENTERS OF THE MAR THOMA CHURCH

Aim:

To acquaint the students with various mission centers of our Church outside Kerala which are established through the “reformation spirit and evangelistic emphasis” of our Church.

Bible Verse: Isaiah 60: 1 & 3

“Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn...”

Scripture Reading: Luke 10: 1-16; Acts 1:1-8.

Main Ideas:

This second passage talks about the risen Lord’s command to wait for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and then becoming witnesses to the gospel first in your hometown, then in the nearby communities and lastly to the distant areas of the world. Empowering by the Holy Spirit is essential for fulfilling God’s mission locally, nationally and internationally.

Mar Thoma Church continues its reformation emphasis of taking the gospel to various corners of India from its home base in Kerala. There was a special emphasis on this "reaching the unreached" during the 150th anniversary celebrations of the reformation in 1986. Late Metropolitan Alexander Mar Thoma had a special role in the "sending new missionaries" to the remote villages of India.

The Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association (established in 1888) is the official Mission Wing of Mar Thoma Church, the first and oldest of the National Missionary movement in India. This organization is supporting various mission centers throughout India. Mar Thoma Voluntary Evangelists Association (established in 1924) is stressing the importance of witnessing to the members and non-members within the borders of each parish (Edavakka). Each parish is expected to have a separate Edavakka Mission. Our parishes in North America are also following this imperative of having Edavakka Mission. The third official mission - centered organization of the Mar Thoma Church is the Suvisheshha Sevika Sangham (established in 1919). (Women's Auxiliary for Witnessing the Gospel) of our Church, The Yuvajana Sakhyam (Youth League or the Youth Fellowship) established in 1933 is the fourth official organization engaged in social, educational and service-out-reach activities of the Church. All these four organizations support various mission and out-reach activities in India and abroad.

Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam was established in 1905 to nurture the spiritual growth of children. Now all parishes including that of North America have Sunday Schools to provide Christian education for Children. Sunday school also encourages the teaching of community service.

There are 52 mission fields, 52 missionary priests, 208 evangelists (lay missionaries), 3 hospitals, 3 Ashrams, and five

homeless shelters (deserted homes), 1 nursery school, 43 schools, and 2 colleges sponsored by the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association. The world famous Maramon Convention is also conducted annually under the auspices of this organization.

Mar Thoma Church is an evangelical church with a clear mandate for various forms of mission activities besides preaching the gospel. In recent years, the Church has taken more mission initiatives in sharing the gospel of Christ in the Indian context. The Church believes in educating, empowering and assisting people to be masters of their own lives. The earlier method of sending evangelists simply to preach the gospel to the masses in India is taking a back seat in the contemporary mission activities of the Church. The church is training evangelists to be more sensitive to the total needs of the people and encourage solidarity with the suffering masses so that the average person can understand the meaning of the gospel as an invitation to become free from the bondage of age old divisions, hatred and apathy. At the same time, our mission efforts focus also on witnessing to the power of the saving grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ, through personal evangelism. To this end, the church has attempted to incorporate some of indigenous life-activity style for establishing mission centers in India.

One of the earliest methods of evangelization was through the Ashram - type centers where dedicated members will establish indigenous "live-in-fellowship" mode of life style (retreat centers) which offered various services (educational, health clinic, and study groups) to the near by villages, along with the personal witnessing of the gospel in the vernacular language of the people.

Sharing the gospel through preaching, teaching and community services became the threefold emphasis of the

Ashram movements. Three of the earliest Ashrams are Christudas a Ashram, Palghat, Christa Panthi Ashram, Shora; and Christu Mitra Ashram, Ankola in North Kanara. As a result of such activities of the members of the Ashram, many local people have learned the love of God manifested through Jesus and have been greatly blessed in many ways.

Other type of mission efforts include adult literacy classes, establishing leprosy clinics (Hoskote, near Bangalore), and small Bible study groups and the method of "dialogue" with people of other faiths. The latest theological school, Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan Smaraka Dharmai Jyoti Vidyaipedam established in 2000 in Faridabad, Haryana, near New Delhi, is specifically designed for training mission workers among Hindi speaking population of North India.

There are great opportunities for people interested in visiting major national mission centers of our Church during the Christmas or summer holidays. Your local parish priest will be able to assist those interested in making a short visit to a particular mission field in India. Our young members have visited Ashrams in small groups from time to time starting in 1989. It is arranged by the Diocese with the cooperation of our Church in India. Young people who return after the "Mission Tour" visit our parishes and describe their experiences and impressions of the work through the Ashrams.

The Diocese of North America has also started its mission work within the United States and Mexico. The Youths in our Church has taken the pioneer efforts in engaging relief work during the summer months and it has already become an annual event. The diocese has initiated the Native American mission in Oklahoma and nearby states starting in 2002.

Review Questions:

1. What is the commission which Jesus entrusted his followers as seen in Acts 1: 1-8?

2. Mention one or two specific activities of the Mar Thoma Church for the fulfillment of this commission.
3. What are the major organizations of the Mar Thoma Church? Select one or two and mention the type of evangelistic work done by them.
4. Discuss the role of the Mar Thoma Church for evangelism in the context of the recent persecution of the minorities in certain parts of India.
5. Develop a plan for mission work outside India as initiated by the second generation of Mar Thoma Members in America.
6. Discuss the current mission work our youths have begun and developed in Mexico.