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GRADE TEN
 MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE
 MAR THOMA CHURCH

Lesson 1

MEANING OF MISSION AND
 MINISTRY

Aim:

To provide a basic understanding of the key concepts of Mission and Ministry

Bible Verse: Matthew 28:18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."

Scripture Readings: Matthew 28: 16-20; John 21: 15-19.

Main Ideas:

A. Meaning of Mission.

The word mission has different meanings today. Many organizations and institutions call for a "mission statement?"

which would precisely and clearly indicate the ideals and purposes for which the entity exists in the society. For example, the mission of an educational institution is to promote education and preserve culture. The mission of a hospital is to provide quality health care services for patients by preventing and treating diseases. The goals and objectives of each institution must be related to its mission. The activities to attain the goals and objectives are designed to fulfill the mission of that particular institution or organization.

The mission of the Church is the mission of God based on the teachings of the Holy Bible. God in Christ has established the Church in this world to fulfill the mission of reconciliation of the entire creation with God. The story of creation is the first act of God's mission. God's spirit or Holy Spirit is the moving force behind the mission. The goal of mission is to bring back the creation, man and his ecosystem, to be in perfect harmony with God. Its mission is revealed in the call to Abraham, the kings, the prophets and other leaders mentioned in the Old Testament. God's mission is finally revealed in the life and work of Jesus Christ in the fullness of time. God in Jesus Christ extends the invitation to all humankind to return to the full fellowship with God. Today the mission of God is carried out by human beings all over the world in partnership with God. The Church has been called to be the instrument of God's mission.

The Church is engaged in sharing the Gospel message with unconditional love and acceptance of humankind. God in Christ calls every human being to return to God in repentance and invites them to become members of the Kingdom of God. Christ commissions his disciples to continue his mission and to carry the message of the Kingdom of God till the end of the earth (Matthew 28:16-20). It is a continuous mission that encompasses the entire universe. It is a laborious, time

consuming, expensive and an expansive activity. The Bible reflects a record of God's work in history as well as a divine call for participation in God's mission.

The Church, as the body of Christ, continues the mission of God. It identifies with the ministry of Jesus Christ and also with the suffering humanity. Liberating humanity from the forces of evil, bondage, injustice and inequality becomes the central focus of the mission of the Church in contemporary society.

B. Meaning of Ministry

The other side of the coin of mission is the Ministry of the Church which is also known as the "diakonial ministry" (servant ministry). Church, as the extension of the incarnation of Christ, participates in the servant ministry of Christ by continuing to serve the total needs of persons as Jesus Christ has done during his ministry on the earth. If the proclamation of the message of the Kingdom of God is done by witnessing to the saving grace of God, then the ministry of the Church must focus on the serving aspect of that proclamation. The basis of this aspect of the ministry is found in John 21: 15-19; "Feed my lamb" commission. If the mission of the Church is "centrifugal", that is, reaching out and bringing in people into the fellowship of the Church, the ministry consists of the "centripetal" dynamic of taking care of the total (educational, economic, social and spiritual) needs of the members of the Christian community. Persons who accept the message of Christ need nurturing in the loving, caring, and worshiping community.

By nature, church is a community which recognizes mutual dependence and communion with one another. It has to be a human community of men and women who struggle hard to translate faith into action. The distinctive element of the early church was its unique quality of life which was expressed through *Koinonia*, a Greek word for communion and fellowship. The church was meant to be a community that is based on the

spiritual values of faith, hope and love. The contemporary Church has to recover this vision of *Koinonia* which binds everyone with Christ to provide for the nurture and growth. Ministry is not merely a function to be performed by an ordained priest alone; active participation of the laity is equally important. Laity, as people of God, must always be sensitive to the needs of its members as well as others within in the community. The Church must be willing to work with members and non-members in order to provide for the needs of those around us and thus to fulfill the servant ministry of the Church in America as well as all over the world. While upholding the eastern traditions of the Mar Thoma Church, we must join hands with other Christians in this land, since we share with them the gospel through the confession of our faith and actions. We should also engage in the activities that are designed to meet the varying challenges and needs of our local neighbors and communities. It is certainly incumbent upon us to support the institutions and individuals who are engaged in communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ in foreign countries where Christians are minorities especially in India, the ancestral land of our parents.

The essence of the mission and ministry of the Church is summed up in the following words of Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan: "The message of the Kingdom of God calls upon us to serve others in all their needs – physical, mental, and spiritual. This involves working with the integrated development of the community to eradicate poverty, and unemployment and to provide education and health care for all." (*The Mar Thoma Church-Heritage and mission*).

Review Questions:

1. What is Mission? What is ministry? How would you differentiate between the concepts of mission and ministry as carried on by our Church?

2. Discuss the statement of the late metropolitan Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma on mission and ministry.
3. What is the mission of the Mar Thoma members living in North America? How do we accomplish it by following different ways or approaches? Examine the responsibility of young people for the mission and ministry of our Church?

GRADE TEN

MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE MAR THOMA CHURCH

Lesson 2

PIONEERS OF MISSION IN THE MAR THOMA CHURCH

Aim:

To study the life of two great leaders of the Mar Thoma Church in the 20th century and to examine the impact of their contributions on the mission of the Church in contemporary society.

Bible Verse: Romans 10: 12

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, the same Lord is Lord of all, and richly blesses all who call on him.

Scripture Reading: Acts 3:1-10.

Among the many church denominations upholding the St. Thomas traditions in India, the Mar Thoma Church has a unique and unparalleled position in developing indigenous missionary movement in India by establishing the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association in 1888 A.D., which started sending Indians as missionaries (evangelists) to the rest of India. Among the Bishops of the Mar Thoma Church, two stand out as pioneers who guided the Church in this endeavor in the twentieth century.

They are the former Metropolitan: The Most Rev. Dr. Abraham Mar Thoma and the Most Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma. An overview of their contributions to the missionary efforts of the Church should explain the current mission focus of the Mar Thoma Church. There are a few other bishops including Metropolitan Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma who initiated unique social programs for achieving justice in society, and Bishop Dr. Mathews Mar Athanasius who built centers for evangelistic work and the Suffragan Metropolitan Dr. Thomas Mar Athanasius who laid a strong foundation for the Mar Thoma Church in North America. In addition, there are a large number of evangelists, men and women who preached the Good News of the Gospel in the Malayalam speaking areas of the country. Local revival preachers such as the late Moothampakkal Sadhu Kochukunju and Punchamannil Mammen, and Kandamma Varrughese, the pioneer leader who established the Sevika Sangham (Women's Auxiliary Mission), are a few examples of leaders who participated in the indigenous lay mission in Kerala.

Dr. Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan (1880-1947)

N. M. Abraham was born in central Kerala and received his elementary and high school education in Eraviperoor and Thiruvalla. Later, he attended Madras Christian College and received his B. A. degree. He was ordained a deacon in 1911 and became the first college graduate to enter the ordained ministry of the Mar Thoma Church. Later he was sent for higher studies to Wycliff College in Toronto from where he received his M. A. and B. D. degrees. Also, he was awarded the honorary Doctor of Divinity degree by the same college when he became a bishop. He was consecrated as a bishop of the Mar Thoma Church in 1917 and in 1944 he became the Metropolitan. He led the Church with a new vigor and vision until his death in 1947. Dr. E. Stanley Jones, a pioneer missionary of the

Methodist Church, called him the "Great Indian Missionary". During his 30 years of service as the bishop of our Church, he energized the Church through regular parish visits, revival meetings, prayer fellowship meetings, youth meetings and continuing education (refresher) courses for the clergy of the Church. He worked incessantly to share the gospel message with the rest of the Indian population. He became the role model of an activist missionary and in the true spirit of reformation, inspired hundreds of lay persons to become evangelists during the first half of the 20th century. As a result of his progressive leadership, Mar Thoma Church gained a unique position among the Churches in Kerala and India. Some of his contributions may be summed up as follows:

1. He firmly believed that Mar Thoma Church has a special role in evangelizing the rest of India.
2. He was a pioneer in sending missionaries from Kerala to various corners of India to preach the gospel.
3. He exhorted every member of the Mar Thoma Church to be a Missionary (Evangelist) and to promote this, he established the Mar Thoma Voluntary Evangelists' Association.
4. His entire life, as a priest, bishop and Metropolitan, was dedicated to the molding of the Mar Thoma Church as a pioneer evangelistic church among all the Churches in India.

**Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan
(1913-2000)**

M.G. Chandry was born and raised in the family of Rev. M. C. George at Kuriamnoor in Central Travancore of Kerala. After completing his high school education, he attended two famous junior and senior colleges in Kerala and received his B. A in Mathematics and started his career as a teacher. Later he attended the United Theological College in Bangalore and

received his Bachelor of Divinity degree. He was ordained a deacon in 1945 and a priest in 1946. In 1948, he was sent for higher studies in USA and received his S. T. M. (Master of Sacred Theology) from the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and in 1952 he was awarded the Ph. D. degree from the Hartford Seminary Foundation in Hartford, Connecticut. Upon his return to Kerala, he was appointed principal of the Mar Thoma College, Thiruvalla. He was consecrated as a bishop in 1953 and in 1976 he was elevated as the metropolitan, and Senior metropolitan (Valiya Thirumeni) in 1999. He was the first among our bishops to receive an earned Ph. D. and also the first to hold the title Senior Metropolitan, in the history of our Church. Having entrusted the responsibility of the administration of the Church under the able leadership of his successor, he succumbed to death on January 11, 2000.

He was regarded as a great spiritual leader by Mar Thomites, episcopal colleagues and leaders of sister Churches and political leaders in Kerala and elsewhere. He led a very simple life of an Indian ascetic throughout his life as a bishop. Although he had the best education in India and USA, he had the special gift for communicating with the low and high, the poor and the rich, Christians and non-Christians, religious or secular political leaders which earned him the reputation of a bishop who lived what he preached.

Main contributions

1. A great passion and zeal for the Mission of the Church was the supreme guiding principle in his life. His tenure as a missionary bishop of the church still holds the record. His mission concept included the centrifugal and centripetal dynamics. This twofold dynamic of mission and ministry is evident in his call for sending missionaries throughout India and starting new mission fields in the remote villages of

India. Also, he strengthened the existing mission fields. In spite of his health condition, he made it a point to visit annually the outside Kerala mission fields. His deep insight into the Biblical basis of mission and the urgent need for evangelization was reflected in his monthly letters published in the official Church bulletin, *the Sabha Tharaka*. Along with his urgency for implementing the Biblical imperative of mission, he tried to challenge the members to strengthen the spiritual life through parish mission, prayer group meetings and the study of scriptures.

2. His prophetic vision. Alexander Mar Thoma had a prophetic vision. He fulfilled the prophetic role of the priest and continuously challenged the social evils that weaken the spiritual life of our members in the Church and in the community. He continuously fought for the abolition of the use of liquor that bankrupts family life. He always exhorted people to eradicate rampant corruption and to fight against injustice and inequalities within society and the Church.

3. His concern for the poor. Finally, he was not pleased with the material progress of the Church that left behind the economically weaker segments of the members of the Church. He exhorted the Church to be inclusive and to take appropriate measures to uplift the life of the less fortunate ones not only among its members but also among its neighbors, without regard to creed, religion or caste. He showed special interest for the total development of the Dalit community belonging to the Mar Thoma Church. A major development was the recognition granted to the congregations of the Mar Thoma Dalits as independent parishes, with representation in the Sabha Pradhini Mandalam. He never enjoyed elaborate and expensive social or religious functions. Rev. George Alexander wrote "In

Valiya Thirumeni (Senior Metropolitan), one can see the evangelistic vision of Abraham Mar Thoma intertwine with Juhanon Mar Thoma's (these are the two predecessors of Alexander Mar Thoma) call for social justice." (Translated from Malayalam, *Sabha Tharaka*, July 1996). He continuously reminded the church members to do more with the time, talents, and resources for the furtherance of the gospel in India.

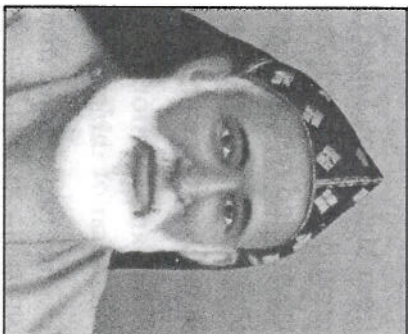
Review Questions:

1. What are the notable features in the upbringing and education of the two metropolitans we have studied?
2. Discuss two or three major contributions of Metropolitans, Abraham Mar Thoma and Alexander Mar Thoma.
3. Examine the life of two Metropolitans we have studied and show that they are pioneers of mission in the Mar Thoma Church. (Discuss this question combining with question no.2 in lesson one).
4. As young people growing up influenced by two cultures (of India and North America) what do we learn from the lives of these two Metropolitans who were influenced by both cultures?

Pioneers of Mission



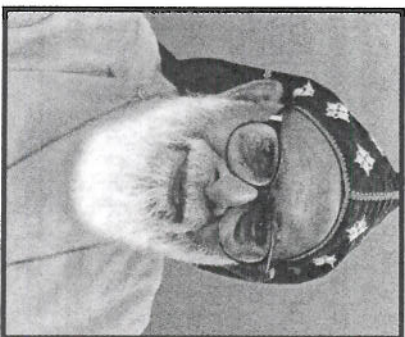
Abraham Malpan



Dr. Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan



Dr. Yuhanon
Mar Thoma Metropolitan



Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma
Valiya Metropolitan

GRADE TEN MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE MAR THOMA CHURCH

Lesson 3

TWO MISSIONARIES TO INDIA FROM THE WEST

Aim:

To introduce the contributions of two well known missionaries to India, Dr. E. Stanley Jones and Mother Teresa who gave most of their life to enlighten the masses in India through two different approaches.

Bible Verse: Micah 6:8

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1-8.

1. Dr. E. Stanley Jones. (1884-1973)

Time Magazine called Dr. Stanley Jones the world's greatest missionary (Time December 12, 1938). He was also known as the most trusted exponent of evangelism in the American Church. When he was awarded the Gandhi Peace Prize in 1964, a spokesperson for the Government of India declared that he had done more than any other person to bring India and the

United States together. The late Bishop Stephen Neil maintained that after C. F. Andrews, Jones was the best-known Western Christian in the whole of India.

Eli Stanley Jones was born in Maryland in 1884. He felt the call to be a missionary while he was a student at Asbury College, Wilmore, Kentucky. He arrived in India in 1907, got married to Mabel Lossing, a lecturer in Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow, in 1911. He continued to serve as a Methodist Church educational missionary until his retirement. He died in Bareilly in northern India in 1973.

In 1928, he was elected as a bishop of the Methodist General Conference in USA; but he resigned the post the next morning before his consecration because he was convinced that his call was to continue as a missionary evangelist. In 1930, he was appointed as “Evangelist-at-large for India and the world.”

He was ahead of his time in his innovative approach to sharing the gospel with the people of India. He adopted a style of Indianizing and de-Westernizing the gospel message in his understanding of evangelism. Christ must be seen in the Indian cultural context, not as a Westernized partisan zealot. This he brought out clearly in his book, *The Christ of the Indian Road* published in 1925. In this book he wrote “Christianity must be defined as Christ, not the Old Testament, not Western Civilization, not even the system built around him in the West, but Christ himself, and to be a Christian is to follow him.... Christ must be in the Indian setting. It must be the Christ of the Indian Road. Christ must not seem a Western Partisan.... but a Brother of Men.” He wanted to present Christ in the form of an Indian Guru, donned in the saffron colored dress, teaching, helping, and healing by the Indian roadside; and crucified and risen walking on the Indian roads.

The second major contribution of Dr. Jones is related to starting Christian Ashrams in India. Modern Indian Ashrams have been an attempt to reclaim an ancient Indian social institution for contemporary social, political, or religious purposes. Having spent considerable time in the Gandhian Ashram, in 1930, Jones created his own Ashram at Sat Tal in North India, truly Christian and truly Indian. He wanted the Ashram to be an ongoing local community of living together. In this Ashram there was an attempt to study the gospel, its implications, its relationship to India's heritage, and to India's religions.

Dr. Jones was also a great friend of the Mar Thoma Church. He was a regular speaker at the world famous Maramon Convention held in Central Kerala under the auspices of the Evangelistic Association of the Mar Thoma Church. He contributed immensely to the theological education of our priests by establishing scholarships at the Leonard Theological College in Jabbapur, India. His message was simple but thought - provoking. His style of evangelism probably did encourage Mar Thoma Church to establish Christian Ashrams in various parts of India. Today, several of the United Methodist Church parishes conduct annual “Ashrams” (retreats) for their members.

Missionary, evangelist, trusted friend of Mahatma Gandhi, interpreter of the gospel in the Indian cultural context, friend of the Mar Thoma Church- these are the major dimensions of Jones' legacy. He was able to communicate the gospel by through interreligious dialogues with scholars of various religions, by learning from one another and by relating the gospel to the indigenous people through their own life styles, symbols, and language. Who else would forsake the glamour of being a bishop and accept the simplicity of a missionary evangelist who could mingle with people of all levels and nationalities but Dr. E. Stanley Jones?

2. Mother Teresa (1910-1997)

Mother Teresa whose original name was Agnes Bojaxhiu, was born on August 27, 1910 in what is now Albania. In 1928, at the age of 18, she joined Roman Catholic religious order and took the name Teresa. The order immediately sent her to India and few years later she began to teach at a Convent School in Calcutta. In 1948, the Catholic Church granted her permission to leave her convent and work among the city's poor people and she became an Indian citizen in the same year. After studying nursing for three months with the American Medical Missionaries in Patna, she returned to Calcutta. Teresa left the convent, wearing a sari and carrying five rupees in her pocket to live "as an Indian among Indians and founded a religious order of nuns" in Calcutta known as "the Missionaries of Charity". Mother Teresa and the nuns of her order wear plain sari with a blue border and simple cross pinned to the left shoulder. Her order provides food for the hungry, and operates hospitals, schools, orphanages, youth centers, and shelters for lepers and the dying poor. It has branches in 50 Indian cities and 30 other countries. The Nirmal Hriday (Pure Heart) home for dying destitute opened in 1952 in Calcutta remains even today as the citadel of her missionary work in India.

She was awarded "the Pope John XXIII Peace Prize" in 1971 and "the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding" in 1972. In 1979, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work with the needy. In her acceptance speech she said: "I choose the poverty of our poor people. But I am grateful to receive the Nobel Prize in the name of the hungry, the naked, the homeless, of the crippled, of the blind, of the lepers, of all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to society and are shunned by everyone." Mother Teresa

died on September 5, 1997. She is the epitome of simple faith and humble living.

Mother Teresa was the supreme example of love, humility and Christ - likeness. She never held big religious rallies or revival meetings. Even her speeches were short but thought provoking. While Dr. Stanley Jones continued to be a missionary, engaging in conversations within the Indian cultural context with political leaders, statesmen, intellectuals and the ordinary people. Mother Teresa embodied the life of an Indian with full of God's love and concern for the neglected, the abused, the marginal and the destitutes of the society. She preached many sermons, not so much through her words, but through her living.

A few of her simple one sentence sayings are:

"We can do no great things, only small things with great love".

"Sacrifice to be real must cost, must hurt, and must empty us of ourselves".

"Yesterday is gone, tomorrow has not yet come: we have only today and let us begin."

"Every child is precious; every child is a gift from God."

"The slum sister they call me, and I am glad to be just that for His love and glory".

The following words reflect of Mother Teresa's philosophy of her mission.

"There is light in this world, a healing spirit, more powerful than darkness we may encounter. We sometimes lose sight of this force when there is too much pain. Then suddenly, the spirit will emerge through the lives of ordinary people who hear a call and answer in extraordinary ways." Finally, she said, "I do convert. I convert you to be a better Hindu, a better Catholic,

a better Muslim, or Jain or Buddhist. When you have found Him, it is up to you to do what He wants from you”.

Review Questions:

1. Who are the two missionaries we studied and where do they come from?
2. Evaluate the life achievements and decisions of E. Stanley Jones as a great missionary for India.
3. Discuss the service activities of Mother Teresa as the supreme example of love, humility and Christ - likeness.
4. Explain a few simple one-sentence sayings of Mother Teresa, you have studied.

Missionaries who loved India



William Carey



Stanley Jones



Mother Teresa

GRADE TEN

MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE MAR THOMA CHURCH

Lesson 4

CONTEMPORARY MISSION (OUTREACH) ACTIVITIES OF THE MAR THOMA CHURCH

Aim:

1. To overview the outreach activities as part of mission.

2 To promote a sense of service among the young.

Bible Verse: Matthew 22:37-39.

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:31-40

The Mar Thoma Church has championed the cause of the poor, the oppressed and the down trodden through various outreach activities, such as, medical mission, relief work, shelters, counseling centers, homes for the poor, and marriage assistance. This lesson will focus on the Church's role as an advocate, leader and provider for the needs of the poor, the sick and the suffering.

The Church has realized that simple preaching is not enough to accomplish the mission of God among his people. All people in the world are God's people in the sense that they are part of the creation of God. The Church has been given a mandate to reach all people in order to bring them back to fellowship with God. In this particular task, Mar Thoma Church has taken the role of the leader among Kerala Christians in planning, organizing, and establishing medical, educational, training institutions and social welfare centers all over Kerala and outside. There are over 38 organizations and institutions exclusively devoted to the growing needs of the "less fortunate ones" in society. These institutions are supported by the financial contributions of members and well-wishers of the Church, both within in India and abroad. Some of the institutions and centers are listed below under various categories.

1. Rehabilitation and Development for the Mentally Challenged...

The institutions under this category is devoted to serve the welfare and special needs of the mentally challenged persons. Examples of such include Mar Thoma Center for Rehabilitation and Development in Thadiyoor, Mar Thoma Opportunity School in Bangalore, Deenabandu School for Mentally Retarded Children, Kunnamkulam, Jyothi School for Mentally Retarded in Mavelikara. In these institutions, youngsters are cared for their physical, intellectual and spiritual growth.

2. Rehabilitation centers for Physically Challenged

Instead of defining persons with disabilities or handicaps, we use the current language in the literature as physically challenged. Examples of such institutions include the following:

Mar Thoma Deaf and Dumb School, Kasargod, Kerala;

Asha Bhavan, Pathanapuram;

It is specially note worthy to mention that the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers branch has undertaken to support the Deaf and Dumb School in Kasargod as the focus of their mission efforts in India this year.

3. Guidance and Counseling Centers

These types of centers include counseling people with physical, mental health, marital and alcohol problems. Some of such centers include the following:

Mar Thoma Hospital Guidance Center, Trivandrum;

Mar Thoma Counseling Center, Kottayam;

Navajeeven Kendram, Malayalapurza - focus on alcohol problem.

Mar Thoma Hospital Guidance Center, Vellore; and

Mochana, (Focus on Alcohol Problem), Mangalam, Kottayam.

4. Homes for Boys and Girls

The focus of service at such homes is on providing shelter, education and training for poor children and orphans. It is similar to the orphanages in American society. It is to be noted that unlike U. S. orphanages, these facilities are separate for girls and boys. Examples of such homes include:

Balika (girls) Mandiram, Perumbavoor;

Mar Thoma Boys Home, Punalur;

Salem Children's (girls) Home, Thiruvalla and

Balika (girls) Bhavan, Elanthoor.

5. Shelter for the destitute and homeless

More than any other country, India has millions of homeless people of all ages. Many spend their nights in railway stations and vacant -abandoned wagons, and shacks in the urban areas. Mar Thoma Church has established several institutions to serve the destitute. A few of such institutions are listed below.

Dharmagiri Mandiram, Kumbanad;

Ravi Varma Home for the Destitute, Trichur;

Shanti Mandiram, Hoskote, Bangalore and

Carmel Agathi Mandiram, Ayroor.

6. Old Age (Nursing) Homes and Hospice Center

The Nursing Homes in India refer to private medical clinics or hospitals and not the long term care institutions like nursing homes we have in America. The founding of homes for the aged is relatively a new practice in the Mar Thoma Church. Hospice centers, providing shelter and medical and other supportive care is the latest program for the terminally ill.

The following are some of the examples of old age homes and hospice centers.

Sneha (love) Bhavan, Thiruvalla;

Deenabandhu Home for the senior citizens,

Kunnankulam;

Vishranti Bhavan (Retired Workers' Home), Thiruvalla;

Hospice, Kottarakkara and

Hospice Center, Kasargod.

7. Medical Centers

Providing health care for the sick has been a major focus of the mission of the Church in the 20th century. Two of the famous medical mission hospitals of the Mar Thoma Church in Kerala are the Kattanam Medical Center and Kumbanad Fellowship hospital. In addition to caring for the sick, these two institutions have become training centers for nurses and home-health workers. The late Metropolitan Alexander Mar Thoma chose to spend his last days in the Kumbanad Fellowship hospital, the earliest medical institution established by our Church. Several of the outside Kerala Mar Thoma Parishes have supported establishing health clinics as part of the wider ministry of the church for the local people. For the

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 (Edavaka). Each parish is expected to have a separate Edavaka Mission. Our parishes in North America are also following this imperative of having Edavaka 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 Vidyapeedam 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.