

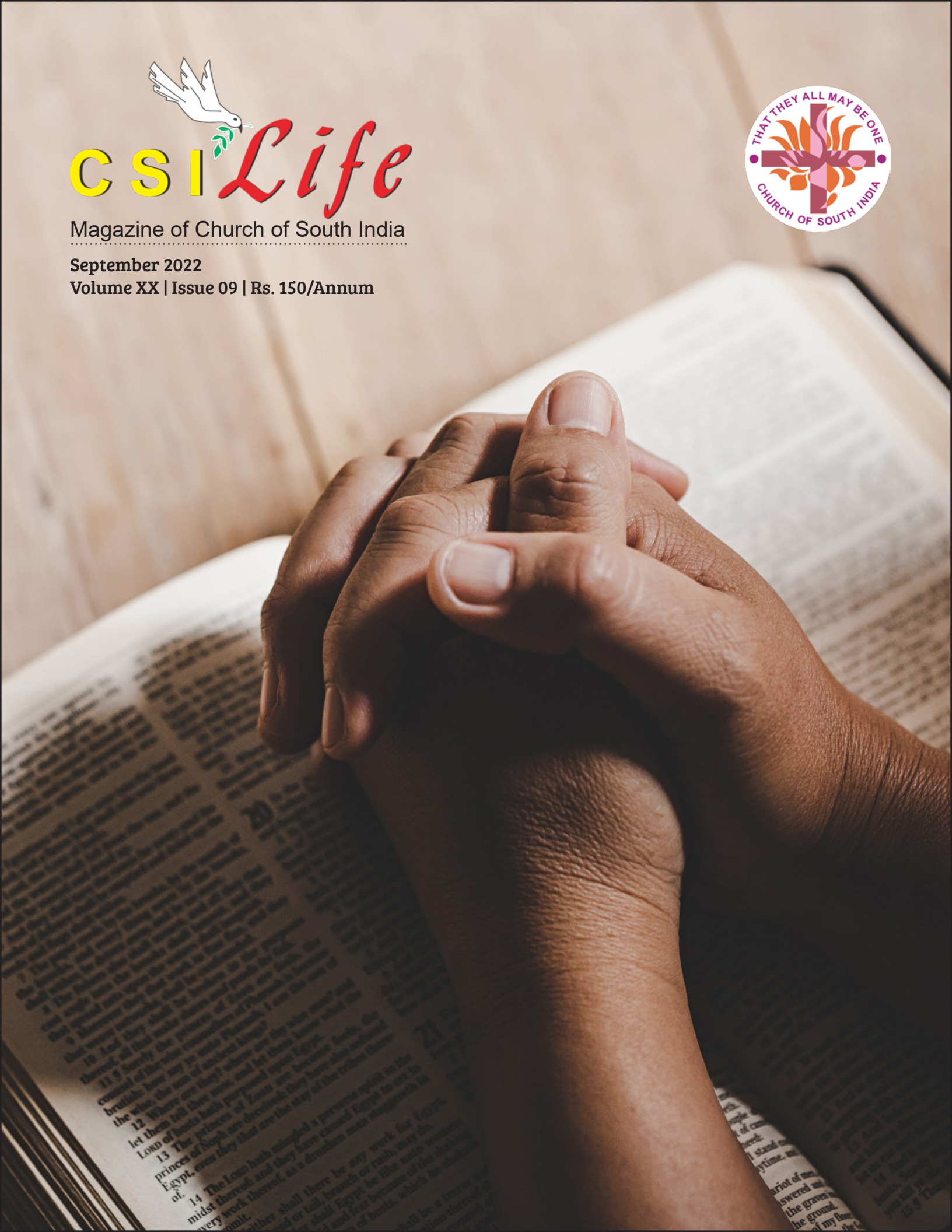


# CSI *Life*

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# ALL INDIA CHURCH SUPPLIERS

38, Main Road, Perumalpuram, Tirunelveli-627 007, Tamilnadu, South India.

Phone : 91+462 2533437,

Mobile: 098421 53281 / 094425 33437

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# Let us Envision Together an Open Church in an Open World

EDITORIAL »

**G**reetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is with immense pleasure and deep sense of thankfulness to God for His unfailing faithfulness and irresistible Grace on the Church of South India; I greet you all from the Office of the General Secretary. Re-viewing the history of our Church, no doubt would prove the greatness of our God and immeasurable love He has showered on us. His unfailing presence has mercifully guided us all for the past seventy-five years.

Founders of CSI have responded to the need of the then context and negotiated to be a united Church bringing together various ecclesiastical traditions. Unity has been our focus and centre of our church life. We are uniquely United both within and outside the church. Our theme on the occasion of the formation and subsequent for Silver and Golden Jubilees have affirmed our commitment to Unity. The theme for the Platinum Jubilee has widened the horizon of unity to allow all those neglected in the church and society to be found within the scope of unity and living together.

In the Platinum Jubilee year, we understand unity not only from the perspective of the church offering

possibility to be united, but also, we move forward to understand unity from the perspective of those who want to be welcomed and accepted, embraced and sustained. This makes our church a real Open Church in our Open World. The vision to be a united Church takes yet another dimension of being open.

As we look ahead and move forward with this vision of being an Open Church in this Open World, let us rededicate ourselves to fulfilling the mission of God. I pray for God's abundant blessings on all of you as you carry out the ministries. I wish all the Pastors a fruitful ministry, the Elders of the Church diakonal solidarity, the grandparents a healthy and peaceful living, parents a satisfactory sense of bringing up the children, young people a vision filled life and persuasion to achieve the vision, and little children a sweet and memorable childhood. Special greetings to all those who are challenged with physical difficulties.

Let us Envision together an Open Church in an Open World.

**C. Fernandes Rathina Raja,**  
*General Secretary, CSI*

# Mission Statement, Mission Priorities and Mission Consultation

**R**evision of the Mission Statement of the Church of South India is a response to the realization of the changing scenario within the context in which the Church lives and ministers. Members of the congregation go through a process of understanding and re – understanding life within their experiences and challenges post by the society. More so in their faith journey, they are in the pursuit of making meaning of the Scripture and its teachings, as well as the teachings of the Church within their socio, cultural, political, economic and religious realities. They try to understand the Scripture within the context of their existential reality on the one hand and life in the light of the Scripture on the other. Members of the congregation, in their faith journey live in specific Context, and move through Experiences, leading to Interpretations, Understanding and resulting in Perceptions which determines the core of the very substance of their faith. The context in which they live give them experiences which affect them both in positive and adverse ways. These experiences forces them to interpret their own life, faith and also the scriptures leading them to understanding(s) of life and faith. These understandings further lead them to develop perspective(s) about their life and faith. It is with these perspectives they continue their faith journey looking up to the Church for teachings which make meaning of the Scripture within their existential reality of life and meaning of life in the light of the Scripture. In the face of these changing, demanding and challenging realities, Mission statement and the Mission Priorities of the Church of South India are revised every decade with view of making the mission and ministries of the Church relevant and contributing to the needs of the congregation.

## **A Mission Consultation was organized with the Global Partners to discuss the Mission Statement and Mission Priorities.**

The Bishops, Synod office bearers, mission partners, clergy, heads of institutions and representatives from the dioceses gathered together at the CSI Centre, Chennai from 24th -26th September, 2022 for the Mission Consultation on the theme, “Life affirming mission of God: Towards building living communities.” The Consultation followed the method of blending together the perspectives on mission through paper presentations drawn from the priorities for mission (2021-2030) and through the life stories of resilience shared by the vulnerable people. The two-way process of reflection from the presentations by the speakers and listening to the life narratives of persons from the marginalized communities provided crucial perspectives. The speakers included Rev. Dr. Dieter Heidtmann, Rev. Julie Sim, Rt. Rev. Iain Greenshields, Rev. Dr. Gnanavaram, Rev. Dr. Duncan Dormor, Rev. Priscilla Reuben Mark, Rev. Dr. Prinstone Ben and Rev. Asir Ebenezer. The life stories were shared by Ms. Prarthana, Mr. Praveen, Dr. J. Jerene Jayanth, Ms. Sudha, Mr. S. John Vincent including video presentations on issues of the people and the earth.

Cry of the Earth and Groaning of Creation : Mission as Striving for Climate Justice By Rev. Dr. Dieter Heidtmann, General Secretary, EMS

Gender & Sexuality : Mission as Affirming Dignity of Life, by Rev. Sim Joo Yee, Mission Secretary, CWM

Sustainable Spirituality in the Contextual Reality of the Local Congregation : Mission as Equipping by



**Prof. Rev. Dr. Alfred Stephen**  
Special Officer,  
Platinum Jubilee Celebrations

Rt. Rev. Iain Greenshields, Moderator,  
Church of Scotland

Witnessing the Faith of the  
Dalits, Migrants and Indigenous  
Communities: Mission as Experience,  
by Rev. Dr. Gnanavaram

Celebrating Plurality : Mission as  
Fostering Networking for Ecumenical  
Unity – Global Perspective, Rev. Dr.  
Duncan Dormor, General Secretary,  
USPG

Gender & Sexuality : Mission as  
Affirming Dignity of Life, by, Rev.  
Priscilla Reuben Mark, Presbyter &  
Bishopamma, CSI Karimnagar Diocese

Dialogue & Diakonia with the Living  
Traditions: Mission as Engaging, by  
Rev. Dr. Prinstone Ben

Celebrating Plurality : Mission as  
Fostering Networking for Ecumenical  
Unity - Indian Perspective, Rev. Asir  
Ebenezer, General Secretary, NCCI

**To make these paper  
presentations and the  
discussions available for the  
members of the Church of South  
India, it was decided to publish  
these papers in the CSI Life  
Magazine which has a much  
wider readership.**

Pertinent themes and affirmations  
emerged through the Mission  
Consultation:

1. Sustainable spirituality in the  
contextual reality of the local  
congregation: Mission as equipping

Sustainable spirituality is possible  
by affirming the body of Christ,  
nurtured by the Holy Spirit to  
grow in the likeness of Christ since  
sustainable spirituality is a gift of  
God. The centrality of the Holy  
Spirit in Christian spirituality and  
righteousness must constantly be  
affirmed as the Spirit empowers the  
communities to be spiritual in life and  
in action.

2. Dialogue and Diakonia with living

traditions and celebrating plurality:  
Mission as engaging

Since the emerging global issues  
are complex, a single religion may  
not be able to engage with possible  
interventions. The Christian  
communities may need to reimagine  
a living intercommunion with other  
faith traditions.

3. Witnessing the faith of the  
Dalits: Migrants and indigenous  
communities: Mission as experience

The experiences of the marginalized  
communities, especially the Dalit  
subjective and liberative experiences  
offer affirmative perspectives  
of mission as reconciliation,  
identification through empowerment  
in eco-centric diaconal mission leading  
to transformation.

4. Cry of the earth and groaning  
of creation: Mission as striving for  
Climate justice

Protecting the environment is possible  
only when all can act together just  
as the world fought the Covid-19  
pandemic through a global culture of  
solidarity.

5. Global and Indian perspectives  
on celebrating plurality: Mission as  
fostering networking for ecumenical  
unity

The global Christian presence requires  
overcoming narrow denominational  
and traditions that have come to define  
churches today. An introspection  
process is required as to whether  
there needs to be a rethinking on  
governance structures that are capable  
of engaging with the mission priorities.

6. Gender and sexuality: mission as  
affirming the dignity of life

In spite of the clash of perspectives  
existing in the understanding the  
gender and sexuality, it needs to  
be affirmed that anything that  
disregards and destroys human dignity  
is negation of love. The pastoral

challenges in encountering gender  
and sexuality are ever present as  
communities and families struggle  
to comprehend and accept sexual  
minority members. The Church  
must involve in a listening process of  
hearing the deep suffering of gender  
and sexual minorities and imagine the  
mission of God as solidarity with the  
broken



# Cry of the Earth and Groaning of Creation : Mission as Striving for Climate Justice

Dear Moderator, Dear Secretary General, Excellencies, Eminences, Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I would like to thank you very much for inviting me to speak here on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the CSI. And before I come to the topic of my talk, I would like to congratulate you all very warmly on your Jubilee.

## 1. The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity

I would like to begin my presentation by introducing you to the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity. I think this is helpful in understanding the perspective from which I am speaking today.

EMS is an international fellowship of 23 churches, two guest churches and five mission societies in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East. The secretariat is located in Stuttgart, Germany. Together we connect 25 million people across three continents. The special feature of the EMS is that all members have equal rights. Together we decide on programmes and projects, finances, personnel and all fundamental questions.

## 2. The Mission

Allow me to start my presentation with a report of a personal encounter. When I was elected General Secretary of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity two and a half years ago, a friend of mine asked, what EMS is doing. I then described to her the three areas of EMS work: Sharing our Faith, Sharing Personnel, Sharing Resources and told her that run about 70 joint projects in EMS every year, not only in the area of faith, but also in the areas of fighting and discrimination or environmental protection.

She was quite surprised and said to me: "Why are you doing this? Mission means to win people for faith, to evangelise. What does it have to do with protecting the environment?"

***I found the answer to this question on a wall.***

If you ask people what mission means, you quickly come to the so-called "Great Commission" in Matthew 28: "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" (Mt 28:16-20)

What you see here on the foto is the wall of the Mission House in Leipzig. There is the analogous "Great Commission" from the Gospel of Mark (Mark 16:15): "And he said unto them: Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

***"Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."***

This opens up a very different horizon in Mark than in Matthew. "Proclaim the good news to the whole creation." Here all creatures are included in the mission of the disciples. The good news is not only for human beings, but for the whole creation! And we are not only sent by God to other people, but to all fellow creatures.

## 3. The State of Creation

It is said of Francis of Assisi that he preached to the animals, the birds and the fish. God's good news is also for them. But what would they say if they could answer? A good news?

***They would probably point out:***

You, human beings, are destroying our habitat and irretrievably killing whole species of us every day!

You are taking the air we breathe and you are poisoning the water we live in! You are destroying all that God has created through your way of life!

It is an essential part of our Christian faith that this world is not an accident, but that it was created and ordered by God.



**Rev. Dr Dieter Heidtmann**  
General Secretary,  
Evangelical Mission in  
Solidarity(EMS), Germany.



## ***The Bible tell us about God's creation:***

In the beginning everything was desolate and empty. "Tohuwabohu" describes the water desert and the dry desert. But then God sets limits to the chaos and the hostile forces and creates habitats for the plants, for the animals, the birds and the fish. And in the end, he places human beings in this newly created world and gives them the task of guarding and preserving this world – like a shepherd guards and preserves his flock.

And God himself dwells in his creation. Gen 3:8 describes, "Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze." This is one of the most beautiful images of God in the Bible: The Lord himself walking in the cool evening breeze in his creation. He does not live somewhere beyond, but here in this world and he participates in the life of his creatures. God sustains this world. The Psalms sing of God creating the world anew every day. Without his care, it could not continue to exist.

## ***But how do we humans deal with the world that God has entrusted to us?***

Adam and Eve did not keep to the order that God had set and had to leave paradise, and only a few generations later, the wickedness of mankind had spread to such an extent that the Bible says: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, 'I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created-people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' (Gen 3:5-7)

God, as we know, changed his mind and promised Noah and mankind: 'I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.'" (Gen 9:11)

But we experience today that we humans put ourselves in the place of God. The consequence is that the order of creation is destroyed and the tohuwabohu takes hold

again: dry desert and water desert - desolate and empty. We are experiencing man-made water floods that destroy and annihilate everything and we are experiencing, just this summer, a worldwide drought in which everything dries up and which costs the lives of millions of people.

God has promised that he will not destroy the world anymore, but if the scientists who study climate change and its effects are right, it won't take humanity much longer to do it ourselves.

I ask the question again: What is the "good news" that we Christians have to proclaim to all creatures?

## ***4 Our today's "Mission"***

We launched the EMS Jubilee Year last September with a Theological Conference in Ghana and invited young people from all member churches and member organisations. We asked them: What does mission mean to you? What do you think is the mission of the churches in view of the challenges of our time?

For me, the most exciting moment of this meeting was when the young people started to tell each other about the conflicts they live in.

It started with Peter from South Korea reporting that he is seen as a communist and a collaborator because he is working for peace and reconciliation in Korea.

Georgina from Ghana told how whole areas of Ghana are being destroyed by illegal gold mining and how the mercury used to extract the gold is poisoning the rivers and drinking water.

Charlotte told how difficult it is for young people in Germany that on the one hand they know that we all have to change our lifestyles as soon as possible to slow down climate change and on the other hand they experience that the older people just keep on living as before and still buy bigger and dirtier cars and still go on holidays three times a year by plane.

Elim and others from Indonesia described how the rainforest is being cleared to plantations for palm oil - and that very

little of the money earned from this reaches Indonesia.

The young participants of the Jubilee Conference remind us what "Jubilee" means in the Bible. There, a jubilee year is not only an occasion to celebrate, but also the occasion to put things back in order that man has messed up.

## ***The participants write in their conference message to the churches of the EMS:***

"Biblical tradition describes the Jubilee Year as a year that brings justice to the poor, liberates the oppressed, heals the bruised and opens the eyes of the blind to a new view of the world (Lk 4:18-19). We understand the Jubilee Year as a "kairos" moment, a right moment for experiencing the favour of God. It is not only a moment to celebrate, but to reflect and to act." (Now is the time to act! Conference message of the EMS International Theological Conference „Free for the Future“, 13th to 17th of September 2021 in Akropong, Ghana)

## ***And they are calling for repentance!***

"The Jubilee Year calls Christians to repent regarding the past. For too long, we as Christians have focussed on our own good:

In God's creation, trees have been cut down without planting new ones, seas have been poisoned, air has been polluted, and every creation has been exploited.

In our living world, people have been taken as slaves, prisoners, aliens, outcasts, and forcibly sent to the margins of society.

In our spiritual world, other religious sisters and brothers have been judged, discriminated against, hated, and abused.

For these and many others, we are called upon, in the Jubilee Year, to reflect on the negative aspects of our past and sincerely seek for forgiveness from the Lord and the victims of our shortcomings.

They call for a conversion that leads to different action, not someday, but now!

## ***The Jubilee Year calls Christians to be stewards of God's creation***

Christians have a mandate to reconcile with

nature. Christians must perceive all creation in equity, identify themselves as stewards of God's creation, and take the initiative in dealing with contemporary environmental issues. The Jubilee draws us to the common theme of compassion and dignity that exist in every creation's unique entity.

The destruction of the environment fills us all with great concern, because it not only puts our present at stake, but it also dooms our future. The effects of climate change, the destruction of biodiversity and the ruthless exploitation of natural resources are already clearly visible in many of our home countries.

From our point of view, the destruction of natural livelihoods is a typical example of the loss of relationships. How can humanity destroy what it lives on?

The churches have a special responsibility for the preservation of creation, because it is God's gift. Therefore, we have a mandate to preserve it. ... We call on our churches to work towards a different spiritual attitude towards creation, as it is the lack of understanding of the integrity of creation that endangers it. We call on the churches to act as advocates for the preservation of the environment with all urgency. We call on the churches to take all possible measures to protect the environment and slow down climate change.

Protecting the environment, like fighting the Covid-19 pandemic, is an example of how we can only overcome global challenges acting together. We need a new global culture of solidarity. Here, "Mission in Solidarity" is needed more than ever. We do not have much time left. Now is the time to act!"

## 5. Free for the Future

I must say that we in the EMS secretariat are extremely proud of these young people from our member churches, because they really get to the heart of the task of the churches. Not only with regard to the environment, by the way, but also with regard to other conflicts in our society. It is worth reading this conference message, which you can find on the EMS website.

*We Christians have a mission, we have a*

*message to share.*

*We are asked to be ambassadors.*

*Ambassadors for a different spiritual attitude towards creation.*

*Ambassadors for the integrity of creation*

*Ambassadors for a change in our human behaviour so that the hope of preventing climate change does not die.*

Following a proposal of the EMS Youth Network, the members of EMS have made "Integrity of Creation" the focus theme for the next three years.

## In EMS, we are planning three programmes in this regard:

1. we will start again in November the project "Reading the Bible through the eyes of another." We invite all congregations and groups in EMS member churches to read creation texts from the Bible and then consider what this means for their context. We then bring them into an exchange with a Bible reading group from another EMS church to hear what they have found for their context in the biblical texts. We hope this exchange will increase our spiritual awareness of creation.

2. We have started an environmental certification process. Everything EMS does will be assessed to see what impact it has on the environment. This should help us to bring our own activities into balance with natural resources.

3. We will start a campaign for "Green Ambassadors". We know that there are already many good projects and ideas in our churches to protect the environment and prevent climate change. We want to network these projects internationally. So that, for example, schools in the Middle East or South Africa can transfer the CSI's environmental education project to their schools or that initiatives for a healthy lifestyle from Indonesia and Germany join forces.

## 6. Ambassadors of Hope

The destruction of the environment and climate change are a global challenge and it is obvious that we will only overcome if we act globally together.

The destruction of the environment and climate change are also a challenge to our justice and our solidarity, because the

consequences of climate change and the destruction of the environment already now primarily affect the poor people in the world and not primarily the rich people who caused them.

To fulfil this mission, we need the cooperation and collaboration of all people - and the churches should lead the way.

Will we have the strength? Will we have the time? I do not know. But I do know that we have to try and that we can only succeed together.

I would therefore like to end my presentation in a somewhat unusual way.

We have a jubilee song in the EMS. We developed the lyrics of this jubilee song from the core messages of the Jubilee Conference in Ghana last year. It sums up what is at stake even in the face of the cry of the earth and the wailing of creation.

## We Christians are called to be ambassadors:

*Ambassadors of love*

*Ambassadors of hope*

*Ambassadors of Jesus Christ*

We sent this song out into the world and asked our member churches to send us their own version. I would now like to show you a version of this song, where at the beginning there is an excerpt from the original and then a little journey around the world of what it has become.

I believe that we can learn something from this song and its story about how we can save the world: By all of us coming together with our diversity and our different possibilities. By speaking with a common voice and carrying others along with our energy and our enthusiasm.

Jesus Christ gave us a mission: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation".

If we want to survive, we have to take this mission seriously:

We are ambassadors of love, ambassadors of hope, ambassadors of Jesus Christ. This is our mission for the whole creation!

# Gender and Sexuality: Mission as Affirmation of Dignity of Life

“Affirming justice and human dignity requires a radical impatience with practices that foster the sin of systematized, structural inequality and abuse. Transforming discipleship is expressed through practical acts of love.”

*Thematic Plenary 4: Affirming Justice and Human Dignity  
6<sup>th</sup> September 2022  
World Council of Church 11th Assembly  
Karlsruhe, Germany*

## Introduction

The Church of South India's mission priority on “Initiating Just Conversation on Gender and Sexuality in Affirming the Dignity of Life” is a pressing need of the hour, particularly the links between gender, mission and human dignity. I break the theme into three areas: (a) gender fluidity in the context of South Asia, (b) theological perspective of human dignity, and (c) the church's missiological mandate of dignity of life. At the heart of these themes are several intriguing questions: How should a just conversation of gender and sexuality reflect Jesus' community of hospitality? Why is human dignity so important when it comes to human rights? What are the imperatives of the church in promoting equal dignity of sexual and gender minorities? This paper hopes to offer some thoughts on furthering the conversation.

In today's context, gender and sexuality is a conversation related to the intersectionality between the question of gender and sexuality, and the question of social class and their demand on the state norms. In general, it is observed that gender nonconforming community are portrayed as disrupting any framing of their lives through their varied gender embodiments.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, the gender and sexuality of South Asian contexts intersect with class, caste, culture and religious plurality. The question of gender and sexuality

is a human rights and justice issue in this land. Therefore, the relation between gender and sexuality with other sociocultural context urgently calls for our attention as community of faith.

The Council for World Mission's theological and missiological mandate envision doing mission as promoting *Life-Flourishing Communities*. What does 'life-flourishing societies' look like in the context of South Asia region? Given the signs of our times today, we reflect on these questions: First, how should the global community, including the Church, position itself to claim the moment and to resist and overcome life-denying forces? Second, how do we both confront these challenges and offer alternatives which create change in the society? Third, how can a spirit of hospitality that embraces all rise up in the Church of Jesus Christ? Lastly, what should be the priorities of CWM and its member churches as it seeks to be prophetic witness to the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ in this era?

## Reading the Context of South Asia Region

### Social Political

South Asia contains 25% of the world population<sup>2</sup> and is one of the world's fastestgrowing economies.<sup>3</sup> Yet it is also a region confronting social, economic and political issues such as becoming home to the worst forms



**Revd Julie Sim**  
Mission Secretary -  
Mission Programme &  
Partnership, East Asia &  
South Asia Regions,  
Council for World Mission.



of discrimination, human rights violation, conflict, deprivation, a high level of illiteracy rate (74.04%),<sup>4</sup> the prevalence of underweight, stunted and wasted children,<sup>5</sup> climate crisis, and the great impact of the “war on terror” particularly in the regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the unrestrained free market policies which is popularly called “The Washington Consensus,”<sup>7</sup> the genetically modified (GM) foods,<sup>7</sup> the effect of bio-fuel on hunger and climate crisis,<sup>8</sup> and other issues and challenges related to World Trade Organization (WTO) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).<sup>9</sup> According to World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2021 India rank 140 out of 156 countries. Currently, the score is 0.625 which is 0.024 more in comparison to 2006 World Economic Forum’s gender gap index when India’s rank was 90. The reasons behind the increase in gender gap are many. The first is the economic participation and opportunities labour force participation rate percentage of female is 23.3 which is very much less as compared to male which is 79.6%.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, South Asia has emerged as a region of strategic international interest. In an article entitled “China + India: The Power of Two,” Harvard Business Review claims that China and India will be the two biggest economies powers in the world in 2050.<sup>10</sup> This development in the economic arena also has an impact on the major social distortions like inequalities, poverty, climate crisis, conflicts, and gender violence.<sup>11</sup> For instance, Nadia Agha’s research points out that the localized practices which oppress women are the result of poverty and social insecurity in Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> In like manner, India accounts for more than 80% of the region’s population and accounts for more than 77% of the South Asian GDP (which is used to measure the health of the national economy).<sup>13</sup> This concern can be addressed primarily by achieving greater equity in income distribution. For which, along with

the growth of South Asian economy at 8.32% per annum,<sup>14</sup> policy intervenes for better income distribution and gender equity is imperative because hidden within these statistics is the worse condition of the women and children. And such is the context we are called to reflect on the issues of gender and sexuality in South Asia.

### Health and Education

The South Asia region alone is home to 49% of the global illiterate population in the world.<sup>15</sup> Although some of the countries in this region like Sri Lanka, Maldives and Southern Indian states have health and education levels comparable to middle-income countries, the problem of equity and quality still demands attention. For instance, in Sri Lanka, although girls have advanced to parity with boys in accessing secondary school education, the quality of girls’ education is still poor.<sup>16</sup> Hence, affirming gender equality and securing human rights are extremely crucial for the empowerment and development of any community, particularly in the South Asia region. In Pakistan, due to its judicial crisis, parliament performance especially the onslaught of the medieval Taliban 2.0, gender freedom and gender balance has been greatly compromised far more in the tribal areas of Pakistan than anywhere else in South Asia.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, school for girls were forcefully shut down and NGOs working for women’s empowerment and the girl child were asked to leave the country.<sup>18</sup> In Bhutan, when it undertook military operations against separatists, it aggravated the conditions for women and girls in particular.<sup>19</sup> Evidently, both the human rights and gender support in Afghanistan and the northern part of Sri Lanka remain at risk.<sup>20</sup>

### Gender and Sexuality

#### Gender Rights

Increasing cases of murdering the sexual minority, especially the queer community, raping and killing of women and girls in South Asian

countries demonstrate the exclusive socio-cultural phenomena. Not only their voices but also their existence is perceived as a threat to the normative and patriarchal society. In her article, “Sexuality, Rights and Personhood: Tensions in a Transnational World,” Dina Siddiqi discusses the murder of gay rights activist and blogger Xulhaz Mannan in Bangladesh 2016. She defines the context as an extremely delimited and shrinking space for expressing social and cultural dissent.<sup>21</sup> Also, when we

consider the suicide of Rohith Vemula in the same year 2016, a young Dalit student and a PhD scholar at the University of Hyderabad, it points to the fact that caste and sexualities cannot be ignored while considering the Indian context.<sup>22</sup> Similar discrimination is seen in the murder of Professor Srinivas Ramchandra Siras in 2010 due to his sexual orientation.<sup>23</sup> These are just some instances of “institutional murders” which point to the fact that the heterosexual normative and patriarchal system uses its cultural and religious norms to violently erase dissenting voices, in this case—the voices of the gender nonconforming.

Today, socio-political systems in South Asian countries remain gender insensitive, and hence, become the locales of normalizing and enforcing heterosexuality. The absence of involvement of women and sexual minorities beginning from home, classroom, church and society at large, and silencing the voices of their experiences and preferences with the ‘help’ of cultural, religious and state-supported systems is the cruel reality of our world. Scholars like Quinlivan and Town strongly assert that pathologization of gender experiences and sexuality and policing of gender boundaries with cultural, religious, and political values and demands must be treated methodologically with systematic hermeneutical analysis.<sup>24</sup> According to them, this approach is necessary since the systemic exclusion and dealing are evidently through the

already established social structures and orders in this region. For instance, the home and school atmosphere are conditioned and function to sustain gender boundaries and sexual polarization.<sup>25</sup> Thus, bringing the changes in the curriculum by incorporating gender studies and gender-responsive pedagogy with the hope to transform the notion and structure of the established patriarchal and heteronormative pedagogy in the future.<sup>26</sup> These gender-responsive pedagogies reprove the gender and sexual normalcy that needs to be un-learned. Such gender-responsive pedagogy and its ideology will ensure the gender roles are reinforced and sexual minorities are not discriminated, instead, it is reimagined and embraced positively and allinclusively.

Liberation from gender and sexual discrimination is the community's manifestation of its faith and spiritual endeavors. This community of faith creates and enables a safe space in which gender fluidity is experienced and expressed in its full manner. This gender fluidity is the community's ethos of gender and sexuality—it is also a vision of life-flourishing societies.

### Affirmation of Dignity of Life

***In her article, "Of the Same Flesh: Exploring a Theology of Gender," Susan Durber commented:***

"To reflect before God on gender... is to think about what it means that we are male and female. It is to ask what it would mean to experience our being gendered as gift rather than danger, a source of life and hope rather than

oppression or fear, as something to be received gratefully from God, rather than experienced as a source of strife."<sup>27</sup>

Human dignity is at the heart of human rights. But what is human dignity exactly? And why does it matter to our study of gender and

sexuality? The phrase "human dignity" as we understand it today was not recognized until 1948 when the United Nations ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>28</sup> The *Preamble* of the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights* begins by saying that 'the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.'<sup>29</sup> Article 1 states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." As such, dignity was not something that can be earned because of class, race, status, gender or other factors. It is something all humans are born with. Which means, simply by being human, all people deserve respect. Although human dignity is a widely recognized concept today, much debate surrounds the basis out of which it arises and its practical implications. From the biblical perspective, human dignity is often connected to the idea that humans are created in the image of God, according to God's likeness.<sup>30</sup> From a grammatical point of view, the preposition in the phrase "let us make man *in* our image" can be understood as "let us make man *as* our image." Humans are to be considered as images of God. In this perspective, humans function as living symbols of God: God's representatives.

God is the primary reference for understanding who humans are and how all persons ought to be treated. The affirmation of other people's dignity finds a compelling justification in the call to love one's neighbour. But since the Bible states that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4), Christians take the issue of human dignity further. They factor in that their attitude to others has a correlation to their relationship with God. In other words, respect for people's dignity reflects our respect for God. This is also true with the reality of love. The Apostle John stated it unequivocally: "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their

brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen." (1 John 4:20 NRSV)

The concept of equality is often viewed as connected to this image of God. It also arises out of the impartiality of God's love to all humankind, which leads in turn to an ethic that demands a concern for the well-being of all persons.<sup>33</sup>

Why is human dignity so important when it comes to human rights? Human dignity justifies human rights. Dignity is marked by discretion, consideration, and respect for others. The question of human dignity can only be discussed in its respective contexts, taking account of the history of development and the culture in which the concept is embedded. Recognition of this fact will further dialogue, from which everyone benefits, and the efforts of all people to promote human dignity. When people are divided and given a value based on characteristics like class, gender, religion, and so on, it creates unequal societies where discrimination is prevalent. We have seen what happens in places where human dignity is not seen as inherent and human rights are not universal. While the privileged few in these societies flourish, society as a whole suffers significantly. Inevitably, conflict and violence run rampant. Any form of manipulation or aggression violates the dignity of humans. Any form of coercion erodes human dignity.

Human dignity is the bedrock for what it means to be human and humane. It is the foundation for relating to people, treating them with respect and honour. It is the basis for all other values in society, whether freedom, justice or peace. It is also the foundation for the concept and reality of human rights. It is essential to understand human dignity as central to the ordering of society. Hence, everything that disregards and destroys human dignity is the negation of love. Recognizing human dignity and the universality of human rights

is not just so that individuals can be protected and respected. It is for the good of the entire society.

### **Missiological Paradigm of the Gender Fluid Worldview**

Discussing all these views and dealing with gender and sexuality in any social reality of Asian context particularly in line with the context of mission and ministry demands to scrutinize the centuries old church traditional and biblical claims and belief systems on community. Predominantly the Asian churches and their traditions are borrowed realities of the colonial Christianity.

On the one hand, the Christian worldview introduced by the colonial Christianity not only consciously failed to encourage the Asian converted communities to imagine an inclusive community of all genders as they claimed and criminalized the sexual minorities as non-biblical and women race as God-made low-grade creations than men. On the other hand, most of the Asian cultures which are part of the local religious ideologies also were working against the diverse sexual realities. Therefore, recreating narratives against the well-established meta narratives of the gendered worldviews is an imperative engagement of any faith community. And it needs to be done biblically and theologically.

For instance, Jesus' preaching on the reign of God was the reality of community being formed around the name and person called Jesus. The Gospel narratives and miracle stories of the New Testament clearly demonstrate that if someone wants to follow Jesus, needs to give up her or his family, property and even demanded to hate or deny of oneself (cf. Lk 9:23). Jesus' demand to deny even the self-identity of a follower was in fact socially and theologically crucial as the relationship and self (identity) which was defined and given by the gendered, imperial world order of his time.

Hence, behaving and practicing freedom and faith from sexism and gender roles was the community manifestation of its faith and spiritual endeavours in Jesus' community of hospitality. And this community faith creates and relishes the space in which gender fluidity is experienced in its full manner and this gender fluidity is in fact the community ethos of sexuality of the faith society. As all four Gospel demonstrate, in Jesus' community of hospitality – where the relationship and love (and being loved) become the crucial interests of the social life not the gender of those who are involving in it.<sup>31</sup>

In this line, primarily the theology of creation needs to be de-religionized not to substantiate the religious and cultural normative aspect of any society, but to reaffirm the originality of all creations to live and cherish its existence and experience at all times. Demonising and demanding the sexual minorities to adopt to and adjust with the patriarchal and heteronormative cultural norms of any society is an act against the creation order. Consequently, it is against the creator who is our God.

Hence, in our missional engagement, discussing and learning about gender fluidity and sex positivity, listening to the gender and queer narratives as part of ecclesial and/or nonecclesial curriculums, and affirming the safe, liberative, and genuine space for all the children and adults of gender non-conforming community and women should be the primary mission agenda of the ecclesial communities and the community imagination of the future world of the society at large. This is to create and shape our future with an inclusive gender worldview. As faith community, we all affirm and proclaim,

*"There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."*

*Galatians 3:28 NRSV*

### **CWM's Vision of Life-Flourishing Communities**

CWM's missional duty, through its member churches and in partnership with other liberative religious and faith communities, is to re-present Jesus of Nazareth—the Liberator, to promote life-flourishing alternative visions, values and approaches. Rising to life and breaking out from 'babylon' is indeed a costly witness to the new world of love, justice and peace that the God of life announced in Jesus. The followers of this resurrected Jesus embrace a spirituality of resistance that is permanently open, supportive and welcoming to all who are crucified and dehumanised by 'babylon,' including the sexual minorities or gender nonconforming communities. They are the Jesus' communities of hospitality, the communities he enabled and for which he was crucified. In his article "Together in God's Mission: The Prospects for Ecumenical Missiology," Jooseop Keum affirms that

"[o]ne of the reasons for the success of the missionary movement was its practice of hospitality... In God's hospitality, there is no discrimination between the poor and the rich, between the Jew and the Gentile, between male and female, between centrality and marginality. God calls us to a new relationship of mutual hospitality not only at the margins but also at the centre, not only within Christianity but also with other faiths, not only expected of the receivers of the news but also those who bring it need to be ready to be transformed through the encounter of marginality."<sup>32</sup>

In this *kairotic* moment CWM, in response to the groanings of this age, commits itself and calls upon its member churches and the wider ecumenical community to engage in transforming discipleship, as expression of faith and witness to enable Life-Flourishing Communities. This flourishing is a Christ-like act of resistance to 'babylon.' In Isaiah 65:17-

24,<sup>33</sup> the 'new heaven and new earth' was envisioned as an alternative community in which God-given life was guaranteed, justice assured and peace experienced for all peoples.

CWM's vision of *Life-Flourishing Communities* necessitates a paradigm shift in prophetic understanding and mission engagement. It requires alliances, engaging churches and peoples' movements. It calls for a rediscovery of human identity, in the image of God, in an era of egotistic, mechanistic and technocratic dehumanization. It envisions the affirmation of dignity of life, the restoration and renewal of the global landscape into *Life-Flourishing Communities*. This is the mission to which Jesus committed himself and which encompasses his declaration that "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10 NRSV). Therefore, the quest for 'life in its fullness' is central to bearing witness to the liberating Gospel of Jesus. Accordingly, as a missional duty, CWM will engage member churches in ways that are life flourishing, justice supporting and peace affirming.

### **Mission as Promoting Life-Flourishing Societies**

Abolishing walls and barriers among people of colour, race, class, culture, and gender was the key revolutionary action of the early church community that Jesus initiated. The mission model passed down to the church calls for alternative communities that bear witness to justice-centred value system, people-inspired political direction, permission-giving ethos for life in communities, and generosity of spirit in relationships. CWM is exploring ways to be differently organized on the basis of life-flourishing values, principles and ethos that are daring in addressing issues such as gender injustice, racism, caste, disabilities, religious persecution, and committed to engagement with churches that nurtures renewed relevance in being church in a pluralistic society. The

concept of human dignity and its implications for justice and peace needs to be integrated into the very fabric of how people think, act, and relate to one another. The church's missional call is to create a welcoming environment for the sake of the common good.

### **Mission as Enabling Life-Flourishing Church in Action**

The church that embodies the living presence of Jesus of Nazareth is a community of hope, healing and hospitality. In contexts where ideologies of supremacy breed gender-based violence, discriminate sexual minorities, engender hate and divide peoples into class, caste and racial categories, Jesus calls the church to become life-flourishing in its grassroots expression, embodying a culture of inclusiveness, justice and peace. CWM will, therefore, encourage a spiritual renewal movement within the church, where worship serves as a life-giving instrument for transforming discipleship, hope in action and prophetic witness to life-flourishing communities.

### **Conclusion**

The CWM community faces an urgent call to rise up and resist. Inaction, neutrality and apathy are not options of faith. All followers of Jesus are invited to confront the sin of our evil systems that produce alienation and broken relationships with all people. CWM invites its member churches and all people of goodwill to demonstrate their commitment to transforming discipleship through the offering of ourselves to serving others.

We are not to discriminate against sexual minorities. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. Individuals who are gender nonconforming, others who identify differently than their biological identity, as human persons with dignity, have a right to a life free from unjust discrimination or unjust treatment in any form. We recognize

them as sisters and brothers, our daughters and sons, our siblings who are deserving of our love and respect. At the same time, we ask for their love and respect in return for us and our beliefs.

Lastly, we simply must give witness to the good news of Jesus Christ, seek to love and embrace all those with whom we share a common humanity, a common dignity.



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# Dialogue and Diakonia with Other Living Traditions: Mission as Engaging

The continuing Globalization, migration, conflicts and missionary work of different religions have made the global community increasingly a religiously and culturally plural world. Though plurality of religion is expected to complement and strengthen each other religions' tenets and practices, very often we see religions are practiced with self-centeredness and concentrating on numerical growth and financial stability. The history of religions shows that religions always borrowed ideas from other religions but later emerged as separate and hostile to each other's religious traditions. For instance, there are influences of Judaism on Christianity, influence of Hinduism on Sikhism and Jainism and several religions' influences on Baha'i religion. These giving and borrowing nature of religions are not much known among the adherents of such religions. This ignorance of the history of religions has given rise to hostility which is now flourishing without any hindrances. Since no religion emerged from vacuum and all of the religions are indebted to one another, religions should maintain good rapport with each other and grow together to fulfill the divine purpose in this world.

The present global scenario opens ways for religions to work together for maintaining peace and reconciliation; alleviation of hunger and poverty; struggle against exploitation, discrimination, human rights violations, and ecological injustice and so on. This is imperative for Christian mission to prepare dialogical communities and diaconal forums to engage in the process of arriving at solutions for the crucial global issues. Therefore, it is pertinent for Christian mission to prepare churches to engage dialogically and diaconally with all other living

faith traditions for preparing a just, reconciled and peaceful world.

While revising the mission priorities of Church of South for the decade 2021-2030, the whole forum assembled here at CSI center Chennai with one accord and agreed that the Church should engage in dialogue and diakonia with other living traditions. Though living traditions carries a broader meaning, my focus will be limited only to faith traditions. In all religions, there are areas where people of different living traditions can work together for the benefit of the whole creation. For instance, there are ethics of responsibilities in all religions that invite all to engage in God's mission. For instance, Jacob Kavunkal quotes Jonathan Sacks, the chief Rabbi of Europe suggesting that "one of the challenging idea of the bible "is the ethics of responsibility, i.e.; God invites human to be partners in the work of creation – naming, tilling, caring for the earth, building the ark and so on."<sup>1</sup> God, the one who created human being in his image invites all people of different living traditions to be partners of God's continuing work of creation. There are scriptural and theological elements in all living faith traditions that can also nourish other faith traditions. Therefore, missional engagement needs to be addressed from scriptural, theological and ethical aspects of all living faith traditions through dialogue and diakonia.

## Dialogue Affirms the Life of the People of All Living Faith Traditions

In a context of unexpected flaring up of religious conflicts and violence, Christian mission needs to engage in interfaith dialogue to affirm the life of people of all living faith traditions.



**Rev. Dr Prinstone Ben**  
is a Presbyterian from CSI South Kerala Diocese and the former Director for Department of Pastoral Concern at CSI Synod.



Dialogue has a vital role in the life of whole humanity as means of promoting justice, peace, and reconciliation. Dialogue should not be a monopoly of a particular religion, but it should be a joint effort of all people of different faith traditions. In dialogue, people should be enriched mutually and share their resources for the well-being of all. Antony J Gittins, a Roman Catholic Missiologist says “But this is not a matter of ‘us’ giving and ‘them’ receiving; it is a matter of mutuality. We are mutually indebted to one another. Each of us has something we can share. By doing so, all are enriched, God is praised, and the Kingdom or realm of God is just a little closer than before.”<sup>2</sup> This mutuality and indebtedness to one another is the beauty of interfaith dialogue. Moreover, dialogue helps people to develop mutual understanding, mutual sharing and mutual respect and it expresses God’s love in all.

Dialogue expands our understanding of God’s mission and its engagement with people of other religious traditions. Through our limited understanding of God, we think God is exclusively working with us and our sole responsibility is to establish justice and peace in this world. At the same time, we cannot set limits to the encountering of the power of God in other living faith traditions. There is a crucial perspective that “in dialogue we are invited to listen in openness to the possibility that the God we know in Jesus Christ may encounter us also in the lives of our neighbours of other faiths in the efforts for justice, peace and service to the environment engages us in dialogue—the dialogue of life.”<sup>3</sup> Our responsibility is to respect our neighbours and work along with them since God works with our neighbours and utilizes them in God’s mission. Along with this, we should offer a better place for friends of different living faith traditions in our own conversations that can create a good space in the minds of our people. It is therefore pertinent to imagine that “dialogue helps us not to

disfigure the image of our neighbours of different faiths and ideologies. It has been the experience of many Christians that this dialogue is indeed possible on the basis of a mutual trust and respect for the integrity of each participant’s identity.”<sup>4</sup> Dialogue is designed for the affirmation of life against all systems of evil. We are to affirm that “in dialogue Christians actively respond to the command to “love God and your neighbor as yourself.” As an expression of love, engagement in dialogue testifies to the love experienced in Christ. It is a joyful affirmation of the life “against chaos, and participation with all who are allies of life seeking the provisional goals of a better human community.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Is Multiplicity of Religion a Blessing?**

Through the previous centuries we have heard from some religious reformers that a singular religion can solve religious violence and conflicts and promote peace and unity among people. At the same time, we know that working together for a singular religion is not a solution for the emerging religious disputes and conflicts. Helping all religions to complement each other for revealing God’s purpose on humanity more clearly and meaningfully is certainly the way forward. Paul F. Knitter quotes Edward Schillebeekx and writes that “the multiplicity of religions is not an evil which needs to be removed, but rather a wealth which is to be welcomed and enjoyed by all .... There is more religious truths in all religions together than in one particular religion.... This also applies to Christianity.”<sup>6</sup> God, the one who works in all religions and cultures expects that all adherents of different living faith traditions build dialogical communities to share their experience of divine encounters and revelations to strengthen each other’s spirituality. Paul F Knitter said, “It would seem that the religions of the world have to come together, not to form a new, singular religion, but to form a *dialogical community of communities*.”<sup>7</sup> Such

kind of communities can provide opportunities for people of different religious traditions to learn different scriptures and share the religious truths, revelations and prophecies for the betterment of their societies.

### **Intertextual Hermeneutics**

Since churches are living in the midst of people of other living faith traditions, our worships, sermons and prayers should address the whole community living around us. The vocabularies, way of addressing that we use in worship services should respect and honor the people of other faith traditions. Moreover, the scriptural interpretation should honor and nourish the faith of the people of other faith traditions.

The colonial interpretation of the Bible was not fully helpful for the poor and marginalized society to receive freedom and equality in the society. The colonial mission did not give freedom to its adherents to read and understand other religious scriptures. So Biblical interpretation was markedly narrow in its outlook and did not allow any opportunity to understand the affirmations of other religious scriptures. Sugirtharajah believes that the superiority of Christian texts undermine the scriptures of other living traditions at the time of colonial period. He writes,

Colonialism is not simply a system of economic and military control, but a systematic cultural penetration and domination. Most damaging is not the historical, political, and economic domination, but the psychological, intellectual, and cultural colonization... they displaced the norms and practices of our indigenous reading methods, but in that they were used to justify the superiority of Christian texts and to undermine the sacred writings of others, thus creating a division between us and our neighbors.<sup>8</sup>

Sugirtharajah further opines that “the task then for a biblical interpreter is not only to discover how to live as a member of a multi-faith society but

also how to interpret the scriptural texts taking note of the presence and the spiritual intuitions of the people of other faiths.”<sup>9</sup> He suggests that when we interpret the Bible in a context of religious diversity we should be aware about at least two things. “Firstly, it must be sensitive to the scriptural text of other faith communities and the spiritual sustenance they provide for many of their adherents....Secondly, Christian scriptural interpreters should be conscious that their literary output is likely to reach a wide audience which is not necessarily exclusively Christian.”<sup>10</sup> This indicates that the Christian should understand the richness of other religions and the context where we are living. This encourages us to eliminate our prejudices towards other faiths and try to understand that our neighbors are also the owners of rich religious heritages and sustained by spiritual guidance and protection from God.

Through his intertextual hermeneutics Sugirtharajah argues that such kind of a hermeneutics can be given deeper meaning for Biblical texts. To highlight this idea, he borrows an idea, contrapuntal reading, which is propounded by Edward Said. Contrapuntal reading is a reading strategy advocated by him “with a view to encouraging the experiences of the exploited and the exploiter to be studied together.”<sup>11</sup> Sugirtharajah suggests reading the religious scriptures contrapuntally to find more contextual meaning from scriptures that gives life to society, where there is disharmony and violence in the name of religion. He further says, “Such an intertextual hermeneutics could illuminate many gaps and silences in the biblical texts, and brighten some dark corners.”<sup>12</sup> Reading the great commission of Jesus Christ and the commission of Sri Buddha contrapuntally will give more and effective meaning to people who are dedicated to involve in Christian missionary activities.

### Some Questions for Interfaith Dialogue

While mentioning about Hindu Sacred

Texts in Pre-Christian Past, Timothy Tennent, an American missiologist raises a question, “Christianity is growing dramatically in areas that are the traditional heartlands of major non-Christian religions. How can one really talk about the rise of Indian Christianity without giving due consideration to the role of Hinduism, which for many centuries has shaped Indian thought, religious vocabulary, and cultural life?”<sup>13</sup> Can Hindu religious Scriptures and its tenets prepare a way for the Indian Christians to enter into the New Testament more meaningfully? Timothy Tennent writes,

...just as the Old Testament served to prepare the way and point people to Christ in the early Jewish context, so the Upanishads serve as a kind of *preparatio evangelica* for the gospel in the Indian context. Some Indian theologians, reading the account of Jesus on the road to Emmaus, which states that ‘he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself’ (Luke 24: 27), have applied the passage to Jesus’ presence in India today.<sup>14</sup>

These are some questions that need to be addressed in interfaith dialogue to prepare dialogical community to think and understand the greatness of God who work in different living faith traditions.

### Promoting Ethical Responsibility in Religions

How to build friendship with people of other living faith traditions for an interreligious cooperation? is a fundamental question. Paul F Knitter says that the first step relating each other is not religious, but ethical.<sup>15</sup> He writes, “It’s ethical. We come together, first of all, not to share our beliefs, but *to act out of our beliefs*, together.”<sup>16</sup> Since the world is facing serious life destroying problems like poverty, violence, injustice, and environmental degradation, religions should build interfaith cooperation to deal with these issues as an interfaith community. There is a tendency for

all religions to spend considerable time to discuss and deliberate for arriving at solutions for the issues they face. Very often, a single religion will propose a solution for a big issue. As complex problems emerge, the proposals and solutions suggested by a single religion will not be meaningful. Simultaneously, a forum of different religious practitioners can propose multiple solutions for complex issues. Knitter mentions the role of Interreligious peace council of religious groups who can visit in conflict areas and propose solutions for the conflict.<sup>17</sup> People of different faith traditions will give high importance for the proposals and solutions by different living faith traditions for tackling issues.

It is necessary to note that by doing ethical responsibility truthfully, people of different living faith traditions can also inherit the kingdom of heaven. In his parable of last judgment (Mt. 25: 31-46), Jesus Christ mentions about a group of people who inherited the kingdom of God. The quality for their selection is that they provided food to the starving, drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, taken care of the sick, and visited the prisoner. The chosen people does not explicitly mention only communicant members or ordained people of any specific church, but a group of people who had done their ethical responsibility faithfully and truthfully. There will be mentioning of ethical responsibilities in all religions that can lead people to heaven. Bringing these kinds of teachings from different living faith traditions can help all people to practice them and will provide motivation to do their ethical responsibility for the benefit of all creation.

### An Inter-faith Communion: A Life Affirming Mission of God

St. Paul was along with 276 passengers voyaging towards Rome to stand before the emperor as per his appeal (Acts 27:37). Their sailing became dangerous due to the rushing of a violent wind called the Northeaster. All

passengers lost their hope of survival and they did not eat anything. On the fourteenth day, Paul stood before the co-travelers and said, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been in suspense and remaining without food, having eaten nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food for it will help you survive, for none of you will lose a hair from your heads. After he had said this, he took bread; and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, broke it and began eat. Then all of them were encouraged and took food for themselves" (Acts 27: 33b – 36). It may not be directly suggested that Paul had celebrated Holy Communion that Jesus Christ instituted for us. However, it was in fact a communion that strengthened a community who were in suspicion that they lose their lives. Here, Paul was performing a life affirming mission with an interfaith community who were broken-hearted, suspicious, hopeless and dying. The communion he celebrated encouraged everyone to transform themselves into a life affirming context. Paul did not do an 'altar call' or deliver a sermon on salvation in the name of Jesus Christ in that context. He did not even distribute the elements of communion to all, but gave them freedom to choose their own elements. After the communion, the starvation ended; the people became capacitated to face the challenges even in the midst of the shipwreck, and became part of a life affirming mission.

We can involve ourselves in this type of interfaith communion amidst the masses those who are expelled from their lands due to wars, internal conflicts and natural calamities. We have often branded them as refugees, strangers and illegal immigrants. Such kinds of people stray around in a new land weeks and months for drinking water, food and shelter. There are people of different living traditions wandering in suspicion in new places losing all their hope. Can the Church celebrate interfaith communion for such distressed people and give them hope and courage in their contexts of doubts and hopelessness as part of

God's life affirming mission?

### **Diakonia with People of Living Faith Traditions**

Diakonia is one of the ways the Church can involve in the life struggles of the poor and marginalized in associating with the people of other living faith traditions. The meaning of diakonia "service" or "care for the sick and poor" that we often use is a 19<sup>th</sup> century German understanding.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, new researches give nuance in the understanding of diakonia since recent research has radically questioned this understanding. The Australian scholar John N. Collins has documented that the *diak-* words themselves have no connotation of charity, or of self-effacing service of the poor. Collins suggests that, "in ancient Greek, diakonia rather means an assignment or a task as messenger or as go-between. The term itself does not indicate what kind of activities the task entails, its focus is the relation to the one in whose service the diakonos stands and who authorizes and instructs for action."<sup>19</sup>

Chandran Paul Martin writes, "Theologically we affirm that diakonia is not just the distribution of material goods, but also the process of addressing the root causes of the injustice. It includes the radical critique of the social, economic, cultural and other sins."<sup>20</sup> He proposes three models of diakonia, i.e; Transformative diakonia that attempts to restore the divine image in the exploited one by addressing the root cause of exploitation critically; Liberative diakonia that focus on development thinking, "a process of building and investing in people who will in the long run author their own liberation"<sup>21</sup>; and Prophetic diakonia that "deals with the process of 'truth telling' from the perspective of the 'victims of injustice'....challenging structures that perpetuated oppression, marginalization and injustice."<sup>22</sup>

Through a meaningful diakonia,

people of living faith traditions experience the life experience of the victims of injustice and jointly work together for their liberation and restoration. The Bible proposes a servant model of ministry in which the *diakonos* join in the struggles of the people.

### **Diakonia and Servant Model of Ministry**

The Israelites are mentioned in the book of Exodus as God's firstborn. At the same time, when God realized that an effective model of ministry is mandatory for serving his people, God formulated servant model of ministry for the regeneration of the people and called Israel as his servant. Through this model of ministry, God envisions to provide justice for the people in all nations who currently live like bruised reed and dimly burning wick (Isaiah 42: 1-4). God has put his spirit on his servant and provide him a tongue of a teacher with an intention to strengthen the weary. God provided him an ear to listen what God says to him and to serve God's people. In this pattern of ministry, the servant has to experience opposition and persecution from the unjust structures.

Jesus Christ has chosen such kind of a model of ministry to minister poor and marginalized people. Though he was in heaven, through incarnation, Jesus travelled through the bridge of suffering and identified himself with the poor. St. Paul says, "...though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness (Phil. 2: 6, 7). In this model of diaconal ministry among the people of living faith traditions, a person needs to reinvent himself/herself as a slave and be with them in their struggle against the systems of injustice that subordinate people. Here the servant does not disturb the aims and motive of the people for attaining success. If the needy community is a religiously plural one, a group of *diakonos* from different living faith traditions can join together and serve

them meaningfully. Building interfaith diakonal team should become one of the priorities of our mission engagements.

### Conclusion

The Church in this present context is participating in God's mission with people of other living faith traditions

dialogically and diakonally. With a truthful and sincere motive, the Church can take initiative to invite people of other living faith traditions and have dialogue and diakonia for maintaining peace and reconciliation; alleviation of hunger and poverty; struggle against exploitation, discrimination, human rights

violations, and ecological injustice and so on. As discussed above, since the issues in this world are complex one, a single religion cannot propose a meaningful solution for the global issues, but a combined effort will bring success and hope.



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## AAROGYAA free Medical Camp in Thangasamipuram

The Department of Mission and Evangelism CSI Synod along Cochin Diocese has organized the AAROGYAA Free Medical Camp on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2022 at Mission Vayal in Thangaswamipuram, Mariyoor. Rt Rev. B. N. Fenn, Bishop in Cochin Diocese has graced the Camp. Rev. Maxcin John, Synod Mission and Evangelism Department Director has explained the concept of AAROGYAA. Mr Rajan Jacob, Diocesan Treasurer, Adv. P. K. Joseph, Diocesan Lay Secretary also graced the camp. The Camp was led by the health care Professionals, Dr Sanuj (Government Hospital Kanthalloor), Mr Arum, Health Inspector in Kanthalloor

Government Hospital, Mr Ajith, Eye-Specialist, and Sisters Vimala and Sakunthala from government Hospital Kanthalloor.

The Medical Camp was well attended by the Missionaries, Church Workers, Members of the various congregations in Moonnar District, and the pastors including Rev. Nitten Bose (Mission Director), Rev. Davidson Vijayakumar, Rev. Malairaja, Rev. Arulraj, Rev. Sankar Anandh, Rev. Thamilselvan, Rev. Anoop George, Rev. Gidion, as well as Mr Raja Das, Mr Solomon, Mr Gnjana Robinson, Mr Balan, Ms Swarnamery and Ms Vimala. Evg.

Jerin Jacob Missionary made all the arrangements for the program. 80 people have participated in the program.

AAROGYAA Free Medical Camp was a direct initiative of Synod Secretariate by the General Secretary Adv. C. Fernandas Rathina Raja through the Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod. It was a venue for community medical awareness and well as mutual empowerment during the COVID19 pandemic era.

**Rev. Maxcin John,**  
Director, Dept. of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod.

## Agali-Attappadi Encouraged towards the 'BE-SMART' Mission

The Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with Board of Mission and Evangelism, Cochin Diocese has organized two-day Mission Camp on 23<sup>rd</sup> -24<sup>th</sup> March 2022 at Attappady Camp Centre, Agali and Mundanpara CSI Church in Cochin Diocese. The Camp was based on "Sustainable Mission Accompaniment towards Radical Transformation (SMART)". The Rt Rev. B. N. Fenn, Bishop in Cochin Diocese, has inaugurated the camp. Bishop encouraged all the missionaries

to actively participated in the mission of God through the witnessing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Rev. Maxcin John explained the 'SMART' concept. Mr Rajan Jacob, Diocesan Treasurer, and Adv. P. K. Joseph, Lay Secretary of the diocese have led the sessions on Mission as Transformation. Rev. Shiju Johnson made all arrangements for the program. 92 people have participated the program in two days included Rev. Shibu, Rev. Joyce John, Rev. Shinu Abraham, Missionaries Evg. Sabin, Evg. Ajesh, and Evg. Sarath Lal.

Attappadi- Mundanpara Mission programs was the venue for fellowship, sharing, listening, and learning together for the Missional engagements. It was the venue and stage for the mutual empowerment and motivation to participate in the mission of God more fruitfully and constructively.

**Rev. Maxcin John,**  
Director, Dept. of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod.

## AAROGYAA free Medical Camp in Agali-Attappadi

The Department of Mission and Evangelism CSI Synod along Cochin Diocese has organized the AAROGYAA Free Medical Camp on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022 at Attappady Camp Centre, Agali and at CSI Parsonge, Mundapara, Agali. It was a general community medical camp conducted with the support and help of Government Community Health Centre, Agali in Palakkadu District, Kerala. In consultation with Dr Reetha (DMO, Palakkadu), with Dr Arun (RMO, Agali), and with Dr Jojo (Superintendent, CHC, Agali), Dr Prinu Panakkal, Causality Medical Officer conducted the Medical Camp. Mr Prakash John, pharmacist, Neethi Medical Store, Mannarkadu has

extended pharmacy service and helped to distribute the prescribed medicines to the beneficiaries. The Basic and necessary medicines were purchased and distributed at free of cost to each beneficiary. Mrs Jaya Prakash, Asha Worker also extended her service to organize this camp. Rev. Maxcin John, Synod Mission and Evangelism Department Director has explained about the concept of AAROGYAA.

There were diagnostic activities towards both pediatric and adult health care. This medical camp was venue for person to person and face to face community health care awareness which focused on life style modifications for noncommunicable

diseases as well as communicable diseases including pediatric anemia, and vitamins deficiency disorder too. Besides, there was counselling sittings for the needed people.

The AAROGYAA Free Medical Camp was the opportunity to reach out people who were in needy and with vital necessities. It was the motivational health care accompaniment with the needy people in the midst of their various vulnerabilities. Moreover, it was the time to guide people to the government hospitals especially CHC Agali for further treatment if needed. Thus, it was the opportunity to make rapport with the people. Rev. Shiju Johnson, Vicar & Chairman

for Mannarkkad-Thachampara CSI Pastorate made all necessary arrangements along with the Church Workers, Seby N. A., Sarathlal. P., And Ajesh N. O. There are 35 people from the local community who have benefitted out of the medical camp.

Furthermore, AAROGYAA Free Medical Camp was a direct initiative of Synod Secretariate by the General Secretary Adv. C. Fernandas Rathina Raja through the Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod. It was a venue for community medical awareness and well as mutual

empowerment during the COVID-19 pandemic era.

**Rev. Maxcin John,**  
Director, Dept. of Mission and  
Evangelism, CSI Synod.

## AAROGYAA free Medical Camp in KGF

The Department of Mission and Evangelism CSI Synod along with Karnataka Central Diocese has organized the AAROGYAA free Medical Camp on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2022 at CSI St Paul's Church, Kolar Gold Fields (K. G. F), Kolar District, Karnataka. Rev. Maxcin John, Director for the Department of Mission and Evangelism has explained the concept of 'AAROGYAA' and opened the camp in prayer. Dr Sandeep and Dr Ramya from Bangalore facilitated to diagnose the patients. Moreover,

there was a Nursing Team who have come from Community College, KGF to assist the doctors for the camp. Rev. Robin, Rev. Elish, and Rev. Usha also attended the camp and extended their leadership. Rev. Noah Vasanth Kumar, Mission Director in KCD has made all necessary arrangements for the Medical Camp. There was 34 people from KGF Area who have been attended and benefitted out of the camp. Necessary medicines were prescribed and distributed at free of cost. This camp was a platform to

share the community health awareness and it was a source of considerable relief and solace during the threat of pandemic season of COVID-19. This Medical camp was the direct initiative from the Synod Secretariate by General Secretary Adv. C. Fernandas Rathina Raja through the Department of Mission and Evangelism during the pandemic era.

**Rev. Maxcin John,**  
Director, Dept. of Mission and  
Evangelism, CSI Synod.

## CSI Synod Secretariate Provides AAROGYAA Pre-Hospital Care Training to Missionaries

Madurai-Ramnad: On behalf of CSI Synod Secretariate, a Pre-Hospital Care Training has been provided to the selected missionaries in the Church of South India. The first training program was conducted on 29th April 2022 at Christian Mission Hospital Madurai. As authorized by the General Secretary, the Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod has organized the training program in collaboration with Madurai Christian Mission Hospital (CMH) and Home Missionary Society (HMS) in CSI Madurai-Ramnad Diocese (MRD). Rev. Dr. A. Alfred Stephen, Special Officer for the Platinum Jubilee has delivered keynote address by which he has highlighted the importance of the healing ministry of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, he encouraged the participants to be the channels of healing and peace in the living arenas.

The Christian Mission Hospital (CMH) in Madurai has graciously provided the venue and resource persons for the

training. Ms. Udayakumari, Treasurer, CMH made all arrangements creatively for the Training program. Dr. Jeffree, CMH, Dr. Sangeetha, CMH and Mrs. Mirabel, Nursing Director, CMH have led the trainings on Pre-Hospital Care, Community Health Awareness, Basic Health Education, usage of medical apparatus kit. Dr. Premkumar, Medical Director, CMH distributed the medical apparatus kit which included of one BP apparatus, 2 thermometers, 1 pulse oximeter, 1 glucometer with 100 strips. Besides, Dr. Mrs. Anita Joel, Principal, School of Nursing has conveyed the greetings and Rev. Rajan Kanagamani, CSI East Gate also motivated the participants with prayers and greetings. Rev. Maxcin John, Synod Mission Director explained the necessity of pre-hospital care and detailed about the concept of 'AAROGYAA' as 'Active Accompaniment in Recuperative Outreach towards Grassroots through Yearly Awareness Activities'. The training program was concluded

with message and prayer by Rev. Rajan, Treasurer, CSI Madurai-Ramnad Diocese. The Christian Mission Hospital, Madurai extended hospitality to the participants in remarkable ways. The Department is grateful to Rt. Rev. Dr. M. Joseph, Bishop in Madurai-Ramnad Diocese (MRD), and Rev. Pon Prabhakar, HMS Director, MRD, and Mr. Pon Raj, MRD for their wholehearted support and help to organize the training program.

The AAROGYAA Pre-Hospital Care Training to the missionaries in CSI was the special initiative and efforts taken by the General Secretary Adv. C. Fernandas Rathina Raja along with Moderator, Deputy Moderator and the Treasurer to empower and equip missionaries to serve and work more for the well-being of the people, especially the most vulnerable in the context of COVID19. The General Secretary has initiated to organize the training program in collaboration with Madurai CMH. 40 Missionaries from

the seven dioceses of the Tamil Region have benefited out of this vital training program. This training program will be organizing with other CSI Regions also in the near future. Moreover, this program is purely intended to equip missionaries to guide and direct people to hospitals in right time during their physical complications.

**Rev. Maxcin John,**  
*Director, Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod*



## A Missional Clarion Call Resounded towards Be-SMART in Kerala Regional Missionary Conference-2022: KOVALAM

Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with the Board for Mission and Evangelism, CSI South Kerala Diocese organized Kerala Regional Missionary Conference on 20th -21st April 2022 at Kovalam CSI Retreat Centre. The conference was based on the theme 'Be-SMART-Sustainable Mission Accompaniment towards Radical Transformation'. Rev. J. Jayarajan, Pastoral Board Secretary, South Kerala Diocese has inaugurated the conference. He pointed out the need of paradigm shift in doing mission and he has wished that may this conference be a new milestone in mission and Evangelism. Rev. Dr. C.I. David Joy (Principal, KUTS, Kannammoola) delivered the keynote address based on the theme. He has emphasized about the need of more passion in the participation of Gospel engagements. Further he added that we should affirm our faith through our actions, and we should witness the Gospel of Jesus Christ through our life. Be faithful to each other and serve each other, he added. Besides, he raised a question that how to lead the younger generations and what should be the missional attitudes towards them. Following to it, Dr. S. Blessed Singh, MD (HOD Community Medicine, SM CSI Medical College, Karakonam) led a session based on "SMART Awareness on Community Health". In this session, he has talked about five types of health as societal health, mental health, spiritual health, emotional health, vocational health. Further he warned against the overuse of cellphones also. Following to it, Mrs. Ranjini Solomon,

South Kerala Diocese shared her mission experience to the participants.

There was a special church fellowship meeting arranged in CSI Mulloor Church based on 'SMART interaction with SMART Church'. Rev. Misihadas, Vicar in Mulloor Church made all necessary arrangements for the Fellowship meeting. Rev. C. Jayan, Presbyterian, CSI Christasramam Church shared the Word of God in which he reminded about expanding mission, educating mission and empowering mission based on the kingdom of God. There were cultural performances by the church members as well as by the participants. As moving further, Rev. Dr. J. W. Prakash, Presbyterian, CSI Immanuel Church Kallayam conducted a Bible Study on the final day of the conference based on Luke 4: 35-41 by which he stated that all missionary journeys are the plans of Jesus Christ and Jesus is always with us in our day-to-day journeys and therefore, we should engage in the creative missional doings, he added. Adv. Reshma Lawrence L.J. (BBA, LLM) conducted a session based on 'SMART Social Engagements on Human Rights' in which she has highlighted the rights of equality, rights of freedom, rights against exploitation, rights of freedom of religion, cultural and educational rights and constitutional provisions. Following to it, Rev. Bibin Lal (KUT Seminary) led a session based on "SMART Counselling" in which he shared about counselling and healing ministry as physical healing, mental healing, and spiritual healing. Then,

Rev. Mohandas conducted a session based on Missional Engagement and shared about contextual missional doings.

Kerala Regional Missionary Conference based on SMART was enriched with Worship, Bible Studies, Singings, Fellowship Meetings, Group Discussions, Feedbacks, and Cultural Performances. A hundred and twenty (120) participants have attended the conference from various Kerala Dioceses. Rev. Solomon MR, Mission Director along with Board Secretary Mr. Rajkumar and with other Missionaries and Office Staffs made all necessary arrangements for the conference. It was the opportunity for fellowship each other and rejuvenation of passion towards mission.

**Rev. Maxcin John,**  
*Director, Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod*



## A Workshop on Capacity Building for Tamil Regional Woman Missionaries

Chennai: The Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod joined with CSI SEVA and CSI Trichy-Tanjore Diocese has organized a two-day workshop for the Women's Missionaries on 23rd and 24th May 2022 at CSI Bishop's College of Nursing, Dharapuram in Trichy-Tanjore Diocese. The conference was based on 'Workshop on Capacity Building for Woman Missionaries' and 'Be- Sustainable Mission Accompaniment towards Radical Transformation (Be-SMART)'. Rt. Rev. Dr. D. Chandrasekaran, Chairman for the Department of Mission and Evangelism has inaugurated the workshop. Bishop has highlighted the pertinent role of women in the mission and ministry of the Church. Rev. Benjamin Inbaraj, SEVA Director, Mrs. Janet Vasanthakumary (Counsellor, Madurai), Mrs. Glory Thomas, Program Executive, CSI SEVA and Mr. Solomon

Raja, Program Executive, CSI SEVA have led different sessions based on 'Identifying the Gender Issues', Gender Sensitive Counselling for Women', 'Importance of Human Rights'. The Holy Communion Service along with a Bible Study have conducted by Rt. Rev. Dr. D. Chandrasekaran, Bishop. Besides, there a Village Outreach program organized in Alampalayam along with Cultural Programs from the participants. It was a spirit-filled program by which everybody experienced the unique grassroot life and hospitality. Mrs. Roselind Chandrasekaran, Bishop Amma, Rev. S. Sudharsan, Clerical Secretary for Trichy-Tanjore Diocese, Mr. Stanly Mathiselvan, Lay Secretary, and Rev. Maxcin John, Director for Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod also attended and conveyed greetings. Rev. D. Sekar, Mission Director along with the CSI Nursing College and also with Rev.

Benzly Solomon Raj, District Chairman, Rev. John Dawson, Pastor-in Charge for Dharapuram Pastorate have made all necessary arrangements for the workshop. There was a wonderful choir led by Rev. Augusty Gandhi.

The Workshop for Women's Missionaries of Tamil Region was the venue for capacity building, mutual fellowship, enrichment, learning and listening. Furthermore, it was an opportunity for women empowerment which will be impacted in the respective Dioceses in coming days. Furthermore, one hundred and Fifty (150) women missionaries from all eight CSI dioceses of Tamil region have attended the workshop.

**Rev. Maxcin John,**  
Director, Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod.



## Pre-Hospital Care Training for Missionaries in Karakonam Medical College

Thiruvananthapuram: Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with the Board for Mission and Evangelism, South Kerala Diocese organized a Pre-Hospital Training for the Missionaries of Kerala Regional Dioceses on 20th May 2022 at Dr.SM CSI Medical College, Karakaonam, Thiruvananthapuram. Rev. Maxcin John, Synod Mission Director inaugurated the training. Dr. Subha Joice, Prof. Community Medicines led a session based on 'Preventive Aspects'. Dr. Blessed Singh, HOD Community Medicine conducted a session based on 'First Aid Measurers'. Dr. Dhanya Roy, Assoc. Prof. Pediatrics led a session based on 'Pediatric Emergencies'. Dr. Vijilia Vijayan, MO, Causality conducted a session

based on 'Medical Emergencies'. Mrs. Ajila Raj B S, Assistant Professor and Nursing Superintendent, introduced the medical equipment and made a demo on how to use the pulse-oxi meter, thermometer, glucometer, and BP apparatus. Dr. Bennet Abraham, Director, Dr.SM Medical College concluded the training program with closing remarks of service and caring mentality towards the needy people. Rev. M. R. Solomon, Mission Director, Board for Mission South Kerala Diocese has made all necessary arrangements along with other Board Members and Medical college authorities for the training. Thirty missionaries (30) from various dioceses of Kerala region were the beneficiaries of the training program. In this regard, medical

kits contained of Pulse-Oxi Meter-1, Thermometers-2, 1 Gluco- Meter with 50 strips, and Thermometer-1 was given to each participant who have attended the training program. This training program was the opportunity for community health care awareness as well as pre-hospital care awareness. The training program was enriched by the worship, singing, Word of God and fellowship.

**Rev. Maxcin John,**  
Director, Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod



## Inter- Diocesan Mission Partnership Blooming Towards the Mission from the Margin

**D**evarayaneri: It was quite remarkable to witness the blooming of Inter- Diocesan Partnership between CSI Madurai-Ramnad Diocese and Trichy-Tanjore Diocese towards the Mission from the Margin. This was well- evident during the dedication service of the newly constructed Church named as 'Gethsemane Prayer House' on 6th May 2022 in Narikuravar Colony, Devarayaneri in Trichy District. The Church was constructed by the CSI Good Samaritan Church, Chokkalinga Nagar Pastorate in Madurai-Ramnad Diocese as response to the ardent request from the Narikuravar Community in Devarayaneri for contributing their own upliftment and development. Furthermore, Devarayaneri Narikuravar Colony stands as the HMS mission field supported by the Good Samaritan Church. Moreover, the Church is supporting two missionaries who are hailed from this Narikuravar Community.

Rt. Rev. Dr. M. Joseph, Bishop in Madurai-Ramnad Diocese, Rt. Rev. Dr. D. Chandrasekaran, Bishop in Trichy-Tanjore Diocese and the Chairman for the Department of Mission and Evangelism have led the Dedication service. Rev. Samuel Ravindra Victor Singh, PC Chairman in Good Samaritan Church, Rev. S. Sudharsan, Clerical Secretary in Trichy-Tanjore Diocese, Mrs. Leela Manohari-WF President and Bishop Amma in Madurai-Ramnad Diocese,

Mrs. Roselind Chandrasekharan-WF President and Bishop Amma in Trichy-Tanjore Diocese, Rev. D. Sekhar-Mission Director in Trichy-Tanjore Diocese, Rev. Jesu Sahayam, Rev. Maxcin John, Synod Mission Director, Parish Committee Members and other members from the Good Samaritan Church have graced the occasion along with friends of Narikuravar Community. It was also notable that the women's Fellowship in Madurai-Ramnad Diocese have distributed five sheep to the five families of this community to support them in their struggles to meet their needs.

There was an overwhelming joy and enthusiasm among the people in Narikuravar Colony which was crystal clearly visible during the dedication service. The newly dedicated church was the fulfillment of their long-cherished dream and all people in this colony have owned it and taken as their own pride and prestige. Thus, the Gethsemane Prayer Home became the venue for the fellowship gatherings, worship and Bible Studies and social enrichment and also stand as service providing center for the betterment of the whole community.

Ms. Esther, local Missionary made all necessary arrangements for the dedication service and extended wonderful and wholehearted hospitality and welcome to the guests from Madurai-Ramnad and Trichy-Tanjore Dioceses. More remarkably, the spirit, zeal and passion of the

people in Devarayaneri Narikuravar Colony towards the Church and worship are always appreciable. Likewise, the unique way of welcome and hospitality extended by the people are also worthy to be highlighted. During the dedication Service, Holy Communion Service also were solemnized. As a token of appreciation and recognition for the Missional initiatives of Madurai-Ramnad Diocese, a fellowship lunch and get together also has been arranged by Bishop D. Chandrasekaran at the Bishop House in Trichy-Tanjore Diocese. It was also promoting the mutuality and cooperation in missional engagements.

Inter-Diocesan Mission partnership must be encouraged and nurtured more and more in the days to come for the sustainable transformation of the marginalized communities. The dedication of Gethsemane Prayer House and the fellowship get together was the another evident of Inter-Diocesan Missional Partnership which is Blooming towards the Mission from the Margin.

**Rev. Maxcin John,**  
Director, Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod



## We are Ambassadors for Christ: Missionary Meet in Kovalam

**K**ovalam: The Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod involved in the Missionary Meet-2022 organized by the Board for Mission and Evangelism (BFM), South Kerala Diocese (SKD) from 11th -13th May 2022 at CSI Kovalam Retreat (Youth) Centre. The program was based on the theme "We are the Ambassadors for Christ". The

Most Rev. A. Djarmaraj Rasalam, CSI Moderator and Bishop in South Kerala Diocese inaugurated the program. Rev. Maxcin John, Synod Mission Director has presided over the meeting. There were various sessions based on the theme. Rev. Solomon M.R. Director, Board for Mission, SKD led a session on 'Financial Management and Accountability',

and Rev. Dr. C.I. David Joy, Principal Kerala United Theological Seminary, Kannammoola, delivered a keynote address. Besides, Rev. Arun D.S. Presbyter, Poojapura led a session on 'Identity and Commitment', Mr. Bensic Miranda, Family Therapist & Family Counselor and Director, Institute of Christian Counselling, led a session based on 'Challenges of Leadership',

and Rev. Dr. Prinstone Ben, Presbyter, CSI Amaravila and Former Director, CSI Synod Pastoral Concerns Department, led a session on 'We are ambassadors of Christ: Missiological Perspective', Rev. Dr. Bipin Lal, Faculty, Department of Pastoral Care and Counselling, KUTS on 'We are ambassadors of Christ: Pastoral care and Counselling Perspective', and Rev. Adv. Sibin Paul, Presbyter, CSI Holy Trinity, Thirumala conducted a session on 'We are ambassadors of Christ: Stewardship Perspective'. Mr. J. Rajkumar, Secretary, Board for

Mission led the business session for the meet. Worship and Bible Studies were conducted by the leaders of various Mission fields of North India. There were cultural performances by the participants. This program was organized for the Malayalee Missionaries who are working in the various mission fields of North India. It was the venue for mutual learning, listening, sharing, encouraging, and fellowship and get-together. Rev. Solomon M.R., Director, Board for Mission, SKD made all arrangements for the program along with Board

Secretary Mr. J. Rajkumar and other Board Members. There were one hundred and ten (110) participants who have attended the missionary meet.

**Rev. Maxcin John,**  
Director, Dept. of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod



## School of Evangelism South Kerala Diocese Molds Junior Missionaries

Chennai: The Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod involved in the School of Evangelism organized by the Board for Mission and Evangelism (BFM), South Kerala Diocese (SKD) on 9th -11th May 2022 at CSI Kovalam Retreat (Youth) Centre. The program was based on 'Be- SMART: In Christian Mission and Ministry'. The Most Rev. A. Djarmaraj Rasalam, CSI Moderator and Bishop in South Kerala Diocese inaugurated the program. Rev. J. Jayarajan (Pastoral Board Secretary, SKD), presided over the meeting. Rev. E. Shine (Director, Palliative Care, SKD), Rev. S.M. Prasad Das (Coordinator, Central region, BFM, SKD), and Rev. Godfrey Wilson (Coordinator, BFM, SKD) have led the devotions. Rev. Sibin Paul (Presbyter, CSI Holy Trinity, Tirumala) delivered the keynote address based on the theme.

There were different sessions in the three days program. Noble Miller (AAO Finance) led a session based on 'Motivational Skills and Practices', Rev. Anilal M. Jose (Presbyter, CSI Kazhivoor) on 'Developing SMART Communicative Skills', Rev. Dr.

C.I. David Joy (Principal, KUTS, Kannammoola) on 'New Testament SMART view on Mission', Joshi (Cyber Police) on 'SMART Understanding of Cyber Crimes', Rev. Chandran (Presbyter, Kurisumala) on 'SMART Mission Priorities and Engagements', Rev. A. R, Suseel (Presbyter, CSI Palukal) on 'SMART Counselling Approaches', Rev. Dr. J.W. Prakash (KCC & Presbyter, Immanuel CSI Church, Kallayam) on 'SMART Ministerial Developments in Young Minds', Rev. Biju Japasingh (Regional Coordinator, Telugu, BFM, SKD) on 'Know Mission History to Do SMART Mission' and Rev. Maxcin John, Director for the Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod on 'SMART Awareness for Junior Missionaries'. Besides, Rev. Joseph Israel (Hindi Regional Coordinator, BFM, SKD) shared missionary experiences of North India. Rev. Dr. Prinstone Ben (Former Director, Pastoral Concerns Department, CSI Synod and Vicar in Amaravila Church) led the concluding session and encouraged the participants to actively participate in the mission of God and live out Gospel in daily life.

The necessary arrangements for the programs were made by Rev. M. R. Solomon, Mission Director, Board for Mission, South Kerala Diocese along with Mr. J. Rajkumar (Secretary, Board for Mission, SKD) and with other members of the Board for Mission. The program was a venue for creative learning and character formation for the youngsters in doing and participating Mission of God. Furthermore, it was the opportunity to prepare the teenagers and youths, to take the Challenge of Great Commission by Jesus Christ. A One hundred Twenty-five (125) participants have attended the program.

**Rev. Maxcin John,**  
Director, Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod.



## Build Up the Youngsters towards the Better World: Mission Fields Get Ready for the VBS

**T**hoothukudi-Nazareth: The Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod has participated in the Vacation Bible School Training (VBS) for the Missionaries of Global Mission Society (GMS) in Thoothukudi-Nazareth Diocese on 3rd May 2022 at IELC Campus in Tirupattur.

The GMS General Secretary Rev. Devarajan organized the VBS Training. Children Gospel Club (CGC) leader Mr. David Wilson and the CGC Team have led the training program. The program was enriched by a homily based on Mathew 5:13-

16 led by Mission Director, CSI Synod and prayers, Action Songs, Games, Gospel Stories, Lesson Plan, Teacher's Training, and personality Development. GMS Coordinator Mr. Arputha Raj made necessary arrangements for the Training along with Missionaries in Tirupattur Mr. Kailas, Mr. Chandran and Mr. Bhaskar and Mr. Enos, GMS Coordinator. One Hundred and Sixty (160) participants including GMS Missionaries, Missionary Families, Volunteers from the Mission Fields have attended the training program.

The VBS Training was the venue for

fellowship, motivation and inspiration towards missional engagements for the upliftment of the younger generations. Furthermore, it was the venue to receive a clarion call to build up the youngsters for the better world.

**Rev. Maxcin John,**  
Director, Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod



## A Pastors' Koinonia cum Retreat: Towards a Blueprint for Transformational Pastoral Leadership

**C**hennai: Department of Pastoral Concerns, CSI Synod along with the CSI Vellore Diocese has organized a two-days Pastor's Koinonia cum Retreat on 20th -21st July 2022 at CSI Synod Centre, Chennai. The Rt. Rev. H. Sharma Nithiyanandham, Bishop in Vellore Diocese has led the retreat in the most evocative ways. Rev. Maxcin John, Director In-Charge, Department of Pastoral Concerns has inaugurated the retreat. Rev. Dr. John Samuel Ponnusamy, Principal and Professor in Old Testament, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, Chennai has conducted three sessions based on the Book of Lamentations, Book of Ecclesiastics, and the Book of Job. Through these sessions, he encouraged all the participants to rededicate and recommit for the mission and ministry of God with sense of calling with more commitment and enthusiasm. Besides, Rev. Suresh Anadhakumar, Vice-President, and Rev. Jared Jeba Arul Reuben, Hon. Secretary also graced program with their creative leadership. The CSI Vellore Diocesan PAD Director Rev. Leo Samuel has made all arrangements in diocesan level to coordinate the program.

Furthermore, Rev. Benjamin Inmbaraj, Director for CSI SEVA, Rev. Christopher Dharmaraj, Director for the Department of Christian Education and Director In-Charge for Adivasi-Dalit Department, CSI Synod, and Rev. C.H. John Nischal Kumar, Director for the Department of Youth and Director In-Charge for the Department of Communication have attended the program and conveyed their greetings. The Holy Communion was celebrated during the retreat and Rev. Benjamin Inbaraj has delivered the Word of God and Rev. Christopher Dharmaraj and Rev. Maxcin John have led the service along with other pastors. The retreat was concluded with a closing remark from Rev. Suresh Anadhakumar. Moreover, Mr. John Vincent, Senior Program Coordinator, Department of Pastoral Concerns made all arrangements to organize the program.

Noticeably, Vellore Diocesan Pastors' Koinonia cum Retreat was a meaningful venue for the refreshment, rejuvenation and renewal towards the transformational Pastoral leadership. It provided a blueprint towards the pastoralia. On behalf of CSI Synod,

Adv. C. Fernanandas Rathina Raja, CSI General Secretary has extended all necessary hospitality and support for the program. There were 85 participants who have been attending for the program.

**Rev. Maxcin John,**  
Director In-Charge, Department of Pastoral Concerns, CSI Synod



## Emergency and Disaster Preparedness Programme

A two-day Training of Trainers programme on Relief, Disaster Management, Counselling on Gender and Peace Perspectives and COVID 19 Learning and Experiences for the youth members from Kerala Region was held during 13-14 August 2022 at Wayanad, Kerala. The programme was hosted by CSI Malabar Diocese

Thirty young participants from the Kerala region participated in this programme which aimed to train young people on various relief activities and methodologies for disaster management. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Royce Manoj Kumar Victor, Bishop, CSI Malabar Diocese inaugurated this training programme.

The following resource persons dealt with various topics such as :

Rev. Fr. Benny Edayath, Executive Director, Shreyas Training and

Research Centre, Wayanad : Church and Relief Work

Mr. Shaji K.V. Programme Officer, Shreyas Training and Research Centre, Wayanad - Youth and Churches' Role in Disaster Management

Ms. Glory Angeline, Programme Executive, CSI-SEVA - Methodologies for Inclusion : Intersectional Approach to Relief and Emergency Response

Mr. Praveen Daniel, Programme Executive, CSI-SEVA – Concept of Do No Harm ( DNH ) in Relief and Disaster Management.

During the plenaries the participants shared their life-time experiences during floods and the COVID Pandemic situations. They have outlined their way forward for activities in their own congregation as well as at the dioceses level.

This training programme was co-ordinated by Mr. D. Solomon Raja, Senior Programme Executive, CSI -SEVA and logistic arrangements were made by Mr. Nivin Thomas, Project Co-ordinator and his team, CSI Malabar Diocese

**Daniel Solomon Raja,**  
Senior Programme Executive,  
CSI -SEVA



## Student Chaplaincy Ministry Programme-III Phase and International Youth Day Celebrations held at CSI Synod Centre, Chennai.

Church of South India-Department of Youth organized 'Student Chaplaincy Ministry Programme-III Phase' on 11th & 12th of August 2022 and observed 'International Youth Day' on 12th of August 2022 at CSI Synod Centre, Chennai. It is a part of Platinum Jubilee Programmes of CSI.

This programme was inaugurated on 11th of August 2022. The General Secretary of CSI, Adv. C Fernandes Rathina Raja and Hon. Treasurer of the CSI, Prof. Dr. B. Vimal Sukumar inaugurated the Student Chaplaincy Ministry- III Phase. In the Inaugural the General Secretary of CSI explained the need of the Student Chaplaincy in the student community. He appealed for the committed action and vision of the Student Chaplains in addressing the needs of the students. General Secretary of CSI quoted the Nazareth Manifesto from St. Luke 4:18-19. Hon. Treasurer of CSI brought out the various challenges faced by the student

community and the role of Student Chaplains in helping the students to walk in a constructive way. Rev. Benjamin Inbaraj, Director of the CSI SEVA took the devotion. Rev. Maxcin John, Director of the Department of Mission and Evangelism & Director In-Charge of the Pastoral Concerns of the CSI Synod and Rev. Christopher Dharmaraj, Director of the Department of Christian Education & Director In-Charge of the Department of Dalit and Adivasi Concerns of CSI Synod greeted the gathering.

'CSI Platinum Jubilee Youth Festival (PJYF-2022)' poster was released by the General Secretary of CSI and announced by the Hon. Treasurer of CSI. This is a Mega Youth Festival which will be held at LMS Compound, Tiruvananthapuram, jointly organized by the CSI Synod Youth Department and CSI South Kerala Diocese from 26th to 28th August 2022. The Theme for the PJYF-2022 is, 'Youth

Envisioning Service & Solidarity' - Faith journey of CSI Youth from Platinum Jubilee to Centenary.

Dr. Samson Gandhi, Executive Director of the Person-to-Person, Institute for Christian Counselling, Hyderabad took sessions on 'Suicidal Ideation in Student: Triggering Factors and Prevention', 'Handling Guilt and Anxiety in Students Life' and 'Anger Management.' These sessions helped the Student Chaplains to learn more about the emotions and feelings in the student life because of the various challenges like parental expectation, education achievements, career management, family and peer group pressures and so on. Interactive sessions and the aspects of person-to-person counselling helped the Student Chaplains to know more about counselling techniques.

Second Started with the Holy communion service for the CSI

Synod Staff and Student Chaplains. Holy Communion service was led by Rev. Arul Dhanaraj, Presbyter from Madurai-Ramnad Diocese; Rev. Moses Francis Huggi, Youth Director of Karnataka Northern Diocese; Rev. Robin Lawrence, Youth Director of the Malabar Diocese; Rev. Dixon Karu, Youth Director of the Nandyal Diocese. After the Holy Communion service, session on 'Wholistic Mission of Student Chaplaincy Ministry' was taken by Rev. Christopher Dharmaraj, Director of the Department of Christian Education & Director In-Charge of the Dalit and Adivasi Concerns of CSI Synod.

'International Youth Day' was observed by the CSI Synod Youth Department on 12th of August 2022. Mr. B. Asher Noah, Executive Secretary of the Youth Concerns in National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) explained the Challenges and Prospects of the International Youth Day and he has elucidated the theme of this year's International Youth Day – 'Intergenerational Solidarity: Creating a World for All Ages'. Feedback & sharing session took place. As a follow-up of the III phase, Student Chaplains identified two educational institutions in their diocese to conduct workshops for

students.

**Rev. Ch. John Nischal Kumar,**  
Director, Department of Youth,  
Director In-Charge, Department of  
Communications, CSI Synod.



## Rev. Anilal M. Jose is Appointed as the Director of the Department of Pastoral Concerns, Church of South India Synod

Rev. Anilal M. Jose is appointed as the Director of Pastoral Concerns Department of the Church of South India Synod. Rev. Anilal is an ordained minister of Church of South India, South Kerala Diocese. He joined the diocese as a probationary minister in 1998 and was ordained on the day of Pentecost in 2005 after his theological training. He graduated in Chemistry from the Kerala University, and has done Bachelor of Divinity (BD) and Master of Theology (MTh in Communication) from the United Theological College under the Senate of Serampore College (University). He has also done Masters Studies (MA in Christian Studies) from the Madras University and Post Graduate Diploma in Communication and Journalism (PGDCJ) from the Kerala University. He also completed research for the Doctor of Divinity (DTh) on the theme 'Emerging Media and Young generations in the Church of South India' in the field of communication under the South Asia Theological Research Institute (SATHRI) of the Senate of Serampore College (University).

Rev. Anilal has been ministering various parishes in the South Kerala Diocese and teaching Communication at the Kerala United Theological

Seminary (KUTS), Kannammoola, Thiruvananthapuram and the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary (TTS), Madurai as adjunct faculty. He has been actively involved in the ministries among children, youth, and women apart from leading training and motivating sessions both in the diocesan and synod levels. His association with the CSI Synod began in 1992 with the participation in the Children's Rally organised in Dharward. He continues to associate with various departments of the CSI Synod and contributing his expertise in various levels as a participant and resource person in various workshops, consultations and programmes. He has participated in various consultations organised by the Council for World Mission (CWM) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). He was part of the Youth Empowerment for Transformation training organised by the National Council of Churches in Nagpur (1998) and the Asia Gateway Training (an intense intercultural mission training), organised by Asia Gateway Board in Seram, Malaysia (2015). He had been helping the South Asia Christian Youth Network (SACYN) and Asia CMS as communication consultant. Anilal is a writer, translator, editor and has graphic design skills. He contributed



academic articles in national and international journals both in secular and theological domains. He has been regularly contributing sermon outlines to the publications of the Department of Pastoral Concerns.

Rev. Anilal M. Jose is married to Mrs. Teeja T. S. who is working as a High School teacher and their son Aabitilal A. and daughter, Aneeka A. T. are school students now.

The CSI Synod Secretariat is happy to welcome Rev. Anilal M. Jose to the Synod family and wish all the very best for his important ministry among the Presbyters of the Church of South India.

~ CSI Synod Communications



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