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Christian Education for Child Friendly Churches

EDITORIAL »

Warm greetings to you all as we celebrate the World Sunday School Day.

The church is a place for the Children and everyone should make sure that every child is given priority in the Church and the rights of children and adolescents are protected. Church is a place where we teach the younger generations to always speak the truth, protect their younger ones, and build Christian behavior.

Churches commitment to Children is derived out of Jesus's relationship with the younger ones.

Jesus embraced the children brought to him by their mothers and asked the disciples to send the 'little children to him. This ministry of Jesus is a model for us to engage children appropriately in all aspects of Christian life. The Church needs to acknowledge children as active participants in the worshipping communities. Some Christians have perceived a disconnection between theological expressions of love and compassion for children and a rights-based understanding of childhood.

Biblical Perspective on Children: The Bible often depicts children as gifts of God and signs of God's blessing. Children are sources of joy

and pleasure, who ultimately come from God and belong to God. The Psalmist says children are a "heritage" from the Lord and a "reward" (Psalm 127:3). Leah, Jacob's first wife, speaks of her sixth son as a dowry, or wedding gift, presented by God (Genesis 30:20).

Parents who receive these precious gifts are being "remembered" by God (Genesis 30:22; 1 Samuel 1:11, 19) and given "good fortune" (Genesis 30:11); to be "fruitful" with children is to receive God's blessing.

Children, we should remember, are God's gifts not only to their parents, but also to the community. They will grow up to be not only sons and daughters but also husbands, wives, friends, neighbours, and citizens.

Based on the biblical mandate for the Children, we, the Church needs to raise the following questions/ concerns about children:

Are they being raised with love and affection?
Are they receiving a good education?
Are they safe in their homes and schools?
Are they being exposed to good role models?
Will they have a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives?

Will they contribute in positive ways to society?

Will our children have faith?

Will they live out that faith in service and compassion toward others?

CSI as a Child Friendly Church

The Church of South India is committed to ensure a 'Child Friendly Church'. Child participation is a way for children to learn and grow into the communities they are a part of. When they participate in worship and other activities of the Church, children acquire skills, build competence, develop aspirations and gain confidence. When the Presbyters and the elders of the Church listen to the children and show them respect, it teaches the children the importance of respecting others. If the children are given the chance to share their ideas and are taken seriously, they learn that others, too, deserve to be heard. It is understood that listening is a way of resolving conflict, finding solutions and promoting understanding all of which are beneficial for family life. Listening is likewise a conduit of the Holy Spirit, decision making that considers all points of view, resulting from healthy discussion and mutual respect, is a charism of a healthy church. The Church of South India is committed to the cause of Child Friendly Church.

Child Friendly Church ensures the following:

- Allow children to speak
- Relationship between teachers and students
- Allow ourselves to enter into the children's world
- Understand the struggles of the children in their context
- Teaching methodology in present day developments
- Treat children with respect
- Teacher is a role model – in attitudes and behaviour
- Do not underestimate the children by their age
- Do not mock at children.
- Motivate
- Explain the practical difficulties

- Encourage the children for creativity, innovative work

The Church is called to Promote child protection policies:

- Ensure a child safe church environment
- Contribute to ending violence against children in society at large
- Support child protection in emergencies

The Church is called to Ensure meaningful participation by children:

- Promote children's meaningful participation in all church activities and worship
- Advocate for the recognition of children as persons possessing agency in society at large

The Church is called to raise voices for intergenerational climate justice, supporting initiatives for and with children

- Promote systems and behaviors that are eco-friendly and adaptive to the impacts of climate change within the church
- Advocate for systems and behaviors that are eco friendly

Child Protection Policy of the Church of South India

The Church of South India has developed a Child Protection Policy and always in the forefront to promote a child safe church environment which provides a space for church personnel (Presbyters, employees and volunteers) children and their parents/ caregivers to discuss prevention measures related to physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, family violence, sexual abuse.

We need to constantly adopt specific mechanisms to ensure children understand what behavior is to be expected from church clergy, employees and volunteers, and how to report abuse should they suffer or witness it (e.g. Training for children). Moreover, we are committed to provide spiritual and psychological

support to the victims of child abuse and ensure their recovery from the traumatic conditions.

In educational theory, pedagogy/ education/teaching is a "deliberate, purposeful action between an adult and a child formed to assist the child throughout his youth to reach responsible adulthood successfully." In a context where we witness a lack of commitment to children, Churches have to be consistent public advocates for children. Although churches have highly developed teachings on related issues such as abortion, human sexuality, gender relations, and contraception. Children are not aware of the nature of faith, language about God, and the task of the church. The church teaches the parents to educate their children in the faith and for children to obey their parents.

Therefore, the constant accompaniment of the Church would ensure that every child is raised in Christian values/ values of the Kingdom of God and reach their responsible adulthood. The Church of South India is committed towards this end.

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The Ethics of the Covenantal Open Church Amidst the Challenges of the Contractual Open World

The spirit of the formation of the Church of South India was not merely about a change in the perception of the ecclesiastical offices, a cosmetic coming together of former mission agencies nor was it a casual revisiting of doctrinal affirmations. It was about raising uncomfortable questions to the contractual church missions (comity system)¹ and toxic denominationalism that had come to define the character of the churches. It was the audacity to reclaim the spirit of freedom articulated by borderlessness, openness and grace over against the building of a closeted confessional church. It was addressing the theology of the church and the marks of the church being one, holy, catholic and apostolic and perhaps, reimagining the fifth mark of the church, the covenantal mark of the church.

The Church of South India's Formation as an Open People's Movement

The discussions and negotiations towards the formation of the Church of South India from especially from 1919 to 1947 were dominated by the conviction that the 'will of God for God's church in every place was and is that it should manifest a visible and effective unity.' Openness was evident in the way in which movements, societies, conventions and individuals of all persuasions overcame narrow domestic walls to dream of the united and uniting church. People's movements such as the YMCA (1890), the Student Christian Movement of India and Ceylon (1896), the Indian Missionary

Society (1903), the National Missionary Society (1904), Christian Literature Society and the Christian Endeavour Conventions forged bonds of hope together. The visionary architects of

the formation such as A. J. Appasamy, V. Santiago, V. S. Azariah, K. T. Paul, G. S. Eddy, C. J. Lucas and the many local congregations passionately put aside unhelpful personal and ecclesial differences in privileging fellowship over above denominationalism. What energized the formation of the Church of South India was the enduring involvement of theological and educational societies such as the United Theological College, Bangalore, Madras Christian College, Chennai, Women's Christian College, Chennai, and Jaffna College, Ceylon.²

In such a historical backdrop, the theme of the 75th anniversary of the formation of the Church of South India is both intriguing and yet welcoming. It is even the more crucial to recall that the CSI anniversary coincides or rather, runs parallel to India's marking of the 75th year of independence. The citizenship rights discourse is now being carefully shifted to a duty discourse where a citizen's duty (allegiance) is more valued than the guaranteeing of citizen rights by the state. The Sri Lankan economic and Rev.

political crisis has proved as to the limits of a state that has consistently used binaries and the 'us-versus-them' rhetoric dividing the populace on regional and religious lines, and thus, hastening the crisis. It is often said that South Asia is a place where God is worshipped in so many different ways and people are being killed through so many different means. In such a scenario unfolding around the geo-politics of the world, what does an open church in an open world look like?

The pervading missionary compound culture stands in juxtaposition to the



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invitation to be an open church. Any form of openness brings with it challenges of vulnerability, of being defenceless and the fear of being exposed to undue criticism. Openness and vulnerability are mutually correspondent entities. Such concerns have become endemic in recent years as the churches reel under constant attacks from dominant forces seeking to question the legitimacy of the church presence in our respective countries. Yet, to be forever an open church was a fervent prayer for the intercession of the Holy Spirit to renew the church towards being open for all and the entire creation. It is in this spirit, the Church of South India echoes Jesus' prayer, "That they may all be one." (John 17:21).

The people's movement of the Church of South India was embarking upon an unknown Emmaus journey of faith seeking the presence of the wounded risen Christ amidst the wounded communities of faith. Pausing here, uncomfortable questions are now being posed today: Is the Church of South India reaching a point of saturation as regards further unity and openness? Has the Church of South India been overrun with theologies that resist fresh insights into issues of human dignity? Have litigations become the identity of church life? Can the church survive the dominant prosperity and highly privatized spirituality discourses from populist pulpits? Have the beautified church altars and the bully pulpits further distanced themselves away from the congregational emotions and the societal landscape?

In his address to the Lambeth Conference in 2008,³ Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks drew from his Jewish heritage and made a crucial distinction between contract and covenant in everyday living from a Hebraic worldview. Sacks shared wisdom, thus:

In a contract, two or more individuals, each pursuing their own interest, come together to

make an exchange for mutual benefit. So, there is the commercial contract that creates the market, and the social contract that creates the state. A covenant is something different. In a covenant, two or more individuals, each respecting the dignity and integrity of the other, come together in a bond of love and trust, to share their interests, sometimes even to share their lives, by pledging their faithfulness to one another, to do together what neither can achieve alone. A contract is a transaction. A covenant is a relationship. Or to put it slightly differently: a contract is about interests. A covenant is about identity. It is about you and me coming together to form an 'us'. That is why contracts benefit, but covenants transform. So, economics and politics, the market and the state, are about the logic of competition. Covenant is about the logic of co-operation.⁴ This, perhaps is the ethics of the covenantal open church amidst the challenges of the contractual open world.

Contours of the Contractual Open World

What then is the difference between a covenantal open church over against the contractual open world? Thought the supposed differences may sound dualistic, almost akin to a Johannine worldview of the community of the faithful and the world in opposition to each other ("My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), there is a need to articulate the various semantic layers of the interrelatedness of the church and the world. Incarnational ethics determines the necessity of the church's presence in the world, reshaping itself according to the affirmative perspectives emerging from the world and reshaping the world according to the affirmative perspectives emerging from the church.

The concept of the 'open world' has its prospects if articulated from the perspective of accessibility, rediscovery and creative understanding of God's

world. However, undeniable is the concern that there is an open market that defines the ideology of the open world today (mis)using the vocabulary of openness to misconstrue freedom as per the capitalistic logic. The powers that be, both local and global, have unfairly used even the Covid-19 pandemic to further tighten their hold on power and wealth by stealthily masking their profits through unrealistic projections of loss and yet drawing their own share without any moral inhibitions.⁵ The pandemic has been used to whip up communal tensions in India through a heady mix of economic sanctions and fostering hatred between communities.⁶

The Accra Confession of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) made this clear as it analysed the logic of the open and free market defining the notion of the open world in actually enslaving human communities and waging war against creation. The South African theologian Allan Boesak, et al. (2010) reflected on the understanding of the Accra confession drafted in Accra, Ghana, of the emergence of the open market forces thus:

We speak of empire, because we discern a coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power in our world today. This is constituted by a reality and a spirit of lordless domination, created by humankind. An all-encompassing (open) global reality serving, protecting and defending the interests of powerful corporations, nations, elites and privileged people, while exploiting creation, imperiously excludes, enslaves and even sacrifices humanity. It is a pervasive spirit of destructive self-interest, even greed – the worship of money, goods and possessions; the gospel of consumerism, proclaimed through powerful propaganda and religiously justified, believed and followed. It is the colonisation of consciousness, values and notions of human life by the imperial logic; a spirit of lacking compassionate justice and showing

contemptuous disregard for the gifts of creation and the household of life.⁷

The history of the early Christian communities suggests that the church, though it began as a challenge to feudal authority of the empire, unfortunately resulted in furthering the cause of the empire.⁸ This is a significant reminder that the covenantal open church is always in the danger of becoming a contractual open church. The collapse of the powers of the medieval church gave rise to colonial enterprises in favour of private property.

The ideology of the contractual open world commodifying people with money and capital became the motto of countries influenced by the church leading to large scale economic, race and caste injustice within churches. Scripture was used to guarantee authority for the expansion of empire. The earth was there to conquer, plunder and possess. Vocabularies such as 'extension of the Kingdom' forcefully encapsulated theology and liturgical spaces. The open church must decipher the logic of the open market pervading within an open, albeit globalized world.

The Characteristics of the Covenantal Open Church

Reflecting on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the reformed churches provided a crucial link between justification and justice. They stated that "we are drawn into right relationship with God and into the true worship of God (*solī deo gloria*). The true worship of God finds concrete manifestation in striving for justice and righteousness in society."⁹ It is to realize that when we comprehend acts of injustice, we become witnesses to those acts of injustice. Biblical justice was not merely performed by formal procedures.

The role of the witness was crucial with 'degrees of responsibility'

that was expected of the witnesses. Burnside points out that "unlike modern law, where witnesses are seen as suppliers of neutral information, biblical witnesses took sides (Job 16:19)"¹⁰ This is an important perspective to be pursued in terms of character of the covenantal open church, based on the scriptures. Zehr brilliantly captures the essence of biblical justice, thus: "The test of justice in the biblical view is not whether the right rules are applied in the right way. Justice is tested by the outcome. The tree is tested by its fruit.... Does the outcome work to make things right? Are things being made right for the poor and the least powerful, the least 'deserving'? Biblical justice focuses on right relationships, not right rules."¹¹ Doing justice, thus, does not merely become an 'intervention', but the way of life. Doing justice to the other, therefore, becomes a central motif in the reformation tradition. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who championed the cause of the anti-apartheid movement, in his own characteristic style, famously warned that "if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If the elephant has his foot on the tail of the mouse and you say you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."¹²

The formation of the Church of South India was a public event. It was initiated in public and deeply influenced all walks of public life.¹³ The Church of South India was envisioned by communities who affirmed the nature of the church as a worshipping community. Corporate open worship became the driving force behind the formation of the Church of South India. The Preamble of the CSI Book of Common Worship also affirms this context of worship in the CSI:

From the very beginning, the Church of South India perceived that if unity is to be realized and living experience, it can only spring forth from a deeper, richer experience of God's presence and power through

corporate worship...and at the same time challenges the congregations with prayers that call for more authentic relevance in worship by bringing in contextual and contemporary issues and concerns such as violence, poverty, oppression, marginalization, globalization, ecology, justice, peace and integrity of creation.¹⁴

The reimagining of the Church of South India as a covenantal open church was the faithful "No" to the ecclesiastical and political monologues of the day. It is to distinctly identify modern-day slavery thriving in the babylons and egypt of our times. It is in this context that one can most clearly remember the audacious "No" of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego when they defied the powers: "Be it known to you, O king, ... that we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up. "(Daniel 3:18.). It is in our times that we need to ask, what are the golden statues that we are asked to bow down to and are being set up in our churches, in our institutions, in our country and in our world? The nationalistic, patriarchal, capitalist and casteist golden statues are being constructed and allegiance is being demanded towards them. Discerning the covenantal open church is to discern and identify the contractual logic of the open world and respond by the faithful "No" to these monologues.¹⁵ The covenantal open church is a burning desire that refuses to be contained or cordoned off by the barbed fences of defined faith or doctrinal affirmations. Such are the places of theophanies, epiphanies and transfigurations.

Imagining the Road to Openness of the Church

1. Openness is a commitment to unlearn unethical trajectories inherited and solidified in everyday church life.
2. Openness is an invitation to receiving insights from theological anthropology and civil society and embark on just conversations on human dignity, especially

on gender and sexuality. It is to resist biblical interpretations that demonize human beings based on their gender and sexual orientations.

3. Openness involves a reimagination of spatiality within the everyday church by engaging with the ethics of the built environment of the local church. For instance, whether the church has disability-friendly access, whether children feel welcomed throughout the worship, whether our liturgies are accessible, whether senior people are assisted, whether women feel discriminated in the placement of their pews and the like.
4. Openness is the courage to risk our liturgies and worship patterns in receiving the revelation of God in worship.
5. Openness is the boldness to accept criticism as genuine correctives to our being and becoming as church.
6. Openness is proactively creating opportunities for an overhaul of the discriminative administrative machinery and constitutional instruments that prevent shaping future ministerial members and leaders who may be better equipped to

read the signs of their times.¹⁶

7. Openness is seeking wisdom with great humility from other faith and non-faith affirmations and being enriched in our own faith journey.
8. Openness is developing a sensitive ear to the groaning of the world and the cry of creation.

A Covenantal Open World of Hospitable Discipleship, Radical Diakonia and Missional Accompaniment

The urgency for the Church of South India and her related institutions to engage in with-ness of hospitable discipleship, radical diakonia and missional accompaniment is evident as the call of the church is for the immersion into the unjust socio-political and economic landscapes of human societies. Therefore, the context of hospitable discipleship, radical diakonia and missional accompaniment is invariably in the context of the present unjust open world. When Jesus says, 'truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (Matt. 25:40), it is important to note that there is the radical selfidentification or the self-personification of Jesus himself with the 'least of these'. The gospel mandate

in passages such as the celebrated Nazareth manifesto-Luke 4:16-21 and Matthew 25: 31-46 clarifies the context of hospitable discipleship, radical diakonia and missional accompaniment. The widening of the lens involving all the nations of the earth broadens the scope of justice in relation to diakonia.

Finally, the covenantal open church becomes alive and present when lifeaffirmative change happens. The words of Sadhu Sundar Singh reverberate through the years: "A great Indian Church is needed to form a great Indian nation."¹⁷ Practice authenticates and vigorously validates confession. Dietrich Bonhoeffer pleads with the faith communities to dwell on 'the deed', that, 'the primary confession of the Christian before the world is the deed which interprets itself. If the deed is to have become a force, then the world itself will long to confess the Word'.¹⁸ The covenantal open church is never a finished event. It forever challenges faith communities to identify moral and ethical gaps in any spaces, re-imagine theology and spirituality and calls for re-forming these through the life-affirming values of the gospel. This is the character of the covenantal open church.



Endnotes

1. J. W. Gladstone, *United to Unite: History of the Church of South India 1947-1997* (Chennai: CSI Synod), p.8. The missionaries in India had provisional conferences on the Comity system of dividing mission fields at Calcutta (1855), Benares (1857), Ootacamund (1858), Lahore (1862), Allahabad (1872) and Madras (1879).
2. J. W. Gladstone, *United to Unite: History of the Church of South India 1947-1997*, p.8.
3. The author was a participant as a Lambeth steward when Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks addressed the Lambeth Conference in the summer of 2008.
4. 'Address by Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks to The Lambeth Conference 28th July 2008.' <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2008/07/plenary-monday-28th-july.aspx>. Accessed 10th July, 2022.
5. The Guardian, 'Billionaires' wealth rises to \$10.2 trillion amid Covid crisis,' <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/07/covid-19-crisis-boosts-the-fortunesof-worlds-billionaires>. Accessed 2nd August, 2022. Also see, Chinmay Tumbe, *The Age of Pandemics: How They Shaped India and the World* (Noida, UP: HarperCollins Publishers, 2020); Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2008).
6. Anirban Mitra and Arnab Mukherji, 'Brothers in arms? Covid-19 and Hindu-Muslim Conflict in India,' in *The Covid-19 Pandemic, India and the World: Economic and Policy Perspectives*, Rajib

Bhattacharyya, Ananya Ghosh Dastidar and Soumyen Sikdar (eds.) (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2022), p.92.

7. Allan Boesak, J. Weusmann and Amajad-Ali, C. (eds.), *Dreaming a different world: Globalisation and Justice for Humanity and the Earth; The challenge of the Accra Confession for the Churches* (Stellenbosch: The Globalisation Project, 2010), p.2.

8. Mike Aquilina, *The Church and the Roman Empire (301–490): Constantine, Councils, and the Fall of Rome* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press), 2019.

9. World Communion of Reformed Churches, *Association of the World Communion of Reformed Churches with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, p.7. Available at <http://wcrch.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/WCRC-Association-to-JDDJ-EN.pdf>. Accessed 19th July, 2022.

10. Jonathan Burnside, *God, Justice and Society: Aspects of Law and Legality in the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.118.

11. Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 1990), pp.140, 153.

12. cited in Nfor Nagala Nfor, *Died not Dead* (Mankon, Bamenda: Langaa Research and Publishing CIG, 2016), p.146.

13. Patrick Gnanapragasam elaborates on how public theology celebrates difference which is a character of the Church of South India. Gnanapragasam further opines that, “such a celebration of difference brings forth a deep experience of bonding, which is perhaps the commonality of humanity.” See, Patrick Gnanapragasam, *Wings of Faith: Towards Public Theologies in India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), p.20.

14. *The Church of South India Book of Common Worship* (Chennai: Church of South India Publication, 2006), pp.ix, xiv.

15. The case of the 83-year-old Fr. Stan Swamy’s resistance and eventual arrest in the midst of health protocols prescribing that persons above 60 have to be treated with utmost caution was nullified for political ends. He was certainly murdered by the State machinery (Harsh Mander, ‘Stan Swamy has stood with the oppressed. The state considers him an enemy,’ <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/stan-swamy-arrest-bhimakoregaon-case-elgar-parishad-nia-6843742/>. Accessed 13th August, 2022.)

16. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks says that “the call of God in our times is that ‘we have to honour our covenant with future generations that they will be able to live.’ (Jonathan Sacks, ‘The Relationship Between the People and God,’ Lambeth Conference, 28 July 2008. http://justus.anglican.org/~edmondto/pdf/Sacks_The_Relationship_between_280708.pdf, accessed 29th July, 2022.)

17. cited in C. F. Andrews, *Sadhu Sundar Singh - A Personal Memoir* (e-book) (Redditch: Read Books Limited, 2012), p.88.

18. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ‘The Nature of the Church,’ in *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Geoffrey Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (ed.) trans. John Bowden (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), p.91.

“Envisioning Together an Open Church in an Open World”

What do we learn from our Engagement with Children

I am still looking for a space in this world with considerable openness, if not with an ideal openness, to be called a model for an ‘Open World’. Even for that matter, an ‘Open Church’! But not to be left much disappointed, children’s world, as much as we have observed and noticed, is arguably the most open-world possible. But this statement has to be qualified: the children’s world is the most open-world possible until it is socialized into the abhorring world of adults with its cultural, religious and political divisions, exclusivity and discriminations. Abhijit Naskar, a neuroscientist and the author of the book *Making Britain Civilized: How to Gain Readmission to the Human Race*, says: “The human heart is too grand to be wasted in the gutter of cultural exclusivity.” Yet, we carefully craft these divisions to sustain power relations.

‘What have we learnt about Children in the church?’, ‘What do we continue to learn from Children?’ and ‘How can the Church of South India envision an openness as a Church in a divided world?’ are two important questions that I wish to attempt to answer in this paper.

Seeking to achieve openness in an already divided and partitioned church is an “impossible within”, as Kwok Pui-Lan calls it. This is because partitions and divisions are purposefully and carefully safeguarded to perpetuate many self-interests. To those who wish to deliberately safeguard the divisions, thinking about and working towards openness means a gigantic task of recognising and giving up of privileges and power that they hold on to dearly. Holding on to such divisive powers only block the envisioning of an open church. Envisioning openness constitutes the love and hate drama of ‘isolation and intimacy... desolation and creativity, repulsions and attractions’.¹ Martin Marty, an American

political-theologian and philosopher, has a central argument that if we have to visualise a radically improved way of understanding an open community that has children as its members, then there should be an equally radical shift from understanding ‘children as complex sets of problems’ to ‘children as “mystery surrounded by mystery”’. Marty suggests that the idea of interaction with children should be recaptured in “childness”, something that one *should not* grow out of. Furthermore, Marty explains that the adult-dominant world must ascribe the Image of God to the child. He wishes to take the line of thought that speaks of an “analogy of relation” where humans and God participate in each other’s activities. An interactive relationship helps a child to freely receive life with gratitude.² Now, how about continuing that gift of abundance of life in human communities, with openness, when the world is a strongly dichotomised adult-children world?

I wish to share with you three important theological affirmations, which I have come to believe from my research on Children & Theology and after having worked with children. And, I continue to learn from children everytime.

1. Acknowledging the centrality/agency of children and childhood
2. Rooted solidarity of the adults
3. An adoption of Christology that embodies both the above

These affirmations should work simultaneously, to facilitate envisioning an engaging church towards an open-church. Karl Rahner, undoubtedly the most important Catholic theologian of the twentieth century, has offered some unparalleled thoughts on the notion of openness that we can observe and learn from children. In his work “*Infinite Openness to the Infinite*”, Rahner explores the conditions for



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the possibility of experiencing in the infinite openness of God in human life. Human beings, as Rahner explains, experience a fundamental openness (a self-transcendence) toward God in many human acts. Among the human community, Rahner sees the adult-mindset conditioned by cultural biases that blinds us from envision the bigger openness. In such a context, Rahner sees children as having a far greater deal of openness to receive the gifts of the Infinite openness of God. To expect the unexpected, to commit ourselves to the incalculable, a state which endows us with the power still to be able to play, to recognize that the powers presiding over existence are greater than our own designs, and to submit to their control as our deepest good.³ Unfortunately, children's openness to God and the world has no control over their cultural and their historical past. It is here that Rahner calls the adult-community, which holds all authority to interpret religions and cultures, to journey back to childhood to open itself to the Infinite openness of God.

Exploring the three principles:

1. Acknowledging the centrality/ agency of children and childhood

The understanding of the agency or centrality of children includes the impact children make by their presence as social and political actors and also by their views and expressions. This agency is a deliberate act or an unprompted communication that offers ideas for change in or enhancement of a discourse. The positive and creative presence of children can also be understood through received traditions such as religious scriptures and cultural practices that claim centrality of children. The Bible speaks of children as Images of God, children as signs of God's covenant, children as messiahs, and children as signs to the kingdom of God. A more robust understanding of the agency is largely about the agency of the marginalised children who keep demanding for continued social acceptance. However, it is demanding for children to claim their rightful place when should have been got without having to claim it. Explaining

this contextually, the agency of children discloses itself in the situations of the violation of their rights where children start speaking up for their rights and dignity. The circumstances of speaking up for their rights is when children converse with adults or retaliate in predominantly adult-dominant contexts. Fierce conversations or retaliation also need to be part of the definition of agency because children. Retaliation comes from a state of awareness of being wronged against. Therefore, the understanding of the agency of children should consider different age groups and wide spectrum of awareness of children about their dignity. Age and awareness become important analytical factors. Understandably children of younger age and less aware of legalities of the society are unaware of their rights and dignity and therefore do not even realize the violation of their rights.

Marty explains why the child should be treated not just as a physiological being but as a mystery: "Treating the theme of mystery effectively can lessen the temptation of adults to see and sustain dominance and control over the child..."⁴ Marty readily connects the notion of mystery to God. However, the God as mystery is not "remote and ineffable". The connection of the child as a mystery to the mystery of God is "analogical". Therefore the child as a mystery entails two significant theological thoughts: "that the child is a child of God", and "the child is made in the image of God"⁵ This gives care-providers (meaning adults) a heightened sense of responsibility towards children not in the sense of greater patronage but with joyful reflection. Mystery does evoke awe and wonder which could be attributed to children. But when the care-providers joyfully accept awe and wonder, children become the agents of joyful reflection.⁶ God is certainly a part of the discourse on mystery but not the only factor. Mystery, when interpreted religiously, gives rise to two claims: [a] the child is a child of God, [b] the child is made in the image of God.⁷ Therefore, from the analogy of the mystery of God, we understand mystery as "incomparable".

2. Rooted solidarity of the adults

The world of adults, more specially the church fervently advocates the rights of children. However, advocacy faces serious challenges when the advocates could be potential dominant powers themselves. The roles of the adults as advocates have their own pit-falls.

Advocacy is fundamentally didactic in nature and its objective is to conscientize and empower the marginalized. Conscientizing and empowering indeed aims towards the agency of the marginalized. In the case of adult-children relationship, however, the advocates may not see a transformation in themselves towards embodying the cause. The danger of employing the didactic method in Christian theological debate is to readily connect it the traditional Biblical didactics mode to preach, proclaim and baptize, which will promote a dominant and vicious circle of advocacy. This is noticeable in families and Christian education methods.

Another uncritical role that adults take up in their engagement with children is the manner in which the adults represent God or Christ. Traditionally, it is those who teach and direct (pedagogues) take up the roles of being the visible representatives of the invisible God/ Christ. Such narratives of representation come from the traditional Christian interpretation of the Household. In such cases, advocacy misjudges the power to represent. The subaltern cannot speak, but when they do they speak the language of the dominant. This completes the vicious circle when adult the representers re-hear their own language from children to make it easier for the advocates to represent their own perspective of the narrative.

Advocacy resorts to preaching or 'speaking out against injustice', privileged representing of the oppressed and therefore does represent the experience authentically.

Advocacy could involve shallow charitable external support for a cause without embodying the cause or pain.

Advocacy may not be authentically closest to the narratives of the oppressed thus not advancing the views of children. The adult-world need to wilfully acknowledge this.

Listening and representing in advocacy takes a legal turn: In a rights violated situation the advocate may have to resort to a counter legal language that is caught up in philosophical debates rather than have emerged from experiences. The uniqueness of experiences may not find an authentic place of explanation.

A patronizing or an entitled advocacy can be put to critical test through the proposal of what I call rooted-solidarity. Here the adult community of leaders and rights-practitioners are called to return to their childhood as much possible to identify themselves with children before thinking of representing them.

A more relevant approach for the adult-centric world to exercise is rooted solidarity. Rooted-Solidarity calls the adult world to empathetically listen while being responsibly silent, because the adult world has experienced deprivation and biases in its childhood. Now it has to recall its own narratives of vulnerability and deprivation to help sympathize with children who faces injustice and vulnerability. This further facilitates to embody the narrative to a greater extent than being a mere representative for of advocacy.

A well-thought through critique of advocacy is offered by Joerg and Rosemarie Henkel-Rieger's in their

explanation of 'deep solidarity' offer a noteworthy explanation and also unwraps our thoughts for deeper questions on solidarity. For them, "solidarity is no longer a matter of the relatively privileged trying to help the underprivileged and to solve their problems; rather, it is a matter of understanding that nothing will change unless we are addressing the problems of the world together. And deep solidarity is the recognition that we might be in the same boat."⁸

The above analogy has limitations. To further explain it: not all are in the same secure boat or a privileged ship. Some could be on rafters or less secure modes of transport. These modes have different levels of securities as much as people are able to financially afford.

I wish to share what I think could make the adult-world come more closer to children's world and experience. I call this Rooted-solidarity. Rooted-solidarity involves a redefined responsibility of not just representing but also listening to an extent that finally what the adult world listens as individuals and groups will convert into a community activity of listening to open up spaces for the voices of children. The adults are those who have passed through childhood themselves. It is make them easier to look back to their own vulnerable times as children and to strengthen their solidarity towards the vulnerable children. Such community activities will create spaces for clearer narratives to prevail. Therefore rooted-solidarity widens up spaces for authentic agency to flourish.

3. An adoption of Christology that embodies both the above

A child-Christology at its core cannot be divisive but should recognize the interpretations emerging from the narratives of Jesus' own childhood and adulthood. An outline for such a debate draws from the fact that Jesus was a child himself, a part of the Christological narrative that is often ignored. Our mental images of Christology develop from the restricted imagination of Jesus as a grown up adult and an always-preaching or telling Jesus, a posture that signifies authority and control as an adult-entitlement.

My analytical basis also involves some corrective understanding that Jesus as an adult could have had some adult-biases, yet constantly tried to overcome it by understanding children as central to God's new world order in a context of the empire that demeaned the place of children. Therefore, I believe that theologians must see these roles of Jesus as carrying cultural impediments as we engage with Christological narratives.

The progress of the discourse will all the more be jeopardized if an adult Jesus is being employed as a pawn to stop furthering the subjectivity of children. In our discourses we focus so much on the victimhood of children so that we either ignore or deny to critique adult entitlements.

The Church of South India SEVA and Child Protection Policy.



Endnotes

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2. Marty, *The Mystery of the Child* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 66.
3. William Dych, *Karl Rahner*, and Harvey D. Egan, *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 80-104.
4. Marty, *The Mystery*, 60.
5. Marty, *The Mystery*, 61.
6. Marty, *The Mystery*, 68.
7. Marty, *The Mystery*, 61.
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Perspectives from the Margins

The March of Majoritarian Religion and Mission on the Margins:

The trigger for this article was a ground zero report, that appeared in *The Hindu* newspaper on July 23, 2022, about the struggle of the Sarna Tribals against the twin onslaught of the Hindutva as well as the Christian missionary activities. It is a report about the struggle of the Sarna Tribal people to assert their tribal religious identity and to salvage their tribal spirituality. The report had two photographs. The first one showed a church structure occupying a hillock which was used as a Sarna tribal worship place thereby displacing the native religion from its traditional spot. The second photo showed a Hanuman temple dominating the landscape where a government primary school is located. This temple is reported to be built by the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak (RSS), which spearheads the Hindu nationalism. The report goes on to register that the RSS fund not only the temples but also actively involved in procuring the local amenities like tar topped road, pucca houses, access to power, etc. to the tribal hamlets and set up organic compost manure and help to pack and sell the same. They do these social services through the schemes of the Union and State governments. Their cadres are also involved in organizing children from 4-10 years of age to teach them Hindu devotional songs and to enrol in the schools. RSS affiliated Vanvasi Kalyan Kendra (VKK) run hundreds of elementary schools and hundreds of Shraddha Jagran Kendras teach tribals to celebrate Hindu religious festivals and conduct poojas. Hundreds of VKK cadres visit the remote villages daily to build connections with them and to win them over to Hinduism.

The Sarna Tribals are resisting both the Christian as well as the Hindutva missionary activities through tribal movements like Kendriya Sarna Samitis. However, the RSS argues that they do not convert the tribals like Christians

do. The Hindutva mission claim that Sanathan Hinduism and Tribal religion are one and the same. This report is an example of the massive challenges that a minority religious mission is confronted with when we launch into mission on the margins. The majoritarian religious mission backed by the Hindu nationalist government schemes is already marching ahead of us. Let us list some of the challenges below:

1. The Christian mission is portrayed as foreign in the native religious sphere.
2. Christian conversions from their native religious practices are contrasted with the indigenous religious elements of Hinduism (though it is alien to tribal religion).
3. The Christian mission lack the huge number of sevaks (volunteers) that Hindu organizations can deploy.
4. Penetration and daily presence among the remote rural villages to relate and to respond to their material needs are important elements of the Hindutva mission
5. Enormous resources are at the disposal of Hindu organizations to create basic amenities, health, education and infrastructure. Enormous resources are channelized to encourage tribals to celebrate Hindu religious festival.
6. Hindutva forces exploit their connections with the Hindu nationalist government to connect with the local administration to bring down the state as well as the union government's schemes.

The ground zero report in *The Hindu* is a report about how the marginalized tribal people are trying to fortify their religion against the onslaught of other religions. The report is a crucial eyeopener about difference between the mission



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activities of Hindutva and Christian organizations. How do we, as a minority religious community envision mission for those on the margins? How do we carry the mission of God to the margins where we have to clash with the mission activities of the majoritarian religion?

The Holistic Protestant Christian Mission and its Decline:

The Protestant Christian mission had different dimension of mission. Apart from the propagation of the gospel, the interventions in health and education and technical training were the hall mark of the holistic Christian mission. Almost all of the mission activities had the margins as their centre and locale for mission. In many areas of interventions, the Christian mission was the pioneer and path breaker. The Christian mission contributed to the nation building in a country where for centuries majority of the masses were systematically denied literacy, quality health care and prevented from skill developments due to caste restrictions. When the nation became independent, many of the leaders of the nation have had their primary and secondary education at the Christian institutions, the Mission hospitals were the life saving centres, and many latter-day improvements in education and technical trainings were modelled

upon the developmental schemes drawn by the mission institutions.

As the nascent democracy found its foothold in governance in the due course of time, those who assumed the governance of the independent India woke up to the need for the welfare state to put India on the path to development. The welfare state policy allocated funds to public institutions in education, health, technical training etc. to include those who have hitherto had been excluded by class, gender and casteism. This resulted in the government institution slowly stepping into the sectors which had been the spheres of Christian missions' public interventions. Today, we have come to a stage where the Christian mission institutions are seen as redundant in many areas. We have Panchayat Union Schools and Adi-Dravida Welfare Schools, Primary Health Centres, and Government General Hospitals, Rural Technical Training Institutes, and Polytechnics, Law Colleges, and Teachers' Training Institutions etc., all public funded institutions catering to the need of the rural masses. On the other hand, we have seen many of our schools losing aided posts due to deployment, local people do not patronize Christian mission hospitals anymore, and we struggle to maintain even our aided

institutions. Migration of people to the urban centres is also one among the reasons. They migrate from rural margins to urban margins.

The Neo-Liberal Right-Wing Governance and the Renewed Mission Opportunities:

The neo-liberal right-wing governance anywhere has the tendency to amaze the general public with its massive projects with least consideration about their usefulness for the development of the people on the margins. Hence, the right-wing governance in power want to amass huge revenues for its awe-inspiring projects. In India, the present right-wing nationalist government has contrived to operate on two levels. On the one level, it is seeking to rapidly privatize the profit-making public sectors, in the name of monetizing the economy. Only a few crony capitalists, who will channelize the kickbacks through the back doors to fund the Hindu nationalist agenda, are promoted. On the second level, the right-wing nationalist government is severely restricting the state governments' resources so that the concept of welfare-state is forever abandoned. Government is planning to relieve itself of its responsibilities in core sectors like education, health, technical training, transport, etc. The intension of the government to shrink



the range of public sector services and to pool the public institutions in urban centres is well explained in the New Education Policy of the present union government.

The government's policy of withdrawal from welfare areas has renewed the mission opportunities for the church to relaunch itself to the mission on the margins. Starting right from reclaiming its lost ground in the primary education and rural health, the Church must divert its resources to the mission to the margins. The Church has become self-serving and self-focused for many decades, celebrating the festivities within its own campuses. It must re-imagine its mission in the areas from where neo-liberalism has withdrawn the public sector services. Mission Festivals have to be followed with Education Festivals to raise funds for new primary schools, and Healing Ministry Festival to raise funds for subsidising poor treatments in mission hospitals. Service sector is another expanding area where the employment opportunities are huge. If the Church is serious about generating employment opportunities, then it needs to consider a separate wing or directorate to launch into service sector. In the urban areas, the poor Dalit Christians are feeling increasingly marginalized in the

Church. Unable to withstand the flashy middle-class fashion parades in the church, the urban poor Dalit CSI Christians have quietly slipped away to the neighbourhood shanty churches run by independent pastors. The Church of South India must take it as an urgent call to form urban slum Dalit mission to save families from poverty and youth from unemployment, alcoholism, substance abuse, premature death and young widowhood.

De-Religionized and Multidimensional Mission Praxis:

The essay began with the report of how the RSS and its entities swarm the communities, which were cut away from the mainstream administration, to look for every opportunity to serve and to enfold them into Hindu religion. The Christian mission to the margins too must be strategized as an assurance to access the hitherto denied opportunities of life. That was the hall mark of the Protestant Christian mission during its initial times. At this juncture it is good to be reminded of the concept of the fivefold ministry, often spoken of by the late Bishop M. Azariah, former bishop of Madras Diocese, as part of the vision for equipping local congregation for mission. According to his vision,

every pastorate must have a Pastor, an Evangelist, a Social Worker, a Bible Woman, and a Health Guide. It is the vision for a holistic mission. We need to reinvent the multidimensional mission praxis, which involves not only propagation of the gospel and charity work. Our mission should involve activism, campaign, networking with government and other non-governmental agencies, etc., with a commitment to improve the material conditions of those who live on the margins in rural and urban settings. The dimension of religious dialogue with other faiths and joint celebrations of festivals must also be accommodated in the mission praxis. For, the ultimate objective of the Christian Mission is not the expansion of a religion, but the offer that the lofty ideals expressed in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution, justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity will be assured in everyone's life. To that end the future mission praxis may considerably be de-religionized, not totally, but to the extent that it may be made relevant to mission needs of those on the margins of the society.



Ambayathode Technical Tailoring Center Promotes Woman Empowerment By Upholding Social Harmony

THAMARASSERY: Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod joined the Board for Mission and Evangelism, Malabar Diocese to visit the CSI Technical Tailoring Centre, Ambayathodu, Thamarassery on 28/11/2022. This Tailoring centre is an initiative of the Board for Mission and Evangelism, Malabar Diocese which started on 15th December 2021. At present, there are twenty-six ladies (26) who are the beneficiaries from this tailoring centre. They are coming together from various religious and social backgrounds and learning and sharing new tailoring skills and thus enhance their capacities and talents in creative ways. This centre is proudly standing for women empowering, community development, skill enhancement, poverty eradication

and self-employment opportunities. Most evidently, this center promotes religious and social harmony by accommodating and welcoming people from the local community without any religious or social discriminations. Thus, this center witnessing the love and compassion of Jesus Christ to all communities. Rev. Soban Kumar Daniel, Mission Director, Malabar Diocese, Mr. Lenad Stanly, Mission Convenor, Mrs. Esther Stanly, Mr. Santhosh Mathew, Missionary and Rev. Maxcin John, Synod Mission Director participated in the exposure visit.

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



Overwhelming Enthusiasm towards Gospel Movement in Bothamedu

MUNNAR: Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with Cochin Diocese organized a SAHODAYA program along with mission field exposure visit on 27th November 2022 at CSI Christ Church, Bothamedu, Munnar in Cochin Diocese. Rev. Praise Thaiparambil, Bishop's Commissary and Clergy Secretary in Cochin Diocese has inaugurated the program and he has stressed the importance of SAHODAYA as rising together in the day-to-day life. Moreover, he has led an awareness class based on the vital problem of substance abuse and de-addiction. He has encouraged all the participants to rise together against all kinds of social evils. Rev. Maxcin John, Synod Mission Director conducted a session in regards to SAHODAYA and he highlighted the need for prayer movement (SAHODAYA PRARTTHANA SAMAJ), volunteers' movement (SAHODAYA SANGH) and hope -giving movement (SAHODAYA ASHA Kendra). Mr. Rajan Jacob, Diocesan Treasurer also extended his greetings and he encouraged everybody to witness the gospel

through life for the well-being of all. Furthermore, Rev. Anoop Jacob, vicar in-charge, Malayalam congregation, Munnar also conveyed his greetings and motivated everybody to carry out gospel through life testimonies.

Rev. Nitten Bose, Munnar Area Chairman and vicar in Munnar CSI Church made all necessary arrangements for the program along with Jerin Jacob, Missionary in Bothamedu. Apart from this, Selvarau, CSI Munnar Colony Church worker, and Suresh, Treasurer, Munnar CSI Church also attended and extended their leadership for the program.

Bothamedu SAHODAYA program was the opportunity for cherishing and nourishing mutual fellowship and friendship in Jesus Christ. Seventy-one (71) participants have attended the program. There were a number of youngsters participating in the program with senior members of the Church which reveals the bright future of the community at present and on the days to come. It was the meeting to witness the overwhelming enthusiasm

of grassroot people towards the Gospel movement.

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



CSI Mission Academy MAITRI SHALA -Curriculum is Being Translated into the Vernacular Languages

Chennai: Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod organized a three-day workshop for curriculum translation into the regional languages from 15th -17th November 2022 at CSI Synod Centre, Chennai. The workshop was jointly inaugurated by the participants of the workshop. Rev. Anil M. Jose, Director for the Department of Pastoral Concerns led the devotions. Rev. Dr. A. Alfred Stephen (CSI Platinum Jubilee Special Officer & TTS) addressed the participants and highlighted about the importance of curriculum and its translation into the regional languages. He further added that this translated curriculum will enable us to reach to the grassroots and enable and equip their capacities to build their life. The concluding message also was delivered by Rev. Dr. A. Alfred Stephen by which he has highlighted the importance of the language for the communication – 'lingua-franca'-vernacular languages for the communication. Rev. Dr. Alan Palanna (Karnataka Southern Diocese

& UTC) and Rev. Dr. Bethel Kripa (Karimnagar Diocese & UTC) have served as the resource persons for the workshop. They have given proper guidelines and advices towards the translation and also helped to organize necessary steps for the compilation of the translated documents.

The MAITRI SHALA Curriculum was created in 2019 in English with the help of Mission Directors and other mission-oriented persons from various Dioceses of CSI. Now, it is being translated into Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and Hindi which are the five most spoken languages and primary regional languages of CSI. The Department of Mission and Evangelism will organize Missionary Training in regional levels in three phases based on the translated MAITRI SHALA Curriculum. twenty-one delegates (21) from various Dioceses of CSI have attended in the three days translation workshop. Rev. Benjamin Inbaraj (Director, CSI SEVA), Rev. Christopher Dharmaraj

(Director, Christian Education & Adivasi-Dalit Department), and Rev. CH. John Nischal Kumar (Director, Department of Youth and Communication) also have graced the workshop with their presence and leadership.

The Curriculum workshop was the venue for collective and joint efforts towards the translation process. It was the time for complementing each other and rejuvenate passion and zeal towards mission and evangelism for the well-being of entire communities.

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



Dharfa Worship Centre Inaugurated

KOLLAM: The Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod has witnessed the inaugural ceremony of the newly organized Dharfa Worship Centre on 26th November 2022. Rt. Rev. Dr. Oommen George, Bishop in Kollam - Kottarakara Diocese declared Darfa Worship Centre as the 65th Church in Kollam - Kottarakara Diocese and he named this Church as St. Luke CSI Church, Dharfa. The opening prayer was offered by Mrs. Aliyamma Oommen, Bishop Amma and the opening speech was delivered by Rev. Maxcin John, CSI Synod Mission Director. Based on Mathew 5:13-16, he encouraged the people who belong to Darfa Worship Centre to be salt and light to the world and to organize life for the glory of God and for the well-being of the entire community without any division and discrimination.

Furthermore, he wished to see Dharfa Worship Center as the centre for prayer and hope for all the people.

There was an opening worship led by the Bishop Oommen George. People from Pattaazhy Church and Kalayapuram Church have attended the worship service along with Dharfa Community. Rev. I Babychen, Rev. Sabu, P. Roy, Rev. Paul David, Rev. Johnson, Rev. Dn. Albin Rose M Wilson, P. Jose, Diocesan Treasurer, Suvisheshakar John G, Deva Prasad, Titus, Marcy José, Diocesan Women's Fellowship General Secretary, Convention Preacher Sosamma James, and PK James Kaliyar also have attended the opening ceremony and extended their greetings.

A history of the beginning of the Dharfa Worship Center has been

briefed during the ceremony by Manoj, Dharfa and Mercy Jose, Pattaazhy. The pioneer missionaries and other people who contributed to the development of this centre were well appreciated during the meeting. A meticulous service rendered by Mercy Jose, the then School Teacher, LMS LP School, Kalayapuram, Late Mr. James, Mr. Manoj, Rev. Wilson Kottoor, Rev. A. Thankechen, V. Vijayadas Suvisheshakar, Diocesan Home Missionary Society, G. Mathews, Rev. George E. Mathew, Rev. Aruldas, Rev. Noble Bright, the first Missionary Tarun T, Shaji L, Anil Mosses, and Roy Mathew have thankfully acknowledged in the meeting. Moreover, Bishop authorised Rev. I Baby, District chairman for Manjakkala, Rev. Sabu P. Roy, Pattaazhy, Rev. Paul David, Kalayapuram and Diocesan Mission Director, Rev. Johnson and Anil

Mosses in order to look after the proceeding matters related to the development of Dharfa Center from time to time.

The people who belong to Dharfa Worship Center strongly expressed their faith affirmation and conviction that this newly inaugurated worship centre will flourish ahead for the glory of God and for the well-being of the living community. Furthermore, they have affirmed that this center will amazingly contribute towards the building and moulding of the future

of their young generation in the most valuable ways based on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Moreover, they have requested more accompaniment from the Church and other well-wishers in their struggling for the infrastructural development of this worship centre. Thus, inauguration of Dharfa Worship Centre marked a unique momentum towards mission, ministry, service and Gospel movement.

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



Enkale Paakka Yaaru Varuvanke?!: A Crave for Sustainable Accompaniment

Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with the Board for Mission and Evangelism organized a Missionary Meet and Mission Field Exposure Visit based on SAHODAYA on 10th November 2022. At the beginning, there was a Chenkalpet Church District Meeting followed by Missionary meet and Mission Field Exposure visit.

Rev. Paul Dayanandan, Mission Director in Madras Diocese has arranged the missionary meeting and field exposure visit. Rev. Maxcin John, Synod Mission Director shared the word of God and explained about SAHODAYA movement as an opportunity to pray and study the Bible, nurturing volunteering attitudes in helping others and to be an exponent of giving hope based

on the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the vulnerable people towards the transformation.

Mission field exposure visit was organized to Pazhaveli Irular Colony in Chengalpattu, Tenpaathi in Athur, Chengalpattu, Keezhambi Narikuravar Colony, Kanchipuram, Kalakattur Irular community in Kuruvimalai, and Kuruvimalai in Vandavasi Area. Missionaries Jnanaselvom, Joel Jeremiah, Vijaya Amritharj, Vijayakumar, Yovel Jnanasingh, Neethi, Paul Thankaraj, Ebenezer, Manimozhy, Samuel, Peter, Gapzial, Edwin, Tamizh Selvan and Peter participated in the field visit (15 missionaries). It was an eye-opening opportunity to witness the struggling life of the marginalized people. There was a pathetic voice which heard from

a community during the visit that “Enkale Paakka Yaaru Varuvaanke” -Who will come and meet us?! It was a challenging demand for the sustainable accompaniment towards the transformation. Furthermore, it was also a time for witnessing the gospel in prayer and fellowship.

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



Kalayapuram Sahodaya Conference Explores More Diaconal Alternatives

KALAYAPURAM: Department of Mission and Evangelism CSI Synod along with the Board for Mission, Kollam -Kottarakara Diocese organized one day SAHODAYA Conference on 26th November 2022 at CSI Church, Kalayapuram. Rt. Rev. Dr. Oommen George, Bishop in Kollam - Kottarakara Diocese has inaugurated the program. Based on Mathew 28:19-20, Bishop highlighted about Divine authority, assurance, and anointment upon the Church in doing mission. Rev. Maxcin John, CSI Synod

Mission Director delivered a keynote address based on SAHODAYA and detailed about the prayer movement (SAHODAYA PRARTTHANA SAMAJ), volunteering movement (SAHODAYA SANGH) and center of hope (SAHODAYA ASHA Kendra). Rev. Sabin K. Paul, South Kerala Diocese led a session in which he emphasized about the prayer life, sense of calling, credibility and integrity of life, and witnessing life spirited by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The SAHODAYA mission conference was also the venue for inauguration of the activities of the Board for Mission, Kollam -Kottarakara Diocese. Mr. Varkey Jacob, Mission Board Secretary gave an introduction about the missional doings of Kollam -Kottarakara Diocese. Rev. Paul David, Mission Director in Kollam -Kottarakara Diocese made all necessary arrangements for the conference. Moreover, Daniel, Diocesan Lay Secretary, P. Jose, Diocesan Registrar, Rev. I Baby,

Rev. Sabu P. Roy, Rev. Johnson, Rev. Kunjumon, Rev. Dn. Albin M Rose, Suvisheshakar G. John, Titus, Deva Prasad, Aliyamma Oommen, Bishop Amma, Marcy Jose, Diocesan Women's Fellowship Secretary, Convention Preacher Sosamma James, Kaliyar, and P. K. James, Kaliyar have attended the conference and involved in the different activities of the program. There were seventy-eight (78) people who attended in the conference from Kalayapuram, Pattaazhy, and Dharfa Churches.

Kalayapuram SAHODAYA mission program was the creative opportunity to explore more diaconal alternatives based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the common well-being of all communities, especially the most vulnerable communities.

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



SAHODAYA Movement in Tiruttanni-Nagari Areas

Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with CSI Madras Diocesan Mission Department has organized a Missionary Meet and Mission Field Exposure Visit on 7th November 2022 in Tiruttanni - Nagari Areas of Thiruvallur District, Tamilnadu and Chittoor District in Andra Pradesh. Rev. Paul Dayanandan, Mission Director in Madras Diocese organized missionary meeting and conducted Baptism Service in Kollagunta pastorate. The meeting was based on "SAHODAYA Mission Movement". Rev. Maxcin John explained about the SAHODAYA and encouraged the participants to organize more prayers and Bible Studies through SAHODAYA PRARTTHANA SAMAJ and motivated to be in volunteering attitudes by

being part of SAHODAYA SANGH and being an exponent of SAHODAYA ASHA KENDRA - Hope Center for the common wellbeing of the community.

Soon after the meeting, there were mission field visits to Karakantapuram Village in Nagari-AP, VKR Puram ST Colony in Nagary-AP, and N.N Kandigai in Nallattur Pastorate. Rev. Paul Dayanandan, Rev. Maxcin John, Missionary Dhanaraj, Sivakumar, Devan and Job participated in the field exposure visit. 15 Missionaries have attended the missionary meeting along with 35 people from various mission fields of Kollagunta Pastorate.

Missionary meeting and field exposure visit was the opportunity for mutual learning and listening towards the

spiritual nourishment as well as community development in various levels. It was an eye-opening time to experience the vital realities of village communities who are struggling to move on in building themselves by receiving necessary support from the government as well as other well-wishers.

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



"SAHODAYA" Movement Calls to 'Rise Together'

The Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with Madras Diocesan Mission Department organized Missionary meet and Mission field visit on 6th November 2022 in Arakkonam and Nemili Areas. There was a confirmation and Baptism Service at St. Peter's CSI Church, Andersonpet. Rt. Rev. Dr. J. George Stephen, Bishop in Madras Diocese delivered Lord's message and Bishop stated that Jesus is the Hero to everybody. We should imitate Him and carry out Jesus' gospel through our life, Bishop motivated everybody during his message. Rev. Julius,

Rev. Dhinakaran, Rev. Punitha, Rev. Mathew, and Rev. Francis assisted Bishop in the service.

There was a missionary meeting and mission field visit soon after the Church service. Rev. Paul Dayanandan, Mission Director in Madras Diocese has organized a missionary meet and field visit. Rev. Maxcin John, CSI Synod Mission Director has explained the SAHODAYA Mission Concept in the missionary meeting and encouraged the participants to rise together for the welfare of others. Furthermore,

he encouraged them to organize prayer and Bible Studies (SAHODAYA PRARTTHANA SAMAJ), nurturing a volunteering attitude in helping others (SAHODAYA SANGH) and be as a center of hope (SAHODAYA ASHA KENDRA) in accompanying others who are struggling out of various vital issues. Further he explained that the SAHODAYA is a sustainable mission accompaniment in search of holistic overarching diaconal alternatives through yielding activities towards the betterment of everyone and everything.

A mission field exposure visit was organized in Melpakkam where a Tailoring Centre was inaugurated by Bishop George Stephen along with Mrs. Yamuna George, Bishop Amma. Afterwards, there were visits to Irular Community Centre and also to Irular Community's worship centre in Gawthamapuram, Kainoor, and the exposure team has visited Melkalathur field in Nemili Taluk, Balapuram field, and Ochalam Area. Missionary

Paul Daniel, Yesudas, Princy Rani, Edwin, Devanesan, Sangeetha, Rev. Francis, Rev. Paul Dayanandan and Rev. Maxcin John have participated in the field visit. It was the opportunity to see the life situation of the people and it was also the time for prayer and worship along with them.

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



Kuttanad Striving Together Towards Sahodaya-Rising Together

KOTTAYAM: Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with the Department of Mission and Evangelism, Madhya Kerala Diocese has organized a Mission Field exposure visit to Kuttanad Mission Centres of Madhya Kerala Diocese on 24th November 2022. Rev. Joseph Thomas, Mission Board Secretary, MKD led the visit. Rev. Rijin P. Abraham, Palurkavu, John Mathew, Mission Promotional Worker, Rev. Kishor K Pongapara, Kuttanadu Mission, Missionaries Alexander, and Ouseppachen and Rev. Maxcin John, Synod Mission Director participated in the exposure visit along with a few Church members from Kavalam and Venattukadu. The exposure team visited St. Mark's CSI Church, Kunnumma, Kavalam, CMS LP School, Kunnumma, Kavalam, and St. Mathew's CSI Church, Venattukadu.

It was an eye-opening experience to see the struggles and crisis of the

people who are living in Kuttanad Areas. A majority of the people are financially backward farmers. During the monsoon seasons, they're severely struggling and suffering out of floods and waterlogging and thereby struggling out of various epidemics and other diseases. Moreover, lack of proper employment is another crisis of these areas. Lots of infrastructural developments including proper roads, and bridges, and more employment opportunities are the needs of these areas. Governments are working towards the development of these places from time to time which is appreciable, yet, still needed more sustainable developmental engagements with the communities of Kuttanad to support in their struggles to live sustainably. It is appreciable that Madhya Kerala Diocese compassionately extending their accompaniment for the well-being of the people of Kuttanad through various programs and other yielding activities.

Amidst all struggles and crisis, it is evident and also highlighting that the people live in Kuttanad are enriched with unique enthusiasm in extending warmth hospitality and in welcoming nature.

The exposure visit was concluded with a visit to Rt. Rev. Dr. Sabu K Cherian, Bishop in Madhya Kerala Diocese. Rev. Jacob Daniel, Mission Director, MKD was accompanied in the visit.

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



Sahodaya in Kanamala Strengthened the Togetherness

KOTTAYAM: Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with the Department of Mission and Evangelism, Madhya Kerala Diocese (MKD) has organized the SAHODAYA Mission program on 23rd November 2022 at CSI Church, Kanamala in Madhya Kerala Diocese. Rev. Jacob Daniel, Mission Director, MKD presided over the meeting. During his presidential address, he has pointed out the relevance of

SAHODAYA and the need for renewal in faith and the need of standing together against the substance abuse. The program was inaugurated by Rev. Shajan A Idicula, Treasurer in Madhya Kerala Diocese. In the inaugural speech, Rev. Shajan Idicula highlighted that the mission of the Church is the mission of God and the Church is called out to participate in the mission of God. Through the missional engagement, we should

lead everybody unto the love of God. The Church must be inclusive in all missional doings to which Church should focus on Jesus Christ who is an example for the missional engagements, he added.

The theme presentation was given by Rev. Maxcin John, Director, Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod. He has explained the SAHODAYA as '

Sustainable Accompaniment for Holistic Overarching Diaconal Alternatives through Yielding Activities '. Further he explained about SAHODAYA PRARTTHANA SAMAJ, SAHODAYA SANGH and SAHODAYA ASHA KENDRA. Rev. Jacob George, Former Mission Director, MKD has led a session based on SAHODAYA. In this session, he has explained about the practicality of SAHODAYA. He has mentioned that the SAHODAYA Movement originally started with the calling and selection of disciples of Jesus Christ and it has been eventually developed as the number of disciples increased. It is the need of the hour for a paradigm shift in doing mission which should be more inclusive. We should be sensible of the present world scenarios. Not only this, we should maintain cordial friendship and neighborhood towards our fellow beings and towards the living surroundings. In order to fight against

the social evils like substance abuses, we should be ready for allies with like-minded agencies, organizations and religious groups. We should extend our helping hands to help others in their struggles. It is very much needed a revival in the Church, he added. Rev. Joseph Thomas, Secretary, Mission Board, MKD delivered a concluding message in which he emphasized that mission should be dynamic, and everyone should witness the Gospel of Jesus Christ through life with passion and commitment.

Rev. Sabin Jo Benson has delivered a welcome speech and Rev. Shibu Selvaraj offered the vote of thanks. Rev. Rijin P Abraham, Missionaries Shino V. Issac, Vineeth Raju, Sibychen, Sajin Mathew, Shibu Daniel, Maju Solomon and O. P. Jacob extended their participation and leadership in the program along with the eighty seven (87) participants

from Thottapradesam Mission (Palurkavu, Kombukutthi, Kuzhimavu, Panackachira, Kanamankulam, Kodukutthi), Midland Mission and Malayora Mission (Kodithottam and Kanamala). Kanamala CSI Church made all necessary local arrangements under the leadership of Rev. Sabin Jo Benson and Maju Solomon. This meeting was the venue of learning and listening together in regards to SAHODAYA - Rising Together.

Rev. Maxcin John,

Director, Department of Mission & Evangelism, CSI Synod



Neenghal Yengalukku Sondhakkaaragal - A Significant Voice from a so-called insignificant Community

Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with the Board of Mission and Evangelism has organized a Mission Field exposure visit to Kanchipuram area on 8th November 2022. Rev. Paul Dayanandhan, Mission Director in Madras Diocese has made necessary arrangements for the visit. Rev. Maxcin John, Synod Mission Director, Missionaries Imbanathan, Bhakayaraj, Joyson, Johnson, Sudhar Raj, and Edwin have participated in the visits. The team has visited MGR Nagar Narikuravar Colony, Karisankal, Kanchipuram, KK Nagar, Kanchipuram, Irumbedu and Echoor fields, Kanchipuram.

The Mission exposure visit was a part of SAHODAYA Movement. It was a heart touching experience to witness the innocent love of the marginalized communities. Also, it was a heartbreaking time to see the vulnerable life situation of the people. It is notable that Madras Diocesan missionaries extend their accompaniment with these communities in their struggles to live. There was a highlighting matter of an enthusiastic comment from a person towards the exposure team. Without any hesitation, he told us that "ninkal enkalukku swanthakaararkal" (you are like our own family members). It was an affectionate and significant

representational voice from a so-called insignificant community. And it was a challenging voice to invite others to render an empathetic accompaniment in their sufferings and crisis.

Rev. Maxcin John,

Director, Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod.



Nisi Dominus Frustra: Voorhees College to Impart Holistic Education

VELLORE: Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with Vellore Diocese organized an exposure visit to Voorhees College, Vellore on 30th November 2022. Rt. Rev. H. Sharma Nithiyanandham, Bishop in

Vellore Diocese and Chairman and Secretary in Voorhees College led the visit along with Principal-in-charge Dr. A. Nelson Vimalanathan and other faculty members and staff of the College.

Voorhees College incepted in 1898, is one among the several institutions founded by the American Arcot Mission of the Reformed Church in America. Rev. Dr. W. I. Chamberlain, of the Arcot Mission was the First

Principal. With the magnificent gift Rs. 75,000.00 by Missionary Ralf Voorhees, the main building for the college was constructed and was named in memory of the donor's wife Elizabeth Ralf Voorhees.

Voorhees College is a first grade College affiliated to Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore. The College admits all students belonging to every community and creed. Their religious sentiments and freedom of conscience are respected. The College lays importance on character building and the development of the whole personality of young people.

'Nisi Dominus Frustra' in Latin is the Motto of the institution. The English version is given as "In Vain without God". Voorhees College is one of the unique missionary educational contributions to Indian society. This institution proudly stands as the center of Wholistic Education and Service to all communities spirited by the Gospel of Jesus Christ for every humankind.

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



"OKKA PAATTU PADANDI" - Thirst for Songs of Life

Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with the Board for Mission and Evangelism, Madras Diocese organized Missionary Meet and Mission Field exposure visit based on SAHODAYA on 9th November 2022 in Nellore - Bitragunda Area, Andhra Pradesh. In the beginning, there was rededication service of CSI Christ Church Nellore which was 166 years old, and the Church has been recently renovated. Rt. Rev. Dr. J. George Stephen, Bishop in Madras Diocese has led the service along with, Rev. Raja Rao, Rev. Paul Dayanandan, Rev. Frederick, Rev. Mathew, Rev. Vinaykumr, Rev. Vinod, Rev. Sebastian, Rev. Milandon and Rev. Stephy George. Mrs. Yamuna George, Bishop Amma also participated in the service. Bishop highlighted the theological affirmation during his preaching that God is God of poor, oppressed and marginalized.

Rev. Paul Dayanandan, Mission Director in Madras Diocese has led the missionary meet, and baptism service. 25 missionaries have attended the program. Rev. Maxcin John, Synod Mission Director has addressed the gathering based on SAHODAYA and encouraged everybody towards SAHODAYA PRARTHANA SAMAJ (Prayer and Bible Study), SAHODAYA SANGH (Volunteering Attitudes), SAHODAYA ASHA Kendra (Hope Center). Moreover, there was a mission field exposure visit to Odupalayam in Dhanalkshampuram, Nellore, Vaviletipadu in Nellore, and Kanuparthipadu in Nellore. Rev. Paul Dayanandan, Missionary Y. Lazarus, C. Prabhakar, Prasad, Catechist Yoshuva, and Rev. Maxcin John participated. It was a time to witness the need of the marginalized community to experience and celebrate life in transformative

ways. During the visit, there was a request to sing songs of Gospel (OKKA PAATTU PADANDI - Telugu means sing a song) which revealed as the representational voice of the alienated communities towards the need of celebration of life. Madras Diocesan Missionaries are sincerely extending their best services to these communities based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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



Sahodaya Towards New Light! New Life! New Association!

Kozhinjampara : Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with CSI Cochin Diocese has organized one-day SAHODAYA program on 25th November 2022 at CSI Christ Church, Kozhinjampara, Palakkadu in Cochin Diocese. Rev. Praise Thaiparambil, Bishop's Commissary in Cochin Diocese has inaugurated the program. During

his speech, Rev. Praise Thaiparambil explained the relevance of SAHODAYA for the Wholistic development of the Church. By exemplifying the life of St. Paul's in Jesus Christ, he pointed out that the SAHODAYA will lead to the new light, new life, and new association. Adv. P. K. Joseph, Lay Secretary in Cochin Diocese and Mr. Rajan Jacob, Treasurer

in Cochin Diocese extended their greetings to the meeting in which they have highlighted the credibility and integrity of life in witnessing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Further they have added that love is the driving force of the mission and we should be filled with the love of God.

It is the need of the hour for the

church to nurture and cherish more prayer life, volunteering attitude, and hopeful activities for the common well-being of all, said Rev. Maxcin John, CSI Synod Mission Director during the theme presentation in the program based on SAHODAYA. He further added that we should complement each other, and encourage and share each other to rise together in sustainable ways. The unity, love and compassion in God consciousness are the basis of SAHODAYA, he added.

The meeting was well arranged by Rev. Balan, Kozhinjampara and Mr. T.

J. Ninan, Palakkadu along with Rev. Mathew George, Palakkadu, and Rev. Joyce John, Kanchikodu. Not only this, Nimmy Mathew, Mini Joyce, Mary Balan, Jolly Ninan, Mary Joseph, Biju Sam Jacob, and Biji Vincent also extended their leadership and support for the program. There were sixty (60) participants who have attended the program with an enthusiasm and passion for the mission.

Kozhinjampara SAHODAYA program was the venue for fellowship and gathering in prayer and worship and also it was the opportunity to learn

and listen from each other in regards to the missional doings.

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



A Call to Rise and Shine Together for a Better World

SULTAN BATHERI: Department of Mission and Evangelism, CSI Synod along with Malabar Diocese has organized a SAHODAYA mission program on 29th November 2022 at St. Thomas CSI Church, Sultan Batheri. Rev. Jacob Daniel, Diocesan Clergy Secretary inaugurated the program. He has highlighted the relevance of rising together for the common good. Rev. Shine C. K., Diocesan Treasurer extended his greetings and made a call to participate in the mission of God more passionately. Rev. Soban Kumar Daniel, Mission Director in Malabar Diocese gave an introduction to the program. He has explained about the mission and evangelism and emphasized the need to carry out the gospel in the day-to-day life. Rev. Maxcin John, Synod Mission Director made the theme presentation. He has

explained the concept of SAHODAYA as rising together. Further he added about sustainable mission accompaniment, diaconal alternatives, yielding activities for a better world. Rev. Anish Mathew, Evangelical Church, Thiruvalla delivered the main message in which he has motivated the participants to rise and shine together for a better world. Mr. Lenad Stanly, Mission convenor shared the mission and evangelism engagements of Malabar Diocese.

There were two hundred and twenty-three (223) participants including pastors, church workers, missionaries and evangelists from various parts of Wayanad have attended the program. Rev. Sunil Edacheri, Vicar in CSI Batheri Church along with Mr. Billi Graham, Batheri has made all necessary arrangements for the

program. This program was the venue for motivating each other and empowering together by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There was praise and worship, cultural performance, and creative fellowship. All the participants were actively involved in the SAHODAYA program and rejuvenated more towards mission and evangelism for the sustainable transformation.

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



Regional Institute of Pastoral Management for North Tamilnadu Region Inaugurated today at CSI Synod Center, Chennai

A three-Day Institute of Pastoral Management (IPM) organized by the Department of Pastoral Concerns was inaugurated today morning by Prof. Rev. Dr Alfred Stephen, the Vice Principal, Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Special Officer of Platinum Jubilee celebrations and the Hon. Advisor for the department of Communications, CSI Synod. In the

inaugural session, Rev. Maxcin John, Director of the Mission and Evangelism Department of CSI Synod and Rev. Christopher Dharmaraj, Director of the Department of Christian Education & Director-in-Charge of the Dalit and Adivasi Concerns of CSI Synod were present. Sixty pastors from North Tamilnadu Region of CSI are participating in the Institute.

Rev. Anilal M. Jose,
Director, Dept. of Pastoral Concerns



CSI Platinum Jubilee Youth Festival (PJYF)-2022

Day 1 : October 15, 2022

Church of South India: Department of Youth and South Kerala Diocese has organized, Platinum Jubilee Youth Festival (PJYF 2022) with the theme Youth Envisioning Service and Solidarity: Faith Journey of CSI Youth from Platinum Jubilee to Centenary from 15th to 16th October 2022 at LMS Compound, Tiruvananthapuram, South Kerala. More than 1500 youth from all the CSI Dioceses in unison have envisioned Service and Solidarity for the upcoming 25 years of Faith Journey. The first day of the programme started with an invocation, followed by a flag hoisting and then a procession on "Anti-Drug Awareness" headed by the Bishop in Rayalaseema Diocese, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Varaprasad; the Bishop in Medak Diocese, The Rt. Rev. Dr. A. C. Solomon and the Bishop in Kanyakumari Diocese, The Rt. Rev. Dr. A. R. Chelliah along with the Directors of the CSI Synod, Youth Directors of the various CSI Dioceses, South Kerala Presbyters, lay leaders and the Diocesan Youths.

After the Procession, Inaugural Worship was conducted. Sermon was delivered by the Bishop in Rayalaseema Diocese, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Varaprasad. Bishop emphasized the conversion of Saul to Paul through his encounter with God. He highlighted the thought that, "In order to have God's vision one should lose their own selfish vision". God has chosen everyone to be the instruments of service, solidarity, unity and peace. The Bishop in Medak Diocese, the Rt. Rev. Dr. A. C. Solomon; the Bishop in Kanyakumari Diocese, the Rt. Rev. Dr. A. R. Chelliah; Rev. Maxcin John, Director of the Department of Mission & Evangelism of CSI Synod; Rev. Christopher Dharmaraj, Director of the Department of Christian Education & Director In-Charge of the Department of Dalit & Adivasi of CSI Synod; Rev. Anilal M. Jose, Director of the Department of Pastoral Concerns of CSI Synod; Rev. Jayaraj, Pastoral Board Secretary of the South



Kerala Diocese; Rev. Bright B. Mohan, Youth Co-Ordinator of the South Kerala Diocese; Rev. Ch. John Nischal Kumar, Director of Department of Youth & Director In-Charge of Department of Communication CSI Synod, Rev. Vinod Victor, Presbyter of the Freiburg, Germany and other Presbyters from South Kerala Dioceses led the Inaugural Worship.

The Inaugural Ceremony started with the word of prayer by Rev. Adrian Deepak, Youth Director of the CSI Karnataka Southern Diocese followed by a special choreography by a team from CSI Rayalaseema Diocese. A brief introduction of the origin and the formation of South Kerala Diocese was given by Rev. Shiju R Das. Rev. Ch. John Nischal Kumar welcomed the dignitaries and the gathering. Concept Note of the CSI Platinum Jubilee Youth Festival was explained the CSI Synod Youth Director. The Lighting of the lamp was done by all the dignitaries. The Inaugural Address was delivered by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Varaprasad. The Keynote Address was delivered by the Rt. Rev. Dr. A. R. Chelliah. He urges the young minds to come out of the closed walls of the church and wide open to the gates of the contemporary world. A gist of the theme of the programme was delivered by the the Rt. Rev. Dr. A. C. Solomon.

Afternoon session started with a word of prayer by, the Rt. Rev. Dr. A. R. Chelliah. The thematic session in English was led by The Rt. Rev.

Dr. A. C. Solomon. Bishop persists youth to visualize an open church that has to go beyond the invisible boundaries. According to Hebrews 13: 16 "Do not forget to do good and to help one another, because these are the sacrifices that please God". He gave an open call to the youth to love others as you love yourself. That was the solidarity our Christ has insisted and left. He concluded stating "Expression of Solidarity is witnessing God's love for others". Bishop has brought out Biblical, Theological and Social understanding of the concepts such as Youth, Envision, Service and Solidarity.

Thematic Regional Sessions were conducted in Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada on "Youth Envisioning Service and Solidarity". The Malayalam was headed by Rev. Jeyaraj, Rev. Maxcin John and Rev. Anilal M Jose. Rev. Rajesh Patros (East Kerala Youth Movement General Secretary) started the session with prayer. Rev. Siby Mathew (General Secretary, Madhya Kerala Diocese Youth Movement) welcomed the gathering. Rev. J. Jayaraj (Pastoral Board Secretary, South Kerala Diocese) led the session. He emphasized that the Christian philosophy should never change with the growing artificial intelligence. He reminded that God's solidarity is "I am with you" and also the contributions of missionaries in the history of Kerala can never be forgotten. The delegates were encouraged to brainstorm on

“Youth Envisioning Service and Solidarity”. The session ended with a vote of thanks by Rev. Maxcin John.

The Tamil session was headed by Rev. Christopher Dharmaraj, Director of Christian Education & Director In-Charge Department of Dalit and Adivasi. He emphasized on the thought of “Openness of the Church”. He called out the delegates to ponder upon, “What a Youth Fellowship can do?”, “What they have already accomplished?” “What future developments can be attained in mind with the openness of the church?”. He also encouraged the youth to actively participate in the healthy politics and to create a network between all the 24 dioceses.

The Telugu session was headed by the Bishop in Rayalaseema Diocese, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Varaprasad, Rev. Vincent Raj Kumar, Rev. Rathnakar, Rev. Nagaraju, Rev. Anil Babu, Mr. Nashy Moses and Mr. Jessie Alfred. They urged on the concept of solidarity which in turn means Movement, Action, Peace, Justice and Goodness of Life. They explained that solidarity is a feeling of unity. It is a social integration of the society that helps to bridge people for life. They have also explained about “Ecological Solidarity” that is to be able to balance along with God’s creation and to stay together naturally. The Rt. Rev. A. C. Solomon also stated that “Obedience to God gives Authority”.

The Kannada session was headed by Rev. Adrian Deepak. The Kannada diocese solely discussed on the topic

“Youth Envisioning Service and Solidarity”. Rev. Adrian Deepak helped the youth to focus on solving conflicts. Be it any conflict, the youth should look up to a positive outcome rather than reacting to a negative impact. The youth should be a light bearer for the society. With this in action the youth should march towards the centenary.

All the sessions gave a head start to the youth to go beyond the closed walls of the church. Within our next centenary celebration, the youth are pledged to go out of the closed walls of the church by taking up the challenge of service and solidarity. After the Regional Sessions there was a Cultural evening where all dioceses came up with the creative cultural performances depicting the ethos of their diocese and the theme. First day ended with Camp fire, which added fuel to develop fellowship and entertainment.

Rev. Bright B. Mohan, Co-Ordinator of the Youth Board; Mr. Vijeesh Kuruvadu, Secretary of the Youth Board and other Youth Board Presbyters and members were instrumental in the organizing the programme. Mr. Suhash. S and Mrs. Melvina Evelin Rani. P were part of the Drafting Committee who documented the event.

Day 2 : October 16, 2022 – Youth Sunday

Church of South India: Department of Youth and South Kerala Diocese has organized, Platinum Jubilee Youth Festival (PJYF 2022) with the theme Youth Envisioning Service and Solidarity: Faith Journey of CSI Youth

from Platinum Jubilee to Centenary from 15th to 16th October 2022 at LMS Compound, Tiruvananthapuram, South Kerala. More than 1500 youth from all the CSI Dioceses in unison have envisioned Service and Solidarity for the upcoming 25 years of Faith Journey. The Second day of the programme started with the Holy Communion Service held at MM Cathedral, Thiruvanthapuram. The Rt. Rev. Dr. P. Isaac Varaprasad, Bishop in Rayalaseema Diocese was the Preacher and Celebrant. Bishop delivered the word of God. Bishop emphasized on the ‘Youth Sunday’ by focusing on ‘Youth with Christ in Action’ and ‘Service and Solidarity.’ Bishop exegeted text from Daniel 1:1-17 and said that Youth need to be committed to the Ministry and Mission like Daniel. Bishop spoke on the role of the Youth in the present global world and the action-oriented life helps youth to engage in the Church and Society.

After the Holy Communion Service, Tug-of-War was held at the LMS compound, Thiruvananthapuram for all the dioceses and the youths of various dioceses gave their best participation. Sessions of the day was led by Rev. Christopher Dharmaraj, Director of the Department of Christian Education & Director In-Charge of the Dalit and Adivasi Concerns.

Mr. Praveen Daniel, Programme Executive, CSI SEVA presented a topic on, ‘Youth in Response to Peacebuilding in the context of Conflict.’ Mr. Praveen emphasized on ‘peacebuilding’ and how social media influences people’s perspective. He stated how people should have empathy to understand one another, he also explained about being Non-Judgmental and to be patient enough to resolve a conflict. Mr. Praveen stated that “When you are trying to resolve a conflict, do not escalate the problem even if you can’t prevent it”. He concluded by saying that if there is a conflict or a problem happening right in front of them, one must make sure that if they offer their help, they



should not create more problems from the existing problem that is taking place, but to analyze and think before any form of action and this in turn would help in peacebuilding.

Dr. Jason Alexander, Programme Executive, CSI SEVA presented a topic on, 'Youth in Response to Issues faced by People with Disability.' Mr. Jason Alexander emphasized on "disability". He described how hard it is for a person to be disabled and how it affects one's lifestyle. He questioned the youth and asked them whether they have encouraged any person with disability to come for the youth festival. Mr. Jason insisted the youth to be inclusive of people with disability and concluded saying "Disability could be a part of the design of God" and it is important to be inclusive for people with disability.

Mrs. M. Sneha Prarthana Nischal, Programme Executive, CSI SEVA presented a topic on, 'Youth in response to Gender and issues faced by Children.' Mrs. Sneha emphasized on the 'Gender Issues faced by Children.' She made the youth understand the difference between gender and sex. She explained how a girl child and a boy child are stereotyped by the society to see each other differently from a physical and mental state. Mrs. Sneha also highlighted about 'Gender Injustice' and explained about the Girl Child Campaign (Focus 999) and the four important rights of children. She concluded saying that Jesus gave importance to women in the Bible and the best way of breaking this gender stereotype is to follow the 'Jesus Model' of perceiving people.

Mr. George Wesley, Programme Executive, CSI SEVA presented a topic on, 'Youth in Response to Gender Based Violence and Counseling.' Mr. George emphasized to focus on 'solidarity.' He explained about how women are victims to gender-based violence and how they are forced to become commercial sex workers. Mr. George took up the issue at hand and gave psychological training to a group

of councillors who were working on gender-based violence and has been rescuing women. Mr. George played a video of a rescued women who gave her testimony on how the church has saved her and has helped her come out her trauma and also to be financially independent. She explained how women are forced to become commercial sex workers and how most of them are saved and are self-employed doing tailoring and jute bag making. The rescued woman is now helping 40 other women who were victims to do tailoring and jute bag making. He concluded by asking the youth to focus on solidarity.

Rev. Vinod Victor, Presbyter from the Freiburg, Germany spoke on the Socio-political and religious context of the Youth Envisioning Service and Solidarity and brought the significance of service from the missionaries who worked in South Kerala Diocese and established several mission activities like Polio home, schools and hospitals which stands tall for their service and solidarity towards poor and needy.

Voice of the Youth took place and this gave space for the young people to bring out their suggestions, ideas and thoughts towards the faith journey of CSI Youth from Platinum Jubilee to the Centenary of CSI. The Vision of the Youth for next 25 years of CSI was presented by the youth representatives.

The Bishop in Rayalaseema Diocese, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Varaparasad welcomed the gathering and invited The Most. Rev. A. Dharmaraj Rasalam, Moderator of the Church of South India for the closing speech.

The Most. Rev. A. Dharmaraj Rasalam indulged with the youth and explained "the directions and goals of the youth has to be redefined according to the emerging context and this helps youth to achieve their vision and goals. He highlighted the fact that the 'Voices of the Church should be heard when it needs.' He concluded by saying that one must 'dream high to achieve

the highest' and the youth can do wonders when they all come together in oneness and unity.

The report for the Platinum Jubilee Youth Festival (PJYF) – 2022 was read by Mr. Suhash. S, Drafting Committee, Department of Communication CSI, Synod. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks and PJYF Oath, focusing on the Vision and Mission of Youth for the upcoming 25 years was led by the CSI Synod Youth Director. Commission & Benediction was pronounced by the Most. Rev. A. Dharmaraj Rasalam, Moderator CSI.

Church of South India: Department of Youth expresses its thanks to the Most Rev. A. Dharmaraj Rasalam, Moderator CSI; The Rt. Rev. Dr. K. Reuben Mark, Deputy Moderator CSI, Adv. C. Fernandes Rathina Raja, General Secretary CSI, Prof. Dr. B. Vimal Sukumar, Hon. Treasurer CSI; The Rt. Rev. H. Sharma Nithyanandham, Chairperson of the CSI Synod Youth Department for their constant support and encouragement. Special thanks to Bishops of all the Dioceses, Directors of the CSI Synod, Officers of the South Kerala Diocese, Youth Board of the South Kerala Diocese, Diocesan Youth Directors and the Youth from all the CSI Dioceses for their support and Prayers. Rev. Bright B. Mohan, Co-Ordinator of the Youth Board; Mr. Vijeesh Kuruvadu, Secretary of the Youth Board and other Youth Board Presbyters and members were instrumental in the organizing the programme.

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





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