

XXI National Mar Thoma Youth Conference

Report By: Leny Varghese, Secretary

During the days of August 17-2001, 204 youth attended Life Change University, which was located in the heart of the Texas Hill Country at the John Newcombe Tennis Ranch in New Braunfels, Texas. The XXI National Mar Thoma Youth Conference, called Life Change University officially got its start by the lighting of the traditional Indian lamp by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa. In a slight departure from the twenty conferences past, and in a desire to address the needs of the youth, some things have been altered, but the essentials that make this conference unique has not. This year's conference did not have an official theme, but we adopted the concept of Life Change University. Our desire was to bring students to a format they could relate with and for the most part are successful with, which is the university atmosphere.

The focus of the courses we selected were fundamental building blocks to the Christian faith. This is in line with our desire to get back to the basics of what we believe. Students registered for two of four classes offered such as: "What's up Doc?" which focused on three major doctrines of the Mar Thoma Church taught by Rev. Kurien George and Rev. M.O. Oommen Jr.; "As It Occurred" which was a basic course on Christian Apologetics taught by Rev. Roy A. Thomas; "Follow the Leader" which was a class on Christian stewardship and leadership taught by Dr. Art O'Dell; and "Tools of the Trade" which was a class that fostered tools in which the Bible should be studied in order to yield a deeper level of understanding taught by Rev. M.C. Thomas. There was also a mandatory class that all of the LCU students attended entitled Relationships. Since most of the youth in this Diocese are living with both Eastern and Western ideals, we thought it best to discuss this topic from both perspectives. Dr. Sam Adams and Rev. Kurien George both taught this seminar. Our beloved Thirumeni led the group in our morning devotionals and also in an enlightening Question and Answer Forum. It was a great pleasure for the youth to have their questions answered by such a prominent leader of our church in an honest and genuine manner and to gain insight from Thirumeni in his messages that he delivered to us throughout the conference.

All of the LCU students were arranged in small groups led by peer leaders from all over the Diocese. The peer leaders lived with their small groups and led them in discussions. Our students were set in groups not necessarily from their church, but rather with youth from all over the Diocese so that we could break out of our "comfort zones" and interact with those whom we otherwise would not have had the opportunity to meet.

During the closing ceremony we were able to celebrate our beloved Thirumeni's as well as Kurien George Achen's birthdays, which were both celebrated during the month of August. The celebration reinforced a message that we were attempting to present to the youth of the concept of the larger community outside of the local parish. The four days at the conference was not a church in the typical sense of the word, but it was an extended time of fellowship among believers. We sought as a result of this conference to point everyone directly to the cross of Christ. The Lord blessed us all tremendously during our term at LCU and we are honored to have served Him and His people through this conference.