

XXIII National Mar Thoma Youth Conference

Report By: Charles Abraham, Convener

OVERVIEW

As the convener for the 23rd National Youth Conference, it is my duty to present this report summarizing the 2002 conference. The St. John's Mar Thoma Church Youth Fellowship hosted the conference at Hofstra University in Hempstead, NY. The theme of the conference was "The Rhythm of Christian Life: A Meaningful Spirituality" taken from Ephesians 5:1-2.



MAIN SPEAKERS

Rt. Rev. Thomas Mar Timotheos Episcopa was our main speaker. Thirumeni provided us with three main talks about the theme, and also led a panel discussion on Saturday evening (August 10th). The main talks were refreshingly honest, and it allowed the conference delegates a closer look into what it means to be in rhythm with God, and how to make our spirituality meaningful. The panel discussion was also an interesting session, where Thirumeni addressed questions from the delegates with the assistance of two of our youth chaplains, Rev. Raju Philip Zachariah and Rev. John George.



Rev. John George is the Youth Chaplain for the Southwest Region and he is based in Houston. Achen gave further meaning to the theme, in his two talks. John George achen was successful in relating the theme to our daily lives, and ways in which we should apply the word of God to our lives. We welcome Achen, Reena Kochamma, and his daughter Sneha to the diocese, and wish them the best.

SEMINAR SPEAKERS

During the conference we had four different seminars/tracks set up. They were: Liturgy: History, Meaning and Purpose, The Mar Thoma Church: Yesterday & Tomorrow, Relationships, Marriage and Christ, and The Christian Mission: What are we to do? Each delegate had the opportunity to attend two of these seminars, and each seminar was divided in two parts. Therefore, each person would attend part 1 and part 2 of a particular seminar on Friday (August 9th), and then switch to attend part 1 and part 2 of another seminar on Saturday (August 10th). This format allowed for in-depth study into two seminars of the delegates choice.



Rev. Dr. John Joseph, our Diocesan Secretary led the seminar on Liturgy. This seminar was loaded with information that is necessary for every Marthomite to know and understand. The way we look at our worship will be drastically changed when we learn of the meaning and purpose behind our liturgy.

Rev. Raju P. Zachariah, the Northeast Region's youth chaplain, and Liju Varghese from the Trinity Mar Thoma Church led the Mar Thoma Church seminar. An oft-ignored aspect of our spirituality is our history, where we come from, and why we do the things we do. The seminar did not stop just at being a historical seminar but went on to explore what the shape of the church will be as it adapts to fulfill its mission here in this diocese. This session was interactive with participants sharing their views of how the church will change so that it can preach the gospel and share the tradition of St. Thomas to our communities in this land. This track assisted the delegates in a deeper understanding of the Mar Thoma Church.

Mr. Thomas Abraham (Joe) from the St. James Mar Thoma Church in New York led the Relationships track. Joe spoke about an arguably controversial topic, and honestly discussed the necessity of God's presence in our relationships. We are often led by societal views on relationships, and marriage, when at times these views can be warped. Joe gave us sound advice that flies in the face of this present culture but is in tune with Scripture. We learned again that we are not to be conformed to this world but to the pattern of Christ and reflect him in all of our relationships.



Rev. Alexander Thomas, vicar of Ascension Mar Thoma Church in Philadelphia led the Missions seminar on Friday (August 9th). Achen spoke very lucidly about our responsibility to evangelize, and various aspects of missions and mission fields. Ms. Merry George of the St. James Mar Thoma Church, led the Missions track on Saturday, in Alexander Thomas Achen's absence.

BRIEF CONFERENCE SUMMARY

The conference started on Thursday August 8th. Registration to the conference was held from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. Following dinner, the first worship of the conference was held at 7 p.m., followed by a welcome address by the St. John's vicar, Rev. Monsi K. Philip. After which, our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa delivered the inaugural address and lit the ceremonial lamp to inaugurate the conference. Rt. Rev. Thomas Mar Timotheos Thirumeni offered a few words of introduction, which was followed by a short welcome video by the St. John's Youth Fellowship, and a traditional candlelight dance. The evening ended with an introductory group meeting for the delegates, and a short snack session.

On Friday, worship commenced at 8:30, which was followed by a short devotional by our youth chaplain Rev. Raju P. Zachariah. Timotheos Thirumeni held his first main talk, and then the participants broke up into their groups. We reconvened for lunch, after which John George Achen gave his theme exposition. Following this talk, we broke into the first parts of the four different seminars. For the recreation time that was allotted, the film Shrek was played in the auditorium, we offered board games, and other games, plus opened the recreation center and basketball



courts. After dinner, the delegates met once again for worship, then split up for the concluding sessions of their seminars. When we met again, we showed a brief video presentation of the different views on the conference theme, and then moved on to play the game show "The Price Is Right". The game was a success, and the winner took home a \$100 American Express gift certificate.



The third day of the conference began with worship. Rev. Dn. Manoj Zacharia led Saturday's devotional. Timotheos Thirumeni shared his second main talk with us, after which the small groups conducted their second small group session. After lunch, Rev. John George provided his second theme exposition session, and the conference delegates broke up into their second choice of seminars. During the recreation time that followed, the movie Lord of the Rings played, while others chose to participate in basketball, volleyball, tug of war, three-legged races, water-balloon fights and a few were content to sleep until dinner. After dinner and worship, the group split up once again for the second session in their

seminars, and reconvened an hour and a half later for a panel discussion that was led by Timotheos Thirumeni, Raju P. Zachariah Achen, and John George Achen.

The concluding day of the conference was Sunday, and everyone from neighboring Mar Thoma churches was invited to participate in the Holy Communion service. Our main speaker, Rt. Rev. Thomas Mar Timotheos Episcopa, led the service. After the service, Timotheos Thirumeni gave his last talk, and his closing remarks. The St. John's Youth Fellowship presented a closing slide show, with pictures taken at the conference. In the absence of our Diocesan Bishop, Rev. John Joseph also gave his closing remarks. After the conference secretary, and the DYF secretary Mathew Thomas provided their vote of thanks, Timotheos Thirumeni concluded the 23rd National Youth Conference with prayer and benediction. Lunch was provided for all the conference participants.



CONCLUSION

Looking back, at the conference I see how much of a blessing it was to host it. At times it was a frustrating, tiring, and all-around burden, but then God has a funny way of turning it into a beautiful experience, and chiding us for thinking of it as a burden instead of a privilege. If you ever doubt that God has a sense of humor, look back at the ways that our Creator provides us with blessings. His presence was what held this conference together, what helped the coordinators to laugh and have fun in the planning process, and to trust that this would be an amazing experience. The St. John's Youth Fellowship is stronger because of this conference, and we would like to believe all the delegates who attended this conference became stronger in their spiritual walks, and had fun spending time with us. I would definitely encourage all who are reading this to attend next year's National Youth Conference; I'm hooked. God bless.

