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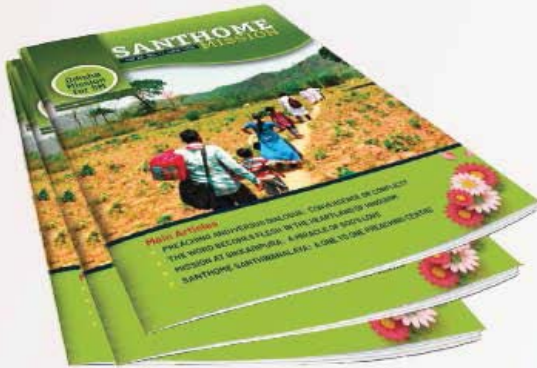
**Odisha
Mission
of MST**



Main Articles

- > PREACHING AND/VERSUS DIALOGUE: CONVERGENCE OR CONFLICT?
- > THE WORD BECOMES FLESH IN THE HEARTLAND OF HINDUISM
- > MISSION AT SIKKARIPURA: A MIRACLE OF GOD'S LOVE
- > SANTHOME SANTHWANALAYA: A ONE TO ONE PREACHING CENTRE





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Disclaimer: Ideas expressed by the contributors do not necessarily reflect the mind of the Editorial Board

Editorial

21st December 1923 is an immensely significant date, written in golden letters in the annals of the bracing history of the Syro-Malabar Church. It was on that auspicious day that the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy was restored after it had been suppressed at the Synod of Diamper in 1599. Still it had only limited jurisdiction i.e., between two important rivers of Kerala, namely, Bharatapuzha and Pampa. There were plenty of missionary vocations in the Syro-Malabar Church that time, and young boys and girls were joining other sui iuris churches for mission work in India, since the Syro-Malabar Church did not enjoy national jurisdiction. With the political independence of India in 1947, people started travelling beyond their proper kingdoms for business and employment. The administrative policies of the Church also changed with political independence. Erection of the eparchy of Tellicherry in 1950 was an important breakthrough and the first expansion of the jurisdiction of the Syro-Malabar Church, after the restoration of the Hierarchy in 1923. Creation of the eparchy of Chanda in 1965 and the later establishments of other eparchies outside the proper territory of the Syro-Malabar Church were landmarks in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church. In the given setting, the founding of the Missionary Society of St Thomas the Apostle (MST) in 1968 was yet another milestone for the Syro-Malabar Church that enhanced further mission work through its proper rite.

The MST got mission regions like Ujjain, Mandya and Sangli, in different parts of India. Since these territories proved unfavourable for direct evangelization and establishment of Christian communities due to their socio-political and religious situations, indirect means and methods of evangelization like education, health care, works of charity and mercy and empowerment of the weaker sections of the society were adopted. Wherever it was possible, direct evangelization and forming of Christian communities were also taken up with considerable success.

The erection of the eparchies of Shamshabad and Hosur and the expansion of the eparchies of Ramanathapuram and Thuckalay provided *provisional all India jurisdiction* to the Syro-Malabar Church in 2017 and this development opened extensive vistas of evangelization, offering vast opportunities and responsibilities for the MST. To this MST responded positively, with eagerness to preach the word of God in these areas, by taking up the responsibility of evangelization for the Syro-Malabar Church in Orissa and other areas of the eparchy of Shamshabad and extending the territories of its all three regions towards the areas where people are more responsive to the word of God. The MST experiences such an environment of wider opportunities of missionary involvement for the first time in its 50 years of existence since its foundation in 1968. Holding fast to the unfailing promises of God, the MST shares the message of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all humanity in Jesus Christ and looks forward to the emergence and establishment of new vibrant Christian communities in these areas.

One knows from the history of the Church that the formation of ideal Christian communities is not an easy task. The words of Tertullian hold true even today, "Semen est Sanguis Christianorum" (The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church). I feel that this maxim claps true in any sort of evangelization work in India. It is true that the socio-political situation of India is not convenient for any work of evangelization. Religious fundamentalism and political antagonism against minorities are on the rise. Citizens are conscientized with pseudo nationalism for political gains. Added to these external hindrances for evangelization, there are internal lethargy and clashing ideologies in the Church on the methods of mission that pull back the missionaries from the work of evangelization with enthusiasm and conviction. Only those grace-filled and enthusiastic missionaries, burning with apostolic zeal and displaying the courage of the Martyrs of the early Church as well as the human compassion of Mother Teresa of Kolkata of the contemporary times, can be instrumental in bringing up new communities of faithful for Jesus. They will have to go through the martyrdom of daily life by taking up the crosses of unending struggles like the Master who sacrificed his life as ransom for many.

True evangelization calls for the incarnation of the missionaries in their missionary and apostolic contexts. The new vistas of mission for the MST are among the people of the lowest strata of the society i.e., the tribals, adivasis, people belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and living under the yoke of injustice and discrimination for centuries. Their standard of living may be the lowest in the sub-continent although they keep high morals in their personal and community lives and their culture might be superior to the consumerist culture of the modern times. In all such contexts, alike Francis of Assisi who embraced poverty denouncing the riches of his ancestral property and the mansions of comforts of an affluent society, a missionary has to come down and anchor oneself to the context of the mission and ministry. The presence of plurality of religions in India gives a big challenge to the MST in doing direct proclamation while the elements of truth in other religions are recognized by the Church. Hence the proclamation of Christ has to be done in convergence with dialogue. A missionary is in constant dialogue with oneself and with the context in which the gospel is preached so that one can preach with simplicity and accepting the values of other religions and cultures.

The present issue of Santhome Mission comes to your hands, proposing the challenge of taking up both proclamation and dialogue not in any conflicting directions but with an inclusive attitude of convergence of both. The subsequent presentations in the issue will reveal some of the frontier ministries of the MST in different parts of the globe and I joyfully invite your attention to the beauty of diversity of approaches in sharing the Good News which retain the feet of our missionaries, ever beautiful and lovely (Cf. Rom 10, 15). The new vistas of areas of opportunities for the MST inspire us to invent something new both in content and approach, so that the Missio Dei will be fulfilled with unflinching enthusiasm and will expose its maximum beauty in every evangelizing effort.

Fr Francis Kureeckal MST
Chief Editor



Preaching and/versus Dialogue: Convergence or Conflict?

Dr. Justin Vettukallel MST

There is a widespread feeling today in the Church that its traditional missionary dynamism is declining and that its urge for bringing people to Christ and thus organizing Christian

communities is growing weaker. When I grew up as a seminarian (in 1990s), having my formation in the seminaries situated in the non-Christian contexts of the mission, the entire atmosphere

of priestly training was stirred with the spirit of bringing people to Christ and the Church. The classroom discussions and the sharing by veteran missionaries often aired that proclamation of



Christ and establishing communities of faith are the primary goals of missionaries. However, there also began some signals of an impending transition in the understanding of mission in the theological writings of the times. Almost every theological journal opened discussions on pluralism of religions, uniqueness of Jesus as the saviour, interreligious dialogue and liberation as the way of being Church for the 21st century, etc.

With almost two decades of theological debates and deliberations, not only that the discussions on mission now disappeared from the leading periodicals and scholarly journals of mainstream Christianity, especially of Catholicism, but the very notion of mission pursued by the majority missionaries drastically changed. Although the magisterial teachings have upheld the primary focus on direct proclamation, the thrust on

direct evangelization through preaching the mystery of Christ event has lost its momentum, especially in the Asian countries, except among the minor segments of the charismatic renewal groups in Catholicism and the Evangelicals or Pentecostals in Protestantism.

Broadening of the Notion of Mission towards Dialogue

The phenomenon of change in the understanding and approach of the mission is being blamed on the contemporary theology of religions on the one hand and the other, on a broadening of the focus of missionary effort towards integral liberation and human promotion. **Proclamation leading to conversion is seen as only one aspect of evangelization and is generally understood as pursued by less progressive missionaries. The broadmin-**

ded missionaries work for the integral liberation of the humankind and the cosmos. This kind of a new stage of awareness and development, as observed by Karl Rahner, began from Vatican II, primarily through its modern interpretation of the Church and the world including other religions. In 1974, this new awareness facilitated the understanding of Christian mission in Asia as triple dialogue by the FABC- dialogue with the poor, with cultures and with religions which were taken as an integral approach with respectful interaction of the Gospel with to the milieu of the Asian continent.

Later the magisterial documents *Dialogue and Mission (1984)* and *Dialogue and Proclamation (1991)* spoke of four forms of dialogue: dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange and dialogue of religious experience (DM 28-35; DP 42). The new theologies have

¹Karl Rahner, "Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council," *Theological Investigations XX* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) pp.77-89.

²The idea of triple dialogue, although was introduced by the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) held in Taipei in 1974, even before the arrival of the *Evangelium Nuntiandi* (1975), it got deeper and wider interpretations from 1990s only.

been successful in taking the notion of dialogue beyond the realm of interreligious interaction to an all-inclusive approach by engaging every human predicament towards holistic liberation of the people, answering to the issues of religious pluralism in the theological level and the matters of human sufferings at the empirical.

Proclamation or Dialogue: Conflicts and Confusions

Swept away by broadened visions and radical commitments, the perennial and the most important element of preaching the Word of God in all seasons (2Tim. 4, 2) was side-lined as an exceptional practice by the conservative missionaries. **The chunk of our missionary efforts today, especially in the Indian context, stay in the ongoing dialogue with the poor and the illiterate, and also in the realm of dialoguing to the needs of the elite and affluent by the social establishments of service sectors of quality performance.** I have heard from my confreres in the Missionary Society who say that we



need to be proud of undertaking varieties of ministries addressing to the diverse needs of the suffering and marginalized humanity both in the mainstream and in the periphery. The missionary goals of many such activities rarely hold Christ and the Church as the prime focus. Even the opportunities for sharing the Person and the message of Christ are sometimes underused due to the lack of conviction or the inefficiency to convey. Do we miss to speak the most important, while pursuing the so-called integral approach of dialogue in mission?

On the other hand, there arise eminent and gifted preachers of the Gospel, some of whom are insensitive to human suffering and

are disrespectful to the genius of different religions and cultures. They dare to pronounce statements of absolutism, claim infallible knowledge about the transcendentals and propagate celestial values of detachment by creating an undue sense of sin regarding many of the human and worldly affairs. They do not find much value for the charitable and liberating activities of social promotion and insist that Word of God is enough as a solution to every human problem. For some unknown reasons or some reasons of convenience, we keep proclamation and dialogue in the divide of such a dialectic tension.

Here arises the question - are we finding easy solutions to the issues of religious pluralism and the causes of human sufferings in the world, sacrificing in the process the identity of the Christian mission? In this atmosphere, the dialectical relationship between proclamation and dialogue become radicalized into opposition, with the result that a variety of middle positions that try to hold on to both poles of the dialectic tend to be overlooked. **I think that preaching**



and dialogue are in a convergent relationship rather than conflictual, because only by accentuating their interrelationship can one preach or engage in dialogue in a Christian way.

Proclamation and Dialogue: Distinct but Intimate

In Catholic circles, as illustrated by Pope Paul VI in 1975 through *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, evangelization can have both a narrow and a broad sense. In general, evangelization means bringing the good news of Jesus Christ into all areas of humanity, thus transforming it from within (cf. EN18). This can be done in a variety of ways. One of these ways

is “the clear and unambiguous proclamation of the Lord Jesus” (EN 22). **“This proclamation,” the same exhortation goes on to say, “occupies such an important place in evangelization that it has often become synonymous with it, yet it is only one aspect of evangelization”** (EN 22). **The Gospel can be brought to different areas of humanity by the life of the Christian community and by its actions inspired by love.**

It is important to note that different elements, methods or ap-

proaches to the mission are lived out for themselves, and not for any ulterior purpose. In other words, they are not to be seen as being in the function of conversion to Christ. Presence and witness is already a way of practising mission (and indeed this

purpose. The liturgy is celebrated to give glory to God.

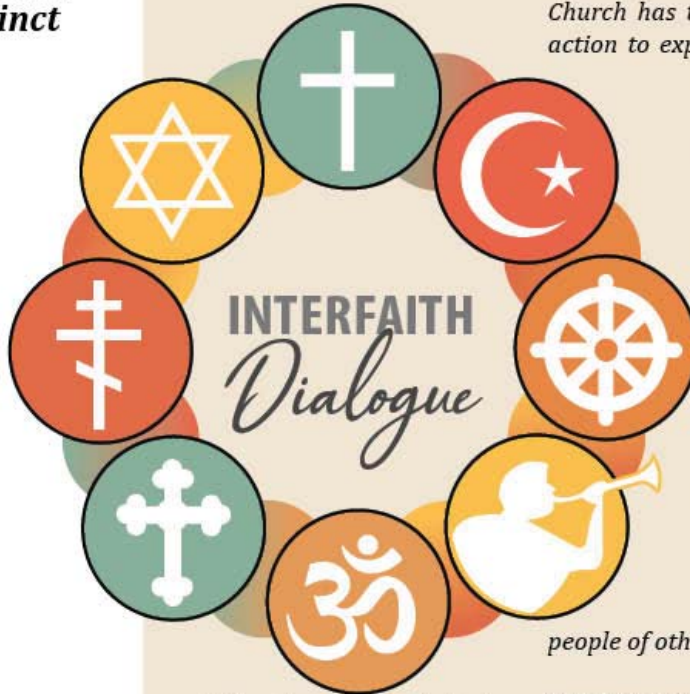
Similarly, the service which the Church offers in the fields of education, health and care of all kinds may also draw people to the Catholic fold, yet again this is not its immediate aim. The Church has to engage in social action to express God’s love for

humankind, since the Church, by nature, is a sacrament of this divine love. So any dialogue should not be seen purely as a means to bring about conversions to Christianity; this would be too narrow a view and would lead to the dialogue being treated with suspicion by

people of other religions.

would be the way the Orthodox churches see mission even today, which perhaps was the attitude of the St Thomas Christians until the 20th century). This presence and witness, to be authentic, has to be accompanied by prayer, both liturgical and non-liturgical. In the liturgy, we proclaim Jesus Christ, yet we do not celebrate the liturgy to draw people to the church. Of course, the liturgy may be and should be, attractive, and so may arouse interest among people who are not Christians who happen to be present, yet this is not its real

Dialogue can be taken as a way of reflecting God’s love for all people, a love which respects their liberty. Often dialogue is considered as the last resort for evangelization by some, when the efforts for direct preaching are defeated or when there is no opportunity of preaching the word of God. It is right to quote here the words of John Paul in *Redemptoris Missio* that the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue. “Instead, she feels the need to link the two in the context of her mission *ad gentes*. These two el-



³Cf. Marilyn J. Salmon, *Preaching Without Contempt* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 107.



ements must maintain both the intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore, they should not be confused, manipulated or regarded as identical even though they were interchangeable" (RM 55).

Nuancing the Quality of Dialogue as Crucial to Mission

If the dialogue of life/action through humanitarian activities would genuinely reflect the love of God both in its content and approach, people will be drawn to Christ - the summit of God's love. If our activities are not qualified enough to bring people to Christ, then there is some mistake in the ways they are being carried out. Therefore, through the dialogue of life, of action, of religious experience or intellectual debate, if Christian faith has nothing different to offer, inspire and draw

people to Christ, not just the action but its quality that is under question. If we make other stories and theories to justify and get away from the real issues and deficiencies of our witness and continue with triple dialogue or four-fold dialogue, such exchanges do not respect the liberty of the people and help them choose the best. Because the best is not disclosed enough to be known and to be loved, or we do not let people know the real way, the truth and the real life (Jn 14, 6). **If our activities of charity and mercy and the projects of human promotion are not qualified enough to make people feel the loving, caring, forgiving and comforting nature of God, we miss delivering the best or the most wanted for the people.**

You may think I am labouring at this point, but to me it is im-

perative because the Christian ways of relating to people of other faiths and way of bearing witness to Him and preaching His name are crucial, because we, with all our knowledge and ignorance, are trying to show forth the world 'who and what' the Christian God is? In the words of Pope Francis, "the failure to show the real face of Christ is a way of deceiving others and of denying them the good which we have been given to share generously with others" (EG 251). If the future world is deprived of Christ and His Gospel, we the mediators in history today would be accountable for the fault.

Proclamation without Dialogue: An Incomplete Process

Just as all of us are called to remain faithful to the Lord's com-

⁴There is a lot of literature springing up to help shape preaching more Christian by deconstructing it from fundamentalist approaches. See e.g. Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017); John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2011); O. Wesley Allen Jr, *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach to Proclamation and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016); Ronald J. Allen, John S. McClure, and O. Wesley Allen Jr, eds., *Under the Oak Tree: The Church as Community of Conversation in a Conflicted and Pluralistic World* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018).

mand to preach the Gospel and to invite people to accept baptism and become members of the community of believers, "each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are also

called to practice dialogue, though not always to the same degree or in the same way" (RM 57). As proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue are distinct elements of the church's overall mission. They are by no means interchangeable. I cannot say that the time of proclama-

tion is over and that it must give way to dialogue, or the time of dialogue is over and we can start preaching. To this position, it might be objected that Christians already have the truth. Did not Jesus say, "I am the way, the truth and the life"? If this is so, how can we who believe in Christ still be in search of the truth? To this objection, the document -Dialogue and Proclamation responds that "the fullness of truth received in Jesus Christ does not give individual Christians the guarantee that they have

grasped the truth fully. Truth is not a thing we possess, but a Person by whom we must allow ourselves to be possessed. This is an unending process" (DP 49). The document further explains



that while keeping their identity intact, Christians must be prepared to learn and receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions (DP 49-50).

When dialogue is taken as mandatory and not an optional extra, the preachers of the Gospel are challenged to do an exchange and to set their proclamation dialogical. Sadly, preaching has too often been a place where the identities of non-Christian others have been used as a foil either for tarnishing the other

or for heightening the Christian character. Historically, Christian preaching is not only monological in approach, but its content pronounces absolute statements on what is right or wrong, not

reflecting the principle of Christian love. In the postmodern societies wherein values are acceptable not because of their doctrinal roots, but because of their usefulness for human existence and moral order, the dictatorial approach of traditional preaching is considered Un-Christian and uncivilized.

Dialogical Proclamation for Post modernity

The proclamation needs to be 'dialogical,' in other words, it needs to take into account that the 'hearers of the word' are not just passive receivers. It has to be readily understood that the message of the Gospel should never be imposed, but always proposed. **The preacher has no right to point the finger at other people, or to engage in**

polemics in the name of Christ or to pronounce the last words for what may be right or wrong. Instead, the preacher has to struggle with his/her transformation so that he/she can truly respond to Jesus' call to love while preaching.³ Again, the proclamation should be humble, for what we are dealing with is a gift which has been received without merit; moreover, the messengers of the Gospel do not always entirely live up to its demands. There must be respect for those to whom the proclamation of the good news is being addressed, for the Spirit is already at work in them.

Indeed the preachers are called to discover and help discover, like flowers in a barren desert, signs of God's love in all peoples. No people can be excluded from this all-embracing love. It means moreover that at all times, God's love has been made manifest in different ways. Would it not be horrific to say to them, "Your ancestors are all condemned because they did not know Christ"? Surely we should instead recognize every human person, possibly by quoting Paul's words to the Athenians: "Yet in fact he (God) is not far from any of us, since it is in Him that we live, and move, and exist, as indeed some of your own writers have said: 'We are all his children'" (Acts 17, 27-28). If the preacher fails to dialogue with the context of his community of listeners, he/she would be delivering a

sermon against Christ and the Gospel.

From Conflict to Convergence

This proclamation springs from love. "The love of Christ impels us," says St Paul (2 Cor 5,14). **It is because we have come to know and value the Lord Jesus and because we appreciate all that God has done for us in him that we wish to share this good news with others.** The desire that others may come to know Christ, may be captivated by the beauty of the person of Jesus, will be in the hearts of Christians who engage in dialogue. It is this that will give strength to their testimony when they are called upon to provide an account of the hope that is within them. It will be a question of discernment when the good news can be preached explicitly, including the invitation to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour with all the consequences of such an acceptance. However, any attempt of the proclamation in word or deed which denounces the attitude of dialogue is anti-Christian and is a scandal to the Gospel. We are called to serve each other in humility, and only by loving one another, the world will know that we are disciples of the Master of the Universe (Jn 13, 35).

The issues of pluralism of religions, the question on the unique

saving act of Christ, the debate on the salvific role of the Christian Church, etc. are God-given opportunities to discern the space of Christian mission in the pluralistic world and to design approaches acceptable to the illiterate and elite alike, and thus to set the mission pleasing to God by honouring all His children. The triple or the fourfold forms of dialogue are no way in opposition to the proclamation. Authentic interreligious dialogue on the part of the Christian supposes the desire to make Jesus Christ better known, recognized and loved (DP 77) and it cannot but be open to the definitive proclamation that Christ is the perfect and the only answer to the cravings of humanity. Similarly, the proclamation becomes imperfect and even un-Christian, if it does not listen and respond to the context of the listeners. It brings insult to God if the preacher fails to recognize the divine in other religions and cultures. As Pope Francis has rightly pointed out, evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another (EG 251). Any preaching that does not make dialogue or any dialogue that does not preach is not only incomplete but deceptive. At the mutual convergence of preaching and dialogue, the Christian mission becomes acceptable and credible in the contemporary world.

MST FINDS GREEN PASTURES: LEADING THE HERDS TO STILL WATERS

An MST Mission Adventure in Odisha

Fr Jose Ayyankanal MST

Introduction

Ever since we joined the seminary we have heard time and again the word 'Missio Ad Gentes.' It was with great enthusiasm and zeal that we started our missionary and priestly training at Deepti College and then went through the various steps of formation. When we first went to Ruhahaya Major Semi-

nary in Ujjain, we were ready to be part of active mission work and we had dreamt of becoming direct preachers of the Gospel at some time in the coming future. We learnt in missiology classes what 'Missio Ad Gentes' was according to the decree of Vatican II on evangelization: "The special undertakings in which preachers of the Gospel, sent by

the Church, and going into the whole world, carry out the work of preaching the Gospel and implanting the Church among people who do not yet believe in Christ, are generally called missions."But through our experience of several years in the mission area of Ujjain and in the various other mission regions of MST during regency and other



An MST Mission Adventure in Odisha

times we were almost convinced that 'Missio Ad Gentes' might remain an utopian dream for a long time to come.

The Golden Jubilee celebration of MST was a time to look back to the missionary life of MST and to evaluate its missionary activities. The last General Assembly gave a lot of thrust to the Ad Gentes initiatives on the part of the Society in the light of the erection of the eparchy of Shamshabad which opened new areas for the proclamation of the Word of God all over India.

Odisha Mission: New Ad Gentes Venture of MST

Rejuvenated by the Golden Jubilee celebrations and the renewed commitment of

the last General Assembly, MST decided to take over Odisha mission with a special commitment to the preaching of the Word and founding of Christian communities. Despite the changing political conditions and the challenges against religious tolerance and peace, MST dared to start our mission ad gentes work in Odisha in the month of October 2018. In this article I would like to highlight the goal, vision, mission, challenges and opportunities for the MST mission in Odisha.

Our Goal, Vision and Mission

The Odisha mission of MST aims at proclaiming the Good News and form Christian communities that will be living witnesses to Jesus in the soil of Odisha. Our task is to reach

out to those areas where Christian message of salvation has not yet been proclaimed. Even though the state of Odisha has six dioceses, there are vast areas without any catholic presence. At the same time, other Christian denominations are exploring the areas and spreading the Good News. We also have the possibilities to reach out to these areas with the message of the Good News. The prime focus of the MST mission in Odisha is evangelization through direct involvement and proclamation. We are trying to reach out to those areas where people have not heard Jesus and the Good News. Concurrent with the evangelization activities, we hope to create opportunities for the deprived and hapless people to redeem themselves from their deprived and exploited state.

Situation of Odisha

The growth rate of the Christian population in Odisha has a quantum jump by 478% in the past 20 years, especially after the 2008 riot, compared to 323% and 130 % in the case of Muslim and Hindu population respectively. This growth is a positive sign for our mission. What we need is to be with the people to lead them, guide them with our witness and living faith. Two factors encourage our presence and mission work in Odisha. The first is the post-riot situation of 2008. The infamous Odisha riot of 2008 had scattered the Christian communities and the believers sought refuge in the forests for their survival. Many of them lost all their properties including their houses. They still continue to live in the forest acquiring plots of land there and trying slowly to settle down there. They have lost their connectivity and communion to the main stream Christian communities such as CNI, Believers Church, Pentecostal churches and even the Catholic Church. However, under the leadership of some local pastors they still practice the Christian faith with the minimum facilities and chances they have. In spite of the struggles and persecution that they faced, they still want to be part of some main stream Churches. Here we have the opportunities to bring them to the Catholic Church and to nourish their faith and look after their pastoral needs. Though we are faced with transportation and communication challenges to

reach those remote areas, the enthusiasm and faith of these people encourage us to work in the direction of planting the Church of Christ there.

The second factor is the socio economic situation of the people. Most of the people, especially in the southern part of Odisha, lead a life of grave poverty and are socially downtrodden. We should take up socio economic developmental programs in order to uplift them from their sad plight in the right spirit of Christian brotherhood. With evangelization as our primary goal, we would like to develop a mission pattern that involves both the spiritual and social development of the people. The situations in Odisha, especially the tribal belt and southern part of Odisha, demand our presence there.

Opportunities in the Odisha Mission

Odisha was the first state to bring anti-conversion law named as 'Odisha Freedom of Religion Act, 1967'. There are a number of groups already practicing Christian faith due to the initial evangelization works carried out by non-Catholic denominations. Now they are left without any leadership or church guidance. As they are ready to join the Catholic faith, we can now form Catholic communities by teaching them Christian faith and morals and administering them baptism and other sacraments. Working among these groups and bring-

ing them to Catholic faith will not go against the anti-conversion law. So this is a great opportunity for us to start with our new mission of evangelization and planting the Church. There are many groups who come in search of us with the request to look after them. We have to arrange intensive faith formation program for them in order to integrate them into our faith and the result will be a strong Catholic Church there in the future.

Evangelization and Direct Preaching of the Good News

Our presence in the proposed area is the first mode of our preaching the Good News. The presence of missionaries in the villages and their house visits, especially visits to the sick and needy, will help taking people into confidence. People in these areas are ready to listen to the word of God and they believe in the power of God. The land of Odisha is more conducive to direct preaching with prudence.

Faith Formation Programs

Constant and continuous spiritual animation is needed for the people of Odisha to sustain and deepen their faith. We need to develop renewal and faith training centers to help the mission with prayer and other spiritual renewal programs and for training Christian leaders in the villages to lead the faithful.



Lay Participation in Evangelization

We plan to encourage lay participation in our work of evangelization. Odisha is a land with diversity in culture, life, language, etc. Each tribe has its own language and life style. Here we would require the help of local people to develop our mission. Training lay leaders with faith and theological formation will be one of our primary concerns.

Social Interventions

In Odisha mission direct preach-

ing and evangelization come first and then with the formation of Christian communities we initiate social and developmental programs for them. We will implement social interventions such as Bridge Schools or Motivation Centers in villages, Scholarship or Sponsorship for poor students, Civil Society Development programs in villages, Women & Youth Empowerment programs, Sustainable Agricultural practices with focus on organic farming, Health Care, Environmental Protection, Alternative Livelihood Options leading to livelihood security

and different Income Generation programs.

MST Odisha Mission Today

In a short period of seven months we have already started four mission centres in Odisha of which three are of the MST and one is in collaboration with FIAT Mission. MST mission house in Cuttack functions as a transit house and language training centre for new missionaries and as faith formation centre for catechists. Other than this transit house, we have three mission centres with evangelization as their only purpose.

Divine Mercy Centre, Rampur -Kolhandi

Fr. Jose Cheriampanattu in collaboration with FIAT mission has started a new mission center in Rampur in the district of Kolhandi. As a preparation for this mission, FIAT Mission under the guidance of Fr. Cheriampanattu gave an intensive catholic faith forma-



tion of one month to 18 selected members from nearby villages of Rampur. After the faith formation course they were sent back to their own villages to prepare the villagers for our mission. On May 13 Fr. Jose Cherimapanattu started living in a rented house in Rampur and began village visits. By the end of May another young and vibrant missionary, Fr. Ambrose, joined the Rampur mission. On 29 May 2019 the house was blessed. Now fathers are visiting nearby villages and preparing the people with faith formation classes, prayers, house visits, etc. With the help of Fr. Varghese Puthumattam of Baleswer Diocese and with the assistance of the trained catechists, our MST fathers are preparing the villagers to become members of the Catholic Church.



New Mission Venture in Khandamal

Christians in India are scared of the name Khandamal because of the persecution that took place there in 2008. This was the most affected district of Odisha in 2008 riots and this area is of great concern for MST Odisha mission. From a study that we conducted here, we have understood that there are many Christian communities like CNI, Believers' Church, and so on still living in forests isolated from the main stream. These groups have deep faith and because of various challenges and situations nobody was so far ready to take care of them. The MST Odisha mission has started a new center in a rented house at Balliguda in the district of Khandamal. Fr. Manu Pottananickal is the priest

in-charge of the mission centre there. He visits the surrounding villages and is making a survey in order to understand their needs and difficulties. Fr. Manu is helped and assisted by a few catechists trained by the FIAT Mission in Rampur. The happiness and joy of the people of these areas make the missionaries really earnest and enthusiastic in their mission work.

MST Mission in Saintala, Balangir

The fourth district that MST Odisha mission has taken up for the work evangelization is Balangir. This is another district that was affected by the 2008 riot and the people of this area are very poor and they live in remote areas. Through the

well-wishers and friends of MST in Odisha, we visited these areas and the people in these areas are very happy to accommodate us and have requested our presence in their area. On June 20, 2019 we began our new mission there at Saintala. Fr. Josin Tharapputhottiyil is the priest in-charge of the mission center and he, with the help of the village leaders, has started house visits to initiate our mission.

Challenges in Odisha Mission

The Church in India, especially in Odisha, is undergoing a crucial time that she has never before experienced. The government talks of tolerance but those promises are never materialized. The fanatic groups are

inimical to the evangelization efforts of Christianity. People are attracted to the message of the Gospel and the Christian life style. The consequences of 2008 riot are still affecting the people here.

Odisha is prone to natural calamities like cyclone, heavy rains and draught. It makes the mission work very difficult in these areas. The developments that we hope to bring to the communities too will be affected by these natural calamities.

Poverty and health issues are the main challenges that people face in these areas. We need to address these issues together with our work of evangelization.

As the people of Odisha, especially tribal groups, live in remote areas, they are deprived of transportation facilities, electricity, communication, etc. It

poses a great challenge to us to reach these areas.

Another great challenge that we face in Odisha is that each village and tribe has its own culture and colloquial language. With the common Odia language we may not be able to communicate in all villages.

A Promising Mission Area for MST

Despite these challenges, we know that the Christianity in Odisha has grown by 478% and it shows that these challenges will not affect us in spreading the Good News. We need to be willing and daring missionaries just like St. Paul and the apostles. The MST has to take courageous steps in the face of challenges and should not miss

the present opportunity at evangelization. The Odisha mission is a great answer to the difficulties that we face with regard to the ad gentes missionary charism of our Society.

Jesus Christ who has chosen us and sent us to the whole world has blessed us abundantly in Odisha mission. We do experience His blessing and protecting hand in our mission. We hope and pray that the Odisha mission will change the style of the mission work of MST by entering into direct preaching of the good news of salvation and planting the Church in the virgin soil of Odisha. May St. Thomas, our heavenly patron, intercede for us to provide courageous missionaries like himself to work in this new mission area and to plant the Church of Christ there with numerous local Christian communities!



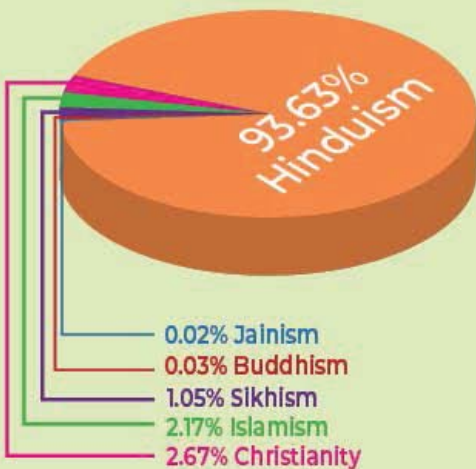
ODISHA AT A GLANCE

Odisha is the one of the 29 states of India. It is located in the eastern part of India, surrounded by west Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. It has 485 km coastal line, along with Bay of Bengal on its eastern, from Balasore to Ganjam district. It is the 9th largest states by area

and 11th largest in population. It is also the 3rd most populous state of India in terms of tribal population. Out of 30 districts 11 districts have tribal population. Oria/Odiya is the official and most widely spoken language by 60 million people according to the census 2016. Its area is spread in 155707

kms and has a population of (21201678) 50.54% of men and 49.46% (20745680) of female. Literacy rate of which 82.20% of men and 64.25% of female as per the 2011 census. The population of people living below poverty line in 1999-2000 was 47.25% which nearly double Indian average of 29%.

Religions



THE WORD BECOMES FLESH IN THE HEARTLAND OF HINDUISM

Fr Anand Mathew IMS

*The word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen
his glory, The glory as of a father's only son,
Full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14)*

The above verse is not a testimony from the evangelist John alone, but from a large number of people living in and around the city of Varanasi and the neighboring districts. These people who have seen the word becoming flesh in their midst, in their specific cultural context, and their day-to-day agonies and struggles in the midst of a highly casteist and oppressive society, are called Khrist Bhaktas.

THE HOLY CITY OF VARANASI

Varanasi, more popularly known as Banaras, is acclaimed as the oldest living religious city of the world. It is much older than Jerusalem, or Rome, not to speak of Mecca. The city is known also as Kashi, Anandvan (the forest of bliss) and Maha Shmashan (the city of great cemetery where one attains freedom from re-

birth). A pilgrimage to Kashi is the life-long aspiration of every pious Hindu. In this holy city, Sanatana Dharma (the eternal religion) in its multiple forms is lived and practiced. There is no better place in India where one can come into contact with the different religious traditions of living Hinduism than Varanasi: one finds here the Dakshina Panthis (the rightists) as well as the Vam Panthis (the leftists)



and pure advaitic parampara (Monotheistic tradition) along with extreme tantric (cultic) practices. Varanasi is a world-renowned education centre with many age old ashrams, muttas and other gurukulas of various Hindu traditions. There are also Islamic and Christian seminaries, and five modern universities (which include a Buddhist and a Jain deemed universities). With its religio-cultural and educational significance, Varanasi still remains the 'light of India'. The city has a population of 2.5 million people and floating population of pilgrims which on important days can rise up to 50,000 - 100,000. As per 1991 census, the number of Christians in the entire district is only 0.11% (5,344 Christians out of whom 2,494 are in the city and 2,850 are in the rural areas).

The city has business and tourism as its main source of income. Agriculture is the major

source of livelihood in the rural areas which today is on a sharp decline due to various factors. The Muslim community in the city and the Dalit and backward communities in rural areas used to earn their livelihood by weaving Benares silk sarees of world fame. But today modernization, globalization and liberalization has ruined these age old means of livelihood. Most of the male folk in a radius of 60 kilometers around Varanasi city pedal their cycles daily towards the city to work as daily labourers. Poverty, illness, deprivations and lack of development are rampant in both the urban and rural areas of Varanasi.

KHRIST BHAKTA MOVEMENT AND MATRI DHAM ASHRAM

It is in the above socio-religious context of this unique city, a few small events of sharing the Word of God took place in 1993 which evolved into a large

movement. And that come to be called Khrist Bhakta (Devotees of Christ) Movement. Khrist Bhaktas are not Christians. They are not part of any institutional Church. But they are devotees of Jesus Christ and accept him as their saviour: not a saviour of a life to come, but their guide and companion today, i.e., in their day-to-day life. Matri Dham Ashram, a centre for spirituality and experiments in inculturation is the nerve centre of this movement. This ashram was founded in 1954 by the members of the Indian Missionary Society (IMS). For some years it functioned as the novitiate of the IMS. After one and half decade of hibernation, it sprang into activity as a centre for training in Indian spirituality for the church personnel. It was in 1993, that the centre started conducting monthly night vigils for Christian community of Varanasi. A handful of Hindus from neighboring villages joined and they

were blessed with physical healing and spiritual experience. As their number started increasing, prayer services began to be held on every Sunday. The night vigil on second Saturday of the month eventually progressed to daytime preaching and prayer services. The number of devotees increased steadily. Today approximately 4000 people attend the Sunday Satsangs, which are conducted from 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. The monthly satsang is attended by some 8000 people from 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. What started with a handful of people has today more than 50,000 people spread all over Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Western Bihar.

WORD OF GOD AS A LAMP UNTO FEET AND A LIGHT FOR THE PATH

The Devotees, mostly illiterate and semi-literate women and men, labourers, weavers, farmers and people working hard

to make both ends meet, come gladly seeking to hear the Word of God preached to them in a very simple manner addressed to their life situations and in their cultural milieu. The simplicity of the ashram, the ambience of prayer, simplicity of language, beautiful devotional hymns and bhajans as per their own cultural ethos appeal to them. Dalits and members of backward communities and also some upper caste people come to the ashram forgetting their caste differences and hierarchies. As victims of social oppression many of them are "non-persons", i.e., "human beings who are not considered human by the present social order" (John Fuellenbach SVD). They go back having experienced physical healing, freedom from evil forces (possessed cases), peace and joy. Back in their homes, despite struggles and discriminations, they experience a new life of joy, peace, contentment, prayer, de-

votion, and above all love. Their neighbours recognize that these are transformed people and seek their advice. Thus the Good news of forgiveness and love, like leaven in the dough, is affecting the entire society bringing peace and harmony in the villages.

FAITH-SUSTAINING PROGRAMMES

Various types of ministries help in sustaining the faith of the people. Some of those major programmes are the following.

1. Daily Morning Worship and Eucharist:

Along with the Christian religious sisters and brothers who come to the ashram for retreats, scores of Khrist Bhaktas in the vicinity of the ashram join for morning prayer and the improvised holy Eucharistic celebration. On Sundays a larger number of people come for the Holy Eucharist. .



2. Sunday Satsang:

In the Indian tradition, satsang is a time of sacred audience, a time to listen to the Guru in rapt attention and in devotion. Āshram conducts its regular satsang on Sundays from 10.00 A. M. to 4.00 P. M, the attendance is between 3-5 thousand people.

3. Second Saturday Satsangs:

About 7000 persons come in to hear the Word of God on every second Saturday for a full day program. This practice is the result of a gradual evolution. They listen to three to four talks and in the after noon they adore the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Special healing prayer is held during which many miracles occur.

4. Annual Satsang:

Three day Annual Satsangs have been organized from 1997 onwards, in the second week of November every year. Christian communities from all over North India and Khrist Bhaktas from various districts

of UP and neighbouring states participate in the annual program with great enthusiasm. Healings take place and people return with a great joy of having witnessed miracles and the glory of God. Their readiness to stay together, the supply of food with the meagre facilities available in the āshram, their sense of devotion and discipline, etc. are powerful living testimonies to their deep-rooted faith in the person of Jesus.

5. Weekly Sādhanās:

The āshram conducts three-day (Friday to Sunday) weekly residential sādhanās (retreats) for the faith formation of the Khrist Bhaktas (KBs). Some 60 to 100 persons attend these weekly programmes on an average.

6. Monthly animation of Aguwās:

There are voluntary village prayer leaders known as Aguwās who do the work of gathering people in villages to share the Word and to pray to-

gether. In the training organized once in two months, they are trained in discipleship as well as in fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

7. Retreats for young Khrist Bhaktas boys and girls:

In summer special and focused programmes are conducted for young girls and boys on life orientation and strengthening of faith.

8. Perpetual Adoration and Intercession:

Perpetual adoration takes place in Darshan Bhawan round the clock. Many of the bhaktas and others too come in, to spend some time with the Lord and to pray for the needs of the world and to get healed. Those in need are also given counseling. Many experience a personal divine touch and healing, which draws them closer to Jesus. It is a joy to see these people praying with such a tremendous faith.

9. Christmas Programme:

To celebrate Christmas, the Khrist Bhaktas start coming from early morning of 24th Dec. By 4 p.m. the ashram premise is packed with innumerable thousands who spend the whole night joyfully worshipping the new born saviour. The special attraction of the vigil celebration is the two-hour long drama on Nativity, staged by professional artistes, giving the people solid insights into the mystery of Christmas. Films on Biblical themes are also screened before and after the vigil Mass.



10. Celebration of the Paschal Mysteries:

One of the most beautiful periods of the year in the āshram is the time of Lent. This is the time when you witness the depth of faith of this multitude of “non-Christian” people. Many of them keep fast through the entire Lent. They come to the āshram regularly on Fridays to take part in the Way of the Cross. They make a parikrama of the āshram, each carrying a cross reciting prayers and singing songs narrating the agony of Jesus in the local dialect in folk tunes. This has been one of the most edifying and challenging experiences for the Khrist Bhaktas as they identify in Jesus as the one who takes up their agonies on his back. They believe that their newfound Guru Jesus who died on the Cross and is still suffering in them and through them, is able to heal them, give them inner peace and eternal salvation. The Way of the Cross on Good Friday is attended by thousands when the whole Paschal Mystery is enacted on the stage by the artistes of Prerna

Kala Manch. The pathos dominant in the passion play and liturgical services make emotional, sensorial and even physical impact of healing.

The vigil ceremony on Holy Saturday stands out as the zenith of the whole forty days’ devotional practices. Thousands and thousands of devotees along with large number of people who have heard about the healing power of blessed water attend the vigil ceremony of the new light and new water. The singing of the Exultet by the whole congregation holding lighted candles moves the heart of every participant to experience real peace and joy of the Risen Christ. After the liturgical services, films on the Paschal Mysteries are screened local folk artistes sing the resurrection events the whole night.

11. Media Ministry:

Prabhu Ne Kaha, the monthly publication brought out by the āshram has a good subscription base. Fr. Anil gives TV talks (Nūtan Dhārā) on a weekly basis. Audio and Vid-

eo CDs containing devotional hymns and talks are also produced and sold through the āshram. Matri Dham radio, a web radio service airs religious talks and prayers 24 hours a day, which the Khrist Bhaktas who have android phones listen with a lot of interest

THE AGUAS AND PRERAKS

The Khrist Bhaktas have not remained as mere hearers or doers of the Word. They have become powerful preachers of the Good News. A good number of them, men and women, have volunteered to spread the Word. Moving from village to village they preach the Word in families (of their own caste people and upper castes) and in organised prayer meetings (cottage churches). Taking the role of aguas (leaders) and preraks (motivators) they pray over the sick and bring healing to them. The aguas and preraks are wanted by people of all castes and creeds to settle disputes and to bring reconciliation in families as well as among warring clans and groups. Because they have a unique and new message to share: love and forgiveness.

A CASE STUDY

Lakshmi Das is a Dalit Hindu youth from Tarapur village. When came in contact with Matri Dham Ashram, he was working as an usher in a cinema theatre in Varanasi city. His salary was Rs. 3000, but he made more money by selling black ticket. When he heard the





Word of God being preached in the Ashram, he felt that making money by selling black tickets was not morally right. But if he remained in the same job, he had to continue this practice because that was the norm for all the theatre employees. The atmosphere in the theatre too was not conducive to live a life led by the Holy Spirit. So Lakshmi quit his job. On the advice of some friends, he took up beedi making job which was a success. He employed more people and the business flourished. He was happy and so were his family members. He continued attending the satsang in the ashram. During one such visit, Fr. Anildev, the Acharya of the ashram, posed a question whether selling beedi contributes to the health of the people. Lakshmi went back home reflecting on this question. He realized his mistake, paid the arrears to his worker and closed the business. It was at this juncture that he became an evangelist under the guidance of Fr. Premraj IMS. Today Lakshmi is a man of joy and contentment. He conducts prayer meetings regularly in five villages where there are groups of Khrist Bhak-

tas. Besides these, he goes daily to make contact in new villages evangelizing them and to establish prayer groups there. Being a Dalit (cobbler caste) previously people never shared food and drinks with Lakshmi. Today Brahmins, Kshatriyas and people of different castes come to Lakshmi's house, eat with him and they are ready to spend many hours with him. They invite him to their houses. No caste barriers! To the question, how this change has occurred, Lakshmi says: "It's only because of Jesus. In the past I did not know to love. Jesus taught me to love and to share. His suffering and death on the cross inspires me to love without expecting anything in return. Because people of all castes, experience that love in me, they come to my home and invite me to their home. I go around telling the people to love as Jesus taught us to love."

KHRISTA BHAKTAS: CLEANSING-JARS OF CANA WITH NEW WINE

There are many like Lakshmi Das (today he is known as Lakshmi Thomas) who have similar

stories to narrate. Although people generally still look at each other through the spectacles of caste, the Khrist Bhaktas are seen as transforming agents of peace and harmony by the society. The miracle at Cana (John 2:1-12) points out a great lesson about this extraordinary intervention of God in the lives of the Khrist Bhaktas and in transforming them as the messengers of his gospel. When Jesus, Mary and the disciples reached Cana for the wedding and when "the wine failed", on the request of Mary, Jesus transformed water into wine. The wine to be served should come from the cellar of the store inside. Those who tasted the new wine and relished it, perhaps were not aware that the wine was being served from the stone jars kept at the entrance and meant for purificatory rites which refer to the ritual cleansing of hands at meals. Generally, the Bible scholars interpret the large stone jars as pointing to Jesus' rejection of the waters of purification, or a replacement magnitude of the transformation (Cf. Interpreter's Bible). But relating the unusual phenomenon of Khrist Bhakta movement

marginalized, non-persons in the eyes of God. In the North Indian caste-hierarchical society, the Dalits and the backwards (shudras) function as cleansing agents doing menial jobs for the upper castes. The sudras may be scavengers, cobblers dealing with animal hides, Dhobis who wash the dirty linen, musahars who glean and eat the left over food, etc. They are just like jars kept outside meant for purification of the respected wedding guest. In our context, imagine the shock of the guest if they are to find out that the best kheer, ice cream of pudding is being served, not from the clean vessels kept inside the store room, but from the large drums kept at the entrance of the marriage pandal for washing of hands before and after the meals! But that is what Jesus did. He asked the servants to fill the jars kept at the entrance, and not the jars kept inside the store. He did not reject the jars meant for purificatory rites, but gave them an importance and dignity. The new wine of the liberating word of God is served from the jars

of the unimportant (illiterate, Dalit-backward, marginalized) non-persons of the society to the larger society which is eagerly waiting for the new wine of socio-cultural and religious transformation. Today God has raised the non-persons of the Hindu society as messengers of His liberating Good News. They in turn have received dignity and are respectfully invited to the homes of the high castes, the doors of which were closed to them until recently.

CONCLUSION

The word of God preached to the illiterate and semi-literate people in a very simple manner, in a language, culture and context of their own, challenge them and transform them. "Indeed the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the hearts" (Heb 4:12). Because it addresses their life situation, the word takes birth in their lives in

the form of Jesus Christ as their liberator. The Khrist Bhaktas see his glory in their transformed lives, the glory of being the heavenly Father's dignified sons and daughters along with Jesus, and in turn they have become agents of grace and truth.

For the missionaries who have been looking for new ways to share the Word, the movement gives a hope and a path. But it would be wrong to consider this as an easy and wide path. The missionaries will have to travel through the narrow and thorny path of simplicity and asceticism, living in their own lives the word and its directives in the fullest sense. The non-institutional approach, devoid of huge investments, challenges the entire church to stoop down like Jesus "who emptied himself taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:7-8).



MISSION AT SIKKARIPURA

A Miracle of God's Love

Dr Joseph Thekkekarott MST

Missionary Society of St Thomas the Apostle (MST) was founded in 1968 as an answer to the universal missionary vocation of the Church. Being very true to the reason of her origin, members of the Missionary Society went to the farthest corners of India and started mission work. MST missionaries reached Mandya in 1978 and after a few years Rev. Fr Joseph Kulathumkal MST started to live with the people at

Sikkaripura near Nagamangala in Mandya, Karnataka. From Fr Kulathumkal to the present priest-in-charge Fr Martin Kandampampil we have a chain of committed and self-sacrificing life of MST priests and religious sisters. The words of St Paul are the most suitable to summarise the mission at Sikkaripura. "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the Gospel of God

but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thes 2:8).

People of Sikkaripura were nomadic hunters who were living in huts. They were known as 'Hakki Pikkis' because they were hunting mainly birds (Hakki in Kannada means bird). According to the tradition they are originally from Gujarat and their dialect is Vagari. Due to various reasons they decided to settle at the present place and the place got the name Sikkaripura, abode of hunters.



God is love and the mission of the Church is to share the love of God with the humanity. Jesus wants his disciples to proclaim the Good News of God's love with the whole world. This is very clear from the Mission mandate in which Jesus tells, "Go into the whole world and proclaim



the Good News to the whole creation" (Mk. 16:15). The universal missionary nature of the Church is clearly emphasised in all the four Gospels. The Christians were fully conscious of the universal nature of mission from the beginning of Christianity.

Jesus, the greatest missionary, had compassion for all human beings and worked for the integral well-being of all people. Mission is an act of sharing God's love with people. The core of mission is that it is an act of love. In Jn 20:21 Jesus states, "as the Father has sent me, so I send you". From the words of Jesus, we can understand that Jesus sends his disciples just as the Father sent him. Hence, the motive of Jesus' sending of the disciples must be in the same line with that of the Father's sending of Jesus, which is clearly emphasised in Jn 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." If Jesus sends

his disciples just as the Father sent him, the reason behind the sending can be nothing other than love. That the guiding principle behind Jesus' sending of the disciples was love can be further substantiated by one of the most important mission commandments, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I loved you, you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34-35; cf. also Jn 15:12). The mission of Jesus was centred on love: he loved those to whom he preached, called them friends (cf. Jn 15:15) and died for them. Those who are sent by Jesus are

called to do things as Jesus did. This is what MST priests and religious sisters did at Sikkari-pura. They proclaimed the Good News and became icons of God's love to the people.

When we look into the mission of Sikkari-pura, we observe the lives of many missionaries who lived and spent their resources, time and energy for the spiritual, social, material and economic welfare of the people. Missionaries underwent innumerable sufferings for the people. They became one with the people by staying in a hut like theirs, ate the food with them and spent their whole life for the overall development of the people. As St Paul tells in 1 Cor. 9:19-22, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win as many as possible. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law – though not being myself under the law – that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law –not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ – that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have be-



come all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

Jesus tells, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). MST missionaries at Sikkaripura worked for the integral development of the people of the whole village. To achieve this goal they gave priority for the education of the children. Regular tuitions were arranged for them and thus they were introduced into the world of education. The parents were made aware of the importance of the education of their children through various programs and constant interaction with them. Gradually the parents agreed to send their children to schools in the neighbouring villages. Missionaries took initiatives and started to send the children to boarding schools run by the Church in different parts of Karnataka. Consequently, there are many graduates, post graduates, nurses, engineers, teachers and so on. With good education, vision of life of the people has changed and standard of living has improved tremendously.



Jesus commanded his disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28: 19-20). Faithfully taking up this missionary mandate of Christ with commitment and the spirit of self-emptying, MST

missionaries started their missionary apostolate at Sikkaripura. Jesus was introduced to them and people were gradually led to Jesus Christ. As a result of the constant accompaniment and continued sharing of the Good News by the missionaries to the people, we have now the fruit, a strong community of ardent Christians.





Santhome Santhwanalaya: A One to One Preaching Centre

Fr Jaison Puthenpura MST

Centre	: Holistic development Centre
Situated	: Muthappanpuzha
Belongs to	: MST
Founding Director	: Fr Mathew Puthukkallil
Foundation Stone blessed	: Fr Dominic Muttathukudy
Foundation stone laid	: Fr Mathew Puthukkallil
Foundation stone oaid on	: 11 November 2011
Blessed by	: Mar Remigios Inchananiyil, Bishop of Thamarassery
Blessed on	: 4 April 2013



Santhome santhwanalaya, a Sholistic healing centre of the MST at Muthappanpuzha, in the eparchy of Thamarassery, is situated at the citadel of nature. The venue, a paradise of God's creation, is covered with greeneries, mountains and valleys with streams and rivers. It is a place where one experiences the nearness of God in and around.

Santhome Santhwanalaya is the fruit of the dreams of Rev. Fr. Mathew Puthukkallil MST, a man of prayer. He started the centre as an ashram where he can dedicate himself fully for lively communication with God. Rev. Fr Mathew was known to be spiritual and prayerful in the

area and therefore, people slowly began to approach him for spiritual support and prayers. The ashram from the very day of its inception, has been on the track of fast development and spiritual progress, nourished by the God-given natural gifts of Fr Mathew.

Today people go in large numbers to Santhwanalaya for various purposes and needs. Jesus of Nazareth healed many in Palestine with his holistic healing power and Fr Mathew tries to imitate Jesus at Muthappanpuzha and nearby, drawing his healing power and strength from Jesus, his Master. People approach him for various needs:

they need his prayer support, for if he prays, they believe, God hears him fast; they need his herbal medicines, for they say that his medicines really work; they need him as an exorcist, for when he prays satanic influences vanish; they need him for their day to day life, for he finds a solution to their impenetrable problems of life; and they need him at Muthappanpuzha, for he is a blessing for the land. He is a man of God who lives and promotes priestly vocation.

Fr Mathew is busy from the early hours of the day. He is appointed the temporary parish priest at Muthappanpuzha parish. People who earlier kept them-

selves away from the Church and priests for various reasons, are turned out to be his close friends today. He draws them to Christ and the Church, leads them to penitential confession and sacraments and nurtures them with sacramental life and prayer. Hence many people have recovered their normal life, getting rid of their alcoholic addiction through the intervention of Fr Mathew. People go to him for his famous 'one time medicine' (ottamooli) and get cured. He also gives first aid for snake bite and other poisonous bites.

Treatment for incompatible food intake is another field of his apostolate in the area. He has medicines and treats people suffering from incompatible food intake (virudhaahara). Virudhaahara can occur either by the

intake of combinations of food with toxic effects or by the consumption of food items that are 'prayed over' or with the invoked presence of any special deities, as believed by the people. He prays over the affected people and then gives herbal medicine, and they are eventually healed holistically. He rescues many from the adverse evil practices like koodathram, aabhicharam, black magic etc.

Fr Mathew spends his time with God and His people. After a long duration of prayer and meditation, he is available to people for spiritual intervention and pastoral counseling. He preaches the Word of God to all who come to him, irrespective of religion and creed. He prays over them and, understanding their personal needs, gives them the Word of

God with medicine. He says in his silent moments of prayer, "No medicine or ointment cured them. They were restored to health by your word, O Lord, the word which heals all humanity" (Wisdom 16, 12). He has turned many to retreats, prayer and faith life.

Fr Mathew Puthukkallil leads an austere and very simple life. He finds time to do manual work and maintains a vegetable garden and a herbal medicinal garden. He dreams that some time in future, priests will come and stay at Santhwanalaya, pray and make recollections and retreats. He names Santhwanalaya a 'spiritual resort', as he qualifies his treatment as 'spiritual therapy'.





**"WHOM SHALL I SEND?..... HERE AM I. SEND ME" Is 6:8
(First Promise of Incorporation)**



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