

ST. THOMAS INDIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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NEWSLETTER

Vicar's Message

2018 is Here!

So, what? Year comes, year goes! Day comes and day goes! Every minute comes and goes! What is the big deal about it? A New Year is just like another year!

Some people think that way. If we analyze such people we can see in them some special nature with which they have grown and unable to see the big picture of one's life. Several such people are selfish and egotistic. They may even forget that they are the products of others around them. Most of such people may be agnostic or with no faith in God.

But what is the truth? We are all sent to this world with a clear purpose. Depending on that awareness of one's life's purpose he/she can see how people frame their life. God gives a purpose for man when He sends each one to this world, "to live in harmony with others and enrich others to the best of one's ability". When we study the words of Jesus who abridged the 10 commandments to two, "Love your God and love your neighbor" (Matthew 19;19) this purpose is very clear. Therefore, only those people who can listen to God in Jesus can understand this goal in life. Jesus had given clear mandate to all His followers as to how to make their life meaningful to others. Unfortunately, it is becoming more impractical for people to obey Him.

I listened to the talk that Mr. S. N. Goenka a well-known thinker and Vipasana trainer who



addressed the UNO in 2012. He said that conversion to any religion is not necessary. Conversion needed for our attitude to other religions. Every religion upholds God and so no need to convert one to another. Every religion should spread the message of peace. His message was received with great acclamation. He pointed out the uniqueness of Indian culture that welcomed Islam and Christianity because of high level tolerance. It is true. At the same time Christianity spread in the Early Church with a clear idea of the teaching of Jesus whose commandments were simple and human-oriented. Jesus did not teach to hate anyone but to love even our enemies. This message was lost sometime and now Christians are a group of people with a name for their religion "Christianity" but losing the message of love and peace.

Our Lord's desire to build a community of believers who can do His will and make a world of

peace, concord, love and enrichment has been thwarted by His own followers. Many big-mouth leaders of Christian Church are making it a livelihood and source for their luxury, show of power and authority. It is my weakness to look back to the time of Jesus and find parallel situation today. The Early Christians were successful in fulfilling His dream of shaping a community that will achieve His dream of Kingdom of Heaven in this world. Many thought Jesus is IMPRACTICAL. But the Christian Church proved that it can make it happen and practice the real goal of life that God has given to the humans. And they could live, almost 300 years, in that style. That too the Early Church has been facing relentless opposition and persecution from strong forces including Jews, Romans, and others not only threatening them to death but simply throwing away the divine teaching. Christians did not budge. They knew that they are believing The Truth that no one can change. They practiced what the Lord taught. Finally, the Roman Government itself bowed down at the feet of Christ.

In the world of selfishness goodness cannot live long. The Church could not fulfil the goal that the Lord instilled in them as freedom was attained. The simple urge for worldly power and material gain which once the Christians could overcome, became a matter of IMPOSSIBLE. Today Christians themselves will say Jesus' message is IMPOSSIBLE to practice. Thus, we lost the opportunity to prove to the world that ONLY through Christ's teaching that the world has a hope of survival in harmony and enrichment.

A few others would still think it is irrelevant to speak "Christian" in today's world. For them Christianity is "IRRELEVANT". Who would argue against this theory today? No one. Because, even those who believe in Jesus would uphold that in

today's world many teachings of the Lord do not make any sense! Who can love his neighbor like himself? Who can pray for one's enemies? Who can sell their property and give to the needy? Who will forgive others unconditionally? Christians have forgotten their own history of practicing the Lord's commands without fail.

Finally, it is not a style for today's modern life to be a Jesus Geek! We have several other people to follow. Most of the people follow the disciples of Christ as "Human Gods". But hardly they want to follow Jesus. It is not the matching style for us today. Jesus' teaching is too OLD and no more MODERN. People used to tell me, "Acha be realistic, why to say something that is not going to work today in this modern world?" So, I rest my case. But I don't want to leave before affirming the Truth.

I believe strongly that Jesus' teaching alone can change our world. His MESSAGE IS RELEVANT EVEN TODAY, IT IS PRACTICAL, IT IS MODERN. Today's world need it badly otherwise someone is going to destroy this world in a split of a second with pent-up anger, hatred and intolerance.

I am once again writing this message to all my parishioners only to revisit your life and prepare to get into the year 2018 with a purpose. May your purpose be divine and tallying with the teaching of Christ. It will help not only you but also the entire world.

**With Best Wishes for a Peaceful, Joyful,
Edifying, Enriching, Harmonious, Selfless and
Healthy NEW YEAR. GOD BLESS YOU ALL.**

Fr. M. K. Kuriakose, Vicar

WITH GRATITUDE

First of all, I would like to thank God Almighty for his providence to serve this great parish as the Parish Secretary.

We had a vibrant Managing Committee and Board of Trustees. Everyone worked together and discharged their responsibilities effectively. I would like to appreciate the young bloods in the committee namely Jiju Alex, Anoop George and Paul Mavelly. I cannot forget the hard working veterans of the committee. My dear coworkers, because of your cooperation and hard work, 2017 was a remarkable year for our parish.

Many other members, who did not have any official position in the parish, also worked as hard as the committee members for the church and the parish. Because it is a long list, I am not mentioning any name. Thank you all.

This year we implemented many new projects. Presentation of Bible to the youngsters of parish who entered in to Holy matrimony in 2017 is the most valuable one. Adopting a less fortunate family from the neighborhood for Christmas was a humanitarian project. Jesus taught us that sharing with less fortunate is the offering to Him. This year we started presenting Christmas gifts to the sick members of our parish who are unable to attend our service. Our visitation is the most valuable gift to them.

Installing the number lock system to the glass door is a significant project of this year.

We were able to reduce the utility expenses. We negotiated with the utility companies to exempt us from paying the state taxes of the utility bills.

PECO refunded the previous years' tax and is in negotiation with State Revenue department for the refund of more than \$6000.00 which PGW collected as the State tax in last three years.

We negotiated with Comcast and bought down the monthly phone bill from \$175 to \$115 and with Waste Management to bring down the monthly trash collection charge from \$340 to \$185.

The advices, encouragements, and supports of Kuriakose Achen and Gheevarghese John Achen and Sujit Achen were very valuable.

I have very cordial relationship with the treasurer Mr. Paul C. John and the office manager Mr. Varghese P. Abraham and the coordinators and committee members.

The Secretary is responsible for the coordination of the working of various committees. I was in constant communication with all coordinators to see that everything was done as planned.

I wish all the best to the incoming parish secretary, treasurer, office manager and other office bearers. I assure that you can count on me for any help for our great parish. This is from the bottom of my heart to my fellow parish members. Thank you all for your help, support, advice, encouragement, and tolerance. Your prayers and support gave me strength to work for this parish with one hundred percent adoration

Wish you all a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year 2018!!!!

Sincerely

John Panicker, Parish Secretary 2017

Parish News, December 2017

Obituary:

Demise of Mr. Oommen Geevarghese: Mr. Oommen Geevarghese (Raju) passed away in India on December 13th. The viewing and funeral Service were conducted at our church and interment was at our cemetery.

We could not forget the service of Raju to our parish. He was instrumental in obtaining the Cardinal Daugherty High School Chapel for worship. He is the second highest donor to our building fund.

We gave a fitting farewell to Raju. Thank you all for your cooperation for the viewing and funeral service. I would also like to convey the gratitude of Raju's family to each and every member.

Mr. K.P. Philipose, father of Philip Thomas (Membership # 312) passed away in India. Funeral was conducted at their home parish in Ranny.

Mr. George M. Geevarghese, the husband of the sister of Thomas Daniel and Saramma Raju passed away.

Mrs. Aleyamma Paul, sister-in- law of Mathew Varghese (membership #160) passed away in India.

Mr. Mathukutty, uncle of Mr. Alex Mathew passed away in India.

The Parish expresses condolences to the bereaving families.

Christmas Caroling: As in previous years, the Christmas caroling was conducted on cluster bases. Thank God Almighty for his mercy to conduct the caroling as planned. The Christmas contribution of our members is more than \$23000.00. Thank you all for the cooperation.

Ecumenical Christmas Celebration: Christmas celebration of the Ecumenical Fellowship of Indian Churches was held on Saturday December 9th at George Washington High School Auditorium. The 'Christian Oppana' presented by our parish was the best cultural program. Special appreciation goes to the choreographers and performers of that program.

Parish Christmas Social and Sunday School Anniversary: We conducted Parish Christmas Social and Sunday School Anniversary on Saturday, December 30th. Rev. Jinson K. Mathew, Vicar of Ascension Marthoma Church, gave the Christmas message. Thanks to Matha Academy and Mr. Baby Thadavanal for the classical dance program. The semi-classical Christmas song by the Ecumenical Fellowship of Indian Churches choir was melodious. The programs of our very talented children and adults were excellent, thought-provoking and entertaining. Congratulations to the performers and those who had inspired him.

Special thanks to Mr. Samkutty John, Mr. Paul Mavelly and team for the delicious dinner.

Renovation of the Stage: Mr. Regi Mathai and team installed three channels in the back side of the ceiling of the stage of the auditorium (Mar Barnabas Hall) which can be used to hang at least nine curtains. It will help to change the background sceneries of the stage within seconds.

They worked many days and nights for the installation. Thanks to Regi Mathai, Thomas George, Rajan Padiyara and George Thadathil for the hard physical labor.

Holiday Family Photographs: Many parish members availed the free holiday family photo shooting by the well-known photographer Mr. Jiju Mathew. All funds raised will benefit the parish parking lot project. We collected \$500 from this program. Thanks Jiju for your magnanimity.

Locking the Wooden Door: We started locking the wooden door **in front of the sanctuary** at 10 a.m. on Sundays. You can use that door to exit but not to enter in to the building. After 10 a.m., the access to the church is only through the glass door which has the number lock system. If you forgot the number lock combination, please come to the office. We are keeping the doors closed to improve security for our parishioners and to avoid any unauthorized entry of strangers.

Please do not try to defeat that good intention by using the emergency exit door near the school hallway to enter or

exit the building unless there is an emergency. Your diligence and help is much appreciated in keeping our church family safe.

Church Calendar 2018: Please collect your calendar from the office.

Annual Report of 2016: If you did not get your copy of the 2016 annual report, please collect it from the office.

Donation to the First Responders: The fund collected for the victims and first responders of natural disasters was donated to Philadelphia Police Foundation. Please note that under the banner of MOCF, we sent 650 pounds of non-perishable food to the victims of hurricane Harvey. The shipping charge of that consignment was approximately \$790.00

On December 10th, Philadelphia Police Commissioner Richard J Ross Jr, deputy commissioners Joe Sullivan, Cristine Coutler, Chief Inspector of Police Cindhya Dorsey, and second district Police Captain McClain came to our parish to accept the donation.

Database Update: The names of many children born this year are not in our database. Parents are requested to provide the information of the children born in 2017. Also, those who got married in 2017 are requested to contact the parish secretary for updating the database.

Philadelphia Area Grow Ministry: Grow Ministry collected new unwrapped toys to distribute to less fortunate children during Christmas season. Many members donated new toys. Grow officials expressed their gratitude to everyone.

Adoption of a Family for Christmas: It is a new charity project we started this year. We adopted the family of Mrs. Nancy for Christmas. Mrs. Nancy is taking care of

her two young grandchildren aged four and five years. Nancy's son, who is medically disabled and had kidney transplant this year, is the single parent of those children. Nancy and family is very active in their Church where she is also a Sunday School teacher.

Thank you all for donating gifts to that family. I would like to express sincere gratitude to Deepa Kochamma, Jesley Alex, Susan David and Milly Philip for coordinating the program.

Visiting the Sick: Kuriakose Achen and few members visited sick members of our parish and presented Christmas gifts. It was a quickly planned program and did not get time to inform many members.

Blood Drive: Sunday school and MGOCSM organized Red Cross Blood donation drive on December 31st. Many members donated blood. Thanks to the coordinators and donors.

Drop off and pick up: We have designated drop off and pick up area in front of the main foyer. It is against the law to park there. Members are requested to drive through Unruh Street from Algon side to Pennway side for drop off and pick up. Please consider the safety of your loved ones and others rather than the couple minutes you would save by driving in the opposite direction.

I would like to thank Mr. Varghese P. Abraham, Mr. Regi Mathai, Mr. Geevarghese John, and Mr. George Thadathil for installing the permanent Drop-off and Pick-up signs.

Parish Broadcasting System: In December, we did many telephonic broadcasting. If any member did not get those broadcasts either in your home phone or cell phone, please contact the Secretary.

ELECTION OF THE OFFICE BEARERS OF 2018

The General body held on 12/17/2017 elected office bearers of the parish for 2018: Congratulations to the 2018 officials. Please see the list below.

Treasurer: **Mr. Elias Issac**
 Parish Secretary: **Mr. Steve Kurian**
 Office Manager: **Mr. Geevarghese K. John**

Board of Trustees: Mr. Raju Markose (2018-20)
 Mr. Mohan Samuel (2016-18) & Mr. Geevarghese M. Panicker (2017-19) are the existing BOT members.

Managing Committee: Mr. Thomaskutty Varghese; Mr. Jacob Zachariah; Mr. Samkutty John; Mr. Varghese P. Abraham; Mr. Philip Varghese; Mr. Sathesh Easow; Mr. Regi Varghese; Mr. Paul C. John (Ex Officio); Mr. John Panicker.(Ex Officio)

Auditors: Mr. Libu Varghese & Mr. Alex Symon

Prayer Meeting Coordinator: Mr. Panackal Mathaikutty

2018 PARISH COMMITTEE COORDINATORS

The 2018 Managing Committee meeting held on 12/30/17. The parish committee coordinators and the following officials were elected:

Asst. Treasurer (Receivables): Mr. Reji J. Varghese

Program Committee: Mr. Philip Varghese

Asst. Treasurer (Payable)/Charity Coordinator:
 Mr. Philip Varghese

Spiritual Enrichment Committee: Mr. Paul C. John

Assistant Secretary: Mr. Thomaskutty Varghese

Picnic Committee: Mr. G.M. Panicker

Building Maintenance Committee Coordinator:
 Mr. Varghese P. Abraham

Sports Activity Committee: Mr. Mohan Samuel

Refreshment Coordinators:
 Mr. Samkutty John, Mr. Sathesh Easow & Mr. Jacob Zachariah

Ecumenical Fellowship Representatives:
 Mr. Prince Pulipurath, Mr. Thomaskutty Varghese

Building Upkeep Committee: Mr. John Panicker

MOCF Representatives:
 Mr. John Panicker, Mr. Sathesh Easow

Please pray for them and promise your support to them.

JANUARY WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

Mr. & Mrs. Rajan T Samuel
 Mr. & Mrs. Shibu Varghese
 Mr. & Mrs. Finney M Philip
 Mr. & Mrs. Eapen V Kalathil
 Mr. & Mrs. Lynnson Mathews Rajan
 Mr. & Mrs. Sam Jacob Kurisinmoottil
 Mr. & Mrs. Mathew Samuel
 Mr. & Mrs. Varghese Jacob
 Mr. & Mrs. Jaison Daniel
 Mr. & Mrs. Mathew Thankachan
 Mr. & Mrs. Mathew V Thomas
 Mr. & Mrs. Sunil Raj Poovannal
 Mr. & Mrs. Ninan Mathai
 Mr. & Mrs. Geevarghese K John
 Mr. & Mrs. Anu Mathew
 Mr. & Mrs. Prasad George
 Mr. & Mrs. Binu Thankachan

Mr. & Mrs. Oommen George
 Mr. & Mrs. Rinu John
 Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Koshy
 Mr. & Mrs. Elias K Issac
 Mr. & Mrs. Mathew Varghese
 Mr. & Mrs. Moni Thomas
 Mr. & Mrs. George G Mampallil
 Mr. & Mrs. Varghese K Issac
 Mr. & Mrs. James C Peter
 Mr. & Mrs. Philip Varghese
 Mr. & Mrs. Abraham Thomas
 Mr. & Mrs. Rebu Roy
 Mr. & Mrs. Babu Varghese
 Mr. & Mrs. James Jacob

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Jestin K. Abraham
 Aleena Robin
 Abraham Thomas
 Ruth John
 Suja Abraham
 Roy Philip Chacko
 Taina I Daniel
 Deepu Mathew Daji
 Ron Philip
 Smitha Robin
 Jobin Varghese
 Renju Ann Joy
 Chrislin H Thomas
 Diya Sara Thomas
 Lydiya Elsa Jaison
 Jijo Jacob
 Amelia J Mathew
 Wilson Panicker
 Madeline John
 Mathew Varghese
 Fiji C Philip

Anila Thomas
 Joyel Manoj
 Mini Ninan
 Sosamma Antony
 Andrew Cherian
 Marshel Varghese
 Nivitha Wilson
 Sandeep K Thomson
 Harshall Thomas
 Divya Mary Thomas
 Joshua M George
 Shawn George Philip
 Carolyn Thomas
 Shelby K Renji
 Rijon C Simon
 Ian Thomas
 Ramany George
 Sajan Varughese
 Allen Abraham
 Binsy E Mathew
 Maliyil M Philip

Sanju John
 Deepthy Panicker
 Wincy B Joseph
 John Polayil Abraham
 Anu Lajy
 Sunil Thomas
 Anu Mathew
 Alwin T Raju
 Shannon Ann George
 Jelitta James
 Linju Jacob John
 Saramma Thomas
 Kasen Samuel Lajy
 John Thomas
 Mathew Thankachan
 Susan Mathew
 Mathew Philip
 Christin Thomas

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

*Submitted by Binny Cherian, Principal
(Tel.: 914.708.7981, email: cbinny@gmail.com)*

At the onset of the New Year, on behalf of the Sunday School family I would like to wish each and every one a Blessed New Year, 2018. Through our ups and downs in the past year, if you might have noticed carefully you will be able to recollect and appreciate how wonderfully our savior, Jesus Christ has led and guided us into this New Year. Many, who lived with us in the past year, have now gone to be with the Lord. This thought should drive us in the New Year, taking each day as though it would be our last, for it will help us stay grounded in both faith and action.

I would like to share with you an incident that occurred with me. I had recently, gone with our Sunday school teachers to take part in a charity activity with an organization, "Twelve Baskets Full" at Logan's square in Philadelphia. Every Thursday between 8.00 and 8.30 pm, volunteers from our area orthodox churches bring food and clothing, and share them with the homeless people. Our tenth grade teachers and students had collected money to sponsor a meal, hence I signed up to go and help them out. We had some new ear muffs at home and since it is winter now, we decided to give them out too. My wife, Mercy and I reached the location on time and we saw a line of people were getting ready to get the food. We stood in the volunteer's line and had our ear muffs ready to be given out. The line started to move; people collected their food and came towards us. Some of them were wearing a winter cap while others had ear muffs, however I asked all those who came if they wanted an ear muff, thinking that they could save an extra one for later. It was not just one person, but many of them told me, "Thank you, I already have one". That is when I realized and also wished; I had the same mentality as them because my thought process told me that, having an extra ear muff would serve them when the existing one went bad, however, I was wrong. The difference, between them and I was that, my thought process taught me accumulation, however theirs was to take only what they needed. This definitely can be translated into our daily lives because I can be Thankful to God only when I am content with what he has given me. I do not have the time to appreciate what has been given to me, rather, my focus is on the things that I do not possess. In our age and time when we chase the pleasures of the flesh to satisfy our WANTS, what our lord taught us, "Give us this day our daily bread" takes a back seat.

This lesson that I learnt in the past year I would like to practice in the New Year. I will work towards being content and also Thankful to my savior for providing me and my family our daily bread while wishing and hoping you do the same for yourself and your family.

Please remember to pray for the Sunday School Children and Staff in your daily prayers.

2018 Sunday School Calendar

Event	Date	Venue	Coordinator
Area Sunday School Planning Meeting	Sunday, Jan.21	TBD	Paul Maret