

# **THE BRONX DIARY**

**Bronx St. Mary's Church**

**& American Diocese**

**1972-2013**

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**The Bronx Diary**  
**(Bronx St. Mary's Church & American Diocese)**  
(History)

**Fr. A. K. Cherian**

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& American Diocese  
1972-2013**

**Fr. A. K. Cherian  
New York**

**Translated into English by  
Jacob Varghese**



**Sophia Books  
Kottayam**

## **Fr. A. K. Cherian**

B.Sc. B.Ed. from University of Kerala.

G.S.T. from Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam.

B.D. from Serampur University

MS. Ed. from Fordham University, New York.

Vicar, St. Mary's Orthodox Church, Bronx, NY, 10458

one of the biggest parishes under Diocese of North East America  
of the Malankara Orthodox Church.

Native of Pandalam, Kerala.

- Books: 1. Joseph Reni Vilathi Thimothios  
2. At the Feet of Jesus  
3. Bronx Diary  
4. The Sacred Lamps of India  
5. Faith of Our Fathers - Holy Faith

Address: 61 MARY STREET  
TAPPAN, NEW YORK 10983  
PHONE (845) 359 - 9583

# Preface

The unique distinction of becoming the first external diocese of the Indian Orthodox Church goes to the American Diocese which came into existence on January 1, 1979 and H. G. Thomas Mar Makarios was designated to be its first diocesan Metropolitan. Among the eminent metropolitans of that period his Grace the metropolitan was a multifaceted, talented and versatile genius endowed with extraordinary ability and caliber. His Holiness the Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan Baselius Marthoma Mathews I arrived here in July, 1979 and conducted the enthronement ceremony (sunthroniso) with full regalia and customary pomp.

There was a parish belonging to us in New York way back in the year 1972. This was at the chapel belonging to the Union Theological Seminary where our parishioners used to congregate on every Sunday for prayer and worship. All Christian families residing here used to attend this service irrespective of their denominational difference. During that time nearly 25-30 members used to assemble here for worship. Among them were members belonging to the Mar Thoma Church as well as that of the CSI Church. The US Government's liberalization policy of 1970 with regard to the immigration laws made a tremendous impact among the Malayalees and they made utmost use of this bonanza opportunity which paved the way for a huge influx of nurses and their families to the US. As a result of this development, joint worship of all denominations became difficult. Under this circumstance two priests who were fully aware about this predicament took initiative to start our own worship center at Bronx city on the first week of November 1972. It was this Church which subsequently became the St. Mary's Orthodox Church, Bronx. Its 40th anniversary was celebrated on Sept. 7-9, 2012 in the presence of His Holiness the Catholicos Baselius Mar Thoma Paulose II along with four other metropolitans of the Church. It was our

earnest desire to bring out a historical document along with this function. But unfortunately owing to certain unexpected turn of events and impediments the proposal did not become fruitful. Now we are thankful to our heavenly father for the benevolence bestowed upon us for accomplishing this long cherished dream. When the history of this parish is brought out, we are constrained to drag the Diocese also into the picture as both are inseparably intertwined and interwoven in it because of manifold reasons and factors.

With effect from January 1, 1979 certain changes were brought out in the structure of the Malankara Orthodox Church. As per this new arrangement the Quilon Diocese was bifurcated into two entitled as the Quilon and Trivandrum Dioceses. In the same way, the Madras, Bombay Dioceses also were bifurcated into five Dioceses namely Madras, Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and America. Under this new arrangement there were 92 parishes in Trivandrum Diocese, 130 in Quilon, 41 in Madras, 24 in Bombay, 36 in Calcutta, 27 in Delhi and 21 in America. This was the arrangement in which the parishes were included in their respective Dioceses. The irony of the situation is that during this period, the American Diocese did not possess a single church building of its own.

When H.G. Bishop Makarios was designated to America, the higher echelons of the church never bothered not only about his board and lodging but also about the office of the so called American Diocese. What was the idea behind constituting a diocese in haste in a country where our church members did not possess a single church building of their own, is still unknown. No doubt, I am sure that it might have caused excruciating pain and mental agony to the church authorities later on. However, using his personal influence the bishop was able to wriggle out from this predicament. The God Almighty provided him an office and residential facility at 'Buffalo', N.Y. and the diocesan office started functioning from there. Whenever new Dioceses are formed let no one brand them in future as 'Utopian Schemes.'

It was after a lapse of thirty years of excruciating travail, untold miseries and unaccounted sacrifices that the so called diocese became a full-fledged diocese.

I have tried to mention the names of only a very limited number of persons in this book. However, I am constrained to include the name of a priest along with the names of the bishops of our church. It is that of Fr. P. C. Varghese. He has done irreparable damage to the growth of the diocese in its budding stage through a newspaper which he was bringing out from here. He used this print media to propagate all sorts of blatant lies and libels against the church. The concocted stories and false statements that appeared in it were a thorn in our flesh.

More than a hundred testimonials are included in this book for authenticity. They are incorporated here as exhibits. History should be truthful, authentic and reliable. The circulars issued by the bishops and the correspondence exchanged in connection with it, matters that appeared in newspapers and magazines as well as the annual reports of the American Diocese and other relevant and veritable records are included in this book, Moreover, historical documents way from 1972, i.e seven years prior to the establishment of the diocese are also available in this book for perusal.

This book contains a thumbnail description of the controversies, disputes, bickering and cold war that existed in our church for the last 40 years. It paved the way for the decline and fall of the church and also we can say to some extent for its growth.

It was on September 15, 1912 that the Catholicate throne at Malankara was re-established. The Chief celebrant on that occasion was H.H. Abdul Messiha Patriarch of Antioch. A few days before the completion of the centenary celebration of that function H.H. Baselius Mar Thoma Paulose II the Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan arrived here and took part in the 40th anniversary celebration of our parish and blessed us. On that red

letter day the inauguration of the centenary celebration of the Catholicate throne of Malankara also was conducted at Bronx St. Mary's Church, on Sept. 9, 2012.



# **Foreword**

## **A Historical Signpost for the Posterity**

**Fr. Dr. O. Thomas**

What is the relevance of the history of a parish which has only a standing of 40 years to an orthodox church with a tradition of 2000 years? Is it worthwhile to depict the deeds of the living and the dead (among them there are bishops also) which would be palatable to some and unsavoury and unacceptable to some others? These and a host of hundred other questions may arise in the minds of those who go through the historical book of Fr. A. K. Cherian's "Bronx Diary" otherwise known as "Bronx St. Mary's Church and the American Diocese."

This book has its own relevance only when we consider the fact, that the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church was able to have its own parishes in a continent thousands of miles away from its head quarters in a country where the culture, socio economic factors, and national ethos of the people are entirely different and divergent. Another important aspect worth mentioning is about the theme of this book. A historian should always have the audacity to call a spade a spade ie, he should speak the plain truth without fear or favour. He should not have partiality or sentiments. Let him present facts as he deems fit and allow the readers to arrive at their own conclusion and judgement. When unpleasant and nauseating facts are brought out the author should bring forth genuine documents to substantiate his claims. Then we would be constrained to agree with him. Even then if we disagree with his standpoint and perspective we shall not question his prerogative as an author to present facts from his own outlook while writing a historical book.

This book highlights a cardinal point which manifests its relevance. That is about the connection and relationship between the American

diocese and the Malankara Syrian Church governed by the Catholicos of the East. A large number of malayalees migrated to the States have now acquired American citizenship. Henceforth their children and their posterity would be American citizens by birth. Their mother tongue and culture would be entirely different from that of their forefathers. This new generation is least bothered about learning the language of their parents. To them it is only the liturgical language of the old generation. Beyond that it is nothing to them. Then why can't the American diocese sever its relationship with the parent church ruled by the Catholicos of the East and become independent and self-governing? Some of the laity and priests were adhering to such a stand on the assumption that it would pave the way for the growth of the church. Even some of the bishops also were holding such a view. But the author of this book was deadly against such an idea. He believes that the time is not yet ripe for such a change. He insisted that the status quo should be preserved and the Catholicos should have supreme control over all the churches of American diocese. The American diocese should be part and parcel of the Malankara syrian church. These types of conflicting and contradictory outlook emerged at St. Mary's Church. From the beginning of this conflict and tussle the mantle of leadership of the old guards fell upon Fr. Cherian who was nurturing the church ever since its inception. It all have happened by divine intervention. An able bodied Metropolitan capable of handling any situation with dexterity, skill and tact was at the helm of the opposite party. Hence the conflict became fierce and ruthless. As both sides were strong, obstinate and rigid the struggle turned from an ideological difference to an open war. Along with litigation, personal rivalry also played a vital role in this conflict causing huge monetary loss and mental agony to both sides. The author is not interested in depicting these developments beyond an ideological difference. But his righteous indignation is explicitly visible through out this book. It crops up through out the book from his firm conviction that the "abomination of desolation" spoken by the prophet Daniel should not creep and climb into the church in future under any circumstance.

There are certain things which priests should observe and maintain in their gospel work. That is absolute obedience to our heavenly father and devotion to the church. If they discard these qualities and do church work for power and pelf they may gain some temporary benefit. But ultimately it would prove disastrous to the church and also detrimental to them. The author of this book did his church ministry with utmost sincerity and devotion. There will be some who may hold other views about him. But no one will question his integrity, devotion and sincerity. All the parishes and believers in America used to render unstinting financial support to charity works with open arms. But there are some who hold the opinion that construction works outside the pale of charity works are not much important. But the parishioners of Bronx church never adhered to such a notion. They contributed liberally for all the requirement of the church as and when needs arose. Whenever I approached them for certain projects of the Theological seminary this parish gave substantial amounts as donation. I take this occasion to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to them for it. I am not running down other parishes. This comparison is only on the basis of the strength of the parish and their insight into such matters. As such they were able to donate more than others. It remains as an undisputed fact.

Another salient feature of this book which attracted my attention is worth mentioning at this juncture. We have always a tendency to praise those who are holding power, pelf and position. All great men have their own follies and foibles. In order to satisfy their whims and fancies truth is very often sacrificed. At the same time those who do not wield any power or position are endowed with so many good qualities. The so called able bodied men's total helplessness, group rivalry in the parish, submission to power and wealth, self interest of certain people, rampant corruption at the top level, shepherds who do not look after the spiritual requirements of the sheep, misappropriation of the church fund, spiritual and moral degeneration - all these things are vividly and graphically described

in this book. This is being done not to tarnish the image of anybody. On the contrary, it is meant for their spiritual uplift and also to make them aware that they should walk on the ways of God leaving abominable and sinful ways. The author of this book does not say that the Bronx church is impeccable and infallible in everything. This parish had to fight with tooth and nail for a mighty cause. The aim behind it was very simple - that the American diocese should always remain with the Malankara orthodox church under the patronage of the Catholicos of the East. It had its desired effect. Ultimately the holy synod consented to form an incorporation for the American churches. There are valid documents to substantiate these facts.

Along with the main theme under discussion, the author's meticulous observation regarding ecclesiastical life, studies about the lives of the Holy fathers and the troubles and tribulations undergone by the immigrants during their early days of settlement, comparative study of the American churches, social life of the people of America etc. are worth mentioning.

I have read all the books penned by Fr. A. K. Cherian and also written prefaces for some of them. He writes as and when need arises and also to give expression to his pent up emotions. Behind his writing there is wide reading, deep study and meditation. He presents ideas with grace and elegance. Even though he has been living in America for the past 40 years he can write beautiful malayalam spontaneously. His diction and style are highly praiseworthy and worth emulation.

The history of the Bronx church has got a very close connection with the American diocese. Heated discussions may take place in the near future regarding the relationship between the American diocese and the Malankara Orthodox Church. As such this is not a historical book. On the other hand it is simply a sign post for the posterity. This is only a graphic picture of the ordeal of a noble priest who suffered indignity and disgrace for the sake of certain principles he upheld. His efforts would serve as a column of fire for Malankara Church, in future.

## **Dedication**

We can say that the success or failure of a priest's ministry has something to do with the circumstances prevailing in his family. I am totally in the darkness about the result of such an assessment when someone makes an evaluation of my ministry. If there is an iota of success in my vocation, all the credit goes to the Lord Almighty and the one whom our heavenly father joined with me some 41 years ago as my life partner. She did everything possible to bring up our children in the right path and managed our household affairs meticulously. She prayed incessantly for the welfare of the family. I also take this occasion to pay a glowing tribute to my beloved sister. We had our own ups and downs in our lives. That is the way of the world. When things were at the worst my wife faced all troubles and tribulations with courage and fortitude assuming that it was the will of God. This book is dedicated to Molly Cherian whom most of you call "Kochamma" and also to all brothers and sisters of this parish who stood with me in thick and thin to uplift the horn of this parish by word and deed.

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## **First stage: The beginning**

The city of New York, the renowned North American city is divided into five boroughs. St. Mary's Church situated in the Bronx, falls under section of Norwood of New York. Even though this parish has only a standing of 40 years it plays a vital role in the history of the American diocese.

The Holy Eucharist was celebrated in this parish for the first time on the first sunday of November 1972. It all happened under an extra-ordinary circumstance. Until then we used to assemble and worship in a church in New York city. Unfortunately those who were at the helm of that lone Indian Orthodox Church were totally ignorant and unaware about the tradition and functioning of an Orthodox church. Two priests were deeply distressed at this sorry state of affairs. As all their sincere efforts to bring the wayward office bearers of the church to the right path met with utter failure, these priests were constrained to take the above mentioned course of action. One of them was late Fr. John Mathew and the other one, the author of this book.

It was our earnest desire to have a parish which strictly adheres to the constitution of Malankara Orthodox Church and its age old tradition and customs. In America all the non-profit organizations will have to obtain a registration certificate from the state. The reason behind such a rule is to exempt these organizations from paying taxes. Big churches have their own articles which are accepted by the state. But new churches generally get their registration under the group Article -10 where the rules and regulations are generally flexible. Even if there are only 5-9 members, such registrations are possible and these members are known as 'Board of Trustees.' They are the director board members of this organization and a fixed period is prescribed for them. Every year more than one member will be eliminated from that board and new member will be included in that place. This process will be taking place in a rotating system. An

Apostolic church like ours will find it difficult to cope with it. There is no other way we have to grin and bear it. But there is a loophole here which can be turned to our advantage when the registration is being done we should have a byelaw.

We can frame it for our own benefit and interest. That byelaw would be the statute binding to us. But as an ancient Orthodox Church we have our own written canonical law and rules from eleventh century. As far as the Indian Orthodox Church is concerned we have our own constitution enacted and approved way back from 1934, our church is being ruled by that constitution.

Among the 5-7 members in whose names the incorporation of the church we left was registered, none of the 4 priests who were available there at that time were included. It was only after the registration that these priests came to know about it. I was at Kottayam when all these things happened. This clandestine and covert action infuriated some people. A turbulent atmosphere was prevailing when I arrived here from Kottayam.

Nearly 20-25 people used to attend the sunday service inclusive of members belonging to other denominations. Those who were behind the registration used to say many things in order to make the situation worse. According to them the Orthodox Church of India - authorities have nothing to do with the American parish. Neither the Catholicos nor the bishops have any power or authority here in America. "The priest appointed by us, our priest." Such were the words that very often came out from them.

Most of the parishioners were young men who were totally ignorant about the relationship between the parish and the church headquarters at Kottayam. Hence some people used these young men for their self interest. Subsequent events proved it and we can discern it from later events.

It was on April 17, 1972 that I arrived in America. At that time my wife, Molly was residing in an apartment adjacent to which John



Mathew Achen was residing. Along with John Mathew Achen's family we all went to the church for worship on the next Sunday. All the four priests used to celebrate Holy Qurbana in the church according to their convenience on each Sunday. When I came over here I became the fifth priest. Usually there are only four Sundays in a month. But on that particular year the month of April happened to have 5 Sundays. As there was no special claimant for the 5th Sunday, the then vicar Fr. Dr. K. M. Simon "compelled me" to celebrate the Holy Eucharist.

Here I have to give an explanation why I have used the word "compelled" for celebrating the Holy Qurbana. Before coming over to America, I was as a teacher in M. D. Seminary High School. Parett Mar Ivanios Metropolitan, the then manager of the schools gave me the additional charge of the boarding home. I do not want to mention the reason behind such a decision. The boarding home was situated on the southern side of the present Mar Elia Cathedral. Vattakkunnel Mathews Mar Athanasius, the then outside Kerala diocesan bishop (later Mathews I Catholicos) was residing on the north side of this building where his office also was functioning. Along with teaching, this additional charge of the boarding home became a heavy burden on me. As I was fully engaged in these works, I had no time to spare for any other activity. As all of us are fully aware some of our bishops are having certain idiosyncracies. They will give special consideration to those who frequently visit and talk to them. That is but natural and we cannot find fault with it. I do not exactly know what was the attitude of the metropolitan towards me as I had not indulged in such activities for want of time. However, when the bishop was engaged in gardening in which His Grace derived great pleasure, I used to approach him. On such occasions he would be in high spirits and in a delightful mood.

It was this metropolitan who blessed our marriage and ordained me as a full deacon. Both functions were held at Mar Elia Cathedral. Before my departure to the states, I approached him to bid farewell.

Earlier I had received some information about the tension prevailing in the New York Church. During our talk the metropolitan said “Achen, you should be very careful while handling the affairs there. Certain things are going on in that parish which are not very pleasant. Lack of leadership is the root cause for it. They had sent a byelaw to me in which they have incorporated certain clauses which are unacceptable and unsuitable to us. I have made certain amendments and then sent it to them. Again they wrote certain things according to their whims and fancies and sent it to us. This is how things are going on there....”. I listened with rapt attention to all that the metropolitan told me. After talking for some more time and then kissing His Grace’s hand I departed.

When I reached my room I was informed that Fr. K. C. Thomas of Theological Seminary wanted me to meet him before my departure to the states. So the very next day I went to the seminary and had a prolonged discussion with him. I had no close contact with him earlier other than having seen him at students conferences on one or two occasions. But I was well acquainted and familiar with his two brothers Very Rev. Ramban Lazar Cor-episcopa, Very Rev. K. C. Mathew Cor-episcopa and their sister, Sr. Mariam of Bethany Convent. During my talk with him I could understand that he was well aware about the facts metropolitan discussed with me regarding the prevailing situation in the American parish. He said “The main reason for the conflict and turmoil going on there is due to lack of leadership and was happy to hear that you are going there.”

Let me give a brief account of the general condition of our church in Kerala during 1970’s, when I planned to go to the U.S.

A Ramban named ‘Aprem Aboodhi’ from Syria arrived in Kerala as the representative of the Patriarch of Antioch. Patriarch faction was trying to sow the seeds of discord and dissension in our church deliberately in order to put an end to the 12 year peace period prevailing in the church. They wanted this Ramban also have a ‘chair’

in the Holy Synod of our church. Slogans such as “Antiochian Movement”, “Simhasana Pallikal” etc. were in the air to add fuel to the fire. By this time the Patriarch had sent a notorious commandment circular bearing No. 203/1970 mentioning that the throne of St. Thomas is only a mythical story. As a result tension began to mount in the church. During this time strenuous efforts were going on in the church to find out a successor to Augen Catholicos. Outside Kerala Metropolitan Mathews Mar Athanasius and Vaduthala Daniel Mar Philexinos Metropolitan were strong contenders for this position. Both of them were dear and near to me. Group rivalry and bickering were going on unabated. Things were going beyond the pale of spirituality. As I was staying at M. D., I could watch everything at close quarters. Finally Mathews Mar Athanasius was chosen as the Catholicos designate. The pathetic condition prevailing at Malankara during this period gave me mental anguish, agony and torture. But the proverb “Man proposes, God disposes” was fulfilled in its entirety in my case.

Later events described here will reveal that things did not happen as I had anticipated. Also, I could not bring into practice what has been desired by Athanasius Metropolitan. While coming over here I had taken a firm decision not to interfere in any internal affairs of the American parish under any circumstance. My sole intention was to complete my five year study course here and then return to Kerala.

I am describing all these details to explain my coinage. “Celebration of Eucharist under compulsion” as I had mentioned above, I never wanted to involve in any domestic matters of the church functioning in the Union Theological Seminary. But much to my chagrin and vexation things happened in the opposite way.

During the early stages there were only 20-25 persons to attend church service. But after some time a great change took place. The attitude of the American government’s visa policy paved the way for the influx of a large number of nurses to the States. As a result

new faces began to appear in the church every week. By September worshippers increased tremendously. Some of these new comers were skeptical and suspicious about the affairs of the parish and as such they began to air their views openly. Even those who had only a vague and superficial idea about the functioning of the church began to talk as if they are well-versed in ecclesiastical matters.

One day, in the first week of June Fr. Simon and his wife Thankamma Kochamma came to my residence. Simon Achen was very popular for his sense of humour and wit. He is one of the illustrious and eminent priests of our church. As for myself, I do not possess that talent and expertise to cut jokes. At the same time, I always liked to enjoy wit and humour. I used to ponder over the humorous dialogues of H. G. Paulose Mar Gregorios and Simon Achen and laugh myself when I am alone. These two humourists were held in high esteem in the church circles. Simon Achen told me that he had come to meet me with a specific purpose. He informed me that he would not be available in the states for the next five months as he had to go to Ethiopia and as such it was his earnest desire that I should be the proterm vicar of his turn during this interim period. But I could not comply with his request of becoming the acting vicar. However, I consented to conduct Holy Eucharist on behalf of him until his return, on the first Sunday of every month, which was his turn. Within a few days he made his journey to Ethiopia.

Meanwhile tension was mounting in the parish and everybody was fully conscious about it. On October 3, after the church service it was announced that a general body meeting would be held on the next Sunday. Coming events began to cast their shadows as soon as the announcement was over. Talks about untoward incidents and faction fighting that is going to be stage managed on that day began to be heard. Several types of mudslinging pamphlets also began to appear.

Whisperings and murmurings began to be heard from the parishioners about a possible tussle and a trial of strength on that

day. On next Saturday evening, I contacted John Mathew Achen and apprised him about the developments. I also told him that I would keep away from the general body meeting scheduled to be conducted on the next day and also would not be present in the church. This was something which he could not tolerate. He became furious and reprimanded me for my decision. I did not feel offended at his scolding as I knew very well that it was his nature to become angry upon any slightest provocation. On that Sunday morning I went to a Greek Orthodox Church at Manhattan for worship taking my position in the last row. On the same day in the evening at about 7 pm one of the young men who attended the church service in the Union Seminary chapel informed me about the untoward incidents that took place during the general body meeting. As pandemonium broke out in the meeting, police intervention became inevitable and the cops evicted some members from the church for their unruly behaviour. I was deeply dejected and depressed at this turn of events. In fact I left Kerala being disgusted and disillusioned at the prevailing group rivalry in the church. But here I have fallen from the frying pan into the fire (Pada pedichu Panthalathu chennappol pandavum koluthi pada). This was the predicament in which I was placed. During my talk with that young man I informed him that I would not be going to that church thereafter. He then told me that he would also follow suit. At about 8 pm John Mathew Achen contacted me and began to reprimand me in his usual style as had done during the previous night. To this I told him clearly and categorically that under no circumstance would I go to Union Seminary Church thereafter. "Then what are you going to do on Sundays?" he asked me indignantly. "As far as we priests are concerned", I told him "nobody would stand in our way for celebrating holy Qurbana. We, the priests are entitled to conduct holy Qurbana and other sacraments until we are excommunicated from the church. I intend to find out a church somewhere here where I can conduct holy Qurbana." For one minute he kept mum. Afterwards he fully agreed with my stand. He consented to find out a church for this purpose and asked me to do

the rest. Within two or three days we took the basement of United Pilgrim Church, 1800 Grand Concourse, Bronx on rent and on the first Sunday of November 1972, the memorial day of St. Gregorios of Parumala, the holy Qurbana was celebrated there. The Church was founded in the name of Virgin Mary. Nearly 10-12 persons attended the service on that memorable day.

As days passed more and more people began to congregate for worship and prayer. The year 1973 was a year of growth and development. As a result the parish was incorporated in New York State in 1974. I had mentioned the details about it earlier. As a byelaw was required for incorporation the constitution approved in 1934 was adopted for this purpose. Without any impediment or objection New York State approved our bye-law. John Mathew Achen took all the initiative to get it registered and it was a notable and remarkable achievement on his part. Thus for the first time in the history of Malankara Orthodox Church a parish was formed in America owing allegiance to the constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Church.

By 1974 nearly 120 families became members of this parish. A request letter duly signed by all the members of the church was sent to the metropolitan for H.G.'s approval for including this parish in the outside Kerala diocese. Accordingly approval was sanctioned by the metropolitan on March 3, 1974. As per the commandment letter of the metropolitan the first vicarship also fell upon Fr. A. K. Cherian (Exhibit 1). This commandment letter infused fresh vigour and vitality to the beleaguered and hard-pressed parish.

But everything was not rosy and smooth during this period. Cold war began to take place between this new parish and the erstwhile parish.

The opposite party began to spread all sorts of scandals and blatant allegations against this new parish. They even told some members that Bronx Church was not affiliated to Malankara

Orthodox Church and those who associate with it will be outside the pale of the Malankara Orthodox Church. This vilification and propaganda had its desired effect. As a result some of the members fearing consequences that may take place in the future terminated their connection with the parish.

### **A One man Commission**

As you may remember I had mentioned the name of Fr. K. C. Thomas earlier in this narrative. He used to visit America every now and then prior to the affiliation of this parish. I had received a letter from the Metropolitan in which it was mentioned that Fr. K. C. Thomas would be sent to New York as a commissioner. He was asked to submit a report after ascertaining the various problems prevailing here. Thus Achen was heading a one man commission. In H.G's letter the Metropolitan asked me to discuss all aspects connected with the feud and rivalry existing here. K. C. Thomas Achen interacted with we two priests. We explained our stand very clearly and succinctly and also elucidated why we were constrained to sever our connections with the other church. We were under the impression that Thomas Achen got a clear picture of the whole affair and also the stand adopted by us. But unfortunately the report that he submitted to the Metropolitan was not favourable to Bronx Church. We could understand it later from our talk with the Metropolitan. As Thomas Achen had certain close relatives and friends who were members of that church and also because of the fact that he had conducted services there on several occasions he was constrained to submit a report against us. As blood is thicker than water we cannot blame him for it.

As per the Metropolitan's circular No.78/73 of May 9, 1973 St. Thomas Church was included as a parish belonging to the outside Kerala diocese (Exhibit No. 2). Fr. K. M. Simon Cor Episcopa was posted as its first vicar. After a lapse of nine months, St. Mary's Church was given due recognition likewise. I think it would be worth

while to quote a few lines from that letter for the perusal of the readers.

“Beloved in the Lord,

You had to struggle hard for nearly three days to write this letter consisting of 34 pages. From the report that I have received I could get an inkling of what was going on there. Being the diocesan metropolitan it is inevitable that I should always have a clear idea about the day to day affairs of the church as well as that of the work of the priests and laity leaders. But it appears that nobody has communicated or written to me about the things going on there and it appears that everything is hushed up. Others know everything but I am totally in the dark about the activities going on in the church there. As such, I am unable to comprehend anything! ... etc” (Exh. 3).

During 1974-75 there were 3 priests and two deacons here to conduct services. Besides John Mathew Achen and myself our eminent Sabha Bushan T. C. Mathai Achen used to come over here on Sundays. He had come to U.S. to attend a one year course at Princeton University. He had close relationship with parish members A. M. Alexander and Cherian Koshy (Raju). His niece, Mrs. Achamma Mathew also was a member of this parish. Almost all Sundays he used to come and delivered thought-provoking sermons. Deacons T. P. Paulose and David Cheruthottil also came to attend church services during this period. Later they joined the patriarchal faction.

### **A Sad demise**

Let me describe an unfortunate and sad incident that occurred during this time. A young lady hailing from Chengaroor who came here for employment died some how under mysterious circumstances. Her official name was Mariamma and pet name Santhamma. I remember having seen her in the church on one or two occasions. As in Kerala, here also it is the practice of pentecostal pastors to



lure, ensure, and persuade gullible and credulous ladies to their fold as and when they get an opportunity. Thus Santhamma also was constrained to join their fellowship. Her premature death occurred on a night. The very next morning I got a telephone message from a pentecostal pastor. The message was as follows "I have come to know that a young woman named Santhamma who used to attend your church is dead some how during the previous night. The body is kept in the hospital." After conveying this message the pastor hung up. I conveyed this sad news to John Mathew Achen and some other office bearers of the church. This tragic incident took place in down town Manhattan. Various types of rumours and scandals began to circulate regarding this tragic death. But no one had any authentic information regarding it. On further inquiry it was found that she belonged to a middle class Orthodox family of Chengaroor. By this time her American landlord had informed her parents about her tragic death. What is to be done in such an eventuality was the million dollar question that confronted us. As this was a new experience nobody had any definite idea regarding it. Everybody wanted to wriggle out from this predicament. Burial of a dead body would incur a substantial amount in America. As it was clear that she was a member of the Orthodox Church we decided to conduct her funeral rites in accordance with the Orthodox Church tradition. Where shall we bury her and how much expense will it incur? These unanswered questions were a thorn in our flesh. If my memory is correct it was her land lord who spent all the expenses connected with it. The cemetery was at Mount Holy, New Jersey. It was some 70-80 miles away from our residence. At last her body was laid to rest in that hill top under the auspices of St. Mary's Bronx Church. John Mathew Achen tried his level best to accomplish all these things. On the previous night before the burial we conducted a prayer meeting in which I put forward a proposal for giving some financial help to the family of Santhamma on behalf of the Church.

I also told them that the Bronx parish is willing to take the initiative for it. But there was only a lukewarm and half-hearted response for it. At last we were able to collect US \$ 2000 for this purpose. When converted to Indian rupees it came around to Rs. 16,000/- A demand draft drawn in favour of the deceased girls father was despatched to the metropolitan who handed it over to her father, Chamathil Chacko on the occasion of the 18th anniversary of the outside Kerala diocese (Exh. 4)

It was a long-standing and earnest desire of some of our people in Manhattan that there should be a place of worship for them in that area. As a result of their sincere prayer and supplication the Metropolitan Hospital authorities allowed us to conduct our services there on Sundays. All the members of that group later took membership in Bronx St. Mary's Church. Two of us priests conducted services there on alternate Sundays.

### **Unsavoury side of priesthood**

Our heavenly father did not allow Bronx church to be duped by an unscrupulous man who established a cordial and deep rooted relationship with John Mathew Achen during the latter's counselling study in a school. This man identified himself as bishop Aboona Michael Gabriel of Ethiopian - Coptic Orthodox church. He also told us that he was consecrated at the behest of the emperor of Ethiopia. John Mathew Achen had implicit trust in him. Until then I had not heard about such a christian denomination, Ethiopian - Coptic Orthodox church.

Most of the people of our parish including John Mathew Achen believed that he was a saintly person. By 1974 the church was having some surplus money. We, the priests did not draw any amount from the church fund for our expenses. During this time we were contemplating about purchasing a small church building. This so called bishop some how came to know that our church is having some money.

Hence he began to make clever moves to swindle it. When we come home after church service on Sundays, this gentleman along with some of his followers will make his appearance. His gift of gab and glib helped him to convince his hearers about his own views and ideas. He talked persistently about the growth of Indian Orthodox Church in America and put forward a scheme to help us in our hour of need.

Owing to his uncanny ability to prevail over others to his way of thinking, it was easy for him to trap anyone who came into contact with him. Here is an extract from his letter in which he unfolded his clever scheme to deceive us.

“We have arranged through our office to guarantee some of our properties as security for a purchase money mortgage for St. Mary’s Church. However, it will be of most expedient urgency that you deposit a portion of the money you have already accumulated to the account of the above named church (Ethiopian - Coptic Orthodox Church of North and South America) namely; Five Thousand dollars (5,000.00), which will make a Summed total of Ten Thousand (10,000.00) for the purpose of enhancing a first mortgage of Twenty Thousand dollars (20,000.00). This means that at the time of purchase of your Church property, you will have on hand a total of Thirty Thousand cash dollars (30,000.00), plus what other moneys you may raise in the interim (Exh. 7).

What a wonderful scheme to give us a helping hand! Those who had explicit faith in his integrity and others who could not read between the lines of this letter might have believed that it was a heaven-sent blessing. No one can blame them for their credulity. A rather strange “helping scheme” commencing at 5000 dollars and culminating at 30,000 dollars! We had only 12,000 dollars in the bank at that time. But I did not take that bait.

At first I had no apprehension about his integrity and good intention. But as days passed I had a strange foreboding that

something wrong is going to take place. I thought that there was something fishy about the whole affair and that he was a swindler. As he was a close friend of John Mathew Achen I did not disclose to any one about my apprehension. Being the vicar of the parish, I convened the managing committee meeting and the letter was read to them for appropriate and suitable decision using their discretion. To my surprise, the managing committee with one accord decided to transfer 5000 dollars to this so called bishops account immediately. This decision was taken on a Sunday. At about 8'O clock in the night this gentleman told me that he had heard about the decision of the committee and asked me at what time he should go to the bank to collect the money. I replied that I could give a specific answer only in the morning. But he insisted upon getting an answer immediately. He also informed me that as this was a very urgent matter he has to draw the money on the very next day itself. After saying this much he hung up and the conversation came to an abrupt end.

Another sleepless night for me! How foolish it would be if we hand over this much amount to a man who is a perfect stranger to us. Who is he? We are totally in the dark about his whereabouts. Unless and until we get a definite answer to these questions it is unwise to give this much money to an unknown person. But as I did not want to offend and discredit John Mathew Achen I kept mum. Very early in the morning I contacted the trustee of the church and shared my apprehension and doubts with him. Even though it is unbecoming and improper on the part of the vicar to stand in the way of the unanimous decision of the managing committee, considering the serious nature of the predicament in which I am placed, I told him that I am constrained to take a decision in contravention of the decision of the managing committee. I also requested him to be with me in this hour of crisis and he consented to do so.

Next morning at about 8'o clock I received a phone call from

‘Abuna Michael Gabriel.’ He wanted to know at what time he should reach the bank to collect the money due to him. To this I replied in the following way. “I am the vicar of St. Mary’s Church. I am here because of the Catholicos of the East. Even though the committee has sanctioned to give you the money I have to get a ratification from the Catholicos at Kottayam as this transaction involves this much amount. I will forward your letter to him and if HH permits I will transfer the money to you within no time.”

This was something which he could not bear. After hurling abuse and castigating me for sometime he hung up the phone. John Mathew Achen along with some members of the committee severely criticized me for not complying with the decision of the managing committee. One of the members of the committee approached me and told me. “Achen, what you have done is grossly unfair. After all, he is a bishop. I am ready to kiss not only his hand but also his feet. If the money is lost, I am ready to compensate it from my own pocket.” “If he is genuinely interested in giving us a helping hand” I said, “let him deposit the promised amount in our account. Why does he resort to this round about way?” Nobody could give any convincing answer to my question. As a result of this incident group rivalry began to raise its ugly head in the parish tremendously. Gradually it began to increase by leaps and bounds. On further inquiry the following facts came to light which are worth mentioning.

Whenever any Christian denomination get a footing in America, some people will appear before them in the name of religion pretending to render help to them. These people may have some theological background and also will be moving in clerical dress for credibility. Thus they will creep and climb into the church and would take some of the parishioners to their confidence. By the time their victims get an inkling about their real intention they would vanish from the scene with the money. Very often such things are taking place here. Our ‘Aboona Michael’ is a member of such a gang and he had been arrested on several occasions for cheating

and swindling. He was imprisoned for these sorts of crimes. His real name was ‘Haitman.’

I firmly believe that it was because of the intercession and prayer of Virgin Mary that we were able to come out from this miry bog. If he had been able to deceive us in this way, many people would have hesitated to come to our church and we would have become a butt of ridicule in their eyes.

After this traumatic experience it was only in 1979 that I could see him again. It was in the party arranged in honour of the Catholicos on the occasion of the Sunthroniso of His Grace Thomas Mar Makarios metropolitan. He took his seat on the stage in full regalia along with His Holiness the Catholicos. It was one of the priests belonging to our church who brought him there. I was taken aback at this unsavoury sight and had a word about it to His Grace Paulos Mar Gregorios and some others who were present there. “What can we do at this juncture?” the metropolitan told me. “Any way, he has taken his seat. Let him be there.” It was the late deacon Thomas Schweitzer who gave me all the relevant details regarding the antecedents of this so called “Ethiopian bishop.”

## **A Time of growth and decline**

The vicar post of the Bronx church was given to me by Athanasius Thirumeni sidelining John Mathew Achen, even though he was senior to me in age. Though no one raised any objection in this appointment at first, within one year unrest and dissension began to evolve. Hence along with the statement of accounts and minutes of the general body, I wrote a letter to the metropolitan requesting him to give the vicarship to John Mathew Achen for the next year. And it had its desired effect. As per the commandment letter of 71/75 dtd 5-3-75 my request was granted and accordingly the post was given to him (Ex. 8).

Even though the year 1975-76 was a golden period for this parish, destructive tendencies also were visible. As membership increased

dissension and bickering also increased side by side. The typical characteristics of Kerala Syrian Christians showed its true colours. As a leopard cannot change its spots; Malayalees cannot shake of their pugnacious and arrogant nature wherever they work. Some of these trouble makers either hailed from the same locality or were working together in the same place. During church committee meetings these people will stall the proceedings in various ways by interrupting the members from airing their views and opinions. Raising allegations regarding misappropriation of church fund and character assassination are the two weapons which Malayalees take out from their quiver in order to tarnish the reputation of their opponents. Usually nobody will steal or pilfer money belonging to the church. Owing to certain oversight sometimes monetary loss may occur. But I am quite sure that nobody would misappropriate church funds for personal gain.

When personal prejudices reached its zenith these types of allegation were hurled against the then trustee. Since I opposed this foul play vehemently rivalry reached at its pinnacle. Hence the annual general body meeting of 1975 would not be conducted. During this period Makarios Thirumeni took charge of Bombay diocese. American churches were under this diocese (Circular letter 58/76). As per the invitation of the parish, Makarios Thirumeni came over to the states and conducted service here on May 23, 1976. Following is an extract from his circular letter dated June 10, 1976.

Beloved,

I am extremely happy in getting an opportunity to conduct holy Qurbana at Bronx Church, on May 23 and also to discuss various aspects connected with the overall developments of the church. I also take this occasion to express my deep and sincere thanks in the name of our Lord for the steadfast love and affection bestowed upon me by the priests and laity. ...”

Again on June 27, the metropolitan came to the church and

conducted service and called the general body in which office bearers for the next year were elected.

As per the commandment letter No 23/76 of December 20, 1976 John Mathew Achen was relieved of his duties from the Bronx church with effect from January 1977 in order to entrust him with the work of forming new parishes (Exh. 10). As there was factionalism and group rivalry those who were with John Mathew Achen also deserted the church when he was relieved. As a result membership was considerably reduced. But it proved to be a blessing in disguise. When the fomenters of discord left the parish others could work with redoubled vigour and enthusiasm for the growth of the church. Thus the parish got a new lease of life.

John Mathew Achen was an able administrator. He had an extraordinary ability to prevail over others and bring them to his fold. He formed a parish at New Jersey. Owing to a sudden heart attack he passed away. I take this occasion to pay a glowing tribute to him for the meritorious work he has rendered to the American diocese.

During 1976 all the parishes of America were under Bombay diocese. For the smooth functioning of the parishes here a zonal council was formed. A. M. Alexander, K. T. Idiculla and myself from Bronx church and Zachariah Kurien from St. Thomas church were included in that council. The remaining members were all priests (Exh. 10).

As per the circular No. 26/76 of 1976 my name also was included among the four members selected for the working committee. These two appointments were an anathema to some priests residing here.

In the beginning of 1977, for its smooth functioning, the St. Thomas parish was bifurcated into four sections. As per the letter No. 25/77 of May 2, 1977 four parishes namely St. Thomas, St. Baselius, St. Gregorios, St. George were formed for the 4 boroughs Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island. Fr. N. K. Cherian, Fr. T. M. Zacharia, Fr. K. M. Yohannan, Fr. T. A. Thomas were posted as



vicars for these parishes respectively. From May 8 the above mentioned priests were asked to take charge in their respective parishes (Exh. 12, 13, 14, 15).

H. H. The Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan Marthoma Mathews I as per commandment letter No. 218/78 of 1978 appointed His Grace Thomas Mar Makarios as the Metropolitan of American diocese (Ex. 16). Accordingly, the administration of the American diocese came under its own Metropolitan for the first time from 1-1-1979.

### **State of affairs of the parish during this period**

As I had mentioned earlier, this parish had to face a lot of teething troubles in its infancy. But the steadfast love and blessings of the Almighty was always with this parish in times of trouble. T. C. Mathai Achen went back to Kerala on completion of his education here. Two young men namely Revi Mathew and K. M. Samuel arrived here for studies at this juncture. Both of them served in the “Madhbhaha” on Sundays wholeheartedly. I was acquainted with K. M. Samuel’s brother late Fr. K. M. Varghese. Way back in the year 1951 Deacon M. V. George had constructed a worship centre at Mavelikara when he returned from the U. S. after the completion of his studies there and commenced a Bible study class. I had the good fortune to attend classes there and thus got an opportunity to come into contact with Varghese Achen. When I arrived in America in 1972, Achen came all the way from Boston to meet me and stayed a few days with us. As K. M. Samuel was studying in New Jersey he could not take part in church services on all Sundays. One deacon named Thomas Schweitzer belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church also used to come and attend church services during this period. All these people spent their time and energy for the growth and uplift of this parish. I am extremely thankful to them for their benevolence.

During this period we had to conduct services at Bethany

congregational church situated at Topping Avenue along with United pilgrim church of 1800 Grand concourse. In view of the increase in the number of members and also taking into consideration the spectacular and tremendous growth of the church, every one began to think about the necessity of having our own church building here for worship. Before the departure of John Mathew Achen such an idea was in the offing. Along with John Mathew Achen some of us visited various places to find out a suitable and convenient location for it.

By 1978 we were having nearly 40,000 dollars in the church fund. Nobody wanted to purchase a church building or construct one outside Bronx city. They were interested only in having a church here in Bronx city itself.

The condition of Bronx city, some thirty years ago was entirely different from that of today. Murder, theft, robbery etc were part and parcel of daily life during that period. Not only in Bronx, but also in various other parts of New York the same condition prevailed. But the crime wave was excessively high in south Bronx. Hence naturally we preferred either upper Bronx or East Bronx for this purpose. As we could not find a suitable church building, we were constrained to purchase a land for construction.

His Grace Thomas Mar Makarios metropolitan took up the administration of the American diocese with effect from January 1, 1979. Meetings, discussions and deliberations were going on with zeal and zest for conducting H.G.'s Sunthroniso ( installation) ceremony in a hurry. It was also heard that His Holiness Baselius Mar Thoma Mathews I was coming to the states. An extract from the Metropolitan's commandment letter is given below:

“It has been decided to accord a grand reception to the Catholicos at the New York cathedral church on July 14. Along with that function the Sunthroniso ceremony of the Diocesan Metropolitan also would be conducted. I am also pleased to inform that the Malabar Diocesan

Metropolitan Thomas Mar Timothios has kindly consented to accept the Chairmanship of the Sunthroniso celebration committee.”

(Commandment letter 15/79)

The news of the visit of the Catholicos filled the hearts of the parishioners with joy and elation. We earnestly desired that the Catholicos should lay the foundation stone of the new church. But still we could not find a land suitable for the construction of the church building. Then all of a sudden one day in April 1979, I received a phone call from late M. G. Abraham, one of the members of our parish. He told me that he had found a plot of land suitable for the church construction. On further inquiry we could find that it belonged to “C” town supermarket of Webster Avenue and also that they are ready to sell it to us.

### **Purchase of Land for the Church building**

Along with the building committee members namely M/s T. M. Easo, K. T. Idiculla, A. M. Alexander, M. G. Abraham, Abraham Thomas and T. Mathai, I went to the office of the “C” Town and held discussion with them. The length and breadth of the plot was 103.77 and 76.38 feet respectively. After a prolonged discussion we consented to purchase it for 42,500 dollars. As per article 23 of the church constitution all the transactions which a parish undertakes should have the official sanction of the Diocesan Metropolitan. Hence I told about all the details regarding it on the phone to the Metropolitan and later in writing for official record.

### **Reaction**

But the response from the Metropolitan was really a bolt from the blue for us. To our utter dismay and consternation His Grace reacted against the proposal to purchase the land. He insisted that before the registration of American diocese we should not do anything connected with this purchase. “What is the connection between this purchase and the registration of your Grace’s diocese?” I asked His

Grace politely. “You have to obey me implicitly” the metropolitan retorted indignantly. I then replied submissively that we had already reached an understanding with the property owners and as such, we could not retrace our steps. If we do not purchase it within the stipulated time agreed upon, it would be lost forever. “You will have to bear the brunt of it if you do not obey me.” The metropolitan gave us an ultimatum through these words.

M. V. Chacko, another member of the church also had this sort of experience from the metropolitan. The entire parishioners were deeply agitated at the strange behaviour of the metropolitan. However, the general body meeting decided to go ahead with the purchase. Accordingly the property was registered on May 22, 1979. It was purchased in the name of the Malankara Metropolitan (Catholicos).

If it had not been a unanimous decision on the part of the parish the Metropolitan could have utilized his authority to prevent us from purchasing this property until the issue is settled. But as there was not any objection from any quarters regarding this purchase the Metropolitan could not do anything against us. Incidentally, the Metropolitan’s objection on the ground of his Diocesan’s registration also was totally false and misleading. H. G. had made registration of it on April 26, 1979 at Erie county (Bye Laws of American Diocese, page 3, Exh.18). It was only on May 22, 1979 that the Bronx Church made its registration ie exactly one month after the metropolitan’s registration.

## **Defects and drawbacks in the Diocesan’s Registration**

Given below are a list of the pitfalls and defects which have been noticed by the parish with regard to the registration of the diocese.

The registration should be made in accordance with the rules and regulation laid down in the constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Church. Hence the basic structure of the constitution

should not be altered or destroyed under any circumstance whatsoever . In this byelaw eleven clauses are incorporated. The first three clauses, of course, are not harmful. But clauses from 4-10 are found grossly detrimental and unfavourable.

As per clause 4, members of the parish will have to abide by the constitution of the church and bye-law of the American diocese. Moreover, a certificate of conformity and obedience to that effect will have to be signed by the vicar (president) and parish secretary together and the same have to be handed over to the metropolitan.

There shall be three members in the Board of Trustee of the American Diocese consisting of the Metropolitan, Diocesan Secretary and a layman trustee who is elected by the Diocesan Assembly. In such an arrangement majority can be obtained if two of the members give their consent to any proposal and thus the board can implment anything according to their whims and fancies.

The powers defined in clause No 8, 9, 10 are in contravention of the constitution of Malankara Orthodox Church. These clauses are at variance with Malankara Orthodox Church constitution and hence they are untenable propositions.

8 A. That it can supervise and handle the properties of the diocese or the parish.

8 (d) It gives authority to possess the title deeds and documents of the property, of the parishes.

(9) Full authority to handle the property of the parishes and organizations for the benefit of the American diocese.

(10) The American diocese can utilize the title deeds and ownership of the property for its own use as and when needs arise.

Any one with a little bit of common sense is fully aware of the fact that whatever His Grace Thomas Mar Makarios metropolitan does will be pre-planned and pre-meditated and it would certainly

be for his self aggrandisement. I think it is worth while to quote certain sentences of H. G. which very often stated during church meetings, for the benefit of the readers.

“We cannot be a rubber stamp of Kottayam forever.”

“Just as there is a Catholicos in the East, we should have a Patriarch for the west.”

Priests who have heard these utterances from the mouth of the Metropolitan are still alive.

It was very clear that the Metropolitan wanted to have an independent church in America with full powers of its own either being part of Malankara Orthodox Church or otherwise. But it is an undisputed fact that time is not ripe for such a movement. H. G. had vested interest in getting H. G.'s diocese registered. H. G. was a man of action with razor sharp mind and had his own influence and hold in the church. Perhaps H. G. might have thought that H. G.'s own plans could be executed since factional fighting was going unabated in Malankara church at this period. Who can discern H. G.'s mind, perception and brain power?

All these things are to be implemented as per the existing rules and regulations. As per the tradition and convention of the Malankara Orthodox Church such things are the prerogatives of the higher authorities. The episcopal synod has the last say in such things.

If any change in the existing pattern is needed, the proposal should come before the episcopal synod and the synod should take an appropriate decision and action on it. That would always be beneficial to the church.

## **The first General body meeting of the American Diocese**

The first general body meeting of the American Diocese was conducted as per the letter No. 2/79 of January 30, 1979 issued by

the Metropolitan in St. Mary's Orthodox Church, Bronx. The meeting was held under the Chairmanship of the Metropolitan. The general body elected Fr. M. E. Idiculla diocesan secretary and five others as members of the council. No unwanted incidents occurred and everything ran smoothly.

After lunch a friend of mine belonging to the metropolitan's family came to me and told in a sarcastic and scornful tone "the game is up and you are duped." I could not understand anything from this talk. I looked at him in utter confusion and asked him what the matter was.

"You had some hidden agenda to become a council member and we have foiled it." After this he began to unfold the story. They held a clandestine meeting on the previous night in the house of a priest. The metropolitan also was present there. In that meeting it was decided who are to be elected and who are to be eliminated. Thus everything had been fixed on the previous night itself.

This sort of unhealthy trends and incidents continued in subsequent years also. As a result sanctity and spirituality could not be found in church election process and there was no Godliness in it. As I never wanted to become a council member, I was least bothered about their behaviour. Still one thing gave me some satisfaction and a sense of achievement; the fact that the first general body meeting of the American Diocese was held at St. Mary's Bronx Church (Exhi. 19A).

It was on May 22, 1979 that the Bronx church purchased the land for the church construction. Subsequently Staten Island Parish church and Yonkers St. Thomas Parish Church also purchased their own church buildings. The Metropolitan through his commandment letter N. of 47/80 & 52/80 of April 21, 1980 have informed the parishes about the consecration ceremony of these churches (Exhi. 19B).

Thus, the year 1979 was a historic year in the annals of this

diocese. During my sojourn in America (1972-1980) our heavenly father was kind enough to bless me with four children. In order to bring them up in the right path my wife and my sister tried their level best. My sister Aleyamma who was staying at Kurthumala St. Mary's convent took leave and came here and took a lot of pain to rear them up. She stayed here many years for this purpose. Twelve years ago she went back to the convent and is doing the work entrusted to her with utmost sincerity and devotion. During this time I also joined the Fordham University in New York as a part time student and took my M.S. Ed. degree from there.

### **Edmonton Parish**

It was in the month of June 1972 that I first set my foot on Edmonton city, the capital of Alberta state in Canada. My elder brother's son Kunjumon and his wife Kunjumol were there and the purpose of my visit was to baptize their son Benoy. Along with Benoy I baptized four children on that day. Many people came to attend the Holy Qurbana. That was the first time an Orthodox Church service was conducted there. The very next year I conducted the passion week service there. There were only twenty families belonging to our church at that time.

However, people from the neighbouring cities and some others from far away places congregated there to attend the awe-inspiring passion week service. K. G. John, son of Koppara Geevarghese Cor Episcopa, Zacharia (Babu) belonging to Kozhencherry Vanchithra Church, Alberta State Jail Commissioner C. Thomas and his wife Marykutty were some of the eminent persons residing in that city with their families at that time. It was C. Thomas who was paying for my travelling expenses as and when I go for church matter. I am deeply indebted to him for his kindness, love and affection that he had bestowed upon me. The members of that parish are fully aware about the fact it was I who conducted "Holy Eucharist" at Edmonton for the first time. On the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of



that parish I was a special invitee.

By the end of 1976 I went to Edmonton in order to conduct a marriage ceremony there. During that time there was no parish priest to conduct service at Edmonton church. Occasionally some one used to come there to celebrate the Holy Qurbana. Hence the parishioners thrust upon me the duty of making a request to the Diocesan metropolitan for appointing a priest permanently there. Even though I wrote a letter to this effect on March 7, 1977, I received no reply. But later their wishes were granted and now that parish is functioning smoothly. They are having a very good church and a parsonage.

## **Two Eminent Bishops**

Before getting back to the history of Bronx church, let me pay a glowing tribute to two eminent bishops of our church who had always poured their love and affection to Bronx church. H. G. Paulose Mar Gregorios and H.G. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios are these two distinguished and renowned metropolitans.

### **Paulos Mar Gregorios Metropolitan**

This illustrious metropolitan is not an unfamiliar figure to Bronx church. After completing his research from Princeton University of America he took up the General Secretaryship of MGOCSM and was residing at Alway Fellowship House. At that time I was a student at Pandalam N.S.S. College. During this period some of us formed a prayer group and we used to gather together once or twice a week for meditation and prayer. On one occasion we invited him to deliver a speech at our prayer group meeting. But unfortunately he was not able to come. In 1957 the 50th annual conference of MGOCSM was held at Thirumoolapuram Balikamadam high school. It was on that occasion that I first set my eyes upon him. Later he was inducted on the staff of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia with the consent of His Holiness Baselios Geevarghese II Catholicos. This happened during the Emperor's visit to Kerala. Along with a

group of Ethiopian students he came to attend this conference at Thirumoolapuram. Clad in a khadhi half sleeved shirt and adorning a shawl around his neck, this young man became the centre of attraction of the audience. His speech centred around the students Christian Movement of Ethiopia and also about the ministry work being done there. Even though he was there for full two days I could not get an opportunity to interact with him. It was only when I joined the Seminary as a BD student that I got an opportunity to meet and talk with him. In 1966 he came to the Seminary and delivered a thought - provoking speech. Eminent persons of our church were present there on that occasion. By that time he was ordained as a full fledged priest.

By 1967 his tenure in the WCC was over and he took charge as the principal of our Theological Seminary. After completing my B.D. degree, I went back to teaching in the M.D. Seminary high school. He was always very kind and considerate to me during my studentship and also while working at M.D. High School. Since 1972 first as a priest and later on as metropolitan he had visited Bronx Church on many occasions. In 1976 he conducted passion week service and feet washing ceremony at Bronx Church. This was the first occasion that a feet washing ceremony was conducted in America under the auspices of a Malankara Orthodox Church.

In 1976 the American parishes accorded a grand reception to him at the conference hall of Inter Church Centre. The Metropolitan had a large number of friends who work here. I was also working there at that time. People from all walks of life including Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, former WCC general secretary, Dr. Clare Randell, National Council General Secretary, Dr. Marian Dewelder, General Secretary of Reformed Church, and representatives from Orthodox Churches also were present on this grand and impressive function to pay their respects to the metropolitan. His Grace Thomas Mar Makarios Thirumeni also was invited for this function at the insistence of His Grace Gregorios Thirumeni. His Grace also attended the

function and delivered a speech. This function displayed the unity of the parish and thus it enhanced the prestige of the Bronx Church.

The ways of God are strange. A young man with whom the Metropolitan came into contact here at Bronx Church later became a metropolitan and turned out to be his successor - His Grace Yuhanon Mar Demetrios, the present Delhi diocesan metropolitan. He was ministering in the church as a layman here during this period.

Afterwards he used to come over here and stayed with us and conducted services in the church on several occasions. The relationship that we maintained was entirely different from that of a spiritual head and his disciple. Until his demise that attachment lingered unblemished.

While attending a conference in Germany he was stricken with palsy and his one side was paralysed. In spite of this disease he took meticulous care to go ahead with his day to day work. We used to talk while he was undergoing treatment in a German hospital and also later in Florida Hospital. Along with palsy he was affected by blood cancer too. Finally on November 24, 1996 he was called to his heavenly abode. A few days before his departure from this world to the presence of our heavenly father, we had a long telephone conversation. As usual I was making an inquiry about his health. During this last talk he opened his heart to me and expressed his anguish and agony about the prevailing sorrowful state of our church. He was deeply distressed and disappointed to witness the degeneration and factional feud in the church. These were the reasons which constrained him to relinquish his positions in the church.

When he poured his heart to an ordinary priest like me I was deeply moved. After having run the race that was set before him he was called to the heavenly kingdom to be there forever. His earthly body was laid to rest along with the great departed Metropolitans at the Seminary Chapel. His tomb is situated by the side of the Malankara Metropolitan Sabha Thejas Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius II.

## **Geevarghese Mar Osthathios Metropolitan**

About the beginning of 1950, it was heard that a ‘Gospel Hall’ had been constructed by a deacon who had undergone his education in America. It had also been told that this deacon was an eloquent speaker. I was a college student at that time and was in very strained circumstances in those days. However, I made up my mind to pay a visit to this ‘Gospel Hall.’ Accordingly in May 1954 I reached there. It was raining heavily there on that day. This Gospel House was of a two storied building of which the ground floor was a prayer hall. Besides the prayer hall, there were only two rooms. An old lady was there as a cook and two or three young men were staying in addition to Dn. M. V. George. After the evening prayer I talked with the deacon for a long time.

The Gospel House was named ‘St. Paul Wyoming Gospel Hall.’ Nobody there knew what is meant by this name Wyoming. Some people said that it was the name of an American lady who donated some dollars to him in consideration of the services rendered to her by him. With this amount this deacon purchased 15 cents of land at Pulimood junction in Mavelikara and built this small building that the missionary work of the Malankara Orthodox Church sprang up and spread out its kender branches to various parts of India. Evangelical works had commenced in Malankara Church during the time of St. Gregorios of Parumala. Subsequently Pathrose Mar Osthathios took keen interest in it and gave it a strong foundation. But it was Geevarghese Mar Osthathios who cleared the ground for it and enabled it to take deep root so as to reach even to the remotest corner of India. My relationship with him that had started way back in the year 1954 continued uninterrupted, first as a teacher - student relationship and later as that of a spiritual father - son relationship.

I had the good fortune to have the presence of H.G. in almost all important events in my life, namely my ordination, marriage, baptism

of my children etc. He was the chief celebrant on the occasion of the marriage of my two children. On the occasion of my son Paul Cherian Achen's Deacon ordination ceremony H.G. arrived here using a third class airticket. I offered him first class ticket, but he refused. Mathews Mar Barnabas was the chief celebrant. On this lengthy service the diocesan metropolitan paid homage to him by inviting him to recite the "ethro" prayer, understanding he was his senior and came here for only this purpose in his old age. Among the eminent metropolitans who took part in the ceremony were Dr. Mathews Mar Severios, Dr. Yakoob Mar Iraenus, Zachariah Mar Nicholovos, Yuhanon Mar Chrisostomos (then a Ramban) and a host of priests and laity. Further details regarding Osthathios thirumeni's visit to America will be described later.

I know very well that he had bestowed a great deal of love and affection towards me. As and when his relatives' marriage or baptism takes place in America he used to say "Isn't A. K. Cherian Achen there? Invite him, he will conduct the ceremony." Hence I got the honour and privilege of conducting two marriages and also baptising some children belonging to his family.

### **Sunthroniso of Makarios Metropolitan - Back to the Diocese**

It was in January 1, 1979 that Makarios Metropolitan took up the administration of the American diocese. While taking up the administration H. G. took meticulous and fastidious care to see that his own henchmen were selected to the council. He was also very particular that everything should go according to H. G's whims and fancies.

His Holiness Baselius MarThoma Mathews I landed at Kennedy airport on July 2, 1979 in connection with Sunthroniso Ceremony. A large number of people including priests and laity came to receive him there. As had been planned earlier, His Holiness was taken to a priest's residence which was located near the airport. After the

reception all those who had arrived at the airport returned to their houses. There is a distance of 49 miles from Kennedy airport to my house. A short time after my arrival at my house I received a telephone call from Mar Makarios. His Grace wanted to ascertain the reason why I had left so soon. His Holiness had remarked that he could not meet me at the airport. To this I replied that I was constrained to depart from there on account of some pressing appointments. I also requested H.G. to inform H.H. that I would present myself before H.H. the very next day itself. On hearing my reply the metropolitan said, "Look, the Catholicate flag has already been hoisted here. Here is a second Devalokam." "That is very nice." I replied and then hung up the phone.

The Sunthroniso Ceremony of Makarios thirumeni was conducted on July 14, 1979 at St. John the Divine Cathedral, a massive building situated in Manhattan. This church is the headquarters of the New York diocese of the Episcopal Church. After the function a grand reception was accorded to H.H. The Catholicos as well as to the Sunthroniso recipient metropolitan. Following the reception meeting a dinner party was held in which the Malabar diocesan metropolitan also participated. In the evening banquet Paulose Mar Gregorios metropolitan also was present. His Grace came here to attend a conference in a nearby city.

Some time back I had written a letter to His Holiness The Catholicos requesting to lay the foundation stone for the proposed Church building in the property which the Bronx Church had purchased on behalf of the Malankara Metropolitan. "We won't allow it to take place here under any circumstances." The air was filled with this battle cry. For further discussion regarding this vexed problem, H.H. gave us an appointment on July 17, 1979. Quite a number of parishioners presented themselves before the H.H. at the stipulated time.

## **Metropolitan locks horns with H.H. the Catholicos**

The scene now shifts to the room in which H.H. sits along with Thomas Mar Timothios and Mar Makarios. Some of us entered the room and kissed the hands of His Holiness the Catholicos and the metropolitans and stood aside. His Holiness looked around and asked “well, Bronx Church vicar and eminent members, what are your requirements? Tell it to me.” “We are here to have a discussion about the contents of my earlier letter. As I had mentioned in it, we have purchased a land and we intend to build a church there. We humbly request Your Holiness lay the foundation stone of it.”

“That is very nice” replied the Catholicos. “Have you brought the title deed of it with you now? If so, I would like to see it. Well, have you showed it to your metropolitan?”

“No” I replied.

“Why is it so?” H.H. asked.

“The metropolitan did not give sanction to purchase the property. He was totally against it.”

“Why? What was the reason behind it?” His Holiness asked me in a surprised tone.

“Thirumeni asked me to postpone it until the registration of American diocese is over. It seems as though His Grace did not like this purchase. That is the reason why we did not hand it over to H.G. for perusal.”

“By the way, what is the connection between the diocesan registration and the purchase of this property?” His Holiness asked me.

“I do not know, holy father” I replied submissively.

As per the instruction of H.H., I handed over the document to Mar Makarios. But to the dismay and surprise of everybody, the metropolitan flatly refused to accept it and said “Give it to the person who lays the foundation stone.” It was very clear that this rude remark was made wilfully and deliberately.

H.H. then went through the documents thoroughly and read it more than once. After remaining silent and tight lipped for some time he said:

“Cherian Achen and committee members did extremely good. Documents of all our churches should be like this.”

Then turning towards Mar Makarios, His Holiness added “Aboon, we should lay the foundation stone. They would be extremely happy if it is done and we would be honoured. So, let it be done.”

“Then you may do it. I won’t come.” The metropolitan retorted.

“Why Aboon is refusing to do it?”

“I have to consult my attorney.”

“Is it so? Well, we are having no engagement tomorrow. You may go and consult your attorney today and then meet me tomorrow.” the Catholicos said.

To this the metropolitan replied in the following way “Aboon, it is good for thou if thou remember one thing - neither thine nor Malankara Church has any authority over the property here since thou are not a citizen of this country. As I am a citizen of this country, I alone have absolute power and authority over the church property here.”

When H.H. heard this rude and insulting comment from the metropolitan he was nonplussed and stunned. As the Catholicos was totally unaware about the rules and regulations prevailing in America he could not give an appropriate and apt reply to this insulting remark. The Catholicos was placed in a predicament and felt like a fish out of water. Here an American citizen is explaining certain legal aspects of that country to a foreigner who is totally unaware about it. But H.H. never had the faintest notion that the metropolitan would utter such blatant lies to him.



We all know that God is truthful and will always abide by truth. It is also our firm faith that ultimately truth will triumph. Here also the same thing happened. As I have mentioned earlier, during this period I was working in the financial department of the Reformed Church of America. It was my habit to read the Wall Street Journal everyday. On that day, that is July 17, 1979 as usual I went through that paper during lunch time. They used to publish world events in a nutshell in the front page of their paper. There I could find out an interesting news item. It was as follows.

“13% of the property of the United States belong to foreigners.” Further details regarding it was given in another page. I read that also. The news item clearly mentioned in unambiguous terms that the foreigners have every right to purchase and own property in America.

His Holiness was stunned and startled at the shocking revelation made by the Metropolitan. Then it came to my mind that the newspaper was already in my briefcase. I took out the newspaper and said “Excuse me Thirumeni, for my interruption. I beg to differ in this matter. What Makarios Thirumeni said is not correct. There is a report in today’s paper regarding it. Then I read out the relevant details connected with it. On hearing this Bava’s face became radiant. After reading the pertinent portion aloud H.H. then said “Ask the deacon to put this paper inside my suit case.” Makarios thirumeni was taken aback at this turn of events and he remained there tongue-tied. Then a story described in the Book of Numbers flashed into my mind all of a sudden. Our Heavenly Father caused a dumb donkey to speak in order to refrain the prophet from uttering curses against the Israelites. In the same way our Lord used here the ‘Wall Street Journal’ to bring out the truth and reveal the true colour and hidden agenda of the Metropolitan.

After the lapse of a few minutes His Holiness asked the Metropolitan “Well Aboon, When are you going to consult your attorney? You may go today and consult him.”

“I am not going today” said the Metropolitan. H.H. became indignant and stood up and asked “Are you going to do it after my departure from here? Aboon, one thing you have to bear in mind. I have got every right and authority to do this thing. But I won’t do such a thing without your consent and presence. So, if you are willing to do something about it do it immediately.”

By this time some people had assembeled in front of H.H.’s room. They informed that the scheduled time for H.H.’s appointment with the dentist was fast approaching. Even though Mar Timothios was present there, he did not utter a single word while these discussions were going on. But after the departure of H.H. and Mar Makarios, Mar Timothios approached me and said “What Cherian Achen told is absolutely correct. We need not show any leniency or forbearance in such matters. However, you could have spoken in a mild tone.” “May be I have spoken in such a way inadvertently, I am not at all haughty or conceited.” Thus I made my stand clear to Mar Timothios.

We waited nearly for four hours for the return of H.H. All except three persons who had come from the parish went back to their homes. The late Mathew Alexander, the then parish secretary, Cherian Koshy and Jacob Thomas remained along with me. We were told that H.H. would return with in one hour. But it was only at 10 pm that H.H. came back. H.H. was surprised to see us at that late hour.

“Oh! You people haven’t yet gone?” H.H. asked surprisingly.

“No, how can we go back without getting a definite answer, Holy Father?” I replied. “Then you should discuss the matter with the metropolitan and do the needful.” Thus H.H. made his stand clear. Wearing black vestment I sat at the feet of Makarios Metropolitan just like an obedient servant. Various matters came for discussion. At last I told him “If Your Grace insist upon making any alteration in the document within the pale of law, it can be done.

Kindly tell the Catholicos to lay the foundation stone of the church building.”

“You need not spend any sleepless night here for getting the foundation stone laid. Under no circumstance it is possible.” The Metropolitan declared bluntly, like a spiteful ordinary person.

My body began to tremble. One of the persons with us began to cry aloud. Tears were trickling from the eyes of the other two. Immediately I stood up and said “Your Grace, we are going now. We will build the church and we will worship in it.”

“O.K. we will wait and see.” The Metropolitan retorted. We kissed his hand and departed. On the way most of the time we were silent. After driving nearly 35 miles they dropped me at my residence. It was my birthday - July 17. The words that I uttered while leaving from the presence of the Metropolitan still linger in my mind. “We will build the church and we will worship in it.”

The very next day parishioners knew what had happened and they took a firm decision to go ahead with the construction work. But the diocese prevailed upon some people and brought them into their fold. But the majority of the people stood firmly with the parish. The parishioners heard with dismay and disbelief the contention of Makarios thirumeni that the Malankara Orthodox Church has no authority or jurisdiction over American Churches. They had their own apprehension about the aim and intention of the Metropolitan. Sunthroniso committee gave permission to H.H. to conduct an evening prayer service at Bronx Church before his departure to Kerala. After this prayer service a public meeting also was arranged at which a memorandum was submitted to H.H. on behalf of the parish. In that memorandum it was categorically stated that the Bronx Church would always remain as an integral part of the Malankara Orthodox Church. But till now there remains a lingering regret in my mind in connection with his reply speech he delivered there. In that speech H.H. unequivocally declared that he would return to Kerala

only after laying the foundation stone of the church building, if the sky did not fall down.”

### **His Holiness the Catholicos returns**

The day of H.H.'s departure date arrived. But it happened to be a working day for me. Since H.H. had left us in the lurch in our hour of need, I took a firm decision not to go to the airport to see H.H. off. But on second thought I changed my mind. Reconsideration is a boon which God has bestowed upon us. When we are upset and agitated, it is but natural for us to take this sort of drastic decision. But later on when we make a self-examination about the whole thing we may retrace our earlier decision. In my case also the same thing happened. When I entered in my office the prick of my conscience troubled me. The Catholicos is the supreme spiritual head of my church. I am acquainted with His Holiness for the past many years. My own association with H.H. dates back to my ordination, marriage and so many other things in which H.H. was the chief celebrant. All these things flashed through my inward eyes at a stretch. More over, H.H. was constrained to go back without fulfilling what His Holiness wanted to do for this parish, because of the subversive policy adopted by the Metropolitan. As such, if I absent myself deliberately from seeing H.H. off at the airport I would be doing a great injustice to His Holiness. Hence I took leave in the afternoon and immediately set out to the airport.

When I reached the terminal everybody was present there. The Catholicos had a serious expression on his face and was deep in thought. At times he was looking around. Instead of approaching His Holiness, I stood a far. Then H.H. beckoned me. Immediately I approached and kissed his hand. H.H. asked me “Cherian Achen, why have you kept away from my presence? What is the reason behind it?”

“Today is a working day. I could come out from the office only just now.” Then a short rough sound “Hum” came out from H.H.'s

throat. This is the sound of nobility prevalent in days of yore. I had heard this sort of grunting sound on another occasion. That was on my second Qurbana celebration. My first Qurbana celebration was at my own parish. The second one was at Mar Elia Chapel and for that I had extended an invitation to His Holiness. After the Qurbana instead of going to the vestry H.H. remained in the Madhbaha for some time. When prayer and other functions connected with the Qurbana was over H.H. came near me and uttered this same grunting sound “Hum” and said “Your Qurbana celebration was excellent. It is exactly like that of the veteran priests.” H.H. then smiled and touched my shoulders in appreciation and retreated to the vestry.

H.H. then touched my shoulders and moved a little away because the ‘caucus’ were standing near. Makarios thirumeni also was there and was talking with an airport employee whom Panam - Achenkunju (Zachariah Kurian) brought there. “Cherian Achen, I know very well that you are grief stricken and also very much dejected. You are not at all at fault on these developments. Whatever you have done with regard to the purchase of the property is absolutely correct and also in order. But you should understand why I could not comply with your request. Then pointing H.H.’s finger at Makarios thirumeni said “I have laid my hands on this Metropolitan’s head. If I do anything against his wishes now, his prestige and reputation will be in jeopardy. As a result, if some problems arise in future everybody will put the blame for such a thing on me. If I insist upon strict rules things would become more complicated and cumbersome. Let them handle everything in their own ways. Now I think you have fully understood the stand taken by me in this vexed problem.”

Without probing deep into that subject I then put forward another pertinent question. “Now there is nobody to lay the foundation stone. When the construction work is over, will your Holiness be kind enough to consecrate it? Or else who will do it?”

“I do not want to come over here again. You may construct it and conduct a consecration ceremony for the time being. The blessings of God Almighty will be with you always. According to my knowledge, we have nearly 1054 churches. No one knows how many of them are consecrated. A time may come for all these things. ...”

While we were talking some people were watching us from a distance. Then some one came and informed that it was time for boarding. I kissed H.H.'s hand and moved away. Then some priests who always assumed themselves as “Big guns” came along with airport employees to escort H.H. into the plane. But the security staff chased away some of these intruders from there. Till then they appeared to be highly complacent and happy.

One among them, on seeing me shouted sarcastically “Foundation stone of Bronx Church was not laid; and the sky did not fall down.” These were the very words of H.H. when a reception was accorded to him at Bronx Church. All the people who were with him laughed hilariously and marched in front of me triumphantly. “At last this sort of riff-raffs and good for nothing fellowbare here to see off our spiritual head. What a degeneration!” I thought to myself.

Thus they placed the Bronx Church in a desolate pit and laid big stones over it so that it should never resurrect. With such self-satisfaction and conviction these Christian brothers cheerfully went back to their homes. With tears trickling from my eyes I also went home with down cast eyes. From that moment St. Mary's parish got a fresh lease of life and vigour.

The next ten years were the years of litigation, cold war and feud for the American diocese. And it came to pass, nearly twelve years after the Sunthroniso of the Metropolitan, as per the decision of the episcopal synod on July 1991, the administration of the American diocese was vested in the hands of the Catholicos. I think this is the first time that such an incident took place in our church.

When the Catholicos left America without laying the foundation

stone of Bronx St. Mary's Church there was a deliberate attempt from certain quarters to create fissures in the church. They were of the view that if another church is constructed just near Bronx Church they would be able to put an end to the "arrogance and sense of superiority" of Bronxites. As a result there emerged two groups in the church. For this purpose a priest was 'imported' from Kerala and he was securely lodged in the house of a parishioner. They took delight in spreading malicious gossips and scandals against the vicar. It was even told that the vicar had made a fake document and that was the reason why the Catholicos went back without laying the foundation stone of the church. It had its desired effect. A section of the laity believed it and they became very angry. Usually the laity will have no apprehension about the integrity and righteousness of their bishops. Hence when an issue like this occurred, a section of the laity put the entire blame on the vicar. But the other section who knew the ins and outs of the whole affair stood firmly behind their vicar. But a group of people used to rant and rave inside the church while the service was going on there on every Sunday. During this period some of the relations of these people who had come from Kerala also used to attend church services on Sundays.

Without knowing anything about the actual facts they also joined the bandwagon of these people. Thus pandemonium prevailed in the church on almost all Sundays. No one could attend church service in a calm and serene atmosphere and the priests could not celebrate the service peacefully because of the action of these trouble makers. This sorry state of affairs continued relentlessly for some more time. Later on these new comers formed into two groups and established two churches in the vicinity and thus two more parishes came into existence. But the troubles and tribulations of St. Mary's Church did not come to an end with this turn of events. The relatives of those who founded these new churches still retained their membership at St. Mary's church and continued to create troubles as usual. Because of the loutish behaviour of these people, the

spiritual growth of the children of the parishioners was adversely affected. Later history has proved this fact.

### **Laying the Foundation Stone**

With the verbal permission of His Holiness the Catholicos and in accordance with the decision of the parish assembly, Fr. A. K. Cherian conducted laying of the foundation stone ceremony on November 4, 1979. The function was conducted after the celebration of the Holy Communion and a large number of people took part in it. Fr. Markose Mylakkal and Fr. K. Mathai served as Co-celebrants.

It was because of the bounteous blessings of our Heavenly Father that we could construct a church of 79 feet length and 40 feet breadth. In spite of bickering and constant quarrel we were able to finish the construction work within two years. But we had to incur some loss owing to lack of experience and also because of the fact that the construction was being done in an alien land.

### **Temporary Consecration**

The temporary consecration of the church was conducted on September 12, 13, 1981 and the first service was conducted here. Americans as well as people belonging to various denominations also took part in this function. A newspaper named "Daily News" published a writeup under the caption "Achievement of Indian Christians." President and secretary of National Council of churches and representatives from Presbyterian church, Reformed Church, Malankara Catholic church, Mar Thoma Church etc. also graced the occasion by their esteemed presence. The U.N. Ambassador also was present on the occasion.

### **Clergy Fellowship, Indian Orthodox Christian Association**

On the day of the consecration ceremony and after the conclusion of the evening prayer the priests who have come to take part in the



function held a prayer meeting to find out a lasting solution to the problems confronting the Diocese. The period between 1979 July 14 (the day on which Sunthroniso ceremony was conducted) and Sep. 12, 1981 the diocese was in turmoil and was facing a great crisis. In order to wriggle out it from this predicament and also to find out a lasting solution to these problems an organization named 'Clergy fellowship' was formed. Fr. K. G. Philipose was elected as its secretary. Dissatisfied and disillusioned with the functioning of the diocese some people from various parishes also formed a laity organisation named 'Indian Orthodox Christian Association.' T. M. Easo of Bronx Church became its first president. It was also decided that members of this fellowship should gather together once a month for prayer and meditation. The very next day a trimass was celebrated in the church. Lunch was served and all the members exchanged pleasantries with each other. Filled with divine grace everybody went home praising God for his beautiful gift of this church building. It had been decided earlier by the general body that each member should donate 1000 dollars for the church building. Out of this 500 would be regarded as a donation and the balance 500 as a loan which is to be refunded with 6% simple interest.

Even though almost every one gave the donation some people were unwilling to remit the deposit amount. Perhaps they might have thought that the loan amount would never be refunded. But our heavenly father helped us to clear the entire loan amount within three years.

When I reached home after the function I received a phone call from Makarios thirumeni. His Grace told me that he had heard about the temporary consecration ceremony and congratulated me for it. Then he added "I was here and had a desire to come over there for the function."

"Then why did you not turn up?" I asked.

"Well, how would have you received me if I had come?"

“Exactly like the customary reception being given to a metropolitan. That is with lighted candles.” I answered.

On hearing my reply the Metropolitan laughed hilariously. I also joined in it. The conversation ended there. Everybody knows that he is an astute and sharp-witted “politician.”

After taking up the administration of the diocese, His Grace despatched commandment letters to all parishes for running the administration quickly and effectively.

### **Church representative meeting at Buffalo**

According to a commandment letter dated 27, November 1979 it was informed that a church representative meeting would be held on January 19, 1980 at Buffalo in order to discuss various programmes and activities meant for the next year. One of the items included in the agenda (Item No. 8) was the certificate of incorporation (Draft). At that time there was a lot of talk going on among the members regarding it. Some people had their own apprehensions about it. They were of the view that there was something fishy about it. Hence I asked for a copy of it but it was not given to me. But with the help of an attorney I was able to obtain one from the Erie county office. I wanted to know the ins and outs of it before attending this meeting. There were many things in it which were at variance with the constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Church. As I had mentioned about it earlier, there is no need of repetition. It was with this copy that we three people set out to take part in the meeting.

A general body meeting of Bronx Church was held in order to elect two members who were to attend this meeting. Accordingly, M/s A. M. Alexander and M. K. Thomas were selected. We three reached at the venue of the meeting early in the morning of January 18. In the afternoon the main item, namely the certificate of incorporation was taken up for discussion. Then a white man introducing himself as the attorney of the Metropolitan appeared on

the scene. The Metropolitan introduced him to the delegates and told that if any one requires any clarification in this regard, he can have it from him.

Some copies pertaining to the incorporation were distributed to the delegates. As it was a legal document nobody had any idea about it. All the delegates sat there without asking any question. As we had gone through the documents earlier we had some definite idea about it. Hence I asked the following questions to the attorney.

“Sir, have you read the constitution of the Indian Orthodox Church?”

“No”, he replied hesitantly.

“Well, are you then aware about the fact that this diocese is a part of the Indian Orthodox Church in which we are all members?”

“Yes, I know” he replied.

“Since you have already stated that you have not yet read the constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Church, I would like to point out that many of the articles incorporated in this bye law are at variance and contrary to the constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Church. When our church was registered at New York state, we had given the constitution of the Malankara church as its bye-law. Hence we cannot approve this registration as it contravenes with Malankara churches constitution violating its sanctity.”

“What are the items according to your opinion at variance?” the attorney asked.

“Mainly item Nos. 8, 9 & 10. These articles are at loggerheads with the basic structure of our constitution. Various other defects and flaws are also visible here. Unless you rectify these defects we cannot give our consent to it.” Thus I made our stand clear.

The attorney remained silent for sometime. It seemed as though the meeting would come to a dead lock. Then A. M. Alexander hit

upon an idea to tide over the impasse. He stood up and put forward a proposal to ease the tension. He mooted the idea of sending the copies of the draft registration to various parishes and ascertain their views and opinions. This suggestion was acceptable to all the delegates and thus the meeting was postponed for another convenient day for further discussion without any verbal exchange or uproar.

But contrary to this decision, the Metropolitan submitted this document in the Synod meeting held in February 1980. But the synod sent it back to him with the instruction to make the requisite amendment as had been contemplated earlier and then to despatch the same to all the parishes. The letters of Daniel Mar Philexinos, the then synod Secretary, dated July 22, 1980 bear ample testimony to this fact. But not a single parish received such a rectified incorporation document from the Metropolitan thereafter.

### **Fr. P. C. Varghese appears on the scene**

It was in the early 1980's that a priest named Fr. P. C. Varghese attracted the attention of the Metropolitan. This priest, in fact, was forbidden by the church to conduct priestly duties. He reached in the middle of 1960 and stayed at first in Boston and later in Florida. He started his priestly career by joining the Sleebadasa order and subsequently got ordination from Mookkancheril Mar Osthathios Metropolitan. After that he got married and then migrated to America. I was familiar with this priest while he was with the Sleeba Dasa order. His conduct and character were strange and shady. Those who had no idea about his background, will fall into the pit which he cleverly dug for him. I am giving below the testimony of a senior Metropolitan who had a first hand and thorough knowledge about his character.

“I know P. C. Varghese Achen. He is unscrupulous and fraudulent; a strange creature thriving on deceit. He .....” (Exh. 30).

He razed to the ground the very foundation of the diocese within eight or nine years of his tenure in the administration. A mass petition

was submitted against him after the church representative's meeting of 1989. The petition was forwarded on the basis of a resolution moved by the representatives.

Introducer - Fr. Kurian Thottupuram Cor Episcopa.

Proposer - Dr. Thomas John Washington D. C.

We shall examine later why such a resolution was passed against this priest in that meeting. Between the year 1988-89 five criminal cases were filed against him at Florida for cheating, breach of trust, swindling and fraudulent financial practices etc. Through real estate business he deceived several of his friends. Through treachery he amassed huge amounts from friends and well-wishers. At the same time he had very good relationship with some of our senior metropolitans. Later the same metropolitans were constrained to disown him and were forced to say that this priest had cheated many persons. Some of my friends also happened to be in that list. Details regarding it had appeared in the newspaper 'Orthodox Herald' dated January 30, 1990 but the contents of it cannot be included in this book though it cannot be branded as obscene.

Through the commandment letter No. 90 of 1980 the secretaryship of the diocese was bestowed upon him by the metropolitan.

The decision taken by the synod in the month of February 1980 of the registration regarding the amendment, was not despatched to the parishes. The metropolitan sent the old document to the churches saying that it had been approved by the synod. In 1981 the metropolitan came to Bronx church to get the registration approved. Construction work of the church was going on vigorously at that time. Parishioners had already turned into two groups and the factional feud and rivalry were going on unabated. One group was with the metropolitan. The other group, which was against the metropolitan believed that if the metropolitan arrived there the construction work would come to a stand still. They also were of

the view that the visit would add fuel to the fire. Hence the majority insisted upon to request Thirumeni not to come to the church. But I could not comply with the opinion of the majority. Since the metropolitan's visit is prerogative, "Let H.G. come" I told the members who were against his visit. I never wanted to stand in the way of H.G.'s spiritual powers and privileges in this regard. But there were grumbling and murmuring from the laity against my opinion and stand.

The metropolitan, along with Fr. P. C. Varghese arrived at the scheduled time. As it was clear that his new secretary also would be with him, three persons, namely T. M. Easo, T. V. Mathews and A. M. Alexander stood outside the church. Alex led the metropolitan into the church. At the same time the others asked P. C. Varghese Achen about his identity and whereabouts. To this he replied that he was the secretary and as such he had come along with the metropolitan. But they objected to his entry and asked him not to enter the church. Finding that the situation is not congenial and also being fully aware of the fact that discretion is better part of valour he returned in the same way as he had come.

After the celebration of the Holy Mass the Metropolitan expressed his resentment and dissatisfaction at the "disgraceful" expulsion of Fr. Varghese from the church. Till then he did not talk much about it. There were sufficient reasons for peoples' anger towards Fr. Varghese. He was bringing out a newspaper. He used that newspaper to spread all sorts of scandals and allegation to create strife among the people. When the Catholicos returned without laying the foundation stone, he published an article in it under the caption,

"Catholicos of the East refused to lay the foundation stone in some one's property." Some loafers exerted influence over him to write such an article.

As the metropolitan insisted upon holding a general body meeting it was held under H.G.'s chairmanship. He revealed the purpose of

his visit in a mild tone. He also informed that the synod had approved the registration and the bye-law. But the members were not convinced. They insisted upon to have an ocular proof regarding the insignia and emblem of the Catholicos in the letter. To this the metropolitan said that he had not brought it but it would be sent immediately. Thus saying he wound up the meeting abruptly. During the meeting I had to ask several questions in connection with the registration which the metropolitan did not like. In order to put me in an embarrassing situation the metropolitan in a sarcastic tone said “you need not bother about the issues which Cherian Achen raised here. It is because of his blood pressure problem that he is raving like this.” To some extent what he said was correct. When the problems in the church began to multiply my BP had increased tremendously. But the way in which the metropolitan presented that fact and the tone and tenor of his speech was quite unbecoming on the part of a metropolitan. Some people became highly indignant at this. But nobody ventured to say anything publicly to disgrace the metropolitan.

### **A Notorious Fake Commandment letter**

A few days after this meeting I received an envelope which contained a registration form approved by the synod and also a commandment letter from the H.H. The Catholicos. The emblem and insignia of H.H. also were in it. The commandment letter was in H.H.'s letterhead itself. The sum and substance of the commandment was this! “As per this commandment letter you must accept the registration.”

While going through the letter I had an uncanny feeling of having read this letter earlier. The handwriting is exactly that of H.H. and there is no iota of doubt about it. But I felt something fishy about the contents of the letter. After the Sunthroniso and prior to his departure to Kerala H.H. had written a circular letter to various parishes in America. It was about incorporation, and about the need of rendering implicit obedience to the decision of the higher authorities etc.

That letter was of six pages. But when I went through this one page letter I was under the impression that it might be a synopsis of the above mentioned letter. However, I thought of reading that old letter once again to clear my doubts. But this time when I read that letter I stood baffled. On closer examination, I could find that it was a forged one. Certain words and sentences were cut out from that original letter and pasted it in such a way as to arouse no suspicion. A cursory look at this letter, of course, will not arouse any doubt or suspicion about its authenticity. My heart was filled with anguish and sorrow at this discovery. How can a metropolitan commit such a heinous duplicity? What a mighty fall from his faith! What will be the repercussions of it in the church? All these questions brought forth a host of melancholy thoughts in my mind. Immediately the parish managing committee was convened and after elaborate deliberations the matter was reported to the Catholicos. Subsequently we received a letter from Metropolitan Daniel Mar Philexinos, the synod secretary.

The reply from the metropolitan is as follows:

I received your letter only after coming back from the synod meeting. But the Catholicos got it on the last day of the meeting. All of us are deeply distressed and worried about this forged letter. The certificate of incorporation itself is fake. It is not sent by the Catholicos. That is why the seal and insignia are not found in it. All of us are distressed and disturbed at the audacity of the metropolitan in resorting to this sort of manipulation.

You may inform me about further developments in this regard.

March 6, 1981  
Pathanamthitta.

When the Catholicos sought an explanation from the metropolitan, he cleverly washed his hands out of it. He simply told that it might be the handiwork of Fr. P. C. Varghese.



Forgery, counterfeiting, fabrication etc. are serious criminal offences. We give eternal values to truth, righteousness, justice and goodness. But all these wicked and nasty deeds have taken place inside the church. But very often the persons who are responsible for these types of criminal activities go scot-free and later would be elevated to higher positions. That would be another feather on their caps. Later events of the next ten years in the history of American diocese proved it correct. The guilty go unpunished and they would be placed in high pedestals. In spite of all these things this fake commandment letter turned out to be a blessing in disguise later. A certificate of incorporation letter with the genuine seal and insignia of the catholicos approved by the synod in February 1980 was despatched from the catholicate office to all the parishes of American diocese directly. The parishes were asked to register this document with the appropriate authorities concerned. As such this document which proclaims the power of the Malankara Church constitution clearly ratifies the power and authority of the Malankara Orthodox Church over the American diocese.

Even if some bye-laws are added to this incorporation, the status of the parish will remain intact and unchanged since the power and authority of the American diocese is vested with the Catholicos as per the incorporation registered earlier. But it is the duty of the higher authorities to inquire how many parishes have duly executed the registration as per this incorporation. When we consider and appraise the situation prevailing in 1982, there is every possibility that some of the parishes which are on the side of the metropolitan may not approve of this registration, as they would stand with him through thick and thin. It is my sincere and earnest request that the church headquarters should enquire whether all the parishes have complied with the commandment letter of October 17, 1982.

Moreover, the 11th clause of the above said registration is known as the 'dissolution clause.' This clause deals with the question pertaining to the property of the church. If the functioning of the

parish comes to a stand still and the diocese becomes defunct, what is to be done with regard to the property of the church is the cardinal point involved in this clause. In accordance with the registration of Mar Makarios, if such an eventuality occurs, the entire property of the church would be reverted to the state. But the Bronx St. Mary's church was totally against this clause. Bronx church's contention was that if such an eventuality takes place the money and property should be reverted to the church instead of the state. Accordingly in the new registration, the right to ownership was to be vested upon the church instead of the state and under any circumstance if the church, becomes defunct, the members of corporation and the New York state supreme court can take appropriate decision. This spectacular and triumphant achievement was certainly a feather in the cap of St. Mary's church, Bronx.

### **The visit of His Grace Philipose Mar Theophilos**

Having come to understand that H.G. Dr. Philipose Mar Theophilus metropolitan was arriving in the states on July 7, 1981 I extended an invitation to him. In that invitation letter I had also requested him to celebrate the Holy Qurbana in our church. In due course I received his consent letter to it. After his arrival some of us went to a church where he was at that time and once again extended our invitation. When I joined the theological seminary he was the principal. He had great love and affection towards me just as Paulose Mar Gregorios had bestowed upon me (Exh. 34).

During this time tension was mounting in the parish as well as in the diocese. Many of our people were residing at the northern area of the church. They were upright, honest and high principled persons with impeccable character. In order to bring them more close to the church it was decided to form a prayer group for them. As such, prayer meetings were held once or twice every month in rotation. But when dispute cropped up between the parish and the diocese, the diocesan workers lured these people to their fold. Inspite of it,

myself and today's New Delhi Metropolitan His Grace Mar Demetrios (he was then ministering in the parish as a layman) used to take part in the prayer meeting. But some among these people were unwilling to give any consideration to the parish priest or to any one representing him. Revi Mathew (now Demetrios Metropolitan) was treated very badly on the occasion of an evening prayer on one Saturday. The matter was reported to me on Sunday. We two then decided not to take part in the prayer meeting thereafter. It was at this juncture that His Grace Mar Theophilus arrived in America. The metropolitan was a native of Kottayam. There was another person in that prayer group who also hailing from Kottayam. That person was well acquainted with the metropolitan. He was an active member of the prayer group. Hence it was decided to hold a prayer meeting in the house of the above mentioned person in the presence of Makarios thirumeni. His Grace Mar Theophilus also was invited for this function. Both the metropolitans arrived on time and many people gathered there to take part in this prayer meeting. After some time Mar Theophilus became uneasy and restless. He asked the host "Where is your vicar A. K. Cherian Achen? He has not yet turned up. Will he come?"

The master of the house replied, "Your Grace, Achen is not in a position to come over here. He has informed me about his inability to arrive here" (This was a blatant lie. Nobody had informed me about this meeting). Metropolitan was visibly upset and deeply discomfited at this turn of events. It was very clear to every one that he was agitated. He then stood up to leave from there and told the Metropolitan "Aboon, now I am leaving. I cannot take part in any spiritual activity without the participation of the vicar."

When things have reached at this stage the master of the house and Makarios thirumeni requested Mar Theophilus not to take such a drastic step. They very politely requested him to be there in the function. As a result of this request Mar Theophilus attended the function in a disgruntled and dissatisfied manner. Within ten minutes

someone who was a witness to all these incidents informed me about it over the phone.

A Metropolitan presiding over a prayer meeting in a house without the knowledge or presence of the parish priest on one side! A senior Metropolitan who insists that he would not take part in the meeting unless the parish priest is present, on other side! What a paradox!

The diocesan Metropolitan refused permission to Mar Theophilus to enter in the Bronx Church. Thus the earlier declaration by this group that no metropolitan will be allowed entry to this church was duly fulfilled.

It was the unanimous decision of the parish that as soon as the construction work of the church is over, the Catholicate designate Mathews Mar Coorilos should be invited for its consecration ceremony. Accordingly, I invited him and his consent letter to it was received. In addition to his letter the Metropolitan conveyed his consent personally through the then deacon Revi Mathew who had been in Kerala during that period to receive his sub deacon ordination. I had also informed all these things to His Holiness the Catholicos as well as to the Diocesan metropolitan.

I would now like to quote a sentence from a letter which Paulose Mar Gregorios Metropolitan despatched to me on October 24, 1980.

“Coorilos Thirumeni will not come without Makarios Thirumeni’s permission. This is a delicate issue” (Exh. 36).

### **Dissension begins in parishes**

Sunthroniso ceremony was conducted on July 14, 1979. After a lapse of nearly one year dissension and bickering began to surface in some parishes. It was at Brooklyn St. Baselius parish that trouble began to brew. Without giving any consideration to him or hearing his version of the story, the diocesan metropolitan gave his full support to certain people who deliberately opposed the vicar of the church.

At the same time the diocesan metropolitan held the view that this priest resisted his commandment and refused to obey him. As a corollary to this cold war, a new parish emerged at Jackson Heights in Queens under the name St. Mary's Malankara Orthodox Church. This priest was behind it and it occurred in the year 1981.

About this time dissension broke out in another parish in Washington where there were only 16 families as members. The incumbent parish priest was not made permanent there. Instead another priest belonging to the Metropolitan's family was installed in his place.

An extract from a memorandum submitted by them to the Metropolitan on July 15, 1982 is given below.

("It is painful to state that not only your grace ignores our plea, but also did adopt a policy of 'divide and rule' which resulted in a division in parish") (Exh. 37)

During this period, the American diocese was nicknamed as a 'problem diocese' among church circles. Friction began to brew in other parishes too. On November 21, 1981 I received a letter from Osthathios thirumeni. Full text of it is given below:

My dear Achen,

Yesterday I wrote a letter to Aboon Mar Makarios. In that letter I have informed him that I would be arriving at Kennedy Airport on December 23 at 15.35 hours. It would be highly beneficial if a conciliation conference is convened before Christmas. For that a one day clergy retreat conference is highly necessary. Let Bronx church be the venue for the retreat. You may request metropolitan to convene this retreat meeting. Let peace prevail at Christmas. Let those priests who can spare time for it come and take part in it. Do everything with utmost devotion and prayer (Exh. 40).

I had conveyed this message to the diocesan metropolitan on November 27. In that letter I had clearly mentioned that it was being written as per the instruction of Mar Osthathios. I also made it clear

that I would do everything for its smooth functioning. But unfortunately I received no reply from him in connection with it.

## **Two personalities - Mar Makarios and Mar Osthathios**

These two illustrious and distinguished metropolitans were entirely different in their work style, words and deeds. In short, they kept divergent views and outlook and there was no resemblance or similarity in their outlook and perspectives. Everything that Mar Osthathios did was with bona fide intentions. He never wanted to possess anything for him. Whatever he possessed was meant for God and the church. Hence he had no difficulty in conducting the administration of the church. He always derived his strength from prayer. "My help comes from Jehovah who made heaven and earth." That was his motto. Mar Makarios was highly domineering, overbearing and autocratic. He always gave emphasis on law and litigation. Hence he considered conciliation and peace talk merely as rubbish. As a result of this the desire of Mar Osthathios never came to fruition.

By this time one of the priests had been suspended. Mar Osthathios arrived here mainly to settle the issues between the parish and the diocese involving certain constitutional issues and also to get the suspension of the priest revoked. H.G. was staying with me on most of these days. A conciliation meeting was held at Staten Island Holiday inn. The two metropolitans and some priests participated in that meeting and a settlement agreement was signed. In the meanwhile some people laid down a rather perplexing precondition for the entry of Mar Osthathios to Bronx Church. They insisted that Fr. A. K. Cherian, the vicar, should apologize to Makarios thirumeni. I then told them that I had no objection to tender an apology as they had asked, provided they let me know the whys and wherefores of it. I am entitled to know what wrong I had done to the metropolitan. No one was able to find any fault with me in this

regard. Still they wanted to have my unconditional apology. Then I made my stand clear. There is no meaning in tendering an apology unless and until the accusers give evidence against me. Tendering an apology for apology's sake is something which I cannot agree with. Thus the whole thing came to a stand still. However, Osthathios thirumeni came to the church and celebrated the Holy Qurbana and also delivered a discourse in the church. But all these things had no effect in the attitude of the rebels. Subsequent events clearly proved it. As usual they created pandemonium in the church unabated.

### **A Delegate meeting of the diocese**

A diocesan delegate meeting was held on April 17, 1982 at Chicago St. Thomas Church. There was a large gathering as most of the delegates participated in it. It was also an election meeting. As the period of the office bearers who were elected in 1979 March in the Bronx Church was about to end, new members were to be elected consisting of secretary, council members etc. In that meeting Fr. T. A. Thomas, K. T. Idiculla of Bronx church were elected as diocesan secretary and treasurer respectively. Myself and four other members were elected to the diocesan council. Several important resolutions were passed in that meeting. It was also decided to dissolve the existing incorporation and in its stead to incorporate according to the certificate of incorporation which has been passed by the episcopal synod in 1980 (Exh. 41).

(The general body meeting held at Bronx Church on October 17, 1982 had approved the registration sent from the church headquarters and the copy of the same was despatched to the diocesan Metropolitan.)

In this meeting certain other crucial problems also cropped up. Several representatives expressed their displeasure at the Metropolitan's stay at Buffalo and also about his callous and indifferent attitude towards the parishioners as and when they contacted him over the phone. The delegates also pointed out that

they were pinpointing this factor for the smooth functioning of the diocese. The majority were in favour of his stay at New York for this purpose. The number of immigrants were increasing day by day. Along with it parishes were also multiplying. The parishioners brought forth all these arguments before the metropolitan for his kind consideration. They also pointed out that it was the solemn duty of the diocesan metropolitan to comply with the request of the parishioners if that proposal was good for the diocese. If the proposal of the majority is not considered it would be against democratic principles and values. But the response from the metropolitan was highly disappointing. He said “I have fully understood what you have said. But one thing I want to make it clear. You need not do anything for me. If you intend to do anything, let it be for my successor.”

Here the Metropolitan’s tone and tenor was somewhat sarcastic and scornful. It could be interpreted in two ways.

(I) However you may try to achieve your goal, it won’t succeed. Hence you need not waste your valuable time on it. I don’t require any help from you.

(II) Moreover, your effort to change my residence from here to New York would be futile. I will stay here itself. What can you people do?

“Man proposes and God disposes.” So goes the old saying. His successor, within two years after his arrival here, was able to possess a dwelling place as well as an office room here. We would certainly have been able to construct a splendid mansion for our diocesan centre much earlier, if we had not devoted our time and energy on trifles and feuds. In spite of all these impediments we were able to accomplish that long cherished desire. We could possess a beautiful diocesan centre worth 3 million dollars. I can proudly proclaim that of all the parishes in this diocese it was Bronx Church that donated more amount for this mighty cause (one lakh three thousand dollars).

During these types of meetings I expressed my views and opinions bluntly. Those who were not in the habit of prejudging the issues



were extremely happy at this. When matters relating to the diocese appeared detrimental to the growth of the diocese it was my habit to pinpoint it. Thus it caused a terrible headache to those who sided with the ruling faction.

On one occasion when I came out from such a meeting, Fr. P. C. Varghese, the then secretary of the metropolitan said “we expect absolute obedience in these types of meetings.” Instead of giving him a befitting reply, I simply ignored him. That itself served as an appropriate reply to his overbearing and bullying nature.

After taking part in some of these meetings I could understand that neither the diocese nor the parishes derived any benefit out of it. These meetings were convened solely for the personal aggrandisement of certain people. Hence I deliberately refrained from taking part in it.

Fr. P. C. Varghese was very clever and capable in preparing projects. The sum and substance of a project report which he presented for the diocesan centre is given below. According to the plan envisaged by him, the diocese should purchase 100 acres of land near Princeton University and construct 100 residential buildings in it. By disposing 80 houses the debts incurred for this project could easily be cleared.

The remaining 20 houses, which belong to the diocese and are free from all encumbrances, could also be sold in the same way. With that money we could easily purchase a fine building for diocesan office either in New York or in any other place according to the desire of the metropolitan. A lot of time was devoted for the discussion of this so called grand project!! At last the metropolitan himself intervened and put an end to further proceedings in the matter as he himself became aware that it was a ‘Utopian Scheme.’ Any one with a little bit of common sense could easily understand that this scheme was not at all viable. But common sense was a very uncommon thing as far as these people were concerned.

On July 5, 1983 I tendered my resignation from the diocesan council and sent a letter to the metropolitan explaining the reasons behind it. I made it clear in unambiguous terms that the diocese would not be benefitted in any way by my being a committee member in it. Before submitting this resignation I devoted a lot of time for prayer in order to arrive at a right decision.

Even though the construction work of the church building was finished and temporary consecration ceremony was conducted, in the Bronx everybody was eager to have an official consecration ceremony. Accordingly, they invited the Catholicos designate and the consent from him was obtained for the same. But the diocesan metropolitan raised his objection to this function. Hence that function did not take place. Later the general body meeting held on February 20, 1983 decided to invite the Catholicos once again for this function. As the Catholicos was not in a position to travel this much distance at a stretch, commandment letter was sent to us to invite the Catholicos - designate. Accordingly, as per the decision of the managing committee held in November 1983 the Catholicos Designate was invited and the decision conveyed to the Diocesan Metropolitan with all details.

By the end of 1982 the 10th anniversary meeting of the parish was conducted. The Diocesan Metropolitan was invited for this function. But he replied that he could celebrate the Holy Qurbana only in the evening. But the parishioners were not interested in having the Holy communion being celebrated in the evening. In connection with it he sent a commandment letter (64/82) to the parish in which certain other things also were mentioned. I would like to quote one sentence from it: "I am extremely happy to receive \$ 500 from you for diocesan fund."

I am just mentioning this fact in order to point out one thing clearly. Even though the Diocesan Metropolitan victimised and harassed us in manifold ways, we used to pay the money due to the Diocese promptly. Over and above that every year more than one occasion

we invited him to the church and paid tribute to him inspite of difference of opinion with regard to his programmes and policies.

## **The Commencement of Fund Collection**

Let me go back to a few years and then resume where we have stopped. The Bronx Parish which is one of the oldest parishes of this diocese has always extended its helping hands to the Malankara Orthodox Church whenever the church headquarters faced financial crunch. Economic position of Kerala during the 1960s was in bad shape. During this period the influx of Malayalees to the Middle East and the states had only just commenced. Agriculture was the only source of income for the common man in Kerala. In short the people of Kerala were leading just a hand to mouth existence during this period. As a result the church also was facing monetary difficulties.

Prior to his departure to eternity in 1964, the blessed Catholicos Geevarghese II, had cherished a strong desire to modernise the Catholicate palace. It was at the fag end of his life that the southern side of the present Devalokam palace was constructed. Only limited facilities were available there at that time. The Catholicos entrusted the church managing committee with the entire duty of completing the remaining construction work. But nothing was done during the tenure of H.H. Augen Catholicos. His successor H.H. Vattakkunnel Mathews I, Catholicos of the East took up the unfinished work with zeal and enthusiasm. It was estimated that Rs. 7.5 lakhs were required to finish this project. Three commandment letters were issued for it. For the fund collection of this project the blessed Joseph Mar Pachomios was deputed to the states by the Catholicos in 1978. The Malayalees of America at that time were in straitlaced circumstances. The immigration visas were issued only for nurses. After the arrival of the wives in America their husbands and children also migrated in due course. These people accepted whatever job they got and began to lead a happy life. As far as men were concerned their salaries were comparatively low.

I was familiar with His Grace Mar Pachomios Metropolitan from his priesthood. His name at that time was Fr. P. V. Joseph. While a B.A. student of Catholicate College Pathanamthitta he was serving as the parish priest of Paranthal St. George Church (Pongalady Church) which was very near to my house. From that time we became close friends. When he arrived in America it was at Bronx Church that he first celebrated the Holy Mass. Here I would like to quote a sentence from the commandment letter of His Holiness the Catholicos dated 19-9-78:

Beloved of the Lord,

I am in receipt of the two thousand thirty three US Dollar which you have collected from your church and sent through Pachomios Metropolitan. Let me express my profound happiness and gratitude for it. May the God Almighty amply reward you for the enthusiasm and commitment that you have displayed for this mighty cause (Exh. 46).

From that time several people used to come over here for fund collection mentioning innumerable requirements. Some of them arrived with the knowledge and consent of the church authorities and others according to their own volition for “fresh woods and green pastures.” Both these ‘genuine’ and ‘bogus’ fund collectors have never gone empty handed from Bronx church. Eminent metropolitans and enthusiastic nuns abound in this list. It had even been alleged that these fund collectors arrive here because of the generosity of Bronx church. Members of the Bronx church are not hard hearted, but are open minded and magnanimous. They are not ruined by lending liberally. No parish in America has so far donated more amount for the Church Day Fund than this parish. The funds that are collected from this parish for this particular purpose is more or less same as that of a Gulf based parish. For mission field work this parish has donated several lakhs of rupees during last 40 years. I have collected from this parish 14.5 lakh rupees for tsunami fund and handed it over to His Grace Mar Osthathios Metropolitan. A

member of this parish, Thomas Idiculla met the entire expenses from his pocket for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of a village which had been devastated by a cyclone in Orissa.

God has uplifted this church for a definite purpose. It is basically for preserving truth, righteousness and justice and thus to demonstrate the ways of God to men and women. Bronx Church was following this path for the past forty years. We used to celebrate “Moranaya” festivals and also fasted and prayed uninterruptedly every year. All the High priest of our church, as and when they arrive in America, used to visit this church and celebrate Holy Qurbana. As far as many of them were concerned their first Holy Qurbana celebration in U.S.A. was indeed at Bronx Church.

### **The Stresses and Strains of Fund Collection**

It is an undisputed fact that the fund collection being done by the church is not utilized for the benefit of the church. In every year four or five fund collection campaigns takes place. It is only recently that it has abated to some extent. If this collection is intended for a good cause there is no harm. But generally it is not so. From whatever source funds can be collected, let us make use of it by hook or crook, is the motto of those who indulge in this campaign. A ‘respectful’ priest who had collected a substantial amount from this parish paid the lion’s share of it in a jewellery which is owned by one of the parishioners and purchased gold from there. When asked why he was purchasing gold from here, his reply was highly interesting. As the cost of gold in Kerala was exorbitant it would be profitable if it was purchased from here. This answer itself is self-explanatory and self-evident. The money that he has collected from here for the church straight away goes to his pocket. But let us take the case of Metropolitans like Geevarghese Mar Osthathios and Mathews Mar Severios. Both of them maintained accurate accounts for all the money they had received for charitable purposes and it was published in the annual reports of their respective institutions.

We are receiving the full statement of accounts from the Thalakode Boys Home regarding the amount donated from here. A sister came here some years back to collect money for an old age home. Out of respect and regard for this nun the parishioners gave donation lavishly. After a lapse of three years this sister came again for collection saying that it was intended for a 'Childrens' Home.' When those who had donated earlier for her 'Old Age Home' inquired about it, her reply was rather strange. "Oh! so far nobody has come over to stay there." "Then why can't you convert it as a children's home?" They asked. As an answer to this question she simply made the grunting sound "Hum."

Those who arrive here for fund collection are of the view that the entire amount that they collect absolutely belong to them. They take it for granted that what they collect is their private property. They firmly believe that they are not answerable to anybody.

No one knows how much money has been collected from the American diocese so far for the various institutions in Kerala. Whoever comes here collects whatever he gets and goes back contented. In this connection the blessed H.H. Mathews I, Catholicos of the east's letter is worth mentioning here:

"Achen, you have mentioned in your letter that your people are donating substantial amounts for the various needs of our church. Of course, it is well and good. But no one who collected, this so called donation has informed me about it until now."

In this connection, I would like to make a passing remark about another denomination which also has got deep roots in Kerala. They are also having their parishes here and engage in fund collection. But their methods and arrangements are entirely different from that of ours. The church headquarters decide how much money is required for each and every scheme or project. Then circular letters would be despatched to all dioceses mentioning the target amount allotted for them. In this circular letter the purpose of the fund

collection would be mentioned clearly and also the name of the person who is deputed for that purpose.

‘This year there is only one fund collection and it is for such and such purpose. Hence all of you donate the maximum within your means.’ This is the method adopted by that church and it has always its desired effect. The church would get more than enough money it needs and the donors also would be extremely happy. As a result of this arrangement their parish would be able to accomplish things which are beneficial to the society.

Hence this is what we must try to do. Whoever collects money should furnish full details of it to the supreme head of the church. The finance committee of the church should probe deep into the entire transactions in connection with it. If misappropriation of the fund or any fraudulent dealings are found actions should be initiated against them.

If I embark upon the project of writing a book on “fund collection” it would turn out to be of considerable size. When the American diocese was passing through a turbulent period, those who came here for “fund collection” after their return to Kerala unleashed stories and scandals about this parish. This sort of scandals tarnished the reputation of our parish to a great extent. As the poet Kunchen Nambiar has said: “Column light is amazing and wonderful. But I also should get money.”

This is the attitude of some of the people who control the church. They are least bothered about the laity who donate liberally to the church fund. If the higher authorities of the church give tacit approval to their misdeeds, the future and growth of our church would certainly be in jeopardy. Hence the rulers of the church should be more vigilant hereafter and should take timely action when things go wrong. With this request let me conclude my findings and views regarding fund collections.

## **The Church tightens its hold on the Metropolitan**

The construction work of Bronx Church was over by 1981. From that time the parishioners were eager to have the consecration ceremony performed. Requests for the same was solicited. The parishioners insisted that either the Catholicos or any other Metropolitan authorized by him should conduct it. There were two reasons for having such a demand. The supreme head of the church have been invited to perform this type of ceremony in the past by several churches. On such occasions no one raised any objection against it. But about our church, things were entirely different.

In fact it is the prerogative of the parish managing committee to extend an invitation to the Catholicos consulting with the Diocesan Bishop. The Diocesan Metropolitan has no right to obstruct it. At the same time it was the duty of the Catholicos to assert his authority and prove that his jurisdiction remains intact over the American Diocese irrespective of its geographical boundary. But here the Catholicos failed in exercising his power and authority. Hence the parishioners were constrained to take necessary steps to uphold the prestige and reputation of the Catholicos. For six years the parish worked relentlessly for it.

In 1986 the Episcopal synod and the working committee took a unanimous decision to authorize the Catholicos - designate Mathews Mar Coorilos, Metropolitan of Quilon Diocese to conduct the consecration ceremony of the Bronx St. Mary's church. When the Metropolitan arrived at Kennedy airport for this purpose, Mar Makarios along with some priests and parishioners accorded him a grand welcome. There it was announced that the Metropolitan would be staying at the residence of Mar Makarios. But contrary to it, he was whisked away to Fr. P. C. Varghese's residence in Florida.

The very next day was a working day for me. At about ten o'clock I received a telephone call from Mar Coorilos informing that there was strong protest from Makarios thirumeni against conducting the



consecration ceremony. Thus Mar Coorilos was placed in a tight corner. He was eager to get out of this predicament and conduct the ceremony some how or other. As he was sent from Kerala for performing this ceremony he could not retreat at this juncture. As days passed news began to percolate gradually that the consecration ceremony would not take place. It was of common knowledge that whenever problems of these types arise Mar Coorilos would become upset. During this time Yuhanon Mar Severios Metropolitan was also here (because of certain reasons he relinquished the diocesan administration post and later went to Parumala Seminary and stayed there. It was during that time he came for a visit to America). This Metropolitan also was visibly upset at the turn of events. The time of departure for Coorilos thirumeni was fast approaching. One night Mar Coorilos contacted me on the phone. He asked me to meet him at 'Yonkers' Holiday Inn' the very next day at 8'o clock. I was also informed that Makarios thirumeni also would be there. As such, I reached there early in the morning. It was Fr. P. C. Varghese who received me. During my talk with him, he alleged that I had not yet invited Makarios thirumeni for the consecration ceremony. To this I replied in the following way, "We do not know whether this consecration ceremony is going to take place or not. Hence we have not invited anyone so far including the Metropolitan. If permission is granted to conduct this ceremony, there is no problem in extending an invitation to him." Coorilos thirumeni made use of this opportunity cleverly. He asked me to extend the invitation forthwith. Straight away I wrote an invitation letter and handed it over to His Grace Coorilos Metropolitan for his perusal and requested him to make necessary corrections if needed. H.G. went through the letter and expressed his appreciation and then handed it over to His Grace Makarios Metropolitan. Mar Makarios simply wrote "Received" and then put his signature on it and gave back the duplicate copy to me. The meaning behind this action was loud and clear. The Metropolitan admits that he has received the invitation letter, but at the same time he does not comply with the contents of

the letter. Mar Coorilos' face blanched at this strange behaviour. Within no time I made a hasty retreat from there to my work place.

The same day in the after-noon Mar Coorilos Metropolitan rang me up. He then told me that Mar Makarios had given permission for conducting the consecration ceremony. As had been asked by us, October 31 and November 1 were fixed for conducting this ceremony. As I insisted upon having a commandment letter regarding it, the same was sent to me by mail. The Chief celebrant was Catholicos-designate Mathews Mar Coorilos assisted by Yuhanon Mar Severios and Thomas Mar Makarios Metropolitan. A host of priests and laity were present on this solemn occasion. It has also to be noted that this function took place on the 14th anniversary day of the parish.

But to our great surprise and shock the report that appeared in the annual report of the American diocese of the same year was in the following way:

“The consecration ceremony of Bronx St. Mary’s Church was conducted on October 31 and November I. The Diocesan Metropolitan being its chief celebrant. The Catholicos-designate and Yuhanon Mar Severios served as co-celebrants and the function was conducted with all the usual regalia and pageantry.

On being questioned about this falsification from higher authorities the Diocesan Metropolitan cleverly washed his hands out of it putting the entire blame on the Diocesan secretary. But the stone tablet in front of the church proclaims the truth loud and clear unambiguously.

### **An incredible Ordination**

Within a few days after the consecration ceremony the Catholicos - designate returned to Kerala. But Mar Severios stayed behind - presumably having no Diocese for him to look after. He had profound knowledge in Syriac language and had been teaching in the Seminary. As a priest he earned the love and respect of all the students and

laity. It was he who taught me Syriac in the Seminary. For a long period he served as the Diocesan Metropolitan of Cochin. Some of the members of his family brought him to America. Thus he got an opportunity to take part in the consecration ceremony of the Bronx Church. Besides being a distinguished Biblical Scholar, he was also well-versed in canonical laws and other relevant matters connected with it. He was one among the members of the Holy Synod which took the decision that no one who had not studied in the seminary was eligible to be ordained as a priest under any circumstance.

A few days after the consecration ceremony a highly distressing news reached my ears. Seven persons including two young men and five boys were ordained as deacons in a ceremony conducted at St. Peter's and St. Paul's church, a neighbouring parish situated closer to my residence.

Some of the parents of these children got wind of it only when they reached their homes after this function. When one of the parents told me about it with deep sorrow tears were trickling from his eyes.

It was the inviolable decision of the church that anyone without undergoing a four year regular study in the seminary should not be ordained as a priest. The above mentioned Metropolitans also were signatories to this unrevokable decision when it was adopted by the Holy synod. I am at a loss to understand why these two Metropolitans took initiative for such an ordination in contravention of the standing orders of the church and thus violate the rules and regulation of the church. But they can justify their actions citing certain precedence. But one thing is very clear. Neither the Malankara church nor the American diocese was benefitted in any way by this mass ordination. This was done to gladden and please certain people who were either their relatives or friends. An eminent Metropolitan made a pertinent and fitting comment about it in the following way: "Through these deeds they were deliberately venting their pent-up anger and frustration. One of them lost his diocese. In the case of the other one, the church authorities did not comply with his exorbitant

demands. The church is not, in any way, responsible for his relinquishing the administrative powers that were vested upon him. He did it so out of his own volition. The church has nothing to do with their actions.” The consecration of Bronx Church put an end to some of the over vaulting ambitions of Makarios thirumeni.

Here ends the part of our narrative. The church has made spectacular achievements in three points.

Firstly, we were able to get the Bronx Church registered in New York state submitting the 1934 constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Church as bye-law. Thus we could prove that the Malankara Church constitution would be binding to Bronx Church, even though it is situated outside India.

The Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan, a citizen of India is the owner and title deed holder of Bronx Church and as such had temporal powers over the parish. The government accepted that fact and property tax exemption also was granted.

Thirdly, we were able to prove that the Catholicos and Malankara Metropolitan has got absolute power and authority to conduct consecration ceremony in Malankara Orthodox Churches situated in America. The opposite party’s contention that the Catholicos has no right to lay the foundation stone was thus frustrated. All these factors once again underscores the fact that the Catholicos himself is the supreme head of the Malankara Orthodox church and that his jurisdiction over the American diocese is absolute and unquestionable.

## **Second Stage**

### **A topsy - turvy Diocese**

We cannot say that the condition of the American diocese was in bad shape at the time of Bronx Church's consecration. Certain problems were cropping up here and there.

Dissension and bickering reached its zenith in the Philadelphia St. Thomas Church. One of the parishioners of that church contacted me on the phone and expressed his intention of filing a suit against the Metropolitan. I opposed this idea vehemently and tried to make him understand the futility of such a recourse. But he was very adamant and wanted to go ahead with litigation. There were two reasons behind my stand against litigation. Reason number one was that so far no one had gone to court against a Metropolitan in the history of the American diocese. If the verdict of the court is against the Metropolitan it will have an adverse effect on the church here. On the other hand, if the Metropolitan wins he will become more aggressive and belligerent. Both the situations are equally detrimental to the church. But he told me that he had already taken the decision to go to the court and hence he could not retreat from it at the eleventh hour and then hung up the phone abruptly. He filed the suit but the verdict was in favour of the Metropolitan. As a result the Metropolitan became more powerful and then he began to assert his authority with redoubled vigour. Again conflict and quarrel began to increase by leaps and bounds. Hence the Catholicos was constrained to issue a kalpana letter (letter No. 3/89) advising the parishioners to abide by the verdict of the court. The Metropolitan and his followers hailed this decree of the court as the "Magna Carta" of the American Diocese. But this verdict and other techniques could not bring out a lasting solution to the problems prevailing in the American diocese. Fr. P. C. Varghese was wielding extra ordinary power and influence at Devalokam during this period. The church headquarters was facing severe financial crunch at that time. Hence

during that time wealthy members of the church occupied prestigious positions in the administration of the church and they could do anything according to their whims and fancies. There was a talk in the church headquarters at that time that Fr. P. C. Varghese was having his own airplane in America for his personal use.

Because of certain inexplicable and obscure reasons Catholicos Mathews I and Mathews II held Fr. P. C. Varghese in high esteem. Thus he was in the good books of these eminent leaders who had bestowed their love and affection on him bountifully. As such he became superman to those who stayed at Devalokam during this period. It was at this time that a weekly named “Orthodox Herald” began its publication from there. When this weekly faced financial constraints Fr. P. C. Varghese donated a substantial amount for its smooth running. As a token of gratitude for this timely help one of the priests who worked in this weekly wrote a letter to Fr. Varghese in the following way: “Achen, it is through your own view point and outlook that we are now moving ahead. ....” (Exh.)

Fr. P. C. Varghese’s behaviour and activities had cast a dark shadow over the American Church. As a priest it is unbecoming on my part to give more details about his misdeeds and misdemeanors. But to say that the church authorities were totally unaware about his atrocities would be challenging. Any way, the weekly which adhered to his “view point” became defunct very soon in Kerala. However, it reappeared in America. But in due course, it became defunct in America too. Finally in accordance with the resolution adopted by the church representative’s meeting held way back in the year 1989, the Diocesan Metropolitan terminated the services of Fr. P. C. Varghese once and for all.

Later he stayed at Devalokam and also in America for some time. Gradually he turned his guns against the church and the metropolitans by issuing statements and hurling insults against them. As a result of this unsavoury behaviour, a Bishop, who once deeply

loved him was constrained to send a Kalpana letter informing everybody that he was being suspended. Later, another Kalpana letter bearing Number 114/2006 was issued by His Holiness Didymus Catholicos informing that he had been banned from doing all ecclesiastical duties in the churches (Exh. 50). 1990's he established an institution named "Yownan Sadanam" at Nariyapuram near Thumpamon (his native place) in order to cater the needs of aged priests. After being expelled from the church he fell ill and within a few months he passed away. May our Heavenly Father give him everlasting peace, solace and comfort in the other world.

I have heard many people putting the entire blame on the shoulders of Fr. P. C. Varghese for the decline and fall of the American Diocese. He alone should not be made a scapegoat for all the ills of this Diocese. That is grossly unfair, unjust and illogical. Was he alone answerable for making the Diocesan administration into an institution wherein deceit, falsehood and untruth reigned supreme? Vested interests and opportunists who always wanted to gratify their false sense of prestige and arrogance are to some extent responsible for its degeneration. The higher authorities of the church, though fully aware about these facts, simply adopted an ostrich policy.

The office bearers of the Diocesan council, secretaries, trustees, priests, church representatives from 1979-1992 are also responsible for this mortification and ignoring. If a Diocesan Metropolitan does something for his self aggrandisement without paying slight regard to the opinions and suggestions of the Diocesan council or the assembly, it is the duty of the members of the committee of the assembly to reject his ideas respectfully. It is my firm belief and conviction that the members of the committee should not think that they are bound to obey the order of the Diocesan Metropolitan even if it is against the interest of the church. So long as the committee members do not use their discretionary powers, the smooth functioning of the parishes will be in jeopardy. Certain people in our church uphold the view that when a Metropolitan is deputed to

a diocese as its administrator as per the decision of the Catholicos and the Holy synod, they are bound to obey him even if his actions are at loggerheads with the interests of the diocese or parish. This sort of servile and slavish mentality is at variance and contrary to the basic tenets of the constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Church. When the American Diocese came into existence here, people complied with this age old principle. But now there is a great sea of change in the outlook and attitude of the laity. Nobody would bear with this sort of overbearing nature and outlandish ideas. People will certainly seek new ways and means to wriggle out from this obsolete method of administration.

By 1990 the condition of the American diocese became worse and it took a nose dive. Most of the parishes were in a state of utter chaos and confusion. The clergy fellowship organization formed in 1981 Sept. 12 had drifted away from the very purpose for which it was formed. The leadership of that organization reached in the hands of certain people who believed in the doctrine “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” There was a time when this organization confronted the activities of the Metropolitan in an amicable and peaceful way. But a great sea of change occurred in their attitude and behaviour after the outcome of the court verdict of St. Thomas Church of Philadelphia. The two warring factions then became more aggressive and pugnacious after this verdict. The vanquished wanted to annihilate the victors by hook or by crook. The winners also adopted the same policy. This modus operandi of both sides created more and more problems in the diocese. When I came to understand that some of the members of the Bronx church also were involved in these activities, I tendered my resignation from this organization and kept aloof from it. I also wrote a letter to the office bearers pointing out that since the clergy fellowship has moved away from its original aim and ideals, the organization itself should be dissolved at the earliest. In due course that organization became defunct.



## **Unwanted Commissions**

I do not want to give an answer to the question whether the highest echelons in the church took any active interest in solving the problems of the American diocese after making an in depth study about it. But some metropolitans and certain priests came here in the name of the so called "Commission." Perhaps they might have seen the tip of the iceberg of the problems confronting this diocese. They would then submit their report stating that they have studied all the problems prevailing here. But as a matter of fact it would be either the opinions of the persons with whom they are staying or that of the priest who are near and dear to them. When the report of one commission is found useless another commission would be formed. All these things were sheer waste of time and energy. Some members of the commission showed their partiality openly.

### **A High priest who understood the gravity of the situation**

His Holiness Marthoma Mathews I Catholicos was the only person who was fully aware of the intensity of the problems confronting the American diocese (to some extent H. G. Paulose Mar Gregorios Metropolitan also was cognizant of it). H.H. Marthoma Mathews I was deeply distressed at the turn of events taking place in this diocese. As a result of a sudden stroke he lost his power of speech. But his power of thinking and the ability to listen and grasp whatever is told were intact. In spite of this drawback he held the position of the Catholicos and the Malankara Metropolitan for some more time. Later he relinquished this post for his successor H. G. Mathews Mar Coorilos in April 1991. After 15 years reign, His Holiness Mathews I resigned as Catholicos and on November 8, 1996 he left his earthly abode to join the group of his ancestors in paradise. He was laid to rest in the vicinity of the tombs of his predecessors.

During his tenure as Catholicos the record of achievements and

the strides of progress that the church had made were wonderful and tremendous. The liturgy was modified, improved and revised. Books were made available. After the verdict of the supreme court of 1958, the church had to face scathing attacks from the patriarchal faction. All peace efforts from our part fell into deaf ears. In spite of all these adversities the Catholicos faced all these problems with courage and fortitude. It was his firm decision and conviction that all the properties of the church should be vested with the Malankara Metropolitan. When the American diocesan Metropolitan refused to despatch the registration document approved by the synod in 1980 he himself took initiative to send it to various churches in America. This is a typical example for his capability and administrative acumen. He thus reinforced his power and authority over American churches so that it could not bifurcate from the parent church under any circumstance. This was a remarkable achievement as far as the American diocese was concerned.

## **His Holiness Mathews II and the American diocese**

By the time His Holiness Mathews II ascended the throne, problems in the American diocese had reached its zenith. H.H. was fully aware about these problems. He wanted to find out a lasting solution to this strife-torn diocese. As a true righteous and upright Metropolitan, he never wanted to hurt the feelings of others. Hence he could not make much headway in the negotiations.

It may be, most probably, because of the stringent action initiated by the synod meeting of February 27, 1990 that paved the way for the resignation of Mar Makarios. Hence the synod sent a letter to the Metropolitan asking him to send the attested copies of registration and all the relevant documents to the church headquarters. As the full details of these decisions are included in the appendix (Exh. 51). I do not want to give further details about it here. The responsibility to send these documents were vested with the Metropolitan.

His Grace Mar Makarios tendered his resignation before the synod meeting held in July 1991. At that time I was in Kerala. That day happened to be the very same day on which I was given an appointment with the Catholicos. That being so, I went to the Old Seminary in the afternoon. The synod meeting was conducted at the Sophia Centre. When the meeting was adjourned for lunch I happened to hear people talking about the resignation of Makarios thirumeni.

When I met H.H. after the lunch break he appeared gloomy and crestfallen and said: “Achen, your metropolitan has resigned from the Diocese. I tried my level best to dissuade him from taking such a drastic step but he did not budge and handed over his resignation letter to me saying, ‘Now my problem is over and your problem has started.’ I am at my wits end and do not know what to do.”

Several views and opinions were in the air regarding this resignation. In connection with it H.H. had issued several Kalpana letters. Let me quote a few sentences from the Kalpana letter captioned “To all the parishes in the North America (No. 162/91) dated Sept. 27, 1991.

“During the meeting of the Holy Episcopal Synod in July 1991, His Grace Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios requested, of his own free will, to be relieved of his administrative duties in the north American Diocese. The synod recognises the fact and was grateful for it, that His Grace has done so out of good will, in order to pave the way for the integration of all parishes in North America in to a single North American Diocese directly administered for the present, by the catholicos-cum-Malankara Metropolitan taken over the direct administration of the North America Diocese, as provided in article 95 of the constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (exh. 52).

First sentence of the third paragraph:

“His Grace Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios is no longer the

Metropolitan of the North American Diocese. But he continues to be revered Bishop of the Church, living in North America, who has served this church for long time.”

From the fourth paragraph

“He will not therefore convoke any official meetings of any of the statutory bodies or spiritual organisation or parishes of the diocese. ...”

I now want to make a special note about three things.

(1) Dr. Thomas Mar Makarius requested, of his own free-will to be relieved of his administrative duties in the North American diocese.

(2) His Grace Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios is no longer the Metropolitan of the North American Diocese; but he continues to be a revered Bishop of the Church.

(3) He will not therefore convoke or convene any official meeting.

As the full text of this commandment letter is included in the appendix, no further explanation is needed with regard to it.

To relinquish the administrative powers willingly is tantamount to being divested of all powers vested upon the person concerned. For this same reason Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios is no longer the Diocesan Metropolitan. As such he is not entitled to summon official meetings.

I am now reminded of an incident which took place during my student days in the old Theological Seminary at Kottayam in the year 1966. Mar Theophilus Metropolitan (then a Ramban) was the Principal of the seminary at that time. He then told us about an incident that took place in a church in the Middle East. During that time we had only one or two churches in that region. Of these two churches the main church was the centre of the trouble makers. In spite of the best efforts of the parish priest peace could not be restored there. Just like that of America the newly arriving young men were the real trouble makers. Whenever a new priest arrives they will display

their might and main to him. Their impertinent behaviour became a constant irritation to the church headquarters. Hence Fr. K. Philipose was delegated to be a one man commission to enquire about the whole problem. He summoned the parish general body in which the vicar unburdened his problems in the following way. "Father, I cannot carry out the administrative work of this parish. I will look after only the spiritual requirements of the parishioners." The answer which Theophilus Metropolitan gave to that priest still lingers in my mind. It is as follows. "The responsibilities and duties entrusted to a priest or a Metropolitan cannot be separated either into spiritual or secular. Both are two sides of the same coin. It is always inseparable and both should go hand in hand. Priest and Metropolitans are shepherds. The rod and the staff they possess are meant for correcting and controlling the laity when they go astray. Metropolitans using their administrative powers are really leading the sheep to the presence of God. He explained various illustrations like this to drive home this point to us. If a priest does not have the interest to handle these two duties simultaneously, then he is unfit to be the vicar." I still remember the various examples similar to this which he explained to us in the class.

In his resignation letter submitted to the synod Mar Makarios had requested to "relieve him from administrative duties." That itself is self explanatory and hence no further clarification is required to understand that his administrative power has become void. Hence the synod unanimously approved his resignation and all his administrative powers thus became defunct from that day. That is the reason why the commandment letter No. 162/91 runs like this.

"His Grace Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios is no longer the Metropolitan of the North American Diocese; but he continues to be a revered Bishop of our Church."

But this incident stirred a hornet's nest in the American Diocese. Some people contended that the Metropolitan has not resigned. He only asked to "relieve him from administrative duties." They had their own interpretations about it according to their whims and fancies.

It was an undisputed fact that Makarios thirumeni was an intellectual giant. No one had any doubt of it. He would not do anything which would be harmful to him under any circumstance.

It was the decision of the Episcopal Synod that compelled him to tender his resignation. He was unwilling to comply with the edicts of the synod. As he was unwilling to execute his duties within the organization and framework of the church he took up the decision to resign. It was in July 1991 that he submitted his resignation to the synod.

His twelve years as the Diocesan Metropolitan had created great fissures in the church. It created dissension and strife among the laity and it remained as a permanent scar in the parish forever. Most probably these developments might have made him restless and nervous. Many of the priests who were with him earlier deserted him at the eleventh hour. Parishioners also became indifferent and callous. But there were others who thought otherwise. Through this resignation, they thought, he would come back with redoubled vigour and energy like a Phoenix. But later events proved otherwise.

In the managing committee meeting of the Malankara Association held at the old seminary auditorium on November 26, 1992, His Grace Makarios Metropolitan spoke at length regarding this issue. In that speech he deliberately criticised Paulose Mar Gregorios by declaring that he had not tendered his resignation as Diocesan Metropolitan and also alleged that the so called resignation letter was the handiwork of Paulose Mar Gregorios. He utilized that opportunity to discredit Paulose Mar Gregorios Metropolitan covertly and overtly. But the secretary rose to the occasion and read out the resignation letter of Mar Makarios. This trump card was a bolt from the blue for Mar Makarios and he became non plussed. There occurred no hubbub or untoward incident in the managing committee meeting in connection with this revelation.

But the unruly and recalcitrant supporters of Mar Makarios

Metropolitan were in an angry mood. The speech he delivered on April 24, 1993 at Queen's "Gujarathi Samajam Centre" was a pre-planned and pre-meditated one. Let me quote a few sentences from it.

"You should not abandon the holy church under any circumstance."

"But at the same time you should always disobey the Metropolitan, Synod as well as the Catholicos."

"We would always remain steadfastly in Malankara Church as its constituent" (Exh. 57).

A large number of his followers were present there on that day. Even though this irresponsible and provocative speech did not produce any desired effect immediately, subsequently it paved way for more troubles. In due course it became a thorn in the flesh of Mathews Mar Barnabas.

## **A New Leadership for American Diocese**

The Catholicos and Malankara Metropolitan Moran Mar Basilius Mathews II took up the administration of the American diocese as per clause 95 of the constitution of the church. Circular letters proclaiming this commandment were despatched to various churches of American diocese (Circular No. 91/91 dtd December 27, 1991). In order to lend a helping hand to the Bava in administration former metropolitan of Idukki Diocese Mathews Mar Barnabas was transferred to America as per circular No. 33/92 of February 22, 1992. The Metropolitan arrived in America on March 20, 1992 to take up his new assignment. Some priests along with a group of laity also arrived at the airport to receive him. One of the senior priests present there then insisted that it would be highly improper and inappropriate if the Metropolitan goes to his residence straight away without performing Luthinia in any one of the churches here (it was a fact that there was no proper residence for him there then). Near

the airport there were some churches where in some of the priests assembled there used to conduct services. But none of them invited him to their churches for this purpose. These priests were simply enacting a screen play in the presence of the spectators assembled there. Nobody had any idea about the Metropolitan's accomodation facility.

I had been in Kerala a few days before all these incidents had taken place. At that time the H.H. the Catholicos had a discussion with me regarding the accomodation facility of the Metropolitan. Accordingly I had made necessary arrangements for his stay in our church. At the same time I did not divulge this fact to anybody and no one present there had any inkling about it.

When the hubbub and commotion reached its zenith in the airport I told them that the Metropolitan could conduct prayer at Bronx Church and those who wanted to take part in it could by all means join. Except some of the priests who were present there at the airport, most of the people came along with us to Bronx parish. By this time I had already informed the secretary and the trustee about the programme of the Metropolitan. They, right away conveyed this news to those parishioners who were residing near the church. When the Metropolitan arrived in the church quite a large number of people had assembled there. While we were having the evening coffee after the prayer, one of the priests who was present at the airport appeared in the church all of a sudden. He told us that he had received a telephone call from Devalokam in which he was asked to make accomodations for the Metropolitan. The Metropolitan had only a suitcase and a small bag with him. He kept the suitcase and the Mooron in the church and went along with that priest. After two days I was informed that he would be staying in various houses on a rotation basis and asked me to handover the suitcase and also to keep the Mooron safely in the church. The very next day that is on March 21 the Metropolitan despatched a Kalpana letter to all parishes. In that letter he informed all, about his arrival in America



and exhorted the parishioners to pray for the success of his mission. He also wanted to have a list of the members in the parishes. The Camp address on the letterhead was as given below: “2131, Batchelder street, Brooklyn, NY 11229.”

The next Sunday when the Holy Qurbana celebration was over, Bronx Church became the hot bed and breeding ground of commotion and uproar. It was stage managed by the followers of Makarios thirumeni. They contended that Mar Barnabas’ entry into the church without their consent and knowledge has no legal standing. Then I gave them a fitting reply. I declared in unambiguous terms that I need not obtain any sanction or permission from any one in order to welcome a Metropolitan belonging to Malankara Orthodox Church, to a church owned by the Catholicos of the East. On hearing my reply all the trouble makers departed one by one from the church.

Nearly six months, the Metropolitan stayed in various houses as their guest. By the end of September “80-34 Commonwealth Blvd” building was taken on a rent of 1050 US Dollar per month. Afterwards as per the decision of the general body of the Diocese held on April 14, 1994 this building was purchased on behalf of the Diocese. His Holiness the Catholicos gave us permission for purchasing this building (Exh. 54).

While mentioning factors connected with the diocese, certain factors which have no direct bearing to the Diocese are also to be mentioned here. During the period 1992-94 three eminent Metropolitans of our church had been given medical treatment in America. All these Highpriests were heart patients. The late Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, H. H. Mathews II Catholicos, H.H. Didymus I Catholicos were these three persons who arrived here for treatment.

The open heart surgery of Mar Osthathios was performed at St. Louis Jewish hospital on June 16, 1992. It was Dr. Prasad Abraham, an eminent member of our church who took the initiative for it. During

one of his visits to Kerala, on one occasion, Dr. Abraham paid a visit to Metropolitan and persuaded him to come to America for further treatment when everybody thought that no further treatment was possible for H.G. Under compulsion from Dr. Abraham H.G. arrived here and an open heart surgery was conducted on him for which the church had not to pay any amount from its own fund. After this surgery H.G. lived for another twenty years and was capable of performing all the works entrusted with him. He was taken to his heavenly abode on February 16, 2012 and was buried at the tomb constructed at the St. Paul's Mission Training Center in Mavelikkara. H.H. Mathews II Catholicos' operation was performed on January 16, 1993 for which a portion of the hospital expense was paid by the Diocese. At the same time the entire treatment expenses of Didymus Catholicos was collected from the Diocese itself. In all these things the church is greatly indebted to Dr. Prasad Abraham.

The administration of the American Diocese was vested with Catholicos with effect from March 20, 1992. It was to help H.H. in the administration of the church that Mathews Mar Barnabas was deputed to America.

Before being ordained as a Metropolitan he was known as Fr. K. K. Mathews. He was a renowned writer as well as a meditative counsellor. His book "A meditative study of Holy Qurbana" made him pre-eminent in church circles. He had served as Chaplain of Velloor Christian Medical College representing the Orthodox church. He had also served as Vicar of the burgeoning parishes situated in Secundurabad and Jabalpur. After taking M.A., B.D. degree he worked as a teacher in our Theological Seminary. He used to teach Greek and pastoral theology there. I had the privilege of being a student of his at the Seminary. He also wrote quite a large number of booklets. He was very particular in setting apart his time for prayer strictly in accordance with the time schedule fixed by the church.

He had worked as assistant of several Metropolitans before becoming the administrator of the newly formed Idukki diocese. He had no hesitation to work earnestly for the growth and development of the church. He never bothered about what others thought about him and was least bothered about reproof or denunciation. He had certain unique qualities which others did not possess.

He always insisted that those who attend the church service should fully grasp its meaning and significance clearly. He tried to avoid the syriac language wherever and whenever it was possible while conducting church services.

During the Holy Qurbana, after the Creedal Statement, when the thurifier says "Sthoumen Kalos" the laity answers "Kurielaison." H.G. tried to render its Malayalam version in the following way. He wanted the thurifier to say "Let everybody stand with dignity and decorum" to which as an answer the laity should say "O Lord, have mercy upon us." In spite of an effort of nineteen years the age old practice of "Sthoumen Kalos Kurielaison" lingers still now in the American Diocese. He never wanted to be a co-celebrant in a Qurbana. All these are some of his peculiar characteristics. If some one gives him a present he will say thanks and then return it humbly. When he came here from Kerala, one of my parishioners, Vincent K. John took him to his house and the Metropolitan stayed there as his guest. At the time of his departure, Vincent John, the host, finding that H.G.'s suitcase was very old and worn out purchased a new one and gladly presented it to him. At this the Metropolitan smiled politely and told him "May God bless you for your benevolence. I require only my old suitcase. You may keep it for your own use." This was his stand regarding ordinary dress as well as with regard to the vestments worn on the occasion of Holy Qurbana.

He always found pleasure in meeting the sick and praying along with them.

If some one gives him money in the name of "kaimuth" he would

gladly accept it. But he would always utilize that amount for giving donation to the poor and the needy. He would never use that money for his personal needs. Without giving scant regard to his old age ailments he used to travel only in economy class while going to attend Synod meetings. When he returned to Kerala after retirement he donated the entire amount that was in his bank account to the two American Dioceses. Even though he had some health problems after reaching Kerala, we are informed that he is convalescing now (I am writing this on May 2012). I am giving here only a brief description about the life style of Barnabas thirumeni. My heart aches when I think about sending such a humble and pious Metropolitan to this faction ridden and bickering American Diocese. After his arrival here he worked day and night relentlessly to set the Diocese in order. He used to send Kalpana letters on each and every week pinpointing various aspects connected with the church. With ardent dedication and perseverance he worked for the well-being of the church in strong opposition.

You may remember my earlier reference about the heart surgery of H.H. Mathews II Catholicos. In fact he had come here only for eye treatment. As the treatment was not quite successful as had been anticipated, he accepted the invitation extended by Dr. Prasad Abraham and went to St. Louis along with him. There all of a sudden he became a heart patient and was constrained to have an open heart surgery on January 16, 1993. The parishes donated a sum of 65000 US Dollar for this purpose and thus cleared the debt incurred in the hospital. The hospital authorities were kind enough to remit some amount from the medical bill.

On March 27, 1993 H.H. conducted the Sunthroniso ceremony of Barnabas thirumeni at St. Mary's Church of West Sayville (Exh. 59). After a few days H.H. went back to Kerala.

H.H. the Catholicos always had a soft corner for Makarios thirumeni not only he being a Metropolitan but also as an old colleague and a bosom friend. When most of the people of his

Diocese turned against him, H.H. gave him unstinting support and succour. Those who had close contact with the Catholicos were fully aware about it. The managing committee meeting held on May 13, 1993 and the Episcopal synod held between July 6-9 took a decision for the formation of a separate diocese for him under the name Canada, UK, Europe, consisting of six churches of Canada and eight churches from Germany and UK. (Exh. 60). Out of these 16 churches, only four were functioning well. Churches situated in Edmonton, Toronto and London were financially strong and in good fettle. The rest of the parishes were in an embryonic stage. Everybody knew that this new Diocese would not be able to generate much money. Mar Makarios was not satisfied with this new arrangement.

H.H. wanted to form a new Diocese by annexing some eight or ten churches of America which were situated in the bordering area of Canada and include it in the proposed Canadian Diocese. By this arrangement there would be nearly 25 churches in the newly proposed Canadian diocese. He discussed this matter with some people in America. However, the proposal did not materialize and further details regarding it would be given later.

## **Dark Valley**

The American Diocese was passing through a catastrophic period from 1992-2000. Not only the Diocese but also the priests and all the office bearers of various churches were sailing in the same boat. Group rivalry and factional fightings were going on unabated in all the parishes. Priests and Metropolitans were scorned and ridiculed. One priest even went to the extent of filing a suit just to subvert the Diocesan general body meeting which was scheduled to be conducted on January 16 at St. George Church of Staten Island. The Metropolitan who had set a part his life for the uplift of the church and devoting his time and energy for praying for the sick and the suffering was beating his hands and legs in the void just like a fly that had fallen in the fire. People were standing in the precincts of

the church building excitedly to face any eventuality. The grief stricken thirumeni like a fish out of water was muttering incoherently in an ornery mood. Whenever those who were near and dear to him approached for consoling him he would drive them out. As I happened to witness this pathetic sight, I prayed “O, Lord Almighty! Why have you forsaken this poor Metropolitan and left him amidst these stubborn and rebellious people?”

At last, some how or the other, the annual general body meeting was conducted amidst hustle and bustle. On October 17, 1993 the same priest conducted service at Brooklyn Church and after the service informed the parishioners that he would not be there on the next Sunday to celebrate the Holy Qurbana. On October 24 he went to another church and conducted service there. But he had not obtained prior permission from the Metropolitan for it. What a tragic fate. This parish insisted that they would owe their allegiance only to Makarios thirumeni. The parishioners were impudent and obstinate in that respect. Barnabas thirumeni, meanwhile appointed another priest for that church. When the Metropolitan arrived in that church on October 24 along with the newly appointed parish priest the gates of the church remained locked. When the Metropolitan found that the situation was becoming more and more complicated he retreated from there. But the Diocesan Metropolitan took disciplinary action against the said priest (commandment 220/93 Exh. 61).

As I had mentioned earlier, H.H. the Catholicos was here in the first half of 1993. When the Catholicos took initiative to hold a conciliatory meeting in the presence of the two Metropolitans, Mar Makarios rejected that proposal outrightly. H.H. wanted to find out a lasting solution to the problems and settle all the issues amicably. But Makarios thirumeni was adamant. “I don’t want to be an invited guest in my diocese” he told to H.H. bluntly. Thus Makarios thirumeni foiled the plan to settle all the disputes harmoniously. This incident is described in one of the commandments of Barnabas thirumeni (Exh. 61).

For the next two or three years the church authorities tried their level best to solve the problems confronting the American Diocese in several ways. But when it became incontrovertible and self-evident that the problem could not be sorted out, the Episcopal synod, in its meeting between 1995 February 21-25 and also in the subsequent managing committee meeting of April 27 decided to have a new formula for it. A relevant portion from the commandment letter of the Catholicos is given below (No. 84/95).

“We, the Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan deem it necessary that for the sake of restoring peace and amity in the Diocese; the following interim-directions are necessary to be issued with regard to the administration of the American Diocese which shall remain in force until otherwise appropriately decided.

The administration of the Diocese shall be carried on entirely by the Diocesan Metropolitan, H.G. Mathews Mar Barnabas conforming and responding the following specific requirements made here in.

His Grace Thomas Mar Makarios is designate, the Senior Metropolitan of the American Diocese.

Order for convening General Body meetings of the diocese, shall be issued under the seal and signature of the Diocesan Metropolitan along with that of the senior Metropolitan H.G. Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios also. H.G. Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios, the Senior Metropolitan shall preside over such Diocesan General Body meeting in case he is present. But the minutes and other official documents shall be authenticated under the seal and signature of the Diocesan Metropolitan H.G. Mathews Mar Barnabas..... etc.”

I have quoted only the first 4 paragraphs of the Kalpana letter here.

I do not want to criticize the Kalpana of our High priest nor do I have the power and authority for doing such a thing. However, I would like to point out one thing regarding it since the managing

committee also is a party to such a decision. This is simply my own analysis and evaluation and not a criticism or censure. The Kalpana letter itself is self-evident and self-explanatory with regard to one thing - that the higher authorities of our church were totally unaware of the problems confronting the American Diocese from its very inception.

Here there are two rival groups - always engaged in bickering and quarreling just like snake and mongoose - people who seek legal action to solve the problems confronting the Diocese. Whenever discussions regarding conciliation process came up each group insisted that settlement should be effected according to their own terms and conditions. These people would always talk about the 'future of the youth' but would not put even a little finger to lift our young men from the desolate pit in which they have fallen. Anyone with a little bit of common sense could understand that this arrangement was preposterous and logically unconvincing. Any one who goes through this book from its first chapter can easily understand that those who were at the headquarters of the church in Kerala at that time could not fully realize the problems involved here. They adopted an Ostrich policy instead of taking the bull by its horns.

What was the reason behind drafting another Kalpana letter which was at variance and contrary to that of September 27, 1991 and sending another one in 1995 bearing No 84? An extract from the second paragraph of the commandment letter of Sept. 1991 is as follows.

“His Grace Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios is NO LONGER the Metropolitan of the North American Diocese”

After issuing such a circular letter and then again despatching another non-implementable and unrealistic commandment letter (84/95) was totally non-sensical. As a result of this action the Diocese became defunct for the next two years.



## **A clergy meeting which destroyed the basic concept of the church**

In 1995 H.H. the Catholicos again visited America. Even though this visit was for a medical check up in connection with his open heart surgery, underneath there was an intention to find an amicable solution to the problems ailing the American Diocese which was becoming worse day by day. Within a few days a clergy meeting was summoned. The Catholicos and the Diocesan Metropolitan took initiative for this meeting. The Catholicos celebrated Holy Qurbana in an Armenian church located at Queens. While celebrating the Holy Qurbana tears were trickling from his eyes. In the meeting held after the Eucharist all the priests who were present there put their signature in the register. "I seek your kind indulgence to find a lasting solution to the problems confronting this Diocese." So said the Catholicos bursting into tears. But Barnabas thirumeni kept mum, without uttering a single word.

During his speech H.H. made a casual reference about a talk which he had with Maharashtra Governor Dr. P. C. Alexander in order to find out an amicable solution to the age old problem confronting the American Diocese. The proposal put forward by Dr. Alexander, according to the Catholicos, was in the following way 'Let us hand over some eight or nine churches which lie contiguous to Canada from the American Diocese for his administration. If this proposal meets with his approval, the entire problem can be solved at one stroke. Otherwise disciplinary action should be initiated against him' (But this very same proposal had been put forward by the Catholicos himself nearly two years ago. When he visited America and he had also discussed this topic with certain people here at that time. Most probably the Catholicos might have mentioned this idea to Dr. Alexander and the Governor also might have approved it. I am constrained to think so). Hence it would be worth its while if this clergy meeting also hold the same view with regard to this vexing problem." With these words the

Catholicos concluded his speech. Several priests stood up and expressed their views and opinions. Most of the priests were of the opinion that Makarios thirumeni should be removed from the administrative duties of the American Diocese. In the meanwhile one of the senior priests stood up and told that the suggestion put forward by the Catholicos was not in conformity with the rules and regulation laid down in the constitution. To this the Catholicos replied that the rules committee would do the needful regarding it. Time was running out and no tangible solution was coming forward to arrive at a decision. At this juncture H.H. turned towards me and said “A. K. Cherian Achan, what have you to say about it?” I then replied thus “Your Holiness, in principle, I do not agree with this suggestion. However, if this proposal could bring out a lasting solution to this turbulent and tempestuous Diocese, then I fully endorse your proposal wholeheartedly. But I have my own apprehension whether Mar Makarios could be appeased by this arrangement.”

Then several priests stood up and gave full support to my view point. Some others dissented. After some deliberation and pondering it was decided unanimously that Mar Makarios might be given some eight or ten churches in order to settle all the outstanding issues. The matter was recorded in the minutes. The Catholicos was fully satisfied with this arrangement and after the meeting he asked the Clergy Board Secretary to send a copy of the minutes to him the very next day and the priest concerned consented to do so.

From there the Catholicos went to Bronx Church. It had already been announced earlier that the Holy Qurbana celebration would be conducted by him at Bronx Church on the next day. During his speech after the evening prayer he announced with great satisfaction that the problems of the American Diocese was over and everything had been settled giving full satisfaction to both factions and for this Cherian Achen had rendered valuable support and help. The same thing was mentioned again during his speech in the midst of the Holy Eucharist on the next day. On that Sunday he conducted evening

prayer in a church in New Jersey. Then he went to a house, took food from there and had a chat with the members of that family. By 9.30 pm he returned to Aramana.

When he arrived at the Aramana on that night at about 10.30 quite a large number of people were present there. They were members of a breakway group from a church situated at Queens. These people were staunch supporters and ardent adherents of Makarios thirumeni. Since they had severed all connections with their mother church, they insisted upon having their share from that church, which according to their version, was their legitimate right. Catholicos told them that he would do the needful to alleviate their grievance with regard to it. Later I came to know that their behaviour towards the Catholicos was highly abominable and disgraceful on that night. They launched painful attack against him and were least bothered about the fact that the Catholicos had undergone an open heart surgery and under medical care.

By this time, the Catholicos' host, the Metropolitan had gone to sleep. At about five o' clock in the morning my telephone rang. Catholicos' secretary was at the other end. He gave me a brief account of what had transpired during that night and also told me that Catholicos had to spend a sleepless night on account of it. Hence I was asked to find out a suitable alternative place for H.H.'s stay here. I told him that I would be there by eight o' clock and the necessary arrangement for it would be made. In the morning nearly at seven o' clock the secretary Achen again contacted and told me that the Catholicos wanted to have a talk with me. Catholicos was fully aware about the background of the previous night's incidents. He was convinced that there was a collective attempt to foil his reconciliation attempt. He then said "Achen, if I shift my residence now to some other place, what would people think? What would be their attitude towards this Metropolitan? Things being so, I want to stay here some how or other for another two or more days. Anyway, after that I am going to Kerala."

H.H. then tried to contact the clergy secretary to remind him about the copy of the minutes of the meeting held at Armenian Church about which he had asked him earlier. As the telephone connection was disrupted he could not talk with that priest. For the next two days also Catholicos tried to have telephone talk with him. But all his attempts did not succeed.

A grief-stricken Catholicos then asked me what should be done to get that document. I replied that as soon as he reached Kerala a cable should be sent asking him to despatch the document forthwith failing which disciplinary action will be initiated against him. But the Catholicos did not take any action against him and he went scott-free.

Before proceeding further, I would like to clear certain doubts that might have crept up in the minds of the readers. Why did the Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan seek the opinion of an ordinary priest like me on certain vexed problems as and when it arise? I do not hold any post in the council here. Also my name is not included in any of the committees here. Nor do I have the financial capacity to influence others to my side. My photographs do not appear in print media. More over, I am on the bottom rung of the ladder in the church hierarchy. I do not hold any position except that of the vicar post of Bronx Church.

It was from 1986 that I came into close contact with H.H. Mathews II Catholicos even though I was acquainted with him from 1957. I first set my eyes upon him on the occasion of the golden Jubilee celebration meeting of the Orthodox Student Movement which was held at Thiruvalla Balika Madam High School. At that time I was a jobless B. A. degree holder. Mar Coorilos was the youngest, handsome Metropolitan of our church at that time. Another young man, one P. George of Kattanam, a jobless M.A. degree holder also was present there to participate in the meeting. He just invited me to go along with him to meet this Metropolitan. Our relationship commenced from that day. P. George later became a

priest and retired as the principal of Pathanapuram Training College. Sad to say, recently his earthly life came to an end and was taken to his heavenly abode leaving us to weep and wail for him.

The Catholicos - designate Mathews Mar Coorilos arrived in America in order to conduct the consecration ceremony of the Bronx Church. The working committee of the church was very keen about it and the ceremony was performed in the teeth of strong opposition. During the time of his stay in America we used to discuss various problems connected with the Diocese and the church. From my talk with H.H. I could gather that he had a clear idea about my stand in this factional fight and bickering. He was fully convinced that I was impartial and never resorted to any dirty underhanded method to consolidate my position in the church. Whenever he made a mention about me he always made it clear that Cherian Achen was impartial in all his dealings. When both groups turned against me in view of my impartiality, the Catholicos bestowed his explicit faith and confidence in me. This was something which the two warring groups could no longer relish and hence their hatred towards me began to gather momentum. As we were referring earlier about the clergy meeting held at the Armenian church, I would now like to go back to it and recapitulate certain events. Catholicos, through his commandment letter No 44 of 1988 mentioned his anguish and disappointment about it in the following way.

“You may be remembering the clergy meeting held after the celebration of the Holy Qurbana at the Armenian Church. You are also aware about the decisions taken there. If it had been implemented in toto, how well and good it were! But that also ended in failure” (Exh. 62).

Who are the persons responsible for it? Why did such things take place?

Some people were of the view that this decision was violative of the constitution. That was why they were against it. If this contention

is approved, then these people are bound to answer certain fundamental questions regarding the power, rights and privileges vested upon the Catholicos of the East. The Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan is the supreme head of the Malankara Church and at the same time he is also the custodian, protector, keeper and defender of the constitution of this church. This fact has been declared by the supreme court of India in unambiguous terms. The fact being so, if H.H. Mathews II Catholicos, in accordance with the decision of the clergy conference awards ten churches to another Diocese, how can that decision become an infringement and be at variance and contrary to any of the articles laid down in our constitution? I have gone through all the documents connected with the constitution of Malankara Association of 1934 which had been duly approved by the synod. Then again I examined and perused thoroughly the amendments made in 1957, 1967 and in 2006. In spite of all these perusal I could not find out which part of the constitution had been violated. More over, the Catholicos had given an assurance in that meeting that if any infringement has taken place the rules committee would look into it and rectify the defects. In this case the irony of the situation is thought provoking. The Catholicos of the East and the supreme head of the Malankara Orthodox Church, with tears trickling from his eyes asking the sheep of his fold, his own children, including the priests under him to implement a decision which had been adopted and approved in the clergy meeting earlier. More over, the very same idea of it, according to the Catholicos, was the brain child of an eminent son of our church who is held in high esteem through out India. If the dark forces of our church could stand in the way of implementing this decision for the connivance of some of the so called leaders of our church, then it is highly distressing and lamentable. I wish and pray that these types of unfortunate incidents should never take place in our church. Those who are behind this foul play may be thinking that they have won the battle. But in fact they are living in a fool's paradise because it was the church that had been "vanquished and trounced" and not

the individuals concerned. Persons responsible for this sorry state of affairs are the “ardent lovers of the church.” All these misdeeds went unnoticed and went into oblivion just as other transgressions of the American Churches also were submerged in the dark abysmal of the past.

H.H. Mathews II was a versatile genius. Though brilliant and capable, the way in which he handled the affairs of the American Diocese was, to some extent, disappointing and disheartening. He never wanted to hurt the feelings of others. He followed a policy of appeasement and consensus. As a result corruption became rampant in the Diocese. Everyone acted according to his own whims and fancies. Power and pelf were the root cause of all these evils. There was a feeling that those who opposed the church for any and every ground were “extremely brilliant.”

The Catholicos returned to Kerala with a heavy heart fully comprehending the topsy-turvy condition of this Diocese. At this juncture a rather strange news began to circulate among the laity. It was about certain unforeseen misfortunes that occurred in the family of the priest who refused to despatch a copy of the minutes of the clergy meeting to the Catholicos in spite of his Kalpana. Everybody began to say that this misfortune was due to a curse put on him by the Catholicos. Somehow this strange news reached the ears of the Catholicos. Immediately H.H. sent a letter to the concerned priest informing him that he had not cursed him under any circumstance. A copy of the same letter was sent to me asking me to hand it over to the Metropolitan who was at that time here to conduct a commission report. As such, I sent it to the concerned Metropolitan. On receipt of this, the Metropolitan became furious and contacted me on the phone and began to talk in an angry tone. I knew him very well before he became a Metropolitan and we were close friends at that time. He asked me in a loud voice why the Catholicos had sent that letter to me instead of despatching it directly to him. “Is there not a Metropolitan here? As such the letter should have come to him

directly.” He asked me in wild tone. At this stage I gave him an answer which came to my mind on the spur of the moment. “Your Grace, it is better you ask this question to the Catholicos himself. He will give you the correct answer. I am not eligible to give an answer to this vexed question.”

I do not want to explain why this Metropolitan had behaved in this way to me. One thing was clear to me. This Metropolitan was not aware of the fact that the relationship between the Catholicos and the Diocesan Metropolitan had become strained by the time H.H. made his departure to Kerala from here.

Before proceeding further, I would now like to mention two factors in a nutshell.

The first question that remains to be answered is the fact that whether Makarios thirumeni would have been satisfied if some eight or ten parishes were given to him as per the decision of the clergy meeting. We are unable to give either a positive or negative answer to this vexed question. Whatever may be his decision, it would have been beneficial to the Diocese. If the proposal was not agreeable to him then status quo would remain in force. On the other hand if he had consented, all the bickering and feud would have come to an end. If some churches are taken away there would not be any financial constraint to the diocese. Even after the bifurcation of the Diocese no considerable financial loss has taken place here. Only half of the number of churches remain in this Diocese now. If one is not willing to do a small favour to his own brother, what is the point in shouting about the virtues of love from house tops. Then what is there in saying that love is patient, love is kind and envies no one, love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude, never selfish, not quick to take offence. It is only a befitting subject to speak from the pulpit on Sundays.

After this I never attended any of the clergy fellowship meetings. I tried to keep away from other meetings also where our priests



used to congregate. I conveyed this decision to the Diocesan Metropolitan in writing.

## **Construction of the Diocesan Building and War of words**

It was the earnest desire of everyone that we should have our own Diocesan headquarters building befitting our status and prestige. Both of our Metropolitans Mathews Mar Barnabas and his assistant Mar Nicholovos used to conduct church service in their residence after converting a part of it as a chapel. Since I had mentioned it earlier, I am not elaborating these things now. As days passed everybody was convinced that we should have our own Diocesan building. The Marthoma church was able to construct a beautiful diocesan building of their own much earlier. Other Orthodox Churches except the Ethiopian church have their own fine buildings and their Metropolitans are residing there. I have seen the Diocesan centre of the Armenian church with whom we are maintaining holy communion participation. It is a beautiful building in the heart of New York City which they have constructed a few years back. Ethiopians have neither unity, brotherhood nor money. The Armenians had arrived in America some seventy years before us and most of them are merchants and industrialists. They are ardent lovers of their church and had a burning desire for its upliftment and growth.

Nearly fifty years ago they constructed this bishop's palace by purchasing a property near II avenue 34 street (Manhattan). I had gone there in 1974 along with late Fr. John Mathew. His Grace the present Jerusalem Patriarch Tokom Manugian Metropolitan was the primate of America at that time. Manugian Metropolitan was a close friend of Paulose Mar Gregorios Metropolitan. He had visited our church on many occasions and had also taken part in church services. In 1974, we had not even a small church of our own in America. At that time, I used to hope against hope that one day our church also would possess a headquarters like this in New York

City. Even though it was an overvaulting ambition under the existing circumstances our desires are always unlimited. As it is written in chapter 11 verse 1 of St. Paul's letter to the Hebrews. "Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see." In fact this faith is the experience of most of the people including myself. After a lapse of some thirty one years this long cherished desire became a reality by the grace of God. Our Heavenly Father bestowed upon us a splendid Diocesan centre at Mutton town in Long Island. Nicholovos thirumeni used to tell us not to worry about anything and cast all our cares to God.

Why had we to wait for this much time to have a headquarters here in America? This is a topic which we have to ponder over seriously. The entire fault for it lies with us. It all happened because we had not any definite plan or aim for it. Another important reason for it was the disinterest of Mar Makarios. As we all know, he was not at all interested in living among his own people. Until the arrival of Barnabas thirumeni nothing was done for it. Nearly 12 years had passed in this way. Of course, we were facing severe financial crunch during that period. As the proverb says "necessity is the mother of invention." When Mar Barnabas arrived we were constrained to find a suitable place where he can reside. Hence as a temporary arrangement we purchased a building at Bell rose (80-34 Commonwealth Blvd). The Metropolitans started to reside there after making some renovation. During this period His Holiness the Catholicos Mathews II arrived here (1995) and stayed in this building for some days. As a result of his stay there the Catholicos could get a clear picture about the troubles and tribulations these two Metropolitans were undergoing and also about the predicament in which they are placed. Without any further delay the Catholicos sent commandment letters to all the churches in America highlighting the need for having a Diocesan centre. Moreover, in all the churches that he visited, H.H. mentioned this fact while delivering sermons. Barnabas thirumeni also prayed incessantly and worked earnestly for achieving this long-cherished goal.

## **Two properties**

Some of the priests were very eager to have the Diocesan centre to be situated at Queens-Long Island. These priests were able to prevail over Mar Barnabas and bring him over to their way of thinking.

### **Garden City property**

It was during this period that some of our people came to know that a building owned by the Episcopal Church of Garden City is put for sale. They conveyed this news to all churches. It was reported that the area of the property was about 3 acres. It contained 120 parking space, a cathedral of 33,000 square feet, large number of rooms, auditorium etc. (Exh. 66).

For the benefit of the readers, let me give you a brief description about this Episcopal Church. Just like the Roman Catholic church, the United Presbyterian Church, this Episcopal church also is very powerful in America in wealth as well as in numerical strength. This church is associated with the Anglican church and they accept the Archbishop of Canterbury as their head. But the Canterbury Arch bishop has no administrative power over this church here in USA. The headquarters of all the Dioceses of this church are having huge buildings. The headquarters of New York Diocese is at Manhattan. It is situated near Broadway 109 street comprising one block of gigantic buildings. St. John's The Divine Church or The Cathedral of St. John The Divine is one of the biggest churches of the world. Inside this church, besides the main Chancel, there are five chapels. It is a main tourist centre. Other centres of the Episcopal Churches are also having big buildings, though not as big as this one.

When it was heard that a proposal for purchasing the property in Garden City was under the consideration of the Diocesan council, we wanted to ascertain further details regarding it. One of our priests had celebrated Holy Qurbana in that building sometime back. When

Philipose Mar Eusebios Metropolitan, my classmate and colleague and now a Metropolitan celebrated Holy Qurbana in that building, I also had participated in that ceremony. It was a rainy day and rain drops were dripping on our heads on that occasion. After the Holy Qurbana we had a talk with the caretaker of that building. We were told that the building was constructed some seventy five years ago and the annual maintenance expense would be more than that of the annual income of our Diocese.

No doubt, it was a big building. But our American Diocese had only 3500 or 4000 families as per the directory published by Fr. C. O. Varghese. America is three times bigger than India and all these families are living scattered in various states of USA. When a Diocesan meeting is held we require only parking facilities for approximately 15 cars. All our conferences are being held elsewhere in this country.

This building, it is said, was being used for office purpose. When it was constructed some seventy five years ago it was built in the fashion and design prevailing at that time. Hence it was not suitable for our use under the present conditions and circumstances. They deliberately avoided maintenance work as they wanted to dispose it of. We required a well-furnished building in which our Metropolitans and priests could stay comfortably. Such a building should have conference hall, bath attached rooms, chapel, dining hall, guest rooms and all other modern amenities. Hence I put forward these suggestions when a discussion regarding the purchase of this building came up. Some people vigorously raised their objection to my proposal. In the end the Diocese took a firm decision to purchase this property. But it was only when the time came for drafting the sale deed that the Episcopal church authorities became aware that there was a clause which stipulated that this property could be sold only for the purpose which should some how or other be connected with the affairs of the Episcopal Church. Hence the advance money remitted by us was returned. As a result the purchase

programme came to an end. But on September 6, 2004 an article appeared in ICON E mail group casting aspersions on me for the non fruition of this purchase programme. The author of that article published it deliberately in order to discredit me. This concocted story was only a figment of his imagination. I firmly believe that our Heavenly Father did not forsake the American Diocese and me in that hour of need.

### **The Second one - Creedmore property**

This property lies contiguous to Creedmore Mental Hospital and it belongs to State Government. Some people informed that it could be purchased at a very cheap rate. Hence these over enthusiastic people immediately formed a registration with the name of the Metropolitan in its bye-law only, not in the registration. But later it was known that this land was contaminated, as it was being used for chemical waste disposal. As a result of this information, the then Diocesan secretary, along with another committee member, himself a priest, vigorously opposed the idea of purchasing this property (both of them were chemists). In the soil examination report, it was stated that a considerable depth of soil has to be unearthed before constructing any building meant for residence purpose in it. With this available report and the evidence gathered, I argued against this purchase proposal. Thus dissension and difference of opinion surfaced.

Heated discussions and debate took place and the majority were against going ahead with the plan. However, the Catholicos sent a commandment letter (HES/HOH/28/03) (Exh. 9) giving sanction for the purchase.

I would now like to go back a little and recapitulate certain facts. Following points were put forward by some people who insisted upon purchasing this property.

1. This property should not be purchased for and on behalf of the church.

II. It should be purchased in the name of a cultural society.

III. Even if a building for prayer and worship is constructed neither the name of the church nor its denomination should be written there with in the next 25 years.

IV. A cross should not be erected on the top of this building.

But when tension began to mount, these people said that even a Cathedral could be constructed there and for that there would not be any complication. When majority of the people turned against, they wanted to put the blame on somebody. Articles began to appear in newspapers that Fr. A. K. Cherian, Yonkers group and the Diocesan secretary were responsible for all these turmoils and disturbance. But it was a blatant lie. In fact, Barnabas thirumeni was genuinely interested in purchasing this property. Perhaps others might have instigated him to do so. I supported the proposition to purchase this property on certain terms and conditions. The conditions laid down by me are given below:

I. If this property is purchased in the name of a cultural centre, it should be mentioned in unambiguous terms in its bye law that the Malankara Metropolitan has got outright and absolute power and control over this property.

II. As it was found that the soil contained poisonous substance the matter should be taken seriously. Hence urgent steps should be initiated to make the land poison free.

But in a meeting held on May 10, 2003, to discuss these problems, a priest declared in a high pitched tone that the Malankara Metropolitan would have no authority over this property. Strangely enough, on hearing this contemptuous and arrogant outburst, the Metropolitan who presided over this meeting deliberately kept silent.

Those who want to know more details about all these things and also about the earlier decisions can have it by going through a report despatched by the Diocesan secretary on October 5, 2004 to all the priests belonging to the American Diocese (Exh. 72).

Thus innumerable impediments and setbacks came one by one in the way of building up a Diocesan headquarters here.

In the administrative set up of the Malankara Orthodox Church, the word transparency has got its own value and worth. However, this is just the opposite in the case of the American Diocese. When vested interests and unscrupulous people try to creep and climb into the administrative council they should be denied entry by a process of elimination.

### **Coming back to St. Mary's Church, Bronx**

Now I would like to go back a little and recapitulate certain things once again. Now the pertinent question that remains to be answered is whether the day to day affairs of the Bronx Church was running smoothly without any hitch after the consecration ceremony? The answer, of course, is an emphatic 'No.'

Create pandemonium at the annual general body meeting, cause commotion in and around the church premises after the Holy Qurbana, gather outside the church and hurl abuse and talk indecently in such a way as to produce an unholy and irreligious atmosphere in the church - these were the strategies of the trouble makers. They wanted to put an end to the christian atmosphere prevailing in the church through these untoward incidents. The annual general body meeting of 1998 had been postponed and the previous years committee was allowed to function at the directive of the Metropolitan through his commandment letter of OL 30/98. After the consecration ceremony of 1986, it was decided to construct a building in the land lying adjacent to the church. This building, if it had been constructed, could have been used for conducting meetings and holding functions of various spiritual organizations of the church. The annual meetings of March 1, 1987 had unanimously ratified this proposal.

There is no difficulty in finding an answer to the question why some people created troubles after the consecration ceremony. The answer to this question is very simple. As per the decisions of the

church headquarters, the consecration ceremony was conducted by the Catholicate designate. This was something which the Diocesan authorities could not tolerate. Those who put forward the contention that the Indian Church has no jurisdiction in the land of America were shocked at this turn of events. Like smouldering embers this problem was slowly and steadily burning in the American Diocese with no sign of its quenching. But the majority of the people were fully aware about these developments and they were watching everything with dexterity.

### **A heart burning Court case**

The parish committee and the general body held several meetings in which various decisions were taken regarding the construction of the building. After the celebration of the Holy Qurbana on September 4, 1995 His Holiness the Catholicos Mathews II laid the foundation stone for the building. He named this building as 'St. Gregorios Annex.' Subsequently His Grace Mathews Mar Barnabas Metropolitan approved the plan and the blue print of the building and put his signature and insignia on the plan. Before awarding the contract for US \$ 4,95000 to a construction company, a general body meeting was convened to have the approval for this contract. But some of the people who had given their unstinting support for this scheme earlier then joined hands with the trouble makers and made a walkout from the meeting. As this meeting was legally valid the vicar then asked the assembled members to take a decision on it. 53 members gave their consent for the proposal and there was only one person to express dissent. As such the tender for 4,95000 US dollars was approved by the general body.

Without much delay the construction work was started. But when the foundation work was in progress it began to rain heavily. There were trenches consisting of 4 feet depth in the backside as well as on the left and right sides of the church. The heavy down pour continued incessantly. At this juncture, I got a subpoena from the



Bronx Supreme Court. Myself, the church and the contractor were the defendants. The ten persons who boycotted the general body meeting were the plaintiffs. The ground cited for filing the case was this. "The vicar, out of his own free will and decision started to construct a new building without the approval of the parish committee."

Days and weeks passed. As the church building became waterlogged, the architect and the contractor informed us that if this state of affairs continued it would cause immense damage to the church. Hence we had to make the building stronger and for that a substantial amount had to be spent. As a result a large space inside the church also was lost forever.

The judge who was to hear the case was on leave. In such situations retired judges would be appointed to hear the cases. It was an old retired judge named Joseph Masur who heard this case.

Several people belonging to both sides were examined. From the accused side myself, the then trustee M. K. Thomas and secretary Cherian Koshy were examined.

While being examined, I was asked one question (I do not remember exactly whether it was from the plaintiff's attorney or the attorney from our side).

"Father Cherian, how much salary you are getting from the church?"

"I am not getting any salary from the church; only getting an honorarium to cover my expenses like travel and telephone charges." I said.

Judge: "you are not getting any salary from the church; Are you a family man, Father?"

"Yes, your honour! I am a family man." I said.

Judge: "How do you live Father?," he was looking at me like he heard something strange.

I said “I am working a full time job in another church office for my living and working full-time in this church to fulfill my call.”

The judge then looked straight into my face. Afterwards he asked the attorneys.

“Any other questions?”

No one had any questions.

Judge: “Father, you are excused, thank you for coming.”

While I was being examined, the attorney for the plaintiff handed over a paper to the judge. When the examination process was over, the judge asked what the paper contained. The attorney replied that it contained the names of the persons who had made a walkout from the general body meeting. The judge then said sarcastically,

“Oh, good for them; that was their right.”

He then rolled up that paper and threw it into the waste basket.

Justice Joseph Masur removed the injunction order which stood in the way of the commencement of the construction work. Even though the vacation judge could pronounce the judgement, the execution of the same is vested with the sitting judge of that bench. When the incumbent judge assumed charge after the vacation, several objections were raised from the plaintiff’s side regarding the setting aside of the injunction order. But the judge over ruled all these objections. His name was Jerry L. Crispino. He ratified the verdict of Joseph Masur and follow up actions were initiated accordingly. A total expense of approximately 1.5 lakh dollars had to be spent by the church for this litigation and also for strengthening the church building. As the parishioners were fully aware about the fact that it was an unwanted litigation, they were willing to donate a part of the amount spent for this case to the church. Hence the church did not incur much loss. Plaintiffs were ordered to pay compensation to the church.

In spite of all these setbacks the mischief makers continued their monkey business vigorously. Hence the attorney for the defence filed a suit for compensation. At this stage the plaintiff's attorney returned the brief. Finding that they are in a predicament these people then approached the Catholicos to help them from the court punishment. As a result the Catholicos issued a commandment letter against going ahead with the case against the plaintiffs. When everything was thus settled some of the plaintiffs severed their connection with the parish.

Let me now mention the names of two persons who spent their valuable time and energy for the success of this case. The first one was the then parish secretary Cherian Koshy and the other one T. Mathai who stood firmly behind me through thick and thin. From the beginning of the first general body meeting in which the decision to construct this building was taken until the last general body meeting which decided to get the contract signed, he did all the paper works connected with it. He also delivered all the relevant documents which were to be submitted in the court at the stipulated time. The submission of these documents in time was a major victory on our part and the credit of it goes to him. Among the plaintiffs, there were persons who supported the proposition for this building. The documents submitted to the court thus became self-explanatory and self-evident and it helped us to a great extent to win the case. It was T. Mathai who informed me about the day to day developments and proceedings of the case. He informed me about the verdict in favour of us. Majority of the members of the parish gave their support by their prayers, financial help and also by appearing themselves in the court for watching the proceedings. His Grace Mathews Mar Barnabas Metropolitan also presented himself in the court for the parish. I remember it with deep gratitude and thankfulness.

The story of my life is filled with injustice and ill-will that I had to have from the very same people whom I loved most. Most of the people who went for litigation were men hailing from God-fearing

families. But they became stubborn and rebellious because of the malignant and malicious influence of some mighty people. In spite of all these adverse circumstances the parish was growing and flourishing by leaps and bounds. Even though the opposite party tried their level best to retard the growth and development of the church in various ways all their attempts became futile. As a last resort they established new churches in this locality and brought forth priests for those churches. When all their attempts failed they turned to litigation. Even though I had to undergo untold miseries and sufferings because of this case, it was the will of our Heavenly Father. As the final verdict and subsequent turn of events dashed their spirits and enthusiasm their so called supporters made a hasty retreat from the scene. When the plaintiffs found that they would have to remit a substantial amount as compensation, these wrong-headed persons became fully aware of its seriousness and sought the help of the church in order to wriggle out from the predicament. The church, through the attorneys settled everything amicably and thus put an end to the age old problem of dissension and discord prevailing in the church.

It is by the grace of God and intercession of Virgin Mary, the mother of Our Lord that this church came out from this ordeal unscathed in spite of all the earlier setbacks. It is the will of our Heavenly Father that this Diocese should remain forever under the Malankara Orthodox Church and the Catholicos of the East should have all power and authority over the American Diocese, just as His Holiness has power in other dioceses of the Orthodox Church. As a result the Malankara Metropolitan or any one designated by him has got full power to conduct consecration ceremony as well as to purchase movable and immovable properties in America on behalf of the Malankara Metropolitan. The Bronx Church underwent all these ordeals in order to achieve these goals and we have always that gratification with us.

## **Makarios Metropolitan and Mar Gregorios Centre**

Mar Makarios purchased a property along with a building in 1996 at Suffern in Rockland County of New York State with the help of St. John's parish which had a very close knit connection with him. He named this building as St. Gregorios Orthodox Centre. He also sought financial help for it from all the parishes through commandment letters. Barnabas thirumeni despatched a copy of the above mentioned commandment letter and other relevant details to Catholicos for his perusal. An extract from Catholicos' reply in response to this letter is quoted below:

“I am in receipt of Aboon's letter along with the copy of Makarios Metropolitan's commandment letter which he has sent to the parishes. I have strictly informed Makarios Metropolitan that the property which he is going to purchase should be in the name of the church. Otherwise we are not going to associate with it under any circumstance whatsoever and this fact has already been conveyed to him. You may inform the parishes regarding it in whatever way which seems befitting the occasion” (Exh. 73).

Barnabas thirumeni despatched a copy of this letter to all the concerned parishes.

But Makarios thirumeni purchased the property and later he disposed it off. He gave back the money which he had received from St. John's Church. It is said that he got more than 2 million dollars from this sale (1 million means 10 lakhs).

### **Celibate (unmarried) priests and their properties**

The church insists that the celibate priests should never stay in their birth houses. Instead they should stay in monasteries set apart by the church. But owing to certain peculiar circumstances some celibate priests are constrained to stay in their own houses. Some of them give their ancestral properties as well as their self-acquired properties to the church. Others give it to their kith and kin.

But when some one is elevated to a Metropolitan he becomes an entirely different person. A Metropolitan, in fact, is the bridegroom of the church and as such, the church is his bride. Sainly Metropolitans during the fag end of their lives used to bequeath all their movable and immovable properties to the church namely the cross staff, crosier, the chain along with cross which adorns it etc; even the vestements. This is the age old practice and tradition of our church.

When Makarios thirumeni passed away the church made a thorough probe about the details of his property. Then it was found that all his properties have reached in the hands of some one. He collected money from the parishioners telling them that the St. Gregorios Centre is in the name of the church and it would be the headquarters of the American Diocese. It is true that some of his own money also was used to purchase it. But he did not inform any one about his intention to sell the property. It was quite unbecoming on the part of a Metropolitan. Some people from Philadelphia filed a suit against it. But as the title deed and all other relevant documents were solely in his name they could not go ahead with the case. According to a simple calculation, it is said that he could have a savings worth 3 million dollars at his hands at the time of his demise. All these amounts were acquired by him from the donations he got from the faithful members of the church. Moreover, it might be remembered that His Holiness the Catholicos had reminded him at the time of the purchase of this property that it should be purchased only in the name of the church. As you are aware, I have already mentioned these facts in the previous pages of this book. He deliberately ignored that commandment. This amount which belonged to the Malankara Church, unfortunately reached the hands of an American attorney and his family in accordance with the will executed by the Metropolitan. What a tragedy! Those who supported Makarios thirumeni were constrained to keep mum at this turn of events. This is a lesson which our future generation should remember. History should not be repeated.

## **A pilgrimage to the Holy Land**

I had to engage myself in some other form of work for my livelihood, while I was going through these kinds of difficulties in the church work. Hence I was fully engrossed in all the seven days of the week. As such, I could not find anytime for sight seeing or to be away from home for any other purpose. But there remained a lingering desire in my mind for visiting the Holy Land. This unfulfilled desire came to fruition in the year 2000. Cherian Koshy (Raju) and his wife Molly Koshy (Mollykutty) took initiative for it. Accordingly our team consisting of 41 members boarded the plane on 1, October 2000 from Kennedy airport. The very next day on the night of October 2 we arrived at Tel Aviv and commenced our sight seeing programme on October 3 itself. All the important places mentioned in the old and new Testaments of the Bible such as the tombs of prophets and kings, the Mount Carmel, the abode of Elijah the prophet, Dead Sea, Kumran Caves, the sea of Galilee, Mount Horeb, tomb of king David, Gogultha, Kyamtha Church, the place from which our Lord ascended to heaven etc were included in it. This trip would remain as the most unforgettable event in our lives. The last place that we visited was Yohosafath Valley and the place where the mother of our Lord was buried and the church there. Everybody was extremely happy during these twelve days. Our Heavenly Father gave me an opportunity to celebrate the Holy Qurbana at Sehion Mansion, generally believed to be the place where our Lord took the last supper along with his disciples. St. Gregorios of Parumala and His Holiness the Vattasseril Metropolitan had celebrated Holy Qurbana here earlier. Only the Syrian churches hold the view that the Last Supper was served here. Other churches have a different opinion about it. They attribute it to some where near the place where David's tomb is situated. That place is called Coenaculam, which means dining hall. It is very wide and big and is kept intact.

Another important fact that I have to mention in connection with this journey is that I was exempted from paying any amount for this

trip. The organizers of this trip were eligible to get two free tickets and they offered it to me. I accepted that gift from them. I take this occasion to thank them.

I published a travelogue in Malayalam titled “Under the Feet of the Lord” (Sophia Books, Kottayam, 2002) describing all the details and experiences we had during this spectacular and exciting journey.

### **The dear departed church fathers connected with Bronx Church**

His Holiness Catholicos Mathews II passed away on January 26, 2006 at 5:18 pm. He served as Metropolitan for 38 years and subsequently reigned the Malankara Metropolitan for another 15 years. His body was interred in Elia Chapel at ‘Eapen Hill’ situated on the banks of Sasthamkotta Lake. Fr. C. T. Eapen donated this property to the church. Mathews Mar Coorilos later purchased some more land lying adjacent to this property and thus extended the boundary of Eapen Hill (Exh. 71). Next to the renowned and distinguished Pulikottil Dionysius II Metropolitan, no other Metropolitan in Malankara has founded this many institutions like Engineering College, Arts College, Teacher’s Training College, Convents, Monasteries, High Schools etc. No wonder, this spectacular and remarkable achievements, that too within a short span of his life, is certainly a feather in his cap. He brought forth all these establishments under the administration of a Trust for which criticism arose from certain quarters. But in due course all these fault findings and disapproval fizzled out. Most probably he formed this Trust solely as a safe guard against misappropriation of funds by persons who may handle it in future. But ultimately all these properties are to be vested with the church as a natural corollary. Bronx Church is deeply indebted to this Catholicos and I take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude and gratefulness to him in full measure.

All the five priests who were enthroned as Metropolitans on February 16, 1975 at Niranam Martha Mariam Church had strong



and steadfast connections with Bronx Church in one way or other. Out of this, mention has already been made about Paulose Mar Gregorios and Geevarghese Mar Osthathios. The remaining three are Stephanos Mar Theodosius, Joseph Mar Pachomios and Thomas Mar Makarios.

The Bhilai mission of the Malankara Church is a notable handiwork of Mar Theodosius. He has done a splendid work there and that mission field is indeed a lodestar of the Malankara Church. It was a long cherished ambition of our church to have mission centres in North India ever since the inception of outside Kerala diocese H.H. Catholicos Mathews I worked vigorously for its implementation and success. Theodosius Metropolitan took charge of this mission in 1972 and followed the footsteps of his predecessor with zeal fervour and the mission work continued unabated under his able guidance. Thus the Malankara Orthodox Church, which until now confined only in Kerala had begun to spread its branches to North India. He established several kindergarten schools, higher secondary schools, Colleges and one engineering college. The Nagpur St. Thomas Theological Seminary, the second one of our church also started functioning under the auspices of this mission. The Metropolitan passed away on November 5, 2007 and was buried at Bhilai St. Thomas monastery.

Mar Pachomios served as the Diocesan Metropolitan of Kandanad Diocese. He assisted the Catholicos in his administrative work and was also the secretary of the Episcopal Synod. He left for his heavenly abode on August 19, 1991 and was buried at Mulakkulam St. George Church which is his own parish.

Of all the Metropolitans who had been anointed in modern times by the Malankara Orthodox Church, Mar Makarios had a fine sense of humour and was capable of getting along with his friends and foes alike. Before the formation of the American Diocese he was the Metropolitan of Bombay Diocese under which the American churches, were functioning. During that period I did a lot of work

on behalf of him to strengthen and consolidate the administrative set up of the American churches which were under him. I have mentioned about it in the early part of this book. It was a common practice of the people to create disturbance and commotion during the annual general body meeting of the parish. Some of these people believed that they were a law unto themselves. These unruly members of the church would raise unnecessary and irrelevant questions and also would behave insolently. Various factors and reasons might have contributed for this behaviour. A probable reason that can be attributed for the unruly behaviour is the accumulation of wealth which had unsettled their mental equilibrium. Whatever may be the reason they created an adverse effect on the parishes in which they congregated. On one occasion a parish priest invited a Metropolitan for taking part in the annual general body meeting of his parish.

After the Holy Qurbana the general body meeting commenced. The Metropolitan congratulated the members of the parish at the growth and prosperity of the parish in his introductory speech. He then told that if they had got any questions to ask they would be given an opportunity to do so. Then all of a sudden several people stood up to ask questions. The questions these persons then put forward were totally irrelevant, ridiculous, frivolous and absurd. The Metropolitan gave apt answers to all these questions. This process continued for a long time. Then for a few minutes the Metropolitan remained silent without giving any answer to their impertinent questions. At last he stood up and said "I am now fully aware about the problems prevailing here. When your bank balance has multiplied you have lost the balance of your heads. As such, there is no remedy available for it."

Those who have grasped the meaning of this remark laughed hilariously. With this the general body meeting came to an end. There are several such incidents to write about. For lack of space I do not want to go ahead with it.

Broad mindedness acquired through foreign education, extraordinary personality, gift of the gab, fine sense of humour all these qualities made him a multiple genius. He had also an encyclopedic mind. This Metropolitan would always be in the forefront for everything as and when he reaches Kerala.

It is an undisputed fact that the Malankara Church has no difficulty in establishing a Diocese in America. But it seemed that the higher authorities of the church were least bothered about the facilities that had to be accorded to a Diocesan Metropolitan when such a new Diocese was formed. What about his board and lodging? The Church authorities never gave scant regard for such things. As Makarios thirumeni had some close connection with the Episcopal bishop of Buffalo he could manage things without any difficulty. He was able to use their office address for his own use. His address at that time was "Episcopal Diocesan House, Buffalo." Hence our own people had a misconception that this building was owned by Makarios thirumeni.

Under this peculiar circumstance Mar Makarios was constrained to reside at Buffalo. Later it proved harmful to him as well as to the Diocese.

In 1979 there were only 21 parishes in America and Canada. Some of these parishes were functioning only for namesake. Only 13 parishes were functioning smoothly. No parish possessed its own church building for worship. It is to such a place that the Metropolitan came. That too at his own will and desire; not on any compulsion or coercion.

During the early period there was severe financial strain. When the Metropolitan arrives in a parish he would get an amount as Kaimuthu. Later a decision was taken to the effect that each parish should contribute a sum dollars every year as contributory fund for the Diocese. After sometime a fund collection campaign was launched under the name "Diocesan Day." Meanwhile another fund collection

scheme was commenced under the label “100 \$ one unit.” But nothing worthwhile was achieved from any of these schemes. I am mentioning these things in order to bring to light the fact that the metropolitan had to undergo severe financial strain during his early tenure.

The above mentioned factors were the state of affairs prevailing during the early period of two or three years. By 1982 bickering and dissension became rampant in many of the parishes. Whenever difference of opinion takes place some of the rebel members would form a new parish. Such a tendency was prevailing in America during that period. The rationale behind this policy was to increase the number of parishes to suit the whims and fancies of these people. This relentless process was continuing unabated upto the end of the administration of the Metropolitan. After finishing off some more relevant facts let me conclude this part of the story.

As I had mentioned earlier, this highly talented and multifaceted Metropolitan did not pay sufficient attention and care in the administration of his Diocese. I have my own apprehension regarding it. All the problems arose due to his oversight in the administration. Whenever problems arose he handled it as if it were negligible, minor or insignificant. This was his undoing. He was under the clutches of a group of self-centred, egotistical and greedy priests and laity. The Diocese followed the political philosophy of “divide and rule” and as a result brought out its ruin. We could have constructed a Diocesan centre within 5-10 years in nearby places where most of our people were residing. But it seems that the Metropolitan never bothered about it. As everybody knows priests lives should be an open book. They are bound to justify their ways, words and deeds before God and people. They should never adapt themselves to the pattern of the worldly people.

Another factor that I could discern from all these things is that the High priests of our Church did not take these problems seriously as they ought to do. If the Metropolitan puts forward a question such as where can we find a problem-free Diocese, no one would be

able to give an answer. Nobody had the courage to face him and talk with him sternly. In a way it is correct to say that everybody became mealy-mouthed before him. Almost all the Metropolitans were afraid of him. H.H. Mathews I the Catholicos of the East, who proclaimed vehemently and in unambiguous terms that he would lay the foundation stone of Bronx Church “if the sky did not fall down” had to board Panam flight as an obedient lamb before the Metropolitan whom he himself had anointed. The very sight of it sent shock waves over me. The question what would be the aftermath of it raised a big question mark before me.

Paulos Mar Gregorios used to get a clear picture of what was going on here from various people as and when he arrived here. On one occasion when he came to Bronx church I unburdened my pent up feelings before him after the celebration of the Holy Qurbana. I requested him to take initiative to put an end to this feud and rivalry by requesting the Catholicos to intervene and thus bring out an amicable settlement for all the problems here. To this request he replied in the following way.

“Cherian Achen, I know very well that you are anguished and agitated. Even though the Catholicos knows all about these things, he won’t do anything. As for me, I won’t lift a single finger against Aboon Makarios which will adversely affect his career and reputation. Moreover, if I do anything against him he will utterly ruin my Diocese. He has got his own henchmen to do such things. Even though I have my sympathies and moral support to you, I am totally helpless to alleviate your grievances at this juncture.” The valiant Gregorios thirumeni who had the audacity to criticize the Australian prime minister in his own country was afraid of Makarios thirumeni. There were only two Metropolitans who were a match for Makarios thirumeni. But Mar Makarios used to avoid them. They were the late Paret Mathews Mar Ivanios and the late Daniel Mar Philexinos. In short Mar Makarios always believed that he was superior to everybody. And it was this egotistic attitude that brought forth his downfall.

The third aspect, it seems to me is the fact that he never strived for the progress and development of the parish. He never thought about having a Diocesan centre for himself or his successor. He had property and cash worth several crores of rupees in America. All these possessions were lost irrecoverably. When we take into account all these factors, we can say that it was a mighty fall of a gigantic and distinguished personality. No one, but he alone is responsible for his decline and downfall. When we ponder over all these things we can see that an eminent person destined to be the shepherd of Malankara Church have withered and faded away at the hands of destiny some how or other.

His Grace Makarios Metropolitan passed away on February 23, 2008 in London at the age of 82. Even at this ripe old age he was active and energetic like a young man. He went to England to form a new parish at Sunderland for his diocese and celebrated the Holy Qurbana there. While going to the airport in a car on his return journey to America, a serious accident took place and he was fatally injured. He was fully conscious until he was brought to the hospital. As days passed his condition began to deteriorate. Most of the time he was on ventilator. At last with the consent of his brothers as well as that of the higher authorities of the church, the ventilator was detached and he left for his heavenly abode on February 23, 2008. His body was brought to Kottayam Devalokam Aramana and was buried on the southern side of the chapel there.

As the health condition of Barnabas thirumeni was declining he insisted upon going back to Kerala. He himself consecrated his long cherished Diocesan Center on July 24, 2010. The inauguration ceremony of the Diocesan Center also was conducted in an open house on September 4. On December 27, 2010 he despatched a letter to the Catholicos requesting him to relieve him from all official duties and the Catholicos accepted his request and relieved him. His assistant Zachariah Mar Nicholovos Metropolitan was given the charge of the Diocese by the Catholicos as per commandment

letter 109/2011. The installation ceremony of Zachariah Mar Nicholovos was conducted by His Holiness Paulose II, the Catholicos of the East at Philadelphia Bensalem St. Gregorios Church on May 21. Thus Mathews Mar Barnabas who served as Diocesan Metropolitan for 19 years went back to Kerala on May 25, 2011. He was then admitted to Kolencherry Medical College Hospital for treatment. After treatment he resided at Pampady Dayara where he was well attended. On December 9, 2012 he entered his heavenly abode and his earthly body was laid to rest at his own native place in Valayanchirangara (near Perumpavoor) Church.

He arrived in America on March 20, 1992 and after completing the assignment allotted to him returned to Kerala on May 11, 2011. 19 years, as far as the life of a person is concerned, is a considerable time. He underwent all sorts of troubles such as scorn, derision, contempt, scandals etc. Criticism was heaped upon him. He faced all this adversity with stoic fortitude and courage. He had to shift to various places even for his accomodation. In spite of all these affliction and hardship he ran the race successfully that was set before him. I am now reminded of the prophetic utterance of Isaiah on this occasion. "But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

Groupism and large scale bickering was rampant in most of the parishes. By the time of his departure peace and good will were restored in the Diocese. Nobody knows how it all happened. Some people were of the opinion that it was because of his incessant and persistent prayer and meditation. Others were of the opinion that the people of this Diocese who were quarrelling for the past several years became conscious about their past misdeeds and came to their senses. But people in Kerala were least bothered about these things. May the God Almighty now transform the loss incurred during the last 32 years into a gain for this Diocese. Thus after a lapse of many years peace and tranquillity were restored in the Diocese.

Besides having a beautiful Diocesan centre most of the parishes were able to have their own church buildings. It was after accomplishing all these things that the Metropolitan returned to Kerala.

On December 9, 2012 his earthly life came to an end and he joined with the blessed saints. May his prayer be beneficial to us on all occasions.

His Grace Zachariah Mar Nicholovos Metropolitan stepped into his shoes and we earnestly pray that our Heavenly Father give him sufficient wisdom and insight to discharge his duties with utmost satisfaction to all concerned.

### **Clergy Sustenance Fund Scheme in the American Diocese**

This topic had been the subject of discussion for the past many years. But no appropriate solution could be arrived at. Lack of membership in the parishes was the main impediment to implement the scheme envisaged. If there are not less than 100 members in a parish this scheme can be worked out with out any hitch. A sum of \$ 60,000 is required per year for the livelihood of a priest and his family. Additionally for medical expense, conveyance allowance, accomodation facility a minimum \$ 3000 is required for a priest and his family for their sustenance. It is said that some members of certain other denomination of Kerala who are residing here earmark \$ 1000 for the welfare of their priests. The money thus collected would be given to parishes which are in need to meet the welfare expenses of their priests. If such an arrangement is implemented here, it is very easy to fix a uniform fund for the priests. We should never take too much interest in increasing the number of parishes. Instead we should try to increase the number of membership in each parish. If a parish is formed with 20-25 members it would not be beneficial to the church. Instead in the long run it would be counter productive.



From the very inception of this Diocese divisive forces were at work and it is still continuing unabated. That may lead to more impediments and complications in the future.

For the past many years the system prevailing in the parish church was the arrangement of fixing the sustenance fund for the priests as per the decision of the general body. This was not perfectly impeccable. But to some extent it is well and good. Now the payment has become centralized. The priests welcome this method of payment. Even though the North-East diocese has contemplated to implement this scheme, a consensus regarding it could not be arrived. If no new parishes are created and membership campaign is intensified we can implement centralized scheme in due course. It is an undisputed fact that the present scheme is meaningless and illogical.

Moreover, our people are not at all conscious about the fact that it is the duty of the parish to see that the priests should earn their livelihood from the income derived from the parish. It is the duty of the Diocese to take initiative to inculcate this idea in the minds of the laity and for this an awareness programme is needed.

### **Third Stage**

## **40th Annual Celebration of Bronx St. Mary's Church**

“This much the Lord helped us  
This much the Lord has guided us  
Out of nothing He has lifted us  
This much the Lord has helped us.”

This song of praise is highly relevant and appropriate as far as this parish is concerned. An abandoned three-legged table was repaired by fixing a fourth leg to it and making use of it, the Holy Qurbana was celebrated for the first time here. Thus this parish started to function from scratch. This was the only possible way available to us at that time to be in touch with our parental church. The state of affairs and circumstances prevailing 40 years ago were entirely different from that of now. The early members of this church did not even possess their own houses here. Only very few had motor cars. Meticulous care had been taken to save every cent that came to the account of the church. In spite of all these teething troubles and hardships, Fr. John Mathew, along with others struggled hard to preserve and protect this parish. This parish can never forget persons such as P. C. George and Susy, K. V. Mathen and Ammini and many others like them. Let the grace of God be with them forever. The thought-provoking and highly impressive sermons of venerable Fr. T. C. Mathai played a vital role in enhancing the reputation of this parish. A building fund was formed for the construction of a church building. In the first chapter of this book I have mentioned about a person who tried to swindle a part of the church building fund from us dexteriously. By 1979 we had more than \$ 40,000 in our account. None of the priests drew any amount from the church for their sustenance. This service mentality of the priests helped a lot in purchasing the present site for the church. The property was

purchased in the name of Malankara Orthodox Church. This purchase created innumerable problems. As you are aware, I have mentioned all the relevant details regarding it in the previous chapters. Tension began to mount by leaps and bounds. The propaganda that the Malankara Orthodox Church and the Catholicos will have no power or authority over American church was in the air during this period. In the meanwhile we made the registration by submitting the constitution of Malankara Church as our bye-law and that was accepted by the state. I am just reminding this fact to refurbish your memory. But all these good deeds done by us were distorted and falsified by the rebels in such a way as to appear that it was intended to harm the Diocese. Hence the four newly formed parishes made scathing and unsavoury criticism against this parish with the result that the parish became a house divided against itself. As a result, the parishioners themselves formed into three groups. The majority of the parishioners belonged to the first group. They stood firmly behind the parish priest to face any ordeal to preserve and protect the parish. The second group were fence sitters. They were like leaning walls. They supported both sides and were incapable of taking a firm decision in anything. The third group always opposed the functioning of the parish under all circumstances without any specific reason. They were stubborn and rebellious.

### **The Priests Served in this Parish**

As you are aware, I have given a brief description about the priests and deacons who rendered valuable service to this parish. The dear departed priests, Fr. T. C. Mathai, Fr. John Mathew and Deacon Thomas Schweitzer toiled strenuously with all their energy for the upliftment and growth of this parish. After them came two young priests. Of these, the first one later became a metropolitan and the second one is at present serving as a priest in North-East American diocese. Let me express my deep gratitude and respect to His Grace Demetrios Metropolitan and Fr. K. M. Samuel on this occasion. Fr. Ninan Easo, the son of a member of this parish T. M.

Easo served this parish as a layman, deacon and later as a priest. For sometime he also discharged his duties as Sunday School Headmaster. The parish is deeply indebted to him for all the services rendered by him. Among the Malayalees born and brought up here, Fr. Paul Cherian had the good fortune to study at St. Vladimir's Seminary and become a priest. He also rendered timely help to this church as and when needs arose. Similarly Deacon Philip Mathew took part in the activities of this church when he gets opportunity.

Let me take this occasion to pay a glowing tribute to some persons who had taken part in the activities of this church with zeal and zest ever since its inception. All of them are now above three score and ten years old.

### **A. M. Alexander**

Mr. Alexander started his career as the security chief of U.N. Secretary General. He is highly talented, brilliant, competent and capable of doing any work entrusted to him with consummate skill and dexterity. He is having a burning desire for the growth and development of this parish and worked for it with unstinting devotion and sincerity. He had explicit faith in the words and deeds of the vicar. He made every effort to convince the parishioners that the actions and deeds of the vicar are bonafide, when there was bickering and strife in the parish. He could get along with friends and foes alike. When the severe cold war in the church reached at its zenith, the parish brought forth a news letter. Alex and Revi Mathew (now His Grace Demetrios Metropolitan, the Delhi diocesan Metropolitan) were the brains behind this endeavour. This news letter was highly beneficial to the parish and it became a sensational hit. Alex worked relentlessly for the growth and development of this parish. His motor car was always at the disposal of the church. As far as I am concerned he was my friend, philosopher and guide. He was able to thwart and frustrate the tactics and contravences of the opponents with his expertise and experience. He left no stone unturned for the

survival and preservation of the parish. His was the brains behind introducing a detailed radio programme in 'WOR Radio' about Bronx Church. Thus for the first time a Malayalam news appeared in that radio programme in America. All these things were the handiworks of Alex. After the church construction and its provisional consecration ceremony, Alex returned to Kerala on January 26, 1982. Being the only son of his aged parents, he was fully aware about the fact that it was his duty to be with them during the fag end of their lives. He is still actively involved in church affairs as well as in all other social activities at Ranni, his own home town in Kerala.

### **T. Mathai**

While Alex was working in the field for the church, another man was doing a silent work for the church from inside. Mr. T. Mathai (Pappachen) an employee of New York Telephone is that man behind the scene. He was doing all the telephone contact for the church as and when it was required. He spent a lot of his time and energy for the church. Some people were under the misconception that Pappachen was the vicar of the church. Some times when I make a telephone call on behalf of the church, the reply I used to receive from the other end would be very interesting and amusing. When I mention the name St. Mary's Church, the person concerned would immediately announce that he knows very well Rev. Mathai of St. Mary's Church. As Pappachen was well-versed in both English and Malayalam languages, I used to entrust him to handle several things which I was bound to do. He did all those works with meticulous care and precision.

### **Thomas Idiculla**

Another important name worth mentioning is that of Thomas Idiculla. He was always in the forefront in handling things connected with the church. He was broad-minded, affable and genial. He always thought about Malankara Orthodox church as a whole instead of confining his perspective in the parish itself. He used to donate liberally

for the church. Ever since the time of the land purchase for building the church, he was present everywhere in connection with church activities.

M. V. Chacko (Baby), Cherian Koshy (Raju) devoted a lot of time for the construction of the church building. In them the accuracy and perfection of an architect and the intelligence of an engineer are embedded alike. Though young in years, Raju's contribution for the growth of the church is immeasurable. Now the renovation work of the church is going on at a fast pace. M. V. Chacko used to come early in the morning at 8'o clock to the church everyday. He stays there until evening and watch how the work is going on. He himself does certain work with the help of persons like T. Chacko. It is not easy to imagine how much money the parish might have spent if we appointed some one to oversee these works.

A host of some other names also flash upon my mind when I think about persons who worked hard for this parish. Hence I want to mention the names of only some of them who are now above the age of 70. As I am not fully aware about the age of all, I would like to mention the names of only very few of them. M/s T. V. Mathews (Orangeburg), M. C. Mathai, Punnose Abraham, P. K. Oommen, Jacob Thomas (Senior, Thankachen), M. K. Thomas, Thomson Kochupurackal etc. were strong pillars of this church. They worked for the parish with unflagging energy and enthusiasm and always rose to the occasion to meet all the challenges the parish faced. Thomas John is now the senior most member of this parish. He is very much interested in proclaiming the gospel with the congregation and also is willing to take up all the responsibilities connected with the church.

Artist Thiruvalla Baby constructed the 'Kuduskuthisin' of the church as well as other decoration works for the church.

The second and third generation of the church (those who are born and brought up here) will be remembered by the church in due course.

Let me now pay a glowing tribute to some of our sisters who underwent all sorts of hardships and looked after our spiritual organization. Late Ammini Thomas, Alice Thomas, Rachel Rajan, Annamma Mathai, Mariamma Mathai, Mariamma Idiculla, Aleyamma Abraham, Sosamma Mathew and so many other elder sisters as well as youngsters who came afterwards deserve our special congratulations. As they are below seventy, I am not mentioning their names at this juncture.

Within these 40 years 21 persons departed from their earthly frame to their heavenly abode and joined with the Lord. Among them there were elders and youngsters. Most of these dear departed persons worked for the church ardently. May God Almighty grant them eternal peace. We pay our special tribute to late T. M. Easo who had served as the Chairman of the church building committee. Photographs of the dear departed persons are included in the souvenir.

### **8<sup>th</sup> day Lent Festival**

It was in the year 1981 that the 8th day Lent Festival commenced in our parish. It was started under the auspices of the Martha Mariam Samajam. In due course the parish itself took up the responsibility of observing this festival. In the early days only Holy Mass was celebrated in the morning. Very few people took part in it. On such occasions there was none to help the priest as thuriffer. Besides being non-cooperative to this venture, many people tried to discourage this lent festival. But four members used to come everyday to attend it. I used to go to the church with a firm conviction that at least these four persons would be there in the church to take part in it. I now remember with gratitude how far their presence during that period helped this organization in the future. They were Santhamma Thomas, Rosamma Jacob, Kunjamma Oommen and Kunjumol. After some time Kunjumol shifted to another parish.

During this period I was able to conduct the baptism ceremony

of several children. Later I had the good fortune to conduct the marriage of some of them. In the case of some others I was a co-celebrant. Now our Heavenly Father gives me opportunity to conduct the baptism of their children also.

A large number of young men of this parish have acquired high education and reached prominent positions suited to their qualifications. They are the moving spirit and cream of this parish. They are always willing to do anything for this parish, especially with regard to money matters. But so far no such requirement has arose in the parish. But the church always utilize their talents and ability as and when they are needed. It is the duty of these young men to look after the parish for the next 25-30 years. It gives us immense pleasure to find out that these young men are too happy to shoulder this responsibility. Ours is the first Indian Orthodox Church in Bronx city. Now the cost of land has increased exorbitantly in this city. Once this city was in a declining stage. But it is now flourishing rapidly. We cannot imagine what would be the value of this property after some years. This property which we had purchased some 32 years ago is worth several million dollars now. As per the records of the American Government, this is exclusively the property of the Malankara Orthodox Church, which, of course, enhances its prestige and reputation tremendously.

## **Construction of the House of God**

All places of worship centres are considered to be the House of God. It was King David who first endeavoured to construct a house for God Almighty. But the Lord told David not embark upon that project as he had killed too many people and caused a lot of bloodshed. Instead, he was asked to give instructions to his son Solomon to do it on behalf of him. But at the same time God allowed David to do the preliminary works connected with it. He purchased the threshing floor of "Araunah the Jebusite" to build an altar to the Lord. The men of Tyre and Sidon brought great rafts of cedar logs



to David for the construction. “The temple of the Lord must be a marvellous structure, famous and glorious throughout the world.” That was the only thing in David’s mind before the commencement of the work. David collected the construction materials before his death. He then asked his son Solomon to build the House of God of Israel on behalf of him. David wanted to shift the ark of the covenant which was covered on all sides with pure gold, the golden urn containing manna, Aaron’s rod that budded and the tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments to the newly built House of God (In 1 Chronicle, chapter V, verse 10. It is recorded that there was nothing in the Ark except the two stone tablets).

It was after celebrating the Holy Qurbana in the presence of the parishioners and other eminent men that the construction work of the church building commenced at Bronx Church. A ditch was dug in the shape of a cross. Thereafter offering the incense and with prayer a stone with cross mark was laid there. When the actual construction work started this stone was shifted to the right side of the wall. Christ is the ‘Corner stone’ of our church and upon that corner stone we laid the foundation of our church. When the work was finished we conducted a temporary consecration ceremony. It was only after a lapse of five years that the actual consecration ceremony was conducted. Its proceedings were as follows. In the centre of a consecrated stone a hole was made and after that 12 consecrated stones were inserted in it. Then a paper in which the date and year of this consecration day was inserted in this hole. In our church we had used 12 precious stones for this purpose. A golden cross also was deposited in it. After that Holy Mooron, the symbol of the Holy Spirit was smeared on the door posts of the Madbaha (sanctum sanctorum) and along with this ceremony special prayers also were conducted. With the culmination of the celebration of Holy Qurbana this ceremony came to an end. I have written all these details just to give sufficient knowledge to our readers that the construction works of our church buildings had been in accordance

with all the ceremonial formalities in letter and spirit. As I had mentioned earlier, God dwells in all places of worship. But it is good for us if our people remember that our “house of God” is a sanctum sanctorum. In the olden days the early christians used to conduct prayer and worship in caves and by morning they completed it. Most of them were slaves and they were to present themselves before their masters by morning. Their place of worship was not consecrated as of now. These people were filled with the Holy Spirit and they had dedicated their lives for the Lord. In due course rules and regulations regarding the manner of worship came into existence. I am mentioning these facts just to remind you that we are bound to follow all these traditions and customs in our day to day worship.

### **Car parking**

Car parking facility was not available at Bronx Church. There is nothing unusual about it. All the churches situated in New York City are plagued with this problem. Even those churches situated some 30-40 miles away from the city itself are not having sufficient parking space. Here the worshippers park their vehicles as per the parking rules laid down for Sundays. An example for the city parking, there were more than 3000 employees in Manhattan Inter Church Centre where I was working. Only 99 parking places were available there for that big building. At River side church, which is situated in the next street nearly 2000 people used to throng for Sunday worship. There they were having only 115 parking space. I used to park my car at both places. Most of the people park their vehicles in the street. They would not raise any complaint with regard to this non-availability of parking facility. When the question of Bronx church comes, members of other churches blame us for our lack of parking facility. The most interesting thing in this case is the fact the accuser’s church may not be having more than 10 parking facility. Those who are residing outside the city may be able to purchase more land for parking facility. I had a lingering regret in my mind when others say that Bronx St. Mary’s church has no parking facility. It was at this

critical moment our Heavenly Father did a wonderful thing for us. Nearly 100 feet away from our church, at Webster Avenue, an enormous parking garage with facility for 800 vehicles came into existence during this period. It belonged to the Botanical Gardens and the parking fee was comparatively low there. They would give special consideration for the church if prior request is made. I do not know whether our people are making use of this facility to a great extent. Even otherwise they are satisfied because they are getting parking facility some how or other on the street.

Along with the establishment of the parish, Sunday School teaching also was started here. Late A. M. Thomas, K. V. Varghese, Fr. Ninan Easo, Revi Mathew (H.G. Yuhanon Mar Demetrios), the present headmaster George Samuel etc served as headmasters. We are using the Oriental Orthodox Church Sunday School curriculum. In connection with the Sunday School, OVBS also is being conducted here every year. George Samuel and his family played a vital role in strengthening these two organizations, many others also gave their support to strengthen their hands in this endeavour. Student's organization (MGOCSM) also is functioning well. All the Sunday School leaders and other spiritual workers deserve approbation and appreciation abundantly. Whatever you have done for God would not certainly go unrewarded. I am indebted to all the members of this church in many ways. I have enjoyed the hospitality of the members of this parish on innumerable occasions and for that I thank all of you profusely. I would not forget all those who have showered their love and affection upon me. If anyone has harmed me knowingly or unknowingly, I will not keep a grudge against them. I am indebted to all the members of this church in many ways. I was with everybody in their sorrows and joys and henceforth it would be in the same way.

## **Martha Mariam Samajam**

Since I have mentioned about Martha Mariam Samajam of this parish in the early pages, I do not want to elaborate further about it.

We now entrust a huge responsibility on the shoulders of the youth of this church, who are brought up in this house of God. Its growth and prosperity will help you a lot. We are now leaving behind some work for you. In future, whenever you think that this church building should be enlarged, you can very well extend some 12 feet on both sides. Similarly the frontage of the church also can be renovated and broadened. St. Gregorios annexe constructed on the backside, can be modernized with 3 more storeys and thus it can be converted into a beautiful Cathedral church. This possibility was mentioned to me by the Cowboy contractors who have constructed most part of our church.

Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, prophets like Ezra and Nehemiah built the second Jerusalem Temple and the walls of the city amidst stiff opposition from their enemies. It was with building materials in one hand and weapons in another hand that they completed their task. Likewise, it was with fierce opposition that this parish survived until now. Let our Heavenly Father bestow upon you peace, prosperity, joy and gladness forever. Let His steadfast love and grace be with you all.

As per the decision of the general body meeting of the parish, it was decided to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the parish. Accordingly we celebrated the anniversary on the occasion of the birthday festival of the blessed Virgin Mary with pomp and pageantry. His Holiness Baselius Mar Thoma Paulose II presided over the function. The Diocesan Metropolitan Zachariah Mar Nicholovos, Delhi Diocesan Metropolitan, Yuhanon Mar Demetrios, Kochi Diocesan Metropolitan Yacob Mar Iraenius, Adoor-Kadambanad Diocesan Metropolitan Zacharias Mar Aprem, Metropolitans of Armenian Church, the dean and delegates of St. Vladimir's Seminary,

Bishop Rt. Rev. John Itty (Malayalee) of Anglican Church of Long Island, New York bishop of OCA, representatives of Bronx community, eminent priests of our church, some nuns from the Catholic church and a host of other reputed personalities were present here to accord a warm reception to the Catholicos. The Catholicos stayed in the church for five days and celebrated Qurbana on every day. A large number of people thronged in the church to participate in the ceremony, on the final day.

### **Catholicate re-installation Centenary**

On September 9, after co - celebration the Catholicate re-installation Centenary celebration was conducted. His Holiness the Catholicos presided over the function. Metropolitan Yacob Mar Iraenius, Yuhanon Mar Demetrios, former Church Secretary Alexander Karackal, Sabha managing committee member Korason Varghese, former managing committee member Thomas Idiculla etc delivered speeches on the occasion.

Thus this parish took initiative to commence the Centenary celebration as a trailblazer to other parishes in America.

### **Epilogue**

The present office bearers of this church Jayan Varghese, the treasurer, Jacob Malathu the secretary, Thomas T. Joseph. Jt. Treasurer, Jaison Thomas, Jt. secretary Lillykutty Mathai, Martha Mariam Samajam secretary, Mrs. Laly Jacob Malathu, treasurer along with their co-workers deserve congratulations for their untiring work for this parish.

Let me pay a glowing tribute to all our dear departed souls who took keen interest in the growth and development of this parish. If they were not here at some critical moments, the history of this church would have been entirely different. Most of these people were here ever since the inception of this parish. They loved this parish with utmost sincerity and devotion and worked for its

upliftment and development in manifold.

Mr. A. M. Oommen (Thankachen) served as the trustee of the parish for several years. He was always a managing committee member when he did not possess other position in the committee. He was a man of integrity and righteousness. He worked relentlessly for the parish and devoted his entire time for it.

Mathew Alexander was the secretary of the parish when His Holiness the Catholicos returned to Kerala without laying the foundation stone of the church building. In those days of trouble and affliction he stood as a staunch supporter and helper behind me. Shrewd, astute and intelligent, he was ready to lay down his life for truth and justice.

Abraham Cherian, a native of Kottayam was born and brought up in a patriarchal faction family. In one of the commandment letters the patriarch of Antioch (No. 203/1970) alleged that St. Thomas had no ordination and therefore he does not possess a throne. Through this commandment letter the Patriarch contended that the Catholicate was a myth and a legend. Being unable to bear such irresponsible and heinous falsification of history as well as distortion of facts and truth he shifted his allegiance to the Malankara Orthodox faction. He worked a lot for the development of this parish and was deadly against the misdeeds of the Diocesan Metropolitan. He passed away at a very young age.

Abraham Thomas (Kunju) stood behind the church like a rock when feeble-hearted persons deserted the church on some pretext or other. He left for his heavenly abode a few years back.

Ever since his youth, M. G. Abraham (Pappachen) was actively participating in church ministry wherever he went. He was a true follower of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was Pappachen who first informed me about the site of Bronx Church. He passed away a few years ago while residing at Baltimore.

The last person who was called to paradise from this group was Thomas Mammen (Kuttappai). He passed away a few days after the 40th anniversary of the church. He served in this parish for a long time in many ways.

All the members of this parish remember these dear departed persons in their daily prayers. We always remember them during the celebration of the Holy Qurbana. The members of their family actively participate in all the activities of the church with untiring energy and render all the necessary help to the parish. We are deeply indebted to these families for their benevolence and good deeds.

As I have referred about Mrs. Amminikutty Thomas in the early chapters of this book, I am not making any further mention.

There are others who after residing here for a long period went back to India. Most of these people have settled in Kerala and quite a few of them are living in different cities in India. Besides A. M. Alexander, Jacob Thomas (Sr), K. V. Varghese, Vincent K. John, T. C. John, and Dr. V. O. Mani belong to this group. All these people were office bearers of this church during their sojourn here. The family of Thomas P. Gomez & Jason Thomas, though residing in Philadelphia come over here to attend church service on Sundays and maintain their membership here. K. P. Varghese & V. K. George are residing in Florida. Omana Joseph, Marykutty John and Mathew Varghese are members of this parish from the very beginning of its inception. May God bless all of you.

Those members of this parish who are residing far away are always being remembered in our prayers and Holy Qurbana on their birthdays and wedding anniversaries.

I take this occasion to mention the names of some persons who were office bearers of the church committee. Persons like M. N. Thomas, P. M. Mathai, Thomas K. Issac, T. J. Varghese, Varghese Rajan, P. S. Varghese, K. G. Mathew, T. Chacko, A. M. Thomas, M. M. Mathew, M. K. Thomas who did all the work allotted to

them with meticulous care and enthusiasm. Thomas Melakathu and Alice contributed a lot to the parish. They got the foundation stone prepared. Thomas Panicker and Kunjamma is another family of high stead for the parish.

Members of the Martha Mariam Samajam had done their work wonderfully well. They deserve our special thanks and congratulations. There is one member who served as treasurer for 10 years. At the same time there are persons who rendered their services only for one year. Whatever you have done here for this church you have done for our Heavenly Father. Words are inadequate to express our gratitude to you for all your good deeds.

God Almighty showered blessings on us to enable us to conduct the 40th anniversary marvellously. All the parishioners worked untiringly for its success and it was a typical and classic example of the co-operation and good will of the members of this parish. General convenor, co-ordinators and members of the editorial board worked in unison for its success. One name deserves special mention here. Officially she came to the committee as the Chief Editor of the souvenir. Her capability, competence, farsightedness and intellectual calibre helped me a lot to conduct the affairs of the church smoothly. Let beloved Lovelyamma Varghese's insight and acumen be an asset to the parish in future and let God Almighty grant her the requisite wisdom and discernment to do so.

Our thanks are due to those who have supplied various costly items that are required for the church. God has accepted your offerings. We pray incessantly for all of you. I take this occasion to give thanks to our sisters who have served sumptuous food to the priests when they come out after celebrating the Holy Qurbana.

There are some others who render all sorts of timely help to the parish unobtrusively. They are always reticent and reserved in all their dealings. Hence they are not being recognized and no one knows them. But the very same Jesus, who valued the widow's mite more



than that of the huge amount of the rich, would certainly value and appreciate your services.

Let MGOCSM workers take more interest and develop their field of activities. Similarly FOCUS and Golden club members also should take keen interest in their activities. All of us are servants of the Lord and we are accountable to Him.

Some members who used to worship in this parish broke away and established two or three new parishes in neighbouring places. In spite of that some members of those parishes still maintain cordial relationship with us. My humble and sincere prayers are always with them.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God Almighty and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all forever.

## **Annexure 1**

Commandment letter appointing Fr. A. K. Cherian as the vicar of Bronx St. Mary's Church.

No. 119/74

### **The Orthodox Syrian Church of the East**

**MATHEWS ATHANASIOS,  
METROPOLITAN OF THE DIOCESE OUTSIDE KERALA  
M. D. SEMINARY, KOTTAYAM, KERALA**

3rd March, 1974

Blessings to the Vicar, the Assistant Vicar and Parish Members of the St. Mary's Orthodox Church of India, Bronx, New York.

Beloved of the Lord,

Be it known to all those concerned that I (Mathews Mar Athanasios Metropolitan of the "Diocese Outside Kerala" of the Malankara Orthodox Church in India) have recognised and accepted the St. Mary's Orthodox Church of India, Bronx, New York, U. S. A. incorporated as a Religious Corporation pursuant to Article ten of the Religious Corporation Law of the State of New York, and included it as a Parish in the said Diocese Outside Kerala under my administration subject to the constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, India. I have also acknowledged and accepted the General Body (Parish Assembly), the Managing Committee and the Board of Trustees of the Parish, elected by the General Body for 1973-'74 whose names have been reported to me and appointed them to their respective posts until further orders. Hereby I appoint, until further orders Rev. Fr. A. K. Cherian (1776 Topping Ave., Bronx, N.Y. 10457) and the Rev. Fr. John Mathews (1776 Topping Ave., Bronx, N.Y. 10457) as the Vicar and President and Assistant Vicar and Vice-President respectively of the said Parish.

I desire that all those who constitute the Parish, will in all matters connected with the Parish, co-operate and work harmoniously for its well-being, taking care to maintain the faith and discipline of the Church and subject themselves to its order and constitution.

May the love of God the Father, the Grace of the only begotten Son and Communion and indwelling of the Holy Spirit be with you all for ever.

Our Father who art in Heaven.... Amen.

(sd) Mathews Athanasios Metropolitan

## **Annexure 2**

Commandment letter issued by His Holiness the Catholicos to all churches before his departure to Kerala after the installation ceremony of His Grace Makarios Metropolitan.

### **The Orthodox Syrian Church Catholicate of the East**

**Baselios Marthoma Mathews I**

Catholicos of  
The Apostolic Throne of  
St. Thomas  
And Malankara Metropolitan

Catholicate Palace  
Kottayam - 686 038  
Kerala, India

Blessings to the vicar of Bronx St. Mary's Church, priests of the land, trustees and the laity if this has been heard.

As we think that it is proper and fitting to issue a common commandment letter to all the parishes of American diocese before our departure to Kerala after the termination of the American visit. We are very happy to inform you that our more than one month's stay here was highly delightful and beneficial to us. We are also fully aware about the fact that the Metropolitan, priests and laymen took keen interest in providing everything connected with our journey, stay and also giving all other facilities as and when it was required. We are deeply moved by your devotion, love and affection. Let the merciful God bless all of you for it.

Let me congratulate you for building up a diocese in America. We take this occasion to glorify and exalt our Heavenly Father for giving me an opportunity to officialy declare the functioning of this diocese with effect from January 1, 1979 and also for installing Thomas Mar Makarios as the diocesan Metropolitan. Dear children, we now implore you to strengthen the hands of the metropolitan and also to render him all helps in running the affairs of the diocese smoothly.

With regard to the administration of the diocese, everything should be in accordance with the existing constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Church. We understand that we have to function on corporation basis which is the prevailing system laid down there in order to obtain tax exemption meant for religious institutions. While incorporating our parishes there, you have to see that the certificate of incorporation and bye-laws should not be at variance with or in conflict with the constitution of Malankara Orthodox Church. After drafting the required rules and regulations in consultation with attorneys, the diocesan metropolitan would send it to us. In order to seek the opinion of the priests and parishioners of the American diocese draft copies of the same would be despatched to you. When it is duly approved by the synod, copies of the same would be despatched to all parishes in America. Those parishes which are already incorporated will have to do the needful to get certificate of incorporation and bye-laws duly approved from the authorities concerned. Hereafter all the parishes which are to be incorporated must have to comply with these rules and regulations.

It gives us immense pleasure to understand that some of the American parishes have acquired land to build churches there. We congratulate them for this tremendous achievement. These properties and church buildings are to be registered in accordance with the prevailing laws there and it should also be in conformity with the certificate of incorporation and bye-laws approved by the Malankara Orthodox Synod. There is no objection to commence the construction work for church building under the above mentioned terms and conditions.

Dear children, we now return to Kerala with the full satisfaction of witnessing the growth and development of a diocese, which, we are sure, would thrive and flourish day by day. Your love and affection towards us will linger in our mind forever. All of you, along with the metropolitan and priests should make every effort and bear the burden to develop this infant diocese to further heights. Bear with

one another and avoid all quarrels and bickering. Let our Heavenly Father's name be glorified through your deeds and behaviour. Let the grace of God be with you forever.

Let the prayers of St. Mary, the mother of Our Lord and the blessings of St. Thomas, the Guardian Angel of India and the protection of all the saints be with you from now and forever.

Our Father who art in heaven. ...

(sd)

August 16, 1979,  
New York

## **Annexure 3**

**Blessings in the name of God Almighty, the trinity and one true God without beginning and end in whose name We, the Mar Thoma Mathews II Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan ascends the throne of St. Thomas.**

Blessing to the vicars of all the churches of American diocese, priests of the land, trustees and the laity if this has been heard.

It has come to our notice that the development of that diocese has come to a stand still as a result of certain problems that have evolved in some of the parishes there. Even though the Holy Synod has initiated certain steps to put an end to this dissension, it could not produce the desired result. In order to find a lasting solution to this vexed problem the holy synod met in conference from July 10, 1991 to July 12 at Sophia Centre, Kottayam. The Synod sought opinions from all persons connected with it and arrived at certain decisions to put an end to this bickering prevailing in the American diocese forever. On that occasion the incumbent diocesan metropolitan Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios submitted a request before the synod for relieving him from the administrative duties of the diocese. He also requested the Catholicos to take over the administration in his stead. After elaborate deliberations and discussion the synod complied with his request and relieved him from all administrative duties. Under this circumstance, we have taken up the administration of the American diocese in accordance with the powers vested upon us by the constitution of the church.

Hence you are asked to conduct the affairs of the parishes as per the commandments we issue from time to time.

The decision taken by the holy synod in that meeting is despatched herewith with our signature and insignia for your perusal. You are asked to work in accordance with it.

The Lord Jesus Christ loved us when we were sinners without

considering our iniquities. He suffered bodily pains and died for our salvation. While on the cross he prayed for those who crucified him. We are benefitted by that unsurpassed love. We have to follow such a Jesus.

Hence I advise all of you to work for your diocese with perfect harmony and concord.

The rest follows,

The grace of the Almighty be upon all of you forever. Our Father who art in heaven. ...

(sd)

July 12, 1991

In relation to the American Diocese of Our Church the following decisions were taken:

1. His Grace Mar Makarios be requested to submit as soon as possible attested photocopies of the certificate of incorporation of the Diocese of America, with copies of any subsequent amendments, and bye-laws if any.

2. With regard to the more than 40 existing parishes in the diocese, the Catholicate Office should immediately request all those parishes whose certificate of incorporation and bye-laws are not in file here to submit attested copies of such certificates with any subsequent amendments, to the office immediately, and a proper file be maintained at the Catholicate Office and be studied by an appropriate panel of experts. Only those parishes incorporated in accordance with the standard form decided by the Holy Episcopal Synod in 1980 should be recognised as parishes of the Diocese of America.

3. Any other churches in America whether within the existing diocesan administration or outside it singly or in groups can be incorporated only with prior written permission of the Catholicos-cum-Malankara Metropolitan.

4. The American congregations not presently affiliated to the



Diocese be requested to submit to the Catholicos their requests for incorporation, along with proposed draft documents of incorporation, and proposed draft bye-laws and they are to be incorporated only with the prior written permission of the Catholicos. As many of the reported 24 congregations which have sufficient numbers and other facilities should be encouraged to incorporate themselves according to the standard form decided by the Synod in 1980, or as an alternative be requested to merge in some other existing parish.

5. His Grace Thomas Mar Makarios has requested the Holy Synod in writing to be relieved of his administrative duties as Metropolitan of the diocese of America. The Synod accepts this with regret, places on record its appreciation for His Grace's services to the diocese and his achievements as Diocesan Metropolitan, decides that His Grace Thomas Mar Makarios be relieved of his administrative duties as Metropolitan of the Diocese of America, and requests that His Holiness the Catholicos-cum-Malankara Metropolitan, in accordance with articles 94 and 95 of the Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church take charge of the diocese with immediate effect until more permanent arrangements are made, and all concerned in the Diocese of America be informed about the same.

6. In making permanent arrangements the principle should be observed that all the parishes in the U.S.A. and Canada be incorporated and organized on the same general pattern, as integral parts of the Diocese of America. No particular grouping or association of certain parishes among themselves unrelated to the diocese should in principle be allowed.

7. It has been reported to the Synod that a body called The Catholicate Churches in America has been formed and incorporated on the 15th January 1991 in the State Of Maryland. This has been done without the permission of the Synod or the Catholicos and is hereby disallowed by the Synod. The said corporation should be dissolved.

## **Annexure 4**

The letter despatched by His Holiness the Catholicos to the American parishes after the relinquishment of Makarios metropolitan.

### **The Orthodox Syrian Church Catholicate of the East**

**Baselios Marthoma Mathews II**

Catholicos of  
The Apostolic Throne of  
St. Thomas  
And Malankara Metropolitan

Catholicate Palace  
Kottayam - 686 038  
Kerala, India

No. 162/91

27-9-1991

To,

All our Parishes in North America.

Dearly Beloved in Christ Jesus Our Lord,

Once again we beseech you in the name of our Lord to live together in peace and concord in all our parishes in North America. To this end we wish to clarify to you the present position once again, in order that you may always act in accordance with the decisions of the Holy Episcopal Synod.

1. During the meeting of the Holy Episcopal Synod in February 1991, His Grace Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios requested, of his own free will, to be relieved of his administrative duties in the North America Diocese. The Synod recognized the fact, and was grateful for it, that His Grace had done so out of goodwill, in order to pave the way for the integration of all our parishes in North America into a single North America Diocese directly administered, for the present, by the Catholicos-cum-Malankara Metropolitan. The Synod accepted His Grace Mar Makarios, request and relieved him of his administrative duties with immediate effect. We have, as Catholicos-cum-Malankara Metropolitan, taken over the direct administration

of the North America diocese, as provided in article 95 of the constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. All the parishes of North America are now in a single North America diocese, directly administered, for the present, by the Malankara Metropolitan. One should not speak of “Catholicate Churches” or parishes in North America outside the Diocese.

2. His Grace Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios is no longer the Metropolitan of the North America Diocese. But he continues to be a revered bishop of our Church, living in North America, who has served our Church for a long time. He should be given due honour and support, and may be invited to preach, to teach, to lead conferences and retreats and to engage in other spiritual activities appropriate for a bishop of the Church without administrative duties.

3. His Grace Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios cannot be expected to engage in any direct administration in the diocese. He will not therefore convoke or convene any official meetings of any of the statutory bodies or spiritual organisations or parishes of the diocese. He will not issue Kalpanas or orders to the parishes and other bodies, nor will he handle the finances and accounts of the diocese.

4. We recognize with gratitude that His Grace, while he was serving as Diocesan Metropolitan, did not want to be fully supported financially by the diocese. He had magnanimously used his own funds for many of his expenses. In future, His Grace will be given an allowance for his living expenses. We will directly see that this allowance is paid to His Grace by the diocese. We are sure that many of our people will also .....

5. It is exceedingly important that the diocesan Assembly and Council be properly reconstituted in accordance with the constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (Chapter 3. Articles 45-62). To this end, each parish in the diocese should be properly incorporated under the law of the State or Country in which the parish is located and in accordance with the proforma sent to you.

Two copies of the certificate of incorporation should be on file in the office of the Malankara Metropolitan, and one copy in the Diocesan office, when it is properly constituted, in the custody of the Diocesan Secretary to be duly elected.

6. The Diocesan Assembly and Council of the North America Diocese, we understand, have not been properly constituted hitherto. It shall be one of our first duties to set up the Diocesan Assembly or “Methrasana Idavaka Yogam” in accordance with Article 46 of our Constitution, so that it can fulfil all its duties as prescribed in Article 47, including the election of members of the Diocesan Council and the Diocesan Secretary. Only properly incorporated parishes will be invited to send duly elected delegates to the Diocesan Assembly. Unincorporated parishes will not be recognized by the Church, nor will any of the priests of the Church, be allowed to serve such unincorporated parishes, unless there are clear and valid reasons for doing so.

7. The funds of the diocese will be held in a manner to be decided by the Diocesan Council and approved by us, in accordance with the laws of the USA and of India, and also keeping in mind article 53 of our constitution which lays down that such funds are to be deposited in the name of the Diocesan bishop.

8. Those parishes which have not sent the certificate of incorporation should do so to reach us before November 30th 1991. Those not doing so will not be represented at the Diocesan Assembly.

We hope to visit USA and Canada very soon. We shall soon let you know the precise dates of our visit and the venue and date of the Diocesan Assembly. Meanwhile please do everything possible to promote harmony and concord. Do nothing to create bitterness or discord. You are all children of Holy God our Father, who is the Lord of Peace, Grace and Mercy, and faithful children of the Church which is the Body of Christ. May the blessing of the Father Almighty, the Son and the Holy spirit be with you all.

The receipt of this Kalpana should be acknowledged.

(sd)

Baselios Marthoma Mathews II  
Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan

Copy to:

His Grace Thomas Mar Makarios Metropolitan.

# **Bronx Diary**

## **New York St. Mary's Parish and American Diocese**

An abandoned 3 - legged table was mended by fitting a fourth leg to it and converted it as a reredos to celebrate Holy Qurbana during the early days. Travelled extensively by bus and train to various parts of America carrying church utensils in bags in order to conduct church ministry. The church was registered in New York State on the basis of the constitution of 1934 of Malankara Orthodox Church which was duly approved by Government and thus tax exemption was obtained. Site for building the church was purchased in the name of Malankara Metropolitan and the church building was constructed. Immediately temporary consecration was conducted. After a lapse of nearly six years the Catholicate-designate conducted permanent consecration. Thus the authority of the mother church is established. Lakhs of rupees were donated to the church headquarters for various purposes. In giving donation this church was in the fore-front among Malankara Orthodox Parishes. Adjacent to this building a three storied building was constructed, fitted with beautiful icons and stone glasses. 40th anniversary was conducted with Catholicos as the chief celebrant. 100th birth anniversary of Catholicate reinstallation was celebrated. "This much Jehovah has helped us. Out of nothing he has lifted us. Let his name be glorified."