



**Daya Bhai**  
to deliver  
D.T. Niles  
Memorial  
Lecture  
on Oct 2nd  
at 5.30 p.m.



**Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay**  
General Secretary-  
World Council of Churches  
will present the theme today  
- *God Renew us in your  
Spirit and Restore the  
creation*



# CCA NEWS

VAARTHA വാർത്ത 28 SEPT.

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE OF ASIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY KOTTAYAM | 28 SEPTEMBER - 03 OCTOBER 2023



## CCA ASSEMBLY TO BEGIN TODAY

**T**he 15th General Assembly of Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) is set to take place in Kottayam, from 28 September to 3 October, with the theme “God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation”; and the sub themes, Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Affirming the Will of God (Romans 15: 5-6; Psalm 143:10), Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Dwelling in Harmony (Isaiah 65:25), & Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Attaining Life in Its Fullness (John 10:10).

Organised at three different locations the Pre-Assemblies-

Asian Ecumenical Women’s Assembly (AEWA), Asian Ecumenical Youth’s Assembly (AEYA), and South Asia Sub Regional Consultation on ‘Ecumenical Diakonia, towards attaining Sustainable Development Goals’, and Asian Ecumenical Migrants Advocacy Network (AEMAN) will discuss various themes.

On September 26-27 the Executive Committee will meet the final time prior to the Assembly.

To commence the Assembly, Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillai will share the thematic address followed by speakers and panel discussions. On October 1, 15 different topics drawn from the themes and sub-

themes will be discussed at three different locations.

In the presence of Hon’ble Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr. Pinarayi Vijayan, the Asian Ecumenical Festival will occur as a public gathering on Sept 30. Asia Sunday will be observed on Oct 1.

The National Council of Churches in India and the member Churches in Kerala Church of South India, Malabar Independent Syrian Church, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, and The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church are dedicated to make this event a success and remarkable gathering.

The coordinator of the General Assembly Meet, Rev. Dr. Abraham Mathew had this to say: “I thank God for His guidance and abundant blessings. It is indeed the work of God as the delegates deliberate on the assembly theme”.

“The 15 Asian General Assembly will be yet another ecumenical history” stated the General Secretary of CCA, Dr. Mathews George Chunakara. This historical event is set to bring a renewal in ecumenism.

The Inaugural session will begin with an opening worship led by Dr. Yakoob Mar Irenios



Dr. Yakoob Mar Irenios with the participants of Asian Ecumenical Institute conducted at Kottayam in connection with the Christian conference of Asia General Assembly.

# Asian Ecumenical Institute in Kottayam

Asian Ecumenical Institute, that functions under the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) commenced in Kottayam at the TMA Study Center.

The Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church, Dr. Yakob Mar Irenios delivered the lecture on “God’s Renewal and Restoration of creation and our stewardship”.

Dr. Irenios began the lecture by referring to Bible verses, especially Psalms 51. The main thrust of his

message revolved around Renewal, Restoration and Stewardship. HG firmly asserted that God continues to renew and restore creation. He then moved on to say that Restoration and Salvation are inevitably linked and man’s role in achieving salvation was to have a willing spirit. As stewards we have to listen to the Master who gave His promise in Psalms 96 and 98—“I will renew the entire creation”, “Sing to the Lord a new song”.

Dr. Irenios reminded that Repentance is one of the means of Renewal. In this context he referred to the parable of the Prodigal Son and Samson. Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. As we have striking similarities with God we are asked to care, suffer and ready to serve.

Dr. Irenios referred to Leviticus 25, when he spoke of Restoration- of human dignity, justice, peace and freedom from exploita-

tion. Rebuilding of broken lives and relationships, working to restore justice, freedom and dignity of the individual and responsible parenting are the responsibilities of the stewards.

Dr. Irenios concluded the lecture by remarking on testaments and witnessing. He exhorted the participants to be co-workers with God. The lively lecture was followed by an inter-active session with the AEI participants.



Dr. Abraham Mar Paulose, Dr. Yakoob Mar Irenios, Dr. Kuriakose Mar Theophilos, Bishop V.S. Francis inaugurating the reception committee office of the CCA General Assembly.



The Organizing committee meeting conducted at Jerusalem Marthoma Church Kottayam.



Dr. Mathews George Chunakkara, General Secretary, CCA speaking at the press meet. Anoop John Chakkalayil, Treasurer, Local Coordination Committee, Rev Dr Asir Ebenezer, General Secretary, National Council of Churches in India, Rev Dr Abraham Mathew, Executive Secretary, NCCI, Local Coordinator of the Assembly, Dr Paul Manalil, Chairman, Media Committee from left.



**Prof. E. John Mathew  
Koodarathil**

## WELCOME TO KOTTAYAM

**K**ottayam is a charming city of the state of Kerala in Indian. By all reckonings, Kottayam is best equipped to host the 15th General Assembly of Christian Conference of Asia, an event of far reaching impacts and resonances. Christianity, with a long tradition of more than 2000 years, has been flourishing in this part of the world ever since the arrival of St. Thomas in A.D 52. The missionary zeal of St. Thomas is still sustained by the succeeding generations.

Kottayam landscape, from its backwaters to High ranges, from water logged slushy river banks to hilly terrains, offers a hearty welcome to one and all. You are welcome to our long cherished hospitality and impeccable arrangements. We are sure that the Assembly will be a major event in the religious and cultural calendars of our Churches adding another feather on its cap.

Kottayam is located in the central Travancore region and is also the administrative centre of Kottayam district. Kottayam is flanked by Western Ghats on the east and the Vembanad lake and the luxuriant paddy fields of Kuttanad on the west. Apart from its floral panorama, Kottayam is also replete with highlands, hills and hillocks and rubber plantations. The city is an important marketing centre

of spices and commercial crops, particularly rubber. Most of India's natural rubber originates from its verdant sprawling lands and is well catered by Rubber Board office head quartered at Kottayam.

Kottayam has many firsts to its credit. It is called a land of God's own gift with 4 Ls, Letters, Latex and Lakes and Legends. For all the proud generations, Kottayam is named as 'Akshara Nagari' which means 'the city of letters'. It is etched in history that Kottayam could achieve 100% literacy as early as 1989. English education in South India was started from Kottayam Old Seminary in 1813. The first Printing Press – CMS Press- was established here in 1821 by Rev. Benjamin Bailey. The first College in the state – CMS College – was also started at Kottayam in 1840. As a token of our proud heritage, the first 'English- Malayalam' and 'Malayalam-English' Dictionaries were published from Kottayam in 1846 and 1847 respectively. The first and the only Cooperative Society of writers, authors and publishers (SPCS) for publishing books and periodicals was started at Kottayam in 1945. Kottayam is the cradle of publishing and printing houses like Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi, Deepika, Mangalam, Madhyamam and Desabhimani with the DC Books remaining at the helm.

Kottayam is proud of a harmonious coexistence with its Churches, Temples and Mosques. The Malankara Orthodox Church has its Head Quarters at Devalokam and all denominational Churches are vibrant with Spiritual activities. The Kottayam District is proud of age old Churches like Kottayam Cheriapalli; Kottayam Jerusalem Marthoma Church; St. George Orthodox Valiyapalli, Puthuppally; Kottayam Mar Elia Cathedral, Manarcad St. Mary's Jacobite Syrian Church; Chingavanam St Mary's Knanaya Church; Kottayam CSI Holy Trinity Cathedral; Kaduthuruthy Valiapalli and Bharananganam St. Alphonsa Shrine Church as worshipping centers where healing and teaching ministry are giving solace to the distressed beings. Also, Kottayam has Thirunakkara Mahadeva Temple; Ettumanoor Mahadeva Temple; Panachikad Dakshina Mookambika Temple and Thazhathangadi Juma Masjid as centers of worship which attract pilgrims all around the year.

Kottayam could give birth to time honoured prodigies like Sri. K.R. Narayanan who steered the destiny of the Nation as its First Citizen- the Tenth President of Republic of India. Kottayam is also a hub of prestigious higher education institutions like Mahatma Gandhi University, K. R

Narayanan National Institute of Visual Science and Arts ( KRN-NIVSA), Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) and other renowned co-educational Arts and Science Colleges and reputed women's colleges. Augmenting the spirit of Science and Technology, Kottayam has Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Technology. In the Health Care sector also Kottayam holds a significant position with its Kottayam Government Medical College, Carithas Cancer Care Institute and a host other medical hospitals. Allied Aayurvedic treatment centers are serving the masses. The wellness of every citizen of Kottayam is an assured precondition. Kottayam can be easily reached by road and by rail by water and by air ( Cochin International Air Port). We hope that the proposed Sabarimala international Green Field Air Port at Erumeli, will be a reality soon.

Kottayam is the ideal take off point for our tourist attractions and dream destinations like Kumarakom, Peermade, Munnar, Thekkady. Kottayam is the gateway to the famed Sabarimala Temple. A Visit to the bird sanctuary at Kumarakom is an overwhelming experience. While abundant are our God given benchmarks, we cordially welcome you to Kottayam, bountiful with salubrious climate and culinary delight. □



Baselios Marthoama Mathews III Catholicos honoured Dr. Jerry Pillay, WCC General Secretary with a *Ponnada* (Golden Shall) at a function in Kottayam. Justice K.T. Thomas, Prof. P.J. Kurian, Bishop Malayil Sabu Koshy Cherian, Dr. Mathews George Chunakkara, Dr. Kuriakose Mar Theopilos, Dr. Abrham Mar Paulose, Cyril Mar Baselios, Dr. Issac Mar Philoxenos, CCA Moderator Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabay from left.

# CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE OF

**Dr Mathews George Chunakara**  
General Secretary, CCA

When I was asked to be part of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and make a presentation on 'CCA: Past, Present and Future', it gave me a privilege to recall my memory, especially my direct association with CCA since 1980 –when I was a college student. I had very many opportunities and those manifested in a variety of capacities: as steward at an Assembly, as an interpreter at a CCA youth exposure event, as a participant at a number of CCA youth meetings, as a CCA youth intern in the Philippines, resource person in various youth committees and programmes, resource person for international affairs programmes, as executive secretary for seven years and co-ordinator of a programme cluster covering four programme units for three years, etc. My relationship in a variety of capacities with this Asian ecumenical body over the past 43 years has given me so many opportunities to observe this organisation from 'close up'. It has been a unique privilege and honour. For the past 25 years, my association with the CCA has been even deeper,

For almost seven of those years I was on the staff of the CCA and for the past 14 years I have worked closely linked with the CCA as Asia Secretary of the World Council of Churches and in that capacity as the coordinator of CCA's funding round table for 9 years and subsequently as Director of the International Affairs of WCC for more than five years. All these experiences and professional mandates richly helped me to both relate directly with and collaborate with the CCA.

When the first coming together of EACC took place in 1957, I hadn't even been born yet. However, in reflecting on the theme, I tried to visualise the first coming together of the ecumenical stalwarts more than half a century ago. I went through some of the old documents of the first Prapat meeting which are archived at the WCC archives and library in Geneva. Only a handful of our senior ecumenical friends participated in the Golden Jubilee of CCA can remember the 1957 event and the path on which God has led our forefathers since. But there are many others who can remember how the EACC/CCA has spread its wings over the years. There were many who had contributed to the growth, life and witness of the

CCA, whose lives and thoughts have shaped CCA in the past are not with us now, especially those great Asian ecumenists like D.T. Niles, Bishop E.C. Sobrepena, and Prof.D.G.Moses, who played a significant role in the formation of the CCA. However, we are extremely happy that we still have in our midst other ecumenical stalwarts who had that rare privilege of acting as midwives during the birth of the EACC in 1957–U Kyaw Than and Soritua A. E. Nababan. Kyaw Than was a staff member of the WCC and the IMC and he was the organising secretary of the Prapat Conference. S.A.E. Nababan was a local staff who facilitated the smooth running of the local committee hosting the Conference. The CCA has given us friends around Asia and the world. The CCA made us part of the Asian and global ecumenical movement. The CCA shaped our thoughts and vision for what God wants us to be and to do in Asia and beyond.

**Half a century of witness and service of a regional organisation is a remarkable achievement. When we celebrated the Golden Jubilee of CCA in 2007, and when we look at the present scenario even after the period from 2007 onwards and look into the future, it is important that we should reflect on the past too. Indeed, throughout the five decades of its life, the CCA has been a platform from which churches, coming from different traditions and a great variety of ecclesiological backgrounds, were able to converse with each other. It promoted ecumenism and addressed the emerging socio-political issues based on our Christian faith and in spite of the obvious difficulties precipitated in our local, sub-regional and regional contexts over the past five decades.**

It should be acknowledged that in the fifty seven years of the life and witness of the CCA, it has passed through numerous challenges and difficult periods. Whether due to theological, missiological or socio-political, cultural and ethical issues, the CCA has faced challenges from time to time in all these years of its existence. However, the most important factor here is to look into those actions and assess how faithful we were in our engagements and how faithfully we responded to the historical realities and aspirations in each context.

When the Prime Minister of Indonesia sent the message of greetings and wishes to the Prapat Conference, he referred to the great Afro-Asian conference held at Bandung in Indonesia in 1955.

There, 29 nations from Asia and Africa pondered over common responsibilities and obligations they had in the cause of world peace and co-operation amidst contemporary tensions and conflicts. The East Asian Christian Conference - held in Prapat in 1957 – was, in a way, analogous to the great Bandung Conference in its attempt to examine the role and vocation of the Churches in Asia in the contemporary missionary situation of the whole world. Yet, the fact remained that it was not the intention of our forefathers to establish an Asian "power bloc" or an "ecclesiastical Bandung" within the ecumenical movement through the Prapat Conference. The EACC/CCA did not just spring up as a result of the 1957 conference at Prapat. In fact, it came about as a result of serious thought and effort going as far back as the 1938 Tambaram Missionary Conference. From that time on, and including the 1949 Bangkok Conference, more concrete thought and action took place.

The theme chosen for the Prapat Conference was "The Common Evangelistic Task of the Churches in East Asia".

It was striking that the emphasis was on "the common task", the Indonesia slogan "Gotong Royong" which President Soekarno himself had referred to at the opening acts of the Prapat Conference. The common task, for the participants in Prapat, was that of evangelism. When the leaders of the churches and national councils in Asia came together as a representative group for the first time in history, that coming together became an historic occasion. The theme of the Prapat Conference was not for the churches in Asia, a definition of a goal to which the churches must move. Rather, it was a starting point for them as they manifest in their life and mission the already given unity because of their common membership in the body of Christ. As it is summarised in the report of the Prapat Conference, "the churches in East Asia were not gathered at Prapat to give birth to the idea of a common task suddenly agreed upon by them. They were there to examine the implications of the common task they had already been granted because they were what they were". It is in this context that the Asian church leaders who led the discussions emphasised that "Asian regional consciousness should not detract from world consciousness or in any way hinder the ecumenical ties with Christians in other parts of the world".

Today, when we look back after fifty years, how do we assess our

achievements, success, strength, failures, and weakness? As it was mentioned in Charles Dickens' novel "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity; it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair", we experienced everything in the past fifty seven years of the journey of this Asian ecumenical body. However, a self-assessment of this great ecumenical body and its journey, especially to assess where we stand now is an important task we need to undertake.

What is the legacy of the Asian ecumenical movement and what gains have we made which must be carried forward towards the unity and community of God's people in Asia as a sign of God's purpose in Asia and in this world? As we have been listening to the stories of our sense of togetherness through the work of the CCA over these years, there are several things which stand out and point to the future.

The CCA we see today has grown institutionally, although the tent has been shifting from one place to the other, from Jaffna and Rangoon to Bangkok; and from Bangkok to Singapore and Singapore to Manila, Osaka, Chiangmai and again coming together under one roof in Hong Kong and most recently from Hong Kong to back to Chiangmai. Although these relocations and regroupings have taken place every now and then, the CCA has reached a stage of being an established and matured ecumenical organisation and institution. It has international staff located mostly in one place, a variety of programmes, proper budget and plans, and a minimum of worry about human and financial resources available most of the time since its inception. Nonetheless, we need to ask and reflect on the following questions in our journey together: Has this privileged instrument of the Asian ecumenical movement been affected with any institutional paralysis? Have the programmes of the CCA become dormant or vibrant? What new elements are we offering to our constituency? To what extent should we follow the same organisational and institutional structure even after half a century of our existence and our witness and service in Asia?

How far has our original thrust of evangelism and mission been seriously considered in our ecumenical engagement these days? Are we really articulating an enduring theological, ecclesiological

# ASIA PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

and ecumenical vision in today's Asian context?

The enduring vision and abiding mandates of CCA was declared at the beginning that: Believing that the purpose of God for the churches in East Asia is life together in a common obedience to Him for the doing of His will in the world, the EACC is hereby constituted as an organ of continuing co-operation among the churches and National Christian Councils in East Asia within the frame work of the wider ecumenical movement.

The salient points and constitutive elements of this vision are clear. First, it is of and for life of the mission of the church in Asia that is not its own but one that is of God and is therefore grounded in acknowledgement of and engagement in a common obedience of witness to God's mission. Second, the CCA is servant of this vision of the church and exists as an organ and a forum of continuing co-operation among churches and national Christian bodies. Third, its service within the framework of the wider ecumenical movement.

And Fourth, in its effort to manifest common obedience and life together, it is to seek to bring about the equal participation of women, men, youth, clergy and lay in church and society.

The document prepared at the time of the last restructuring of the CCA in 2000, "Towards New Thrusts and a New Structure for the CCA" reaffirmed this vision, which has laid down and developed objectives that embody its abiding mandates. These abiding mandates provide openness and responsiveness to the changing and specific issues and challenges in the life of the church and of society in Asia.

The CCA also needs to act as an instrument to help in providing constructive and critical analytical insight into crucial Asian issues and developing ways by which the churches - in co-operation with each other and with others in society - can express responsibility. Its mandates also involve regional and contextual tasks to encourage, facilitate and develop Asian contributions to Christian thought. More specifically, the CCA is to develop and promote relationships with peoples of other faith in Asia and engage in dialogue with them. The CCA will continue as a regional ecumenical body rooted in the life, the culture, the economic, social and political realities of Asia. The development and nurturing of the spiritual and theological gifts of the Churches in Asia is another prime mandate.

The CCA has consistently tried to respond faithfully to this enduring vision. When I reviewed various documents and publications of the EACC/CCA from the very beginning, I could understand the struggles of the leadership of the EACC/CCA from time to time. There were efforts to be relevant contextually and timely amidst changing realities.

As we face the challenges that impinge upon the life and witness of the church and the ecumenical movement at all levels, the CCA also feels the need and imperative for a greater clarity in its current programmes and priorities.

The CCA provided platforms and opportunities for Asian Christian thinkers and theologians to explore the implications of people-centred theology, focusing on the areas

people in the Asian ecumenical movement. Compared to Western countries, we can be proud of the fact that there are more young people in our churches. These youngsters actively participate in their local congregations. Beyond that, however, their presence and participation are limited. They are confined to the rural or town parishes and are not getting any opportunities for wider exposures which normally help them to become tomorrow's ecumenical leaders. The churches and ecumenical bodies in Asia have not been engaged in an effort in recent times to identify and promote young people and use their talents for the ecumenical movement.

The Asian Ecumenical Course, started in 1975, became an annual event and made a major contribution to ecumenical

the possibility of working towards Catholic membership in the CCA or an ecumenical structure where the Roman Catholic Church could be a fully active member.

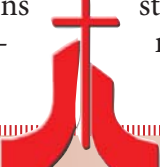
No substantial progress has been made until now. We are satisfied with annual or biannual meetings or the nominal participation of certain staff members of both bodies in each other's programmes, once in a while. I would say that this has become a ritual as both parties have taken no concrete steps to promote ecumenism at the local or national levels.

At the same time, we have been satisfied with some cosmetic adjustments instead of more meaningful and deeper relations.

We can say that there are certain, issues-based collaborations-between certain NCCs and the Catholic Bishops Conferences.

The fact remains that we need to have a crucial issue in our countries and a common enemy to counter for the NCCs and the Roman Catholic churches to come together and work together as Protestants and Catholics while we proclaim our public witness. With regard to the CCA's relations with the Evangelicals and Pentecostals, the situation is similar, as we are not making any serious initiatives towards entering into a meaningful dialogue with them. Engaging them in ecumenical dialogues is not impossible and there are many examples from other parts of the world where ecumenical bodies can successfully engage the Pentecostal groups. The Latin American Council of Churches is an example. What we really lack in today's CCA setting is a sincere effort for ecumenical dialogue with Pentecostals and Evangelicals. It is a known reality that CCA's dialogues with ecclesiastical or confessional bodies, whenever it happens, often end without any follow-up. At least this has been my observation and experience during the past two decades. This approach should be changed for meaningful outcomes.

There are a number of other issues in the socio-economic and political arena of Asia that need to be addressed properly by the CCA. For example, the peace and security concerns in North East Asia, (Korean peninsula, Cross-Strait tensions), South East Asia and South Asia, human rights, growth of religious intolerance and the emergence of religious fundamentalism, etc. Ecumenical leadership development and ecumenical formation, increasing HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, migration and its social implications, etc., are other areas where more attention of the Asian churches needs to be focused. □



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of Christology and ecclesiology, interpreting salvation in terms of liberation and humanisation.

The CCA supported Churches and national ecumenical bodies in their struggles against human rights violations. When severe problems cropped up at a time when the CCA could not use its name or platform to speak on sensitive political issues, it was able to form the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) as part of CCA International Affairs. Initiated through the CCA International Affairs platform as per the decision by the CCA General Committee, the AHRC/ALRC was headed initially by Clement John, a Pakistani lawyer who was International Affairs Secretary of the CCA. The Youth programme of the CCA helped the moulding of many young people in different Asian countries. In the area of ecumenical formation, the CCA Youth Desk provided excellent services, especially in the 1980s when Chris Tremewan was Youth Secretary. However, the youth initiatives have deteriorated for the past several years and this has minimised the participation of young

formation for several years. The CCA played a vital role in establishing and strengthening relations between the churches in former closed door societies and socialist countries like Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

For a long time, the CCA has had a separate China Relations Committee. In the 1970s, 1980s, and even in the 1990s, the CCA took a very keen interest in developing good relations with the Churches in China. Ever since the Prapat. Conference was planned, there were sincere attempts to ensure the participation of Chinese Churches in the EACC.

The question of relations with the Roman Catholic Church, Evangelicals and Pentecostals is another issue where the CCA needs to pay more attention at the local, national and regional levels. Every time when we talk about the relations with the Roman Catholic Church, we quote an example of the CCA-FABC joint meetings, mainly the AMCU and CCA-FABC relations committee meetings. The Asia Mission Conference in 1989 resolved to strive towards a more representative expression of Asian ecumenism and to explore

# From Jakarta to Kottayam

Humanity has been facing unprecedented challenges during the past decade. Since the last General Assembly of CCA was held in 2015, Asia too has confronted an array of difficulties. The headlines appearing every day chronicled grim realities across Asia. As geopolitical, geo-economic, and geo-strategic landscapes have rapidly evolved, instances of heightened conflicts, violence, and displacement, eroding trust, and ecological imbalances have become commonplace. Democratic values, human rights, and the security of people face unrelenting threats in several parts of Asia. A vast number of Asians continue their struggles for livelihoods, life-giving health, peace with justice, and human dignity. Amidst these formidable challenges, the cherished Asian values of communal harmony and religious tolerance, nurtured over generations, have suffered a series of setbacks in recent decades.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia have tried to promote the vision of hope amidst adversities and anxieties. With a constitutional mandate, CCA's vision, mission, and purpose revolve around working as God's instrument for the Church in Asia for life together in a common obedience of witness to the mission of God in the world. As such, the CCA has been trying to perform its mission to serve as an organ and a forum of continuing cooperation among the churches and national Christian bodies in Asia within the framework of the wider ecumenical movement. In order to achieve these goals, the CCA continued its mission in manifold ways in the post-Jakarta Assembly period as well.

Every CCA General Assembly is an occasion to set up priorities for the next quinquennium. The new strategic programme directions and plans adopted by the new governing board of CCA in October 2015, started implementations from the beginning of 2016 with a prime focus on the promotion and strengthening of ecclesial unity, stimulation of initiatives in dynamic Christian living and action, development of effective Christian responses to the challenges of emerging contexts, promotion of relationships with people of other faiths in Asia, protection of human

rights and human dignity, peace with justice and the promotion of care for the creation. CCA has initiated and implemented programmes and activities through four programme priority areas during the past eight years.

In the tapestry of our shared ec-

churches, a coming-together that resounds with hope and commitment to collective witness, service, and mission. As each Assembly convenes, it weaves new chapters into the Asian ecumenical pilgrimage, reflecting the evolution of Christian thought, expression,

challenges of the time and proposed recommendations for the future work of the CCA through the decision-making Business Sessions.

The programme implementation period that ensued after the 14th General Assembly was marked by the new Strategic Programme Plan which re-organised the programmatic thrusts and departments of the CCA and was approved by the Executive Committee in October 2015. The core programmes of the CCA are Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology (MU), Ecumenical Leadership Formation and Spirituality (EF), Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts (BP), and Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy (PD). The Action Together to Combat HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA) is a special project. Under this new programme structure, gender concerns and youth issues are transversal across all programme areas. This was a shift from the earlier programme structure with three key programme areas, namely, Faith, Mission, and Unity (FMU), Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice, and Youth Empowerment (EGY), and Justice, International Affairs, and Development and Service (JID).

The Strategic Programme Plan, scheduled for implementation from 2015 to 2020 and leading up to the 15th CCA General Assembly in 2020, faced an unexpected and grave challenge with the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, causing widespread health crises and socio-economic-political impacts across Asia.

An immense number of lives were lost, especially within Asian countries. As life came to a standstill, we reflected on our shared vulnerabilities and expressed solidarity. Consequently, the General Assembly and other planned programmes had to be postponed, prompting the CCA to swiftly adapt by organising a series of webinars on COVID-19 and related topics like health, gender, children, migration, and trafficking, as well as a number of relevant programmes conducted entirely online. The CCA also accompanied churches in crisis situations during the pandemic.

As global travel restrictions eased in 2022, the CCA reintroduced in-person programmes and decided to convene the 15th CCA General Assembly in Kottayam, India, in 2023. □

## CCA LEADERSHIP



**Bishop Dhilloraj Canagasabey**  
Acting Moderator (December 2022-)



**Dr. Mathews George Chunakara**  
General Secretary (August 2015-)



**Bishop Reuel O. Marigza**  
Acting Vice Moderator (December 2022-)



**Augustine Dipak Karmaker**  
Treasurer (May 2015-)

“Notwithstanding these challenges, the churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia have tried to promote the vision of hope amidst adversities and anxieties.”

umenical pilgrimage, the General Assemblies of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) emerge as radiant mosaics, composed of the diverse hues of Asian Christian faith traditions, the interwoven threads of unity, and the transformative brushstrokes of action. Although the General Assembly is the highest decision-making body of the CCA, it is also the largest representative gathering of the Asian churches, where the pulse of the Asian churches resonates with resolute purpose. The General Assembly is the visible manifestation of 'life together' of the Asian

and action.

The 14th CCA General Assembly, held in Jakarta, Indonesia from

21 to 27 May 2015 focused on the theme 'Living Together in the Household of God' and encompassed aspects such as 'Witnessing Together as Asian Churches', 'Moving Beyond the Boundaries of the Church', 'Managing with Responsibility', and 'Sustaining God's Creation'. In different sessions such as the Thematic Presentations and the Sarasehan Deliberative Sessions, the Assembly participants reflected on the chal-



Rev. Prof Dr Jerry Pillay, the General Secretary of the world council of churches, meets with the CCA Executive Committee



Participants of the Asian Ecumenical Migrants Advocacy Network (AEMAN) Pre-Assembly Meeting



Prof. Dr Dietrich Werner speaks at the Pre-Assembly Meeting on Ecumenical Diakonia: towards sustainable development goals



Dayabai, a Roman Catholic nun turned social activist, speaks to the participants of the Asian Ecumenical women's assembly (aewa)

# CCA Member Churches in Kerala

- Fr. Biju P. Thomas

## Church of South India (CSI)

The Church in South India is a united Protestant church in India. CSI is a union of a number of Protestant denominations in South India that occurred on 27th September 1947. The CSI has over 14000 congregations, 38 lakh members, 3300 ministers with a membership of nearly four million it is the second largest Christian Church based on the number of members in India. K Ruben Mark is the present acting moderator. The headquarter of the church is located at Madras where there is a Synod office.

## Malabar Independent Syrian Church

The Malabar Independent Syrian Church also known as the Thozhiyur Church is a Christian Church centered in Kerala. It is one of the Saint Thomas Christian communities that traces its origin to the Evangelical activity of Thomas the Apostle. It has 13 parishes and 6 chapels. The Church has 5000 members. The present head of the church is Mar Cyril Baselios I.

## The Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church

The Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in Kerala is an integral part of the universal Syriac Orthodox Church with the Patriarch of Antioch, H. H. Moran Mar Ignatius Aprem II as its supreme head. The local head of the church in Malankara (Kerala) is the Catholicos of the East, His Beatitude Baselios Thomas I. The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch is part of Oriental Orthodox Church. The Church employs

West Syriac Liturgy. The headquarter of the Church is in Puthencruz, Kochi. The Church is ecumenical in its character.

## The Malankara Marthoma Syrian Church

The Malankara Marthoma Syrian Church believes to have been founded by St. Thomas in the year AD 52. The Church defines itself as Apostolic in origin, universal in nature, Biblical in faith, Evangelical in principle, Ecumenical in outlook, Democratic in function and Episcopal in character. The Church has its headquarters at Thiruvalla, Kerala. The present supreme head and the Metropolitan of the Church is Mar Theodosius Marthoma. The Church has 1246 parishes and 1149 priests spread worldwide. The Church is a very active member of World Council of Churches since its inception.

## The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (MOSC) believes that the Church was founded by St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, who came to India in A.D. 52. The MOSC is using the West Syriac Liturgy. The Church is in communion with the Oriental Orthodox Churches. The MOSC is one of the founder churches of World Council of Churches. The MOSC officially claims of 2 million members, who are spread all over the world. The supreme head of the church and the present Catholicos is H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III and the headquarters is at Kottayam, Kerala. The Church has 30 dioceses and each diocese is served by a Diocesan Metropolitan.

# My Ecumenical journey in CCA from Penang

-Dr. Joseph P.Varghese

Consider it a blessing that I had the opportunity to participate in the 6th Assembly of the CCA in Penang, Malaysia in 1977, as a young person of 27 years, representing the Mar Gregorios Orthodox Christian Student Movement (MGOCSM) of India. I remember with gratitude the loving persuasion of the Philipos Mar Theophilus, of blessed memory, the then President of MGOCSM, who insisted that I attend these ecumenical events and experience the joy of togetherness.

There was a pre-assembly event for youth, the Asia Youth Mission, held in Hong Kong (14-23 May 1977) which I attended prior to the Penang Assembly. The Asia Youth Mission was held in the Kowloon Island with about 150 participants from different Asian countries. Several innovative worship forms from different cultures and backgrounds, discussions on liturgical renewal, informal discussions on the theme during the evening barbecues all added to the charm of the meetings. Participation in the Asia Youth Mission was a truly an enriching experience.

The General assembly which

followed in Penang Malaysia (31 May to 9 June 1977) had the theme: Jesus Christ in Asian Christian Suffering and Hope. Bible studies and theme presentations on the main topic were keenly attended and appreciated by the participants. I still vividly remember the two Bible studies by the Metropolitan Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios of Blessed memory. Based on Romans chapter 8: 18-25, He beautifully explained the intricate relationship between suffering and hope, and explained how the prospect of hope transcends suffering of various kinds in our lives.

Metropolitan Mathews Mar Coorilos, later HH Coorilos Bava of blessed memory, Prof Mary Thomas from CMS College, Kottayam and several other friends from our country participated in the Penang Assembly.

The major issues raised and discussed in the Assembly included:

- The need to develop an Asian Theological frame work within which Asian Christians may pursue their social tasks creatively and interpret the Asian realities of the present time

- The role and place of women and youth in churches and in international gatherings

- A greater emphasis on the cultural and religious aspects of our societies in Asia

- The problem of cultural imperialism, and so on.

The Penang Assembly concluded with the affirmation:

“Made in God’s image, redeemed by Christ who died for them, people have His promise of abundant life, not wasted life.

Therefore, we affirm that God is a living God, the God of love and acceptance that the Holy Spirit of God works with His people in freeing and uniting them.

This is our message. “To share our new life by Word and Action, to share His life style, to offer His hope by offering ourselves in proclaiming the Gospel; To share Christ is thus our mission.”

In its God-guided passage over years, the General Assemblies of the CCA after the Penang Assembly (1977) were held in different Asian countries:

- The 7th Assembly (1981) in Bangalore, the 8th Assembly (1985) in Seoul, South Korea, the 9th Assembly (1990) in Manila, The Philippines, the 10th Assembly (1995) in Colombo, Sri Lanka, the 11th Assembly (2000) in Tomohon, Indonesia, the 12th Assembly

- (2005) in Chiang Mai, Thailand, the 13th Assembly (2010) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and the 14th Assembly (2015) in Jakarta, Indonesia. It is the 15th General Assembly of CCA that is taking place in Kottayam.

The Preparations for the Assembly have been going on for the past several months with the involvement of the CCA leadership, and all member Churches in Kerala under the leadership of a Host Committee. Apart from the theme presentations and discussions, there is another unique feature of the Assembly. That is the ‘Charcha’ Programme.

This programme gives an opportunity to selected theological students in the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary, Mulanthuruthy and Kerala United Theological Seminary, Trivandrum to listen to and to participate in the theological discussions and deliberations. A special *Charcha* session has been organized on 1st October Sunday afternoon covering 15 different topics, taking place in three different venues in Kottayam. □

## In 1952, World Youth Meet at Kottayam!

- Justice K.T. Thomas

It is incredible and stunningly surprising to believe that 71 years ago (1952) the sleepy town of Kottayam hosted an International Conference—World Conference of Christian Youth! It was a period when the town had no worthwhile Halls or facilities to host an event of such proportion and magnitude. Under severe constraints and circumstances the mega event was held at the Great Hall of Kerala’s oldest institute of higher learning—CMS College (founded in 1815) and at Thirunakara grounds. The memorable event lasted for two weeks replete with messages, discussions and interactive sessions. Needless, to say the choice of this town had the abundant blessings of God.

Deacon Simon of the Knanyaya Church, whose services were then employed by the World Council of Churches (WCC) at Geneva came up with a daring and out of the world proposal to opt for Kot-

tayam, his home town to host the world class event! The theme of the conference was—Jesus is the Answer.

Once the decision was approved, Kottayam began its earnest preparation. The Food committee convenor was Mrs. Thara Cherian, (later to be Mayor of Madras) and wife of Dr. P.V. Cherian (later to be the Governor of Maharashtra). The Volunteer committee was led by the well-known YMCA functionary, Dr. Frederic Franklin. Prominent homes in the town were aptly prepared to house the senior and venerable delegates from all parts of the world. Schools and other institutions underwent facelift to comply with international standards. Other prominent citizens of the town took up the responsibility to be in charge of the various committees for the smooth and efficient conduct of the conference.

The organisers entrusted Dr. John Mathai (an early member of Nehru’s cabinet) to request the Prime Minister of India, Pandit

Jawaharlal Nehru to be the chief guest. However, he politely declined the invitation saying that he could not fulfill the request when India had declared herself a secular nation! The choice ultimately fell on the Maharaja of Travancore, Sri Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma.

The inaugural function was a runaway success and it was followed by the showcasing of the best traditions of Indian culture to the outside world. The populace of Kottayam flocked in large numbers to listen and relish the speeches, especially by the famed Pastor Neemueller who had once been imprisoned by Adolf Hitler. The delegates were also taken on a boat cruise to the Vembanad Lake and the famed Thekkady Wildlife Center. Worship at churches were led by the Supreme Head of the Orthodox church and the Marthoma Church (Dr. Juhanon Marthoma). A grand public meeting was organized at the Thirunakara Grounds to honor and felicitate the interna-

tional delegates. The meeting was chaired by His Holiness Moran Mor Baselios Geevarghese II.

71 years later, as one looks back to reflect, one can only say that it was indeed the work of God to have chosen this town and change its face forever! □

### CCA NEWS - 2023

For Private Circulation only

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Graphic Designer:

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Printing :

S@S Associates,

Kottayam