

**Today in Juhanon Mar Thoma Hall**  
 10.00 am-Thematic presentation  
 Rev. Dr. Vicky Balabhanski,  
 Rev. Dr. Raj Bharat Patta  
 04.30 pm-D.T. Niles Memorial Lecture  
 by **Daya Bhai**

CCA  
 15<sup>TH</sup>  
 GENERAL  
 ASSEMBLY  
 KOTTAYAM



**Tomorrow in Yuhanon Marthoma Hall**  
 Tuesday 03 October  
 09.00 am  
 Nomination Committee Report  
 11.00 am  
 Closing Worship and Official closing of the  
 15th General Assembly.

# CCA NEWS

Christian Conference of Asia

VAARTHA വാർത്ത 02 OCT.

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



With the Elephant  
 Pampady Rajan :  
 CCA Deligates  
 in South Pampady  
 St. Thomas Valiyapally

## Elephant Welcome

to CCA Deligates in Kottayam Churches





Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan Inaugrating the Asian Ecumenical Festival.



Fr. KM Zachariah and Anoop John Chakalayil receiving the Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

# Asian Ecumenical Festival

**Krishna Shaji**

The Asian Ecumenical Festival ignited the spirits of all delegates as they joined together in celebrating the cultural diversity together. The Festival was followed by the Public Meeting with the Chief Guest, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr Pinarayi Vijayan and ecclesiastical and Ecumenical Dignitaries. Dr. Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan presided. Dr. Jerry Pillay, Minister V.N. Vasavan, Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabay, Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios, Joseph Mar Gregorios, Fernandes Rathina Raja, Dr. Abraham Mar Paulose, Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza spoke. The welcome address was delivered by Dr Mathews George Chunakara, CCA's General Secretary.



Dr. Mathews George Chunakkara greeting the Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on the dias.



Minister V.N. Vasavan releasing the Souvenir. from left: E. John Mathew, Joseph Mar Gregorios, Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza



Dr. Jerry Pillay releasing the book *Ecumenism In Asia prospects and Challenges* written by Dr. Mathews George Chunakkara. The book is published by Christhava Sahithya samithy (CSS), Thiruvalla.



# Churcha in Different Venues

## Ecumenical Dialogue through 'Churcha'

**Silpa Ann Zachariah**

The General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) is set to feature an engaging and insightful component known as "Churcha" sessions. Derived from the Indian languages, where it means 'conversation', 'discussion,' or 'sharing,' Churcha sessions are focused to facilitate ecumenical dialogue on pertinent theological, social, and geopolitical matters. These discussions will not only inform but also shape the future endeavors of the CCA's programs and projects.

Delegates and participants attending the Assembly had the unique opportunity to select from a diverse range of fifteen topics based on their expertise and interests.

The Churcha sessions conducted at three distinguished venues: the Orthodox Theological Seminary, the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, and the CMS College in Kottayam. These locations offer an enriching stage for these vital discussions.







# An Interview with Dr. Jerry Pillay

Prof. Philip Koshi

**E**xcerpts of the interview with Rev. Dr. Prof Jerry Pillay, General Secretary, World Council of Churches.

Dr. Pillay, in his opening remarks said that his life has always been that of service. He had many other jobs to choose from but instead listened to the call of God and opted to be in the Ministry.

Dr. Pillay, a global church leader, with a global perspective, embarked on a road of service to God at the age of 10. When elected to the world's most prestigious ecumenical position, he said: "Being a General Secretary is not just a job, but a calling. On his installment, he said: "God has saved me for this moment".

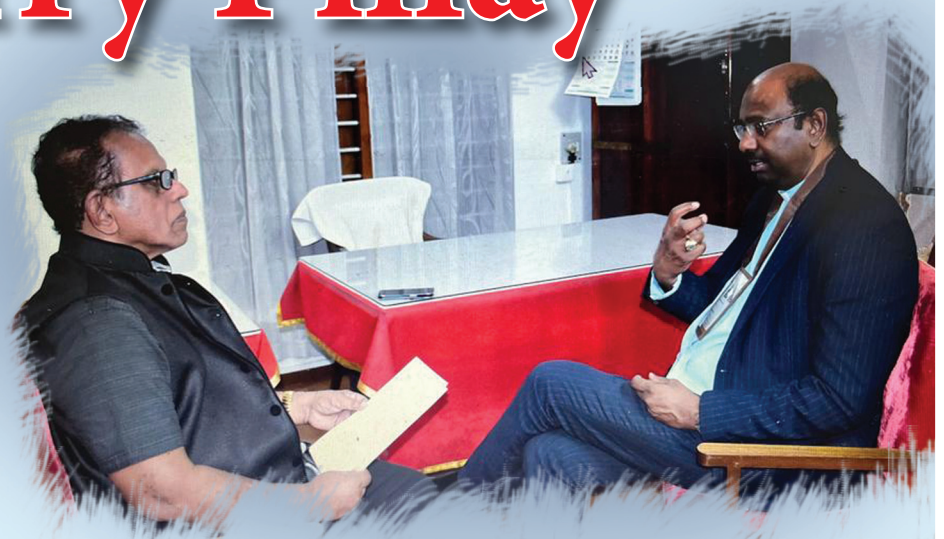
At the Christian Conference of Asia 15th General Assembly Meet in Kottayam he inaugurat-

ed the event and delivered a powerful thematic presentation on the theme—God, Renew Us In Your Spirit And Restore The Creation.

Asked to comment on the theme, Dr. Pillay said that we have lost the initial obedience to God. We have lost the ability to listen to God. We live in a world where spirituality has taken a back seat. It is indeed a different sort of spirituality that now exists—that of subjective life, justice, truth etc. In the process we lost the purity of the Gospel.

Dr. Pillay went on to passionately argue that when we dwell on the affairs of the world we deviate from God's love. Once we listen to God's spirit we become a transformed being.

Creation suffers when people suffer. In this context Dr. Pillay referred to the endless wars in Ukraine, Sudan and the Middle



East. Innocent humanity suffer when some want to dominate the world. It is to be remembered that we are merely the stewards of God and we serve God by caring for creation. At this moment of time we don't seem to realise that this is God's world.

God said something simple as per the Scriptures. But we made it complex by our own sense of addition to what life should be. There are very clear guidelines for living found in the Scripture. This is very foundational and once we take ourselves away from the all

consuming materialistic pursuits and become a person of care.

In conclusion, Dr. Pillay referred to the concluding statement of his thematic presentation—"Lord, start with me, and work in me and through me to restore your creation"

According to Dr. Pillay, that is the starting point. When we truly say a prayer with honesty and integrity, God will listen and the world will be different".

□

## THE MEDICAL TEAM WITH FULL OF VIM AND VIGOUR

Alisha Reji,  
Malavika M Nair

**A**lice Bijy and Annie George, the two enthusiastic workers of the medical team with immense joy shared their experiences and gratitude in serving as a part of the medical team of the CCA. Their duty is to provide the basic medical care. They function as a first aid care unit.

Mrs. Alice George briefly explained differences in medical cases with that of abroad. People with some minor cases of common cold, headaches and PSC problems are being handled by them. She went on to elaborate that most of the problems are caused by the climate change. They have a fully equipped ambulance and also good team of doctors to keep the situation in control. In case

of any emergency, the patient will be sent to hospital by the advice of doctors. Dr Selin Abraham, the charming doctor of the medical team of CCA is presently working as a general physician in Lifeline Hospital, Adoor. She was so full of happiness in serving the people and felt immense gratitude when called to be a part of the medical team of CCA.

They have been working as the medical team of the 15th general assembly of CCA from day-01. They are invited for this purpose by their local priest Rev. Father Shibu Mathew. Both of them expressed their happiness in being a part of CCA.

As a way of message, Mrs. Alice Bijy conveyed that, for any human being, health is one of the basic necessities of life. Anything can happen to anyone at anytime. So in every public gathering the most primary essential to set up should be a medical team and first aid station. This can reduce the

level of emergency to a level. They said that "at any time anything can happen as we are humans, therefore it is an absolute necessity to set a medical stall be it any occasion or programs. And we need are extreme-



ly happy to be a part of this".

They again explained their pleasure to be a part of such an international conference. The medical team is co-ordinated by the convenor Dr. Varghese Punnoose and a team of dedicated Doctors.

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# Feeding the Masses

## Insights from a Food Convenor

Silpa Ann Zachariah

Fr. K.M. Zachariah, serving as the Food Convener and also holding the esteemed position of Malankara Orthodox Church Diocese Secretary and also Orthodox Theological Seminary PRO. Fr. Zachariah had a monumental task before him - to ensure that the meals provided were not only delicious but also a reflection of the rich culinary heritage of Kerala. This culinary journey, however, didn't begin overnight. The wheels were set in motion almost half a year prior to the assembly's commencement. The Food Committee, comprised of nearly 10 dedicated individuals, commenced their tireless work. Gathering quotations from six renowned caterers across Kerala, they meticulously curated a diverse food menu that would satiate the diverse palates of the attendees. The committee's rigorous selection process led them to choose two distinguished caterers. For the first two days of the assembly, Vee Kay Vee Caterers from Ernakulam stepped up to the plate, promising a delectable culinary experience. The subsequent days, from the third to the sixth, were entrusted to the skilled hands of Calicut Chillies.

Ensuring food safety was par-

amount to Fr. Zachariah and his diligent team. They left no stone unturned, securing all necessary licenses and certifications from the Municipality. Caterer licenses were scrupulously examined, guaranteeing that each meal served was not only a feast for the taste buds but also safe for consumption. Three culinary worlds were converged: Continental, Chinese, and Western, all designed to offer a global culinary voyage to the assembly's participants.

For Fr. Zachariah, this General Assembly held a unique significance. Despite his extensive experience attending conferences and serving on food committees, this one held a special place in his heart. It marked his first participation in the CCA General Assembly, a cherished milestone in his spiritual journey.

To fully dedicate himself to this endeavor, Fr. Zachariah renounced his responsibilities within the Seminary and the Diocese. This decision highlighted the depth of his commitment to making this assembly truly special. His dedication was not in vain. Fr. Zachariah beamed with happiness as he witnessed the assembly in full swing. He expressed his heartfelt appreciation to the organizers for their impeccable planning and execution, praising



their attention to detail and their gracious invitation to him.

Another aspect of the assembly that deeply touched Fr. Zachariah was the delegates' visits to local churches during their stay. It was a moment of spiritual bonding, where faith transcended boundaries and language.

In the end, this General Assembly not only nourished the souls of those who attended but also their bodies, thanks to the unwavering dedication of Fr. K.M. Zachariah and his exceptional Food Committee. It was a culinary journey that mirrored the spiritual journey of the assembly itself, one filled with tradition, diversity, and a profound sense of community.

## 'Serve Humanity'

Malavika M.Nair,  
Alisha Reji

Kekirawe, a Buddhist from Sri Lanka was full of excitement when asked about CCA. He is a professor from the University of Kelaniya who is also a strong supporter of Buddhism. He said he never felt like a guest in CCA, but more like a family. He also expressed his happiness in giving a presentation based on his practices and love for all religions.

He also highlighted the different struggles that are faced by the Sri Lankan society and how he is working to ensure that everything falls back in its place. He also conveyed his love for all religions and being in Kottayam made him realise and see the beauty of religious tolerance.

To restore the peace and stability in the society he was overjoyed to be a part of the general assembly and share his experiences and also to meet all the amazing people from all over Asia. When asked about a message that he wanted to convey Kekirawe was quick to answer. He said "I want all the people to come together and serve humanity not just as a religious leader but as a simple human".

# Islamic Perspective Living in Harmony

Sundus Sali

Dr. Citra Fitri Agustina, Sp.KJ is a Mental Health Specialist who graduated from the University of Indonesia. She is a member of the Indonesian Doctors Association and practices at YARSI Hospital and Primaya Evasari Hospital in Central Jakarta. In the interfaith session she talked about Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), a diverse Indonesian religious and community organisation, founded in 1926. It promotes mainstream Sunni Islam while embracing tolerance and openness to modernity. NU, with over 50 million members, is Indonesia's largest religious and community organisation. It has a vast organisational net-

work, including provincial offices, branch offices in districts/cities, sub-district offices, village offices, and overseas branches. Due to its extensive reach, NU is seen as a guardian of Indonesia's state ideology (Pancasila) and constitution (Undang-Undang Dasar 1945). NU's core values are based on: Tasamun (Tolerance), Tawazun (Harmony), Tawassuth (Moderation), Itidal (Consistency).

She then briefed the holistic approach to Islamic teachings and social interactions in Indonesia. On a practical level she emphasised balanced creed (Akidah) by combining reasoning and religious texts, purifying beliefs, and exercising caution in labelling terms like polytheism, heresy, or infidelity. Similarly, it stresses adherence to the Qur'an and Sun-

nah in Syari'ah, employing rational faculties only when religious texts lack clear explanations and accepting diverse opinions in interpretable matters. In Tasawuf, it encourages exploration of Islamic teachings, discourages excessive attitudes, and promotes virtues like courage and modesty. Socially, it advocates tolerance, mutual understanding, and standing against those opposing Islam. It calls for defending the unity of the Indonesian state, obeying government rules aligned with Islamic teachings, avoiding rebellion, and offering mild warnings for perceived deviations. Regarding culture, it recommends aligning cultural practices with religious norms, accepting compatible ones, discarding negative aspects, and embracing new beneficial cul-

tures while preserving relevant old ones. Finally, in dakwa (preaching), the focus is on promoting good deeds rather than condemnation, using clear guidance and words for specific purposes, and adapting to local contexts. NU fulfils a vital role through its autonomous bodies (Banom) and various departments, encompassing religious, social, and cultural aspects of society. Its 18 departments, which cover areas such as Health, Climate Change, Dakwah (religious propagation), and Education, work collectively to address a wide range of challenges.

She added, "NU's involvement extends beyond these areas, as it actively engages in political matters and contributes to economic development". She asserts these actions are grounded in Islamic principles, with a focus on upholding religion, preserving life, safeguarding intellect, nurturing offspring, and protecting assets from harm, as guided by the principles of Maqasid As-Syariah.

# Churcha – Fostering Ecumenical Dialogue

The General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) featured an engaging and insightful component "Churcha". Derived from the Indian languages, where it means 'conversation,' 'discussion,' or 'sharing,' Churcha sessions facilitated ecumenical dialogue on pertinent theological, social, and geopolitical matters. These discussions will be vital in shaping the future endeavours of the CCA's programs and projects.

Delegates and participants chose subjects from a diverse range of fifteen topics based on their expertise and interests. Expert resource persons and speakers guided the dialogues, aiding in the development of focused outcomes that promises to enrich the CCA's priorities for the years ahead. The Churcha sessions were conducted at three distinguished venues: the Orthodox Theological Seminary, the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, and the CMS College in Kottayam.

"Responsible Stewardship and Participation in God's Mission of Renewal and Restoration of Creation" took place at the CMS College Great Hall. The facilitators Fr. Dr K.M. George and Rev. Dr Deonal Sonaga, the Moderator Rev. Dr Kim Sungjae, the Rapporteur Dss. Blessy Grace M. De Leon, and 36 other delegate participants discussed along the lines of 'the church must concentrate on the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in its fullness here and now'. Through this session, Asian churches could lead the way in contextual theological responses focused on the sustainability, renewal, and restoration of creation.

"Eco-Spirituality and Liturgical Innovation: An Asian Theological Appraisal", held at Mar Thoma Seminary Classroom. Rev. Dr Mothy Varkey and Rev. Christian Tanduk Langi were the facilitators, Rev. Ko Kwok Hung, Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China, was the moderator, and Ms. Nubpron Panya, Church of Christ in Thailand, was the rapporteur; along with them 33 other delegates participated in this Churcha. A highlighting concept was that church and the mission of God are not two separate entities, indicating that the church exists solely to participate in the Creator's mission. This session discussed questions like 'Is creation celebrated in our worship services?', 'How does our liturgy help us spiritually and

morally to live in ways that honour the earth?

"Climate Crisis Mitigation and Adaptation: Environmental Sustainability in God's Oikos", at CMS College Theatre, was a session led by Ms Yueh-Wen Lu, the Moderator, Dr. F Mathew Eben, the rapporteur, and Ms Juliate Keya Malakar and Md Foezullah Talukdar, the facilitators. 29 other delegates were part of this session discussing how environmental calamities have brought adversities to millions. The keynote of this session was "mitigation and adaptation must be emphasised in people's responses to climate change." The churches, partnering with governments, multilateral organisations, development agencies have a take on helping people tackle these issues.

"Eco-Anxiety : Churches In Asia Engaging to Address Health And Healing", held in Orthodox Seminary. The moderators Rev. Dr Tertius Yunias Lantigimo and Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Tengah with rapporteur Ms Ma Kay Catherine Almario, National Council of Churches in the Philippines and facilitators Dr Renji Mathew, Dr Suman Varghese Sam led the session. 'Eco-anxiety' referring to a variety of difficult emotions and mental states that are significantly related to environmental problems and 'climate anxiety' referring to the the climate change-related forms of eco-anxiety were highlighted, while the role of churches in providing a space for the wellness of minds and bodies of people through community initiatives was discussed. This included maximising the potential of healthcare institutions of churches and providing pastoral care and support for the emotional and mental well being, thus, promoting authentic and holistic health and healing.

"Dwelling In Harmony With Creation : Indigenous People In Asia", held at the orthodox Seminary with facilitators Rev. Dr Jacklevyn Frits Manuputty and Pangernungba Kechu, the moderator Ms Rowan Tautari Te Runanga Whakawhanaung and rapporteur Mr Imran Mrong, emphasised the importance of recognising the struggles faced by indigenous people in maintaining their traditional way of life and their role in protecting the environment. Indigenous people have a deep connection to the land and have more traditional knowledge and practices that enabled them to live sustainably for generations. The discussion sus-

tained recognising the knowledge, wisdom and practices of indigenous community.

"Welcoming The Stranger: Displacement, Stateless And Trafficking In Persons", held at the Mar Thoma Seminary, with the Moderator Ms Minnie Ann M. Calub, the rapporteur Ms Asai Soror, and the facilitators Ms Yusmiati Vistamika Wangka, Rev. Jollify Daniel, David Nigel Perry Brohier, discussed practical ways to support and aid asylum seekers who are being forcefully displaced and also ways to help victims of trafficking. The discussion also aimed to bring up awareness about the issue and discussed strategies for advocating their rights and promoting their dignity as human beings.

"God's Design For Life And Human Dignity: Practical Application Of Bioethics", at CMS college Kottayam was based on the biblical account that human beings are "made in the image of God". The facilitators were Rev. Dr T. Arulhas and Dr Manoj Kurien. The moderator was Rev. Dr Kang-Hee Han, and the rapporteur being Dr Anna Alisha Mathew Simon. The discussion asserted that all human beings possess an inherent and inalienable dignity and worthiness. Implying although humans are made in God's image, we are not divine ourselves; we are creatures, not creators. It was reflected from the biological, ethical and theological perspective of God's design for human life.

"Resilience of Ecosystems for the Sustainability of Creation: Towards Life-Giving Agriculture in Asia", held at the Orthodox seminary stressed the importance of the Life-Giving Agricultural movement which helps promote sustainable agricultural practices as a means to promote healthy ecosystems, support rural communities and achieve sustainable livelihoods in Asia. The facilitators of this discussion were Mr Jaehak An, Mr Junyoung Kim, Rev. Kyeong Ho Han, Rev. Won Young Lee and Rev. Daniel Premkumar. The moderator was Rev. Dr A. Joshuva Peter. And the rapporteur for this discussion was S. Karen Erina Pui-mera. The discussion explored the advantages of the movement which provides improved food security and contributes to the health and resilience of ecosystems, exploring the role and responsibilities of the churches in addressing sustainable livelihoods in Asia and advocacy towards food for all.

## CELEBRATING ECUMENICAL COMMUNION

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) observes Asia Sunday every year on the Sunday before Pentecost. However, Asia Sunday in 2023 was observed on Sunday 1 October, 2023 in conjunction with the 15th CCA General Assembly (27 September – 4 October 2023). The theme of Asia Sunday-2023 was the same as the theme of the 15th General Assembly— 'God Renew Us In Your Spirit and Restore The Creation'. The suffering and groaning of the creation is not merely the result of natural forces but arise primarily from man's own choices, actions and lifestyles. We must therefore strike a balance between human development and ecological preservation. As a result the call to stewardship takes on a new urgency. To set the stage for a contemplative exploration of our faith's cardinal principle that God's expansive love encompasses all creation, the 500 delegates of the 15th CCA General Assembly from Asian and global churches, national Christian Councils and ecumenical partner organisations attended the liturgical worship of 55 churches in and around Kottayam. It was a marvellous and blessed moment as they united with local congregations and took part in a sacred dialogue with God as they beseech God for divine intervention.

Asia Sunday-2023 beckoned the participants and the local congregations to rekindle our commitment to care for the earth as God's entrusted stewards. The Churches in Kottayam warmly received the delegated members of the Assembly. □

### CCA NEWS - 2023

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