

PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW

October - December, 2010

LIFE AND MINISTRY OF THE MIZORAM PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rev. Dr. K. Lallawmzuala & Ms. P.C. Lalitlani

Presbytery Meetings. The Presbytery meetings of the different presbyteries under the Mizoram Presbyterian Synod were held during 7th – 10th of October 2010. The Synod Moderator and other Synod officers attended different presbyteries. Dividing into groups, the Aizawl Theological College students also attended different Presbytery meetings as part of their practical work.

The business session was held on 8th & 9th of October. In all, there were 55 agendas to be put forward to the Synod meeting in December 2010. 63 individuals were proposed for Probationary Pastor, 176 elders were ordained, 16 elders' ordination were removed and memorial for 70 elders were conducted. On Sunday morning service, the ordination of newly elected Church elders were held. The Lord's Supper was celebrated in the afternoon service along with the memorial service of the Church elders who passed away during the previous year.

Seminar on Social Reformation.

The Calvin Study Centre of the ATC organized a seminar on social reformation for Kelkang pastorate at Kelkang Church hall on the 16th of October 2010. In the forenoon session, Rev. Dr. Tlanghmingthanga's paper on "John Calvin and Social

Reformation" was presented and discussed. In the afternoon session, there was a discussion on the factors essential for social reformation among the Mizo.

3rd Laussane Congress. The Synod Executive Secretary Rev. Zosangliana Colney attended the 3rd Laussane Congress on world evangelization in Cape Town, South Africa. The Congress was attended by about 4000 church leaders from different parts of the world. Organized by World Evangelization and Evangelical Union, it highlighted and discussed various issues facing Christians today like faith issues, HIV/AIDS, poverty and persecution faced by Christians.

PWF Biennial Conference cum Silver Jubilee Celebration. PWF Biennial Conference and Silver Jubilee celebration was held at



Jaiaw Presbyterian Church, Shillong from the 28th to 31st October 2010. It was attended by 236 delegates from the different units of the PCI including 99 delegates from the Mizoram Presbyterian Women Fellowship. The theme for the Conference was 'Vision beyond 2010'. The unveiling of the Jubilee tablet was held on the 30th of October by Rev. Dr. L.S. Khawbung, Moderator PCI.

ATC College Day. The College Day of the Aizawl Theological College was celebrated at the college quadrangle on the 19th of November 2010. The theme for this year's college day was "Medicine Mission and the Church: Provisional Demonstration of the Kingdom of Heaven" which was addressed by Rev. Dr. William C. Browne, Executive Director, Medical Benevolence Foundation of the Presbyterian Church, USA. The service was led by the Principal Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad who also gave a report of the college development and activities. Rev. Vanlalzuata, Executive Secretary i/c Theological Education gave away the prizes for deserving students in various areas.

Apart from the College Day celebration, a farewell service

was conducted on this day for Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad, the ATC Principal, who has been appointed as the General Secretary of the NCCI at Nagpur. The farewell service was chaired by Rev. C. Chawngliana, the Synod Moderator and farewell speeches delivered by Rev. Vanlalzuata on behalf of the Theological Education Board, Rev. Dr. C. Lalhlira, Registrar of ATC, on behalf of the ATC faculty and staff, and Mr. Vanlalhriata on behalf of the ATC students. Rev. Dr. Vanlalnghaka Ralte presented a citation and Mrs. P.C. Laltlani presented him with a farewell gift.

Presbyterian Church Women Day. The Women wing of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church celebrated its day and the centenary of 'a handful of rice' on the 26th of November 2010. The history and ministry of 'a handful of rice' prepared by the Central Committee was read out in every church on this day. Every church made its own programme and the day ended with a grand feast.

Preparation for Christmas and New Year. The Central Christian Youth Fellowship of the Mizoram Synod organized various programmes from November 2010



in an effort to lead its members into a meaningful way of celebrating Christmas and New Year. On November 5th night, a carol service was organized at Chaltlang Presbyterian Church hall where 23 gospel singers took part. On the 14th of November, an open air Gospel concert was held at Millenium Centre and at Bawngkawn, Aizawl, and on the 16th of November, the same was held at Vaivakawn and Sikulpuikawn areas in Aizawl. Again on the 23rd of November, an advanced Christmas special programme was held at Chaltlang Presbyterian Church hall. There was also hanging of posters and banners with inspirational words written on them which aimed at guiding and inspiring youth to spend Christmas and New Year in a Christ-like way. Each local Church youth fellowship also organized its own Christmas and New Year programme.

87th Synod Meeting. The 87th Mizoram Presbyterian Synod Meeting was held at Zarkawt church during 1-12 December 2010. 1800 delegates attended the meeting. Business session was held during the day and the evening service was opened to everyone where spiritual theme was addressed by different speakers.

The ordination service was held on Sunday forenoon service on the 12th of December where 20 Pastors were ordained and 17 Pro. Pastors were installed. The Lord's Supper was celebrated by the Synod Moderator Rev. C. Lalsangliana in the afternoon service and a memorial service for the minister and Pro. Pastor who passed away in 2010 was also part of this service. The outgoing Moderator Rev. C. Chawngliana delivered his valedictory sermon in the evening service.

Next year's Synod meeting will be hosted by the Khatla Pastorate at the Khatla Presbyterian Church and the Synod Office bearers (2011) will be as follows:

Moderator : Rev. Thangzauva
Secretary (Sr.) :

Rev. P.C. Pachhunga

Secretary (Jr.) :

Elder D.P. Biakkhuma

Finance Officers :

Rev. Zosangliana Colney

Rev. Dr. Lalmangaiha

Statistician :

Rev. C. Sangliana

Executive Secretaries :

Rev. Vanlalzuata

Rev. Lalzuithanga



REPORT OF THE 87TH MPC SYNOD AT ZARKAWT

- Rev. Dr. Tlanguhmingthanga

The Synod of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church was hosted by Dawrpui Pastorate at Zarkawt Presbyterian Church during 7th- 12th December, 2010.



[Zarkawt Presbyterian Church]

The followings are included in this report.

Synod Officials:

Moderator : Rev. C. Lalsangliana

Secretaries : Upa Vanlalhuma (Sr.)

Rev. P.C. Pachhunga (Jr.)

Finance Officers :

Rev. Zosangliana Colney

Rev. Dr. Lalhmangaiha

Statistician :

Upa J.H. Ramnghinglova

Sr. Executive Secretary :

Rev. Vanlalzuata

Executive Secretary :

Rev. Lalzuithanga

From this year the Synod was hosted by Pastorate instead of

individual Church in line with the previous Synod suggestion. The Business session lasted for 4 days (8th- 11th December). Various important bodies like the SEC, Pastoral, and Nomination met beforehand and selected agenda for approval or to be discussed in the Synod. Some of the important resolutions were:-

1. Posting and Transfer of Pastors

1) The Synod ordained 20 Probationary Pastors who had completed their 3 years probationary course.

2) Out of 83 candidates for Probationary Pastor 17 were selected, Of these 3 are under the Synod Mission Board, 2 are under Manipur Area and others will be working under the Synod Pastoral Ministry.

3) 8 Pastor/Minister who have reached the age of 60 years will be retired with effect from January 2011.

4) 12 Pastors were given permission to go for further studies.



5) 13 Pastors who completed their term were deputed in the same position. 2 Pastors were given new responsibilities by the SEC, they are Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad for NCCI Gen. Secy. (full time), and Rev. Dr. Vanlalchhuanawma for Principal, ATC.

6) The Synod appointed Field Secretaries for various Mission Fields

7) 51 Pastors being completed 5 years term were move to various posts, while 18 Pastors were assigned in different post from their present assignment and 11 Pastors in Manipur Area were also moved.

2. Bifurcation of Presbytery

1) Aizawl Chhim Presbytery was divided into two, i.e., Aizawl Chhim Presbytery and Aizawl Chhimthlang Presbytery. The newly formed Aizawl Chhimthlang Presbytery will comprise of 4 pastorates namely, Bungkawn, Khatla, Mission Vengthlang, and Maubawk.

2) A new Presbytery called Tuivawl ral Presbytery was also formed from Tuivawl and Tawi Presbytery. The new Presbytery will constitute 3 pastorates- Kawkulh, Hliappui, and Lungpho.

3) Karbi Anglong will also be upgraded to constitute Presbytery.

3. Newly Formed Pastorates

1) Sairang Dintar Pastorate was formed from Sairang and Kawnpui Pastorate.

2) Chawngtlai Pastorate from Khawzawl Vengthar Pastorate.

3) Leithum Pastorate from Vanzau and Khuangleng Pastorate.

4) Ramthar Pastorate from Electric Veng (Aizawl) Pastorate.

There were also newly formed pastorates in the Mission Field.

1) In Arunachal West Field- Likabali Pastorate from Pasighat Pastorate.

2) In Lucknow Field- Lucknow South Pastorate.

3) In Manipur field- Ithai Pastorate from Kumbi, Kakchingkhunou, and Mayang Pastorate.

4. General Agenda from Presbytery and Board/ Committee

There were 78 General agenda which were discussed upon in the Synod-

1) To be looked into by the Synod Executive Committee- 20

2) To carry on as per tradition- 17

3) Agenda accepted and to be followed upon- 13

4) Clarification made- 7

5) Floor discussion is enough for now- 6

6) To be put up to the PCI General Assembly/ Executive Committee- 4



- 7) “We had done the urging and given advise to”- 3
- 8) “Not for now”- 2
- 9) To be put up to the NEICC- 1
- 10) To be discussed over again in all the Presbyteries- 1
- 11) To be looked into by the MSSU- 1
- 12) Accepted agendas in line with the proposal- 1
- 13) To follow the usual practice rather than change- 2
- 6) Matrimonial age fixed by the Government (Male- 21years and Female- 18 years) should be followed upon. (Gen. 65)
- 7) Grant in aid for Pastor Quarters be upgraded from Rs. 8,00,000 to Rs. 10,00,000. (Gen. 67)
- 8) The proposal to tackle with the negative impact of the media and the responsive measure be notified to all families. (Gen. 68)
- 9) Homosexuals be disciplined as long as they are together. (Gen. 69)

5. Some important agendas

A. These are the lists of agenda accepted

- 1) Important letters of the Church should be used more carefully and uniformly throughout Mizoram. (Gen. 23)
- 2) To discontinue sending ATC students to Presbyteries as delegates especially of those whom we have difference in Doctrine. (Gen. 48)
- 3) Mizo language should be used as much as possible in the Synod. (Gen. 53)
- 4) In newly formed Pastorates only competent pastor should be deputed who can ably guide. (Gen. 56)
- 5) Lessons like Sunday School, Wednesday Night, and Beihruah be made more inclusive keeping in mind learners outside of Mizoram. (Gen. 58)

- 10) The proposal to decrease number/items of agenda in the Synod (Gen. 78)
- 11) The request from the Central Women Fellowship to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the General Conference of Women in 2011 along with the financial assistance for that celebration was granted.
- 12) Admittance to Sunday School for Children 4 years of age should be as per Mizo calculation of years and not their exact calendar age
- 13) The request from Manipur Area to have their representation to the SMB and MSSU Committee was granted. (Gen. 78)

B. Agenda to be taken up by The Synod Executive Committee

- 1) Establishment of Secular College. (Gen. 4)



- 2) To draft rules and regulations for Pavalai Pawl. (Gen. 5)
- 3) To seek the ownership of the then Boys' M.E. School (Sikulpui) to the Synod.
- 4) To prepare guidelines for dress code and etiquette inside the Church. (Gen. 39)
- 5) To review the Synod financial management. (Gen. 63)
- 6) Re-location of Missionary Training College (MTC) currently at Mission Vengthlang to M.D.T.C site at Bualpui.
- 7) To appeal to the Government of Mizoram to reduce the alcohol content in Zawlaiddi (Grapewine). (Gen. 66)

There are certain matters to be handed back to the Synod that are once put up for SEC deliberation.

C. The Budget Estimate presented by the Synod Finance Committee for the new Financial Year April 2011- March 2012 was approved.

1. Budget Estimate (Pastoral)
Rs. 64,78,42,300
2. Budget Estimate (Mission)
Rs. 37,36,56,700
3. Expenditure/Income Estimate
Rs. 1,02,14,99,000

D. Statistic of Mizoram Presbyterian Church

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| No. of Presbyteries | - 40 |
| No. of Pastorates | - 251 |
| No. of Churches | - 1360 |
| No. of Pastor in charge of Pastorates | - 250 |
| No. of Ministers | - 191 |
| Total No. of Pastors | - 441 |
| No. of Church Elders | - 3940 |
| No. of Migrated Elders | - 376 |
| Total No. of Communicant | - 3,67,019 |
| Total No. of Members | - 5,50,560 |

E. Next Synod (2011)at Khatla

The next Synod will be hosted by Khatla Pastorate at Khatla Church during 30th November- 11th December, 2011. The Synod Officials will be as follows:-

Moderator: Rev. Thangzauva
Secretaries:

Rev. P.C. Pachhunga (Sr.)
Upa D.P. Biakkhuma (Jr.)

Finance Officers:

Rev. Zosangliana Colney
Rev. Dr. Lalmangaiha

Statistician: Rev. C. Sangliana

Executive Secretaries :

Rev. Vanlalzuata
Rev. Lalzuithanga



DEDICATION OF THE NEW MIZORAM PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SYNOD OFFICE

- Rev. Dr. Vanlalnghaka Ralte



The new Synod Office of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church (MPC) was dedicated on November 11 (Thursday), 2010 at 2:00 pm at Mission Veng, Aizawl by Rev.C.Chawngliana, the then Moderator of the MPC Synod. The dedication function was attended by the Synod Executive Committee members and about five hundred special invitees from within the Aizawl local churches. The function was led by Rev.Vanalzuata, Senior Executive Secretary of the MPC and reports about the building constructions were given by Rev.Zosangliana Colney, Executive Secretary, i/c Synod Property

Committee and Dr.Lalbiakmawia Ngente, the Architect.

The new Synod Office building has been constructed in the MPC Synod plot of land (LSC No.DLLMisc.75 pf 2007, Block I, Mission Veng) where the earlier Synod Offices were also constructed. The building foundation was laid by Rev.Vanalchhunga, the then Synod Moderator on July 7, 2007. With the total cost of Rs.522,80,518.00 till date, the whole construction work took three years and four months.

The ground coverage of the building is 4,980 Sq.ft, with 78'X60' width and breadth, and 80' height. This massive six storied building



with a blend of traditional and modern architectural touches has been designed to host the offices for various Synod administrative heads and other staff as follows:

Ground Floor: Synod Moderator

- Senior Executive Secretary
- Office Superintendent
- General Administration
- Reception Office
- Finance Manager
- Finance Department
- Pension & Provident Fund
- Revival
- Lounge & Common Toilet

First Floor: Executive Secretary i/c MSSU, etc.

- MSSU
- Property
- Editor, SL & PB
- Synod Literature & Publication Board
- Music
- Kohhran Hmeichhia
- Lounge & Common Toilet
- Synod Officers' Room

Second Floor: Executive Secretary i/c Mission, etc.

- Secretary, Synod Mission Board
- Synod Mission Board
- Synod Social Front
- Kristian Thalai Pawl
- Education
- Lounge & Common Toilet
- Committee Room – I (30'X30')

Third Floor : Archives

- Synod Information and Publicity (Synfo)
- Synfo Studio – I
- Synfo Studio – II
- Lounge & Common Toilet
- Committee Room – II (30'X45')

Fourth Floor - J.M.Lloyd's Hall (78'X45')

- Store cum Multipurpose Room
- Utility Room
- Common Toilet

Basement - Vehicles' Parking

- Drivers' Room
- Store Rooms (6 Nos)
- Common Toilet

[Each of the Synod Officer's room has attached toilet and there are three common toilets separately for gents and ladies in all the floors, and there are lounges for customers].

The Synod building had been constructed as a departmental work under the supervision of the Synod Property Working Committee (SPWC). As decided by the Synod Property Committee on 11th August, 2007, the SPWC began the project under the Chairmanship of Rev.Dr.R.Lalbiakmawia, the then Executive Secretary i/c Property which comprised of 8 other members including its Secretary,



Elder F.Lalsangliana. By the beginning of 2010 the SPWC was led by Rev.Zosangliana Colney, the new Executive Secretary i/c Property. Besides the SPWC, the main persons involved in the construction of the Synod Office building are Dr.Lalbiakmawia Ngente B.Arch., DBA, PhD, (Architect) of M/s L.B.Associates, Bungkawn, Aizawl, Er.H. Zoramliana (Structural Engineer), Mr. J.Lalhmachhuana (Work manager) and Mr. R.Lalmangaiha (Work Supervisor).

Some facts about the Building structure are – It has an RCC framed-structure, with 43 main structural columns with 20"X24" and 16"X20" thickness and 10 side columns with 12"X12" thickness. The tie beam measures 10"X15" whereas the structural beam measure 12"X18". The brick wall which is plastered inside is painted with ICI Paints (Dulux) Aqua White (Code No.5320) while the outside wall is lined with Aluminum Composite Panel (ACP—Bright

Silver). For the roofing, the tabular truss is covered with Dyna Roof. The RCC slab floor is covered throughout with vitrified tiles and marbles. The window frames are aluminum which hold one-way glass. North West and South West sides have vertical glazing structures which serve dual purposes, namely, light and beauty. The main gate of the ground floor has a Collapsible Steel gate, and the entry to the basement has Steel Rolling Shutters and Steel Gate.

The new Synod Office building with all its awesome beauty and enormous size will be able to facilitate a better work place and more conducive environment for the servants of God working under this roof. And it is the hope and prayer of every believer within the Mizoram Presbyterian Church that this building will stand as a symbol of love and unity, a source of strength and commitment, and a place where the name God is honored and glorified by all.



13th Presbyterian Women's Fellowship (PWF) Biennial Conference & Silver Jubilee Celebration

- Dr. Lalrindiki Ralte

The 13th PWF Biennial Conference & Silver Jubilee Celebration based on the theme "Vision Beyond 2010" was held during 28th – 31st October, 2010 hosted by KJP Synod, Mihngi at Jaiaw Presbyterian Church, Shillong. The Gospel was first preached in Jaiaw locality by Rev. J.C. Evans after 1866. In the midst of much resistance the first church building was established in 1898 which became a full fledged church in 1899. Since then Jaiaw Presbyterian Church continue to play an important role in strengthening the faith of its members and partner Churches in various capacities. Jaiaw Church is now having more than 7000 members.

The Nomination Committee and Standing Committee met on 28th Oct and the proposals and decisions that they made were discussed during the Business Session on 29th Oct. Some of the important resolutions are as follows:

1) To send 10 representatives of the PWF to the AICCW Quadrennial Conference 2011 to be held at Hyderabad during 20th – 23rd January, 2011.

2) As proposed by the Theological Education Committee of the PCI in 2009 it was decided that the PCI Secretary for Women's Relations would communicate to all the PWF Units to conduct a seminar or consultation on Women's Ordination, and that she be one of the main resource persons.

3) To take part in the Presbyterian Women Global Exchange Programme with PC USA.

4) 14th PWF Biennial Conference 2012 will be hosted by KJP Synod Mihngi under the theme "To be Frutiful" (John 15:16). The Speaker will be Mrs. L. Muani Darnei.

5) Rs. 4,08,000 as the budget for 2010-2012

The Inaugural Worship Service was held on 28th Oct evening. The inaugural and key-note address was delivered by Rev. S.S. Majaw, Administrative Secretary i/c PWF where he exhorted the congregation to diligently pursue two important ministries of the PWF, such as in



spiritual upliftment and in social concern. At the same time he also highlighted the limitation to women's full participation in various ministries of the Church due to the denial of women's ordination. The Silver Jubilee Souvenir of the PWF (1995-2010) "Vision Beyond 2010" was released by Rev. W.C.Khongwir, former PCI Administrative Secretary i/c PWF. The Souvenir highlighted the achievements of the PWF since its inception in 1995 as well as the problems and difficulties faced by the PWF.

The morning of 29th Oct started with a Bible Study conducted by Ms. Barbara Dohling, M. Th based on Phil. 3:12-14. The preacher at the evening public worship service was Rev. D.C.Haia, former PCI Administrative Secretary i/c PWF. He based his sermon on Deut. 1:6-8 and he encouraged the PCI leaders, women and the people to move forward to complete their journey and their mission. After the service a Bible Study was conducted by Dr. Hrangthanchhungi, Executive Secretary, NCCI Commission on Tribal and Adivasi. The theme of the Bible Study was 'The Mission of God for Social Justice' based on Lk 4:18-19, also known as the Nazareth Manifesto. She emphasized that we

live in a world surrounded by problems of women trafficking, child abuse etc. Our duty as Church women is to find creative methods of responsibly tackling the problems in line with Jesus' Nazareth Manifesto.

30th Oct was spent for the celebration of the Silver Jubilee. At 8:00 am Rev. Dr. L.S.Khawbung, PCI Moderator unveiled the PWF Jubilee Tablet at the premises of the Jaiaw Church in the midst of a colorful gathering of PWF officials and delegates, guests and invitees. In the worship service which followed former Office Bearers of the PWF were felicitated with mementoes. Mrs. Zomuani, the first Chairperson of the PWF, delivered a Jubilee message on 'The Secret of Christian Vitality/Strength' based on Phil. 3:1; 4:4-7; Neh.8:10. She said that life is a combination of ups and downs and it is always important to rejoice in the Lord even in bad times. The worship service was followed by a variety programme where delegates and members of the different Units presented entertaining and inspiring skits, songs and dances. In the evening a special Community Feast was prepared by the hosting Church as part of the Silver Jubilee celebration. In the evening public worship



service Ms. Zohmangaihi, PCI Secretary on Women's Relations presented a thought provoking message on the theme 'Vision Beyond 2010' based on Esther 4:13-14 and Lk. 10:38-42. She expressed the need for critically analyzing the present condition of women in our society and in the Church. She felt that the Silver Jubilee Celebration should be an eye opener for making an important milestone in the life and ministry of the PWF, particularly with regard to the issue of women's ordination in the Church as well as to the sufferings of women in the wider society.

On Sunday morning, 31st Oct, the Holy Communion service was held at 7:30 am and the celebrant was Rev. S.I.Iawphniaw, Moderator of the KJP Assembly. Among the Church leaders and important personalities who were invited to the programme the most notable ones were Rev. (Mrs) Catrin Roberts and Rev. Irfan Rh. Roberts from Wales. Rev. Irfan is serving as the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Wales while Rev. Catrin spends her time as a Pastor. At the public worship service in the forenoon the preacher was Rev. Catrin. In the afternoon service Rev. Irfan delivered a message

where he encouraged the Christians in Northeast India not to lose their faith and commitment to the Gospel as had happened in Wales. At the evening public worship service Rev. Dr. L.S.Khawbung, Moderator of the PCI installed the newly elected PWF leaders for 2010-2012. The Moderator also delivered the message and vote of thanks was given by the hosting Church and Mrs. Lalthansangi from PWF.

The new Office Bearers of PWF 2010-2012 are:

Chairperson :

Ms.P.Tiewsoh, KJP Synod Sepngi (appointed by the PCI General Assembly)

Vice-Chairperson:

Mrs. Vahkhohling, Zou Synod

Secretary :

Mrs. Zomalsawm, CHT Synod

Asstt. Secretary:

Mrs. G.P.Pohshna, KJP Synod Mihngi

Treasurer :

Mrs. Rachelbon Myrboh, Ri Bhoi Synod

PWF Representatives to the different PCI Committees:

Executive Committee :

Ms. P.Tiewsoh

Mrs. Zomalsawm



- Theological Education** : delegates and they presented a beautiful song during the last public
Ms. Zohmangaihi worship service of the Conference.
- Christian Communication** : The programme was a historic and
Mrs. Lalthansangi Fanai memorable occasion where the
Mission & Evangelism : ministry of women in the Church was
Mrs. K.Rane acknowledged and celebrated. It
became a symbolic event which
highlighted the contributions of
women as well as the limitations to
women's ministry set by patriarchal
Church structures and tradition.
Thus, the 13th PWF Biennial
Conference and Silver Jubilee
Celebration became a challenge to
the Presbyterian Church of India in
its attempt to make its commitment
and ministry relevant to the changing
context of contemporary society.
- More than 346 delegates and invitees, coming from different Units and from outside, took part in the 13th PWF Biennial Conference and Silver Jubilee Celebration. The hosting Church, Jaiaw Presbyterian Church, played excellent role in making the programme successful. The delegates were warmly hosted by different families belonging to Jaiaw Church. PWF Unit of Mizoram Synod also sent 97



GREETINGS FROM SAMOA

- *Lalengzami Chhakchuak*
CWM Missionary

Samoa or also known as Western Samoa (not to be confused with American Samoa) is a quiet and gentle place that nurtures the most traditionally Polynesian society to be found in the Pacific Islands. It comprise of 11 small islands (4 habitant and 7 inhabitant), out of which two are the bulky main islands of volcanic origin called Upolu and Savaii. Samoa is around 4 hrs flight from Auckland, New Zealand, 5 ½ hrs flight from Sydney, Australia. Lying near the equator, Samoa experience hot and humid conditions most of the year. There is no season except for the hot and wet season and the dry and wet season. The indigenous people of Samoa are large and robust folk of Polynesian origin. Food plays an important role in their life. Samoans are tradition- oriented and follow closely the social

hierarchies, customs and courtesies established by their ancestors. The

Fa'a Samoa or the Samoan way is closely guarded and preserved.



[CWM Staff in Samoa]



Before the arrival of Christianity, Samoans worshipped a hierarchy of gods under one supreme being, whom they called Le Tagaloa. They tell a story of the creation by the god Tagaloa that is remarkably similar to the account given in the Bible in the Book of Genesis.

When Rev. John Williams from the London Missionary Society arrived in 1830, he found the Samoans willing to convert to the Christian God. It didn't take long before all the Samoan people collectively accepted the Christian gospel. Perhaps, the most important factor leading to wholesale acceptance of the new religion in the islands, however, was a legendary prophecy made by the war goddess Nafanua, that a new religion would arrive from the sky and be embraced by the people, bringing peace and prosperity to the land.

So, it was not very difficult for the Missionaries to convert the Samoan to Christianity. Many became Christian without really knowing what Christianity is all about. Most of them became Christian without knowing the real truth about God's word and the teaching of the Bible.

All Samoans used to have a personal *aitu* (a form of spirit)- a fish, a bird or other animal that was sacred to them. To prove the sincerity of their conversions, the Samoans were required to eat their *aitu* which the missionaries regarded as symbols of paganism.

180 years on, after the arrival of Christianity to Samoa, majority of the Christian population are so called to be a nominal Christian. Many don't know the need to have a personal relationship with God. Going to heaven after death is taken for granted as long as a person is a Christian.

The Congregational Christian Church in Samoa (C.C.C.S), derived from the London Missionary Society, is the biggest denomination in the island and is a member of CWM (Council for world Mission) as well as the receiving church for its missionaries. But sadly, there has been a decline in the number of its member for the past years. One of the reasons behind this could be due to the moving away of many of its members to a new religion namely 'The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saint' or also known as the Mormon.

At present, there are 5 missionaries from Mizoram Synod send by the Presbyterian Church of



India, through CWM who are serving in Samoa as a missionary teacher:

1. Lalenzami Chhakchhuak teaches Science at Maluafou College from 2002
2. V.L.Thanpuii Chawngthu teaches English at Maluafou College from 2002
3. Rachel Zote teaches Commerce at Leulumoegafou College from 2005
4. Lalliansangi teaches Commerce at Tuasivi College from 2007
5. Zorinpuii Khiangte teaches Commerce at Tuasivi College(2002- 2005), and at Papauta Girls College from 2009.

We are serving in the different mission schools owned by the receiving church C.C.C.S. The schools where we are teaching have classes from 9 – 13, which is equivalent to the Higher Secondary Level in India. As missionary teacher, our main contribution to the receiving church is in the field of education. Apart from the daily teaching class, we grab whatever opportunity we have to share the truth about God's word with our students and colleagues. In Samoa it is a common norm in all the churches that only theologian (mostly ordained) can conduct worship service and preach. So

there is a little chance of us to involve in church activities. We used to have a Bible Study with our respective class once a week. We also have devotion in the classroom before school starts, wherein students take turn to conduct the devotion and also as far as possible we use this time to share with our student. We find this time of fellowship that we have with our student to be fruitful. After school, before we dismiss student from our class, we break with a prayer which was not practiced before.

The majority of our students are those who are academically weak, and who are not able to attain entry in the Government and Private schools. It has always been a big challenge for all of us to nurture and guide these students. God has been faithful and we have seen God's work in numerous ways through the achievement of our students academically and also through the life of some of our students and colleagues who now have a personal relationship with God. Our Year 12 sits the National Board exam and Year 13 sits the Regional Board (Pacific) exam and the results of our students have been improving beyond our expectations every year. All glory to God!!



Our students being teenagers, many of them are faced with all sorts of problems and difficulties and are under a lot of peer pressure. Some of the common problems faced by our students are that they are victims of sexual abuse, incest, domestic violence and teenage pregnancy. They are reluctant to share their problems openly with their friends and families and due to this end up making the wrong choice. On many occasions, God has often used their situation for us to render help and most importantly a time to share and pray with them personally. We believe that God has worked in their hearts and will continue to work in bringing them to have a better and closer relationship with Him.

The culture of drinking alcohol is prominent among the people, which maybe one of the leading

factor for domestic violence, sexual abuse and incest.

There is still a lot of work to be done in Samoa and we need your continuous prayer support. I would like to bring out some prayer points:

- 1) For our students who are victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence.
- 2) For Revival in Samoa.
- 3) Government's proposal to open a Casino.

Let us all be reminded of the word of Paul, as we carry out the task given to us by God in the different places that we serve. (1Corinthians 15:58)

“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain”.



Samoa Island



REFLECTION ON EDINBURGH 2010 CELEBRATION

- Dr. Marina Ngursangzeli

Thank you firstly for having invited me here this evening. It is indeed a privilege to be a part of this gathering and to share with you some of the things that I have been pondering ever since I received the invitation to be a part of the Edinburgh 2010 celebrations.

As I stand before you this evening I am reminded of Bishop V.S. Azariah's plea a hundred years ago asking for friends. Indeed I believe that his request has been answered to a certain extent as I believe that this evening I stand before friends. This, I believe, is in no small measure because of the many world events that have happened in the last century that have not only changed the world politically but have also brought Christians across the globe closer with a better understanding of the mission in which we are partners.

When I was asked to share some of my thoughts and reflections on Edinburgh 2010, it got me thinking and I realized that I really needed to ask myself some questions and critically reflect and understand what these celebrations mean to me. There are several questions running through my mind and I would like to share some of these with you.

I would like to begin with the phrases or words which have marked several of the presentations and have been repeatedly used by many of the speakers that we have been listening to in the last few days – mainly:

(1) What is different or what are the differences between Edinburgh 1910 and Edinburgh 2010?

There are, undoubtedly differences between the 1910 and the 2010 conferences and these have been pointed out several times. These differences began with something that is very visible – the difference in the faces that you see at the gathering in terms of firstly, colour, secondly, gender and of course thirdly the countries or areas that are represented today from the global south that were not present in 1910.

As one of those who is a part of this difference in terms of face, gender, colour and representation I asked myself these questions:



Has my presence really made a difference in this gathering in 2010?

Am I here through my own efforts and on my own terms or is my presence here fulfilling certain criteria needed to make this gathering look politically correct in terms of portraying a “different” face from 1910?

Is my voice being heard and considered seriously? Or am I just being granted a role or face in terms of context and perspectives because I may have something to share with the world? If so is, then does what I have to say or am saying being accepted? Equally importantly, is such an attitude acceptable both from my side and on the part of those who have included me in these celebrations?

(2) The second word that set me thinking is the term “Shift” used in relation to, or to describe the “difference” or “what is different”.

There has been a lot of talk about the shift of the centre of the Christian movement from the global north to the south. The question is what does this shift really mean for us Indians and by extension for Asian Christians?

- Is it enough for all of us that we are recognized and accepted as being present here today?

- Is the Indian/Asian Church really understood, in other words has it managed to come across or communicate itself as a Church with its own rights – having journeyed through 1910 to 2010, witnessing through and amidst its many challenges, problems, weaknesses?

(3) The third term or word that I would like to reflect on is “Presence”, specifically, our presence or the presence of Christians from India and Asia. And by extension what does our presence in 2010 really mean? What does being here mean for us Asian and Indian Christians? What does our presence mean for those who have invited us to be a part of Edinburgh 2010?

I suppose our being here could mean different things and would have different meanings for those who have seen our presence here as it would be for those of us from Asia who are present here as those faces who have made a difference- and I have to wonder, of what significance in the mission of our Lord is our presence here?



(4) The fourth term that I would like to reflect on is the term ‘Partner’ Or “Partnership”. We could even rephrase this as “Working in Partnership”.

So we have made a difference, we are present and have brought about a shift – not just by our presence here at the gathering of 2010, but because of the very presence of a live and vibrant church in the countries or the contexts we are from.

There is no denying and there certainly has been a shift in different spheres and aspects and here I would like to mention the shift in language and perspectives.

The earlier language or phrases and attitudes such as, “We are called”, “Our mission is to take the Gospel to those who have not heard it, and convert them to Christianity” have undergone a change and are today replaced with the term and attitude of “partnership”.

Missionaries from the global north who had worked with the goal of making Christians and, using phrases such as “to lead the heathen to Christianity”, were perceived and understood as the senders, the doers, the givers and the ones who were to lead – as those leading the others to the “right” and “true way”.

The people in the global south were considered as the receivers, the ones who were in need of what the North had to offer, the ones who did not have the capability or ability of deciding what was good for them and what they needed. They were perceived as those that needed to be led.

But now all of us are speaking a new language. We are now talking about partnership and of working together as partners. We have even gone beyond partnership and are now talking about working in partnership with people belonging to other faiths and those with no faith for the good of all creation.

The question that I would like to reflect on and to try to honestly answer is – why are we talking about partnership?

(a) Are we really convinced of the equality and rights of all people?

(b) Are we all convinced and do we really believe honestly that all people have something to share with the others?

(c) Are we forced to talk about being partners because we are faced with situations we cannot avoid or control?

(d) Is it because we Christian in the global south are not longer passive receivers or listeners, and are no longer willing to be led?



(e) Can it be because we in and from the global south are beginning to raise our voices, not willing to be silenced, and the only way to lower our voices and control the noise and calm us is by talking about partnership and offering us partnership?

I believe that there is a need to really study and reflect and ask ourselves what this partnership really means- are we all, irrespective of whether we are from the global North and or South, in agreement as to what this partnership entails and how it should function and work ? Additionally I would like to ask:

- Are we all really considered to be equals and do we all really have equal say and role in this partnership?
- Do we really have an understanding of what each of us is expected to be, the role we are to play and especially about our share in this partnership?

(5) The fifth term or word that I would like to reflect on is “Context” – a very popular word and one that is used liberally whenever certain issues and challenges are discussed and deliberated.

We have been ‘generously’ granted our context, and so we can now speak from our perspectives shaped by our contexts. But then again, certain questions arise –

- (a) Are we really free to define our contexts and perspectives?
- (b) Are our contexts becoming the pretext of another form of the mission field because these are being used to define and stereotype us again?

In this regard we also need to, importantly consider: Who is defining the context? Who are the ones being defined as a result?

I would like to conclude by saying that we should not forget the good work and contributions made by our foremothers and forefathers and our friends and well wishers and missionaries who have worked and toiled in India.

We have begun our journey together, trying to understand one another through failures and successes on both sides. It was a journey taken together before 1910, through 1910 to 2010 and will continue beyond.

But the journey is not yet over and new maps have to be drawn and new routes need to be charted. For those



of us in India who continue, on one hand to reap the benefits of the work of the missionaries and on the other hand struggle to define our identity as Christians in a pluralistic India and in the global Church, there is the need to consider the following questions:

(a) What has been one role as Indians in the journey so far?

(b) What would be our role in the journey to be yet taken?

(c) Will the Indian Church play a role and contribute in drawing and charting new routes and directions for world Christians and the Christian movement and mission at large?

[Dr Marina Ngursangzeli is lecturer and Chairperson of the Department of the History of Christianity at the United Theological College, Bangalore. She was one of the delegates to the Edinburgh 2010 Conference and was one of the panel speakers at the plenary session of Track 3 from study group II. This reflection was addressed to members of the Fellowship of St Thomas during the Edinburgh 2010 Centenary Celebrations on the 5th of June 2010 at St Peter's Episcopal Church, Luton Place, Edinburgh.]



A REPORT OF URBAN EXPOSURE FIELD EDUCATION

- Mr. H.D. Ramngaihawma & Ms. Manjulie Vaiphei

As per the requirement of the college curriculum BD III students of ATC, consisting of twenty male, five female, and three final year students had undergone successful “Urban Exposure Field Education” at Kolkata during 3rd – 19th December 2010. The exposure was done under the capable guidance of Rev. Rosiamliana Tochhawng, Dean of Field Education and Dr. Lalrindiki Ralte, Lecturer.

Field education as such was practiced for the first time after replacing study tour. Though there was no precedence to follow and compare, all things were done satisfactorily.

A remarkable journey

We left the college on 3rd December, 7:00 pm by Bus. We hardly reached Guwahati on 4th December 10:00 pm so as to miss our train for Kolkata by few minutes. The slow moving of the bus, the time consuming sleep of our driver, bad road condition, the ill-timed calling of nature to some of us, tire puncture, and the extreme tight traffic at Shillong will hopefully show the picture why our journey took 27 hrs while it could be made within 15 hrs. We consequently need to catch another train where only general class was available for us. We therefore experienced the most congested train journey ever had. Even the toilets were crowded with passengers, only few of us were

brave and strong enough to make out to the toilet and pee, while some sort out their problems with empty water bottle, some of us go without any kind of liquid, some remained in their seats all through the 20hrs long journey. And as stomach rules, one of us had to excrete while surrounded by strangers who has toilet as the only place to stand throughout the journey. With all those wonderful experiences we reached Kolkata on 6th Dec. 1:00 am.

Our return journey was so much more comfortable and we were very happy sine we can have our own seats in sleeper class. And we are very grateful to Rev. H.Larinmawia, Field Secretary of Guwahati Mission Field and his colleagues for having arranged our transport from Guwahati to Aizawl.

Exposing Kolkata

We had been exposing the ‘City of Joy’ with the best possible way we could in such a way that we will be prepared for our future ministries. It was done through different means.



1) Placement at Institutionalized ministries

We were assigned to serve in two institutional ministries such as **Missionaries of Charity** and **Emmanuel Ministries**. We were divided into groups according to it. Each group served at their respective places daily during the stipulated time of 7th – 11th December.

‘Missionaries of Charity’ is a Roman Catholic religious order established in 1950 by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, which consists of over 4,500 sisters and is active in 133 countries. Member sisters must adhere to the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, and the fourth vow, to give “Wholehearted and Free service to the poorest of the poor”.

The ministry cares for those who include refugees, ex-prostitutes, the mentally ill, sick children, abandoned children, lepers, AIDS victims, the aged, and convalescent. They have schools run by volunteers to educate street children; they run soup kitchens, as many other services as per the communities’ needs. They have 19 homes in Kolkata alone which include homes for women, for orphaned children, and for the dying; an AIDS hospice, a school for street children, and a leper colony. Of which

we were placed to two homes – **Prem Dan**, and **Nabo Jibon**. These services are provided to people regardless of their religion or social caste.

Prem Dan, the house for the mentally and physically ill, is in a poor area of the city and it’s surrounded by a wall to avoid any violence. On the first floor of the house there are those patients who can’t walk, on the second are those who are auto-sufficient. They don’t have much to do, the ones who are the most ill are only moved when the beds are done, and the others can go in the garden and talk between them, and are taken care of by the volunteers. It is friends and families who take there the people who need help. Sometimes it’s the sisters who find sick people on the street and take them in. During our stay, there were around 180 inmates. The numbers fluctuate as there was constant moving in and out patients.



[ATC Students Volunteer at Prem Dan (Missionaries of Charity)]



Every day between 8am – 12:00 noon we were engaged with laundry, washing clothes, washing floors, helping to feed the patients, spending time with the patients, talking to them, help to prepare the plates, passing out for lunch, cleaning all the dishes when the patients have been fed and when the dishes are finished.



[Worker attending new inmate picked from the street at Prem Dan]

The inmates were friendly and nice to live with. Their faces will not be forgotten easily and their voices uttering “good morning bredarr (brother)” and “hello bondu” will linger in our memories for years. To feed those inmates with good appetite, to shave their mustache, to help them blow their nose were fun!!

Mother Teresa herself and Missionaries of Charity is being

criticized on the ground that she/they did not fight against the structure that led to poverty, rather concentrate on doing immediate relief and for neglecting after-care. But the process of liberation or rehabilitation is always complicated and tough needing lots of struggles and times. So being one person/organization all necessities could not be handled especially in the context like India's. So it is fine that they are concentrated on immediate relief and care. Because, someone is dying today.

Nabo Jibon is a home for children, adult and handicap people so that they can live a more dignified and purposeful life. Besides this it works to uplift the marginalised and disadvantaged people to ensure their rights to life of dignity, respect and fulfilment as destined by God. The centre provides services to those who are mentally retarded and Tuberculosis patient and other vulnerable senior citizens and children in the society. Nabo Jibon is looked after by the MC Brothers; they took care of orphans as well. Only male volunteers were welcomed and on Sunday, street children would come to take bath in the home and play with the volunteers. Female volunteers were welcomed to help them out in this case.





[ATC Student feeding an inmate at Nabo Jibon (Missionaries of Charity)]

A ‘Missionaries of charity’ is being blessed by the constant presence of the services of volunteers from different parts of the world. It was challenging that most of them even non Christians came by their own expense sacrificing their holidays for the needy.

‘Emmanuel Ministries’, where other group of students was placed, was initiated in the winter of 1971 by a young couple, Vijayan and Premila Pavamani. Over the next few years the ministry they named as The Calcutta Samaritans grew, and they founded The Arunoday Midway Home in 1978, the first residential rehabilitation centre for recovering addicts and alcoholics in India, and the Calcutta Emmanuel School – a free school for the poorest children who cannot even

dream of education. In 1985 they founded Emmanuel Ministries Calcutta as an umbrella organization to host projects that fight poverty and social injustice. The Emmanuel Ministries Calcutta is a Christian ministry while the Calcutta Samaritans is a secular organization. After the tragic demise of Vijayan Pavamani on August 20th, 2006, Premila, co-founder now is designated as Executive Director of Emmanuel ministries Calcutta (EMC).

Emmanuel Ministries has a variety of Project under various Departments such as New-market Community Development Project where more than 164 children from slum area came here to learn drama, scripture, sewing and tailoring, dance class and so on. Night Shelter is an open Rehabilitation Center for chemical dependence and there is also detoxification Center which is a Treatment cum Rehabilitation Center. Connexions is the name of a project where slum women are taught how to stitch bags, cushions cover, wrap-round etc. from second hand sari. When they are expert they can bring their finished goods and is export to US. And there is Pavement Club project where children from Slum area came to



learn it is a kind of home tuition. And there is Community Care Center too.

There were Departments such as CAD (Campaign and Advocacy Department) it works to make development more sustainable for people below poverty line, those aids provided by the government is being handled here, as stated by Ms. Reshmi, Project Co-ordinator. PASAC (Prevention of AIDS, STD's, Awareness and Care) is working for safe sex and sexual health. It concentrates mainly on sex worker since they are considered to be the high risk group. There are two projects under PASAC namely ICDC (Integrated Counseling and Detect Center) and Targeted Intervention, and there is CC (Care and Counseling department)



Executive director of Emmanuel Ministries Calcutta Mrs. Premila

Pavamani held that, to say 'God loves you' is something too big, ambiguous and a myth and sometime it is just an evangelical unreality to say if we do not show our love with our deeds to whom it is spoken. After having a week long exposure to the various ministries undertaken by the Emmanuel Ministries Calcutta (EMC), one can only see masses of homeless people, helpless, and people without any hope. For the past four decades the EMC has been working passionately to help these people in its various capacities and it has been a great challenge for us all today especially for those of us who are called to serve God and humankind.

2) Visiting Mission Fields

On Sunday i.e. 12th December, we paid a visit to three Mission Fields under Kolkata Mission Field by three groups containing five members each. The places were Basirhat, Badu and Mathurapur. It is to be treasured that each group was given a chance to preach in the services and it was significant that we could have witnessed how the mission work is carried on by our church in mainland India. It was challenging to see those lonely but daring fighters of God and their missions. The presence of different



mission groups and their different approaches as well as their unhealthy relationship between each other has created a problem as an awful deed like sheep stealing happen.

3) Visiting Serampore

On 15th (Wed) we visit Serampore College which was founded by Wiliam Carey, Marshmann and Ward in 1818. In addition we got the opportunity to pay a visit to the Senate of Serampore Office where our College is affiliated to. We were warmly received by Rev. Dr. Lalchungnunga, Principal, Dr. Ravi Tiwari, Registrar and Rev. Dr. H. Vanlalauva's family, Mizo studentds and Mizo families there. We had seen the buildings, compounds, Carey Museum. We also visit Cemetery where the Serampore trio's bodies were laid. It was inspiring as well as challenging to see the tomb of Dr. Carey, *Father of Modern Mission*, with its humble words carried on it: "A wretched poor and helpless worm, on thy kind arms I fall". During our visit we were guided by Rev. Ramngaihawma who is a student of the college there. We had a delicious lunch prepared by some Mizo friends out there.



[At the front of the Serampore Senate main building]

It feels good to see all the flats in 'Carey House' in Serampore were occupied by Mizos. The scope of ministry in the mainland seems vast if we take it as a challenge. However, having seen two prominent Theological Colleges in India – Bishops College and Serampore College, we came to realized how fortunate we are to be students of ATC. In terms of Faculty strength, infrastructures, campus management and others we came to know that we can hold our head high. It gives joy to say that ATC is a part of Mizoram Presbyterian Church and never drifted apart from the hearts of the congregations. It can be deduced that the strength of ATC much lies in its connection/relations with the Church. The



strength of the supporting church is the strength of the college. The supports from the church in all spheres have been the backbone of ATC which will determine its longevity. We therefore take this opportunity to convey our heartfelt thanks to all the members of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram for their continual supports and prayers.

4) Site Seeing and shopping

On 13th and 14th we had fun-full time of Site seeing in which we visited places like Zoological Garden, Birla Planetarium, Science City, and Nicco Park. The next day is spent for shopping which was helpful for acquiring an in-depth knowledge of the Indian Society.

Thanks

On behalf of all the students we would like to express our genuine gratitude and thankfulness to the Principal and staff of Bishops College, Mr. Laima Chozah, Mr. TBC Rozara, Rev. Lianmingthanga Sailo, and Rev. Dr. Lalthlungnunga. They made our Field Education a success through various capacities and truly add colors to it. We are particularly grateful to Rev. Lalthlanpuia, BD final year student at Bishops College

Kolkata for his untiring cooperation with our faculty guides in many valuable ways.

Our special thanks go to Rev. Rosiamliana Tochhawng and Dr. Lalrindiki Ralte for their proficient leadership and management. We are proud of them for having courageously shared with us all the troubles and hardships which this venture brought forth.

It was an enormous opportunity for us to have such wonderful experiences. It had enriched us in various ways. To have been placed to such a big city and to have worked and served in reputed institutions such as those were of great help for us as we are preparing ourselves to serve God and Humankind. Being there has made it all the more apparent to us how important it will be for us to take full advantage of our next one (privileged) year at the college. We therefore thank the college authority for their creativity that led them to arrange such brilliant endeavor and having met all the necessities for its success.

Most of all, we are grateful to the Almighty God, who by his grace had help us in handling all the situations we had gone through.

[Mr. H.D. Ramngaihawma & Ms. Manjulie Vaiphei are B.D. III Students at the Aizawl Theological College]



MINISTRY IN SINKING VALLEY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH USA

- Rev. J.H. Vanlal Hruaia

1:1 It is a great privilege for me to be invited to write an article about our ministry in central Pennsylvania, USA. Since August 2009 I have been serving as a pastor at Sinking Valley Presbyterian Church in Tyrone, Pennsylvania. It is one of the branch churches in the Presbyterian Church (USA). The PC(USA) is a mainline Protestant Christian denomination in the United States of America. Being part of the Reformed tradition, it is the largest Presbyterian denomination in the U.S. The PC(USA) was established by the 1983 merger of the former Presbyterian Church in the United States, with the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

1:2 The early Presbyterians in America came from England, Scotland and Ireland. The first American Presbytery was organized at Philadelphia in the State of Pennsylvania in 1706. The first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was held in the same city in 1789. The Assembly was convened by the Rev. John Witherspoon, the only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence. This was indicative of the active support of Presbyterians for the American War of Independence.

1:3 For the most part, the PC(USA), not unlike similar mainline traditions such as the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ, are fairly (in some instances, strongly) progressive

(liberal) on matters such as doctrine, environmental issues, sexual morality, and economic issues. Like other mainline denominations, the PC(USA) has also experienced steadily declining membership numbers. A recent phenomenon is that of conservative-minded groups in the PC(USA) (such as the Confessing Church Movement) remaining in the main body, rather than leaving to form new, break-away groups, as those most theologically conservative usually did (e.g., the Presbyterian Church in America, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Bible Presbyterian Church, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod). At the present time, the *Presbyterian Church*



(USA) has around 2.3 million members in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. There are 10,751 Churches, 16 Synods and 173 Presbyteries in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

1:4 The Constitution of PC(USA) is composed of two portions: Part I, the *Book of Confessions* and Part II, the *Book of Order*. The *Book of Confessions* outlines the beliefs of the PC(USA) by declaring the creeds by which the Church's leaders are instructed and led. Complementing that is the *Book of Order*, which gives the rationale and description for the organization and function of the Church at all levels. The *Book of Order* is currently divided into three sections - i) Form of Government, ii) The Directory For Worship, and iii) The Rules of Discipline. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) has a representative form of government, known as *Presbyterian Polity*, with four levels of government and administration, as outlined in the *Book of Order*. The governing bodies are as follows: a) Session b) Presbytery c) Synod d) General Assembly.

2:1 In every Presbyterian Church (USA) the governing body of the local congregation is called

Session. The Session is like "Kohhran Committee" in Mizoram context. In every session meeting the pastor is the moderator and the clerk of session is recording secretary. If the Church does not have an installed pastor, the Presbytery appoints a minister member or elected member of the presbytery as moderator with the concurrence of the local church session. The session is made up of the pastors of the church and all elders elected and installed to active service. The elders are nominated by a nominating committee of the congregation; they can nominate male or female from the member of the church; in addition, nominations from the floor are permissible on the day of election. Elders are then elected by the congregation. In my congregation we have six elected elders serving in the session and one of them is female. All elders elected to serve on the congregation's session of elders are required to undergo a period of study and preparation for this order of ministry, after which the session examines the elders-elect as to their personal faith; knowledge of doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church, and the duties of the office of elder. If the examination is approved, the session



appoints a day normally in the beginning of the year for the service of ordination and installation. If the congregation does not have an installed pastor, the Presbytery appoints a minister member or elected member of the presbytery as moderator with the concurrence of the local church session. Since November 2010 our Presbytery appointed me to moderate the session of the Juniata Presbyterian Church in Altoona that does not have installed pastor.

2:2 According to the *Book of Order*, an elder serving on session, or a deacon on a board of deacons, shall be elected for a term of no more than three years, and service in consecutive terms, either full or partial, shall be limited to six years. An elder or deacon having served a total of six years shall be ineligible for reelection to the same board for a period of at least one year. Elders and deacons are elected in two or three classes as nearly equal in numbers as possible, of which only one shall expire each year. Term of elders and deacons expires when their successors have been ordained and installed.

2:3 The session takes care of the guidance and direction of the ministry of the local church, including almost all responsibilities

of spiritual and fiduciary leadership. The congregation as a whole has only the responsibility to vote on: 1) the call of the pastor (subject to presbytery approval) and the terms of call (the church's provision for compensating and caring for the pastor); 2) the election of its own officers (elders & deacons); 3) buying, mortgaging, or selling real property. All other church matters such as the budget, personnel matters, and all programs for spiritual life and mission, are the responsibility of the session.

2:3 The session also oversees the work of the Deacons. The number of deacons in the local church is depending on the size of the congregation. The board of deacons has its own moderator in which the pastor is ex-officio member. In my church we have six women serving in the board of deacons and my wife Mary Zosangliani is one of them. The deacons are a congregational-level group whose duty is "to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith". In some churches, the responsibilities of the deacons are taken care of by the session, so there is no board of deacons in that



church. In some states, churches are legally incorporated and members or elders of the church serve as trustees of the corporation. However, “the power and duties of such trustees shall not infringe upon the powers and duties of the Session or of the board of deacons.” The deacons are a ministry board but not a governing body.

3:1 In the Presbyterian Church (USA), all the congregations and the Ministers of Word and Sacrament form a **Presbytery** in a geographic area together with elders selected (proportional to congregation size) from each of the congregations. Our church is one of the 50 churches in Huntington Presbytery. In our Presbytery we have clergy Bible study meeting once a month. Currently I serve in our Presbytery as a committee member in the Self Development Committee for three years term.

3:2 One of the remarkable things in the Presbyterian Church (USA) is that the presbytery (not a congregation, session, synod, or General Assembly) has the responsibility and authority to ordain church members to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, to install Ministers of Word and Sacrament

to (and/or remove them from) congregations, and to remove a minister from the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. A Minister of Word and Sacrament is a Presbyterian minister only by virtue of membership on a roll of a presbytery. The Office of the General Assembly maintains and publishes a national directory with the help of each presbytery’s stated clerk. A pastor cannot be a member of the congregation he or she serves as pastor because his or her primary ecclesiastical accountability lies with the presbytery. Members of the congregation generally choose their own pastor with the assistance and support of the presbytery. The presbytery must approve the choice and officially install the pastor at the congregation. Additionally, the presbytery must approve if either the congregation or the pastor wishes to dissolve that pastoral relationship.

3:3 In the PC(USA) the presbytery has authority over many affairs of its local congregations. Only the presbytery can approve the establishment, dissolution, or merger of congregations. The presbytery also maintains a Permanent Judicial Commission, which acts as a court of appeal from sessions, as well as a disciplinary court for church



officers. Each presbytery has their own office in the area and the number of staffs working in the office is depending on the size of the presbytery.

3:4 In the PC(USA) a presbytery has two elected officers: a Moderator and a Stated Clerk. The Moderator of the presbytery is elected annually and is either a minister member or an elder commissioner from one of the presbytery's congregations. The Moderator presides at all presbytery assemblies and is the chief overseer at the ordination and installation of ministers in that presbytery. The stated clerk is the chief ecclesial officer and serves as the presbytery's executive secretary and parliamentarian in accordance with the church Constitution and Robert's Rules of Order. While the moderator of a presbytery normally serves one year, the stated clerk normally serves a designated number of years and may be re-elected indefinitely by the presbytery. Additionally, an Executive Presbyter (sometimes called General Presbyter) is often elected as a staff person to care for the administrative duties of the presbytery, often with the additional role of a pastor to the pastors. A

presbytery is required to elect a Moderator and a Clerk, but the choice to hire an Executive Presbyter is optional. Presbyteries must meet at least twice a year, but they have the discretion to meet more often and most do. In our presbytery we meet 5 times a year.

4:1 Presbyteries are organized within a geographical region to form a **Synod**. Each synod contains at least three presbyteries, and its elected voting membership is to include both elders and Ministers of Word and Sacrament in equal numbers. Synods have various duties depending on the needs of the presbyteries they serve. In general, their responsibilities (G-12.0102) might be summarized as: developing and implementing the mission of the church throughout the region, facilitating communication between presbyteries and the General Assembly, and mediating conflicts between the churches and presbyteries. Synods are required to meet at least biennially. Meetings are moderated by an elected synod Moderator with support of the synod's Stated Clerk.

5:1 The **General Assembly** is the highest governing body of the PC(USA). Until 2004, the General



Assembly met once a year; since the 216th Assembly met in Richmond Virginia in 2004, the General Assembly meets biennially in even-numbered years. It consists of commissioners elected by presbyteries (not synods), and its voting membership is evenly divided between pastors and elders. There are many important responsibilities of the General Assembly. Among them, the *Book of Order* lists these four:

- i) To set priorities for the work of the church in keeping with the church's mission under Christ
- ii) To develop overall objectives for mission and a comprehensive strategy to guide the church at every level of its life
- iii) To provide the essential program functions that are appropriate for overall balance and diversity within the mission of the church, and
- iv) To establish and administer national and worldwide ministries of witness, service, growth, and development.

5:2 The General Assembly elects a moderator at each Assembly who moderates the rest of the sessions of that assembly meeting and continues as moderator until the next assembly convenes (two years later) to elect a new moderator. The current Moderator of the 219th General Assembly is Elder Cynthia

Bolbach. The moderator of the 218th General Assembly was the Rev. Bruce Reyes-Choww.

5:3 A Stated Clerk is elected to a four-year term and is responsible for the Office of the General Assembly which conducts the ecclesiastical work of the church. The Office of the General Assembly carries out most of the ecumenical functions and all of the constitutional functions at the Assembly. The current Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of PC(USA) is the Rev. Gradye Parsons.

5:4 The General Assembly also elects a General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC). There are 48 elected members of the General Assembly Mission Council (40 voting members; 17 non-voting delegates), who represent synods, presbyteries, and the church at-large. Members serve one six-year term, with the exception of the present Moderator of the General Assembly (one 2-year term), the past Moderator of the General Assembly (one 2-year term), the moderator of Presbyterian Women (one 3-year term), ecumenical advisory members (one 2-year term, eligible for two additional terms), and stewardship and audit committee at-large members (one



2-year term, eligible for two additional terms). Among the elected members' major responsibilities is the coordination of the work of the program areas in light of General Assembly mission directions, objectives, goals and priorities. The GAMC meets three times a year. The General Assembly elects an Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council who is the top administrator overseeing the mission work of the PC(USA). The current Executive Director of the GAMC is Elder Linda Bryant Valentine.

6:1: Now I would like to focus more on our ministries at Sinking Valley Presbyterian Church. Our church is located in the borough of Tyrone in Pennsylvania. Being largely of German and Scotch-Irish origin, the early settlers brought both Presbyterianism and Lutheranism into the valley, and Sinking Valley Presbyterian Church was founded on its current site in 1790. Sinking Valley receives its name from the presence of a wide variety of limestone caves, water runs and sink-holes which attract naturalists and speleologists from around the nation. The main cave, which terminates at a natural stone arch about a half-mile down the road

from our church, is unique in its rare formations which have been protected by a complete water lock for millennia. In 2015 the Sinking Valley Presbyterian Church will celebrate 225 years of Christian witness in Central Pennsylvania.

6:2 In my congregation the Session meets once a month. We have several committees under the session in which one of the session members serves as a chairperson. Such committees are – Worship and Music Committee, Christian Education Committee, Mission and Outreach Committee, Budget Committee and Stewardship Committee and Trustees Committee. In each of these committees the pastor is an ex-officio member. I have my office hours in the morning during the weekdays. In the afternoon I go out to visit church families, Hospitals and Nursing Homes etc.

6:3 In my church we have Sunday morning worship service at 10:15AM. Junior church is available for children from ages 3 years to third grade. We also have Adult, Youth and Children Sunday school every Sunday at 9:00AM. On Wednesday at 2:00PM I have Bible Study class at the church for any one interested. We do have youth



group in the church. Youth group activities offer teens fellowship, service and Christian growth opportunities. Youth Christian camping is offered at the Huntington Presbytery supported Krislund Camp. We also have Choir and Bell Choir where adults and teens join together in each of these choirs to bring special music to the worship services. Play group meets at the church on Friday from 10:00 AM to 11:30AM under the leadership of my wife Mary Zosangliani. Any child from birth to three years is welcome with his or her parent or caregiver. Preschool for children ages 3-5 meets at the church every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday morning from 9:00AM to 11:45AM. Every



[Rev. J.H. Vanlal Hruaia & his family]

Saturday morning at 8:00AM we have Men's fellowship at the church to pray and study the Bible. Our Church is committed to spreading God's Word throughout the world. We offer consistent support to the missionaries in Haiti, Iraq and Democratic Republic of the Congo. In August 2011 our youth leader is going to serve for one year in Peru as Young Adult Volunteer under the Presbyterian Church (USA). She is the first one who will be serving as Young Adult Volunteer from our church and Presbytery as well.

6:4 There are some other special events happening in our church throughout the year. Every year we have Lenten services to prepare for Easter as we focus on the journey to Christ's death and resurrection each Sunday. We also have Easer Sunrise Service and Breakfast at the church every year. Every year in May we have Musical Tapestry on Sunday evening at the church. It is a celebration of Christ's love through music. Local musicians perform a delightful variety of musical selections. We have Music Sunday and Sunday Luncheon on any month with a fifth Sunday. This is an opportunity to bring additional music and songs into our worship service. A covered dish luncheon



follows in the Fellowship Hall. Every year the last Thursday of November is Thanksgiving Day and it is a national Holiday as well. Through a combined service with



*[Sinking Valley Presbyterian
Church Member]*

Saint John's Lutheran Church in our area we gather for prayer and Thanksgiving worship service. Every year we have Advent Services at the church. We

anticipate the birth of Christ each Advent Sunday as we light the Advent candle with a special reading. The Christ centered message prepares our hearts to receive the King. We also have Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at the church every year. Our Christmas Eve service concludes with a candlelight circle. The light begins at the Advent wreath and grows as the light passes to each congregant. Christmas hymns, the message and scripture all celebrate the miracle of Christ's birth.

6:5 Dear readers, as soon as you finish reading this article may I request you to say a prayer for the success of our future ministries so that through our humble ministries, God's **name** will be glorified and His **Kingdom** will be extended among His people in our community and beyond. God bless you all.

*[Rev. J.H. Vanlal Hruaia is a Pastor of the Sinking Valley
Presbyterian Church, Tyrone, PA 16686, USA]*



ISSUES FACING THE CHURCH IN INDIA TODAY

- Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad
General Secretary, NCCI

Preliminary Remarks

The church in India is not a homogeneous or uniform church. In other words the church has heterogeneous expressions in terms of ethnic identities of the members, their particular traditions or denominations, their structures of governance, their geographical locations, and their socio-economic and political contexts. Therefore it is inevitable that church bodies would face different issues in their respective situations. However there are certain issues, which have a national significance: no matter where the church body lives in the country, it has to address them. These issues are not entirely distinct, unrelated to one another; many of them are inter-related and so one issue gives rise to several other issues. Some issues are integral to the character and mission of the church. Some others are contemporary contextual concerns, related to the nature and commitment of the church.

Who or What constitutes the Church?

The church has become more and more identified with its exteriors: the buildings, the rites and rituals, the doctrines, the structures of governance; the significance of people as the church is minimized. The exteriors control the people; they are the subjects and people are the objects. People often talk of “going to church” on Sunday rather than considering themselves to be the church all days of the week. The building is the church and not the people! Rites, rituals and traditions give people their identity; the people must practice them diligently if they

are to be counted as church members. (In stating that the Sabbath was made for human beings and not human beings for the Sabbath, Jesus very explicitly drives home the point that religious practices are meant to nurture, heal and empower people and not that rites and rituals should burden and oppress people). Faithful adherence to doctrines is considered to be expressive of true membership; one is said to belong to the church when one recites the creed even though the creed does not have any transforming effect in one’s life. One may be glorified for one’s martyr-like allegiance to the ancient doctrines, but a person questioning



the archaic irrelevant expressions of traditionally handed down doctrines is called an infidel, and any attempt made to contextually and indigenously articulate one's faith is deemed as heresy. (The first century Christians, whose leaders came mainly from the Jewish background, were mature enough to accept John's interpretation of Jesus Christ in terms of the Greek philosophical concept of logos).

If at all people are identified with the church then again it is the few people who occupy positions of authority and decision-making power who represent the church; they constitute the church and the rest of the laity are appendages who have to submit to their "shepherding", "over-seeing" or rule. Some of us may remember that slogan of the political election campaign of the Congress party, "Indira is India!" Quite often in ecclesial circles the people in power and authority claim to be the church. Any act or expression of dissent, however justified it may be, is not tolerated: "How dare one challenge the 'elected', the 'ordained' and the 'consecrated'!" Perhaps it is needless to remind ourselves that Jesus did just that – he criticized the scribes, the Pharisees and the

Sadducees and the priestly religion. Yes, one may be praised by church leaders if one preaches a sermon on "Jesus the liberator"; however the moment one tries to start a movement for justice, human rights, equality, etc., in the community, one is sidelined or silenced by those very church leaders!

Related to the issue of the structures of governance is the matter of patriarchy in the church. The churches whether they are Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational in their polity are basically patriarchal. Men rule the churches: men take all decisions, and the ethos of the churches has male perspectives, principles and practices. Women constitute fifty percent of the church membership. They are used in the church to render services as Sunday School teachers, evangelists, and counselors. Women are usually very regular in attending worship services, and the women's fellowships can always be relied upon for serving refreshments, raising funds, and rendering charitable services! In some cases women are ordained as elders, associate pastors or even as pastors. However, the entire framework is patriarchal; even



some of the women who occupy positions of authority and power act in ‘patriarchal’ ways. Since patriarchy has been the pattern of existence for centuries of human social existence, it has been internalized by all and accepted as the way of life. There are ‘feminine’ qualities and values, which are urgently needed by the church and society: gracious demeanor instead of judgmental attitude in relationships, seeking to bring out the good in all rather than categorizing people as either righteous or wicked, the spirit of complementarity instead of competition, recognizing the plurality of perspectives and ways of life rather than being exclusive and enforcing uniformity, etc.

Yet another related issue is the phenomenon of human-made hierarchy and caste/tribal/clan/class divisions in the church. Caste and ethnic bonds are thicker than the waters of baptism! Therefore the upper castes, the stronger tribes or clans, the rich and middle classes, the urban people rule the church. Quite often elections are contested, important decisions are passed, and activities are organized on the basis of such hierarchical parochial decisions. Therefore the majority of

the church members who are dalits, tribals, villagers, and the poor are marginalized except for some tokenisms offered to them in terms of representations on committees and the doling out of some charities. In our context the strong words of James could be paraphrased thus: “My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if an upper caste person or your relative or a rich person comes into your assembly, and if a dalit, a non-related or poor person also comes in, and if you take notice of the upper caste/relative/rich person and say, ‘Have a seat here, please,’ while to the one who is dalit/unrelated/poor you say, ‘Stand there,’ or ‘Sit at my feet,’ have you not made distinction among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the dalit/ the unrelated/ the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those that love him?” (Cf. Jas. 2:1-5). Let us remember the words of Jesus, “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Lk.6: 20).

The church is to be a people’s movement. Places of worship and



fellowship should serve as facilitators of the community togetherness and solidarity of the church. Temple-like buildings symbolically imprison God and keep God out of the day-to-day lives of the people. The Arc of the Tabernacle was symbolic of God's presence in the midst of people on the move. Rites, rituals and traditions are meant to express one's spirituality in society and not to communalize people into an exclusive group in society. Doctrines are expressive of the community's experience and understanding of God. Primarily it is the community that articulates its doctrines and not the doctrines that constitute the church. Doctrines are contextual formulations; the textual content of the doctrines should not be made eternal prescriptions, but the spiritual intent of the doctrines needs to be understood, internalized and rearticulated in the contemporary context.

The church is the entire people of God. Church leaders are servants and not the sole repositories of God's commission. The early church leaders resisted the temptation of assuming administrative responsibilities and the power associated with such

work. They said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." (Acts 6: 2-4). Down the centuries of history, the church has erred in glamourizing the ministry of administration and giving it a status higher than that of the ministry of prayer and the preaching of the word. The church needs to recapture the spirit of Paul when he writes, "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth... For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building." (1 Cor. 3:5-9). The entire community constitutes the church within which the persons, who have been delegated responsibility, work as servants and not as masters or as the exclusive embodiments of the church.

What is meant by the mission of the church?

Most churches in India are so obsessed with their own existence, their own fellowship programmes



and their own activities of personal merit-accruing charitable services that mission has become a self-centred concept. We have become keepers of aquariums rather than those who 'fish' for people. In other words we have converted mission into a religion of worship attendance, participating in the choir, teaching in the Sunday school, being a member of the youth group or women's fellowship, attending at times cottage meetings or Bible study sessions, participating in religious festivities and social events such as picnics and church fetes, attending weddings and funerals, visiting the sick members in the congregation and giving annual gifts to the poor, making contributions to the Bible Society, the Gideons, etc., and participating in special gospel campaigns and conventions. While so much is happening in the community we fail to give attention to the question, "What is the purpose of the church? Why has God called the church into existence?" Jesus has indicated that the church is called to be the salt of the earth. Regrettably we have made ourselves the gold of the earth, very expensive (people are not 'un-reached'; we have put ourselves beyond the reach of common people) and requiring our own

security. Jesus has suggested that the church is called to be the light of the world. Sad to say we have made ourselves small capacity electricity generators (for our own use, only in times of emergency) which require diesel to function (thereby causing a lot of noise and atmospheric pollution) or which require to be re-charged by some other source of power!

The church has in general forgotten the well-known adage, "The church exists by mission just as fire exists by burning." If there is no burning, there can be no fire; if there is no mission, there can be no church. While it may not be a good criterion, yet one can gauge the mission commitment of a congregation through its budget allocation for mission. In most churches one will find that there is hardly any fund set aside for mission, and even if there is such an allocation it constitutes a very minor segment of the budget. Most of the money raised by the church during the year is spent on itself. It is quite ironic that the offertory prayer usually dedicates the offerings of the people to God and for the extension of God's kingdom while in reality it is used for the maintenance of the church. It is true



that every congregation needs to maintain itself; however if the greater portion of its giving is not utilized for mission then one must question the purpose of the existence of the church. If the church sings with much romantic enthusiasm the hymn, "For Christ and the Church we stand" there is the danger that it will miss out on the mission of God in the world.

There are some churches in India, which do pay serious attention to mission. So also there are many so-called para-church bodies which are committed to mission; they help the churches in fulfilling the missionary mandate given in Matt.28: 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". The problem in the church's mission is that it has made a secondary consequence of mission its first priority: converting persons from one religion to another. In the message of repentance which John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed the focus was on conversion to God and to God's purposes on earth (the kingdom of God); it was not fundamentally on change of religion. The baptisms conducted by John were meant to symbolize repentance

and not express change of religion. The emphasis was on turning away from communal religious superficiality and superiority complex to authentic spirituality in life (cf. Matt.3: 6-10). Even non-Jewish people were told to repent of their worldly corrupt ways; they were not asked to change their religion (Luke 3:14). No mention is made in the episode recorded in Matt.8: 5-13 that the Roman centurion whose faith Jesus extolled changed his religion; rather Jesus said that many would come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven while the sons of the kingdom would be thrown into the outer darkness.

The missionary mandate of Jesus should be understood in conjunction with the Nazareth manifesto of Jesus in Luke 4:18-19 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." The concern of the gospel is individual, social and ecological transformation, directed and empowered by God. The



predominant objective in mission or evangelization is not the victory of the Christian religion over other religions. Living in a multi-faith country the church has still to give a relevant expression to mission rather than carrying on the interpretation given by western mission bodies and organizations. We have to envision a country of Christian Hindus, Christian Muslims, Christian Buddhists, Christian Dalits, Christian Indigenous People, Christian Marxists, and so on. However let us not be obsessed with such labels; it is more important to discern what the Spirit of God makes us realize to be the gospel in our present context and how we need to be committed to it. Through such commitment we shall indeed evangelize, that is, bear witness to the gospel in the world.

In a country with all the political manipulations of communal groups we have allowed ourselves also to become politically communal. So we get worked up about the passing of Freedom of Religion Acts in different states, about constraints being placed on the administration of Christian educational and technical institutions, and the defense of our minority rights as

Christians. We need to carefully and prayerfully examine whether our expressions of mission are really witnessing to, and fulfilling, the purposes of God. When there are Christian Hindus, Christian Muslims, and so on, the Freedom of Religion Acts will not be of any consequence to the missional commitment of the church. As a church we are called to be committed to human and ecological rights. If our educational and other institutions do not serve the poor and needy, but rather the elite of the country, it is better that they are closed down. Jesus has not called us to commercialize education, health and other services. If churches in India depend for their survival upon the money generated by such institutions, the churches do not deserve to exist. If church leaders draw their power and authority from their position as institutional heads and executives of projects (funds for which come mainly from abroad) then the church has lost its cross-like character of mission. Such churches and church leaders will only provide resources for sustaining the unjust structures of globalization, and for cultivating the love of mammon: the market becomes the temple, and money becomes God.



What are some contemporary contextual concerns the church has to address?

There are several contemporary contextual concerns that the church is faced with. A few of them will be briefly discussed here. One is the phenomenon of the electronic church. Different forms of audio-visual communication have on the one hand made the gathering of people as a community redundant. Seated in the comforts of their homes people can listen to and even see recorded and live performances of choirs, sermons and entire worship services. They can communicate their prayer requests by email or SMS. The electronic church is in fact encouraging individualism and self-centredness. On the other hand electronic media are being increasingly used to liven up church worship, including sermons. While one does not deny the value of media in communicating the word, there lurks the danger of worship becoming a spectacle, a performance and an entertainment. Electronic media can stir the people and rouse them to commitment to the extent that it becomes a drug without which people cannot worship God. The church has to be strengthened through edifying personal relationships with God and with all

creation; media should be used to facilitate such relationships and not become the controllers of relationships.

Another related issue is the importance being given to 'praise and worship' sessions before the congregation formally gets into the act of worship. Many communities are afraid that they would lose their youth to some other church if they did not introduce 'praise and worship' sessions in their own places of worship. This phenomenon does emphasize the importance of giving space to spontaneity and freedom of expression in worship; many churches are guilty of carrying on rigid forms of traditional worship. However the term 'praise and worship' is itself questionable: it sets praise apart from worship. In fact praise is a part of worship. Secondly the term makes a superficial distinction between the earlier worship and the formal worship. Perhaps hidden behind this expression is a thought and feeling that praise and worship is the proper worship. Thirdly the expressions of praise and worship sessions are in fact imitations of a western culture and all that passes off as popular music. It whips up human emotions and so there is the danger of



identifying emotionality with spirituality. In worship there should be a wholesome balance of emotion, reason, faith and commitment.

Another concern of our times is that of ecological deterioration. Christians have too long misinterpreted God's commission to human beings to have 'dominion' over all creation (cf. Gen1: 25). Another theological idea that has contributed to the ecological crisis is the distinction made between the spiritual and the physical: the earth is considered physical and so is looked down upon while heaven is spiritual and that is what Christians should aspire to. The church has to change its theological perspectives. Human beings, while they can be gratefully proud that they are created in the image of God, should realize that all creation reflects different aspects of the image of God. God does not intend to set human beings apart from creation but to be integrated with creation. Human beings are called not to dominate over creation but to be good stewards of the universe.

Too long has the church been a church exclusively for physically and mentally able persons. Society appreciates perfection and beauty. Our culture compartmentalizes

people as clean and unclean, worthy and unworthy, able and disabled. Our theology emphasizes the omnipotence, the omniscience and the omnipresence of God. Hence some Christians consider disability as an expression of God's wrath or punishment. Therefore the blind, the deaf, and physically and mentally limited people have not been given adequate attention in the church. There has to be acceptability of such persons in the fellowship of the church; not pity or mercy but compassionate understanding and respectful inclusion. Provisions have to be made to facilitate their participation in the life of the church; opportunities have to be provided to develop their vocations, possibilities and abilities. Our theology has to discover God as a fellow sufferer, and comfort and strength giver in a world of hurt and pain.¹

The pandemic of HIV-AIDS is silently spreading all over the country. Today India has the highest number of people affected by HIV and AIDS. Since the population of the country is so large, and since Indian culture is such that diseases such as AIDS are kept secret, we are not yet seized of the magnitude of the problem. The Church must play a crucial role in addressing this



problem. It should not deny that the problem exists. It should not minimize the significance of the problem. It should not discriminate; what is required is not condemnation but compassion. Involvement and not indifference is the need of the hour. Heterosexual transmission is said to be the primary cause of HIV infections in India, though intravenous drug use is also an important factor in some places. HIV incidence rates for truckers, soldiers, migrant workers, and sex workers are several times higher than the national average. The church has to hear anew the words of Jesus, "I was sick and you took care of me," and "In as much as you did it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:36,40). Education about AIDS, prevention, treatment, and care must become a priority in the mission of the church.²

While churches have paid attention to educate children through their Christian education programmes and to provide charitable services to orphans and neglected children, still they have not placed the child at the center of their lives. The churches programmes are largely meant for adults. This is indeed the great omission in

Christian ministry: child theology and ministry with children. About 36-40% of the world population are children of whom about 1.2 billion could in some way or the other be considered as children at risk. They are at risk due to famine, drought, unclean environment, infected virus of HIV/AIDS, ethnic conflicts, violence, discrimination, war, enforced child labour, child trafficking, and lack of care and protection. The Bible affirms that all children are God's gift. They are also created in the image of God. They too are ministers of God. In fact they are regarded as being more spiritual than Pharisees, Sadducees and priests! In biblical images of peace, the child is an important symbol: "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them" (Is. 11: 6). Jesus himself, placing a child in the midst of the people, says: "Truly, I tell you, unless you change and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). Therefore the church has not to think in traditional terms of doing ministry to children but partnering in ministry with children.³



The Challenges go on

In the context of the several challenges that the church faces it has to re-form, re-structure and re-commit itself. It will have to introduce different kinds of ministries. We have held on too long to traditional forms of doing ministry. We need issued based groups to be set up in the church focusing on Re-reading the Bible, Prayer and Practice, Human Rights, Earth Care, Alternative Technology, and so on. Worship has to be integrated with the realities of life. Then indeed the church will become the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

End notes:

¹ For more discussion on the matter refer A Church for All and for All: An Interim Theological Statement

(Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2003); Wati Longchar (ed.)

Disability Discourse for Theological Institution (Jorhat : ETE-WCC/CCA, 2006).

² Refer, Donald E. Messer, Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence: Christian Churches and the Global AIDS Crisis (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004); Facing AIDS: The Challenge, the Churches' Response (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997).

³ Refer Dan Brewster, Child, Church and Mission (Makati City, Philippines: Church Strengthening Ministry, 2005); "Child Theology – India 2006" (Unpublished papers of Theological Consultations organized by VIVA India and Evangelical Fellowship of India in September 2005 and March 2006).

[Courtesy: **Kum Za Mel Lung**, Aizawl Theological College Centenary Souvenir: Aizawl, 2007, pp165-170]



CHRISTIAN HOPE : A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

(Text : Ps. 42:1-3; 11)

- Dr. Lalnghakthuami

In our theological discourses we often talk about Moltmann's theology of hope as his purpose was not to write a theology about hope but a theology out of hope, i.e. theology as eschatology and theology of the liberating reign of God in the world. Theologically speaking, hope is for the promise future as well as hope of the world of resurrection over our lives.

In Rom. 8:20 Paul says, "The creation is in the grip of frustration and futility. Not by its own choice. God made it so, and therefore, there is always hope that one day the universe will set free from the shackles of mortality and decadence and share the glorious freedom of the children of God."

Christian affirmation has reminded of us that we live constantly within a horizon of freedom. As Letty M. Russell states, "Hope is the expectation of faith that God's promised future will become a reality." And this "hope is not the opium of the people, but an impulse to change the world in the perspective of God's promises." We might hope for human liberation from various types of oppressions or we might hope for an alternative possibility for change. However, let us reminded of ourselves that our

human hopes as Christians are based on the promise of God and the freedom of God. As Moltmann says, "God is not our utopia, but we are God's utopia. We are hoping because God hopes for us." We, as children of God, are drawn with other creation, into the perfect freedom of God by participating in the action of God on behalf of human liberation.

Prophet Jeremiah even affirms that hope comes from God. Even the Psalmist asserts that the foundation of hope is the experience of the liberating action of God in the world. And the goal of hope is the eternal presence of God which renews heaven and earth in the lives of human being. However, our heart, soul or our being is in a state of hopelessness. As a limited being, we often loose hope when certain things are beyond control. Moreover, we are created in such away that we



are unable to heal ourselves physically or mentally. Therefore, we cannot have hope in ourselves. It is in this wretched condition that Hope, a living hope emerges from God. And it is God that often helps us continuously to have hope in God.

Let us be reminded of ourselves with the activities of Martin Luther King Jr. when he fought for the liberation of black in America. There seemed to be no hope for him when he started revolutionizing the theological thinking in the African-American community. Without losing hope he continued to work for a day to come when all God's children will be respected and every person will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Until his death he hoped for a better America where all the people would have meaning, hope and aspiration in life. Likewise we may also envision for a better world where all human being would find a fuller life, having dignity, respect equality and fuller humanity irrespective of gender or caste or class. We may also envisioning a loving community, sincere and true to one another and enjoy a better and abundant life irrespective of rich or poor.

It is easy to loose hope in our attempt to work for a better life. Time comes when we almost give it up our efforts as the achievement seems to be so little and we are badly discouraged. It is at this time that we all need to be strong and courage that our future envisioning is at work in the present in hope for the future of God. It is the promise of God that we should keep on having hope in God in our endeavors and push ourselves to keep on going in order to reach the goal that we set.

Peter is his letter reminded of us that Jesus has given us a new birth into a living hope through his resurrection from the death. It is in and though the resurrection of Jesus that God has given us a living hope – a hope in times of hopelessness and hope in times of critical situations. The prophet is also exhorting us not to loose a living hope in God. And those who forsake God and do not have hope in God shall be put to shame. This is a mandate of God, and those who forsake the fountain of living water shall be recorded in the underworld. Therefore, the people of God should revive and renew hope, a living hope in God and participate in God's action in building a new future of justice for all.



