HAPPY NEW YEAR and GOD BLESS YOU

"You crown the year with Your goodness, And Your paths drip with abundance." – Psalm 65.11

The new address of the Diocesan Office and Bishop’s residence of The Diocese of South-West America is

"Urshlem"
Indian Orthodox Christian Center
3101 Hopkins Road, Beasley, TX 77417

Please update your records to reflect the new address.
Phone and fax numbers remain the same

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Do you have articles or news you would like to share in 'The Stream' newsletter? Would you like to share 'The Stream' with your family and friends. Please e-mail us at thestreamdswa@gmail.com

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Dearly Beloved,

The month of January is a time for the commemoration of several great feasts for Malankara Orthodox Christians. In addition to two great feasts of our Lord (Circumcision & Theophany), we celebrate the feast of St. Mary for seeds, and commemorate the memory of several righteous and holy fathers, namely, St. John the Baptist – the forerunner of our Lord, St. Stephen - the first Christian martyr, as well as the Cappadocian fathers - Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory. We also commemorate the memory of several holy fathers of Malankara who have lived in more recent times, namely, His Holiness Geevarghese II, His Holiness Mathews II, Metropolitan Paulose Mar Athanasius (Aluva) and Metropolitan Philipose Mar Eusebius (Pathanamthitta). It is indeed a blessing to begin a New Year with the celebration of these great feasts.

For this month, we would like to take a moment to reflect on the lives of two late Catholicoi of our Church, His Holiness Geevarghese II and His Holiness Mathews II. These holy fathers contributed much to the growth of our ancient Church, and they are forever remembered for their unique lifestyle and rigorous prayer life. His Holiness Mathews II was a true disciple of His Holiness Geevarghese II and had the blessing of experiencing spirituality hands-on from his Guru, and adopted a lifestyle in a similar way.

The life of His Holiness Geevarghese II should first and foremost be an aspiration for all people. His Holiness lived in a period when the Holy Church underwent persecution from the Romans and English missionaries. He led the Church much like Nehemiah and others who built Jerusalem during the second temple period even while there was both internal and external opposition. The wisdom His Holiness received from his Guru, St. Gregorios of Parumala, and later on the intercessions of this great saint, was surely a fortress for him as he led the Holy Church for a long period. He upheld very strongly the great vision he inherited from St. Dionysius of Vattasseril regarding the autocephalous nature of the Malankara Orthodox Church and its national identity. In the meantime, he made efforts to involve himself in the social, political, cultural and ecumenical areas without compromising Orthodoxy. He was indeed the St. Basil of the 20th century who interpreted Orthodox theology just like St. Basil the Great. It surely must have been God’s divine plan that the blessed memory of this 20th century father be celebrated so closely to the feast of the 4th century father, St. Basil the Great.

On January 26th we commemorate the blessed feast of His Holiness Mathews II. His Holiness was a disciple of His Holiness Geevarghese II. With the guidance and inspiration of Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Philexenos (Puthencavu), he became the guiding force of St. George Monastery, Othara. From there, he continued his spiritual journey leading a model life that led to many of his flock referring to him as “Angel Achen.” After his appointment as the Metropolitan of Kollam Diocese, he led the diocese with the spirit and vigor of his predecessors His Holiness Geevarghese II and Metropolitan Alexios Mar Theodosius of blessed memory. His Holiness led the diocese comprising vast areas of the southern part of Kerala that have now developed into five dioceses. The numerous charitable and educational institutions and the spiritual legacy he left behind for many clergy and faithful, are what led to him being known as a great monastic and a saintly man who walked on this earth. As the sixth Catholicos and the successor to the Apostolic Throne of St. Thomas, His Holiness was the “Surya Thejas” in the political, social, ecumenical, and educational areas in society, and he was surely known as a Bava for all people.

May the lives of these righteous fathers be an example and inspiration for us and may their intercessions be a stronghold and fortress for us all.

Your shepherd in Christ,
Alexios Mar Eusebius
Faith Study

A Revelation for An Experience - Rev. Fr. James Cheriyan, Detroit

The Church celebrates the feast of Theophany or the Baptism of our Lord on Jan 6 of every year. Also known as the Denah Perunal, this feast commentates the revelation of the Holy Trinity during the baptism of Christ our Lord.

Many of us church goers tend to crib about the lengthy duration of our Orthodox services and this feast adds probably another hour to the usual Sunday schedule. The reason why we feel Church is so long and boring and that we should cut in down to suit our needs and convenience, is the reflection of our fallen nature, indeed. The failure to truly participate in the life of the Church, which is called as the Kingdom of God on earth is such a grievous disaster in our lives. If we can't handle a few hours of Church, how can we long for and look forward for an eternity in the presence of God?

The incarnation of Christ, His baptism at which the voice of the Father proclaims that this God-Man (Theanthropos) is truly the Son of God and the descend of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove is the Theophany of the Holy Trinity. This experience was given to man and recorded in the gospel with the intent that man cannot survive and sustain his spiritual life without the true knowledge of God. This knowledge of God is a personal as well as a communal one. The destruction of God's chosen people is rooted in the reason of this lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). In Hebrews 8:11 we read that the blessing of the covenant of God, as it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, will be that all of God’s children shall know God. We read: “And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.” Again, Jesus said in St. John 17:3, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God....” The child of God is simply one who desires and delights to grow in the knowledge of God.

Man can never ‘know’ God in His essence. But the stable, gradual and ascending growth in one’s spiritual life leads one to the true experience of God, which is indeed the knowledge of Him, not in His essence, but in His energies. Unless man tastes who God is, how can he come to the experience of how good his God is? (Psalm 34:8). The knowledge of God helps us to truly understand and achieve the call in our lives, which is to be God’s very image and likeness. The revelation to the prophet Hosea, that the lack of the knowledge of God is what is destroying God’s people is so much more relevant in our times. Serving as a priest for sometime in our community, I have often felt that people nowadays take pride in being spiritually blind, ignorant and cold. This is why there is no growth of the Church in its true sense. The Feast of Denahoe, invokes us to raise our minds and thoughts from the paths of self destruction and darkness to delight and desire the presence and the knowledge of God, leading us to life everlasting.
**MMVS Corner**

**MMVS Elections**
The following MMVS Regional Secretaries were elected in December and January
- Mrs. Ann Varghese, St. Mary's Valiapally, Farmer’s Branch, TX
- Mini Markose, St Gregorios Orthodox Church, Houston, TX
- Aleyamma Punnose, St. Gregorios Cathedral Church, Bellwood, IL - **Midwest Region**
- Rachel Sam, St. Mary's Church, San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles - **Western Region**
- Sara Johnson, St. Mary's Orthodox Church, Calgary - **Northwest Region**
- Elizabeth George from St. Gregorios Orthodox Church of India, S. Florida - **Southeast Region**

*Please note Correction from December 2013 Stream:* December 2013 edition had an error when published. Instead of "4 Regional Secretaries were elected" it stated "Area MMVS Secretaries were elected". Apologize for any confusion.

**2013 MMVS Examination Results Announced**

1st - Omana Thomas, St. Mary's Orthodox Church, Calgary (99%)
2nd - Leena Anil, St. Mary's Orthodox Church, San Fernando Valley, CA (96.5%)
3rd shared by - Molly Jacob John, St. Thomas Orthodox Church, Warren, MI and Ashley Eapen, St. George Orthodox Church, Vancouver, (95.5%)

Writing an exam, at the best of times, is a challenge. Approximately 130 MMVS members from 26 parishes across the Diocese of South-West America took up the challenge and participated in the exam on Nov 16, 2013. The written exam involved the study of the Book of Hebrews, segments of the Basic Doctrines of the Church aka Mathopadesha Sarangal (Ch 11 to 22), a Prayer, a Hymn along with general questions from the Bible, and history / current affairs of the Church. To prepare the members, Rev. Fr. P C George from the parish of Vancouver

**Regional Secretaries Teleconference held on Jan 14, 2014.**

*Highlights: Theme for 2014* - "Jesus Christ the unchangeable model".

**Syllabus for 2014 MMVS examination** discussed and agreed: detailed study on the Book of St. James, 1 Peter and Mathopadesha Sarangal (Chapters 23 - 36).

**Quiz competition:** 1 Samuel and Church history in addition to the Book of James and 1 Peter.

Bible classes to teach the above mentioned portions for detailed studies will start from the first week of February.

**New project** - MMVS launched a new project to make handicraft items for sale.

**Talent Competition** - It was decided to conduct competitions only up to the regional level instead of conducting it up to diocese level.
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From Around the Diocese

Dallas Area Convention Planned for April - Elson Samuel

First Dallas Area Orthodox convention at St. Mary’s Valiyapally is planned for on April 4, 5, 6, 2014. It will begin at 6:30 PM with Evening prayer, followed by Convention 7 PM to 9 PM. The invited speaker will be Rev. Fr. Ninan V. George. General Convener: Rev. Fr. Raju M Daniel. Choir coordinator: Rev. Fr. Rajesh K. John. All Dallas area Achen s will serve as conveners of this program.

Houston New Year’s Retreat 2013 - Shanu St. Thomas Cathedral, Houston

This past year from December 26 - December 29th, 2013; St. Thomas Orthodox Cathedral in Houston, Texas hosted their annual New Year’s Conference. The speakers were Rev. Dn. Abey George and Rev. Dn. Daniel Dennis Mathai. The theme was “Identity Crisis” and the verse was taken from Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”

As a participant, I learned so much from the Conference. I have learned about the sole purpose on earth and how to be unified with God. Though not easy, I and many other participants are trying to implement the lessons we have learned into our lives. The messages by the speakers were eloquently presented and easily understood by everyone. Not only were the messages amazing, but they were also able to connect to high school and college students simultaneously. The presence of many clergy members allowed participants to take part in Holy Confession and be given counseling. Besides from large group session, there were small groups, which were lead by incredible group leaders. There was also a talented choir to lead us in Evening Prayer. Everything at the Conference was well organized and done in a timely manner. All the participants were involved in each activity, and there was this energy of everybody actually wanting to develop a relationship with God.

Besides from the spiritual aspect of the Conference, there was a social aspect as well. One of the many highlights of this Conference was going to Sky zone, as well as making many new friends from other cities. Many participants made fellowship with one another and broke down barriers in making friends. I have made many memories and had a blast at this year’s New Year’s Conference. For those that missed out, you should really come for the next one, because you are missing out on a wonderful experience.

MGOCSM DEVOTIONALS

http://www.mgocsmamerica.com/devotionals

MGOCSM North America releases weekly devotionals based on the Gospel readings for each week. These devotionals are written by leaders of the Church - both clergy and lay leaders. This is a great way to revamp your week with self-reflection and in the word. Please subscribe and spread the word in your areas as well.
Christmas Charity in Dallas

The youth of St. Gregorios Orthodox Church, Dallas, along with our Diocesan Metropolitan, H.G. Alexios Mar Eusebius, volunteered at the North Texas Food Bank on December 26th, 2013, the day after Christmas. The North Texas Food Bank is a non-profit, hunger relief organization that distributes donated, purchased and prepared foods through a network of more than 250 partner agencies in 13 counties. This service project was a blessing to all those who helped, and Thirumeni's presence with the youth made the project a great success.

The Dallas Area ended the 2013 year by conducting a toy drive for the month of December. All toys were donated to the “Toys For Tots” Campaign in Dallas. With the leadership of Nichole Chandrathil and Johannah Chacko, the Area was successful in bringing smiles to many children for Christmas. Thank you to all who made this year’s Christmas a blessing to all!

Ecumenical Christmas Celebrated at Austin

Ecumenical Christmas was celebrated at Austin, Texas on December 15, 2013. Rev. Fr. Dominic, Mission Director of St. Alphonsa Catholic Church gave the Christmas message. In his message, Fr. Dominic reminded that when Christians comes together in Christ is when we experience the love and the joy of Christmas. Priests and faithful from Orthodox, Catholic, Jacobite and Marthoma Churches participated in the Ecumenical Christmas service and caroling.
**Do Not Be Afraid - Santhamma Mathew, California**

This is a word everyone likes to hear. We are afraid of many things and anxious about many things. We worry a lot of things that have not happened or imagine things that may not occur. “Don’t be afraid” occurs in the Bible 365 times, one for each day. If we are aware that God who can save us from all situations is with us, then fear leaves us. The nearness of Jesus frees us from all fear of sins, since Jesus is the ‘lamb of God who bore all the sins of the world’. We do not have to fear sickness, since He can heal you from any sickness. But the Word teaches us to fear one person. Jesus says, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt 10:28). We should have a reverential fear for God. But how can we be afraid of a person whom we cannot see? But we can see and read His Word, The Bible. We should be mindful of what it says us to do. If it says to love others, we should do that, it is what God expects us to do. Make a personal relationship with God. You can talk to Him directly and receive answers from Him. I used to ask questions when things go wrong with me and got answers. May not be immediately or directly, but through Bible or through incidents or inadvertent talk with neighbors or friends. This shows God cares for us. He is very much involved with our daily activities. If we did something which is displeasing to God, the Holy Spirit that dwells in us will let us know it immediately. Since we are under the period of mercy, God forgives us and he is anxiously waiting to hear us asking forgiveness which we must ask without delay.

Three years ago, under a critical situation in the hospital, I had an experience of hearing these famous words ‘don’t be afraid, I am with you’. I was about to shout for help, I opened my mouth, but without saying a word, I closed it. I did not hear any audible words, but I felt it coming from behind me as if someone is holding me and whispering in my ears. A peace, which I cannot express it in words, a peace that passes all understanding, flowed in to me. The doctors and nurses who rushed in to the room found me managing the situation peacefully. I could narrate what happened with the patient without much difficulty. A person who experienced such a situation will never forget that heavenly peace. This personal relationship with Jesus is something which we have to look forward. We are not alone. Do not keep our strength on anything else. Jesus is our strength. Always talk to Him first before we decide anything. Make Him the first and foremost companion of our life. His love for us is undeniable. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear...” (1 John 4:18). If we are aware of that love, we can love Him back. God’s perfect love in our life will cast out every fear, every anxiety, every worry, every apprehension and every mindset that would keep us from His best in our life.

**“FOLLOW ME” by Mohan, California**

When Jesus called Peter the first time, He used the word “Follow Me!” It was the divine call to make him the fisher of men. Then the second time it was the call to make him the Shepherd of Jesus’ Sheep. In between the two calls, the time period of three years was a combination of failures and victories in the life of St. Peter. If we go through the Gospels it is very vivid that Peter was always the first to speak, whether he was right or wrong. He was the only one who stepped out of the boat to walk on water and the one to jump out of the boat to make his way to the shore to see the Resurrected Christ. He was the first one to enter into the empty tomb of Jesus. If any one has gone through an identity crisis, with out any doubt we can candidly tell that it was none but Peter. After the Crucifixion of Jesus, Peter was completely devastated. Peter’s encounter with Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee after the Lord’s resurrection might have made him think whether Jesus would want to have any thing more to do with him after his denial of Jesus, the night He was arrested. In spite of Peter’s failures, Jesus still wanted Peter to follow Him. It is easy for all of us to become followers when someone is in front of us. In our day to day life we see that children follow their parents to the Church or to school, some follow their family business. Whatever may be, every body follows somebody. When Jesus was not physically present with him, Peter went back to his old profession. In John 21 we see Jesus restores and commissions Peter. He had denied Christ three times and here Christ restores him with a three-fold confession of love.

Let us have a look at the different characteristic features of Peter, Paul and John. Peter was an evangelist. The first time he preached the Gospel in Jerusalem at Pentecost 3000 people embraced his message and were saved. Later 5000 men were converted. Paul did not have the gift of evangelism. He was a missionary, a leader and a builder. It is not that Paul did not do evangelism, but he primarily established churches and taught the faithful through his letters. Paul was a theologian where as Peter was an evangelist. They were each individually gifted and had different divine call. John was a peace maker who was totally different from Paul and Peter. God has not called us to do another person’s job. We have to simply ‘follow Him’. There as so many so-called Christians in this world who are not followers of Christ. We have to turn our back on everything else that will hinder us from following Him. If we are not truly the disciples of Christ we cannot be called Christians. In spite of all our failures and pride, Jesus still wants us to Follow Him!
The past few years for the family conference, we focused on how as a church, the body of Christ we are many parts in one body (2013), and we are not to conform to this world (2012), but proclaim the Kingdom; and in a personal way we learned how God is the one who heals us (2011) and gives us his peace (2010).

This year we build upon these past years and want to focus on how we use our faith to stand firm in a fallen world. From this theme we shall build upon the fundamentals of our faith, that we need to know who God is, and know him not just through study, but also through an experience of God. This experience of God should lead us as Christians to act upon our faith, in serving Christ and His people. And finally we should understand that when we are founded on the rock of faith in Christ, we should be witnesses, and be agents of change to see Christ in our personal life, in others and present him to this fallen world.

Ommission: The following pictures and captions was mistakenly not included in the article published in the Aug-Sept 2013 Stream entitled "SE Regional MGOCSM Summer Conference 2013."

We would like to recognize and thank the MGOCSM leaders/committee, namely Mr. Riju Thomas (Convener), Mr. Brandon Panavelil (Co-Convener), Ms. Sheena Mathew (Secretary), Ms. Joshelyn Jacob (Treasurer), Church Representatives Ms. Julia Jose, Ms. Galina Thomas, Mr. Manoj Abraham, Mr. Shane Mathew, Mr. Nithin Varghese, Mr. Jiboey Abraham, and overall Rev. Fr. George Paulose, Rev. Fr. Sujit Thomas & Dn. Daniel Dennis Mathai in all your hard work, cooperation and effort in making this year’s retreat a huge success! Last but not least we would like to recognize the 2012-2013 & upcoming 2013-2014 South-East Region MGOCSM Committee/Leaders.