



## MGSOA MISSION: December 28, 2012 – January 04, 2013

*Do we leave our families, our comforts and head to a place of uncertainty and service during this blessed holiday season?*

This was the question that waivered in the minds of many youth in our diocese. Facing many challenges namely language barriers, abilities to make an impact, and the reception of the people, YES, was the eager response of twelve individuals and their Archbishop as they endeavored on the second MGSOSA National Mission trip to Kerala, India.



December 28<sup>th</sup> – January 4<sup>th</sup> a team of thirteen had the opportunity to embrace our beautiful heritage while helping those in need. We spent seven days at different institutions of the Guardian Angel Charitable Society, founded by H. G. Abraham Mor Severious. During the years, members of our Archdiocese have contributed financially to this charitable society. Upon arrival at the Bethseda Institution, all were taken aback by the simple splendor of this remarkable charitable organization. It was an astonishing experience to witness the fruits of the donations. In addition to working with the poor, the team had an opportunity to visit Holy Church sites, attend Holy Qurbono and start the New Year with a spiritually uplifting experience.

### Learn More About This Mission Experience

Reflections:	<a href="http://mgsosamissions.blogspot.com">http://mgsosamissions.blogspot.com</a>
Fellowship Pictures:	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/a83lg5c">http://tinyurl.com/a83lg5c</a>
Fellowship Videos:	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/9wnkju6">http://tinyurl.com/9wnkju6</a>
Video Blogs:	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/bhsjzew">http://tinyurl.com/bhsjzew</a>

Although the initial itinerary reflected 9AM to 5PM programs, the schedule often started at dawn and ended near midnight. Despite the extended hours, the mission team still felt there were not enough hours in the day. To compress the thoughts, experiences, and lessons in a few short statements is nearly impossible. Our attempt is to wet the palates of our readers to learn more by going to the websites provided, where holds the heartfelt reflections and pictures of the experience.

## Recap of the Mission Experience

### Mission Trip Day 1: Fri 12/28/12

**Schedule:** Arrival at Bethseda, Visiting Old Age Home, Christmas Program by Nursing Staff at hospital, Evening Prayer - Prayer Tower, Session with Youth.

The day began with a small greeting first by Julius Thirumeni followed by a general welcome speech by Severios Thirumeni. Thirumeni highlighted reasons why His Grace started The Guardian Angel Society. In the afternoon, we spent time at the old age home. It was interesting to see that once people know that you are from their village/city or are close to it, they automatically feel like they met family. It's an interesting way of finding some connection to people. If I know where you live, then I can connect with you.

### Find Out More About Day 1

#### Old Age Home

**Pictures:** <http://tinyurl.com/ac23siy>

**Videos:** <http://tinyurl.com/ausildz>

#### Christmas Program (Psych Hospital)

**Pictures:** <http://tinyurl.com/b8xufhq>

**Videos:** <http://tinyurl.com/aug7534>

**Story Highlight 1:** An Ammachi was living in a mental institute for 9 years because her husband drowned at the beach. She had a 4 year old daughter, and was pregnant for 8 months. She got a telegram saying that her husband passed away. She immediately went into shock and lost her baby.

**Story Highlight 2:** An Appachen had a really inspiring story as well. He was a Sunday School teacher and was involved in everything. He raised his three kids very well (two daughters & a son). The girls got married off, and the Appachen stayed with his son. Then one day, the Appachen got kicked out of his house in the middle of the night.

**Story Highlight 3:** We visited an Ammachi who was blind and very frail. Dhanya introduced herself (her Malayalam is very good). The Ammachi was very happy and they conversed. The rest of the team left for the next room. Ammachi sensed another person in the room. Dhanya introduced Asha to Ammachi and explained her background. Ammachi was very frail and her hair was cut very short - that would look modern in America. She was very kind and blessed us both - it reminded me of how Abraham and Joseph blessed their generations.

A lot of respect has to be given to the residents of the old age home because even after facing many hard trials, they never lost their faith in God. After the old age home, we head to the hospital for a Christmas and New Year program. The nursing students held a very enjoyable program for all the residents. The mission team also sang a song for the group. It was interesting to see the wonderful skits that were performed.

In the evening, we had a get together with a Youth group that volunteers at the institution. Most of these kids were alumni of the Bethesda public school who spent time helping in the church and other facilities during their break. We had several ice breakers, games and a cultural exchange discussion. A. P. George Achen provided us with various topics that we could speak about. Our discussions went on close to an hour, which was very awesome because we were able to relate with the youth and talk to them about issues we see and vice versa. One very important point that Dn. Sheryl brought up was that we can socialize with each other, that language and social barriers can be overcome, if we are willing to try. It just took us that two minute barrier to pass before we realized that they are just like us - similar family values and similar instances that happen in and outside of the church. The night ended with a short prayer by A. P. George Achen.

- ❖ **Touching Moment:** Amazing feeling of coming together for prayers in the Prayer Tower which is made of all rocks, Visiting the old age home, and having the residents so eager to talk to us. The cultural exchange time with the youth.
- ❖ **Trying Moment:** (1) In some cases, running out of things to talk about due to language barrier. (2) Not to mix curries with rice as the curry could be spicy.

## Mission Trip Day 2: Sat 12/29/12

**Schedule:** Holy Qurbana at Bethesda YMB Chapel (Fr. Yesudas), Bible study by Theethose Thirumeni, visiting psychiatric patients at Bethesda Hospital, house visit to Raju & family.

### Find Out More About Day 2

**Pictures:** <http://tinyurl.com/aq4zk7m>  
**Videos:** <http://tinyurl.com/a2q9sze>

The morning started with most of us attending Holy Qurbana, led by Yesudas Achen, as a memorial service. Shortly after, Theethose Thirumeni joined us and led a devotional segment with the team. H.E. highlighted certain passages from the bible; Luke 15 and Matthew 25: 33-36. Thirumeni shared with us that Jesus cares about all types of people, not just one type of person. Thirumeni said that we need to see the mercy of God for the lost sheep. God is concerned about every individual. His Eminence urged us to go after the lost sheep - and we will need to go to the darkness. In the darkness, there is the threat of many things.

After breakfast we proceeded on our way to the Hospital to have our session with not only the psychiatric patients but also Dr. Shaji, chief psychiatrist at the hospital. After our session with Dr. Shaji, we were divided into groups to speak with patients on an individual basis. Due to the confidentiality rules, we are unable to share any pictures or details of the patients. After this, all the patients were gathered outside where the doctor led a music therapy session. There is definite stigma when it comes to talking with people who are in mental institutions. It's like no one wants to touch it due to fear of infection. These however are the people who are lost - who are abandoned. The song lyrics, Amazing Grace, seem so apt for the situation. Here is a group of people who are lost and when placed in this institution with proper medical care and attention are brought back to the light.

In the afternoon, we visited Raju & Family. The family had only one room for six people to sleep in; himself, his wife, two kids, and his parents. The overall mood of the group was very solemn; no one made a sound and we just watched and listened. Raju's story was definitely one Indians have heard before, but seeing the story come to life in person was a different experience. Raju fell down a well, approximately 30 feet deep, and survived. He experienced serious damage to his body including a broken spinal cord leaving him in complete paralysis with no hope of living or getting better. Despite his situation, Raju maintained his constant belief in God and what God can provide, which amazed everyone. His wife Jessy explained that they never lost their faith in time of such trouble and heartache. We learned that for the first time since the accident, Raju was able to sit up for about 2 hours, a true miracle. What we took from that visit was to appreciate everything in our lives, even the small things. We should be able to thank God for all that he has provided for us.

❖ **Touching Moment:** The faith of Raju & his family, especially his wife.

### Mission Trip Day 3: Sun 12/30/12

**Schedule:** Holy Qurbana at Bethseda YMB Chapel, Visiting Historical Churches & Tombs of Various Saints and Fathers (among them Akaparambu Mor Sabor Mor Aphroth, St. Ignatius Noorono Mapillassery, St. Thomas N. Paravur, Mar Thoman Mulunthuruthy aka 2nd Jerusalem (most saints' relics there), St. George Simhasana Perumbilly), Visiting Father of Fr. Varghese Paul, Attending birthday celebration of Fr. Varghese Paul's son Eldo.

#### Find Out More About Day 3

**Pictures:** <http://tinyurl.com/as4mjj5>  
**Videos:** <http://tinyurl.com/b3p5m45>

❖ **Touching Moment:** Hearing the small children singing so loudly during Qurbana was encouraging, attending such a peaceful melodious service, seeing so many historical Churches makes one feel God's presence

❖ **Trying Moment:** Walking barefoot on the uneven flooring around Mulunthuruthy Church, Indian road travel on narrow roads and climbing in/out of bus is a more tiring experience than in the States.

### Mission Trip Day 4: Mon 12/31/12 (New Year's Eve)

**Schedule:** Multiple House Visits to Bethseda Friends, Discussion with Mor Theophilos Kuriakose at MSOT Seminary, Midnight Qurbana at St. George Simhasana Church Perumbilly (H.E. Mor Titus Yeldho).

#### Find Out More About Day 4

**Pictures:**  
**House Visits:** <http://tinyurl.com/a9bffjs>  
**Church Visit**  
**(Photos 339-442):** <http://tinyurl.com/as4mjj5>  
**Seminary:** <http://tinyurl.com/avnaln1>  
**Videos:** <http://tinyurl.com/a8vaep9>

On New Year's Eve, we spent most of the day making house visits. A man named Biju tirelessly goes around looking for people who are in dire need of help and reports it to Bethesda and then he and A.P. George Achen go and visit the families and do what they can to help them. We visited over 11 different houses that are being helped by the Bethesda organization. It takes about \$150 US Dollars a YEAR to take care of one family.

**Highlight 1:** Eldho contracted polio at a young age and therefore could not walk or move properly without help. He lives in a one room home probably smaller than some of the closets in our own houses. He spends his days sitting on a chair looking out his window, and whatever he sees out that window is his world. He was so happy when we were talking to him. He had this smile that was contagious. However, the moment we said we have to leave his smile vanished and he looked like he just lost his best friend.

**Highlight 2:** Ajitha is a girl who should be in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, but had to stop school in 7<sup>th</sup> grade because of a skin infection. Her palms and the soles of her feet would break out into blisters making it impossible for her to walk or write. She is a very bright girl; she sings well and always had a smile during our visit. She told us that there is a medication that makes the blisters go away, but it was 300 rupees (\$6) and her family couldn't afford to get it for her all the time. We spend hundreds of dollars on things that we will throw away when a newer and better version comes out, while there are people in our country, God's own country, that can't go to school because they have no means.

These are just two of the people we met during our trip, there were dozens in that area that lived in equally depressing states, families that have houses with walls but no roof, that they had to pull a tarp over a section so that they didn't get drenched during

the monsoon season. A girl who wants to study political science but is planning on taking a course to be a radiologist technician, so that she can begin to quickly earn an income and support her family.

**Highlight 3:** We arrived a few hours early and had our last supper (Kanjai & Payar) of the year with Theethose Thirumeni. As it was New Years Eve, we finished off the night by attending midnight service at Perrumpalli. Where we had the opportunity to be surrounded by the faithful, including Kunju Uncle the oldest srishoshkaran (altar boy). He was inspiring because he never sought attention, and after everyone had left he stayed behind to ensure that everything was in its rightful place. When asked why he wasn't going home, he replied that he didn't want to leave yet so would sleep in the church and go home in the morning.

❖ **Touching Moment:** The house visits, and seeing George Achen and Biju checking in on the families they help who do not live at Bethseda. We were able to witness George Achen and Biju in action, finding a grandmother to help who was basically living alone in a hot tarp tent. They found her while we were walking away from one of the other house visits - the work truly never ends!

❖ **Trying Moment:** On one of the visits, we visited the neighboring houses of two paralyzed brothers. The second one was painful because the man's wife told us how they hadn't seen their daughter since she married someone out of their caste. They wanted to see her, but their son who takes care of the father did not - they were afraid that by contacting the daughter they would likely lose the help of their son. Since the son was away during our visit, the mother showed us an old family picture - one that she had hidden so that her son would not tear it up.

### Mission Trip Day 5: Tue 1/1/13

**Schedule:** Meet & Greet with H.B. Aboon Mor Baselios Thomas I at Puthencruz Patriarchal Center, lunch and park outing with YMB orphanage, visit to Kothamangalam Veliapally and Cheriapally, Dinner/Discussion with Mor Severios Abraham (our host at Guardian Angels) and Mor Gregorios Joseph (Kochi Diocese), Bibi's birthday - he's one of the people from Bethseda who accompanied us on our travels and made us feel so welcome at Bethseda.

We headed out in the morning to visit with H.B. Aboon Mor Baselios Thomas I. We exchanged greetings and expressed our love toward His Beatitude. We also invited His Beatitude to visit our Archdiocese. From there, we headed to the boy's orphanage that housed many orphans between the ages of 4 and 15. At first, you notice that they are very well behaved and look very much the same. They all wore the same uniform, a plaid shirt and blue jeans. However, as we spent more time with the kids and got to know them, they became more to us than just "orphans". Leaving the orphanage, we went to a park to let them be boys and play. Together, between the mission team, the counselors from the orphanage, and the orphans, we were in a world filled with joy. Riding the swing sets, playing silly games, and just laughing with absolute joy. Surprisingly, it did not take much to create this experience just time, love, and the people. They valued every minute that they were at the park, and we could see the sadness on their faces when we had to leave. It was awesome to see that despite whatever they lacked in terms of social structure, the orphans gave us more love than we could ever ask for. To our team, they were more than orphans, they were our little brothers. Despite their present situations, the kids exhibited a tremendous amount of love and affection for strangers they barely knew. Their smiles were infectious and their laughter melted our hearts. By being with them, it felt like we were doing our part to fulfill what St. James exhorts in us. We must have concern for orphans as a true measure of obedience that is pleasing to God. It reflects the concerns of God Himself.

#### Find Out More About Day 5

**Pictures:**

Visit to H.B: <http://tinyurl.com/agbocr7>

Orphanage: <http://tinyurl.com/bgkxghr>

Fellowship (Pictures 10-13):  
<http://tinyurl.com/apzbel8>

**Videos:** <http://tinyurl.com/bheovtd>

### Mission Trip Day 6: Wed 1/2/13

**Schedule:** Visiting Bethseda School (next to our dorms) during Assembly & street play performed by students, Leadership training by Dn. Shiry/Asha to 9th grade students while others walked through classrooms to visit other students, visiting Malecruz Dayro and discussion with Phinehas Rembachen, back to MSOT Seminary for discussion with Mor Thimotheos (newly ordained Patriarchal Secretary) and Syriac evening prayer/Q&A session/dinner with Seminararians and faculty.

#### Find Out More About Day 6

**Pictures:**

School Visit: <http://tinyurl.com/beigpue>

Meeting with Mor Thimotheos:  
<http://tinyurl.com/b9hn3ln>

Seminary (Pictures 82-136):  
<http://tinyurl.com/axvuu23>

**Videos:** <http://tinyurl.com/at7pt52>  
<http://tinyurl.com/a3xrb2m>

- ❖ **Touching Moment:** Time with Phinehas Remachen who emphasized keeping the focus on Christ, even when we were asking him about his own background.
- ❖ **Trying Moment:** "Wrestling will always be there." - a true statement. Learning that the news media may have some of the facts wrong in the recent Mideast conflicts.

## Mission Trip Day 7: Thu 1/3/13

**Schedule:** Prayer Meeting at the Bethesda Chapel with Mental Hospital patients, Lunch at home of Dn. Varghese (a Deacon studying in Philadelphia and living at St. Peter's), visiting Mor Chysotomos at Evangelical Association of the East headquarters and then sprint to nearby boys' orphanage and not so nearby girls' orphanage to deliver about 200 churidars collected in North America, Holy Qurbana by Mor Titus Yeldho at Mor Gabriel Prayer Tower, Closing Session and Consecration Anniversary Celebration of Mor Titus and Mor Julios and birthday/ordination Anniversary of Benny Achen, Dinner.

### Find Out More About Day 7

**Pictures:**

Evangelical Association:

<http://tinyurl.com/adij6p4>

Holy Qurbano:

<http://tinyurl.com/b9hetrw>

**Videos:**

<http://tinyurl.com/bhe25I5>

- ❖ **Touching Moment:** The help of so many at Bethesda during our many days – H.G. Mor Severios Abraham, H.G. Mor Julius Elias, Fr. A.P. George, Fr. Yesudas, Fr. Jogi, Fr. Benny, Bibi, Cinchu, Basil and Yeldho. We are sad that George Achen is not currently with us in North America, but are happy that Bethesda is thriving with his services. The prayer meeting was also very soothing - it seemed like a normal Church gathering rather than mission work - something we need to do more in the States.
- ❖ **Trying Moment:** Saying goodbye to Bethesda was tough, and the day was filled with so much ground to cover and barely any time to accomplish all our intentions.

### Vote of Thanks

My sincere thanks go to our beloved Thirumeni, H.E. Mor Titus Yeldho and the team members for their willingness to serve. We offer our sincere gratitude to Dn. Martin, who as the Mission Director, took on the arduous task of coordinating this large project. In addition, we thank Dn. Renjan, who leveraged his real experience at Bethesda to prepare our team both before and during the mission on what to expect. For the first time, Shauna, a youth from Canada, took part in a national MGSOSA event. In addition to the \$2000 provided by the Archdiocese, we collected closed to \$6000 in donations from churches and people of our Archdiocese. We are humbled by your support. I have to report back and say that of the money we received; only three people opted to take the \$500 travel credit offered by MGSOSA. Ten members paid their own way to India without financial help from the mission's fund. Because of this we have a \$3000 head start for the next mission trip. The mission team spent around \$5000 on this trip. It included providing meals at the old age home, orphanage and seminary. It also included New Year clothes (a pair of pants and shirt) for the orphanage kids, our transportation, meals, accommodations and a donation to Guardian Angel Charitable Society.

Some may think given the exchange rate, maybe it was better to give \$5000 US Dollars to Guardian Angel then for the mission to take place. Being one of the participants of the mission experience, I would have to disagree. Yes there is value in money but money cannot buy the experience for 12 people and memories that will remain for each of us. Money cannot buy the smiles brought on the faces of the people we encountered. A. P. George Achen, speaking in front of the residents said "Prayer is more valuable than a million dollar check." The mission team had the opportunity to pray with them, to cry with them, to laugh with them and to love each person and for them to love us. The quote shared by Mother Theresa is so valuable. She said, "being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, forgotten by everybody, I think that is a much greater hunger, a much greater poverty than the person who has nothing to eat." In His ministry, Christ encountered many that suffered. Some that came to Christ were healed by the touch of our Savior. When Christ heard of the death of Lazarus, he went to Bethania to weep with Martha and Mary and to perform the miracle. The touch, the face to face interaction with those unwanted, unloved and uncared for, is not something any amount of money can buy. It was truly an enriching experience.

Lastly, words cannot express our gratitude to H.G. Abraham Mor Severios, H.G. Mor Julius, Fr. A.P. George, Fr. Yesudas, Fr. Jogy, Fr. Benny and the team of people that took very special care of us. Many times the team felt that we were being served too vs. us serving. Each of you taught us valuable lessons that will help mold our lives and for that we are grateful.

On Behalf of the Mission Team,

Fr. Bijo Mathew

Vice President, MGSOSA