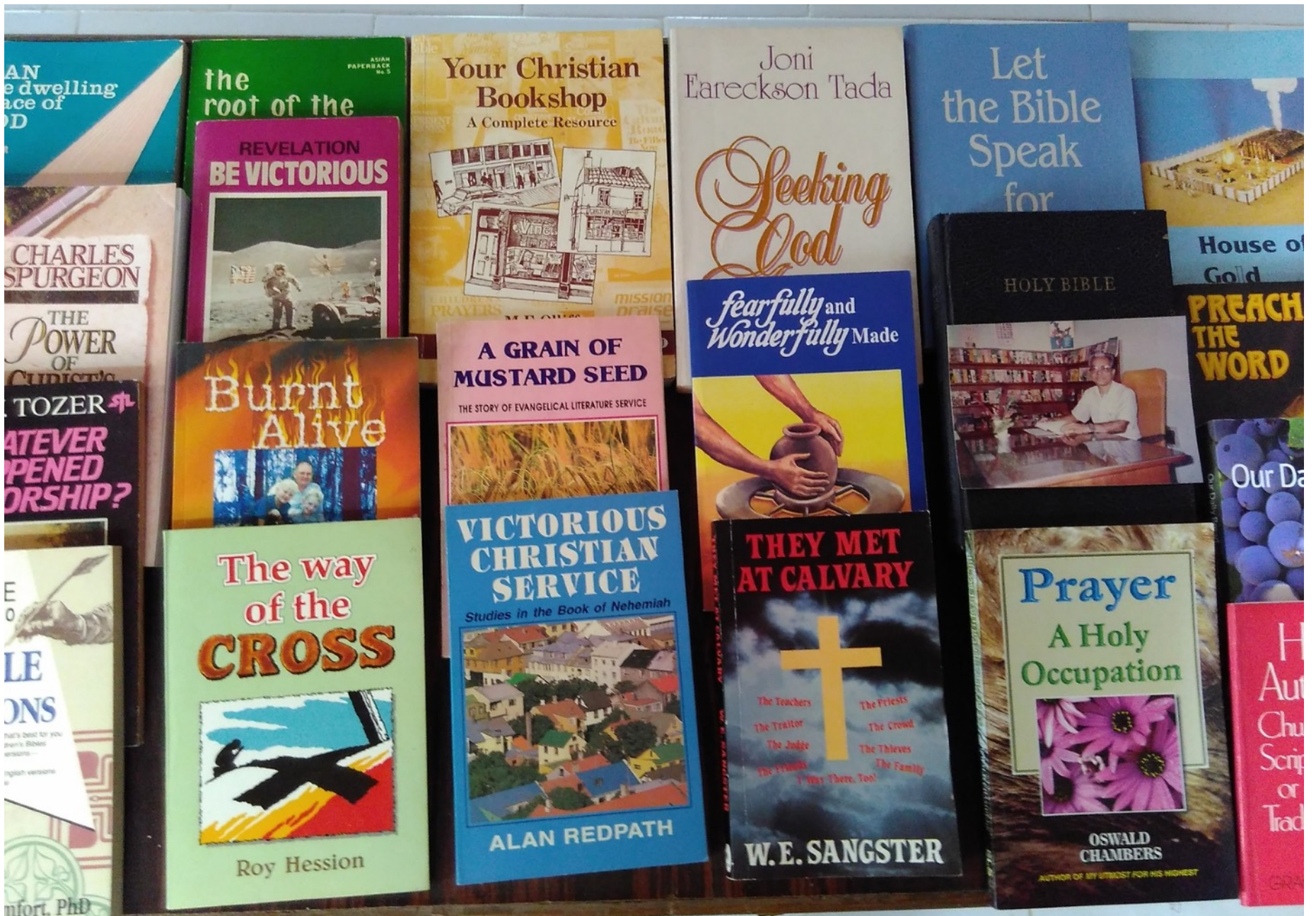


A Lifetime With Books



V M ABRAHAM

A LIFETIME WITH BOOKS

Personal experiences of
V M Abraham and Leelamma Abraham
in Christian book ministry

V M Abraham

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Leelamma, my wife and co-worker for life had patiently 'interpreted my scribbling', keyed it into the computer and made the mss readable. Thank you dear for your patience and hard work. Our special thanks to Evangelical Literature Service - our lifetime service platform and renowned publishing house for undertaking to publish this second book of mine. My first book- the story of ELS under the title "A Grain of Mustard Seed" co-authored by Mrs. Ida David was published by ELS several years ago.

Foreword to "A Lifetime with Books"

It is a great joy and privilege to write a foreword to this book by our friend V M Abraham, and we can only trust that it will be a blessing to many who read it.

Our roots go back a few years, as V M and Leelamma had come into the work of ELS/CLC around the same time that we arrived from CLC UK, (1961), to serve the cause of Christian literature in India.

Although our service was in North India, and V M and Leelamma mainly in South India, and with a greater inter- national outreach, we have, kept in touch over the years, enjoying the privilege of knowing our families, as well as a vision and heart to serve through the medium of Christian literature.

VM has sketched us many interesting aspects of his life, from a boy with bare feet going to school, to being involved in a world wide literature ministry where all the essential lessons learned in Madras/Chennai, were shared with CLC workers in different parts of the world, what a wonderful heritage to pass on.

For those who may not be familiar with life in South India, we have a wonderful account of dedicated parents in all generations, prepared to live lives honouring the Lord, while maintaining a simple and demanding country based life style, that would propel them into the modern day bustle of life in the fast lane.

History is so important, and here we have a good deal of major moves to take "living literature" into so many nations especially those of Asia. We are especially excited about Myanmar, as we prayed for twelve years, when the Lord answered prayer and sent Jacob along. Our visits there, like those of V M and Leelamma, have been most rewarding. Long may things develop to extend the Kingdom of Christ.

Above all, positively but silently, woven in, is the true strength, of what made it all possible for VM and Leelamma to do what they did, and that is their steady and believing faith in Christ, where they experienced time and again, the "miracles" of the Lord and His everlasting faithfulness.

Sheffield. May 2017,
Geoffrey and Pauline Williams.

Preface

Occasionally my wife and I, especially after our retirement, have taken time to reflect on our life's experiences. She had often advised me to write down the interesting and memorable experiences and achievements of our lives. My quick and oft-repeated response was 'who will read it?' Having spent many years in the publishing field of Christian books I was privileged to have met with several writers/authors who approached me to take up their material for publishing. When a manuscript is brought to the publisher for publication, the first question that comes to his mind is 'what is the scope of its readership'. The number of readers will depend mainly on the popularity of the writer and the subject matter, besides other factors. With this backdrop in my mind I promptly discounted any inclination about writing down our own story. I asked myself 'who am I and whether it be worth reading what I write, if ever I wrote'. Then one day an inner voice - a still small voice - seemed speaking to me 'you have often spoken of what God has done in and through your life. Those are spoken words floating in the air, but if written down, it would remain as facts carved in granite.' The written word is like a seed. If it falls on prepared soil having moisture and sunlight, in due season it will grow and bear fruit. So at the age of seventy seven I began to write down this story drawing facts from my notes, diaries, and memories of us both. As one's children or immediate family are the first to compare notes with their parents' lives and confirm or deny what is written by or about them, I am sure the minimum number of persons wanting to read this story will come close to double digit! The main purpose of writing down this story is for the benefit of our own children that they might draw from the well known or hitherto unknown experiences of their parents and keep such lessons they derive from it as a legacy as they too are in the service of the Lord though not directly in the field of literature. For anyone else, especially those involved or interested in Christian literature ministry whether it is known, read or used, the fact remains that 'printed word lives long after its author is dead'.

As we reminisce the experiences of numerous journeys, even though not very enjoyable to me at that time, now I count it as a great privilege that the Lord enabled me and my wife to go to various parts of the world as His witnesses. While the rich people spend a large amount of money for world travel and tours, we who did not have sufficient money even to travel across India were enabled by the Lord to travel around twenty-one countries of the world on His business. As we browse through the notes I had made and the pictures taken during such travels, they refresh our memories and renew our attachment to the Lord's work in those countries. The reader may bear in mind that the facts and figures pertaining to various countries mentioned here were relevant in the late nineties.

In writing down these experiences we wish to highlight how God has guided me and my family in all these years. It is to demonstrate the faithfulness of God to His own promises as well as God's care for His children. It is to testify that those who choose to obey God's Word will be blessed and 'be made the head and not the tail'. At times God's blessings came to me in disguise, but more often it was like the downpour of a heavy rain. As we stood with the Lord, the victory was always ours, for it was the Lord who fought our battles. Our life's journey, especially with the work of ELS, was like the children of Israel overcoming the enemies and occupying Canaan, breaking their strongholds, putting them to shame and exalting the name of the Lord. In fact my life in the role as the leader of ELS was a victory march of eighteen years. It is only with the eyes of a beholder that such struggles and victories can be seen, especially in a spiritual field. We never worked for personal gain - be it money, popularity or position. We firmly believed that 'godliness with contentment is great gain'. In times of crisis it was great to listen to God by reading His Word and meditating upon it to hear what He was saying. At such times, it was God's Word that comforted, encouraged and gave me direction and purpose. I know that He is a God who speaks; but to hear His voice, one must choose to listen.

V M Abraham

Chapter 1: Childhood, Schooling and Conversion

I was born on 29th August 1937, as the last of four children to Aleyamma and Mathunni Mathen of Vadakeparampil, Anicad and given the pet name “Kunjavarachen”, by my parents. I had a brother and two sisters. The sisters were older than us. Being the youngest one, I always had the attention and loving care of the rest of the family. I had a pink shirt with red buttons, which was my favourite shirt. My mother used to bathe me in cold water which I never liked - especially if I had little cuts or wounds on my body. I was of a gentle disposition and quite obedient to my parents, but I remember an occasion when I mustered enough courage to protest to my mother against the cold water baths and decided to teach her a lesson. She had washed some white clothes and spread them out on the ground to get them dried in the sun. As soon as she finished giving me the bath I ran from the house and stamped on those white clothes several times. Mud from my little foot prints streaked across the clothes. Infuriated, my mother gave me several beatings on my thigh using a green stick from a nearby shrub. I cried a lot and decided then and there that I would not do such mischief in future, even though I did not tell her that I was sorry. Apart from that occasion, I do not remember having been beaten by my parents at any other time, even though there were several occasions of severe scolding. I always loved, obeyed and respected my parents.

I was formally enrolled as a pupil in class 1 at CMS Primary School, Muttathumavu, at the age of five under the official name V.M. Abraham. It was a two-mile walk between home and school, and that too on bare foot on a mud road every morning and evening. I used to carry a writing slate, a text book and a lunch packet in my hand and a pencil in my pocket which were all well-looked after during my walk. I felt no pain in my little feet as it was great fun walking with friends. There were around 25 students in my class. Our teacher took special effort to teach us to read and write Malayalam alphabets and words as well as to count in Malayalam up to 100. I enjoyed the lessons in the class room but was not very keen about the drill periods in the hot sun!

On successfully completing the four-year primary education, I had to change school to join the ‘Middle school’ (today’s Upper Primary) where I studied for the next four years. This school was situated in the opposite direction from the previous one, but equally far from home. There also, the medium of instruction was Malayalam, but a new language was taught among the many subjects taught, starting from the beginning of the year. That subject was called ‘English’ and the first lesson in English began in the same way as we started Malayalam in class 1 four years ago. English language continued as one of the subjects in the timetable for the rest of my studies in school and college even though English became the medium of instruction at the college level. In schools, I did fairly well in my studies and slowly developed some interest in games, especially in football.

After the completion of middle school education, I joined St. John’s Baptist High School, a school run by Catholics, some three miles away from my home. In those days there was neither public transport on our route nor any school bus. To reach the school and return there was no other option but to walk to and fro. However the company of many friends made the barefoot walk on the mud road tolerable and also of some fun. While in the high school, I was made captain of the junior football team. The school was situated in the vicinity of a large Catholic church and as many of my classmates were Catholic, I became a little familiar with the Catholic Church and their way of worship. Being a Protestant student I was exempted from the catechism classes conducted in the school. Mathematics and Science were my favorite subjects in high school. I had a liking for Hindi too. During the summer holidays I took up an extra course in Hindi language and passed the preliminary examination of Hindi Prachar Sabha in First Class. With this background, I chose Biology, Chemistry and Physics as my main subjects and Hindi as second language when I joined the college. The college, namely N.S.S. College, Changanacherry; where I began my college education was about three miles away from my maternal uncle’s home. At my parents’ request my uncle happily accommodated me at his home and thus spared us the expenses and inconvenience of being in a college hostel. My father thought that I should not go to the college bare footed, and came along on the day of admission to buy me a pair of sandals and a new umbrella. As these ‘luxuries’ came to me for the first time in my life it took a while for me to get used to walking on sandaled feet. On most of the days during my first year at the college, I walked all the way to the college and back, even though I travelled by bus on some days. However, during the second year, I found an old bicycle discarded by my cousin and got it fixed up so that I could use it as my means of

transport. My uncle's house was in upper Kuttanad, about one kilometer from the Main Central Road. During monsoon time all the paddy field area would get fully submerged in neck-deep of water for several months in an year. Houses were built on small islands here and there in that vast area covered with water. At such times my uncle used to make arrangement with a canoe-man to take me from home to the main road in the morning and from the road to home in the evening on his canoe which had a carrying capacity of only two to three people including the rower. One evening, as I was coming home by canoe, it was windy and the waves were rough. Though the man who was rowing tried his best to keep the balance, the little boat capsized. I fell into chest-deep of water and stood up holding my books in my hands. The rowing man managed to turn the boat upright and bailed out the water. However, in spite of him lifting me up from the water into the boat, it was a very tough job for me to get back into the boat without tilting it which I managed Just about!

During my college days, there was a time when I lost interest in my studies. For the first time in my life I visited a cinema theatre and watched an English movie. Thankfully, during my second visit while I was watching a movie, I felt a strong urge within me that this was not the place for me. Thereafter I have never been to a cinema theatre. I felt class room lectures were rather boring. The only sessions I enjoyed were English literature classes, especially the Shakespearian dramas, particularly the comedies taken by Professor Balakrishna Pillai whom the students named affectionately in private as 'Shakespeare Balakrishnapllai'. Two years in the college passed quickly, at the end of which came the University examination. To my surprise and disappointment my result showed that I failed in Science. It was the first time I had ever failed an exam. Blaming myself, I decided to quit the college. Even though my parents and my uncle who had helped me a lot during my college education, did not approve of my decision, none of them prevented me from making my own choice for my future course of action. Though I knew Jesus and had accepted Him as my Lord and Saviour three years ago, my love for the Lord grew cold during my college days and I had drifted away from Him. I believe that it was in God's eternal plan that I had to fail that University examination. This was a turning point in my life, though at that time I did not know which way I was turning and why. Mr. K.V. Abraham, a neighbor, friend and classmate of mine while in high school was, by then, a student at the South India Bible Institute, Bangarapet. He encouraged me to take a course in SIBI. This idea was strongly supported by my former teacher Mr. P.M. Thomas who had just resigned his teaching job in order to go to Jammu-Kashmir as a missionary. As an eighteen year old lad, discouraged and unsure of the right decision, I was finally encouraged by my teacher's advice and decided to go to the Bible School. I was offered full scholarship by the Bible School. My parents being God-fearing and God-honoring Christians did not want to stand in my way as they learned that I was going to serve the Lord. However, deep in their heart their desire was that I either proceed with the secular studies or seek a job for the well-being of our home as well as for my future.

My travel to the Bible School

It was in July 1956 that I set out to travel outside the State of Kerala for the first time. In those days there was no train service through central Kerala. The Cochin-Madras Mail was the only express train that the people of Kerala could make use of for their travel to the north. A coach bound for Bangalore (Bengaluru) was attached to this train which got detached at Jolarpet junction and was hauled over to Bangalore by another train every day. The third class compartment of this coach being a 'general' one, there was no reservation facility available. Passengers of all sorts, civilians with many pieces of assorted baggage, service personnel with their huge steel trunks and hold-all etc. got into this compartment and occupied to its full capacity even from the starting point at Cochin. My friends and I were to board this compartment from Alwaye (Aluva) station. As the train pulled in to the platform, there were many of us trying to push ourselves in through the door which was blocked by other passengers and their huge boxes. However, we managed to get in somehow and once we were in, we felt as if we had won a great battle! Luckily there were a few senior students of the same Bible school who had already boarded from the starting station and secured a few seats for themselves. Before long we found them out and were able to take turns to sit for a while now and then so that we did not have to stand all along for 20 hours at a stretch. On arrival at Bangarapet station the following day, the Principal Rev. Clifford Dewey, who himself was there to receive us, brought us to the hostel in the Bible school campus. In July, the weather was quite cool and often drizzling and chilly in Bangarapet. The campus

had about 15 acres of land, having several buildings for class rooms, hostels, staff quarters and a chapel. The two hostel buildings, one for boys and the other for girls were constructed at the two extreme ends of the campus keeping enough distance in between so as to ensure that the boys and girls did not mingle with each other freely. The Bible School belongs to the World Gospel Mission whose doctrinal emphasis is 'holiness' or entire sanctification as a 'second blessing'. Although it is a co-educational school and each class had both boys and girls, there was strict supervision to make sure that there was no interaction between boys and girls. They were never given any opportunity to talk to each other on campus. However it is interesting to observe that after their graduation several graduates married their classmates – may be because they shared the same vision to serve!

The medium of instruction in S.I.B.I was English. Most of the teachers were American missionaries whose accent was new to all of us freshers. As I was fortunate to have listened to lectures in English in my previous college, it did not take me long to catch up with the language as well as the foreign accent, but most of my classmates found it hard to understand fully, at least for the first year. Among the subjects that I liked best were the study of the Synoptic Gospels and Systematic Theology. The other programmes that I liked were the weekly 'Sing Song' service and the 'Missionary Prayer Band' sessions. During the Missionary Prayer Band sessions reports of missionary activities in many parts of the world were presented and prayer concern was raised in the minds of students. In my second year it was one such report that moved my heart and made me think of dedicating myself fully for the Lord's service. You will read more about this elsewhere in this story.

My best friend in the Bible School

Rev. Dr. Theodore Williams, after passing BSc. Hons. and M.A. Statistics from the Presidency College, Madras got saved and decided to serve the Lord. His friends like P. Samuel and Sam Kamaleson encouraged him to take a special Bible Study course in South India Bible Institute, Bangarapet. He was doing his final year of studies there when I joined for my first year course. Most of the students were from Kerala who used to converse in their mother tongue Malayalam outside the classrooms even though the seminary encouraged everyone to speak in English only, mainly for the sake of students from other linguistic areas. I often felt bad as Malayalee students kept talking in their mother tongue even when others who did not understand their language were present. In such an environment I felt more comfortable in the presence of non-Malayalee students and some of them became good friends of mine. Theodore Williams noticed this and was happy to encourage me and we became close friends. In my heart I began to recognize and appreciate his wisdom, knowledge and dedication to the Lord and his willingness to sacrifice many lucrative job opportunities at the altar of the Lord's service. As he shared many of his experiences and the ways in which the Lord had been dealing with him, my faith too grew stronger and eventually we became very close friends. Theodore graduated from his special course and was absorbed into the teaching faculty of the Bible School.

By that time I was convinced that I am to serve the Lord and that I should be using Christian literature as a tool to carry out my ministry. When I shared my thoughts with Theodore Williams he encouraged me and advised that I should contact the Evangelical Literature Service, Madras which is a literature mission. During vacation time, he took me to see Madras which was his home city. At that time, Theodore had introduced me to Mr. Donald David, the then General Secretary of the Evangelical Literature Service. As I shared my testimony and vision for the literature ministry, Donald David was happy. He encouraged me to complete my Bible school studies and join the ELS. Mr. Donald David accommodated me as his guest at his house and took good care of me during my two-day stay in Madras. As I was returning to Kerala, Donald's wife Ida lovingly handed me a food parcel for my supper in the train. I was impressed by that expression of motherly care by a leader's wife towards one of the future staff members of the ELS.

The first day of my visit to Madras was spent almost fully in the ELS. The next morning Theodore Williams gave me a guided tour of the city. I shared with him my impression of the ELS and the details of my discussion with Donald David. His advice was one step further than that of Donald's. Theodore advised me that I should continue with the Bible school and then pass the University examination also, as it was not a good testimony to take up the service of the Lord as a failed candidate in secular studies. This idea challenged me and I decided that I would go back after the Bible course and write the university examination that I had

left out. After completing two years of studies in the Bible school, I went back to write the university examination and passed it. Now I was happy and was fully convinced that I was ready to serve the Lord through Christian literature.

Chapter 2: Christian Literature Crusade

It was the time of Second World War. Jehovah's Witnesses were busy spreading their literature everywhere in England. Challenged by the effect of this literature on the unsuspecting people, Ken Adams, an enthusiastic and dedicated young man declared that he could no longer stand by and watch this dangerous propaganda while the truth of the Gospel was freely available in his hand. Ken and his wife Bessie Adams opened a small bookshop in Colchester, England in 1941 and began distributing Bibles and evangelical literature while trusting God to meet all their needs. The new bookshop was named Evangelical Publishing House. Norman Grubb, the then General Secretary of WEC (World Evangelization Crusade) was so impressed by the ministry of EPH that he remarked: "With Ken's vision of book centers, we could begin scattering 'spiritual Woolworths' (a popular retail chain in Britain) around the country and then world wide". It was indeed a prophetic statement. Before long, Ken and Bessie Adams were invited to join the WEC, their unique ministry christened as Christian Literature Crusade and recognized as the literature arm of World Evangelization Crusade.

The Prospects and Vision of CLC

As an inter-denominational mission, Ken Adams affirmed "We will not let doctrinal differences hinder us from serving all denominations with their need of literature. But our position is to be uncompromisingly evangelical so that customers feel quite sure that all they see and buy will build up readers or point the unconverted to the Saviour. Each book shop should be first and foremost a spiritual power house with workers committed to winning souls and helping fellow Christians, this being more important than the sale of books". Ken was greatly influenced by the motto of C.T. Studd, the founder of WEC "*If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, no sacrifice is too great for me to make for Him*".

The ministry of CLC began to grow as more workers joined the mission. There was no salary paid to anyone. Each worker looked to the Lord to get their needs met. In the early days workers were given mission training at the WEC headquarters. Eventually CLC had its headquarters established in London where its own administrative and training mechanism was set up. CLC began opening book shops in several cities of England meeting the literature need of the Church like the 'Woolworths' did for the household of Britain.

Ken Adam's vision of a literature ministry was not limited to England only but to reach out the whole world in step with the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. As a literature mission *CLC's purpose was to make evangelical literature available to all the nations, so that people may come to faith and maturity in the Lord Jesus Christ*. So after entrusting the growing work in Britain with able and committed men Ken moved on to America and established CLC Headquarters at Camp Hill, Fort Washington, Pennsylvania alongside the WEC headquarters. His main effort there, was to recruit literature missionaries, train and send them to various countries of the world as well as to mobilize funds for specific projects for the growth and establishment of CLC centers in such countries.

Basic Policies

CLC is an evangelical inter-denominational and international literature service organization operating under the guiding principles of *Faith, Sacrifice, Fellowship and Holiness* which are known as its four pillars. Its members are men and women who are called of God and committed themselves to literature work. Nationals and internationals wherever possible, are encouraged to work together sharing responsibilities according to their God-given abilities. All members trust God as the source of supply in order to meet their needs.

At the time of writing this story, CLC is actively serving in fifty two nations operating more than 180 Christian book shops and many publishing houses engaging more than eight hundred persons as its members.

Birth of Evangelical Literature Service

Donald David was a fourteen year old boy when he met with a football accident in Madras, while at school. He was hit by a ball on his nose, and the injury sustained was so severe that it not only damaged his front teeth but also caused serious infection in his body. Large abscesses were formed and Donald was bed ridden for a prolonged period of six years. While in that condition the only profitable thing he could do was to study for his high school examinations as well as reading books and periodicals such as Moody Monthly magazines. Through those, he had learned about the foundation and growth of Moody Colportage Library. The affordability and effect of Moody Colportage books began challenging his life. In the meanwhile an influential friend from the Indian Railways had promised to get a good job for Donald as soon as he was well enough. While awaiting full recovery and anticipating the letter of appointment for the job, God broke through all his plans and asked “Will you be part of my plan to reach out to the people of India with literature?” Donald had no immediate answer. Although many people were praying for him, his healing was not progressing as expected. One day a servant of God counseled him about listening to the voice of God and submitting to His will in order to enjoy blessings from above. Donald knew God had already spoken to him and it was his own interest in the security of a job that held him back from saying ‘yes’ to God. Unable to hold on any longer he surrendered his life and said “yes, Lord I will be a part of your plan to reach out to the people with literature”. From that time onwards Donald began to get well and before long he was able to lead a normal life again.

When Donald had recovered from his illness he decided to start a literature distribution work in order to reach the people of Madras city. He opened a small book shop at Vepery, Madras in 1946 and started stocking Bibles and biblical books as well as scripture greetings cards, wall texts etc. He named his establishment “*Evangelical Literature Service*”. Initially sales and distribution were very slow and there were days spent in the shop without selling even a single book. Often he was discouraged and asked himself whether the decision he had taken was the right one at all. At such times he reminded himself that he was ‘already a part in God’s plan’ and therefore must press on. Gradually sales picked up and encouragement from readers and Christian believers was received. However in order to run a successful literature ministry Donald was badly in need of a good capital fund, some work experience as well as certain measures of technical know-how. But all what he did have was plenty of enthusiasm and faith in the One who called him.

Marriage of ELS with CLC

By 1951 the work of ELS had found a reasonable growth. Shortly after starting the work Donald’s aunt Miss Grace Gabriel volunteered to help him in the bookshop. As a result, he was able to move about and make contacts with some of the major Christian book shops within and outside India. A British doctor friend encouraged Donald to get in touch with CLC, Britain which he thought might be willing to help him with some training. The CLC, with their world vision was happy to have a new contact with a young man who was interested in literature work in India. After exchanging a few letters between Donald and Mr. Philip Booth, the director of CLC, the former was invited to London at his own expenses for a period of training. Donald had no money for the fare, but he believed that if God was in it, then He would provide. Understanding his earnestness to improve his skill through CLC and his helplessness in finding money for the travel, an aunt of Donald gave him a generous gift to cover his travel expenses to and fro. Donald saw this as God’s provision and his faith was strengthened. His time with CLC, London gave him a lot of ideas about literature work besides challenging him to trust the Lord for his personal needs. CLC was interested in reaching out to India and to start afresh with ELS, provided Donald was willing to join CLC and give to the mission what he had already built up for himself. His natural question was how to give up what he had and be part of a mission which had nothing to offer in return. Then one day God spoke to him reminding him of the boy with five loaves and two fishes, saying ‘*if you give yourself fully to me and the work you have started in India, I will bless and multiply it to the whole of the country*’. Donald had struggled with this question for some time and finally said ‘yes, Lord, you win’. Then he shared it with CLC staff and made application to join them.

Completely unaware of the above development, CLC had already sent out Miss Ida Howlett, one of their young lady missionaries to India, who had started working with a Christian bookshop in Calcutta, in order to

gain some experience. In 1953 Donald invited her to visit ELS, Madras which was to become CLC in India shortly. After seeing the work and meeting with Donald she returned to Calcutta, but not for long. Ida was impressed not only with the work of ELS but with the ‘worker’ also. Eventually Donald and Ida got to know each other well and of their common call for literature work and decided that they would become partners in life as well. In early 1954, Mr. Phillip Booth, the leader of CLC in Britain visited India to – as he put it- “perform two marriages” one between ELS and CLC and the other between Donald and Ida. Both those happy events took place in March of that year. Thus, ELS officially got affiliated to CLC even though the name “Evangelical Literature Service” was retained. The policies and purpose of CLC and ELS became one and the same. However ELS being a Registered Religious Society in India, the relation between the two is more on a spiritual bonding rather than on any hierarchical authority. Over these past years God has blessed and multiplied this ministry and enabled it to spread throughout India.

In the young independent India evangelical books were rare and literature agencies few and far between. In Bombay, the Brethren missionaries from UK operated the Gospel Literature Service. In Calcutta another mission had a book shop called Evangelical Literature Depot. In Madras the third and the new one was ELS, headed by Donald David. While the former was a publishing house the latter two were mainly distributors. In those days, these three were the well-known evangelical literature agencies in India as well as the founding members of Evangelical Literature Fellowship of India.

My Entry into Literature Ministry

On renewing my contact with ELS and expressing my willingness to join the work, Mr. Donald David, the founder and General Secretary of ELS was happy to invite me to join them. He wrote that I should start serving in their little book shop in Ooty, Nilgiris assisting a missionary couple. “There is no salary offered as every worker is encouraged to trust the Lord to meet his needs, because it is a ministry of faith! However ELS would give you a small amount of pocket money which will be Rs. 40 per month along with free accommodation. If you are willing to accept these terms you may proceed to Ooty”, wrote Mr. Donald David.

As I was sure that it was God who called me to serve Him and that He always abides faithful, I could trust God. Money was not an attraction for me nor a decision-making factor in my life. I wrote back to Mr. David informing my acceptance of their terms.

Travel to Ootacamund

It was March 1959. I purchased a third class train ticket to Ootacamund and boarded the meter gauge passenger train from Changanacherry which was the nearest railway station from my home. In those days, all trains ran with steam engines for which coal was used in abundance. Within a few hours of travel, passengers would be coated with coal dust which sometimes fell in their eyes and caused a great deal of irritation. The doors of this new meter gauge trains were opening outward which was not very safe for the passengers! I had never been to Ooty, though I was told it was quite cold - being a hill station above 7000 ft from sea level. So I had purchased a woollen sweater to use in Ooty. I had to change trains at Ernakulam and then at Coimbatore and finally boarded the Blue Mountain ‘Match Box’ train at Mettupalayam early the next day. Seated next to me was a railway clerk who worked in Ooty station. He was very helpful in giving me information about Ooty. On arrival at Ooty railway station I looked out for Mr. Al Monus the missionary in charge of ELS, Ooty who was expected to meet me at the station and take me to Farley - the mission quarters where he lived. In those days, telephone facilities were few and available only in large cities while the ‘mobile phone’ was unheard of. So, there was no way to contact Mr. Monus except by reaching him in person. Having waited in vain for him for some time, my new-found railway friend arranged with a porter who would carry the box and walk with me to Farley which was about 2 km by a short-cut from the railway station. The porter was happy to get Rs. 2 from me for carrying my box and guiding me to Farley and I didn’t mind walking in order to save a taxi fare of about Rs. 5. We reached Farley at about 3 pm. In about 30 minutes Mr. & Mrs. Monus had returned from the station disappointed, thinking that the young man they expected to arrive, had failed to turn up! However seeing a new person with a box standing in the compound they came to me, asked my identity and apologized for missing me at the station - they must have arrived at the station after I had walked

away with the porter! They soon served me a hot meal in their home and we spent some time catching up on the stories of the travel etc. and they put me up in my room in the 'lower cottage' at Farley. Now, Farley was a large estate on a hill with lots of Eucalyptus, Cypress, and other trees and one large missionary bungalow along with other two cottages. This was the property of WEC (World Evangelization Crusade). ELS, being associated with WEC through CLC, was given accommodation for its staff in these cottages. At that time, there was no one else in the lower cottage. The room allotted for me was at the extreme end of the cottage nearing the pathway to the hill top. The room had a door each in front and back with one small ventilator, but not any window. For fear of wild animals as well as to avoid the cold breeze, both the doors had to be kept shut always. In the evening it was very cold, dark and lonely – giving me a feeling of sleeping in a jungle!

The only one electric bulb shining in the room removed most of my fear. I had to manage food on my own though I had never learned the art of cooking! Due to the lack of sufficient warm clothes I had to fight the cold nights with my sweater and a blanket loaned to me by the Monuses. As I had no facility to heat water for bathing purposes, I used to take my bath at noon when the room temperature was slightly more favorable, lest I freeze in the cold water. Eating from the restaurants was too expensive for me. So from the very first day I made plans to survive on dry bread and cold water or a couple of chapattis that I had learned to make. At the end of the month I noticed that my pocket money was so blessed that nearly five rupees were still remaining from the forty rupees I had received. With the savings of three months I was able to purchase a cheap blanket and return the blanket the missionaries had lent me in the first week. I never let my parents know how I was managing or of my 'special diet' etc. as I was determined to be content with what I had! 'Contentment' is one of the lessons I had learnt in my training period.

Ministry in Ooty

The ELS Book shop in Ooty was located at the Union Church compound facing the main road. Though it was a very small book shop, it had a good range of Bibles, evangelical books, greeting cards etc. The customers were very few and those who visited would often spend considerable time in the shop browsing through books or cards. After the first couple of weeks the manager, Mr. Monus, left me alone in the shop for most of the time so that he could do some outdoor work as well as office work from the office at his house. This gave me plenty of opportunities to talk to several customers and do personal counselling. I also got involved with the local churches which gave me opportunities of speaking at youth groups as well as going out with them on Sundays and holidays for village evangelism. Even though the going was tough, I personally had great satisfaction in the service I could offer in the name of the Lord and felt that the hand of the Lord was upon me. In the month of May the famous Nilgiris Convention started at Union Church, Ooty. Hundreds of missionaries coming to Nilgiris from various parts of India for their summer vacations would attend this convention. Famous preachers from overseas would address the week-long conventions held in each of the three places namely, Ooty, Coonoor and Kotagiri. ELS would put up a special Book Table at these conventions, not only to provide wonderful books to all those missionaries but also to keep in touch with many of them in order to meet the need of Christian literature in their area after their return to their mission field. Every year Mr. Donald David and his wife Ida David would be present at these conventions taking care of the book tables. This was my first opportunity to serve with them at the Ooty convention stall. It was a good opportunity to learn from them some of the techniques of conducting successful Book tables and making good contacts with book lovers.

Training In Madras

By the end of June 1959, I was transferred to Madras HQ where my real training for literature work started. While the biggest challenge I had to face in Ooty was managing my food for survival, in Madras it was the question of accommodation and coping up with the climate. By the end of June, night temperature in Ooty would drop to nearly 0 degrees Celsius while in Madras it was about 28 degrees at night and about 39 degrees or so during daytime. As for accommodation I was given a camp cot in a small space in the stock room of the HQ shop. I could stretch the camp cot at night, sleep on it in between the stock racks and fold it up by 9 in the morning before the bookshop would open. Under such living conditions and in the high

temperature of Madras I felt during the first few weeks of July as though all the fat from my body was melting away! However, the joy of the Lord was my strength and I undertook my training seriously.

My training days would start at 9 am. My first job was to help the office boy to open the door and the show-window shutters of the bookshop. The door of the book shop was a massive wooden structure 8 feet high and 6 feet wide, with folding shutters. The two show- windows on either side of the front door also had folding wooden shutters. Once these were opened the staff in the shop and office would get together for prayer and then take up their position to dust, clean and arrange the Bibles, books, greeting cards, wall texts etc. in proper order. I was given instructions to learn the title as well as the name of the author and publisher while dusting and arranging each book. By doing this for at least 30 minutes every morning I quickly learned the titles of many books and their authors. Then, as and when I got a little free time, I would pick up one of those books and read its blurb to understand the gist of the book. This was very helpful to introduce such books to any customer who would be interested to know about the contents of a new book before purchasing it.

Mail Order Service

My office training began with studying the existing mailing list and building it up further. This mailing list consisted of the local as well as the out-station customers of ELS. Within a few months I was able to build up this list with their postal addresses and prepare a card for each customer which added up to over 1500 in number. A special bulletin called ‘Book News’, prepared once in three months, would be posted to each of these addressees in order to enable them to order the latest books of their choice. This gave a big boost to the ‘mail order’ sales which was especially appreciated by many customers from the North Eastern parts of India to whom accessibility to any Christian book shop was almost non-existent. Before long I was given full charge of the mail order department which involved attending to the letters of all the customers, replying to them, sending the required books to them, dealing with the postal authorities in the dispatch of the book packets as VPP, registered packets, parcels post etc. and preparing bills including postage and packing charges. This involved paying careful attention to every demand made by the customer which made this work enjoyable to me, even though I was not interacting with customers face to face. I felt very happy in that many people even from the remote parts of the country had got opportunity to get the required literature in their hands through this special service. I was greatly encouraged of the fact that the printed pages could go where the authors could not, and that it could travel cheaply and cross any language barrier with ease.

Convinced of these facts I was happy to give my whole time for the promotion and distribution of evangelical literature. By December 1959, I had completed an all-round training of nine months. Shortly after that, the General Secretary of ELS called me to his office and expressed his satisfaction and happiness in my on-the-job training and service and asked whether I would consider service in ELS as my life’s calling. I was given some time to think about it and give an answer.

A member of the Fellowship

ELS is a literature mission dedicated to “Preach the Word” by distributing Bibles and biblical literature to every literate person all over the world. It is affiliated to the Christian Literature Crusade, a literature mission that is in operation in many countries of the world. Its workers/missionaries are expected to be fully dedicated for such work and depend on the Lord to meet their personal needs as no emolument or salary is paid to any of the full time workers. Each worker is to be sure of the Lord’s calling for this particular ministry and hence should look to Him to meet his needs. I had the assurance and peace from the Lord that ‘this is my field of service and it is God who has called me and He always remains faithful’. A few days later I returned to Mr. Donald David and told him that the Lord wanted me in ELS and I was willing. He then advised me to invite my pastor (I was attending the Emmanuel Methodist Church, Vepery at that time) and a few friends for a small a dedication service in ELS at the eve of my acceptance as a full-fledged staff member of ELS Fellowship.

As a Staff member of ELS I was upgraded as a 'faith worker' and hence not eligible for any pocket money thereafter! It was the practice in ELS that whenever gifts ear-marked for the Staff were received from anywhere, (CLC Britain used to send every month whatever gift they had received for the Staff in India) such gifts were put into a common pool and distributed equally among the Staff at the end of the month. Since the gifts were unsolicited, the amount varied from time to time. In one month I received Rs.160/- while in the following month my share was Rs. 20/-. Accommodation for every staff was provided by ELS. In those days no part of the sales proceeds was taken for staff support. Profit, if any, was fully ploughed back into the work for its growth and expansion. All workers were encouraged to lead a simple life style with sacrificial living while exercising faith in the loving provision of the Lord for all of their needs. The principles of Faith, Sacrifice, Fellowship and Holiness were considered as four Pillars of CLC/ ELS which all the staff members were to hold dear. In the early 1960s, the number of Indian staff in ELS including me was only six while overseas missionary staff came up to seven in number. Those missionaries were from Britain, USA, Australia and New Zealand. The names of those from India among the staff were Donald David, Grace Gabriel, S. Abraham, Noble Massey, Coral Massey and V.M. Abraham. The overseas staff members were Ida David, George MacDonald, Aileen Howard, Al Monus, Bernice Monus, Edna Turner and Dorothy Lambert. Among these people, I was the 'baby' and the only one with training from an Indian Bible seminary while most of the others had training from overseas Bible Schools. Shortly after I joined, a few more missionaries from Britain and a few Bible school graduates from within the country joined the staff and the number began to increase.

Chapter 3: Baptism, Marriage and Family

My parents belonged to the Mar Thoma Syrian Christian Church. When I was a baby, I was christened by this church. At the time when I was about sixteen years old, I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour while listening to a message in a fellowship meeting in the same church. Some of my friends as well as pastors from Pentecostal churches had spoken to me on several occasions about the believers' baptism and the need to take it. But I always told them that I had been baptized already as a baby and I was a member of the church. I thought that 'adult baptism' was for converts from other religions. In fact, for about six years after my conversion I had not given serious consideration for believers' baptism nor had I understood what the Bible teaches about it even though two of the six years were spent in a Bible seminary! Though the Bible seminary was silent on the subject, when the God of the Bible spoke to me I obeyed Him. In ELS, the staff members were encouraged to pick up books of their choice and read them- and of course to return in tact- so that they not only get spiritually enriched but also be equipped to introduce such books to customers with confidence. Once I picked up a copy of 'Normal Christian Life' by Watchman Nee and began reading it. The main emphasis of the book is based on the verse "It is no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Watchman Nee says in this book that a Christian's normal way of living ought to be a victorious spiritual life and any living standard below this is abnormal and carnal. When one really believes and fully realizes that his self has been crucified with Christ, and that he has a new life in the risen Christ, that life is one of obedience and constant victory.

While giving a wonderful exposition of the believer's life in Christ, Nee makes a casual reference from 1 Pet. 3:21 about baptism. Here the Spirit of God had inspired Apostle Peter to write that baptism is a 'pledge or response of a good conscience toward God'. As I read this portion from the Bible I felt that the Spirit of God was speaking to me afresh, especially about the lack of my response of a good conscience toward God concerning baptism. By studying the Bible I had already understood that 'baptism' is a command given by the risen Christ Jesus, to those who believe and become His disciples. Though six years had passed since I believed in Jesus as my personal Saviour, I still had not obeyed this command and my conscience began to condemn me. In response I said 'Lord, I will obey your word and testify you in the waters of baptism'. I met the pastor of the Emmanuel Methodist Church, Vepery where I was a regular worshipper at that time and shared my heart's desire. Pastor Alfred Schneck, not only made arrangements for my baptism by immersion during a Sunday service but also gave me an opportunity to share my testimony before the congregation as to how I was convinced about the need for baptism. More than 250 people attended the church service that day. After hearing my testimony a couple of American ladies came up to me and said that it was a blessing to them. Mr. Donald David, together with the staff of ELS gifted me as a token of their joy, a copy of Cruden's Complete Concordance which I use even now as a tool for reference. Besides working full time in ELS, I was also involved with Church activities. I regularly attended the Methodist Youth Fellowship and taught in the Sunday school. There was a vibrant group of young people in the Emmanuel Methodist Church in those days. Later, several of them became pastors, evangelists or Bible teachers.

Marriage

I had realized that next to my personal salvation, the most important decision I would have to make in my life was the choice of my life partner. I had prayed about it for five years before the marriage took place. I prayed to the Lord that He must show me the girl of His choice for me in His time. I was willing to wait until the Lord revealed His Will and when He did, I knew it was perfect.

In 1960, ELS had opened a branch in Bangalore and Miss Aileen Howard from U.K. was given the responsibility of managing this shop. When she was about to leave for U.K on furlough in October 1961, I was asked to take care of that Centre. In those days, Bangalore was a garden city in the real sense and it was also called the 'Retiree's Paradise'. Its climate was very pleasant and there were not many people seen moving about in the streets. The traffic also was not heavy on the roads. At many of the road junctions, there were large traffic circles full of plants with beautiful flowers. The weather in Bangalore was cool and pleasant. I enjoyed very much the move from hot Madras to cool Bangalore. The Christian fellowship, especially with the young people of Bethesda Brethren Assembly was great and very warm. However, by the

end of December that year, a couple from Madras was sent to the Bangalore center and I was asked to return to the Headquarters at Madras.

Parents' Advice to Meet The Girl

At the advice of my parents, I took a week's leave at the end of December after handing over the work to Mr. Noble Massey from Madras. After arriving at home, I was told that there was a proposal of marriage for me and I should go to the girl's house to see her. Accordingly, a friend of mine and I made a visit to the girl's house one evening and met her in the presence of her mother. Her father had gone out for some business at that time. Though we saw each other, neither of us spoke a word until I asked for her name. With a shy smile she responded "Leelamma". I felt that if I initiated a conversation with her while others were around, it would embarrass her. So our first meeting and talking ended with that one word. My friend and I enjoyed the snack and coffee she had placed on a table and left the house before it got dark. As we walked back, I felt all along the two miles to my house, that our meeting was too brief and I must meet her again before I go back to Madras. On returning home, my mother asked me "how did Leelamma look?" I answered "somewhat dark". My answer surprised my mother who knew her as a girl of fair complexion. I did not tell her that it was in dim light and that too at dusk that we saw each other. On the next day I met Leelamma's uncle who lived very close to my house and explained things to him. I also requested him to arrange another meeting between us. He, being a well-educated and broad-minded man with personal interest in this marriage, agreed readily to my request and arranged a meeting at his own house without the interference of anyone else. There, Leelamma and I spent about one hour discussing several things such as our talents, habits, interests including the possibility of her getting involved in literature work and faith life etc. Finally, at my request she sang one of her favorite songs in her melodious voice that attracted me very much to her. At the end of our meeting, we both felt that we were made for each other and the time of one hour that we spent together was too short!

On the following day I got an opportunity to 'walk and talk' with Leelamma's mother as we both happened to be walking on the same road, going in the same direction. I explained to her about my commitment for the Lord's work and the ministry which I was involved with and its bleak financial prospects etc. She could well appreciate my concerns as she and her husband, both being teachers in a school managed by the church, had to face life's struggles while being faithful to the Lord. Leelamma's father was the headmaster of the school as well as the evangelist of the same church without any special pay for his spiritual services. Church activities being mainly among the poor Dalits, the headmaster-evangelist volunteered at times to offer even financial help to those people. As committed Christians fully dedicated to their work, life was not easy for them. However, they had personal experience of the faithfulness of the Lord in providing for all their needs. So they were quite happy to give their daughter to a young man who was also committed to serve the Lord.

I returned to Madras with a photograph of Leelamma and showed it to the ELS folk while sharing the news with them. Everybody felt happy. I kept the picture in a small photo frame on the table in my room and was eager to look at it as soon as I returned from work every day! Within a couple of months, arrangements were made by my relatives along with the church representatives to meet Leelamma's people at their house and fix a date for our marriage. This was our official engagement which was done prayerfully, followed by a sumptuous meal. I was busy at work in Madras while all these things happened!

In the '60s no house in our locality had the luxury of a telephone. The mobile phone was not even invented. Since there were no other means of communication between us, I decided to write a letter to Leelamma after our engagement. As I did not get any reply, I wrote her again, but there was no response from her! When I mentioned this matter to her uncle, I was told that even though my first two letters reached her, Leelamma was not free to write a reply to her would-be husband as such free communication, especially by letters, between the boy and the girl before their marriage was considered highly unbecoming of a girl who had been brought up in an orthodox Christian family! I took it in good spirit and decided to wait patiently! After that, it took four months for us to see each other and that was on our wedding day!

Leelamma's Family back ground

Hailing from Vathallur family at Pathanapuram, Kollam District, Leelamma's father V.I. Thomas was the youngest of eight children. It was a middle class Syrian Christian family which belonged to the CMS church (Church Missionary Society) which is now known as the Church of South India (CSI). While his brothers, after obtaining themselves a reasonable education chose to follow the family's occupation of agriculture, Thomas opted for teaching profession. As soon as he completed Malayalam ninth class and the teachers' training course (TTC), he was appointed as a teacher in one of the CMS schools with a monthly salary of nine British rupees. (There existed two different currencies in those days, the state currency called 'Sarkar rupee' which was acceptable within the state only and the other one called 'British rupee' which was acceptable throughout India. The 'British rupee' was slightly higher in value than the other one). One of the priorities of the CMS church was to facilitate education for the Dalit and the backward class. With this purpose in view, the Missionary Society had established many mission schools along with their churches and often put the headmaster of the school in charge of the local church too to take care of the spiritual activities of the church especially in the absence of the ordained pastors who were few and far between in those days. When the Bishop, who was also the Manager of the schools had met Thomas for appointing him as a teacher, he might have noticed the dedication and commitment of that young man and hoped that he could certainly be put in charge of another church and mission school, sometime in the future.

Leelamma's mother P.V. Chinnamma was the oldest among the six children in Panakuzhyil family at Anicad, Pathanamthitta District. Chinnamma's father was a local evangelist in the Mar Thoma Syrian Christian church. He took keen interest in educating his children in order to enable them to secure good jobs. In those days, teaching job in a school was considered to be a decent job for an educated girl. So before attaining the age of twenty Chinnamma secured a teaching job in a mission school with a monthly salary of seven rupees. It was the norm of those days that the females were paid less than their male counterparts. Shortly after she got the job, her parents were filled with concern about the marriage of their daughter. In most cases in those days, a girl would be married off before she attained the age of twenty-one. Some Christian friends assisted Chinnamma's father in contacting Vathallur family and making a proposal to V I Thomas. The parents provided an opportunity for Thomas and Chinnamma to meet briefly, in order to ascertain whether they were willing to accept each other. Once it was done, arrangements necessary for their marriage were made as a result of which V.I.Thomas and P.V. Chinnamma became husband and wife.

Tragedy at Home

Shortly after their marriage, Thomas and Chinnamma were transferred to the same school where Thomas would be the headmaster as well as the catechist of the church. Chinnamma's parents were happy and content in that they could serve the Lord and bring up the family in godly fear. Then one day, Thomas and Chinnamma received a message saying "Chinnamma's mother is seriously ill, come home immediately". Under normal circumstances, such a message would have meant that the person had passed away already. On realizing the seriousness of the situation, the couple left for Chinnamma's home immediately. As they were approaching the home after walking for the best half of the day, they heard someone talking about funeral arrangements, but when they reached home, found Chinnamma's mother still alive though seriously ill and unconscious. However they came to know that two other members of the household had died that morning and their funeral arrangements were in progress.

Chinnamma had already lost her younger brother a year ago due to Jaundice. Now, typhoid fever had struck the family. Her three surviving brothers, her only sister and mother were afflicted, leaving the father alone to look after the sick. In those days there were neither medicines for treatment nor vaccines for prevention against enteric fever. By the time the news about her mother's condition reached Chinnamma, the elder one among her surviving brothers had died. Within the next few hours the younger sister also died leaving two dead bodies in the house as the day broke. Later in the evening both bodies were buried in the cemetery of Mar Thomas church, Anicad. After three days the mother also died, leaving the whole family and friends utterly shattered and plunging the entire village in sorrow. Thankfully no one else in the family contracted the fever and the two younger brothers slowly recovered. Even though this experience was traumatic,

Chinnamma's father held fast to his faith in the Lord as he continued with his ministry of witnessing and evangelization while taking care of his children. In the absence of a mother at home and without any regular income it was extremely hard for the aging father to take care of his two young children while faithfully carrying on the Lord's ministry. But God stood by him and proved Himself faithful. Chinnamma and Thomas, though being away, comforted the sorrowing father and offered the best possible help from their meager salary in order to top up what little he could get from his agricultural produce. Eventually both the sons secured employments and took good care of their father besides adequately providing for their own families. As a family they are loved and respected by all. God's Word "Them that honour me, I will honour" came true for Panakuzhy family as well.

Leelamma's Parents

In addition to his position as the headmaster of the mission school, the responsibility of the church as its catechist also was given to V I Thomas. All services given to the church were without any financial benefits. The congregation of the church which Thomas served was mostly of the backward class and Dalits. Many people who were considered 'untouchable' by the Syrian Christians of Kerala were brought to the fold of Christianity by the work of missionaries and godly men like him. The Church Missionary Society concentrated their mission work among such people. Even though the Syrian Christians recognized such congregations as 'Christian', they would not freely mingle with them and maintained a 'Jew-Samaritan' relationship between them. If they were invited for the wedding of a Dalit, they might show up in the church but would not join the reception nor eat with them. But Thomas and Chinnamma had a different view and they took up the challenge to identify themselves with them by loving and serving them. They would visit the houses of the backward class and Dalits irrespective of their religion and mingle freely with them. These poor people were welcome to the headmaster's house and were encouraged to sit with the rest of the family. Being Syrian Christians, the Thomas family was always accepted by the 'upper class' Christians, but as for them, they chose to serve the congregation of the poor and the 'lower class'. God gave them opportunities to serve many congregations and schools in different parts of Kerala, the last of which was CSI School, Punnaveli and Muttathumavu church in Anicad. It was by their own request that they got transferred to this school as they felt obligated to take care of Chinnamma's aging father who was alone at his home in Anicad while his two sons were away on employment outside Kerala.

In course of time God blessed the Thomas family with six children- the first three girls, the next two boys and the last one, another girl. The second daughter was born on 30th October 1942 whose pet-name was Leelamma while the name given in official records was Marykutty Thomas. However, after she got married she chose to be known as Leelamma Abraham by joining her pet name with her husband's name and dropping 'Marykutty' from her name. As days went on, life was becoming increasingly tough for her parents. The small income from their salary had to be supplemented with that of the agricultural produce from their land. In addition to his teaching and church responsibilities, her father had to work on his land in order to provide sufficient food for the family. Each child was required to assist the parents by doing whatever work he or she could do. None was supposed to remain idle.

A typical Day of the Thomas family

Even from the very early days of their family life, the Thomas family started their day at 4'O clock in the morning throughout the year. Two kerosene lamps would begin to shine in their house at 4 am, one in the kitchen and the other at the bedside of Thomas. While Chinnamma, the mother got busy with cooking, Thomas, the father would be reading and meditating on the Word of God in order to meet the spiritual needs of the family, the congregation and himself. After an hour, it was time for the family to pray together. Exactly at 5 am the father would call the name of the oldest child to rise up from bed and come for prayer. Immediately he would also start singing aloud an old well known hymn. By the time he ended the first line of the hymn, mother from the kitchen and the children from their bed would have seated themselves in the common room to join the father in singing the rest of the hymn which all of them knew by heart. The children

who were half-asleep and who had no time to even rinse their mouths would be clearing their throats and singing in different pitch! Their normally sweet voices would often sound at that time as if they were suffering from cold and sore throat! The parents' interest however, was not in the melody or harmony of the song but in getting the whole family to begin the day with a song of worship. Once the singing was over the oldest child would read a portion from the Bible and also some devotional thoughts from the church magazine, related to the reading. Thereafter the father would lead in prayer and intercession and close the session just before 6 am. Once again the mother, now accompanied by her older daughters would find their place in the kitchen while the father would start off for work either in his paddy field or in the agricultural land. The younger boys were asked to remain at home and do their studies till 8 am and then to get ready for the school. By then the father would rush back from the field, take a quick bath, eat breakfast along with the rest of the family and all of them would be off to school at 9 am carrying their lunch packs. After school every one would return home around 4.30 pm. and enjoy a snack. Once again the father would find his way to the cultivating land while the children would go out to cut grass for the cows. Every week Thomas would be away a couple of evenings preaching at fellowship meetings. Being a good preacher he was in demand for other meetings as well. Thus everyone in the family was engaged with their duties in the evenings for almost two hours daily while the mother would be cooking the evening meal and doing some odd jobs inside the house. The evening family prayer would be at 8.30 pm for about 30 minutes which would be followed by supper and then sleep.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas kept up this way of life, especially their life of devotion to the Lord and their testimony among the people till the end of their lives. Leelamma's mother lived up to the age of 91 and died in the year 2006, leaving her husband to live until he was 98 years old. He left this world in the year 2011. Both of them were buried in the same tomb they had built in advance and kept ready in the Dalit cemetery of the CSI church at Muttathumavu in Anicad.

When my foot slipped - A Testimony by Leelamma

"My parents were hard working and god-fearing. Their life was a constant challenge to us, their children. Our parents required us to also help them with chores at home along with our studies. My elder sister and I used to help our mother in the kitchen especially in the mornings while our younger brothers were encouraged to do their daily homework. Our mother being a good cook and quite brisk in her work, we girls were able to learn a lot from her, especially in the matter of making tasty food. In later days I think that when we started our own homes and we girls did our own cooking, our husbands must have been surprised at the taste of the food we cooked and also realized that there was more worth in us than they thought at the time of our first meeting! Well, that was all because of what we learnt from the mother in those early mornings. But during the evenings we all, boys and girls alike, had to go out into the field and collect sufficient grass to feed a couple of cows and a buffalo, the milk of which that remained after the use of the family was a source of additional income. As for our studies, apart from the normal school hours, the only time available to the girls was the late evenings after supper at home. By that time we were already tired and sleepy and any reading or writing had the effect of a sleeping pill! With whatever we could learn during class hours at school, my elder sister and I managed to pass the high school examination successfully though I could do it only after a second attempt. As a result, I had no confidence in continuing any further studies.

When I was 15 years of age I received the Lord Jesus Christ into my life as my Saviour while listening to a message in a Christian convention. Shortly after that, I had a dreadful experience during my 'evening duty'.

On returning from school, I went out as usual to collect the grass to feed our cows. This time, my friend Kunjumol from the neighbouring house also joined me and we decided to go to the river bank where there was plenty of good grass. The river 'Manimala' was only about ten minutes walk from our house. After cutting sufficient grass for the day, we found that there was plenty of time remaining before it got dark and we thought it was a good opportunity for us to enjoy a bit of swimming and bathing in the river before returning home. Even though we were able to swim, we lacked the confidence to enter deep waters and to swim against strong currents. So we assured each other that we would not go beyond neck-deep of water but would have a time of fun while our feet could still be on the river bed. Accordingly, we chose an area free of

strong currents and yet deep enough to swim so that we could be safe. After a few minutes of our happy exercise the sand under our feet seemed to have slipped away and both of us found ourselves moving into deep water. There was no one else nearby though at some distance there were people bathing or some standing on the river bank. We managed to swim and stay afloat for a few minutes trying hard to get our feet back on the river bed. During this process, my friend became panicky and bounced up and down a couple of times. As she bounced up she caught hold of my long hair and both of us sank together in deep water. I struggled to get her hand off my hair and somehow my hair was released. By then we were both in a very deep area and had already swallowed some water. In that condition it was nothing short of a miracle that we managed to swim and reach the bank. Having swallowed more water than our normal intake of water for two days, our stomachs were full which made the walk back home difficult! As we had no courage to tell our parents about this incident, we kept it as a secret for a long time. By this harrowing experience I came to know that God has a purpose for my life which is something greater than cutting grass and feeding the cattle. Whenever I read Psalm 94, I am reminded of my experience and keep praising God for His upholding hand on me. *“Unless the Lord had given help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said, ‘My foot is slipping’ your love, O Lord, supported me.” (Psa.94:17-18)*

Our Wedding

May 17, 1962 was the day of our wedding. A week before the wedding day, I arrived at home from Madras. ELS had sent Mr. Azariah Benjamin all the way from Madras to attend the wedding as their representative. Having traveled by train overnight and making a 15 km bus journey from the railway station, he had to walk another 5 km as the last lap of his journey to reach my house. Hardly anyone had a car in our place in those days and taxi cabs were not available easily, and so the only option was to walk from the bus station to home. A friend of mine met him at the bus station and accompanied him to my house. It was in the afternoon of the 16th that he arrived. Earlier that month, a British friend of mine, Capt. Paget, had given me a gift of Rs. 100 to purchase a wedding suit. I faithfully got the suit stitched in Madras and kept it there, so as to wear it at the time of reception in Madras, for it would look odd for people to wear a suit for weddings in Kerala in those days. On the day of the wedding, I wore a white dhoti and a white shirt while Leelamma wore a white sari that I had chosen for her. Even though it was common for a bride to wear colorful and expensive sari for her wedding, we deliberately had chosen a plain white sari. On the day of our wedding it started raining cats and dogs from early in the morning till mid day. At 10 in the morning the bridal party and the bride groom's party had to walk about two kilometers to the church, each person holding an umbrella. In the heavy rain the white sari of the bride got fairly wet and drenched. I had double protection from the rain in the form of a rain coat provided by my friend Mr. K.V. Abraham to cover my shirt and an umbrella for my head. Hence the rain coat became my wedding suit though Capt. Paget had never seen that! During the traditional marriage service held at about 11 am at the Mar Thoma Church, the pastor told me to put the wedding ring on Leelamma's finger and to tie the marriage knot (minnu kettu) on her neck after which he stated the Aaronic benediction and pronounced us as 'man and wife'. The bride's and the bridegroom's parties, numbering around 100 people altogether, walked back to my house and enjoyed the marriage feast, everyone sitting on floor mats under a pandal specially erected for the marriage reception. Even after many years, whenever we talked about our marriage and the feast that followed, Mr. Azariah Benjamin used to praise the taste of the beef fry from the fattened calf!

Our First Train Travel

The leave granted by the ELS for my marriage was over. It was time for me to return to Madras. On the day of travel I realized suddenly that this time I was not alone but had to travel with my wife. It struck me that I hadn't made any seat reservation on the train, but it was too late. When the train pulled into Ernakulam south station we looked into the third class general compartment of Cochin-Madras Mail and found it practically impossible to put my foot within the door, let alone taking my wife and our suitcase inside the train as passengers were even hanging out from the door. So we moved quickly towards the ladies' compartment where I pushed Leelamma and the suitcase in and jumped out to run back to the general compartment. I

barely managed to catch hold of the door handle and remained hanging with one foot on the door step as the train chugged off. A little while later as passengers standing at the doorway began to push in and adjust themselves I got a little space to put my second foot also firmly at the door and pushed myself in. Until then I was not sure whether my grip on the door handle would hold good till we reached the next stop so that I could see my wife once again!

That was the first train journey for Leelamma. The ladies' compartment also was quite crowded. However, she managed to share a seat with another passenger. She did not know whether I had boarded the train or of my whereabouts and naturally it gave her considerable anxiety. However, within the next thirty minutes, the train pulled into Alwaye (Aluva) station for a five minute stop. Being concerned about my wife's anxiety, I rushed out of the train to assure her through the window of her compartment that all was well and that we would see each other in Madras, if not at some intermediate station. The sense of relief that reflected on her smiling face was a great consolation for me as I returned to my standing position in the same door way. Since I was standing in the doorway I could easily get out at various stations whenever the train stopped for a few minutes and peep through the window to see if all was well with Leelamma. At times she saw me and waved happily at me and at other times, especially late in the night I saw her dozing off in her seat. For me, that travel was a standing exercise for about fourteen hours, from Ernakulam to Katpadi station. At Katpadi some seats fell vacant and I was able to sit and travel for the next three hours till we reached Madras Central station. At Madras Central we were warmly received by Bro. S. Abraham, who was the senior most member of Staff as well as the Chief Accountant of ELS. Thus ended our 'honey moon trip' by train, the thought of which cannot be erased from our memories.

Bible School Training for My Wife

One of the principles of ELS was that as far as possible, both the husband and the wife should work together in the same centre and both should have Bible School training prior to joining the mission. Therefore, Leelamma was encouraged to undergo a Bible training course first and then join with me to serve in ELS. Dr. Paul Gupta, the Founder-Director of the Hindustan Bible Institute, Madras very kindly agreed as an exceptional case to admit Leelamma into the first year BTh. class as a day scholar, and that too without charging any tuition fee. Class room lectures were only in the mornings from 7.30 to 12 noon and the students were engaged in out-door work like open air preaching, tract distribution etc. in the afternoons. Leelamma was given exemption from afternoon activities as well as staying in the students' hostel. This helped us to stay together in our quarters which were only about two km from HBI by bus route. As a good cook and a loving wife she was determined to do all the day's cooking before she left for the Bible School at 7 am each day from Monday to Friday. For one whole academic year her routine was to rise up from bed at 4 am, finish cooking by 6.30 am and leave for the school at 7 after our family prayer. During the early days, while doing her work hurriedly handling the kitchen utensils, several glass tumblers and plates slipped off her hands often and broke to pieces. Whenever such things happened she was very upset and expected a scolding from me. But to her dismay and surprise she found only a smile on the face of her husband! I was very much aware that if I had done all that work – which of course I could never have managed – the damage would have been far worse! In order to reach the Bible school, initially for a couple of days I walked with her to the bus stand and helped her board the bus. Thereafter she decided to walk by a short cut up to the Bible School. When the classes were over, she would return by a bus that stopped right in front of ELS Book shop where I used to be at work. One-way bus fare was seven naya paise which was the minimum bus fare in Madras city at that time.

Although the lectures in the class room were not very enjoyable mainly due to language problem, she thoroughly enjoyed any practical ministry whenever she got an opportunity. On one occasion, the whole school made a visit to Bellary, Karnataka for three days of village ministry. She did extremely well in distributing tracts and selling gospel portions in the villages and markets despite not having any knowledge of their local language. Later on in ELS too she had proved this special gift of sales and distribution of literature.

Leelamma's Language Problem

The medium of instruction in the Bible school was English. Leelamma's education up to the high school level was in Malayalam medium, even though she learnt English as one of the subjects. In the early days at HBI, she hardly understood anything from the lectures mainly due to her inability in grasping the meaning of many words. Her failure in catching up with the daily lessons and the lack of understanding the subject matter bothered and discouraged her and she wondered whether it was worth attending those classes at all. We discussed this problem several nights and finally I proposed a solution which she accepted out of her love and submission to the husband! We decided that the medium of communication between us was going to be English until she became capable of handling this foreign tongue fluently. Thereafter any conversation between us at home or outside was only in English. In addition to that, I also gave her a daily assignment to translate into English a few short sentences from Malayalam. In the first few months of our English conversation I got the feeling that she often 'spoke in tongues'. But it was not difficult for me to 'interpret' and understand as it used to be a literal and direct translation of Malayalam into English. But our resolution and consistent effort yielded fruit. Within six months she was able to gain a working knowledge of English, her classes became tension-free and by the time she joined ELS the language did not pose any problem for her. After successfully completing the first year of study in HBI, Leelamma was taken into ELS as a trainee. Thereafter we always had the privilege of working together.

Blessing of a Baby

It pleased the Lord to give us a baby girl in May 1964 and we named her Mercy. For the confinement Leelamma had gone to Kerala to her parents while I was in Madras. I got my annual leave only a couple of weeks after her delivery and went home to see our baby. At birth Mercy weighed less than one kilogram! As soon as I saw the baby in Leelamma's hand I kissed the baby with thanks-giving in my heart. However, before I could hold her in my hand I had to take a lesson from Leelamma about the 'skill needed to hold the baby'! So it was a great thrill for me to hold our first born for the first time. After spending my annual leave with them I returned to Madras while they continued staying with Leelamma's parents until the end of her maternity leave. During this time the parents of both of us felt that the baby must be christened in the Mar Thoma Church where my parents were members. Though they were aware of the fact that I no longer believed in infant baptism, they found out from Leelamma that I would not raise up objection to it due to my respect for our parents. Hence Mercy was 'baptized' when she was three months old. On hearing the news I left the matter with the Lord and trusted that Mercy would make her own choice on spiritual matters whenever she became capable to understand. Shortly after this ritual Leelamma and Mercy, accompanied by a friend, arrived in Madras – this time travelling in a reserved compartment unlike during our first train travel!

Contented Life

Life in Madras became tougher especially after the arrival of the baby. Even though we both were full time staff of ELS, Leelamma found it impossible to be present at ELS on a full time basis because of the baby and she needed the help of someone to take care of the baby. The ELS fellowship was very considerate about her situation and encouraged her to bring the baby with her to the office for half a day and do whatever work she can, while caring for the baby. In the afternoons she was free to go home with the baby for the rest of the day. As a couple we had planned our monthly budget just to cover the expenses of two of us. Though there was now an additional member in the family, there was not much scope to increase the income side of the budget beyond the meager allowance given for the child which did not match the increase in the expenses. Tightening the belt a bit more was our only option at that time.

The aftermath of the Indo-China war was still lingering in the country. Essential things like rice, baby food etc. were scarce in the market. Baby food, especially milk powder was not easily available. One had to produce a doctor's prescription to purchase a tin of milk. Mr. Donald David's aunt, Dr. Jones Gabriel, gladly issued us the required prescriptions which helped us to purchase the baby's milk powder produced by the Britannia Company. Trusting in the Lord we had already made a decision that we would not borrow, no

matter whatever our need be. We had resolved to be content with what the Lord is pleased to give us.

Honesty, contentment and the resolve to live within one's own means are some of the virtues that I had learned from my father. Though almost illiterate, my father was honest to the core, worked hard and provided well for the family. Long before I had read the Bible or was taught from it, the life of my father had taught me some of the great truths mentioned in the Word. My mother was a praying woman and very supportive of my father. I remember her sitting up and praying in the early hours before day-break while we children preferred to cover ourselves and sleep comfortably in the cool of the morning. I thank God for my godly parents and the legacy they left for us.

Devotional Time

As a couple we initiated together our family prayer and devotion from the very first night of our marriage. Thereafter as far as possible and practical, we had family prayer and devotion together every morning and evening. During the time of family prayer we also took special effort to encourage our children to memorize regularly a verse each from the Bible. Thus our children had the privilege of treasuring a good number of scripture texts in their heart from the early days of their lives. As family-friends and co-workers, our fellowship with the family of Mr. Azariah Benjamin was great since we shared a portion each of one large house in Madras for our residences.

Leelamma's Baptism

When she understood what the Bible teaches about the believer's baptism, Leelamma wanted to obey the Lord's command and testify Him through the waters of baptism. At that time we were worshipping along with the believers of the Apostolic Church, Vepery. At our request, that church conducted her baptism which was witnessed by many people from the church as well as from ELS. During the time of her baptism Leelamma was carrying our second baby in her womb. Hence Robin had the privilege of having 'infant baptism with our full consent' before he appeared in the world!

Growing with ELS

I had accepted literature work as my life's mission from the Lord and enjoyed my work in Evangelical Literature Service. My working hours were not guided by the clock. Working late hours was no problem for me. As time moved on, various responsibilities were given to me and I used all such opportunities to learn more and to offer more efficient service to the organization. Though I had never studied book-keeping or accountancy as a subject at school, I had an opportunity to handle the accounts of the Bangalore bookshop and also to prepare its balance sheet with the help of our auditors while I was in-charge of that shop in 1961. Within the short period of my stay in Bangalore, I was quite attracted to that city because of its weather, beauty and Christian fellowship that I enjoyed there. So in early 1968 when I was told that there was a likelihood of getting transferred to Bangalore, I was overjoyed. But that joy was short lived! Bro. S. Abraham, our chief accountant in Madras HQ had expressed his desire to retire from his job in order to go for full time evangelistic work with his brethren from Jehovah Shammah Church. Being concerned about the need to find someone to take over the responsibility from the chief accountant, Mr. Donald David discussed this development with his friend Mr. T.G. Samuel who was an elder of the church as well as a chartered accountant himself, working in Parry & Company, Madras. Mr. T.G. Samuel had already assessed my ability in handling accounts during an earlier session with me in ELS. So he advised Mr. Donald David that I was competent enough to take over from S. Abraham as the chief accountant. After consultation with the chief accountant, Donald David told me of the change of plan concerning the Bangalore office and advised me to work along with Bro. S. Abraham for a few weeks so as to take over the accounts department when he left. Deep in my heart I was sad as our hope of going to Bangalore appeared dashed. Yet, I submitted willingly.

In the meanwhile, time had come for Leelamma to go to her parent's home in Kerala as she was expecting our second child that was due within a couple of months. As a result, I remained in Madras like a bachelor sharing our quarters with another bachelor, enjoying or rather enduring the fun of cooking for a few months

Blessing of the second Baby

One fine day I received a telegram sent by Leelamma's uncle which simply read 'boy born'. I knew that her uncle was trying to make his message short and sweet for just letting me know of the arrival of our second baby. After a couple of weeks I was able to go to Kerala and see the new born baby, his sister and mother. Needless to say that everyone was excited. In the same way as we had chosen the name for Mercy before her birth, my wife and I had agreed that the second baby, if a boy, would be named as Robin. One night on hearing the cry of the baby, his sister who wanted to be near him always commented that the baby's cry sounded like the bleating of a baby goat! Mercy was four years old then. This time, on arrival at home, it was easy for me to grab Robin from Leelamma's hand and hold him firm because of the 'baby-handling training' I already had. We together thanked God for His gift. After spending a few days with Leelamma and children as well as with my parents, I returned to Madras and continued with my work.

Chapter 4: God's Direction to Bangalore

The work in Bangalore was being expanded and some changes had to be brought about in the staff situation. It was at that time, Bro. S. Abraham, the Chief Accountant realized the need of the mission and changed his mind. As such he expressed his willingness to stay with ELS for some more time. "This is an answer to our prayer in a big way", said Mr. Donald David who informed me that his earlier plan of me in Bangalore would now work out because Bro. S. Abraham was not leaving ELS as intended before. I was overjoyed with a thankful heart to God. Then I knew that God grants the desire of His children in His time. As I was willing to submit to the authority and the decision of the Fellowship, God honoured me and gave back that which I had first given up for Him. I wrote and informed Leelamma that shortly after she and the children return to Madras we would be shifting to Bangalore in order to take charge of the work there.

Life in Bangalore

In November 1968, we as a family of four took up residence in a flat just across the Book shop on Mosque Road in Frazer Town, Bangalore East. The printing unit of ELS was about six km away from the bookshop in the city area. The printing press had several staff while there was one person only to assist us in the bookshop. Leelamma took care of the bookshop while I spent my time looking after the Press and the book shop which was my responsibility. It was my routine to reach the printing press at 9 am every morning by means of the Vespa Scooter provided by ELS and take care of the proof reading and other jobs awaiting me including interacting with staff and customers. Paying attention to the staff and their problems took a good deal of my time. On most days, it was necessary to visit the city market to purchase paper or other materials for the. Because of this busy schedule, I was able to return home after 3 pm only for lunch and the much needed rest for a few minutes. Leelamma insisted always that she would wait until I return so as to eat the lunch together even if it was late, though I had advised her against it. Soon after our lunch she would go back to the book shop and stay there until I took over from her later in the evenings when she would go home. As one of the rooms in our flat was used as the office for ELS, after family prayer and dinner I would get into the office and work for at least another two hours before going to bed. That was the only time available to me to do the accounts of the bookshop and the printing unit as well as to take care of the correspondence and other jobs like preparing various forms and returns that were to be sent to the Government departments.

In the following year, it was time to start Mercy's schooling. Being ELS staff, we got special consideration in Clarence High School which was one of the best in Bangalore and only about 300 meters from our flat. On the first day, Mercy walked briskly with Leelamma to the school and sat in the LKG class with a smile though Leelamma shed a few tears while parting with the child for the day. At three in the afternoon our shop assistant would fetch Mercy from the school and take her home. Afterwards, Mercy would look after her little brother while they both played at home. Standing on the mesh-protected verandah of our first-floor flat they could see their mom serving the customers in the shop. But they were not interested in their mom giving her time to the customers. They wanted her back at home soon unless they had planned some mischief already! In a family gathering many years later, they told us the following story: "One day, mom was late in coming home from the shop. We were hungry, but we could find some cooked rice only in the kitchen. Then we grabbed a bottle of jam, scooped out some of it, mixed it with rice and started eating. As the stuff was too much we forced ourselves to finish all of it before mummy could reach home. Mom never came to know what we did and we kept this secret to ourselves". As I listened to their adventure as 'kids' I admired their ability to keep secrets to themselves as long from the shop.

Our work, though quite taxing physically, was a great delight for us. There was special joy in conducting book fairs in schools, churches and Bible schools. We had a wonderful church fellowship with the Bethesda Brethren Assembly especially with its youth fellowship. Leelamma was given an opportunity to teach in the Sunday school. Often I was asked to preach in the Assembly's Gospel meetings as well as at the youth fellowship. One evening, as I was giving a message on the second coming of Christ, the Lord spoke to our

daughter Mercy and helped her to accept Lord Jesus as her personal Saviour. Thus the Lord gave me the wonderful privilege of becoming her spiritual father as well.

Bangalore Building Project

As I kept shuttling daily between the book shop and the printing unit, the thought that captured my mind was concerning the future of the work in Bangalore. I considered the possibility of bringing both units in one place. This would save a lot of time and energy spent on the road each day. Besides, being a large set-up in a prominent place would attract more customers. By that time Mr. C.T. John was appointed as Manager of the printing unit. He too shared my opinion and showed much interest. For a growing work it was necessary to have large premises with a suitable building. Mr. Donald David, General Secretary and the ELS Fellowship as a whole gladly endorsed this view and encouraged me. All of us had plenty of enthusiasm and great vision to expand the work, and the only thing lacking was the required finance! At that point of time, in experienced as I was and having faith not even to the size of a mustard seed, I had not realized that 'the growth and expansion of a work that is being carried on by the will of God does not depend on the visible resources found in human hands'.

As we were unable to purchase a piece of land in a suitable place, we found another option to take a piece of land on a long lease from St. John's church property. Rev. Joe Mullins, the then Presbyterian of the church was very helpful and a piece of church property on St. John's Church Road was leased out to ELS. A building plan was drawn up to house the bookshop and printing press plus a couple of flats for living accommodation. The estimated cost of construction was Rs. 1,42,000 for 4600 sq.ft of built-up area. ELS HQ had kept an amount of Rs. 28,000 in reserve towards the HQ building project in Madras which was passed on to Bangalore for this new project! "Trusting in the Lord is the only way to get the remaining required funds" was the advice of the General Secretary. Even though he had warned me like this, I had pinned a lot of hope on Mr. Donald David to raise sufficient funds for this project. But to my great dismay, shortly after the project started, Donald announced that he along with his family would be going to New Zealand as missionaries of CLC U.K. In April 1972 Mr. Noble Massey, the senior most staff of ELS was appointed 'General Secretary' as the David family left India. Though Mr. Massey was supportive of the Bangalore project, none of us had any idea how the funds would come. As a provision from God the 'Scripture Literature Publishers', the Kannada publishing unit of Brethren Assemblies from Malavalli offered to share a portion of the cost of the first floor of the building if we could accommodate them in the new building. It was great to work in co-operation and fellowship with another similar organization. In order to complete the whole building we were still short of about Rs. 70,000. The construction that began in early 1972 kept progressing unhindered while our prayers kept going up to the Lord for the provision of the needed funds. In the construction plan, there were provisions to accommodate the Bookshop & Printing Press on the ground floor and the Scripture Literature Publishers as well as a two room flat for the press manager on the first floor. Moreover, if funds allowed, there was provision for a similar flat on the second floor for my family's accommodation also. As we watched the funds coming in from various sources - just in time to pay up the contractor's bill, our faith began to rise too. Never was any bill held up for want of money. However, at some stages of the construction, we almost dropped the idea of going ahead with the top floor and felt reconciled with ourselves that we would be content with staying in the old rented quarters, which was not too far from the new building. But the Lord's plan was perfect. As a final gift, a good amount of money came from CLC, USA which enabled us to complete the whole building. At the inauguration when many friends gathered for thanksgiving we had this testimony to tell that every bill of this construction was paid up fully and there was no amount outstanding from us. To the glory of God a concrete building of 4600 sq.ft. was constructed at a cost of Rs. 1,45,000 by the end of January 1973.

Baby locked up in the House

Our first accommodation was on the ground floor of a building across the old bookshop in Bangalore. On one Sunday morning, due to some unforeseen reason Leelamma and the children had to remain home while I went to attend the worship doing some meeting in Bethesda Assembly. Leelamma was washing outside, at the back of the house. Mercy who was four and a half years old, was helping her mother outside the house

while six month old Robin was sleeping inside. He woke up and crawled to the partly closed door. As he tried to open the door and reach his mom, the lower bolt of the door fell into its slot and the door got closed firmly leaving him inside and his mom and Mercy standing outside! The cry of panic from inside the house began wrenching the heart of the mother who was standing helplessly outside and calling out to comfort the child who was caught inside the house. There was a window by which they could see each other but getting in or coming out was impossible. Finally with the help of a neighbor, the door was forced open and there was great rejoicing.

House Shifting to ELS building

It was God's special provision that we were enabled to construct an additional living accommodation in the new ELS building. After first accommodating Mr. CT John and his family in the new building, we also were able to shift to the top flat in the building. While staying in Madras we shared a large house with the Benjamin family where we had a portion each and enjoyed good fellowship with them. Similarly in Bangalore also we had the privilege of sharing the same building where my family and C.T. John's family had a flat each. Here, too, there was harmony, loving fellowship and care between our families. For two families to stay side by side and work together while maintaining good fellowship is something that can be achieved by the grace of God alone. Our children also remember this and carry those good memories, having special regards for those families.

In order to help with the packing and shifting, we had a very special helper - Leelamma's father, who had come from Kerala to visit us at that time. That was also time for Robin to begin his schooling. Since we were going to on the St. John's Church campus in which the St. John's High school also was located, we secured admission for Robin in that school. We also obtained a transfer for Mercy from Clarence High School to St. John's. So on the first day of Robin's schooling, Appachan (Leelamma's father) prayed and sent him with us to the school. Having reached the "take me to the new building (meaning our house in ELS building) for one minute" while his 'Miss' very lovingly carried him off in her arms to the KG class. For many days the same episode was repeated as we dropped him at the school every morning, even though he liked the 'Miss' and the fun inside the classroom. At lunch break, Mercy brought him home and they both returned to school soon after lunch. Staying right inside the school campus was a great advantage for us as the children could find their way to the school and back by themselves.

Book shop and Printing Unit under One Roof.

The beautifully furnished Bookshop in the new building began to attract a lot more customers and the sales of literature began to shoot up. The floor space, other newly provided facilities and the infrastructure of the printing unit made our clients happier. The printing work also increased substantially. The administration of the entire work became smooth and a lot of daily travel time and energy were saved while the efficiency of work increased. Within a couple of years, there was a considerable amount of surplus money each year so that the Bangalore office was able to contribute a substantial amount to Madras HQ towards its building fund.

CHAPTER 5: NATIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLE

During the All India Conference of ELS Staff held at Madras in January 1975, the mantle of leadership fell on me as I was selected as the General Secretary. So we had to shift back to Madras. Although I had to take charge in early February my family could not move to Madras before April as the children being in school until then. So I had to make a few trips to Madras HQ and stay there for a week each time during the next three months. Finally the family also moved in by the end of April.

Schooling for Children

I approached Mrs. Clement Felix, the then Headmistress of Doveton Corrie Girls' High School in Madras for taking Mercy and Robin into her school and she obliged graciously. The children got settled in their new school which was just across the road, opposite to the ELS Bookshop. But in the following year as Robin got promoted to 1st standard, he had to be shifted to St. Mathias School, Vepery because boys were not permitted at the Doveton Girls School from 1st standard upwards.

It was always my desire to build up the work and expand it in a way that would please God. I believed that the key for the development of any work was in the united effort of dedicated people. With this in mind I began to encourage young people who were dedicated to the Lord's work with a special commitment to literature ministry to join our work. I also believed that a growing work like ELS which had its HQ in Madras ought to have a good building and premises of its own. Until now every unit of ELS except the one in Bangalore, was functioning from rented buildings. The Lord gave me a desire to look for a suitable place to locate ELS on a permanent basis. At that point in time ELS did not have more than Rs.2,000 in the bank earmarked for the HQ Building project whereas a modest amount needed for a suitable premises was over two hundred lakh rupees! However, thank God, we had more faith than funds!

New HQ Premises

One evening after a prayer meeting in Vepery Gospel Hall, I was returning home, walking along with an elderly sister Dr. Mrs. Helen Mathews who also was present at the same meeting. It was in one of the rooms at her house in Vepery that Mr. Donald David had initiated his literature ministry. During our conversation she happened to mention that the American Baptist Mission had plans to sell their land at Vepery High Road. I told her that ELS would be interested in it. On the next day, I contacted Dr. Louis Knoll, the Indian representative of the American Baptist Mission to start our negotiations. He told me that an outright sale was not possible due to the Government's restrictions under the new Urban Land Ceiling Act. But ELS being a Charitable Society, there was no problem for the ABM to part with their land in favour of ELS under a special agreement with an Irrevocable Power of Attorney! Within a couple of months the documents were prepared and got registered so that the piece of land was transferred in the name of ELS. There it was, in the heart of Madras city, very near the Central Railway Station, about 30 cents of vacant land on Vepery High Road provided by the Lord for the construction of the ELS headquarters, just for Rs. 1,00,000!

HQ Building Construction

After submitting the building plan, it took nine months for Madras Corporation to grant us the license for construction. When we received the license, many friends commented that it was a miracle to get it without 'greasing the palms' of the officials. At every stage of the HQ building project The Lord was working on our behalf throughout the various stages of the construction project. During the fund-raising process, each of the staff had contributed according to his or her ability. Without making any special appeal for money, ELS had let our people know about the building project and gave them an opportunity to participate, if anyone so wished. Many customers also came forward to make contributions. Whatever money was set apart by ELS during the past five years was utilized fully. A few Christian organizations and CLC overseas, especially of Britain and USA were the main contributors. Finally when the building got completed and dedicated in

November 1979, the total cost of this building with a floor area of 7500 sqft. was slightly over Rs. 7,00,000 only. Every bill had been paid before its dedication. There was no payment pending. God honoured our faith and answered our prayers by proving once again that His provision does not depend on any visible resources but from His unseen hand alone.

New facilities at HQ premises

The new Headquarters premises brought us various new facilities that helped faster growth. A new, large bookshop facing the Vepery High Road with parking facility for vehicles, a big warehouse to store all our publications the stock of which were held at different places hitherto, separate office space to accommodate the departments of finance, publication, mail order and packing section, General Secretary's office, prayer hall, guest room, candidate's quarters and General Secretary's residential apartment- all in one building- created the work environment most conducive. The sudden addition of a beautiful bookshop surrounded with all these facilities enabled ELS to make a big jump in its sales and distribution of literature and made it well-known in India as well as abroad.

Staff Training at Madras HQ

One of the great advantages of the new HQ was the facility to start a full-fledged Staff Training Program. So far the new staff joining ELS was given 'on the job training' only. Now with the new facilities available at the HQ, several young people could be recruited at one time and accommodated for training. Young men (bachelors) could stay in the Candidates' quarters while local girls at their homes and undergo training until they were accepted as staff. Every morning we had a training session of one hour led by one of the senior staff, assigned with a special subject. Thereafter, under close supervision, the trainees would go on with the specific jobs assigned to them. These classes were attended by every male and female candidate as well as other staff who were less experienced in the work. While the theory classes were conducted for three months, 'on the job training' continued for at least a year for every Candidate.

The subjects dealt with broadly in the theory classes:

1. The Mission aspect of CLC/ELS, its Ethos, Principles and Practices- world over
2. Understanding and appreciating the role of mission in the business of literature ministry
3. Call and commitment of the workers specifically for literature work.
4. Printing, Publishing and Distribution of Christian literature

Main thrust of Training Sessions

As the basic emphasis of CLC/ELS is Distribution of evangelical literature, only a limited time was given for lectures on publishing and hardly any time taken on the techniques of printing. The subjects dealt with briefly in the area of **publishing** were:

- a) Agreement between author and publisher on copy right, royalty payment, editing right etc.
- b) Translation, Reprint- Author's or Publisher's written permission to translate and publish a work from one language to another. Similarly the need for permission to reprint a book as an Indian edition in the same language it was originally published abroad.
- c) Freedom for anyone to reprint a book which is already in 'public domain'.

d) Publisher's responsibility- Selecting the right printers, calling for quotations, deciding the number of copies, book size, proof checking, selecting paper, preparing cover design, and binding style, fixing trade discount and retail price.

Lessons on Distribution

Majority of training sessions concentrated on the subject of Distribution. Avenues of distribution explained and taught in detail during training sessions are **Book shops, Mail order service, Book exhibitions and book fairs, Book Tables at churches, schools and convention places etc.**

Distribution through Book shop:

Some of the points to consider while establishing a book shop are its location, size, furniture, variety of stock, attractive display and suitable staff.

Sales Staff

Some of the points explained and illustrated for the benefit of every sales person are as follows: The man in charge of the shop must be well trained, **enthusiastic and willing to do any type of work** in order to build up sales and increase distribution. He must know how to dust, clean and arrange books on shelves, how to and where to **display what and replenish** the moment it is sold out. Book display in the shop as well as **window dressing** is an art which should be learned and practiced by the sales man. A staff at the sales point must **know the books** he sells. He must read as much as he can and be able to **introduce the book** to the customer highlighting the gist of the book. If he did not have a chance to read the book, he should familiarize at least with its blurb which could be quite helpful. The sales personnel must also **know their customers**, their taste in books, their interest in particular authors etc. so that such titles could be introduced to them. A sales person must be neatly dressed and **presentable before the customer**. He or she must know how to take care of a new customer popping into the shop while serving another customer. A nod of acknowledgement with a smile will prompt the new customer to wait patiently for a while so that the first customer can be satisfied before proceeding to serve the next one. A sales person must be an **honest and faithful steward**. A committed Christian bookseller knows that his **shop is his pulpit** and his congregation consists of pastors, evangelists, teachers, believers and unbelievers. His interest and commitment must be to feed every one of these with 'food (literature) suitable for them'. Study sessions on the above subjects in detail were carried out in order to equip every trainee for the future ministry.

Sales and Accounts

We observed that some of the salesmen even though very enthusiastic, were not good at book-keeping. An efficient sales man ought to have at least a working knowledge of the accounting system. Therefore special efforts were made during the training sessions to teach them how to maintain proper accounts of daily sales such as cash and credit, stock purchase, receipts and payments, banking, inventory taking at the close of the financial year and other subjects related to proper accounting.

Fruit of effective training

This way of consistent training given to batch after batch had enabled our young workers to take up important responsibilities entrusted to them in course of time and carry them out with great success. A strong and committed team of staff became the greatest asset of the ministry. As time passed on many of them became highly successful workers in India and even abroad. As leaders of the mission Leelamma and I were

privileged to give personal attention to the trainees at the HQ. Since the living quarters of the trainees was next to that of ours it was easy for us to keep an eye on those youngsters in a parental manner. We were with them in their good health and illness. We made all efforts to fulfil our earnest desire to teach and mould each one so as to integrate them into the fellowship of ELS/CLC. It is with pleasure I can say that our efforts in this matter were successful to a great extent.

A PRINTING UNIT AS A GIFT

Shortly after the dedication of the HQ building in Madras, CLC USA offered to give us a used automatic letter press unit as a gift for our Bangalore unit. Their press manager, Mr. Milan Steffle, and his son Steve Steffle, both of them engineers by profession (and practice) volunteered to come to India and set up the printing unit in Bangalore and to train our staff as required. After considerable paper work, we obtained an import license from the Government of India and the machinery packed in a 20 ft container arrived at Madras port. However, it is another story how we got it cleared through Madras Customs. Even though we had engaged Parry & Co. as our clearing agents, I had to go personally and see the customs appraiser more than ten times within the next few days. Even though all our documents were in order, the appraiser had some excuse to give me each time I met him and sent me away disappointed. It was summer time in Madras and the heat, especially in the harbour area was unbearable to me. I was already tired and worn out due to the strain and stress of the construction of the HQ building. However those trips to the harbour were inevitable until we got the container cleared. In the process, I became sick and developed bronchitis which lingered with me for a long time even after the job got done. When I realized that the appraiser was not inclined to clear it soon, I shared this problem with a friend of mine, Capt. K.M. Philip who was then working as the Captain of a ship in Madras Port Trust. He very kindly accompanied me to meet the Collector of Customs and explained the matter to him. The Collector seemed to have understood the real reason for the delay on the part of the appraiser. Having heard my story, which was substantiated by Capt. Philip and seeing all the documents in my possession, the Collector called the appraiser personally and ordered for the immediate clearance of the cargo. Within the next three hours we were able to load up the container on a truck and transport it to Bangalore the same night.

A Hole in the Wall

When the printing machine reached Bangalore, we came to realize that the door of the building was too small to take it in. We were advised not to dismantle the machine, but to take it inside as a full unit. A crane was made available to lift it from the truck. But there was no way to take it in through the narrow door. The only option was to break the wall on one side of the building and to push the machine through it in to the press hall. The large hole created in the wall for the purpose was bricked up and plastered immediately after taking the machines in.

Shortly after this, the Steffles arrived in Bangalore from the U.S and worked hard for over a month in order to set up the print unit and to ensure that it was functioning well. They stayed in the ELS building and were looked after by the Manager C.T. John and his wife. They trained up the print shop staff to take care of those automatic machines and to run them. Automation of the print unit brought great changes in the work in Bangalore and improved it very much. The Steffles returned to Madras after completing their work in Bangalore and stayed with us for a few days. During their stay, they constructed a car shed for us in the HQ premises. Everyone appreciated their technical knowledge and penchant for hard work.

Our children's education

By living in Madras city we had the great advantage of educating our children in schools of good reputation. By the grace of God they were both good at studies as well as in spiritual matters. Mercy had accepted the Lord Jesus as her Saviour while she was listening to a message. In Robin's case, it was by the reading of his

Bible. They both were involved in Sunday school activities and had participated in Church meetings. In due course of time they volunteered to testify the Lord in waters of baptism and their baptismal services were conducted by Mr. T.G. Samuel, the elder at Vepery Gospel Hall, Madras.

After passing out from 12th Standard, Mercy obtained a merit seat for BSc Nursing in CMC, Vellore. Even though the fee in CMC was very small in comparison with other colleges, our meager income was insufficient to meet Mercy's educational expenses. It had always been our resolve that we would not borrow. As we needed money for Mercy, God opened a way for us. We had two plots of land in Kerala purchased by my father in my name. We decided to sell the smaller plot and deposit that money in bank. The monthly interest from it enabled us to pay Mercy's fees at Vellore regularly. When her course of study was over the capital amount was still intact in the bank. Since her post-graduate study was after the marriage her husband took care of it.

When Robin passed out from 12th standard he got greatly interested in a local Christian music band and insisted to join it on full time basis. He did not want to attend a regular college for further studies, even though we insisted on it and managed to secure a seat for him in Loyola College, Madras. However, he was determined to continue his studies only as an external candidate through Open University. As parents, we were not convinced of its quality and success. So the matter was debated considerably between the son and the parents. Finally, Robin had his way by giving us an assurance that he would major in English literature and get a degree in first class as an external candidate. He also set a condition before us that if he got his degree in first class in the first attempt itself, we should give him a brand new motor bike as our gift! Agreed! In due course of time, Robin fulfilled his promise and enjoyed riding the new bike. Thereafter, he pursued his studies for post-graduation in Public Administration.

Our Children's Marriage

We were careful to bring up our children and lead them into their adulthood under proper discipline and godly fear. They both knew that as parents we would help them to enter into a happy married life in God's time while the final decision of choosing their spouses was their own. We as a family did not believe in the dowry system nor practiced giving or receiving any dowry. When the proposal for Mercy's marriage with Johnny was in progress, I did not know how Johnny's family viewed the matter of dowry. So I asked Johnny's father Rev. A.C. Oommen about it one day. His immediate response was "we Christians must forget about it". This gave me a feeling of assurance that there was oneness of mind between our two families. Shortly afterwards, the engagement service was held on the open terrace of our ELS quarters. Arrangements were made for the wedding to take place in the Medical College Chapel, Bagayam (Vellore) on 3rd June 1991. There was a grand reception after the wedding in the college campus. Both the families shared the cost of the reception equally between them.

Robin was only too happy that Mercy had cleared the way for him to go ahead with his proposal for Shini Yesudian. Shini's father Mr. Prakash Yesudian was a good friend of ours. Being an effective preacher in India and abroad he had been a speaker in ELS conferences more than once which made our spiritual bond stronger. In due course, both our families along with a few very close friends, met at the house of Prakash & Ranie Yesudian in Anna Nagar for the betrothal. The wedding of Robin & Shini was fixed to take place on January 8, 1992 at Emmanuel Methodist Church, Madras. On that day, Rev. Martin Alphonse, the pastor of the church, solemnized the marriage which was followed by a grand reception and a dinner of biriyani for over 700 people at the church premises. All expenses were shared equally between the two families.

At the time of their wedding, Mercy and Johnny were post graduate students in Vellore and Robin and Shini, staff members of Youth With A Mission. So the couples had to stay in their quarters in Vellore and St. Thomas Mount, Madras respectively. Thus our nest became empty by January 1992.

INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP

As the leader of ELS in India I was automatically recognized as a member of CLC's International Council. This Council has its meeting once every four years in one of the western countries. The first of such meetings I had attended was in the USA in early July 1976, which is mentioned elsewhere in these pages. The fourth such meeting that I attended was in France in 1988. At that meeting I was appointed 'Area Co-ordinator' for CLC Asia and Oceania. My service in this position was purely voluntary for CLC International besides my full time job in India as the General Secretary of ELS. Even though the work of a Co-ordinator of Asia-Pacific would take more than one's full time efforts, I was assured by the Council that I could limit it with some visits to certain countries and counselling until I could find more time for CLC. Hence the whole Council prayed for me and Leelamma (she was also present at that meeting) and committed us to the Lord for an effective service in the Asia-Pacific countries. In the following four years, the work load on me was a lot more than we expected as I had to make many visits to several countries and help CLC staff in addition to carrying on with the full responsibility of the work in India.

My Strategy of Work

In all the years of service in ELS I was always a learner, worker, trainer and leader. While leading my team I myself have learned a lot from my fellow workers and even subordinates. During the eighteen years of my leadership in India, by the grace of God, the work of ELS grew fast and became quite strong. Mr. John Silk, the then International Secretary of CLC wrote in his farewell letter, "the pace with which ELS India grew under the leadership of VM was as the speed of light".

While I strongly believed in and practiced teamwork, I always stressed that:

1. Every staff ought to be, first, a dedicated person to the Lord and then committed to evangelical literature work.
2. The work must be made self-sufficient not only financially but also with its own personnel found locally. This is because in any work, a time will come when external help by way of funding and personnel may cease. At such time the organization must be able to stand on its own feet that are already made strong by local resources.
3. The work must be planned in such a manner that it not only can grow fast and become strong, but also can replenish and reach out into other areas to help to fulfil the Great Commission.

To the best of my abilities I have tried to apply these strategies to the work in India as well as overseas, wherever I was called upon to help in training the staff.

Full time with CLC International

In 1993 January, after 18 years of leadership service in ELS I stepped down from being the General Secretary. In fact after serving three terms i.e. 12 years in leadership I had begun to urge our staff members to select another senior staff into my position. The main reason for this was my personal interest to encourage younger people with good talents to take up bigger responsibilities and to help them grow into leadership position. At that point of time there were a number of persons among the ELS staff who were capable of taking up this responsibility. But the Fellowship insisted that I must carry on at least until January 1993 when another person could take over from me after being my understudy for a certain period of time. Having learnt about this development, the CLC International Council that met in 1992 appointed me as their full time Area Co-ordinator to assume the office as soon as I handed over the ELS responsibilities. The understanding between ELS and CLC was that I being a staff of ELS, my services could be loaned to CLC in order to function as the Area Co-ordinator. As such, I would continue to receive the same salary from ELS as any senior-most staff of ELS would get and the amount would be reimbursed by CLC to ELS. I worked for the next five years in that capacity until I retired from ELS/CLC at the age of sixty.

Move to Trivandrum

Once I passed the leadership responsibility on to another person, I felt that I should stay away from Madras. I believed that if my physical proximity with our staff was allowed to continue, it might affect adversely the chances of building up a quick rapport with the Staff by the new leader. As the International Area Co-ordinator, most of my work would involve overseas travel and interaction as well as correspondence with CLC Leadership in other countries. So after considering several options in consultation with ELS for choosing an Indian city for our stay, we decided upon Trivandrum, especially as it was convenient for my travel to other Asian countries en route Colombo which could be reached by a half an hour flight from Trivandrum airport. God provided for us a new house on rent where I set up my office too. Mr. C.T. John and his wife, Marykutty were in charge of the ELS centre in Trivandrum. As we had good fellowship with them it was easy for Leelamma to help them in the bookshop in the morning time and help me with my office work in the afternoons. There were many good friends around and a healthy church fellowship too. In fact during our stay in Trivandrum the Lord guided us along with like minded believers to establish an English worship service in the newly started 'Hebron Assembly' in order to help the young people who were more conversant in the use of English than their mother tongue Malayalam. We stayed in Trivandrum for another year after our retirement from ELS/CLC and then moved into our own newly-built house in Kaviyoor in early November 1998. In spite of CLC requesting me to continue with them as Co-ordinator for Asia-Pacific even after my retirement from ELS, I politely declined the offer in order to enable another senior staff of ELS to take up my place. However at the request of CLC, I continued with them as their International Honorary Consultant for many more years.

CHAPTER 6: Overseas Travel

The very first overseas travel I made was to attend the International Council Meeting of CLC in USA. Mr. Bob Hiley, Assistant to the International Secretary had managed to purchase a Delhi–London return ticket for me on Ariana Afghan Airlines for 90 Sterling Pounds and sent me the Passenger Travel Advice (PTA). He had also made the necessary travel arrangements between London-New York and back. My maiden flight was by Indian Airlines from Madras to Delhi. At Madras airport, my father and my wife Leelamma along with our friends from ELS had come to see me off. On arrival at Delhi my cousin Mr. K.P. Thomas, an officer at Central Government Secretariat received me and took me to his flat. After a while we visited the Afghan Airlines office in order to get my ticket in accordance with the PTA. We also visited the Reserve Bank of India and obtained foreign exchange to the value of six U.S dollars which was the maximum amount allowed to anyone who chose to travel by any carrier other than Air India. At the same time, an Air India passenger could avail up to 100 dollars of foreign travel allowance! Fortunately, as I had CLC friends to take care of me in UK as well as in the US, I did not have to spend anything out of my “hard-earned” foreign exchange while I was abroad.

Airlines with Two Aircrafts Only

Ariana Afghan Airlines Company owned two aircrafts only. As this company was not a member of IATA, their passengers had to risk the consequences if they got stranded anywhere on the way, as no other airlines would come to their rescue. As funds were very limited, CLC was forced to opt for the cheapest ticket. The ground staff of the airlines in Delhi was neither courteous nor very helpful, but once inside the aircraft everything was good and the cabin crew’s behavior was quite acceptable. While flying over Pakistan I felt sick, not because of any turbulence in Pakistan’s air space, but in my stomach! The air hostess gave me a tablet to swallow and I became alright within a few minutes. By the time we landed at Kabul airport, their second aircraft was ready to take off and the passengers were transferred on to it. The flight to London departed within 30 minutes but it made a landing at Turkey’s Istanbul airport, on the way. All the passengers had to vacate the aircraft and those bound for London had to wait 45 minutes in the transit lounge before boarding the same aircraft. Finally our flight landed at London’s Heathrow airport a few minutes before its scheduled time of arrival.

I had only one suitcase as the checked in baggage. All what it contained apart from my clothes, were some mangoes for my British friends. I approached the customs counter fearing that it would not be allowed. But to my surprise no questions were asked. I came out and was warmly welcomed by my friend Mr. George MacDonald. George and his wife had worked in the sixties in ELS as CLC missionaries. George was now the Chief Accountant of CLC, U.K. and lived in Alresford, Winchester. I was their guest for the next couple of days until boarding the flight to the U.S. As the MacDonalds and their friends enjoyed the mangoes, my bag became very light for the next lap of travel. George took me to CLC HQ in London as well as to their warehouse at Alresford and introduced me to all the CLC staff. I was able to maintain good relationship with many of them thereafter.

In the flight from London to New York, I was accompanied by a staff from CLC, UK and we flew by British Airways. From JFK airport, New York, we boarded a Greyhound bus and reached Fort Washington within three hours. From the bus station at Pennsylvania, a staff from CLC, USA drove us to their HQ at Camp Hill where the founders of CLC, Ken and his wife Bessy Adams received me and provided accommodation for me in their guest room. At the International Council meetings, the next 10 days were a time of wonderful fellowship and interaction with CLC’s world leaders representing the work of nearly 50 countries of the world. The International Council meetings were held at the Missionary Retreat Centre in Poconos Mountain, about 3 hours by car from Fort Washington. MRC is located in 57 acres of semi-forest land covered with very tall Oak and Nepal trees. For meetings and accommodation, there were three buildings in the middle of that land. There were good roads and other infrastructure facilities. It was a comfortable stay there in the quiet of the nature. During the meetings, I was given the opportunity to share God’s Word as well as to present reports about the work in India including our plans for the HQ building project in Madras.

Christian Booksellers Association's Convention

CLC International Council had planned its meetings so as to enable its delegates who wished to attend the Christian Booksellers Convention in USA could do so immediately after the Council meetings. The CBA Convention was a marvellous exhibition put up jointly by most of the Christian publishers and Booksellers in the US. The huge convention centre had an area measuring many thousands of square feet fully covered with thick velvet-finish red carpet and each well decorated stall displaying Christian books and materials of music and art. It was certainly a breath-taking sight. The meetings and music concerts held in the large auditorium were exhilarating. I spent three days there along with the other CLC folk and made very useful contacts with some large publishing houses like Zondervan, Moody Press, Tyndale House, Thomas Nelson publishers etc. and obtained permission to print Indian editions of their publications or publish some of their works in Indian languages in order to make books more affordable to Indian readers. I also brought back with me a good selection of Christian music such as cassettes and records that I got from CBA. Along with the 'Scripture in Songs' cassettes from New Zealand which we had already introduced in ELS Madras shop in 1975, these new music cassettes attracted more customers. With the music from CBA now added to our range, we began to provide good audio music in the ELS shop. In fact this was how the production of Christian audio cassettes started in Madras city. All these contacts and contributions helped ELS to grow faster.

My First visit to the city of Philadelphia

Once the CBA Convention was over I had a couple of days free at the CLC HQ, Fort Washington. Mr. Bob Delancy, a senior Staff of CLC took me around to show some places particularly in Philadelphia. 1976 being the year of Bicentennial celebration of the United States of America, there was a lot of decorations and celebrations in the city. As we went up to see the Liberty Bell I felt privileged to touch the cracked part of it. The story of the Liberty Bell is that when the people heard of the news of freedom they kept on ringing this huge bell expressing their joy and excitement until the bell cracked! Thereafter it is kept as a monument. We also saw the 111 ft (33.86 m.) tall Statue of Liberty which is the second one in height to the world's tallest statue (40 m.) of Christ the Redeemer in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro.

As a traveller from overseas visiting any shopping mall in the UK and USA for the first time, I found everything too expensive! Whenever I saw a price tag on anything I was quick to do a currency conversion in my mind against Indian rupees and concluded that the price was far too high! Hence I hardly made any purchases abroad, though a few friends in the UK and the US gave me small gifts of money in order to make some purchases. However, at the request of a friend in Madras, I did purchase a small vacuum cleaner and a set of plastic plates for him and another set of plastic plates for our home use. The total cost of these purchases was around \$25 (25 U.S. dollars) and the foreign exchange allocated to me in Delhi amounted to just a fraction of it! On my return home, the remainder of the personal 'cash gift' after making the above purchases was shared with my colleagues at the HQ as a token of our fellowship.

My Second Overseas Travel with an 'Elephant'

It was in July 1980 that I went overseas for the second time. This time my friends in UK, George and Roseleen MacDonald wanted me to get them an 'elephant' from the Handicraft Centre in Madras. So I purchased a beautiful 'black tusker' carved out of wood and got it well packed in gunny so as to avoid any scratches or damage in transit. My checked-in baggage was this 'elephant' and a suit case containing some mangoes as I did on the previous occasion. Undoubtedly my British friends loved mangoes. This time I travelled by Air India - a small aircraft from Madras to Bombay and a jumbo jet from there. I felt a little bit sick as we were landing at Bombay. However, it was not as bad as it was at the first time. At Bombay airport I saw my friend Mr. Jabasing in the transit lounge issuing boarding passes to transit passengers. He helped me to secure a seat near the Emergency Exit on the plane so that I could have more leg room. I thanked him and praised God for His timely help for my long trip. The Flight left Bombay at 1.40 am, landed at Delhi for a

brief stay and then at Kuwait for one hour. The seat next to mine was occupied by an elderly Roman Catholic lady who appeared very religious. During our conversation I took the opportunity to witness to her about the Lord. She was on her way to New York. At 11.15 am local time, the plane landed at London's Heathrow airport. At the Immigration and Customs, there was no difficulty at all. The immigration officer stamped my passport within a minute and let me go. At the Baggage Claim I spotted my 'elephant' standing steady on the conveyer belt and picked it up. It was in perfect condition. But the suitcase arrived only after nearly 20 minutes. As I pushed the trolley through the green channel the customs inspector signalled that I could go through. At the exit gate George MacDonald was waiting for me and the 'elephant'. After a cup of coffee on the way, we reached CLC, Alresford just in time for their fellowship lunch. After lunch and renewal of fellowship with the folk, we went for the dedication of CLC's new house – a faith project that was undertaken with just an amount of twelve pounds in hand, I was told. In answer to the prayer of faith the Lord had supplied fifty thousand pounds for CLC within six months' period in order to purchase that house! From there we proceeded to George's house where Roseleen was very excited to have the Indian elephant and Madras mangoes. Feeling the jet lag, I went to sleep soon and woke up only next morning at about 5 am.

My First Train Journey in England

We had breakfast at 8 am and then we left for CLC warehouse to share the details of the work in India with the folk there. In the afternoon I discussed various business matters with Mr. Roger Page, the director of CLC. At 5 pm, George left me at Winchester railway station to enable me to travel to Birmingham. It was a three hour journey with very few co-passengers so that I was all alone in one section of the compartment. The second class 'no smoking' section in that train was far cleaner and more comfortable than the first class coach of Indian railways. But it was rather expensive. The second class fare for 120 miles was just over 8 pounds! The journey was very comfortable and the scenery of the countryside was very beautiful. Farms, flowers, houses, pigs, horses, cows - all were visible through the glass window as I travelled on. At Birmingham station Mr. Phil Grant, the manager of CLC met me and took me to his house for the night. The next day we visited CLC's Birmingham shop. It was quite spacious and well located in the Birmingham shopping complex. I went around browsing in the shop for one hour. It was a marvellous display. Then I had lunch with Mr. Leslie and Eileen Coley, former director of CLC UK and his wife. After lunch Les took me to the railway station and saw me off to Sheffield. At Sheffield station Mr. Geoff Williams welcomed me and took me to his house for my stay. Geoff and his wife Pauline Williams were CLC missionaries who worked with ELS Mussoorie branch for several years in the '60s. On their return from India they bought a house in Sheffield and I had good fellowship with them at their lovely home. It was Geoff who made it possible for me to enjoy the 'luxury' of having a wrist watch for the first time in my life, which was bought by him for me from the UK when he first came to India in 1961.

I left for Ipswich on the next day. Mr. Frank Hardcastle met me at the station and took me to his house where we had a time of good fellowship with his family even though I was meeting them for the first time. Mrs. Jain Hardcastle gave me a cloth map of Ipswich for Leelamma. From Ipswich I went on to Chelmsford where Mr. Allan Race met me and took me to his house where Pa Whybrow lived. It was good meeting this old saint who was the co-founder of CLC with Ken Adams. After having lunch with them I was dropped at London's Liverpool station. From there I went by Tube (London's Underground Railways) and reached St. Paul's station, London where CLC's main book shop was located. In the evening, the staff took me to the mission HQ at 201 Church Road where I stayed for a few days.

A Visit to Museums

On Friday the 18th, I boarded a public transport bus and went around for two hours, seeing the city of London. On the following day Mr. Alasdair Cameron, the Overseas Secretary of CLC took me out to see two museums in London. First we visited the London Museum. There were on display some replicas of ancient houses, kitchen, courtyard etc. of people who lived in London about ten centuries ago. It was interesting to see the kitchens of British people of that time - it was just like what we have now in the remote villages of

India. There were earthen pots and pans, firewood gathered in one corner of the kitchen and cooking pots placed on three large pieces of stone where a fire could be lit underneath the pots. Then on the afternoon of Saturday, the 19th we visited the British Museum. There, the main things that drew my attention were the Egyptian mummies and the ancient manuscripts of the Bible. I saw many mummified human bodies dating back from 3000 B.C. I also saw the earliest Bible manuscripts well preserved and displayed in glass cases to be seen by the public and to be read by those who could do so. Though I tried hard, I failed miserably in making out even a single character from it. After spending a few hours in the British Museum we went back to the CLC Headquarters.

The warm reception given and the love, care and hospitality extended to me by the Staff and friends of CLC, Britain had left in me a lasting impression of the fellowship principle that was practiced in CLC. Before visiting the U K and meeting with these white friends I had an inhibition that I being a coloured man unaccustomed to British ways would be looked down by them. However the way they, especially the Camerons and the MacDonalds, took personal interest in me proved that I was wrong. I am thankful to every one of them. Later on I understood that 'fellowship' is a strong pillar of CLC all over the world.

Missing My Flight at JFK airport

In the evening, Mr. Reggie David (younger brother of Mr. Donald David) and family came and took me to their home where I spent the night. The next day they dropped me at Heathrow airport to board a flight to New York. The duration of the flight was a little over seven hours and the plane landed at J F Kennedy airport at 4 pm (local time). As there were too many people to go through Immigration, all passengers in our flight were asked to remain aboard the aircraft for about 30 minutes. Afterwards when the passengers were allowed inside the airport building, there were long queues at the immigration as well as at the Customs. It took about two and a half hours before I could come out. By that time my connection flight to Dallas had already left. On approaching the American Airlines counter, the lady in charge was kind enough to allot a seat for me in the next flight which would arrive in Dallas at midnight. She also arranged to make an announcement at Dallas airport about my change of flight for the attention of my friends there. Brian and Ron Zuck who had come to meet me went back on hearing the announcement. At midnight they came back again, to meet my plane, after doing a 45 minute drive each way! We reached Dallas city where we stayed in a motel. Outside it was very hot - even worse than in Madras, but dry and not humid. I had good rest in the air-conditioned room and got up late on Monday morning. For breakfast, I had toast, coffee and fruit juice for \$1.55 after which I waited for being picked up and taken to the Christian Booksellers Convention.

The displays at CBA were really grand. After registering myself, I walked about the various booths and made a few contacts. At 8 am. on the next day, there was a devotional message by Mr. John White who spoke about the Word. Later, I was able to make contacts with many publishers. Some of them gave me a few complimentary copies of their books and music cassettes. During the luncheon for the Internationals next day, I met Mr. Benny Joseph and his wife Susan, and spent some time with them. Benny is a family friend from Bethesda, Bangalore and Susan, daughter of Rev. Chandapilla, also a family friend from Madras. This couple was undergoing a special course of study in the US with the David Cook Foundation. At their invitation I had dinner with them the following evening and a good time of 'catching up'.

My second time at CLC International Council Meeting

After the CBA convention, I boarded the plane for Philadelphia along with Brian Gesling, John Silk, and Peter Horne. Mr. Bob Gerry, the International Secretary of CLC met us at the airport. We had lunch together at CLC Headquarters and went down to the administrative office afterwards where we spent some time with Mr. Milan, the manager of the print shop. Thereafter, we left for Poconos for the International Council meeting. The Council meeting started on the afternoon of 26th. We had very interesting lectures for three days by Dr. Harry Conn on devotion and Mission Strategy. The Conference sessions started at 9 am each day and went on until 12 noon, with a coffee break in between. Afternoon sessions started at 3 pm with coffee and refreshments in abundance. During one or two evenings we had some play time also. I played Frisbee one

day and volleyball on another. Twice we visited a shopping mall which was roughly a 20 minute drive away. It was very interesting to see all sorts of stuff on display in such large quantities. The food at MRC was rich and very good. Conference sessions were long and sometimes uninteresting as they went on late into the night. But the reports from various fields were very stimulating. On Thursday evening at 7 pm, it was my turn for reports and slideshow. I gave the area report of Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India and showed slides of those works. It was a two hour session and everyone was thrilled about the advancement of work in India.

Chapter 7: OVERSEAS STAFF TRAINING

As Area Coordinator for CLC Asia and Australasia I had to undertake a lot of overseas travel in order to supervise and train the Staff. It was CLC's policy that whenever a leader goes abroad and spends a period of time with the local staff, his wife also should be with him as far as possible. Therefore in most of my travels, Leelamma accompanied me. This was especially helpful and effective in places where CLC had more young women than men to undergo training. Our most frequent visits were to Bangkok and Manila. Once we were in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea for two months. It was in CLC Manila and Port Moresby that we stayed for long periods and imparted systematic training to their staff.

Personally, I never enjoyed nor looked forward to long travels or sight seeing. (I must be a strange character!) In 1957 during the summer vacations of the Bible School, my friend Theodore Williams from Madras took me to his city to introduce me to ELS, Madras. That was my first visit to Madras city. During our spare time Theodore was quite eager to take me to various interesting spots in the city. After moving about for a few hours in the hot sun, I gently suggested to my friend that we should go back. Theodore was greatly surprised and made a remark: "it seems I am more interested in showing you Madras city than you are in seeing it"! However I did enjoy spending some time later in the evening at Marina beach watching the waves! My attitude to travel and sightseeing has never changed.

In spite of this attitude, it is ironical that the Lord has enabled me to travel to more than twenty-one countries in different parts of the globe. To some of those countries, I made several trips. I could visit at least fifteen of these countries along with Leelamma. Unlike me, she loves travelling and sightseeing as long as I am with her. Every time I travelled, it was for the accomplishment of a specific purpose in the Lord's work and I fully concentrated on it. Although my overseas travels were spread out to a 25-year period starting from 1976, it was during the 10 years between 1988 and 1998 that I had to make most of them without much gap in between up and down journeys. In all those trips the protecting hand of God was upon and underneath us. There were no mishaps anywhere except on a couple of occasions when my checked-in baggage did not arrive in time. However the airlines concerned had promptly compensated me to make sure that I had sufficient clothes to wear until the baggage arrived!

The countries to which I have travelled so far are Australia, Brazil, China, Colombia, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, Netherlands, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, UK and U.S.A. The trips to western countries were mainly to participate in CLC conferences and share messages as well as to present reports of the work in Asia and Australasia. The purpose of my visits to Asian & Pacific countries was to attend their regional conferences as their guest speaker as well as to spend some time with them, training their staff.

Effective Training

Several weeks of intensive literature training was given to the staff of CLC Philippines, Papua New Guinea and Tanzania. In other countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Myanmar and Sri Lanka while the personal training input was for shorter periods, considerable effort was made through e-mail follow-up. In all my travels and interaction with CLC workers in Asian and Australasian countries I found the following things in common:-

- 1) The staff in general displayed personal enthusiasm and commitment
- 2) The leaders lacked a driving force as well as clear understanding of financial management
- 3) Book-keeping standards were weak and financial management unfocused.

Recognizing this, the emphasis I gave while imparting training was to build on the enthusiasm and dedication of the staff with the much needed management skill and financial discipline. In the years that followed such training sessions and practical guidance became very effective and fruitful in the work in Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar and PNG as we can see now.

A few Topics of Training

Personnel Management, Stewardship, Financial Management and Accounts were some of the topics which I tried to teach during the training sessions abroad. I thank the Lord that I was able to do this from my experience even though personally I have not undergone any formal course of study in administration or management. Due to the commitment and dedication of CLC staff, actually there was no need for much training on personnel management. Therefore I could spend more time on the other subjects. I have put down a few details of what I learnt during my journey.

Stewardship and Financial Management

Faithfulness is the hall mark of a steward. “Moreover it is required in stewards that a man should be found faithful.” (1Cor.4:2) Money is a wonderful resource given to man by God. The wise king Solomon said “... he who gathers money little by little makes it grow” (Pro.13:11). Like the servant with the five talents, some people have the capacity to put money to work and make it grow fast. There are others equally faithful, yet may not be financial wizards. But when the master calls each one to give account, it is expected from a faithful servant that at least he had put the money in the bank and earned some interest. During the early nineties I had encouraged the Filipino Staff of CLC to do likewise and their bank deposits grew significantly in a matter of a few years. Although the Christian Associations or Trusts are not created to make profit, a reasonable amount of profit or surplus income is bound to be there, if its activities are carried out well. “All hard work brings a profit...” (Pro.14:23) and that helps the work to grow.

Just and Fair Expenditure

Many Christian organizations are inhibited with the idea that their Staff can be paid a lesser salary than what their counter parts elsewhere receive so that more funds could be made available for other purposes. This is acceptable when the organization is struggling to make both ends meet. But when there are sufficient funds made available by the activities of the organization, the Staff who had worked to make it possible must also be paid accordingly.

Salaries of the Staff as well as other overhead expenditure must be in proportion to the sales income so that the Staff will be satisfied in the fairness of the management. In order to determine salaries and overhead expenditure without jeopardizing the exchequer, one may look into the percentage paid on such heads from the sales income of the previous year. Allow a small percent of sales towards yearly surplus also. If the quantum of the present salary is found reasonable, then fix the same percentage for the coming years and stick to it year by year. If the present salary is low, make a small increase in the above percentage each year until a standard rate is reached. The percentage of surplus would be down to the extent of increase made in overheads. Once a standard rate is fixed the yearly increase in salary will be in proportion to the increase/decrease of the sales income which can be boosted by hard work and enthusiasm. As soon as I took up the leadership of ELS in 1975, we tried this system and the practice is still going on to the great satisfaction of the staff.

Transparency of Accounts

Every organization ought to maintain proper books on accounts and follow the accepted procedure of recording it. The hands of those who are in charge of the organization or those who handle money ought to be absolutely clean, and their lives above board. Their account books, cash box and bank balance must be open to scrutiny at all times and be transparent. In fact their cash box and books must be checked periodically and verified in their presence by other persons authorized to do so. Cash found in the box must be counted daily

and tallied with the book. Banking must be done as often as required and reconciliation of accounts to be made on a monthly basis at least.

It is a common practice for the executives or managers to avail 'advance cash' for emergency expenses and return the remaining cash along with the relevant expenditure voucher at the earliest. Such 'top' persons are expected to be absolutely honest, transparent and faithful. Many years ago I heard someone telling the story of a company executive who took a cash advance from his accountant for an 'emergency'. His father's funeral was to take place on the following day for which he needed a considerable amount of money. The cash advance from the company made the going smooth. After a few days the accountant reminded his chief about the cash advance to which his prompt reply was to write it off as company expense. "Yes sir, but under which head of expense to write?" asked the accountant. The executive thought for a while about the cost of coffin etc. and said "under packing and forwarding"!

Christian organizations normally place a high degree of trust on the integrity of their staff. Though this is good, the one in charge ought to be very alert in this area so that he may not be deceived by any of the trusted ones. In the early days of my leadership a 'spiritual' brother was put in charge of cash. No one seemed to have a second thought about his integrity and trustworthiness. He had maintained the accounts well and kept the cash book up to date except the bank reconciliation statement. Whenever I asked for it, he gave me evasive answers such as "I was too busy" or "I shall do it soon" etc. My implicit trust in him made me to accept his words blindly. After a few months, when the chief accountant himself did the bank reconciliation at my request, we were greatly shocked to detect the defalcation of a large sum of money. We spent considerable time interrogating and probing the cashier before he could admit that he had misappropriated the mission's fund deliberately. Even though firm action was taken against him immediately, it was a big loss for the mission. From this incident I had learnt two lessons:

- a) Personally, I could be deceived easily by a seemingly trust-worthy person.
- b) When dealing with financial matters, proper and up-to-date records must be maintained without any excuses.

Purchase Procedure

All purchases ought to be through written purchase order, incoming stock verified against the supplier's bill by another person and payment made by yet another, thus involving at least three persons in an ordinary purchase process. In most organizations there will be a 'purchase procedure manual' especially for heavy purchases which the management must follow.

Complying with statutory requirements

The law of the land requires that the accounts of a Company, Society or Trust be annually audited and certified by a chartered accountant. Such financial statements along with the balance sheet and auditor's report should be submitted to the government departments as required in due time. While preparing the statements one must make every effort to produce as much details as possible. A well prepared balance sheet with elaborate and fully documented statements displays greater transparency and gives satisfaction to the persons concerned. It was our learned and enthusiastic Chartered Accountant Lokendra Rao -now no more- who gave me this idea. At the fag end of the year 1980 when he took up the statutory audit work of ELS, to my surprise he extracted every detail from the book of accounts and typed out, stamped and bound as a book containing more than 100 pages as an annexure to the balance sheet. He then explained to me the need and value of such elaborate documents. Later on when he produced the same before the Assessment Officer of the Income Tax department, the officer was not only pleased greatly, but specially congratulated him for such a 'clean, comprehensive and transparent job'. Those documents enabled the officer to complete the assessment with considerable ease.

Timely filing of the Returns

While filing the Returns with various departments of the government, care must be taken to ensure that the records are flawless and submitted on time and are acknowledged properly. If the question of any tax payment arises, a shrewd and knowledgeable chartered accountant would take the necessary steps to apply all provisions available in the Act to avoid the payment of tax. However, in spite of such provisions, if there is any tax due to ‘Caesar’, one must pay up and never try to evade it. When dealing with the government departments, one must make it doubly sure that everything submitted is accurate, timely and satisfactory, leaving no room for any questions at a later stage.

From my early days in ELS and later on with CLC, I got opportunities within and outside India to attend several workshops and management seminars on literature work such as publishing, distribution and financial management. In one of such Financial Management Seminars, while talking on the subject of complying with government requirements on charitable societies, I remember a story told by the resource person who was a chartered accountant. This time, it was the story of the funeral of a mother-in-law. As the funeral arrangements were in progress, the relatives asked the daughter-in-law about her opinion concerning the mode of disposal of the body. Since there were two options she was asked whether she wanted it cremated or buried. Knowing fully well the nature, attitude and behavior of her mother-in-law, the daughter-in-law promptly said “both” and then explained “first cremate and then bury the ashes deep down”. She wanted to make 200% sure that no trace of the mother-in-law was left behind to harass her in future!

VISIT TO PHILIPPINES AND KOREA

Philippines is the only ‘Christian country’ in Asia. Total population is about 75 million of which nearly 93% are Christians, 5% Muslims and the others Spiritists etc. Roman Catholics form the majority of the Christians and Evangelical Christians account for about 12%. The literacy rate is 95%. As far as I know this is the only country in the world where ‘crucifixion’ of human beings is still practiced by the Roman Catholic Church during the Passion Week every year! The victim undergoes penance, imitating Christ by being flogged and by bearing a cross, but is not allowed to die on the cross. The Roman Catholics in Spain used to practice ‘crucifixion’ but not anymore. During one of my visits to Philippines, I was appalled to see devotees being flogged and mocked and led in a procession bearing their crosses, to their place of ‘crucifixion’ at the premises of a Roman Catholic Church in Metro Manila.

CLC’s Beginning in Manila

CLC USA had started its work in Metro Manila in the year 1957. It began with a printing unit and a bookshop. After a few years, the printing unit was closed down and they carried on with the book shop and publication work. Until the late ‘80s, the work was mainly manned by American and British missionary personnel along with a few local Staff. Thereafter, the responsibilities were passed on to the local staff as the missionaries left. However, financial support from the USA continued to come in. Owing to various reasons among which the lack of capable and skilled leaders was the main one, the work began to go downhill rapidly. At the beginning of the ‘90s it was on the verge of closing down. So CLC’s International Council appointed a delegation to go to Manila and evaluate the situation so that a decision could be reached about the future of the work.

Mr. Peter Horne (International Secretary), Mr. Frans Kairupan (leader of CLC Indonesia) and I (Area Coordinator for Asia) spent a few days in Manila. We submitted our assessment report which indicated the possibility of a revival of the work, if capable leadership is developed. No one wanted to see the work in this country closed. The young team that consisted entirely of local staff was very enthusiastic and willing to make sacrifices to see the work continued. One of them had said during our discussion “it is CLC’s blood that runs in our veins and we are willing to do anything to revive the work”. After much deliberation, CLC international requested me to make myself available to train the young team and help build up this work. Challenged by the enthusiasm and sincerity of the young team and moved by the great need of the land I agreed to do my best, trusting in the Lord.

Thereafter, I was literally sitting with the Filipino staff and teaching them all the aspects of literature work, by giving lectures, notes etc. and showing them practical ways of display, sales and more particularly how to maintain proper accounts and to discipline themselves so as to avoid wasteful expenditure. After spending about ten days at a time, I used to return to India to take care of other responsibilities. In between the trips I had constant contact with the staff by e-mail, especially checking the statements of accounts they were producing as per the format I gave them. They were taught how to maintain proper account books, build up funds through savings bank accounts, increase sales, publication and distribution, pay bills promptly, clear outstanding debts and not to enter into new debts. Personally, I was very encouraged by the positive responses of the young staff. They strictly adhered to my instructions and maintained good discipline. In the next few years I made several trips with longer periods of stay and continued the process of team building. Leelamma joined me whenever I stayed for longer periods. It was marvelous to see the growth of the work in Philippines in the '90s. A few male staff joined the female-dominated personnel, literature distribution increased by leaps and bounds and their financial status rose up. Within ten years or so a beautiful HQ building was constructed replacing the old dilapidated premises in Karuhatan, Metro Manila. Several book centers opened in other cities as well. Mr. Romualdo Macinas, a young man and his wife Deeda to whom I gave special training especially with accounts have emerged as International leaders. At present, Mr. Romualdo Macinas is not only the Director of the work in Philippines but also that of CLC Asia.

SOUTH KOREA

In 1992 I visited Seoul, the capital of South Korea for the second time. As the aircraft loses altitude and approaches the city for landing, the first sight that catches any one's attention especially at night is the array of neon lighted crosses at the steeples of many church buildings. The population of South Korea is about 46 million. More than 40% of the population is Protestant Christians. There are many churches in the city of Seoul. Everybody in the country is literate. About 35% of the population does not claim to have any religion. Nearly 23% of people are Buddhists. The tallest building in the city with sixty-three floors is owned by a Christian. The influence of the Church is quite strong in South Korea.

'Assemblies of God' is the largest Church in South Korea. Its chief Pastor was Paul Yongi Cho – who has now changed his name to David Yongi Cho. The membership of this church runs into several lakhs. In order to enable all the believers to attend the church service at the same time, it is held in a multi-storey building with CCTV facilities in all its levels. There are many services throughout the day for the convenience of the congregations, each service an hour-long, with a short break in between and assisted by many pastors. There is a continuous flow of worshippers on Sundays onto the various levels of the church building. I had the opportunity to attend one of those services which lasted for one hour when Rev. David Yongi Cho himself was the preacher. The three main points of his sermon that day were – Jesus Christ gives life, Jesus gives health and Jesus gives wealth. He ended his message with a call to come to Jesus!

Prayer Mountains

Most Korean churches have their own Prayer Mountains - away from the church premises. 'Prayer Mountains' are just retreat centers built and managed by various churches in order to provide their congregation with facilities for retreats, extended time of prayer etc. It is not necessarily built on any mountains! They have conference halls and living accommodation at these centers. All the participants sit on floor for prayer. In winter these floors are electrically heated up when people want to use them as they would become too cold otherwise. Rooms are available for those who want to stay. Everybody sleeps on the floor using mattresses. In the dining hall, sticky rice, sea weed, kimchee and soup are served three times a day. Soft drinks and coffee/tea are available through vending machines. The cost is low compared to that of hotels. Hundreds of people come to these centers regularly for Bible study, prayer and seminars. This is the life style of all Korean Christians irrespective of their church affiliations.

Korean Prayer Meetings

It is a common practice in all Korean Protestant churches for the congregation to pray together aloud during their prayer meetings. First the pastor announces some prayer points. Immediately everybody starts praying together in a loud voice until the pastor presses a bell. The moment the bell sounds everybody stops praying and there will be absolute silence!

At the Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dr. Young Ho Park the leader of CLC, Korea, is also the pastor of this church. At a midweek prayer meeting of this church which was attended by about 40 people, mostly women, I also was present as a visitor and guest of the Pastor. After the meeting the pastor took me to the church office and showed me an old photograph displayed there. The black and white picture showed the faces of 84 former pastors of the Korean Presbyterian church who were martyred either by Japanese soldiers or by communists. These men stood for their faith and became martyrs for Jesus Christ. Today the Korean church is quite strong and is a missionary-sending church. It once again confirms the saying “the blood of Christian martyrs is the seed bed of the church”.

CLC Conference at the Prayer Mountain

Early in November 1992, CLC held their staff conference at the Presbyterian Prayer Mountain. Mr. Peter Horne, the International Secretary of CLC and I were their special guests. We reached the Center at 10.10 pm and found that the session was in progress and all the staff of CLC numbering about 15 were present. Everyone was seated on the floor which was heated up as it was winter and the temperature outside was freezing cold. At 10.30 pm I was asked to preach which I did for about thirty minutes. Afterwards we all prayed together, each one praying loudly, as all Koreans do and concluded the meeting with the prayer that the Lord had taught His disciples.

Peter and I were given a room to share. Mattresses were provided for us as we had to sleep on the heated floor. The next morning at 8 o’ clock there was breakfast for everybody. The menu was sticky rice and soup with kimchee and seaweed. It was the same menu for lunch and dinner as well. Sticky rice can be rolled in seaweeds and eaten with kimchee, like the Indians take pickle with their food. Koreans eat kimchee, which is hot and spicy, with every meal and that too in large quantities. As we were their special guests, someone brought us a cup of coffee and biscuits to top up our breakfast and a piece of meat at lunch time- maybe to make sure that we were kept fit!

After the day’s conference we were taken for a Bible Class session in another church at 6.30 pm. Over one hundred young people attend that Bible class quite regularly for four days a week at which Dr. Young Ho Park was the teacher. That night we, the guests, were asked to speak about our mission. After sharing with them about the work of CLC in over 52 countries of the world including that of South Korea we proceeded to a hotel for dinner at the expense of one of the Board members of CLC and reached thereafter our room at the Korean Centre for World Mission.

Christian Literature Scene in South Korea

CLC has a large publishing house in Seoul. It is probably the largest Christian publishing House in South Korea. Its director is Rev. Dr. Young Ho Park. All the literature published here is in Korean. Theological books are the main publications of CLC which are distributed through the many Bible Seminaries and schools as well as book shops. CLC does not run any retail book shop, but there are plenty of other Christian book shops in the country.

The Word of Life Press (TEAM Mission) opened a bookshop in May 1992 with a carpet floor space of 13,000 sqft. on the first floor of a building with a stock of 20,000 titles. They have a few English titles also on

display. Every month around 120 new titles are added. They have 25 staff members who claim that theirs is the largest Christian book shop in Asia.

Another Christian shop named Emmaus Book shop, half the size of the above, is again located on the first floor of another building and owned by an individual. There are six similar book shops located in one area, close to each other. All of them have good sales of literature.

A Korean Restaurant

Dr. Young Ho Park took me and my friend to a restaurant one day. The day was cold and snowy. The restaurant had four level car parking facility and heating system. Elevators were available on each floor. More than fifty varieties of food were set up in buffet style. They looked very attractive and delicious. There were thin slices of raw red beef as well as raw liver. Dr. Park liked to eat raw meat. But we preferred it cooked. A customer can have any number of courses, starting with a little of a few items of his choice and for each new course the waiter would offer a new plate and cutlery.

People's age, the Korean and Japanese way

According to Koreans, the age of a new born baby is one year. When the mother conceives, life comes to the baby and when that baby arrives in the world it is one year old! However for Japanese it is a bit different. Their age is based on the calendar year. The year in which a baby is born makes the first year for the child. For example, if a child is born on 31st December, it is already one year old and from the first day of January that child begins to run its second year of life.

Koreans normally work longer hours – on an average, ten to twelve hours a day. Shops are open up to eleven at night. Their roads are very good and well lit, with many four-lane double roads of long stretches. Traffic rules are well observed.

International Prayer Mountain

In July 1995 when Leelamma and I visited CLC, Seoul, we had an opportunity to see the International Prayer Mountain. This is the prayer mountain of David Yongi Chos' church which belongs to the Assemblies of God. Once a burial ground of 96 acres, it is now owned by David Yongi Cho's church. When Yongi Cho's mother-in-law died she was buried in this place. This prayer mountain has 16 chapels for prayer and 300 cottages for people to stay in. Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays are special days of ministry – when normally 2000 to 3000 people stay on for meetings. The main building for prayer/retreat is called "Noah's Ark" and the dormitory 'Agape House'. There were 145 full-time workers. Long sessions of prayer take place at the Prayer Mountain throughout day and night.

Our Worship at West Gate Brethren Assembly

On Sunday 23rd July 1995 one of the staff from CLC took us to West Gate Assembly for worship. There were about 160 Brethren Assemblies in South Korea. In Seoul itself, there were 26 Assemblies. West Gate was the biggest of all with nearly 300 members. At least 230 believers were regular participants of worship services at West Gate. They normally spend the whole day of Sunday together by starting with the Sunday school at 9 am followed by Bible study, preaching etc. until lunch time. After having lunch together, they take part in Worship service and Breaking of Bread from 1 to 2 pm. in the afternoon. Thereafter, it is time for the ministry of the Word followed by young people's meeting etc. As we reached the Assembly two of the Elders welcomed us warmly and gave us special seats on a sofa placed in front. Everyone else – approximately 250 believers including the Elders - sat on the floor as per their custom and went on worshipping by singing, reading from the Scriptures and praising God. There was no preaching or exhortation in between. All the

ladies had their heads covered. There was a girl playing piano for each song. After the Breaking of Bread service I was asked to minister the Word which I did for about 30 minutes. At 3 pm that session was over and people got up for a break. We really enjoyed that worship time at the Korean Brethren church. As we were leaving, the Elders gave me a gift of 100,000 Won (Korean currency) which was equivalent to about US \$120.

Our Visit to Korean Border

Returning from the International Prayer Mountain we passed through the Unification Road by the border of South Korea. A river in between South and North Korea separates the two countries. There are very long stretches of barbed wire fence on either side of the river, separating and protecting South and North Korea from each other. On the South Korean side, parallel to the barbed wire fence is a road called Freedom Road. Leelamma and I, along with our Korean friend stood at the side of this road and had a good view of the North Korean city and its high-rise buildings. There were security guards posted on either side of these borders. They watch each other through binoculars and shout at each other often with abusive words through the mega phones though at times they exchange pleasantries between them as well! While standing on the Freedom Road we lifted our hearts to the Lord and prayed for the freedom of North Korea.

Fringe Benefits of Travel

By fringe benefits, I do not mean bags, paper, pens or chocolate and the like we receive from hotels or at conferences. What I mean is the special advantage of making unscheduled visits of places or persons not included in the itinerary and gathering information and insight during the free time one gets while carrying out the assignments of the planned visit.

In 1991 while visiting CLC Philippines on a special assignment, Mr. Peter Horne and I were invited to be delegates of the CCOWE (Chinese Churches On World Evangelism) Conference at the Philippines International Conference Center. The Conference had special plans for the delegates for Sunday the 14th of July to attend various church services in Metro Manila. 22 buses were ready at 8.00 in the morning to take all the delegates to different churches. Our group was taken to the Filipino Free Church – a church established specially for the urban poor. On arrival at the church the Pastor invited all the 60 delegates to come to the front part of the congregation and he warmly welcomed us. The service ended by 10.30 am and we, the delegates, were given snacks and soft drinks. There was one Indian family (Hindi speaking) in that Church. In the afternoon some of us were led by the staff of the Filipino Campus Crusade for Christ to one of their work places in the city. We visited a middle class Filipino home where the Campus Crusade staff conducted Bible classes regularly.

Visit to the Smoky Mountain

The CCOWE arranged another trip for the delegates to see the work among the urban poor. It was the work of Youth With A Mission. They showed us a video about the care given to the poor in Metro Manila. The scenes were right from the Smoky Mountain.

For many years all the waste materials and rubbish of Manila city had been dumped in a large area at one end of the city. In course of time the heap of waste accumulated and appeared like a mountain. At various places it began to produce gas which caught fire and gave out smoke. Thus it came to be known as Smoky Mountain. The heavy rains of Manila often put the fire off or keep it under control. However the rising smoke, the stench of waste and the flow of filthy water during the rains make life quite miserable there. This large ground of waste materials had attracted a great many rag pickers who seemed to have collected considerable merchandise from this waste heap for their livelihood. Eventually many of these urban poor found this place ‘suitable’ for their dwelling because they could eke out a living from there. Many of them

made make-shift houses there and in course of time the entire Smoky Mountain has become a colony of slum dwellers.

Youth With A Mission had a burden for these people on Smoky Mountain. There are hundreds of despised and neglected families living in the comfort of their cozy homes on this mountain. Their children have not attended school and do not have any medical facilities, or even primary health care. None had reached out to these people to show them any care. They lived without any hope in this world nor in the world to come. YWAM, with its great vision to reach out to them, had established a school for these children, provided basic health care for all, built a community center and a church building for worship. From YWAM's office, we delegates took a walk through this 'mountain' and saw wooden houses with carpeted floor, television, refrigerator etc. We also smelt the stench of filth all around us and had to cross dirty water flowing in between these houses. In the open and free areas on the mountain, small fires appeared and smoke kept rising here and there. The YWAM workers lived right on this mountain identifying themselves with the other slum dwellers making friends with them and caring for their health, children's education as well as social and spiritual needs. As a result of such demonstration of practical Christianity many of those people listened to the Gospel and accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

A Memorable lunch in Indonesia

In 1995 during a trip to Indonesia I had an opportunity to visit CLC's work in several cities such as Surabaya, Medan, Palankaraya in Kalimantan, Palembang and Manado which is a small city on the coast. Its country side looks like Kerala or Sri Lanka with lots of coconut trees and clove plants. Most of the houses - like in the other parts of Indonesia- are tin-roofed. The Christian population in Manado is larger than in other Indonesian cities. A number of church buildings were seen as we drove into the city from the airport.

Having spent a day in YAKIN (Indonesian name for CLC shop) Mr. Frans Kairupan wanted me to see another protestant Christian book shop about 12 km away, up in the hills. On both sides of the road there were plenty of clove trees. There was a market selling dog's meat, not very far from the bookshop. It was a strange sight for me to see for the first time in my life, the whole meat of several dogs, with all the skin burnt off, hanging above the butcher's table in readiness to be sold at \$1 per kilo. Out of curiosity, I went near the stuff for a closer look, tolerating the nauseating smell emanating from it and took a picture of the hanging 'dogs'. I told myself how insecure even a watch dog could be there as it can be put up at any time for sale in such a meat market!

On the following day there was a big celebration in the house of Mr. Frans Kairupan's uncle. Frans and I were invited for lunch there. It was the baptism celebration of the uncle's two grand children. The uncle was apparently quite rich and very popular in that town. On arrival, we found that a lot of people had already gathered in his large and well decorated house. A buffet style lunch was made ready and those who had gathered were just waiting for a short introduction and prayer. Once again I was amazed to see two huge, well cooked pork barbeque hanging by the bamboo poles inserted right through them. The heads, ears, legs and tails of both pigs were in place, though well burnt. There was also plenty of rice and other dishes to choose from. A plate full of dog's meat made pepper fry was kept at one end of the table as a special delicacy. Within a few minutes after the prayer there was a bee line of people with knife and fork in hand 'attacking the pigs' and filling their plates with barbequed pork and dog's meat. I preferred to be a vegetarian at that great feast!

Chapter 8: VISITS INTO THE CLOSED COUNTRIES

The People's Republic of China

After a successful 4 day Area Conference of CLC International in Hong Kong, leaders from nine countries made a one day trip to Canton on 5th September 1994. We were eleven visitors with three Christian friends from Hong Kong as our guides. During the fellowship meeting time at CLC Hong Kong in the evening of the previous day, Rev. Timothy Springer gave us some advice and tips for our China trip. He warned us that Chinese people generally do not like to be contradicted during our conversation with them. A spirit of pride is inherent in the Chinese. One needs great humility to convey any message to these people. One must be sensitive and creative while talking to them. For example, it is better to say to a Chinese "I am in need of your help; I want to learn from you" than saying "can I help you?" or "what can I do for you?"

The purpose of our visit was mainly to create a special burden for China in the hearts of our leaders by walking on Chinese soil with Christian literature in our hands as a token of the literature ministry we wished to extend to the suffering Church in China.

Chinese visas were obtained from Hong Kong within a few hours of application. A three-hour train trip from Hong Kong took us to Canton city (Chinese name Guangzhou) at about 10.30 am. Each one of us had some gift-wrapped Chinese literature or Bibles in our carry-on bags. According to Communist China any literature published outside the Republic of China is counter revolutionary; hence persons found possessing such literature inside China are liable to be prosecuted.

With a mixed sense of fear and excitement each of us approached different counters of immigration prayerfully and then passed through the customs while the officials were watching each visitor, yet not questioning or opening our bags! With praise in our hearts all of us passed the customs area and walked through the corridors of Canton Railway station as though we were strangers to each other. We re-grouped and talked with each other only at the taxi stand outside the station.

Meeting with Pastor Samuel Lamb

A thirty-minute taxi drive and a little walk through the crowded streets took us to the second floor of the house church of Pastor Samuel Lamb who was very happy to meet us and receive all the literature we brought with us. His biography was written by Ken Andersen and published by Zondervan Publishing House in 1991 with the caption BOLD AS A LAMB. Pastor Lamb now 70 years old, had been imprisoned twice in life – the second term being 20 years in a Chinese prison for the cause of Christ. He was released in 1978. Two years prior to his release his wife went to be with the Lord. The underground church that met at the residence of Pastor Lamb had about 1400 members. For want of space for all these to gather together at one time in the small old three-floor house, the congregant was split into three groups of about 500 each which filled all the three floors three times i.e morning, afternoon and evening on Sundays and some week days as well. 80% of the congregation was comprised of young people. Every month they had a baptism service. Many young believers were being added to the church constantly. One day Pastor Lamb had conducted 169 baptisms. So far he had baptized 2000 believers. Dr. Billy Graham was a special visitor to this church in 1978 when Pastor Lamb translated his message into Mandarin. After a time of fellowship and prayer with Pastor Lamb we returned back safely to Hong Kong by 9 pm.

The suffering Church in China

The suffering of the church still continues in China though less intensive now-a-days. Millions of believers in thousands of underground churches do not have freedom of worship nor are they allowed to proclaim the Gospel. After many years in prison, Pastor Lamb is still called up for interrogation once in a while. The Chinese secret police continues to raid his house and take away Bibles and biblical literature. The underground churches are being pressurized by the TSPM to come under the mainstream of Government

approved churches known as 'Three Self Church'. The TSPM (Three Self Patriotic Movement) is government machinery that controls and supervises the activities of the 'Three Self Churches'.

The 'principles' of the so called Three Self Patriotic Movement projected by the communist government for the 'benefit' of the church are: 1) self-government 2) self-support 3) self-propagate. It sounds good for the church! But once the church comes under the purview of the TSPM, they will be so controlled that churches will be supporting the communist ideals and honoring the State more than the Lord. Their sermons must be prepared in advance and approved by the TSPM officials. They are not permitted to preach about the second coming of Christ, the end-times, Antichrist and many other important Christian doctrines. No one under 18 years should be baptized. Adults who wish to be baptized must pass stringent and political tests. Only the Government -recognized Pastors are permitted to give baptism. Those churches which reject these and refuse to register with the TSPM have no *locus standi* and are considered illegal entities. They are under threat and persecution by the government. Yet a vast number of Chinese believers are members of the underground churches and refuse to join the Three Self Church. The TSPM is constantly pressing Pastor Lamb to register with the Three Self Church, but he politely and firmly refuses as he does not want the government to restrict or control the preaching of the biblical truth. He has requested our prayers that he may remain faithful till the end.

Christian Literature in China

Bibles in Chinese are printed in China with the permission of the government. These are available for the members of the Three Self Churches only. Others found in possession of Bible are often put in trouble. Bible-teaching materials are scarce. 45 years of systematic destruction of anything related to Christianity and Christ has created a great vacuum among the millions in China. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) most of the secret believers were unable to keep Christian literature or Bibles with them. Most teachers of the Word had been killed or passed away from the scene. Yet these are words from Pastor Lamb "More persecution – more growth for the Church. In 1949 before the Revolution there were one million Christians in China. Now it is estimated to be nearly 70 million". These believers need more teachers of the Word and teaching materials.

God's ways are mysterious. When one door is closed He opens another. Recently some Chinese business men (not Christians) printed large quantities of 'Streams in the Desert' in Chinese and put up in the super markets for sale. Their aim was only to make big money in business as they found that this book was selling like hot cakes, even though highly priced. As a result, a good devotional book, though expensive, was made available in China from an unexpected source.

MYANMAR

Myanmar formerly Burma is a country with 45 million people. 83% of the population is literate. 82% are Buddhists, 9% Christians, 4% Muslims and the remaining, Chinese and others whose religion is not known. A military junta government was in power during my visit.

My interest in Burma (Myanmar) began while we were giving literature training to a young Burmese in Madras. Jacob Mung had walked across the North East Indian border from Burma's Chin state, studied five years and earned B.D degree from a Theological Seminary in South India. Having completed his studies in India he was burdened to start a literature ministry back in his own country. But he did not know how to go about it. Hence he joined ELS and underwent training for about one year. While giving him personal attention he had shared with me his vision and burden for a ministry in Burma. We in ELS found in Jacob Mung a spirit of sincerity and full commitment coupled with a will to attempt greater things for the Lord without counting the cost.

In the year 1991 ELS fellowship prayed and commended Jacob Mung for the work in Myanmar. He knew fully well that it is a work of faith. In order to enable him to go back to his country and start a work, ELS

offered to supply some books. However, no imports were permitted to his country. Moreover, the Myanmar government had banned the spread of Christian literature. There was no fund available to Jacob. The staff of ELS took the initiative in making a monthly contribution to assist in purchasing some books and sending them to Jacob in Myanmar. To begin with, a supply of books was arranged to be sent with the help of some friends at the border. Jacob went to his home town and started his work in Chin state and moved slowly to Yangon. As the work progressed in Burma, friends from CLC around the world became interested and wanted to encourage Jacob. However for the first few years in the '90s it was extremely hard going for Jacob. Getting any funds or books directly into the country was most difficult, if not impossible.

The military Junta government was under the influence of the Chinese Communists. There was not much religious freedom for the Christians. Anything published within the country had to be subjected to careful scrutiny by the government officials from its manuscript level to the final proof stage and then only was permitted to be printed, provided it was 'found satisfactory'. There was hardly any Christian literature available in the country. Christian printing or publishing of any sort was under the special scrutiny of the government. If words such as 'Satan' or 'devil' were noticed in any manuscript, it was rejected outright. The reason was that 'the government believed that such words were used as synonyms' of the Junta! Any parcel of books from overseas friends sent by mail was confiscated by the Customs and destroyed or thrown away without intimating its addressee. While walking by the market, we found a few copies of Bible commentaries and concordances on the footpath near the market where old books and papers were sold per weight. Vendors must have picked up these books from the stuff thrown off from the post offices.

My first Visit to Yangon

It was the third week of September 1992. Mr. Peter Horne, the International Secretary of CLC and I were in Bangkok on an official visit to evaluate the work there. We had already planned for a side trip to Yangon old name Rangoon in order to encourage Jacob in his work. At that time any visitor to Myanmar had to go through a government-approved tour agency and his stay and movement in Myanmar had to be under the control of that tour agency. Our Myanmar visa, flight tickets, accommodation and date of departure from Yangon were all arranged by 'Myanmar Travel and Tours'. The cost of a three day tour package was \$700 per person. On the previous day of the commencement of the tour, we had a meeting with the folk at 'Tribes and Nations Outreach' in Bangkok. This Christian mission had experienced staff capable of giving advice on such visits to closed countries. They had given us an orientation about the Burma visit. We took a few gift wrapped Burmese Bibles from them. Our check-in and carry-on bags were fully packed with books for Jacob and had only the minimum personal things required for our three day stay. We landed at Yangon airport on 21st Sept. 1992 at 4.15 pm. The immigration and customs authorities were courteous and friendly. No questions were asked. The Chief of tour guides had access up to the immigration area. He introduced himself to us and helped to collect our baggage from customs area easily. To our great relief the customs officials did not bother to open our baggage. Once outside, the tour guide led us to their waiting vehicle and took us to Inya Lake Hotel which was the best as well as government controlled hotel in Myanmar at that time. It was built by the Russians in 1975. On either side of the entry gate we saw military men with gun in their hands. We saw the same sight also in front of the reception area of the hotel. Though Myanmar is a closed country, the people are nice and friendly. Buddhists are peace loving people. Normally, their men wear dhotis with shirts tucked in and the women have blouses inside the dhoti tied around their waist. We were accommodated in one of the 'Luxury rooms'. It had two single beds and a wardrobe with two sections - one for each guest. There was only one coat hanger for each guest! In the bathroom, the toilet cistern did not function properly. Paint was peeling off the bath tub. There was just one tiny tablet of toilet soap for the two of us! We saw a small rat running in the bath room. However, the food supplied at the restaurant was good and coffee and tea were served in plenty at all meals. Though the hotel was poorly maintained, its attraction was the presence of security men with guns – even at the entrance of the dining hall, may be to impress the guests that they were safe!

As it was not advisable for Jacob Mung to meet us at the airport, he managed to visit us in the hotel room at 6 pm. Besides enjoying the fellowship for about three hours, Jacob was delighted to see all the English books

and Burmese Bibles we had brought with us. At 9.30 pm Jacob left us and went home hoping to receive the books when we would manage to meet again.

Our Tour to Shwedagon Pagoda

At 8.30 am on the 22nd the lady tour guide took us to Burma's Shwedagon Pagoda which is said to be a 2500-year old Buddhist temple. This was the main tourist attraction in Yangon. We had to walk barefooted for about two hours around the Pagoda listening to the descriptions given to us by the tour guide. All around the Pagoda one could see hundreds of offering boxes (glass cases) into which the Buddhist devotees and some visitors kept dropping money. 'Giving' being a good deed, the Buddhists do liberally give believing that they may obtain a better life in the next birth. Next, we were guided through Yangon's main market to see their handicraft etc. Since there was no other option we followed the guide patiently. By 12.30 pm she brought us back to the hotel for lunch and advised us to be ready for another tour next morning. However, on our request she left us free till our departure!

friends. Peter and I personally carried the heavy bags of books to the car, making it appear to the hotel staff that we were carrying our personal belongings which were not heavy! We put our bags in the car quietly and proceeded as if we were continuing our tour program. The hotel personnel and security men failed to notice the details of our operation. Soon we transferred the contents of our bags to Jacob's place of residence and heaved a sigh of relief. Jacob was thrilled to have some Bibles and books at his place for sale. He had managed to take on rent a hall 50ft long and 13ft wide. The frontage appeared as a shop selling various stationery and soft drinks. Along with the stationery shelves, there was a partially hidden cupboard containing Bibles and Christian books. Jacob stayed in the rear portion of the hall. This was the beginning of the operation of CLC and its literature ministry in Yangon.

On 23rd morning we visited Jacob's place once again and had a meeting with the members of his Board. The third book published by Jacob in Burmese was 'Calvary Road' which was officially released during the time we visited the Board members. After having a time of fellowship with Jacob and the members of the Board, we returned to the hotel in the evening. Next day the guide took us back to the airport and by 6.45 pm we were back at Bangkok airport, after a very satisfactory four day tour of Yangon. Subsequent visits were relatively easier compared to the first one. In September 1993 I made a visit without going through the Tour Company and stayed in a hotel booked by Jacob. This time also I had three days there - spending most of the time with Jacob and his ongoing work. From that period onwards the situation in the country was looking a little brighter.

Strategy for our literature work in Myanmar

In the early '90s there was very little Christian literature available in the country. Importing was prohibited. There were too many restrictions and limits for publishing anything within the country, yet the literacy rate was quite high and Christian population was about 9% of the people. In order to establish the ministry on a strong footing we had decided to find a suitable premise in the city of Yangon and to operate a good book shop within the limits of the available freedom. We also decided to undertake simultaneously the publishing of as many Christian books as possible, against all odds. Much prayer was mobilized from all over the world, especially from CLC friends, that the Lord may enable these plans to be fulfilled in the days to come.

New Book Shop in Central Yangon

Myanmar being a country closed to Christian literature and the government being hostile to Christian churches, many Christians and missions were interested to come forward with a helping hand for the new work of CLC. Jacob was greatly encouraged. Before long, a portion of an old building in Central Yangon was purchased for the CLC book shop. It was just five minutes' walk from the GPO, main Rail Station, High Court and many government offices, embassies, market and the famous Sule Pagoda. Beginning with a small

stock of books and Bibles in the rear of the shop and stationery items and coco-cola bottles in front, Jacob started book sales while translating and publishing several books in Burmese. Original Burmese manuscripts were taken up for publishing new books. Thus within a short period of time, the CLC shop got a good range of Christian books for this nation.

Another Visit in 1996

By 1996, a lot of changes for the better had taken place in the country. I could see new buildings coming up in the city; new cars and transport facilities were in place. There was less harassment and restrictions on Christians and their activities. CLC had certainly taken advantage of these relaxations and worked with renewed vision and speed. Several Christian books were published and a network was formed for its distribution in various parts of the country.

Jacob Mung's activity in Myanmar appeared outwardly as that of publishing and distributing Christian books. But personally he was actively involved in preaching and teaching also. In one of his Bible teaching classes a young lady dentist from a well-known Buddhist family was a regular attendee. While keenly listening and learning biblical truth she was also closely watching the life style of the teacher to find out whether he practiced what he was teaching in his Bible classes. Jacob's honesty and simplicity and his faith in the living God did attract her to the God of Jacob. She believed for the first time that "Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life". She trusted Jesus Christ for her personal Salvation against all odds and opposition from her Buddhist parents. Her parents being highly educated and well placed in the society, they were tolerant enough to allow their daughter, Sandar, to continue to stay in their home even after she accepted Jesus Christ as her Saviour and Lord. But they were unhappy with her and felt being let down by their daughter.

Being a dentist she was already employed in a government hospital. Admiring Jacob's life of practical Christianity, Sandar proposed to marry him, although she knew fully well that he was from a family with poor financial background whereas her parents were quite wealthy and she was brought up in the luxury of their home. During my visit in 1966, Sandar accompanied by Jacob met me and shared her new found faith in Jesus and the joy of salvation she had received. She also mentioned how empty her traditional religious belief and good works were. Now that she had faith in the Living God there was no fear of opposition or persecution. In fact she was ready to testify the Lord in the waters of baptism and requested if I would personally administer baptism for her. However I advised her that it would be more appropriate if it was done by the pastor of her church than by me as he would always be available to help her in her spiritual growth into maturity. They were also thinking of getting married soon after her baptism.

A Visit to the War Memorial

After this discussion and spiritual counsel, Jacob and Sandar took me out for a guided tour of the famous War Memorial of Burma. In World War II during the Japanese invasion, hundreds of thousands of soldiers were killed and their bodies were buried in a large cemetery in Yangon. This place was named the War Memorial and is well maintained by the government. At the entrance it is written 'THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVER'. As we walked in, another inscription read "In memory of the lives laid down"! As we proceed, one could see thousands of small stone blocks on the ground, each one with the inscription of the name of a soldier or a phrase. One such block read "A soldier who is known to God only". In the center of the cemetery there is a tall pillar with a cross depicted on it. Then there are many tall concrete pillars in rows of six having a flat roof across the cemetery. These pillars are engraved with names of 27,000 persons died in World War II. In the middle of the flat roof there is a large circular opening and has the following words engraved on it "The Twenty seven thousand lives laid down here from Burma and Assam who could not live to see the cause for which they died". Although this War Memorial is beautiful it is heart-breaking too; especially as one thinks of the 'contribution' that wars make to the world, even as the Japanese would remember Hiroshima.

After enjoying a Japanese 'shabu-shabu' type of meal which in Burma is called 'hot pot'- a meal of one's choice cooked by oneself right on the dining table of the hotel- we dropped Sandar at her parents' home and

reached the 'Best Inn' where I was lodged. It was a comfortable stay at Best Inn at the cost of US\$ 42 per day for bed and breakfast plus morning coffee. The next morning Jacob reached the Best Inn with a taxi and took me to the airport. While sitting in the departure lounge, I wrote down the experiences of the previous day, which you have read just now.

Changes in Myanmar

In November 1997 Mr. Benjamin Gnanamanickam, General Secretary of ELS and I made a trip to Yangon. At this time I noticed a lot of changes in comparison with my first visit five years earlier. Now, there was a lot more freedom in every area of life. Freedom of expression and publication seemed to have taken a positive move. Five years ago Yangon's English daily newspaper was consisted of only just four pages of A4 size poor quality paper. Burmese newspapers too were small in size though they had a few more pages. Now the newspapers were found in double crown size with several pages. There was growth and development all around. New high-rise buildings were replacing the old tiled-roofed ones in the city. Public transport, especially good taxis were available. There were plenty of private cars on the roads. Old market places were being renewed. Several supermarkets and foreign business houses especially with electronic goods had appeared. The government and the governance seemed less tense. Harassment on Christians and their activities appeared negligible. Several Christian book shops and publications had appeared in and around the city. CLC had already published a number of Burmese books, the sales and distribution of which was most encouraging.

CLC ministry in the country got established reasonably well and was poised for a gigantic leap forward to reach out to the whole land with the Good News. The leadership abilities of Jacob were recognized and appreciated by Christian community in general and CLC world in particular. Publication of Christian books by CLC has taken long strides. Jacob and Sandar got married and are slowly proving before the Buddhist parents of Sandar that they are a happy and blessed Christian couple. The slow but sure acceptance of their son-in-law by the parents of Sandar is an indication of the Christian testimony of Sandar and Jacob.

One more trip – November 2015

Between 1992 and 1997, I had made four visits to Yangon in order to encourage and guide Jacob. At the first visit Peter Horne, CLC International Secretary was with me and on the fourth Benny Gnanamanickam from ELS. We had seen the work grow steadily taking root in that soil in spite of various restrictions and limitations owing to the rule of the military junta and the general state of affairs (of that) in a Buddhist land.

In the year 2015 Jacob Mung invited us (Leelamma and me) to visit Yangon to see the work and have a time of fellowship with them. I personally was not mentally prepared to undertake an overseas travel at that time. However our love for the ministry in which we were heavily involved as well as our admiration for Jacob and Sandar compelled me to say 'yes'. Jacob was quick to get our air tickets and visa. We landed at Yangon airport on the morning of November 18, 2015 and were warmly received by Jacob and his wife Sandar. Their HQ was at a distance of about 15 minutes by car from the airport and we were accommodated in their guest room, which was one floor above their residential flat. Our ten days' stay with them was a time of wonderful fellowship and thanksgiving to God. They had taken us to places of their ministry in Yangon as well as to see some interesting places at Mandalay. Before we returned, a special service was held at their Church which was attended by most of their pastors, workers in rural areas and members of the Board along with the Bethel congregation. I was asked to minister the Word and to share about the CLC ministry. At the end of the service Leelamma and I were honoured by decorating us with Myanmar's special shawls.

My previous visit to Myanmar was 18 years ago and that was when I had last seen CLC work there. From that time onwards, not much was known about the work there except through short email messages which were few and far between. Now that we personally saw the growth and expansion of this unique ministry, the thought that came to my mind was the comment of queen of Sheba to Solomon "indeed, not even half was told me.."

A sea of change in Myanmar

In the past two decades especially since 2011 when the Military Junta government gave way at least partially for a democratic rule, great changes have taken place in that country. There is considerable religious freedom even though Christian organizations ought to move with caution. Foreigners can visit the country with online tourist's visa and return tickets. At my first visit in 1992, tourists were allowed only through a govt. authorized tour company and there was no freedom to move about except under the watchful eye of the government tourist guide. There were armed soldiers everywhere even at the entrance of the hotel. Now, nothing of that sort is seen anywhere. The roads are full of cars and other vehicles and there is no dearth for taxis. The city of Yangon seems to be as developed as any other modern Asian city.

CLC Ministry

The old building (shop) purchased by CLC in 1993 in central Yangon underwent a sea of changes in 2009. By agreement with CLC and a few other owners a builder tore down the old four storey building and constructed a brand new eight storey building at the same site. The ground floor shop was given back to CLC without any additional cost. The new shop is now full of Christian books, Bibles etc. and is open to the public. In 1993 the few Christian books and Bibles that were made available from elsewhere had to be hidden away at the rear of the shop while the front area appeared merely as a shop selling Coca-Cola! At that time no Christian activity could be carried out openly. But by 2009 CLC was recognized by the government as a Publisher and Jacob was given a license to publish books in any languages. His license No. is 22 and that means he is a very senior publisher in the country. Praise the Lord! As of to date CLC has published 220 Burmese titles, some of which are quite heavy books such as 'Lion Bible Hand Book' and 'Bible Dictionary'. Jacob is also the Pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, a unit of 'Bethel Ministries' that he had started. A western Bible seminary had conferred on him the Doctorate of Divinity.

Bethel Ministries

In the year 2011 the Lord enabled them to purchase half an acre of land at a distance of about 15 minutes' drive from Yangon airport towards the city and to construct a large three storey building there. This building houses Bethel Baptist Church, Bethel Baptist Bible School, Bethel Children's Home and a Warehouse for CLC as well as residential apartments for the Jacobs, Bible school students and the inmates of the Children's Home. This is not the property of the traditional 'Baptist Church' or that of CLC, but belongs to a ministry initiated by Jacob and Sandar with the help of their friends and contacts which they call "Bethel Ministries" and is wholly run by faith.

A unique ministry

I wish to qualify the ministry of CLC in Myanmar as 'unique' because its pivot is the church while the other ministries revolve around it. Literature ministry (CLC) is its arm. Bible school is the training center for church workers. Children's Home is an expression of the outreach ministry of the church. As a result of the personal witnessing of Jacob and his wife as well as Bible teaching and literature work, the Lord has added many people to the Church, resulting in the establishment of the 'Bethel Baptist Church'. Most of the members of this church are new converts from Buddhism. A large number of these people have come to the Lord through the personal witnessing of Sandar while she was working as a Dentist in the government hospital. She being a convert from Buddhism and now well-versed in Bible, Sandar's prayerful witnessing was quite effective. Now she has resigned the government job – a costly step- and is in full time service in connection with the Children's Home and the Bible school. The strength of the main church is about 100 members- mostly converts from Buddhism. They have another 10 congregations in rural areas and a few near the Chinese border. Their vision is to plant 300 new churches within the next 30 years, i.e. by the year 2045!

Their Strategy

Being the main Christian Publisher in the country, CLC keeps on publishing and distributing solid Christian books to feed the church. The effective personal witnessing attracts converts to the Church in urban and rural areas. When their pastors and church workers find deserving orphans aged between 7 and 17, mostly Buddhists, in any part of the country they try to bring them to the Children's Home and look after them well and give good education in public schools. When such children graduate from their 12th grade, those who are born again and interested in studying the Bible will be admitted to the Bible school for a four year course of Bible study. They do the course along with the other Bible students and upon their graduation they are absorbed into the church work as pastors, evangelists, social workers etc. Thus the church of the Lord is strengthened and established day by day.

Certainly Jacob & Sandar have great vision and they make strategic planning – truly a work of faith that keeps growing quietly and flourishing in a country that is anxiously awaiting a democratic government and religious freedom.

Chapter 9: MY LONGEST JOURNEY TO SOUTH AMERICA AND BACK

The main purpose of this travel was to attend the Leadership conference of CLC Latin America. The journey started from Madras on 8th October. 1991 and it took 26 days of visiting various CLC centers in two Latin American countries and attending their Area conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil. There were several stops and change of aircrafts at Bombay, London, Madrid, Bogotá and Sao Paulo.

My first stop was in Bombay where Mr. C.V. John, the manager of ELS, received me at the airport and took me to his flat. Later we visited the book shop at Maker Arcade, Cuff Parade as well as at the proposed new premises in Manish Market, Dadar where ELS was planning to shift the book shop from Maker Arcade. The new building in Manish Market was getting completed and the location of the shop was far better and more convenient for most customers of ELS. The next day I flew to London. It was a non-stop Jumbo flight by British airways. The aircraft was only half full. So, when it was air-borne, I moved to a vacant area and occupied the adjacent four seats so that I could lie down comfortably and sleep for nearly eight hours before landing at Heathrow airport in London. The next couple of days were a time for visiting CLC London and other publishing houses in London area. Friends from CLC HQ were always at hand to take me to various places.

On the flight from London to South America, I had the company of Mr. John Silk, CLC's International Secretary and his wife. After leaving London, we landed at Frankfurt and waited there for three hours for the connecting flight by 'Avianca' airlines. This is a Colombian airline which had offered us the cheapest fare. When one chooses to purchase the cheapest ticket, the related inconveniences too should be taken into consideration. From London we were booked through to Sao Paulo. We had to change aircrafts at Frankfurt, Madrid, Cartesian, Bogota, Manaus and Rio de Janeiro before reaching our final destination. The flight between Madrid and Bogota was the worst. The three seats allotted to us in the Avianca aircraft were the worst located – between two toilet sections in front and back. They had fixed arm rests and no reclining facility. In most aircrafts this space is used as a passage connecting the isles. But Avianca found it fit to fix a few seats there! We were destined to sit straight up for the next nine and a half hours! There was no sufficient leg room for people sitting on those three seats. After sitting for several hours like that, my back began to hurt severely and for some time I knelt down leaning on to the seat while the lights were out. This was an opportunity forced on me to pray on my knees! However as we changed the aircraft at Bogotá, there was plenty of leg-room and better facilities in those aircrafts that took us to Rio and Sao Paulo.

Brazil

Brazil is the largest country of Latin America and the fifth largest in the world. Out of the population of 170 million, nearly (50% is white.) 53% of population is of European origin, 34% mixed race and 10% Spanish. The literacy rate is 83%. Christians account for 91% of the total population and they are mainly Protestants. The tropical rain forest, the Amazon, is here in Brazil. It is a world of forest and water. One third of all the world's trees are here. It is the source of one fifth of all fresh water. Its three biggest cities are Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte.

Brasilia has been the capital of the country since 1960. In its former capital Rio de Janeiro, the famous “**Christ the Redeemer**” statue stands with arms outstretched, seemingly protecting the city. It tops the Corcovado mountain and reaches up to 700 meters from sea level, including the height of the statue which is 40 meters. This statue, the tallest in the world, was completed in 1931 by Paulo Landowski.

Brazilian people, especially the staff of CLC that I met were very loving. Very few of them had any knowledge of English, so my communication with them was difficult. All of them spoke Portuguese. I quickly learned just one word 'Obregadu' meaning 'thank you' in Portuguese. Their staple food is rice and beans curry. Green chilies were also used liberally. Most of the houses have a 'hammock' on their veranda which is used for sitting or sleeping. The hammock is usually made of palm fibers. When I left Sao Paulo, the CLC Friends gave me the gift of a hammock and a beautiful book on Brazil.

The Assemblies of God churches are quite strong in Brazil. Of late, churches have become more interested in mission work and have started sending missionaries. I had opportunities to speak at several meetings in the

AOG church in which most of the CLC staff are members. Those folk really appreciated the ministry of the Word.

CLC had a large house and a publishing work in Sao Paulo. But due to the weak management and administration there were a lot of problems especially in the area of finances. To add to their woes, the inflation in the country had gone up beyond anybody's imagination and the value of their currency against the US dollar had hit the rock bottom. The few days we had in Sao Paulo with the exception of Sunday, were fully spent for business meetings and staff training sessions. There was absolutely no time to go for any sightseeing in Brazil.

On our return, as we were touching down at the Manaus airport we had a panoramic view of the Amazon River. The thick forest appeared like a sheet of green spread over miles and miles without end! As the aircraft was flying low over Ecuador I remembered the story of the five American Missionaries martyred by the Waodani tribal people in Ecuador in the Amazon area. Jim Elliot was one of those young missionaries who said before leaving for Ecuador "He is not a fool who gives up that which he cannot keep in order to keep that which he cannot loose". Today in Ecuador there is a vibrant Church among those Auca tribes whose arrows had taken away the lives of Jim Elliot and his four friends who had offered themselves as a living sacrifice for Christ Jesus in 1954.

Bogota

On our return from Sao Paulo the next stop was at Bogota, the capital of Colombia. It was a small airport. Trolleys are allowed only inside the airport building. Once a passenger is at the exit with his baggage, there are plenty of porters available to carry the bags, unless one wants to carry his bags himself. Mr. Dave Peacock, the American missionary in charge of CLC in Colombia was at the airport and took us to his flat about 20 km from the airport. Having reached the ground floor of the flat, we were told to our surprise that there was no elevator in that five storey building. The Peacocks lived on the fourth floor where our accommodation was arranged. Each of us had to carry our baggage and climb the steps to the fourth floor. By the time we got to the top with all the bags, all four of us were literally gasping for breath! Bogota is about 8500ft above sea level. It is only 30 miles away from the equator. It was quite cold. The traffic in the city was frightening, though not so much for me as I was used to Madras traffic! We reached the Peacocks' flat at 6pm, had dinner and rested well for the night.

During the next three days, we were fully occupied with CLC meetings. As we were free on the fourth day, Bonnie, Dave's wife, got a taxi and gave us a guided tour of the city area. Bogota city is home for 10 million people. It is surrounded by mountains. We went by cable car to the mountain top and had a wonderful view of the city. Bogota is a city of flowers. Its main exports are flowers and coffee. It is also known as the 'drug capital' of Latin America.

CLC Colombia's leadership meeting was from 26th to 28th October after which we left for London on the 29th, attended CLC's 50th Anniversary at City Temple on 1st November and then I returned to Madras on 3rd Nov. '91.

When I completed 60 years of age and officially retired from ELS, CLC International requested me to carry on as Co ordinator for Asia-Pacific. But I firmly declined the offer because of certain principles that I followed. It was always in my heart to encourage my juniors by giving them room to come up in life and take on greater responsibilities. For the past five years I was having this special privilege of being the CLC Co ordinator while still being a senior staff of ELS. Now that I had retired from ELS and taking advantage of the privilege to continue as CLC Coordinator I would be standing in the way of another member of staff from getting that position. Therefore, I gently told CLC International that I would step down from being the CLC Coordinator on the day I retire from ELS. This decision opened the way for the General Secretary, Mr. Benjamin Gnanamanickam of ELS to be appointed as Coordinator for CLC Asia. However, CLC International was keen to make use of my experience at least as a Consultant. It was voluntary service, with CLC meeting all my official expenses. I gave my consent to this proposal and served the mission for a number of years to come.

Mission to Papua New Guinea

This was a special assignment for me to go along with Leelamma, to Papua New Guinea (PNG) as a consultant and to give training for a certain period to the CLC staff at Boroko in Port Moresby, the capital of PNG.

The population of Papua New Guinea was about 4 million at that time. Here, the indigenous people are known as 'nationals' and other residents are called 'expats' (expatriates). The 'expat population was only about 20,000, which was mostly Australian. The majority of the indigenous people are identified with Melanesi. Papuans are found more on the west. It is interesting to note that only just over 7% of the population reaches the age of 60 years or above. Many marriages are arranged at a young age, but wives normally take up residence with their husbands only when they reach late teens. Polygamy is still practiced, but it is declining as the bride-price is not easily affordable.

PNG is famous for its diversity of languages. It has well over 700 indigenous languages. The press uses only Pidgin (pidgin is a form of English, mainly of jargon) and English. The language of the education system and the government is English. On one side of the capital there are stilt houses of the original inhabitants - the Motu people of Koki, on the other side the multi-storey concrete buildings. For 69 years the PNG was under Australian administration. In 1973 it was granted home rule and full independence two years later.

Papua New Guinea is a Christian nation. 97% of the people are at least nominal followers of the Christian faith. 30% of the nation is Roman Catholic, 23% Evangelical Lutheran and the remaining, of various other protestant Churches. The streets of Port Moresby and Boroko are not at all safe for expats and visitors to move about freely even during the day time. Women including young girls, even those of indigenous origin, are advised not to travel alone. Pick-pocketing, robbery and mugging are very common and as a result, expats and visitors prefer to move about in closed vehicles only, even for short distances.

CLC Staff Training at Port Moresby

We left Chennai on 18th August 1998 for Bangkok and stayed there for a week assisting in the work of CLC Thailand. Then on the 25th we flew to Cairns in Australia, stayed there for a couple of days and left for Port Moresby on the 28th to reach there the same afternoon. At Boroko airport Mr. Ako Aruva, the manager of CLC met us and put us up at the CLC Boroko H.Q. We stayed there till the 25th of October, fully involved in the work of training the staff.

The Boroko HQ building was adjacent to the main road. The book shop was on the ground floor while our residence was on the first floor. Two bachelor trainees were staying on the ground floor at the rear of the shop. In fact, we were provided accommodation by Mr. Ako, the manager and his wife Lily in their flat above

the shop while they stayed away from their quarters in order to accommodate us. Our stay there was quite comfortable. Leelamma took care of our cooking and we enjoyed especially the fresh fish brought from the nearby fish market at the sea shore.

The Book shop was located in a main area of the city. It attracted a lot of customers who appeared to love reading. As they visited the shop, some of them preferred to squat on the shop floor and read for long periods of time! The display of books in the shop was rather poor even though there was plenty of stock available in the warehouse. There were six workers as staff, including the manager. None of them had any proper training for the job they were doing. Resources were available, but the workers' lack of knowledge in handling the same made the operation less successful. So we made use of each day to impart systematic training to the staff there.

To begin with, we organized a special Book Sale in the shop with due publicity. A good display of books and other items was put up. There was great response from the public and a tremendous sale took place during that week. This operation in itself gave the book shop a great deal of publicity. During our stay of two months, we concentrated on imparting practical training to the staff on all aspects of literature work. We were delighted to see that those people were eager to learn and put into practice what they had learnt. At the time of our departure, we noticed that there were all round improvement in the work and great satisfaction among the workers.

During our stay there we made friends with a few Christians from Madras who were employed in Port Moresby. They were very helpful to us - especially in taking us to the English Church services and other Christian fellowship meetings, retreats etc. The CLC staff also was very kind and loving. After completing our mission we left PNG on 25th October, stayed at Cairns with the CLC folk for two days and were back home in India on the 29th of October 1998.

Two more travels in the year two thousand

Christian Literature Crusade, USA invited me to be their devotional speaker at their annual Staff Conference in April 2000. The flight route was Trivandrum - Dubai - Amsterdam - Detroit - Philadelphia and back. The journey between Trivandrum and Dubai was by Air India and the rest by KLM. Though I reached Philadelphia safely, my baggage had not arrived. Hence I lodged a PIR (Passenger Irregularity Report) with the KLM office in Philadelphia and proceeded to the CLC HQ along with their staff who had come to the airport to receive me. After two days, the KLM staff brought my baggage to the apartment in the CLC campus where I was staying.

At this time, my son Robin and his wife Shini were staying in Florida with their friends Bill and Charlotte Poteet. Shini was recuperating after a major surgery. I took this opportunity to visit them in Florida. Robin managed to get a flight ticket for me from Philadelphia to Florida and back and on 3rd April I traveled to Florida. Robin met me at the airport and took me to the house of the Poteets, where I was warmly welcomed by them and treated as their honoured guest. This lovely couple was taking care of Robin and Shini as their own children. They were highly pleased with the lives and testimonies of Robin and Shini. They spoke very highly of us as the people who had passed on some wonderful qualities to Robin, by being his parents. They thanked me very specially for the godly way in which we had brought up Robin. After a three-day stay with them, spending most of my time with Robin and Shini, I returned CLC for their conference which was to begin on the 9th of April.

On all the three days of the conference, the devotional message I gave was on the subject 'Waiting on God'. As the Lord blessed His word there was great appreciation from the staff. The weather was quite cold and freezing. It was lovely to see snow settling on cherry blossoms which looked like white birds with red beaks! One night the snow fall was so heavy that it was quite difficult to get out of the house. There was snow all over the place to a height of nearly two feet. While it was a wonderful sight from within the house, it was most miserable for anyone who happened to be driving a vehicle outside. Every time I visited the CLC HQ in

the US, I had the opportunity to visit CLC's bookshops in other places. American book shops are generally larger than the shops in other countries. It was also interesting to see their print shop and warehouse on Camp Hill, Fort Washington.

The Headquarters of World Evangelization Crusade is top of Camp Hill. In fact the whole Camp Hill belonged to the WEC which had given a portion of the hill to CLC, being the literature arm of their ministry. I had the privilege of spending some time with Norman Grubb, the former General Secretary of WEC whose residence was also on Camp Hill. Norman Grubb was the son-in-law of C.T. Studd, the founder of World Evangelization Crusade. The biography of C.T. Studd written by Norman Grubb entitled 'CT.Studd-Cricketer and Pioneer' describes how this famous cricketer was known as one of the 'Cambridge Seven'. Having donated his great fortune and the palatial home for the work of various missions C.T. Studd went to the 'Heart of Africa' and took residence in a hut in the middle of Congo forest. Just before leaving for Africa C. T. Studd told his friends who tried to dissuade him from taking such a great risk "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, there is no sacrifice too great for me to make for Him!" Later on WEC adopted it as the motto of the mission. It was a blessing for me to meet with Mr. Norman Grubb more than twice during my visits to the USA.

My First visit to Africa

In September 2000, I got an opportunity to visit East Africa. CLC Britain was starting a new literature ministry in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. A suitable book shop was taken on lease and a few local staff was recruited. Being inexperienced, they needed some training before they could begin their work. So on behalf of CLC Britain, the International office requested me to go to Dar-es-Salaam and give training to the local staff. A couple of experienced staff from the UK had also joined me later on to help complete this training.

The flight route was Cochin - Bombay - Nairobi - Dar- es-Salaam and the date was 17th September 2000. At Cochin airport, the Jet Airways kindly up-graded my economy class ticket to executive class without any request from me and I thanked the crew for their kindness. At Bombay I was met at the airport by Mr. C.V. John and we had good fellowship at his home where I stayed the night. On 18th, the flight from Bombay landed at Dar-es-Salaam 30 minutes ahead of the scheduled arrival time. CLC's local staff met me at the airport and put me up at the Valley View Hotel. The cost of the room including breakfast was US\$ 25 per day. Each meal would cost US\$ 3, on an average.

Tanzania's population is about 34 million. The capital Dar-es-Salaam has about 3 million people. The literacy rate is about 70%. Official languages are Swahili and English. There is equal religious freedom for both Christians and Muslims. About 51% of people are Christians and 32% Muslims.

Training Sessions for CLC staff

For two full weeks we had training sessions in the book on all subjects concerning the management shop premises and running of a successful Christian book shop ministry. I had notes and papers prepared on various subjects which were passed on to the new staff who attended the sessions. (Mr.) Phil Burnham and Lloyd from the UK also helped with classes and book shop arrangements. The inauguration of the new CLC Book shop at Dar-es-Salaam took place at 12 noon on 30th September 2000. With all the invitees in and around the shop we had a simple service from 11.30 am to 12 noon during which we three overseas visitors spoke about 3 minutes each. Then four persons prayed and everyone together said "we declare this shop open in Jesus' name, Amen". The local T.V. gave full coverage of the whole service and the book shop. On all Saturdays, every shop and establishment in Dar-es-Salaam remains closed in the afternoon. Nothing can be purchased, not even food or drink.

Sunday-Worship at A.G. Church

The Coordinator and organizer for the start of CLC's work in Tanzania was Mr. Roger Pettit, a British National with his African wife Moni. They were members of the Assemblies of God Church in Dar-es-

Salaam. A couple of CLC staff too were members of the same church. We three AG. Church for worship on Sunday the 24 of September, Visitors from abroad joined these friends and went to the 2000.

From 9 am to 10 am, it was a time for Bible study on 'the method of interpreting the Word'. It was a profitable session. Starting from 10 am for an hour and a half, it was time for worship through songs. The congregation was in standing mode and all were singing, dancing, clapping hands and swaying according to the rhythm. I had seen similar worship, though to a lesser degree of enthusiasm, in Papua New Guinea only. After this, the chief pastor who was also called the 'Bishop' preached for nearly thirty minutes- all about how to raise funds for their ongoing 'building project'. The service was over by 12 noon and we were given a tour of the building site of the church. The A.G. church was highly involved in constructing an eight storey building in which there was office accommodation as well as a number of residential flats and a massive auditorium. After seeing this construction project we were taken to Roger's house for a good African lunch. The main course was whole green bananas well cooked in sauce, rice, meat and some vegetables. After lunch, Moni and their driver took us for a tour of the city, passing through the beach road with several embassies on its side, and many shopping complexes in the city centre. After the tour of the city, we were taken back to our hotel by around 5 pm.

On Sunday the 1st of October, Roger dropped me at the Nation's Church - an inter-denominational church for Indians. Here the service was in English with a good gospel message as well as songs in English. There was also Holy Communion during the service. On the next day, the 2nd of October, there was a farewell meeting for us at the CLC shop. After expressing their appreciation by a few words they gave me two beautifully carved candle sticks specially made of 'black wood' and a T-shirt as a present. At 4.30 pm my flight to Bombay via Nairobi took off and I reached home on 3rd October 2000 after a successful trip to Dar-es-Salaam. Lovely Memories of Dar-es-Salaam still linger.

CHALLENGE AND INFLUENCE OF LITERATURE

Importance of the Written Word

The Bible records that the LORD proclaimed His commandments in a loud voice and then *wrote* them down on two stone tablets. (Deut. 5:22) When God wanted to give a lasting message to man, He chose to *write* it Himself. As the first set got broken in the hands of Moses, once again the LORD wrote the same message on another set of tablets (Deut. 10:2,4). Long before the Word became flesh and dwelt among men, God had inspired His prophets and holy men to write down His message and give to the world. Hence we got the Old Testament in the Bible. During His earthly life, Jesus Christ gave great importance to the written Word as He had repeatedly reminded His friends and foes "it is written". The written word of God is the weapon that Jesus Christ used to repel the attack of Satan. The risen Lord Jesus, while revealing Himself to apostle John on the island of Patmos said "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches."

The apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ chose to write and describe the earthly life of Jesus and thus made the four Gospels available to us. As inspired by the Holy Spirit they continued to write and give us the New Testament, thus making the Bible complete. Apostle Paul had exhorted his spiritual son Timothy to "give attendance to reading".

Great men like Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Tennyson and many others had realized the true value of literature and took pains to pass their thoughts to the world through writing, John Bunyan was saved through the reading of a gospel tract. If John Bunyan had only verbalized his dream al'a pilgrim's travel to the city of hope', its message would have reached only a few people of his days. Thanks be to God, Bunyan was prompted to write down his dream and make the book "*The Pilgrim's Progress- from this world to that which is to come*" available to the world and its message has changed the lives of thousands of people across the world down through the centuries. Next to the Bible it is 'The Pilgrim's Progress' that has gained the largest circulation.

Mahatma Gandhi's whole life while in Africa was revolutionized by reading a book called "Unto This Last" by John Ruskin. It was the reading of the New Testament that led Sadhu Sundar Singh to accept Christ. A portion of the Gospel which Pandita Ramabai had read helped her to make up her mind to accept Christ as her Savior. Certainly, 'the pen is mightier than the sword' and 'a drop of ink can make a million think'.

It should make every Christian think as to why great cults and isms of the world use literature as the most effective means of spreading their ideas. The Jehovah's Witness organization has one of the largest printing operations in the world. Seventh Day Adventists have the largest Bible correspondence school in the world. The atheists and communists believe in the power of the printed page. Chairman Mao's Thoughts and Writings had at one time surpassed almost all printing records in China. It was called the 'Red Bible' of the Chinese. Twenty five years before the Russian Revolution, the Communists poured their literature into Russia. When Lenin took over Russia he said "The people will never, believe or understand communism unless they are indoctrinated with communism on the printed page".

We should Read more and distribute much more

Martin Luther wrote nearly 100 books and circulated them throughout Western Europe, and as a result of his writings 'Reformation' took place in the Church. The great Methodist preacher John Wesley was responsible for writing 400 books. He urged all his preachers to spend five out of every twenty four hours in reading good books and he expected them to sell them as well!

In *'Problems in the Spirit-filled Life'* the author writes "A weakness among Christian people today is that far too few 'give attendance to reading', as Paul exhorted Timothy to do. Wesley observed that a reading people would be a growing people and it is only to the extent that people inform their minds about the things of God that they come to a mature faith. A full heart and empty head paves the way for fanaticism or other false enthusiasms, while a full head and cold heart leads one straight for formalism in religion. One must counterbalance the other. The reading of good books should be part of every sincere Christian person's programme. Money should be spared for this, even at the cost of allowing some things to go. Where ever reading and interest in gathering knowledge are found, there exists a wide awake, appreciative, growing mind and heart; in their absence there is leanness and of stumbling in the Christian life. The mind must be fed as well as the body if it is to develop into a healthy, enlightened Christian mind".

The late Kenneth Strachan said, "85 percent of all Latin Americans won to Christ are converted as a result of reading a Christian book, paper, tract, or Bible, and thereby convicted of sin and brought to repentance." Dr. Guy Playfair of the Sudan Interior Mission had said "After much thought I believe that the influence of the *'African Challenge'* (a Christian magazine) would be worth more than 5000 new missionaries going to Africa at this time." Dr. Harold Cook, then Chairman of Mission department, Moody Bible Institute had said "literature can be our most efficient medium of mass communication of the Gospel. In terms of the price paid for it, the number of people reached and the fact that the message can be read over again until it is understood, there is no other method that can compare with literature. No other agent can penetrate so deeply, abide so persistently, witness so daringly and influence so irresistibly as the printed page".

Missionary Statesman and Pastor Dr. Oswald J Smith first challenged his congregation at the Peoples Church of Toronto by asking *"Why should anybody hear the gospel twice before everybody has heard it once?"* He then passed challenge to the whole world through his book 'Passion for Souls'. Later on he said "after studying world evangelism for more than 50 years the only plan I have heard of that could result in the fulfillment of the Great Commission is a Literature Distribution Ministry. There is no quicker, cheaper way of evangelizing the world than through Gospel Literature".

The Effects of the Printed Page

1. It travels cheaply
2. It can go where its author cannot

3. It leaps language barriers, and is never influenced by racial prejudices
4. It never loses its temper - never talks back
5. It never tires, but works even when people sleep
6. It is never discouraged
7. It always catches a person in the right mood
8. It speaks without a foreign accent
9. It never compromises - never changes its message
10. It continues to witness long after its author is dead.

Today we have access to the Bible in many versions and in most of the languages of the world as well as hundreds of thousands of biblical books, magazines, periodicals and tracts. However, unless these are **systematically and prayerfully distributed far and wide** the Church will continue to lag behind in its mandate. The King of kings and the Lord of lords who gave the Great Commission also reminds us in His Word "...How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news". (Rom.10:15b)

A House Built for us

While working for the ELS, we always lived in the quarters provided by the mission. We lived in Bangalore for nearly eight years and in Madras for about 26 years. As a bachelor, I had also stayed alone for a few months in Ooty and in Vellore. Among all these cities, it is Bangalore that we liked most. In those days I used to think that I should try and get a plot of land in Bangalore and construct a house there for our retirement days, as I had no plans to settle down in Kerala. Later I came to understand that while I was busy making my own plans, God had a different plan for me. However, whenever the thought came to my mind of constructing a house I was reminded of the verse in Prov. 24:27 “Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; and after that build your house”. So I decided that as long as I was involved with the work of ELS/CLC I must concentrate on it and consider the construction of our house only after retirement. I was also encouraged by the Word of God that reads “I declare to you that the Lord will build a house for you” (1 Chro. 17:10b).

At the time of my retirement from CLC International, we were staying in Trivandrum. In fact, we had been living there for the last five years prior to retirement. The cost of living in Trivandrum city was higher than that of most other cities in India. I had a feeling that once I retire from the mission field there was no need to stay in a city. Moreover, my monthly income from the salary would cease as soon as I retire and we would have to dig into whatever little savings we have made, in order to make both ends meet. So we felt it was better to consider building a small house in a rural area where living expenses would be less than that of a city. After much thought and prayer we decided to move to central Kerala and construct a house within reasonable proximity of our ancestral home where many of our loved ones live in the neighborhood. The compelling reason for this decision was our desire to make ourselves available to our aged parents whenever they wanted our physical presence. We believe that God has specially blessed us for honouring our parents. Leelamma had the special privilege of staying a few days with the parents of each one of us in their last days, nursing and comforting them. Her mother and father had left for their eternal home while she was watching them by their bedside.

While discussing our plan to construct a house in Kerala, my daughter's husband Johnny's father Rev. A.C. Oommen, offered to sell us a plot from his land property in Kaviyoor. Both of our families were glad at the prospect of being able to live close by. My nephew Thampi, a civil engineer offered to undertake the responsibility of construction of the house on a ‘turnkey’ basis which he completed within a period of 12 months. Our budget was for a single-storey house with a floor area of about 1000 sq.ft. However, with a totally unexpected contribution from Mr. Peter Horne, the then International Coordinator of CLC, we were able to make the addition of a ‘prophet's chamber’ on the first floor. This ‘chamber’ has been found very useful and convenient whenever our children or visitors come to stay with us. In early November 1998 we took up residence in the new house in Kaviyoor that ‘the Lord has built for us’.

As Chairman of Thiruvalla Medical Mission

About five years before the actual date of retirement I had begun preparing my mind for a quiet retired life. So, a transition from city to village was not too hard! Having come to Kaviyoor we found our place for church fellowship in a local Brethren Assembly. It was not easy for us to make many new friends in a new place with a small church fellowship, especially due to the age and the limitations it brings. Hence, with limited activities and not too many friends, a sense of loneliness was felt. Before long, a friend who was also a member of the Board of Management of the Tiruvalla Medical Mission approached me and invited me to join their Management Board with the assurance that my presence would be required only on the day of the Annual General Body meeting each year and as such, there would be no other major involvement for me to disturb my quiet life. However, at the very first General Body meeting I attended, there was a unanimous decision to appoint me as the Chairman of the Board. Understanding the predicament of the organization at that particular point of time, my mind did not allow me to say ‘no’ to them. For the next three years, that is, until I stepped down owing to my health problems I never had a dull moment. By then, TMM was a 300-bedded multi-specialty hospital with more than 60 doctors and 600 staff. It had two branch hospitals and a

Nursing School, all under one Governing Board and all the members of the board belonging to the Brethren Church. There were ‘never-ending’ committee meetings and Board meetings as well as meetings for consultations, policy making, minutes finalizing, staff counseling and many other related subjects pertaining to a large Christian Mission hospital under a Governing Board consisting of many eminent men. In most such matters, the Chairman’s involvement and personal attention were always expected.

A Nursing College in Kaviyoor

In the year 2004 TMM started a Nursing College in a building leased out from the Mar Thoma Academy, Tiruvalla. As per the regulations of the Indian Nursing Council, every Nursing College must have its own building and premises within a couple of years of its opening. At that time, TMM did not have sufficient funds to purchase the minimum requirement of 3 acres of land in Tiruvalla and to construct the necessary buildings for the college. I mentioned this matter for prayer in our local Assembly prayer meeting one day just as I did in Madras way back in late seventies regarding the ELS building so that the Lord may show us a way. Two families of our Assembly took this need to their heart and in a few days’ time, one of them, the Koshy family of Ebenezer offered for the college nearly two acres of their land absolutely free of cost. The other family, that of Thannimootil Mathai offered three acres of their land at a very low price on easy installment basis. We in TMM thanked God and took over possession of both those properties in Kaviyoor. We were able to purchase another acre of land adjacent to the Ebenezer property with the intention of constructing the buildings necessary for the College and the Girl’s Hostel on the same campus. Now that there was nearly six acres of land exclusively available for the college, it was easy to mortgage this property with the bank and raise a loan for the construction of the college and hostel buildings. A generous contribution from a friend of mine from the UK enabled us to provide a beautiful Chapel in the main building. A brass plaque acknowledging this gift is fixed at the entrance of the Chapel. Within 18 months, two buildings with three floors in each measuring altogether about 72,000 sq.ft were constructed and the college shifted from Tiruvalla to its own campus in Kaviyoor in early 2007.

Even though I had stepped down in 2005 from the position of the Chairman due to health reasons, the Board requested me to continue with them as its Vice-Chairman and President of the college. Hence the major administrative responsibility of the affairs of the college was upon me. Friends at CMC Vellore were helpful in getting a Principal and Professor for our college. Some of the practices of CMC were followed in TMM College too, namely the Lamp Lighting Ceremony, and Graduation Ceremony with its pomp and special processions etc. These special occasions are highly impressive and greatly appreciated by the students, their parents and public. Leelamma and I, together had the privilege of composing the College Song based on the hymn ‘We thank thee, O our God’. We had nurtured TMM College as our baby from its inception until I fully retired in August 2013.

During the period of my leadership in TMM the most significant achievement was the starting of a College of Nursing affiliated to the University and locating it in a sprawling campus at Kaviyoor. From its inception I was with the college as its Chairman-Patron, later as the President and finally, after retiring from the Board, as the Executive Director for two years. In this period the Lord helped me to get the college upgraded to the post-graduation level of M.Sc.Nursing. In all these I can boldly say that I was walking ‘along unfamiliar paths’ as it was God who guided me and made the rough places smooth.

Deliverance from the Jaws of Death

Towards the middle of the year 2004 while I was fully involved as Chairman of Tiruvalla Medical Mission I began to feel physically tired and became very weak. At first I thought it was due to the burden of the work load. About that time, by God’s Providence, I was instrumental in getting a senior consultant physician namely Dr. A.M. Cherian, being appointed at TMM. He had just retired from CMC Vellore and joined TMM thereafter. While doing a medical check up on me, Dr. Cherian found out that I had developed Hepatitis B. The only possibility that we could think of as its cause was a surgery I had undergone in Madras about 28 years back and the entry of such virus by way of any injection needles at that time. Dr. Cherian said that this

virus could remain dormant for many years in a person's body and become active again. He advised me to proceed immediately to CMC, Vellore for treatment. There was considerable swelling in my whole body by the next day and any physical movement became difficult. My daughter Mercy and her husband Johnny who were in Orissa at that time were able to make the necessary arrangements at CMC for me to be admitted immediately on arrival. Leelamma and I reached CMC on the following day and found Mercy had already arrived there from Bissam Cuttack, a couple of hours before us. I was in CMC for 10 days undergoing various investigations and treatment. One evening at about 8 pm Dr. Raju Titus Chacko of CMC was at my bedside on a friendly visit and I was talking to him while sitting up and taking some liquid food. Suddenly I felt exhausted and collapsed. Raju and Mercy helped me to lie down on the bed. Raju called up the concerned doctor who was off duty at that time. The doctor rushed to my bedside and found out that my condition was due to an adverse reaction to some medicine. The presence and timely action of Dr. Raju had helped me to get immediate medical assistance that made it possible for me to escape from the jaws of death. Since the Lord enabled me to get the right treatment at the right time, I became free from this killer virus within a couple of years!

Our Golden Wedding Anniversary

About six months before we were to complete fifty years of married life, our children began to plan silently for a wonderful celebration of our golden anniversary. They had planned for having a family get together in the retreat center of Scripture Union at Mahabalipuram, near Chennai. Our immediate families and close friends from Chennai were invited for the function which consisted of a meeting followed by lunch. Mercy and her son Ashu quietly collected some of our ancient and modern photographs as well as email addresses of our close friends and forwarded them to Robin and Shini, who applied their computer skills on the old pictures and arranged them as a beautiful album depicting various stages of our life. They also contacted many of our friends secretly and collected from them messages of felicitations for our anniversary and printed them out as a memoir.

Keeping us in the dark about all these preparations, the children had requested us to spend a couple of days with them in Madras for a change instead of them coming down to Kerala during the summer. At Mahabalipuram on the 17th of May 2012, we were pleasantly surprised to see many of our friends and loved ones coming over there to greet us on our Golden Wedding Anniversary! It was then that our children let out their secret and surprised us by presenting the photo album mentioned above and the memoir of felicitations which we hold very precious even today. We highly admire our children for taking all these initiatives very quietly and efficiently and appreciate the way in which they expressed their love to their parents. It was a very memorable time of fellowship with the loved ones and friends whom we had not seen for quite some time.

Appreciation of the Family

As I look back into our life together over more than half a century, I must write down what pops up in my mind about my better half and my children. To me, Leelamma is my helpmate and companion, chosen by God. This virtuous woman is better described in Proverbs 31:10-31. During the early stages of our life, though I was attracted more by her outward beauty, as the time goes on her inner beauty far outweighs it. I thank God for this precious gift. My parents had seen her as the biblical character of Ruth because of her love, care and respect for them. They in turn had loved her more than their own daughters. Leelamma never liked to think of my parents as her 'in-laws'. They were always her 'own parents' to her. During the last days of my father, Leelamma left me and our children in Madras for a month and went home to Kerala to look after him. My parents and the whole family had greatly appreciated her expression of love and care. Even today, her insight, inclination and willingness to take care of the sick and the weak are far greater than that of a trained nurse. To me personally, after God, Leelamma is everything. She is my companion, friend, fellow traveler, counselor, comforter, prayer partner and much more. If I am ever considered as a successful man, the secret behind it is the presence of my wife. From the very first day of our marriage the Lord has enabled us to

walk side by side in life's journey with God as our Guide. We do not claim to be perfect. We both do have our own special nature, strengths and weaknesses, differences in thinking and expressing opinions, times of sadness and even brief spells of not talking to each other. However, I thank God that we still prayed together even when we didn't feel like doing so! I am sure that the Lord has heard even such prayers of aching hearts and has come down with His healing balm.

We do thank God for our children - Mercy and Robin. As parents we have observed in them some distinctive characters of their own. However, what is common between them is that they are both quiet by nature, gracious, considerate and blessed with leadership qualities. They were content and thankful with whatever we could provide for them in life and there was no demand or complaint. They understood our simple lifestyle and have never looked for any luxury. They never looked for a lucrative job to make money but desired to be subjected to God's will and to be happy with whatever God provided. Both of them had accepted the Lord as their personal Savior before reaching the age of 10. They were smart at studies and possessed good skills in handling computers which make them fit for this digital age. In fact, they are the ones who gave me lessons on how to use a computer! In due course the Lord has joined each of them with their chosen life partners and both the families are in the service of the Lord. The Lord has blessed us with one grandson Ashish John. All these give us great joy as we echo with Joshua of the Old Testament and say "As for me and my household we serve the Lord".

Farewell from the organizations

At no stage in my life I had worked for or looked forward to secure a position or popularity. Every position such as General Secretary of ELS, Chairman of Evangelical Literature Fellowship of India, The Founding President of New Life Computer Institute Bangalore, Area Coordinator of CLC International, Chairman of Tiruvalla Medical Mission and Executive Director of TMM College of Nursing has been given to me with the unanimous and voluntary consent of the concerned organizations. From each of the above, after offering faithful services for a number of years I had voluntarily stepped down whenever I felt it was time to find a successor.

As I remember the grand farewells given to us from the Evangelical Literature Service, Chennai, CLC International, Sheffield and Tiruvalla Medical Mission, especially from the College of Nursing and the sentiments of love and respect expressed by those friends and co-workers and how they regard us even today, it humbles us. It reminds me again that 'I am what I am only by the grace of God'. I know that it pleased the Lord to make these institutions as His sphere of work through literature and medical service. As the Lord gave us the opportunity to serve Him through these missions we feel confident that we have run the race faithfully with each of them to the best of our ability, keeping our eyes off from any personal gain and looking unto Jesus the Author and Perfecter of our faith. By His grace, we have not been side tracked. Now our responsibility to them is, as I understand from 1 Samuel 12:23, 'As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for'. While doing so we keep running life's race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, our Lord.

The End.



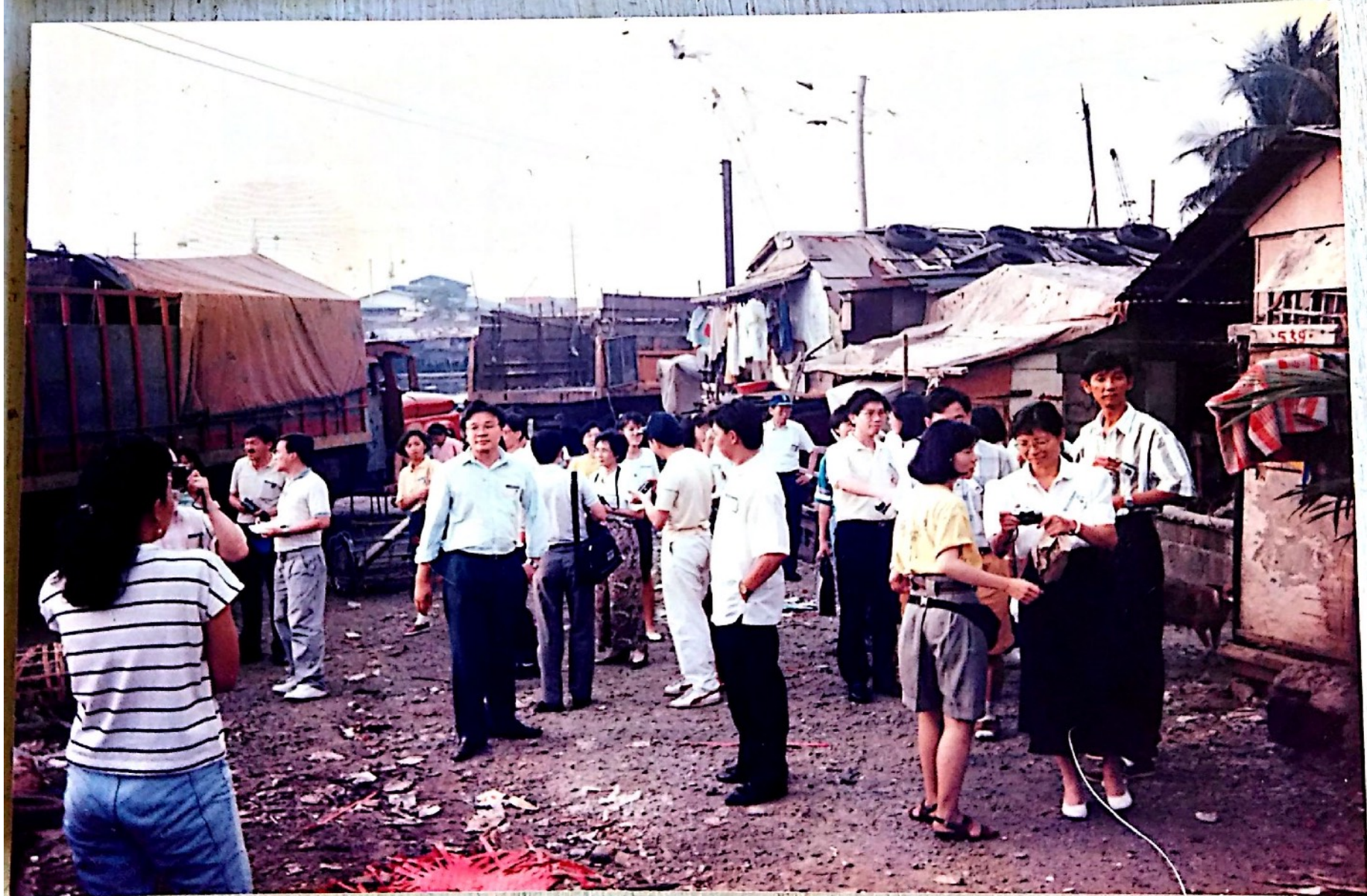
With Samuel Lamb in China



With Jacob's Family in Yangon



War memorial & Book Release - Myanmar



My visit to Smoky Mountain - Manila



Honouring - the Burmese way