

Fellowship of St Thomas



NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2011



President's Letter.

August 2011

Dear friends,

This letter comes to tell you that, sadly, I am obliged to resign as President of FOST. Pressure of work makes it difficult for me to do the task as I would wish.

As you prepare for the Annual Meeting at Dunblane, my thoughts will be with you.

The island of Sri Lanka and the Church there still face great challenges as they rebuild lives and structures. Can I commend to you the work of the Theological College of Lanka and the role it plays in forming people for leadership. Under the guidance of a new principal, it is looking forward to development in new ways, whilst building on the foundations so firmly laid by the dedicated staff and students of the past. Let us keep them in our prayers.

My good wishes to you all not just for that special meeting,

Rev. Eileen Thompson,
President

The Fellowship of St. Thomas Website.

The Fellowship of St. Thomas website (www.fost.org.uk) was set up at the beginning of last year with a view to making information about the Fellowship and its activities readily available and accessible to anyone interested, wherever they may be located. Have you had a look at the site yet?

The front page of the site lets one know the objectives of the Fellowship and provides links to the other pages on the site. These pages include a diary, where forthcoming events can be advertised, a page with news from the church in South Asia, an 'Obituaries' page and pages with useful links to the websites of the churches and Christian organisations active in S. Asia.

One very important page is that containing information about the various partners from our home churches who are serving the church in Bangladesh (ecumenical partners David & Sarah Hall, Pat Jamison and Gillian Rose) and in Nepal (C. of S. partners Joel and Agnes Githinji). Of course, you are likely to know others serving in one of the countries in the area and we would be only too happy to put their news/prayer letters on the site, although some areas are 'sensitive' and our friends would not wish their letters to appear on the web. However, if you do know of someone who is happy to have their prayer letter appear on our website, do get in touch.

It was fortuitous that the website was established when it was as this allowed us to give fairly comprehensive coverage (slightly in retrospect) of the celebrations to mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, held in Edinburgh in December 2009. If you have not had an opportunity to read the assessments of Bishop Newbigin's immense contribution to the thinking of the world-wide church, contributed by prominent Christians from literally all over the world, you can find these on our website!

We are a small organisation so cannot expect to have huge numbers visiting the site. However, we have had almost 1000 'unique visitors' since the site was opened. Naturally, the majority visiting

the site are from the U.K. but we have had significant interest from the United States and some visits from Japan, Pakistan and even Saudi Arabia. (Of course, many do not stay on the site for any length of time!)

If you have not already visited the website, please do so now. Can I draw your attention to the 'Contact Us' page and encourage you to be in contact with me, the 'Webmaster', with 'corrections, comments or suggestions for contents' as any website is only of much use if it provides its readers with the information they want to have.

John McArthur *Webmaster*

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This symbol, appearing on the cover of this Newsletter is taken from logos used in Canada, the United States and Australia by various mission organisations there. Some have used it without the fish, but this is an early Christian symbol from the Greek word for fish - ichthus - which is made into an acronym for 'Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour.' The fish symbol became increasingly important when the church was persecuted.

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New Bishop of Diocese of Multan, Pakistan.

The election of the fourth bishop of the diocese of Multan, Church of Pakistan has been completed. The Church of Pakistan has formally announced the election of the fourth Bishop of the Diocese of Multan, Church of Pakistan. The elections took place on Friday, 3rd June 2011 in St. Mary's Cathedral, Multan. The Rev. Leo Paul was elected as the Bishop. The consecration has been decided for 19th June 2011. A church spokesman said, "We are grateful to the Lord for this achievement after a struggle of almost 7 years in electing the fourth Bishop of Multan. We look forward to your prayers and support in the future."

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Nepal Update

Recently the Nepal government announced that it would re-measure the height of Mount Everest. Their figure, 8848m, disagrees with the China one (evidently a matter of measuring the rock height or the snow height) and also with a 1999 US measurement, by GPS, of 8850m..

Though it's fascinating to think of the continental plates continuing to push the gigantic Himalayan mountains ever higher and higher, this trivial, even comical, distraction from real concerns is discouraging, since once again the political situation in Nepal is dire. More than 22 parties continue to squabble among themselves and frustrate each other's initiatives for peace and progress towards a new constitution... The other day Kantipur News reported that the main opposition party, Congress, was blocking Parliament with a demand that the Prime Minister should resign. With this matter unresolved Parliament was unable to "consider bills or conduct other business". On the very same day was reported the resignation of the deputy Prime Minister/Home Minister after a decision by the Maoist leader to reshuffle his cabinet.

On a recent visit to Kathmandu I saw with disappointment that shortages of water, electricity and fuel were unchanged, that bandhs were still being called by assorted groups and that the Bhagmati smelled as ripe as ever. Meanwhile there has been word of a new push against religious conversion. There is once again talk of punishment for any who change their own religion, or cause someone else to change theirs, particularly from a belief which has been in the country "from time immemorial". It's clear that this is an effort to defend Hinduism and Buddhism against Christianity.

My heavy heart was thrilled, however, when I heard that in the face of this new attitude, some in the Nepali Church are actually praying bravely for persecution, so as to be saved from complacency, and to be a blessing to their country. Let us remember them.

Marianne Karsgaard

Sri Lanka: Spate of attacks against Christians.

Here is a recent report dated 8th August 2011 by Release International from the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka. (NCEASL)

Recent attacks against Christians in south and west Sri Lanka have left several people injured and homes damaged, according to Release partners. On July 19, a mob of about 50 people attacked the homes of five Christian families in Dehiwinna, Badulla district, with clubs and rocks. A grocery shop was also demolished,

The attackers shouted threats, demanding that Christians leave the area. Several families fled and hid in the jungle for a while. One Christian was badly beaten and required hospital treatment for his injuries. Local police were informed and officers were sent in to patrol the area on subsequent nights - but no arrests have been made.

On July 10, a pastor in Ampara district was hospitalised after being beaten by a Buddhist monk and others. The unnamed pastor from Mount Carmel Church in Keviliyamaduwa had attended a meeting about land distribution convened by the monk - only to be attacked by those present. The pastor, who was also later assaulted at his home, was taken to Ampara Hospital with injuries to his arm and severe pains in his stomach.

These are not isolated incidents - and in fact NCEASL publishes regular persecution incident summaries. On June 18, the temporary building of an Assembly of God church in Nuwara-Eliva district was damaged during the night. The pastor of the church has received threats for years, according to NCEASL.

And in Puttlam district, in western Sri Lanka, the Prayer Tower Church in Mahawewa was desecrated with excrement on June 5. Later on the same day, it was then raided by about 200 protesters carrying placards and clubs and demanding the church's closure. A lay preacher who tried to remonstrate with protesters was beaten. Evangelical Christians especially face violence and opposition in this Buddhist-majority nation.

A GIFT OF A CHALICE

The Fellowship of St Thomas has received a gift of a chalice. It is presently being used by our President, Rev Eileen Thompson, in the Livingston Ecumenical Parish and will be used in the service of holy communion in Dunblane Cathedral on 24th September 2011. It originally came from Sister Joy Whitin a member of the Church of South India Sisterhood. She was also a member of the Fellowship of Prayer for Unity associated with Sister Carol Graham who founded the CSI Sisterhood. Sister Carol was also instrumental in founding the Farncombe Community which gave rise to the Ecumenical Spirituality Project now called the Living Spirituality network and based at The Well at Willen in Milton Keynes. Partly because of our Indian connections, recently the people in Milton Keynes have gifted the chalice to us.

In 1992 Sister Joy wrote as follows:

Dear Friends,

My father, Rev Thomas Whitin, joined the ministry of the Methodist Church in 1909 in Nagapattinam, South India, where the Methodist Church from the United Kingdom started work in the late 18th century. They also began working in Sri Lanka at that time.

My father was a convert to Christianity from his study at Madurai -Pasumalai, on the border with Kerala. He married my mother, daughter of the first Indian pastor in Menguapuram - Tinnevely very close to where Bishop Azariah was born. My father and Bishop Azariah had joined with an evangelistic campaign with Mr Eddy from Britain in 1917 and they prayed together in Tranquebar that the churches should be united to evangelise India. Thus the Church of South India began in their time.

My brother, Ashbury Winton, my father and I had the chance to attend the service of inauguration of the Church of South India at St George's Cathedral, Madras on September 27th 1947. After the service, at home, we were talking to others about the service in the Cathedral. My brother and I said that the gathering in the church

reminded us of heaven for Christians of all different countries and different languages were there. Then my father remarked that we should not be content with this as the Roman Catholics should also be one with the Protestants and only then could the church be one. As a Protestant I could not imagine then that the Roman Catholics would join us. That seemed a dream to me and I thought that it could not happen.

Then in 1958 I passed through Oban on my way to Iona in Scotland. I had time to enter a Roman Catholic church where I used their books for worship, and I felt I could follow their worship. With that assurance I went to Iona with a friend and spent a week there. I believed in Ecumenism for the first time in my life - I was reminded of my father's vision in 1947.

This Holy Communion cup for the wine is the one my father used in his ministry, mostly to take Holy Communion as he cycled to villages in his time in Trichy- Tanjore Diocese. When he died in 1951, my brothers and sisters passed it on to me. I now pass it on to be used in Milton Keynes where I know there is Christian unity such as my father predicted in Madras in 1947. It has come true in practice in an ecumenical centre like Milton Keynes which I visited in 1992 and thank God that Rev. Murdoch MacKenzie is there as the Ecumenical Moderator of Milton Keynes Christian Council.

I hope this cup will be of use to small groups who go there to remind them that we are all one in Christ.

Joy Whitin

Thus this cup has a story to tell from the lips of Indian villagers whose lives have been fed in the Holy Eucharist and it is a special privilege for us to be able to use it in Livingston and in our gatherings of the Fellowship of St Thomas. Thanks be to God.

Murdoch MacKenzie

St. Thomas of India Unity Lecture 2012

The next Lecture will be held in 2012. Dates and venues have yet to be finalised.

The lecturer will be Brian Dunn (from Canada) a doctoral candidate in theology at Regent's Park College in Oxford University. He has had considerable international experience having lived in Zambia, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. He and his family lived in North India where he worked for seven years at an international school in the foothills of the Himalayas. As head of the Religious Education department and school Chaplain, he taught and developed curriculum for classes in ethics, philosophy, and world religions for secondary-level students from international and multi-faith backgrounds.

He completed his Masters in Religious Studies at Oxford University with examination papers in the methodology of religious studies, classical Buddhism, and a dissertation focus of second century Christianity and its interaction with the philosophical and religious plurality of the ancient Near East. Mr. Dunn is currently pursuing his doctoral research in the field of comparative theology. His present focus is on the life and writings of a South Indian Christian theologian, Ayadurai Jesudason Appasamy, and his particular comparative interaction with Hindu philosophical and theological conceptions of divine embodiment. He undertakes his doctoral studies with the intention of teaching comparative theology and religion at the post-secondary level. He is currently the interim pastor of First Baptist Church, Thunder Bay, Canada

As always the purpose of the lecture will be to bring to the attention of the audience aspects of the Unity achieved by the United Churches in the Indian sub-continent.

Release International this month speaks of health concerns for two Christians detained for 'blasphemy' in Pakistan.

Release partners in Pakistan say they are concerned for the health and well-being of two Christian women detained for 'blasphemy' in Punjab.

Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan (SLMP) reports that one of the two, Agnus Bibi, is in such poor health due to a lung condition that she has been transferred to Faisalabad Civil Hospital.

Two guards have been assigned to her in hospital. Even so, SLMP says it is concerned for her safety, given that Christians accused of blasphemy are often the target of Islamist extremists, even before a conviction. Christian brothers Sajid and Rashid Emmanuel were shot dead outside the Faisalabad courthouse where they were on trial for blasphemy in July 2010

Meanwhile, Ruqiya Bibi from Kasur district, who is serving a life sentence for 'blasphemy' in Sahiwal Central Jail, is said to be in poor health because of an insect bite on her foot for which she has not received any medical treatment.

SLMP recently made it possible for Ruqiya's family to visit her in jail — after a long separation. An SLMP staff member described as 'heart-rending' the scene of Ruqiya being reunited with her husband and children. They could see one another but could not touch because they were separated by iron bars and a fence.

The staff member reported, 'She was shedding tears continuously which showed her great pain and sorrow. Even the visitors of other prisoners got emotional seeing her.'

Ruqiya has been detained for the past three years and is currently being kept in solitary confinement, after threats from other prisoners. She has been promised safety in return for converting to Islam - but has refused and remained strong in her faith. SLMP reports that she and her husband, Munir, were both given life sentences but Munir was later released.

Memorial Service for Shahbaz Bhatti Glasgow 4th June 2011

Some of the Fellowship of St Thomas attended a Memorial Service for Shahbaz Bhatti organised by the Scottish Asian Christian Fellowship in Pollokshields Parish Church, he was assassinated in Pakistan on Wed 2nd March 2011.

The Rev Neil Galbraith Moderator of the Presbytery of Glasgow took part, he had visited Pakistan several times on behalf of Glasgow Caring City Charity after the Pakistan earthquake of 2005.

It was good to hear from him and to be led in worship, prayers and song by ordained and lay people from the Pakistani Community.

We were reminded of some of the achievements of Shahbaz.

Shahbaz Bhatti, son of Jacob Bhatti was born on September 9, 1968 in Lahore, Punjab and joined the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in 2002. He was elected Member of the National Assembly on reserved seat for minorities on the ticket of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). He was made Federal Minister for Minorities in 2008.

He was one of the founding members of All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA) in 1985 and became Chairman of All Pakistan Minorities Alliance, Founder and President of the Christian Liberation Front, and the Executive Director of the Pakistan Council for Human Rights. APMA was active in bringing relief to people after the earthquake.

Shahbaz Bhatti was the first parliamentarian who made history by assuming the Federal Minister for Minorities. He received International Religious Freedom Award for rendering services to the community. He was the first ever Pakistani to receive this award

As federal minister, Bhatti took serious steps to ensure the safety, rights and empower religious minorities while in office. He launched national campaign to promote interfaith and harmony through seminars, awareness groups, and workshops. He lived with the

knowledge that his life was under threat but it did not stop him speaking out against the Blasphemy Law.

Linda Oxburgh of Release International reminded us of the difficult conditions under which Christians in Pakistan live and work.

Our thanks are due to SACF for organising this service.

Margaret Nutter

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The Persecuted Church Speaker **Linda Oxburgh of Release International** has provided us with this poem for the Newsletter.

Only One Life.

Two little lines I heard one day,
Travelling along life's busy way:
Bringing conviction to my heart And
from my mind did not depart;

*"Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last. "*

By C.T.Studd

She goes on to say: "This reminds me so much of those who are persecuted for their faith. They know what is important and in particular 1st Peter I verses 6-7 "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed."

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Resignation of President.

As you can see in the President's letter, Eileen no longer feels able to be President of our Fellowship. This is an office she has fulfilled ably since September 2007 and we will miss her very valuable contributions to all our meetings, especially her leading of our devotions.

You are now invited to put forward nominations for President (with the nominee's consent) to the Secretary of the Fellowship. This will be decided at the AGM.

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The Constitution states: "The Committee, including office bearers, shall number not less than seven and not more than twelve and shall comprise as wide a representation as possible of the denominations in Scotland and of the Churches of South Asia. The seven remaining members are from the Roman Catholic, United Reformed, Baptist, Church of Scotland and Sheem Gill whom we congratulate on his becoming the Vice Chairperson of Minority Ethnic Churches Together in Scotland (MECTIS)

All members of the Fellowship are asked to think carefully and prayerfully and to approach people whom they think would be good for the Committee and likewise for the Presidency. If possible inform the Secretary (mackenziema@ymail.com Tel. 01631 710550) by mid-September though nominations may be made at the AGM itself.

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Let us pray -

for God to sustain and protect everyone involved in the work of Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan. Thank God for their powerful, life-transforming ministry which brings hope in desperate situations.

for justice for Pastor Hari Shankar Ninama who was stripped and beaten by at least ten Hindu extremists in Rajasthan - when they found him praying for someone sick. His family have urged police not to investigate for fear of further attack.

for Sri Lankan Christians who have suffered attacks and threats in recent months. Pray that God's rod and staff (Psalm 23) will protect and comfort them.

for Christians in Pakistan and other areas charged with blasphemy and persecuted for their faith.

for Christians in Pakistan fighting for minority rights and freedom to worship.

for the Nepali Christians suffering persecution.

for the leaders of the Asian Churches especially those newly elected to these posts.

that the St. Thomas Website may reach a wider audience.

for the Annual Meetings of the Fellowship of St. Thomas and for the selection of a new President.

for the Annual Meeting of our sister organisation in England, the Fellowship of the Church in India, held in London on 1st October 2011.

A Prayer for Renewal

Even as the water falls on dry tea leaves and brings out their flavour, so may your Spirit fall on us and renew us so that we may bring refreshment and joy to others.

(Reproduced with permission from the Ceylon Churchman)

www.fost.org.uk

Modern technology advances and it is now possible to read the Newsletter as well as up-to-date news on the website.

If you have an email address please send this to the Secretary and a list will be compiled which will enable easier circulation of news. Please enter this also on the reply slip for the Annual Celebration which is enclosed with this Newsletter.

We hope you will pass on your Newsletter to other interested friends and help to increase our Fellowship. Additional copies are available if required.

**The Fellowship of St. Thomas
Annual Celebration on
Saturday, 24th September 2011
in Dunblane Cathedral.**

10.00 am: Tea/Coffee and registration in
Cathedral Church Upstairs Hall.

Bookstall with material from Barnabas Fund, Church of Scotland,
Release International and Christian Solidarity Worldwide

10.30 am: Welcome and Opening Prayer

**Theme: The Persecuted Church -Speaker Linda Oxburgh of
Release International**

11.15 am: Prayer and sharing

11.20 am: Panel Discussion - Margaret Nutter, Linda Oxburgh,
Saboohi Gill, Jim Watson and John McArthur

11.40 Questions and contributions from the floor

12.15 pm: Buffet Lunch at India Gate Restaurant

1.45 pm: Annual General Meeting in Cathedral Upstairs Hall

2.30 pm: Communion Service in Dunblane Cathedral

Liturgy - Church of Ceylon Sri Lanka

Celebrant - Rev. Paul Watson

Preacher - Mr. Nimal Wijesinghe

3.45 pm: Tea/Coffee in Cathedral Church Hall.

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**The Friends of the Church in India
FCI Day
Indian YMCA, Fitzroy Square, London
Saturday, 1st October 2011 at 10.30 am**

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For information about the Fellowship of St. Thomas contact the
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