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H.H. Mar Gewargis III Sliwa, Catholicos-Patriarch of the
Assyrian Church of the East Ordains Deacon Martin Nabil
Nicola as Priest at Erbil – 23 June 2018

VOICE OF THE EAST



Flood relief work by Mar Addai Shleeha Parish in Vyanad under the leadership of Fr. K R Inasu on 15 August 2018



Flood relief work by Mart Mariam Big Church under the leadership of Fr. Binu Joseph

VOICE OF THE EAST

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Patron : **His Grace Dr. Mar Aprem**

Metropolitan's Palace,

Trichur - 680 001, Kerala, India

Phone : 91487 - 2420978

Personal : 91487 - 2442166

Email : hgmaraprem@gmail.com

Website Links

Official: www.news.assyrianchurch.org

Archdiocese of India & UAE: www.churchoftheeastindia.org

Archdiocese of Australia & New Zealand: www.assyrianchurch.org.au

Diocese of California: www.acoecalifornia.org

Diocese of Europe: www.assyrianchurch-europe.org

Assyrian Church of the East Relief Organisation: www.theacero.org

Unofficial: www.nestorian.org

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Voice of the East

Vol. 65

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Editorial

Floods in Kerala

Kerala, the southernmost state of India, experienced floods for the first time in the present generation. More than 100 people died in the first two days of this sad event. The Navy, Air Force and Army of the Central Government were mobilised to save lives across the impacted regions.

Our church also joined our Government in helping the people, irrespective of caste or creed. The Youth Conference scheduled for August 21 to 24 was postponed. We are sorry to disappoint visitors from different parts of the world who had made all the preparations to reach Thrissur, Kerala, India. Sadly, Cochin International Airport was under water.

On August 15th we celebrated the 71st anniversary of the Independence of India which coincided with the *Shunaya* of Marth Mariam. We were hoping that the Youth Conference would be conducted as scheduled. Normally, Thrissur and Cochin International airports are safe areas. On the mentioned day, the situation changed with rain, floods and the overflow of Kerala dams turning the situation from bad to worse. The calculated loss is massive and is bound to increase as the situation stabilises.

Our Mart Mariam Cathedral Parish in Thrissur minimised the expenses of the *Shunaya* Day celebrations and collected contributions for the relief effort under the leadership of the Vicar, Fr. Binu Joseph Ponnokaren, with faithful contributing Rs. 2 lakhs (two hundred thousand) towards the Flood Relief Fund. Mar Addai Shleekha Parish rushed urgent medicines and clothes worth the same amount to the relief effort under the leadership of their Vicar, Fr. K.R.Inasu. As most of our church buildings are constructed at a far distance from rivers and dams, we do not anticipate any serious damage to our church buildings.

Let us all pray for the people of our Kerala state. Now the floods are spreading to some other areas of India. We cannot imagine the volume of calamity if the present rains continue, as the regular monsoon season is not over yet. We used to pray for rain. Now we pray to God Almighty that the rains may cease as dams and rivers are overflowing.

The new dates suggested for the Youth Conference are 26 – 29 December 2018, the day after Christmas.

Mar Aprem Metropolitan

International News

New Priest Ordained in Erbil, Iraq

28 June 2017

On Friday 23rd June 2017 at St John the Baptist Church in Ankawa, Erbil, Deacon Martin Nabil Nikola was ordained to the rank of priesthood at the blessed hands of His Holiness Mar Gewargis III Sliwa, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East. In attendance was His Grace Mar Abris Youkhanan, Bishop of Erbil and Patriarchal Vicar, Archbishop Mar Grigorios Sliwa Shimon of the Syrian Orthodox Church along with numerous reverend priests, deacons and nuns from many sister churches.

Biography:

- Reverend Martin was born in Baghdad in 1990 and completed his primary and secondary education in the city of his birth. From there he moved to Erbil to study philosophy and theology at Babel College, successfully graduating in 2014.
- He was ordained a deacon by His Holiness Mar Gewargis III in St Odisho Church, Baghdad on 18th December 2010.
- Reverend Martin is married and will serve the Assyrian Church of the East at St John the Baptist Patriarchal Cathedral in Ankawa, Erbil.

Bishop Mar Ishaq Joseph

Bishop Mar Ishaq Joseph of Duhok and Russia, who was sick with kidney disease for some time and was under expert treatment in Chicago, has recovered from his illness and returned to his Diocese in Dohuk, North Iraq. He will need some more rest. Please pray for him.

WCC Rejoices at Reconciliation of Orthodox Synods in Ethiopia

The St. Mary's cathedral in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia World Council of Churches

14 August 2018

In a letter addressed to the prime minister of Ethiopia Dr Abiy Ahmed, on 13 August, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), conveyed heartfelt congratulations in the decisive role played by Ahmed to ensure the reconciliation of the two synods and unity of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church after 27 years of separation.

“This is a remarkable achievement and a historic moment for the entire Christian family”, said Tveit. ”The unity of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, a historic and ancient church, is central to the unity of Ethiopia itself, a historic and ancient nation”, he added.

Abiy, who become prime minister in April, personally intervened in the talks that led to the reunification of the Orthodox Church.

The WCC general secretary also sent letters to His Holiness Abune Mathias I, patriarch of Ethiopia, archbishop of Axum, Echegue of the See of St. Tekelehaimanot, and His Holiness Abunä Merkorios, patriarch of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, congratulating both for historic reconciliation achieved within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

“This is a historic kairos moment of jubilation and celebration not only for Ethiopians, but for the entire ecumenical family”, wrote Tveit. ”The journey was long and arduous, but oikoumene (unity) won in the end. To God be the glory!” he added.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which traces its roots back to the 4th century, is one of the oldest organized Christian bodies in the world. More than 40% of Ethiopia’s population of about 100 million are adherents of the Orthodox Church.

Indian Church News

Lady President for YMCA

The World Alliance of YMCA elected a lady as its President. Ms. Patricia Pelton of Canada is the first woman to become President of the Young Men’s Christian Association. Ms. Patricia Pelton was the President of the YMCA of Canada. She was also head of the Image & Impact Committee of the World Alliance of YMCAs.

Nobody knows whether the YWCA, (Young Women Christian Association) will elect a man to man the women’s movement to prove equal justice.

Lady Chairman of Kerala YMCA

For the first time in history of YMCA in India a lady has been elected as the Chairman of the Kerala region of the YMCA. Mrs. Kumari Kurias now Vice Chairperson of the Women’s Forum of the Asia Pacific Alliance of the YMCA is the successful candidate. She has been very active in the Women’s Forum of the YMCA in the Kerala region as well as all India level.

Coverage: Kerala Floods – August 2018

WCC Calls for Prayer for Flood-stricken Kerala, India

18 August 2018

As the worst flooding in half a century struck the southern India state of Kerala, World Council of Churches general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit called for prayers for those affected and for those responding, and expressed his sympathy for those who have lost loved ones in the disaster.

The flooding has killed more than 300 people and left thousands stranded. The area remains under grave threat of floods and landslides.

“Our hearts go out to people living in terrible fear in what has become a precarious situation,” said Tveit, who also commended the many churches on the ground assisting in rescue operations and relief work.

“Local churches have become especially important in bringing hope to remote villages cut off by flooding that has destroyed roads and bridges,” Tveit said. “We also hear reports of damage to churches and relief centers, and we pray for those trying to respond even while coping with their own losses.”

The Church of South India (CSI) was reporting that church buildings and mission centers have been damaged or destroyed, and that many are still inaccessible to rescuers. Floods have reached the second floors of houses and buildings, while gushing water has devastated low-lying and coastal areas, the CSI reported.

In Vandiperiyar, an affected area in the Idukki district, roads are washed out, resulting total isolation. “Many people including the CSI priest in this area are now in the relief camp. The rain took away many of their houses,” reads a CSI report. In the same district, the Cheruthoni Church is also at high risk.

People from churches, parish halls, schools, and colleges, youth and priests, students and families, were all in some way contributing to the rescue work. Many were collecting food kits and distributing them in relief camps. CSI parishes outside the area were also responding.

Delegates from Baghdad and Dohuk visits India

15 delegates from Baghdad and Dohuk visited India under the leadership of Fr. Dr. Aprem Alkori, priest of our church in Baghdad. As the Youth Conference was postponed due to the floods in Kerala all foreign delegates lost the hope of visiting our church in India. The delegates from Chicago decided terminate their journey at Dubai in U.A.E. They gave

donation to the priests of Dubai parish Fr. Sachin Timothy after attending our Qurbana in Sharjah on Friday 17th August.

The delegates from Baghdad and Dohuk in North Iraq decided to visit Kerala after fury of the floods had subsided. They began their visit from Delhi. Fr. Mohan Konikara, honorary Vicar of our St. Stephen's parish welcomed the delegates on Sunday 10th. After visiting Jeypore and other places they reached Bangalore the next week. Fr. Lijo Raphael, a Ph.D. student in Christian Ethics in Bangalore welcomed the delegates.

Final destination was Thrissur on Friday 30 August.

On Sunday Sept 2 the delegates from Iraq attended the Holy Qurbana in the Mart Mariam Cathedral where Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan and Bishop Dr. Mar Yohannan Yoseph led the Holy Qurbana. A dinner was arranged in the Metropolitan Palace in Trichur on the same evening in their honour.

Assyrian Church of the East Letters of Support on Kerala Flood Crisis

From Andy Darmoo: Assyrian Church of the East Relief Organisation

18 August 2018

Your Beatitude,

We are praying for Your Beatitude our Bishops Mar Awgin and Mar Youhana and all our people in Kerala.

Please let us know what we can do to help and except our prayers from myself and all the family.

Yours in Christ,
Andy Darmoo

**From H.B. Mar Meelis Zaia, Metropolitan of Australia,
New Zealand and Lebanon**

Dear Mar Aprem,

Greetings,

I pray to the Lord that He is keeping you and the community in His care during these difficult times.

ACERO Australia would like to donate 3000U\$ to the victims of the flood of our church in your area.

Many thanks,
In Christ,
Mar Meelis



Roman Catholic Bishop Rey of Philippines receives Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan and Bishop Dr. Mar Yohannan Yoseph in his office. The Bishops and leaders of the Eastern Catholic Church of Philippines are also seen



Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan and Bishop Dr. Mar Yohannan Yoseph are received in the VIP room of the international airport in Manila. A Flex Board of welcome is at the background



Rev. Fr. Jacks Chandy, Vicar of Mar Awgin Thuvana parish and Mission parish of Goa along with the Goa parish members after holy Qurbana on 29 July 2018



Bishop Dr. Mar Yohannan Yoseph pictured with the parishioners in Coimbatore on their parish festival day in July 2018



**Musical Qurbana team with the Patriarch and other prelates in
Mar Yohannan Mamdhana Church, Trichur**



**Triumphant and Victory Day of the Youths Association.
Bishop Mar Awgin Kuriakose delivers the inaugural address.**



Prelates and priests after the ordination of Deacon Martin Nabil Nicola as Priest at Erbil – 23 June 2018



Prelates and priests with choir group after the ordination of Deacon Martin Nabil Nicolas as priest at Erbil - 23 June 2018

**From H.G. Mar Benyamin Elya,
Bishop of Victoria and New Zealand**

Dear Your Beatitude and Your Graces.

I pray you're doing well.

I'm sending this email to let you know that you and the people of Kerala are in our prayers during this difficult time. We pray that God protects everyone there and give you the strength to continue your tremendous work for all those affected by these floods.

Your brother in Christ +

God bless +
Mar Benyamin Elya

From H.G. Mar Emmanuel Yosip, Bishop of Canada

Your Beatitude,

We regret to learn from your letter as well as from the news concerning the terrible floods which were caused by heavy rains and bridges collapse in the State of Kerala. And which resulted hundreds have died and thousands have suffered... this morning and during the celebration of the holy Qurbana, it was announced concerning your letter and the congregation were asked to keep the suffering people of Kerala in their prayers.

In Christ our Maran,
+ Mar Emmanuel

From H.G. Mar Aprim Khamis, Bishop of Western USA

21 August 2018

His Eminence Mar Aprem Metropolitan.

Your Eminence:

Greeting Y.E., The Prelates, The Clergy, and entire Faithful of your blessed Archdiocese.

I am deeply saddened by shocking news for heavy flood and natural calamities in Kerala and especially in Thrissur. Hope none of our faithful afflicted by such conditions. Please be assured of our heartfelt prayers for the safety of our faithful and all residents of your region.

Meantime, Last week I wrote to all of our clergy and committees of all parishes of our diocese asking them to offer prayers for the safety of all faithful and all other innocents at your region. I have directed them to offer donations to help of victims if any of our people. God willing, as soon as I receive their donations, I will contact Y.E. in order to be forwarded care of Your Eminence.

May our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ watch over all innocent souls of all our faithful and residence of Kerala.

Beseeching for your prayers,
Fraternally your brother
Mar Aprim Khamis

Flood Relief Donation from Chicago

\$6325 USD was donated by the youth of the Assyrian Church of the East in Chicago to the Archdiocese of India for flood relief in Kerala. The delegates attending the Youth Conference from Chicago could not reach India. They reached Dubai and attended the Holy Qurbana with our Parish in Dubai. This Parish meets at a rented premises, St. Martins Church in Sharjah every Friday from 7.15 am to 9.15 am. Fr. Sachin Timothy and Fr. Victor Kollannur are leading this Parish.

We are grateful to all our church members and Bishops who showed their solidarity with the people of Kerala in this time of crisis. It will take time to rebuild our state.

Death of Indian Orthodox Syrian Church Metropolitan

His Grace Thomas Mar Athanasius aged 80, senior Metropolitan of the Chengannur diocese of the Indian Orthodox Syrian Church, died on 24 August. 2018. He fell down from the train a few minutes before reaching his destination in Ernakulam at Cochin Railway Station. He was a very active Metropolitan and the founder of several schools in Kerala and Gujarat states. *Mar Aprem Metropolitan sent the condolence message given below:*

To

H H Baselios Mar Thoma Paulose II
Catholicos of the East,
Devalokam, Kottayam

Dear Bava Thirumeni,

I am shocked by the unexpected passing away of Thomas Mar Athanasius Metropolitan of Chengannur Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Church. Even at the age of 80 he was active. He was the fellow student with Bishop Paulose Mar Paulose in Serampore University for BD. I express the condolence of the Chaldean Syrian Church of Trichur.

May God Almighty reward him for his hard labour for Malankara Orthodox Church in Chenganur and Gujarat.

With prayers,
Mar Aprem Metropolitan, India

Youth Conference in India

Due to floods in Kerala the Youth Conference of India scheduled for August was postponed. However the delegates from Chicago had arrived in Dubai. They visited our church members in UAE and returned to USA.

Around 16 delegates from Iraq came to New Delhi, Jaypore, Mysore etc. and finally visited Kerala too after the floods had subsided.

Foreign delegates from other places refunded their air tickets.

Foreign Donations

There are some restrictions to receiving foreign donations in India. Therefore please send an email and ask for legal and fast transfer of money to India before sending each donation. The government of India is checking whether any foreign money is coming for terrorist activities in India. Kindly send e-mail to hgmaraprem@gmail.com.

Visitors from USA and Iraq

On Sunday 26 August 2018, Youth Conference delegates from Iraq attended Holy Qurbana at our St. Stephen's Church in Delhi, capital of India. Fr. Mohan Konikara, Vicar and Deacon Sinto, assistant Vicar of our Delhi parish welcomed our guests from Iraq.

They are planning to visit Thrissur in Kerala before they return to Iraq.

Delegates from Chicago reached Dubai in UAE before they came to know that the Youth Conference was postponed due to the floods in Kerala. However, they joined with our Mart Mariam Parish in UAE for Holy Qurbana at St. Martin's Anglican Church on Friday 24 August 2018.

They gave a good donation for the flood relief activities in Kerala. Fr. Sachin Timothy welcomed them and thanked them for their donation for the unfortunate people in Kerala. The estimated loss of the floods so far is twenty thousand crore Indian Rupees. That means two hundred thousand million Indian Rupees. It is going to increase after the total loss is calculated. One crore is ten million. One million is ten lakhs. An American dollar is about 68 rupees after deducting bank commission etc. It fluctuates often.

“Youth as Transforming Agents: A Christian Ethical Engagement with the Current Issues”

Fr. Lijo Rapheal B.A., B.D., M.Th. (Ph.D Student)

Abstracts of Youth Conference classes to be held on 26-28 Dec. 2018

This paper intends to look at the topic in Christian ethical point of view. Jesus, being an epitome for the collective identity of ‘youth’ has taught us how to transform within and our surroundings. His ethical practices and teachings challenged the traditional and conservative minds of the people and society. He introduced a new life and order which was intend to give liberation to the poor and downtrodden.

Ethical teachings of Jesus will make great impact on youth. Often times, youth are brought into a Church to be “reformers.” The expectation is that they are going to bring radical and noticeable change and development to the Church. The measurement of expectations in reforming the church are through the creativity level of the youth and involvement. The burden of the change and reformation rests on the shoulders of the clergies, and they are expected to jump in and take charge of everything. There is a challenge to be called out as reformers and being overwhelmed by unreal expectations or end up getting burnt out. A reformation starts by reformation within.

Identity given to youth is ‘Christ-like’ identity. This poses several challenges before the youth to take up the role as transformers in the church and society. How we should respond to the call to be reformers of the Church and society? Initially, its more on being faithful to the scripture and learning how to interpret it in the current context. There are several tools and methods to achieve it. Secondly, identity of youth is prophetic in nature. Prophets intervenes in a particular situation when there is crisis. When social injustice, inequality, cultural disintegration, and immorality rules over a society, prophets make their entrance with the divine message of justice and truth. Prophet is always conscious of his vocation and commitment and has a deep awareness that the source of his mission is in God. . Youth should risk their life for the sake others. In the place of a culture of forced silence, a counter-culture of protest must be re-born.

Youth, being transformers of community is responsible to take up the mission of Jesus. The mission of the Church is nothing less than adopting the mission of the saviour. The focus of the mission should be Christ-centered. The joys, sorrows, tears and suffering of the people should be in the perspective of mission. The voice of the historically disinherited groups like the Harijans, the tribals, the landless, etc., the demand for better wages and basic human rights, the efforts to bridge the gulf between the rich, middle and poor, the struggle for literacy and education, the cry for economic and social justice are the evidences of the activity of Christ among the humanity. The culture of Jesus Should be implanted in the Church.

In this scenario, this paper initiate discussions on ethical teachings of Jesus, stories from other theologians and church fathers, different views of interpreting bible with the current issues, methodological trends of Jesus and new challenges before youth to address.

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth”. Why does the Bible begins with Creation?

Fr. Jos Jacob Vengassary

Abstracts of Youth Conference classes to be held on 26-28 Dec. 2018

During the 19th and 20th centuries much has been discussed about the Creation narrative in the Old Testament since Darwin presented his “Theory of evolution by natural selection”. Even now there are Christian fundamentalists who believe that Creation in the Bible is a historical fact. However, the concern of the Biblical writers was not to assert the historicity and scientific correctness of Creation in the Bible. For, they knew too well that there existed a very similar narrative in Mesopotamia. Many cultures in the then known world had their thoughts about the origin of the universe and later penned it down in their religious texts. What they have in common is the belief that the human beings originated not by itself but created for a purpose. But they differed in defining what the purpose was.

The biblical narrative of creation has many things in common with Ancient Near Eastern narratives of Creation of Humankind. Surprisingly enough, one of them even begins with almost the same phrase. This narrative from Mesopotamia begins with “Enuma Elish” which is translated in English as “When on High”. The Book of Genesis begins with “In the Beginning”, which also may be translated as “when on High”. The Hebrew phrase consists of a preposition and a word. The preposition means in or on. The root meaning of the word means Beginning, Height, Peak etc. The similarity between the two is not limited at the beginning, but also in their content too. However, they differ in their motives. The whole purpose of the Mesopotamian narrative is related to the enthronement of the national god as king over other gods, and he rules over the gods like his devotee, the emperor who rules over other nations.

The purpose of the creation narrative in the Bible is not primarily to depict Yahweh as a sovereign as in the above narrative, but as Almighty, who is powerful enough to bring his people back to their land, from where they were forcefully taken as captives. For that, He uses other rulers as His instruments. God is the Almighty and controls the forces of nature, which in the Mesopotamian narrative were worshipped as gods. Thus, the purpose of the biblical narrative is neither to ascertain the historicity of Creation nor to validate the scientific correctness of the creation. It is a confession of faith that the God they believe will free them from their hardships while they are in bondage and that He will bring them back to their homeland, which He has given them earlier, but was lost in the meantime, and that they will be able to worship Him in His Temple and they shall again be one: Yahweh and His People.

Fr. Jos Jacob Vengassary

**International Youth Conference has been
postponed to Dec. 26, 27, 28 due to the
flood in Kerala**

THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST IN ABROAD AND INDIA: ECCLESIOLOGICAL AND HIERARCHICAL RELATIONSHIP TILL 16TH CENTURY - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Rev. Fr. Cyril Antony (Ph D Student Dharmaram Bangalore)

Abstracts of Youth Conference classes to be held on 26-28 Dec. 2018

The Church of the Thomas Christians of India, which is as old as Christianity itself, is the legitimate heir of a unique ecclesial heritage among the Churches. St. Thomas the apostle sowed the seed of Christianity in India. It is an ancient tradition shared by Christians that St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Christ came to India and founded Christian community in seven places.

This Indian community was constituted and reinvigorated by groups of Christians who came from Persia. It is beyond doubt that some kind of relation between the Christian of Indian and the Church of Persia existed from very early centuries. The available evidences of the early period of the Church in India reveal to us the image of an indigenous Church maintaining ecclesiastical solidarity with the neighboring Churches of the region. But on the other hand, the Babylonians were the first people to accept as a race the gospel of Jesus Christ, and they understood and appreciated the messianic faith in a manner in which was not possible for the other races to which it was completely alien.

The Church in India was in close alliance with the neighboring Churches in the Persian Empire. As it had been the custom of the early Church, the Church in India also formed part of the regional grouping of the Churches. The local Churches in the East outside the Greco-Roman world developed a kind of solidarity and the Patriarchal see of Seleucia-Ctesiphon merged as its centre.

The ecclesiastical alliance between Persia and India was based on several factors. Among them the St Thomas tradition is the most fundamental one. The Church in Persia holds on to the tradition that St Thomas on his way to India did visit Persia and founded their first Christian community. The St Thomas Christians always believed that St Thomas is the founder of their Church. The Church in Edessa (Persia) claims the same apostolic tradition through Mar Addai and Mar Mari, disciples of St Thomas. A common patrimony did build up a common solidarity.

The close commercial relations which existed between the Middle East and India brought the Churches of these countries into closer contact. The presence of the colonies of the Jewish merchants and the early converts from among them paved the way for the use of the Syriac language for worship. From the very beginning of their Church the Syriac heritage has always been a source of inspiration and prestige for the Thomas Christians. It was a means of their communion and close link with the centers of the early Christianity. During the time of persecution in the Persian Empire many Christians fled for safety to India. These immigrants were welcomed into Indian community whole heartedly.

Thomas Christians esteemed their East Syrian (Persian) liturgical heritage as an integral part of their apostolic heritage. Their attachment to this language and liturgy was very deep rooted. The Portuguese missionaries on the other hand, were not prepared to respect the sensibilities of the Thomas Christians. The presence of the Jewish Christians in India has paved the way for accepting the Syrian liturgy and language at the very beginning itself.

Rev. Fr. Cyril Antony (Ph D Student Dharmaram Bangalore)



**The convocation ceremony of
“Mission and Evangelism- 2018” course
in Trichur.**





H.G. Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan speaks in the 17th commemoration of Mar Thimotheus Metropolitan at Chaldean Syrian College, East Fort, Thirssur on 26.08.2018.



Youth Conference delegates from Iraq pictured with Fr. Mohan Konikara, Vicar, Deacon Sinto, assistant Vicar and the church members of the St.Stephen's Church, New Delhi.