

**MAR GREGORIOS SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (MALAYALAM) INC.
THE FIRST SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA**

181 Port Richmond Ave., Staten Island, New York
(35th Anniversary Celebration)

CHURCH HISTORY

By: Eapen Maliackal

In 1974, a sanctuary for Indian Malayalam Christianity was virtually unrecognized. There was no Christian Congregation in Staten Island for the Malayalam community. One day, Mr. Eapen Maliackal met with the Late Mr. Mathai K Melute, Mr. Kochummon Geevarghese (Changed faith) and Mr John Mathew (Changed faith) and discussed the possibilities of a worship place in Staten Island, New York. As a result of this get-together, we were able to form the first unique Christian community in Staten Island. In 1975, the congregation was reformed and later incorporated as a Church. Although, we had only 8 family members at that time, this initial small congregation had strong desire to start up a successful religious community. During this time an impending possibility of a split was evident which sacramented for the Apostolic power in India. This influence created a stunning reduction in the membership and brought our church to 5 families. On every Sunday we were assembled and prayed in front of a cross and two lighted candles in a basement of a Roman Catholic Church for many months with out any reverend priests.

In December 1975 Mr. Eapen Maliackal, Late Mr. Mathai Melute and Mr. John Mathew went New Jersey and met with the Late His Eminence Archbishop Athanasios Y Samuel, the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Churches in USA and Canada. We requested His Eminence, to establish a Syrian Orthodox Church for the Malayalam community of Staten Island. His Eminence informed us that there was no Malayalam speaking priest available to come to Staten Island.

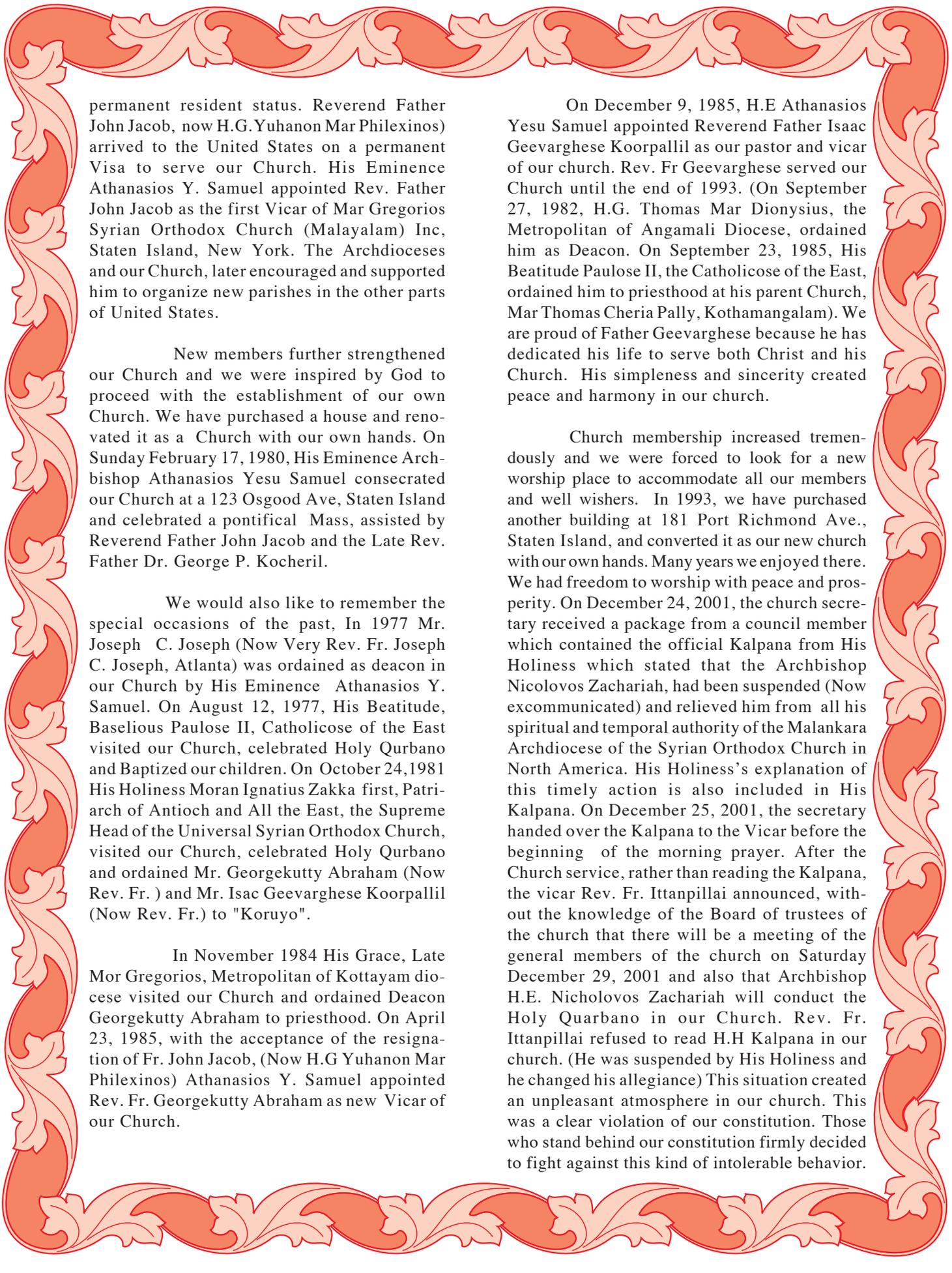
His Eminence told us to come back after few days with the papers of Congregation for review. That initial journey and request for unification of a new congregation was not granted

a confidence, but His Eminence true love lighted a flame of hope. Archbishop Athanasios Yesu Samuel thoroughly studied our request and eventually accepted the papers of our congregation, although there was no Malayalee priest ready to help us with the benediction. Finally, with love and the ideal Christian principles, His Eminence accepted us among his spiritual children. His Eminence asked Late very Rev. Fr. Isa Cicek, Mar Julious, primete of the Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese of middle Europe and the Benelux Countries to administer to the spiritual needs of our Church.

After a long period of time, we witnessed the beginning of peace and the establishment of a new Indian religious community in Staten Island, Late Father Cicek celebrated the first Holy Qurbano in our Church. That blessed day devoted our faith to cheerfulness. Later in, 1975 we made an unanimous decision and fostered our new Church under the jurisdiction of the Late His Eminence Athanasios Y. Samuel, Archbishop of the Syrian Orthodox Churches in USA and Canada. Under the Holy See of Antioch and All the East. His Eminence was appointed by the Patriarc of Antioch.

His Eminence advised Reverend. Fr. John Peter Meno, (Now very Rev. Father) an excellent theology scholar and the general secretary of the Archdiocese, assisted by very Rev. Fr. Isa Cicek (Late) in administering the spiritual passages of our infant Church. Rev. Fr. Meno, faithfully served with a sense of true brotherhood and unrealities devotion for which we shall always be most grateful. The first Holy Quarbno was celebrated in the month of January 1976.

Although we had a priest to fulfill our spiritual needs, we wished for a Malayalam speaking priest to serve our Church. Because of this desire to celebrate the mass in our mother language, we fought to sponsor Reverend Father John Jacob, Elappanal, Kottayam (Now H.G. Yuhanon Mar Philexinos) on



permanent resident status. Reverend Father John Jacob, now H.G. Yuhanon Mar Philexinos) arrived to the United States on a permanent Visa to serve our Church. His Eminence Athanasios Y. Samuel appointed Rev. Father John Jacob as the first Vicar of Mar Gregorios Syrian Orthodox Church (Malayalam) Inc, Staten Island, New York. The Archdioceses and our Church, later encouraged and supported him to organize new parishes in the other parts of United States.

New members further strengthened our Church and we were inspired by God to proceed with the establishment of our own Church. We have purchased a house and renovated it as a Church with our own hands. On Sunday February 17, 1980, His Eminence Archbishop Athanasios Yesu Samuel consecrated our Church at a 123 Osgood Ave, Staten Island and celebrated a pontifical Mass, assisted by Reverend Father John Jacob and the Late Rev. Father Dr. George P. Kocheril.

We would also like to remember the special occasions of the past, In 1977 Mr. Joseph C. Joseph (Now Very Rev. Fr. Joseph C. Joseph, Atlanta) was ordained as deacon in our Church by His Eminence Athanasios Y. Samuel. On August 12, 1977, His Beatitude, Baseliou Paulose II, Catholicose of the East visited our Church, celebrated Holy Qurbano and Baptized our children. On October 24, 1981 His Holiness Moran Ignatius Zakka first, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, the Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church, visited our Church, celebrated Holy Qurbano and ordained Mr. Georgekutty Abraham (Now Rev. Fr.) and Mr. Isac Geevarghese Koorpallil (Now Rev. Fr.) to "Koruyo".

In November 1984 His Grace, Late Mor Gregorios, Metropolitan of Kottayam diocese visited our Church and ordained Deacon Georgekutty Abraham to priesthood. On April 23, 1985, with the acceptance of the resignation of Fr. John Jacob, (Now H.G Yuhanon Mar Philexinos) Athanasios Y. Samuel appointed Rev. Fr. Georgekutty Abraham as new Vicar of our Church.

On December 9, 1985, H.E Athanasios Yesu Samuel appointed Reverend Father Isaac Geevarghese Koorpallil as our pastor and vicar of our church. Rev. Fr Geevarghese served our Church until the end of 1993. (On September 27, 1982, H.G. Thomas Mar Dionysius, the Metropolitan of Angamali Diocese, ordained him as Deacon. On September 23, 1985, His Beatitude Paulose II, the Catholicose of the East, ordained him to priesthood at his parent Church, Mar Thomas Cheria Pally, Kothamangalam). We are proud of Father Geevarghese because he has dedicated his life to serve both Christ and his Church. His simpleness and sincerity created peace and harmony in our church.

Church membership increased tremendously and we were forced to look for a new worship place to accommodate all our members and well wishers. In 1993, we have purchased another building at 181 Port Richmond Ave., Staten Island, and converted it as our new church with our own hands. Many years we enjoyed there. We had freedom to worship with peace and prosperity. On December 24, 2001, the church secretary received a package from a council member which contained the official Kalpana from His Holiness which stated that the Archbishop Nicolovos Zachariah, had been suspended (Now excommunicated) and relieved him from all his spiritual and temporal authority of the Malankara Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church in North America. His Holiness's explanation of this timely action is also included in His Kalpana. On December 25, 2001, the secretary handed over the Kalpana to the Vicar before the beginning of the morning prayer. After the Church service, rather than reading the Kalpana, the vicar Rev. Fr. Ittanpillai announced, without the knowledge of the Board of trustees of the church that there will be a meeting of the general members of the church on Saturday December 29, 2001 and also that Archbishop H.E. Nicholovos Zachariah will conduct the Holy Quarbano in our Church. Rev. Fr. Ittanpillai refused to read H.H Kalpana in our church. (He was suspended by His Holiness and he changed his allegiance) This situation created an unpleasant atmosphere in our church. This was a clear violation of our constitution. Those who stand behind our constitution firmly decided to fight against this kind of intolerable behavior.

Rev Fr. Kuriakose Karukayil (Now very Rev. Fr.) was appointed as the Vicar of our Church, by His Holiness immediately after the suspension of Fr. Ittanpillai. Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Karukayil served our church until 2005.

On January, 2002 some of our members who changed their faith and joined with American Dioceses under the Kottayam Catholicose group, filed a case against Vicar Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Karukayil, our Church and our dioceses. They claimed that our church building, the North American diocese and all other properties were directly under the jurisdiction of the Kottayam Catholicose (Orthodox group) which was administrated by Archbishop Nicholovos Zachariah. At the first Court hearing, the Honorable Supreme Court Judge allowed us to conduct Holy Quarbano on every other Saturday and Sunday for four Hours only. Church membership reduced drastically during this litigation period. On 2005 Rev. Fr. Joy John was appointed as our Vicar and he served our church until the end of 2007. During this period with support and tireless help of Rev. Fr. Joy John, we were able to renovate our Church as one of the most beautiful church under our dioceses. With the help of our Church members Mr. Joy Nadukudi, Mr. Saju Varghese, Mr. Mathai Keenalil, Mr. John Joseph, Mr. Mathew Ouseph and Mr. George Aleyas, support and guidance from Reverend Father Mathai Puthukkunnathu, we were able to fight against the evil act to save our church and our dioceses. With help of our dioceses, His Eminence and many priests, we never missed any Saturday or Sunday services.

After a long legal battle, on March 27, 2006, the Honorable Supreme Court Judge signed a strong Judgement stating Mar Gregorios Syrian Orthodox Church (Malayalam) Inc, Staten Island, New York and all of its properties were under the jurisdiction of Malankara Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Churches in North America, Under the Holy See of Antioch and All the East. Now the litigation is over and we are enjoying our freedom of worship without any legal issues.

Rev. Fr. Rajan Peter is now serving our Church since the end of 2007. The members of our Church are greatly appreciative and thankful to our Archbishop Mor Titus Yeldho, former Archbishop Mor Ivanios Mathews, Very Rev. Fr. Geevarghese Puthoorkudilil, Very Rev. Fr. David Cheruthottil, Very Rev. Fr. Varkey Mundackal Very Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Karukayil, Rev. Fr. Joy John, Rev. Fr. Rajan Peter, Rev. Fr. Mathai Puthukkunnathu, Council members, Priests, our friends and well wishers for their support and prayers during these years and our difficult times.

We thank Almighty God for keeping us safe and our members in good spirit in our Saviour Jesus Christ and saving our church to fulfill His needs.

I, Mr. Eapen Maliackal, a Member of Mar. Gregorios Syrian Orthodox Church, Staten Island, the first Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church in North America, Under the Holy See of Antioch, would like to congratulate the members and Board of Trustees of our Church on the occasion of the 35th Anniversary of our Church.

