

FOREST: OUR GOOD NEIGHBOUR -Departmental Programmes

In support of the United Nations Environmental Programme theme for 2011, 'Forest' Nature at Your Service', the Church of South India Department of Ecumenical Relations and Ecological Concerns, decided to focus this year on the theme 'Forest: Our Good Neighbour'. Following this, various programmes were organized at the Synod, Diocesan and Congregational/Institutional levels, some of which were the 'World Environment Day Celebrations' (including special worship services) both in the Churches and Schools, Ecological Awareness Programmes on 'Vānam Namathu Inam'(Forest: Our Home)' and 'Orientation Programme on Eco-Management, with special focus on Forest'.



The Department was also engaged in the Peoples Movements in Odhissa (against the acquisition of the inhabited spaces, forest and fertile agricultural lands and coast for the scandalous POSCO steel-power-port-mining project) and Kudankulam (who are engaged in an intense struggle in the Kudankulam district of Tamil Nadu in India against the nuclear power project). Both these struggles were seen as protests against the God gifted Bio-Diversity being exploited and destroyed in the name of development

The International Conference on 'Forest: Our Good Neighbour' organized by the Church of South India, in partnership with the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches, is yet another step towards CSI's solidarity with the subaltern communities, whose livelihood is exploited at a daily basis. Further, this is also symbolic of her constant commitment towards partnering with nature in saving the forest bio-diversity.

Rev. Viji Varghese Eapen
 Director, Department of Ecumenical Relations and Ecological Concerns
 Editor, Oikos Voice



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Conference Edition



International Conference On 'Forest: Our Good Neighbour' Begins



Rt. Rev. G. Devakadasham inaugurating the conference by planting the sapling of Mangifera Indica. Along with him are (from the left) Dr. Mathew Koshy, Rev. Viji Varghese Eapen, Mr. M.M. Philip, Rt. Rev. Thomas K Oommen, Dr. Bennet Abraham and Dr. Gullerimo Kerber.

The International Conference on 'Forest: Our Good Neighbour' organized by the Church of South India, in partnership with the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches began here at the CSI Synod Centre, Chennai on October 25, 2011. The Conference which is organized for two days was inaugurated by the Rt. Rev. G. Devakadasham, Deputy Moderator, Church of South India. Addressing the gathering, he hoped that the Church of South India would continue with consistency her commitment towards Ecological responses. He also urged that the Church of South India should continue to listen to the cries of the subaltern communities in Kudankulam and elsewhere (against the commissioning of Nuclear Reactors) crying for the protection of their livelihood.

The Conference, attended by more than 60 theologians, pastors and activists from all over the world, is organized in solidarity with the United Nations Environment Programme theme for 2011, 'Forest: Nature at Your Service'. The Key Note address was delivered by the Rev. Dr. Guillerimo Kerber, Programme Executive, Care for Creation and Climate Justice, WCC, in which he challenged the delegates saying 'Love Thy Neighbour, Love the Trees'

The Conference, organized for two days will concentrate on 'Forest and Trees', 'Bio-Diversity', Resources like River, Minerals, Herbs', 'People', 'Possibilities and Alternatives'.

**Greetings from the Chairperson,
CSI Synod Ecological Concerns Committee**

I am glad to learn that the Department of Ecumenical Relations and Ecological Concerns of the CSI Synod is publishing a tri-monthly news bulletin 'OIKOS VOICE'.



As all are aware, we are pondering over the theme "Forest: Our Good Neighbour" these days. Previously, humankind regarded forests as a foreign entity without much importance for their life. Forests were exploited in order to make our lives more comfortable. Forests were considered as "under developed" fraction of the universe.

The changing climate and seasons, the non-rhythmic behaviour of the environment and the ecological imbalance have made the thoughtful humans to value the riches that our forests offer to us. The rich biodiversity that is embedded in the forests are essential for the sustenance of life that is gifted to us.

Let us all deliberately take the pain to keenly observe and preserve the nature and be diligent in sustaining the life to the extend we could. May the publication of the tri-monthly bulletin be fruitful in convincing the congregations that forests are our good neighbours.

God bless the endeavours.

Rt. Rev. Thomas K. Oomen
Bishop & Chairperson, CSI SECC

**Greetings from the Programme Executive,
Care for Creation and Climate Justice, WCC**

The organization of this International Conference on "Forest our good neighbour", is an opportunity to deepen the importance of forests in the world and in India in particular and to realize how forests, the environment in general and "broken communities", as the Mission of the Church of South India states, are threatened nowadays.



The World Council of Churches is happy to be associated to this Conference. I bring special greetings from WCC's General Secretary, Rev Dr Olav Fykse-Tveit, from the Church of Norway.

By organizing this Conference, the Department of Ecumenical Relations and Ecological Concerns contributes significantly to the CSI Mission Priorities 2011-2020 where it reads "Remain sensitive to all environmental and ecological concerns and ecumenical relations" and "To foster the social agenda of the church through advocacy and development programmes".

On behalf of the WCC I wish you all a meaningful and successful conference

Dr Guillermo Kerber
Programme Executive
CCCJ
WCC

THE CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA SYNOD

DEDICATION OF INTER FAITH DIALOGUE CENTRE

By

The Most Rev. S. Vasanthakumar, Moderator, CSI

On Thursday The 3rd November 2011

In the presence of the CSI Executive Members

Rt. Rev. G. Devakadasham
Deputy Moderator, CSI

M.M. Philip **Dr. J. Bennet Abraham**
General Secretary, CSI Treasurer, CSI

NB: The Interfaith Dialogue Centre, under the auspices of the Department of Ecumenical Relations and Ecological Concerns is organizing its first programme - A Consultation on "Zionism, Hindutva and Cultural Nationalism" on November 29, 2011 (International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinians).

'NUKE NOT INDIA' CAMPAIGN

The Church of South India Department of Ecumenical Relations and Ecological Concerns has launched a campaign against India going more and more nuclear and in solidarity with the local people in Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu who are protesting against the commissioning of the Nuclear Reactor. All the delegates are invited to be part of this campaign by registering your solidarity by imposing your painted palms on the white cloth and signing underneath. This 'Solidarity Piece of Cloth' will be sent to the people who are involved in agitation in Kudankulam.

Green Church

Christians, at least in part, seem to be responsible for the present environmental crisis, primarily because of their misunderstanding of the scripture. Jesus Christ, our saviour, guide, and mentor, tells us to repent, love God and our neighbour. The concept of neighbour include the whole creation. Just as we meet Christ in our human neighbour, we meet Christ in every part of creation. In all aspects of its life, the Eco-Church fellowship will strive to re-establish the fundamental spiritual relationship of humanity with God, the Earth and all its creatures. A basic tenet of its evangelism is found in II Corinthians 5:19 which reads, "God is reconciling the whole world or cosmos through Christ." We encourage parishes to incorporate ecological concerns in their order of worship and include both advocacy and direct action for social justice and the integrity of creation in missional activities. We encourage the active participation of our fellow Christians, and all people of good will through prayer, partnership, and involvement, which will help humanity to return to an eco-friendly life style

CSI is the first Church in India to incorporate Environmental concerns in their ministry. We are really proud to understand that Environmental concerns committee has been functioning since 1992. At the synod level, hectic efforts were being made to propagate the environmental concerns to the grass root level. I have taken the initiative of editing the five Eco-books published by CSI. We introduced the idea of Green Diocesan Award /Green Parish Award/Green School Awards. The Awards are for propagating the idea to grass root level. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Alliance for Religions and Conservation (ARC) has honoured the ecological contributions and long term commitment of CSI in protecting the life in this planet by giving an award on 3rd December 2009. This event is one of the historic moments of CSI. We could receive the award on 3rd June from Mr. Baan Ki Moon, Secretary General of UN in presence of Prince Philip in a function organized at Windsor Castle, London. We are thankful to UNDP and ARC for the royal honour bestowed upon us.

1) Without a good organizational set up, the Green diocese programmes cannot be carried out effectively. Diocesan Ecological Committee, District level/Area level Committees and Parish level committees are essential for a good organizational set up. Then the decisions can be implemented up to the grass root level effectively. Only then it will become a people's movement and participatory in nature. With out the full participation of the members the Green Church movement will not be effective. The programmes should have a continuity.

2) A sound theological backing is essential for our Green Church Movement. There are so many environmental organizations in our country. There is no meaning in duplicating their work. For us it is a ministry. It is a part of our

faith. Hence members have to be taught about the faith aspect of the environmental ministry. The Eco-biblical scholars are now using the word 'mutual custodians' instead of 'stewards'. Earth is a community of inter-connected living things which are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival. The Earth is a balanced and diverse domain requiring responsible custodians who function as partners with, rather than rulers over, the Earth to sustain its balance and diversity



3) The programmes of the Green diocese should have to be eco-friendly. An eco friendly church cannot use plastic cups in their programmes, toxic chemicals for cultivation, exploit the natural resources, etc. Our programmes and policies ought to have an eco-touch.

4) The churchyard of a Green parish ought to be Green. Churchyard is a place not only for us but all the creatures to worship our lord. The flora and fauna of the churchyard should be conserved.

In the book of Deuteronomy, God, speaking through Moses, says, "I have set before you life and prosperity, death and adversity. Choose life." (Deut. 30:15,20) In the story of Noah told in Genesis, God makes a great Covenant, or binding promise, to humanity and to creation. God has flooded the world, but as he brings Noah to dry land he promises never to destroy all life in such a way again. As the Bible says, God makes the covenant with "every living creature of every kind that is found on earth." And the rainbow is given to be a perpetual reminder of this promise. Now we need a new covenant. We need to covenant that we will not now destroy all life. We hold the power of life or death. We are altering the very balances of life on earth, polluting with toxics and poisoning through misuse. We have already swept away countless "living creatures of every kind that are found on the earth. " Unless we change, we, not God, will destroy life. Unlike God however, we cannot bring to life again, nor can we create a new heaven and a new earth. Ninety percent of the chemicals currently on sale have never been assessed for their wider environmental and health impact. Which means that we do not know for sure what they do. But we do know that their impact stretches far beyond our own communities and generations. This is why we need a new covenant based upon the one God made with Noah. This covenant is between us and our neighbours; between us and God; between us and the rest of nature. It is a covenant to the generations who have not yet been born, yet whom we are already endangering by the poisons we are producing now. It is a covenant between us and those who came before us who helped preserve the very balance of creation itself.

Prof. Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu
Convener of CSI Synod Ecological concerns committee