



## From the Presbyter's Desk

### *Re-forming Faith and Thanksgiving*

*“When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him” (Matthew*



Staying connected has become the *mantra* as we go through one of the most puzzling moments in our own time. We are looking for specific answers to specific questions, but we have an opportunity to re-form our questions, because we are compelled to re-form our faith, which in turn are bound to re-form our thinking and attitude on thanksgiving. It is so good to stay connected this way and other ways, as modes of communication have become a vital part of our lives.

*October* is the month for *Thanksgiving*, but it is also important because we remember two people or events, one, *M.K. Gandhi*, whose birthday we celebrate, and *Martin Luther*, because of the *Protestant Reformation*, which overturned the religious, social, cultural and political landscape forever, primarily in Europe and later in other parts of the world. Somehow, cannot help but think of M.K. Gandhi, because of the *Sermon on the Mount*, whose first verse is our focus. Gandhi, in his *Autobiography*, *'The Story of My Experiments with Truth'*, does refer to other Biblical texts with wider philosophical meaning in a subtle manner. I am reading the *Autobiography* again with the critical edition with notes by Tridip Suhrund (Penguin Books, 2018), and strongly recommend that you poses a personal copy. Talking about the *Sermon on the Mount*, Gandhi says, *“The Sermon on the Mount went straight to my heart.”* Further, he says something that is iconic, *“My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the Gita, The Light of Asia and the Sermon on the Mount. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly” (p. 149).*

In the prelude to the main text in Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5, in v. 1, Jesus saw the crowds and chooses to move away. We are in a similar situation as we are asked to maintain *'Social distance'* norms and be away from the crowds. We miss gatherings, we miss the crowds and the hustle and the bustle. But Jesus went away for a different reason, because he wanted to provide an opportunity for the disciples to spend time with him. In other words, the disciples' faith was re-formed in the midst of the crowds, but now it is re-formed by being alone with Jesus, and the disciples came to him with an attitude of *Thanksgiving*.

Faith and Thanksgiving are not simple, natural, or emotional reactions, but it is an intentional act that is shaped by the Knowledge of God and the intervention of God in our lives. Martin Luther and the Reformers went through a similar experience in the lonely castle of Wartburg or in the defense before the powers in Leipzig.

We thank God that He has provided opportunities to re-form our faith, and an attitude of thanksgiving as we receive each day, a gift from God.

Our *Harvest and Annual Thanksgiving* will be very different, but unique this year. I thoroughly enjoyed my first exposure last year and the joy of meeting and fellowshiping with so many people and the mood of celebration. But changed contexts provided changed opportunities. We can still make it meaningful, as we request each family to share a creative idea that will indicate our thought and act of thanksgiving to God. Please share it to the church email ID (***andrewschurchblore@gmail.com***) or share it on WhatsApp (***Church Office Number 9741701874***).

Our *Offering of Thanksgiving* will do go towards *Infrastructure and Digital up-gradation of the church*, which is our way of committing to God. Let us join and celebrate our faith and thanksgiving.

May I share a brief overview of our ministry and vision:

### **1. Worship Services**

*Worship* has and must remain at the center of our lives and faith experiences. Following advisory from the Government, we have cooperated by not having church gatherings, except for three weeks in June, while the church doors remained open for private prayers and meditations. Our online Services are continuing to be a source of comfort, strength and spiritual nurture. We have continued our regular model of Worship Services (English and Kannada, and Joint Worship Service on the First Sunday of the month), since March 29<sup>th</sup>, (Passion Sunday), by Screen-casting our pre-recorded Services. Our Worship Services in the church resumed from September 6, 2020 with live streaming of the Services in our YouTube Channel, and with the observance of Special Ministry Sundays like Women's Sunday and Care for Elderly Sunday. The joy of participating as a Community in the Lord's Supper on the First Sunday and Third Sunday (Kannada Service) in September was visible, although the form is different, in view of the norms in place. Most of the time, we have been able to create new Liturgies and Prayers for each of the Services, both in English and Kannada. Our online Services have helped us '*cross borders*,' and reach out to people both nationally and globally.

We feel very encouraged by your prayers and support and appreciate your enthusiasm in sharing the links with your family and friends. Our online Services have helped us connect and encourage participation of new people with presentation of '*virtual choirs*' getting more professional and effective. The Creative Team that is working to make our Worship Services screen-cast live with minimum technical gadgets and costs, needs our special thanks, because they have declined

acknowledgment or act of gratitude. Say a prayer of blessing for the Team.

## **2. Weekly time of Prayer**

The Apostle Paul in his closing words in the first letter to the Thessalonian community makes a brief request, “*Beloved, pray for us*” (1 Thessalonians 5:25), which echoes in our *Weekly Time of Prayer on Tuesdays*. Our reflections on *Psalms* are intended to draw new meaning about *Prayer*. We have completed 2 sets of *Psalms of 12 Psalms each*, one starting with the letter ‘L,’ dealing with everyday Christian life, and the second one on *Theological themes* with audio notes and prayer requests reaching us. It is my hope that our ‘*Family Altar*’ will become a regular feature, and that we will be able to come together as a family every day, because, ‘*A family that prays together, stays together.*’ We will begin our reflection of the *third series* of the next 12 Psalms. Let us pray together.

## **3. St. Andrew's Agape Emergency Fund for Covid-19**

Challenging times teach us challenging lessons of life and provide us with opportunities to share God's love, and the present *Pandemic* is certainly one. In 1 *John 4:7*, talking about love, the writer says, “*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*” When we wanted to share God's love, we called our outreach program as ‘*Agape*’, which means, *God's love*, because only God's love can make a difference in our lives and the lives of others. The idea is to share a *grocery packet* (valued with discount at Rs1000/-), which can sustain a small family for about a month. We have completed 3 *phases* thus far, and the fourth round is on. We sincerely wish to thank you for your overwhelming support for this initiative and for encouraging us to continue to support as livelihoods of people are broken and need time for restoration. Stories of joy and gratitude can be narrated, but I cannot explain in words the sense of accompaniment that people are experiencing with our *Agape* initiative. *Glory be to God!*

Please find below the details up to *Phase 3*, which is completed.

		<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>Phase 2</b>	<b>Phase 3</b>	<b>Total</b>	
1	St Andrew's School Community	191	191	100	<b>482</b>	
2	Hosur Road Cemetery	9	9		<b>18</b>	
3	Brothers and Sisters at Tubagere	40	40	43	<b>123</b>	
4	Needy members of St Andrew's Church	30	23	6	<b>59</b>	
5	Staff and Contract members of our church	11	7		<b>18</b>	

6	Migrant Workers at Kothanur	10			<b>10</b>	
7	BBMP Workers	11			<b>11</b>	
8	Tunbridge Staff	15			<b>15</b>	
9	Neighbourhood in need	10		9	<b>10</b>	
10	Commercial Street Police	5			<b>5</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>751</b>	
1	Rice	3320	2700	1580	<b>7600</b>	Kgs.
2	Wheat	1660	1350	790	<b>3800</b>	Kgs.
3	Oil	332	270	158	<b>760</b>	Lts.
4	Salt	332	270	158	<b>760</b>	Kgs.
5	Sugar	332	270	158	<b>760</b>	Kgs.
6	Dhal	332	270	158	<b>760</b>	Kgs.
7	Tea	332	270	158	<b>760</b>	Packets
8	Sooji	332	270	158	<b>760</b>	Kgs.
9	Chilli Powder	332	270	158	<b>760</b>	Packets
10	Dhaniya Powder	332	270	158	760	Packets
		<b>7636</b>	<b>6210</b>	<b>3634</b>	<b>17480</b>	

#### 4. Ministries: Enlarging Visions

God calls us to enlarge our *visions* for his Glory. We are glad that our vision for the “*Care for the Elderly*” ministry has completed one year, and has provided new models for Care through the monthly programs, online support and providing space for the active involvement of the elders. The vision and prayer of a “*St. Andrews’ Home for the Elderly*”, is a vision for long at St. Andrew's, and we must commit it in prayer to the Lord, because we embark on the different stages of realizing this vision.

Our youngest ministry initiative is the “*Young Couple's Fellowship*”, which has set a new tone for emphasis on *Family Ministry* in a local church. Young families are under stress and we must accompany them. The monthly meetings are a blessing with a systematic Bible Study lead by a wonderful and trained Resource Team. We must enlarge this vision to move into online care and support and counseling services. Our *Pre-marital Counseling Sessions* are in place and we must do more in this area.

Our annual feature of *Scholarship* distribution has been enlarged into “*Education and Professional Network Committee*” (EPNC) which has become a platform for meaningful exchanges and support. The various sessions related to Education and Career have been remarkable in itself and have been widely acclaimed. During these difficult days, our church can become a space to network career options and

support people through network and support. Learning abilities and skills are new areas that may need attention in the coming days.

The “*Healthcare Professionals Network*,” is a novel initiative with over 25 Health Care Professionals sharing ideas and supporting the various ministries of the church.

### **5. Ministries - Wings of the Church: Staying Connected**

Our ministries - *Wings of the church*, with a committed leadership have adapted and continue to learn in the changing context, as the saying goes, “*Never stop learning, because life never stops teaching*”. We thank God for all the efforts to keep the ministry going by conducting regular and occasional Sessions. The Pastorate Committee has met regularly and provided direction and support.

Here is an overview of the ministries continued online:

1	<b>Sunday School (English and Kannada)</b>	Regular Classes at all levels and participation through virtual choirs; Idea of Virtual Bible School (VBS) continued through online activity.
2	<b>Youth</b>	Regular meetings every Sunday
3	<b>Young Couples Fellowship</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday of every Month
4	<b>Women’s Fellowship</b>	Regular Fellowship and Bible Study every 1 <sup>st</sup> Saturday, and now extended to 3 <sup>rd</sup> Saturday
5	<b>Men’s Fellowship</b>	Every Second Saturday - Completed the Study on The Parables in Luke, and currently studying the 7 Letters to the churches in the Book of Revelation
6	<b>Care for the Elderly</b>	Every 1 <sup>st</sup> Thursday of the Month, with different areas covered by different resource persons
7	<b>Education and Professional Network Committee</b> <i>(formerly Scholarship Committee)</i>	Occasional Sessions on Health Care, Education and Career, with inputs and follow up
8	<b>Music Ministry</b>	Regular participation in all Worship Services; virtual choirs; virtual voice training and music classes

### **6. CARE Groups : Developing Local Leadership**

The *CARE Groups*, formerly, *Area Leaders*, is a clear shift of emphasis to “*CARE of People*” in geographical Zones. The role of the CARE Group Leaders has become important especially during this time, and we really appreciate the efforts made by each one of them to connect with the families personally.

### **7. Upkeep and Maintenance of Church and Property**

Every effort is being made to maintain our beautiful edifice and its surroundings. Our *Rain Water Harvesting Recharge Pits* was timely, and we can do more to

preserve and sustain our groundwater levels, which is depleting rapidly. Lockdowns have led us to think of *Kitchen and Herbal Gardens* without using any additional space or water.

### **8. St. Andrew's Community at Tubagere**

God has led us to sustain and continue with the transition of *Brother Sampath Nayak* to *Brother Chandru*, who is our *Diocesan Evangelist*, and currently helping us to continue the work in *Tubagere*. We are moving simultaneously towards the purchase of the existing place, recognition of the worshipping community as a congregation, partnership with the local CSI Doddaballapur (Palanjogihalli) Pastorate, and the proposed construction of the multi-purpose church building. Our Property Sub-committee along with the Mission and Evangelism Sub-committee will work closely towards the goal set before us.

### **9. St. Andrew's School, Siddapura**

We are glad that *Mrs. Saraswathi*, the new *Headmistress*, is settling down and providing valuable leadership to the School. We continue to hope to upgrade it to 8<sup>th</sup> standard from the next academic year. Our partnership with *Bosch* for the *CSR Program* is unique, and everyone involved needs appreciation. We are happy that 2 teachers have joined with salary support from the Government and hoping to get one more. *Staff Salary Scales* have been regularized and updated. The *Teaching Team* has done their best with online classes and hopes to have orientation programs in the coming days to enhance skills.

### **10. Staff Team: Repositioning Roles and Responsibilities**

A lot of time is being invested by the *Church Office Staff Team*. The long overdue process of employment agreements are completed and specific roles assigned with *Ms. Rakshitha Nelson* joining as *Office Assistant* from *September 7<sup>th</sup> 2020*, after due processes of selection, interview and approval by the Pastorate Committee.

*The Team:*

- a. **Mrs. Loretta Suhasini:** Office Administrator
- b. **Manoj Noronha:** (Campus Supervisor with the additional responsibility to coordinate work at Siddapura and Tubagere. Separate Office Space with storage of essentials for maintenance.
- c. **Ms. Rakshitha Nelson:** Office Assistant

### **11. Church Office: Update of Database , Online Services and Archives**

As we grow together as a congregation, it is important to use technology to the fullest. We are glad that the online *Receipts System with Tally* is in place and members' contribution will be acknowledged immediately electronically. In addition, a lot of effort is put into classify and update the *Database* of members. Two models have been attempted: CARE Group (Vinayaka Nagar) is completed, and Telephoning people personally in RT Nagar are in progress. We hope to complete the process by early next year. Meanwhile, a new emphasis is being given to develop our *Church Archives* both physically and digitally. If you do have something to share, please do share it.

### **12. St. Andrew's Partnership Initiative**

We feel much inspired by our *Patron Saint, St. Andrew*, who was unique in locating the boy with the loaves and fishes, which was blessed by our Lord to multiply and feed 5000 and more. We have envisioned a *Four Focus Areas* of ministry and mission and each one of the ministries will be invited to partner with one. A separate document will be circulated on St. Andrew's Day in this regard.

The Four Focus Areas are:

1. Church Infrastructure and up-gradation of resources
2. Purchase of land and construction of a church at Tubagere
3. St. Andrew's School, Siddapura
4. New Mission Field

We thank each one of you, members of the Pastorate Committee, Conveners and members of the Sub-committees, and the Staff Team, for your cooperation and leadership. Your prayer support and generous giving as People of God, even during these difficult times is truly remarkable and commendable. It has helped us to sustain and support the ministry and mission of our church. The process of auditing our church and school accounts is completed, and the approved Auditor's Report are since submitted.

We continue to learn like the disciples and pray that *God's Protection, Care and Grace* will be our portion as families and persons.

May God bless you

Your Presbyter

**Rev. Dr. Dexter S. Maben**