

On the weekend of September, 5/6 Fr. Joe Thundiyl Chacko was introduced to the parishioners of St. Catherine of Siena Church as their administrator. I had the privilege of interviewing Fr. Joe and found him to be enthusiastic regarding this new appointment and his demeanor that of an optimistic individual truly dedicated to his priesthood.

Fr. Joe was born in India in the State of Kerala located on the southeastern coast of India to a Syrian Catholic family. There were five children, two girls and three boys. When Fr. Joe was a teenager, his uncle was the Apostolic Administrator of Balasore, Calcutta and his inspiration to be a missionary. In 1970 he joined a seminary and studied theological studies for thirteen years. During this period he was privileged to work with Mother Teresa and her Sisters in Calcutta as part of his theological studies. He related to me that Mother Teresa had been a teacher at a high school for daughters of the wealthy for fifteen years.

She left this comfortable environment to pursue what she believed was the direction God was pointing her to - that is to serve the poor openly in the streets of Calcutta.

Fr. Joe was ordained to the Priesthood on March 19, 1984 on his patron's day, the Feast of St. Joseph. From 1984 to 2002, he served in several parishes in India. He said that what he considered to be his noblest achievement during this time was while he was the parish

priest at the Cathedral in Balasore and although the cathedral was splendid, it was located in close proximity of what we would describe as a slum area inhabited by an intensely impoverished population. Characteristic to his missionary spirit, during his free time, Fr. Joe visited the people in this area and felt compassion for them. He appealed on their behalf to an acquaintance, Emily Stark who resides in Kansas City. She generously responded by donating \$145,000!! With these funds new housing was constructed as well as money for education, books, medicine and clothing.

At the request of the Most Rev. Thomas Thiruhahi, the Bishop of

Balasure, Fr. Joe was assigned to the USA in July 2006 at the Diocese of Norwich. Most Rev. Michael Cote, Bishop of Norwich, appointed him as the Parochial Vicar at St. Matthew, Tolland Green, to assist Rev. Jim Carini, the pastor, who served at St. Catherine of Siena several years ago. Fr. Joe said that not only did Fr. Carini assist him in making this huge adjustment but he was also an inspiration to him. Upon arriving at St. Catherine's Fr. Joe beheld the resident peacocks on the church grounds, the national bird of India!!

On October 11, parishioners of St. Matthew's traveled to St. Catherine of Siena and together, both parishes celebrated Fr. Joe's 25th year in the priesthood. Fr. Joe stated that his door is always open to anyone who wishes to share experiences, ideas, etc. because he said "The People of God are what make up the Church."