



## COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

### Upasana CC

***Faiths /Traditions Represented:*** Hindus, Muslims, Christians, & Dalits

***Location of CC:*** Todupuzha, Kerala, India

***Key Areas of Focus:*** Women empowerment, child development, literary programs, spoken English classes, martial arts, and interfaith relations.

#### **Summary:**

*Upasana Centre, Thodupuzha is a CC located in Kerala, India. Upasana CC was founded by Fr. Albert Nambiar Parambil, a veteran in the field of interfaith dialogue in India. The CC provides activities and programs in education, women's welfare, interfaith dialogue, child development, literacy, health and wellness. These programs and services are available every day of the week and provide resources to underserved and vulnerable communities in the area.*

#### ***1. Can you please help me understand the current religious/cultural/political contexts in the area where your CC is working?***

Upasana CC is situated in Todupuzha. We are the only CC in the high range district of Kerala. The CC was founded in 1980, and has become a nucleus of interfaith activities in Kerala. Our founding director is Rev. Dr. Albert Nampiarparambil, a champion in the field of interfaith relations. The major communities involved in the CC include: Hindus, Christians, Muslims and Tribals (Dalits). Upasana has become an important centre of interfaith activities and it is a great example for other CCs in the region.

#### ***2. Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed where your CC is working?***

There are a large number of Hindus, Muslims, and Tribals in this area, although the majority of the people are Christian. Fundamentalist beliefs among these religions can sometimes create problems. People tend to live in isolated compartments with their own religion and culture. Therefore, it is a necessity to bring together all those who are confined in their respective communities.

#### ***3. Can you please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is doing this year?***

We have a series of activities every month (Please refer to copy of our programs copy). These programs include Vanitha Vedi (women's Forum), Kavyakala vedi (Literary Forum), Interfaith Seminars, Community Development Programs, Youth Camps, Children's Camps, classes in English, Yoga, Karate, and an auditorium used for programs for all communities irrespective of caste, creed and religion.



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## 4. Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?

The main religions and cultures involved are Hindus, Christians, Muslims and Tribals. Tribals are mostly illiterate and they earn their livelihood by bringing materials from the forest. They are generally exploited by the rich traders, and need the help of centers like Upasana for the protection of their rights and lives.



**UPASANA**  
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### MARCH - 2014

- 1, Saturday 2.30 pm : വനിതാവേദി (Vanitha Vedi)  
നൂതനനേഷൻ കുട്ടികൾക്ക് എന്തുപറ്റി?  
(What happened to the New Generation Children?)  
Mrs. Latha Varghese
- 2, Sunday 5pm : ഇന്ത്യയുടെ സാമ്പത്തിക വെല്ലുവിളികൾ  
(The Challenges of Indian Economy)  
Mr. T.C. Mathew
- 9, Sunday 3 pm : കാവ്യകഥാവേദി  
5 pm : ബൈബിളും മലയാള സാഹിത്യവും (The Bible and Malayalam Literature)  
Dr. Kurias Kumbalakuzhi
- 16, Sunday 5 pm : വിജയിക്കാനോ മരിക്കാനോ (A Brain to Win) - മനഃശാസ്ത്ര സെമിനാർ  
Mr. John Muzhuthettu
- 23, Sunday 5 pm : ടി. എച്ച്. ലോറൻസിന്റെ "പുത്രന്മാരും കാമുകയും" - നോവൽ പഠനം  
(The Sons and lover's of D.H. Lawrence)  
Mr. M.K. Janardhanan
- 30, Sunday 5 pm : ചരിത്രം നൽകുന്ന പാഠങ്ങൾ (The Lessons given by History)  
Prof. M.J. Jacob

### APRIL - 2014

- 5, Saturday 2.30 pm : വനിതാവേദി
- 6, Sunday 5 pm : മൊബൈൽ ഫോൺ ശത്രുവും മിത്രവും  
(Mobile Phone: Friend and Foe)  
Dr. Sankaraman
- 13, Sunday 3 pm : കാവ്യകഥാവേദി  
5 pm : സാഹിത്യവും മൂല്യവും  
(Literature and Values)  
Prof. M. Thomas Mathew
- 20, Sunday 5 pm : വയലാറിന്റെ കേതീഗാനങ്ങൾ: ഒരു പഠനം  
(The Devotional Songs of Vayalar- A Study)  
Mr. V.S. Balakrishnapillai
- 27, Sunday 5 pm : കുമാരനാശാന്റെ കവിതകളിലെ പാശ്ചാത്യ കാവ്യ സങ്കേതങ്ങൾ  
(The Western Poetry on Kumaranasan)  
Prof. V.A. Joseph

NB: ബാലോപാസന സമരീകാന്റ് മെയ് 5 മുതൽ 11 വരെ സമയം 10 am മുതൽ 4 pm വരെ.  
5, 6, 7 ജൂനിയർ (1 to 7 വരെ ക്ലാസുകൾ) - 8, 9, 10 സീനിയർ (8 to +2 വരെ ക്ലാസുകൾ)

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### UPASANA'S SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- 1. Spoken English : Batch I : 9.30 am to 12.30 pm, Batch II : 2 pm to 4 pm, Batch III 10am to 1.00 p.m. Saturdays & Sundays
- 2. Yoga (Ladies, Students): 3pm to 5 pm (Saturdays and Sundays) Gents: 5 pm to 6 pm Mondays & Thursdays
- 3. Karatte, Kung-Fu - 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. (Tuesdays and Fridays) 4. Painting : 10am to 12 noon (Saturdays)



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**5. Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that would otherwise not interact or cooperate with each other.**

We have an auditorium which we offer for the meetings of all community groups, in the hopes that all sections of society will have a chance to visit us through the facility. We provide flyers about our regular programs to everyone during such gatherings. We also have special programs catered to all sections of society including, women, children, youth, senior citizens and so on. Our English classes and martial arts program attract a large number of people. We also have training programs for music and musical instruments.

**6. Given the current contexts, you described, what does your CC hope to achieve?**

We want to see all communities live in peace, without communal clashes in any given time. One of our CC's main objectives is to stop the exploitation of the tribal communities by the business classes.

**7. How do you see your CC's work improving cooperation among people of different traditions?**

We function as a nucleus where all sections of society come for advice and training programs. These services help improve cooperation among the different classes of people.

**9. What are some indicators / observations you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where your CC works?**

We have been working since 1980 and have seen many fluctuations in our society. Cooperation among different communities has increased to a great extent. The situation of the Adivasis (Aborigines) in the hilly areas has improved a great deal. In addition, most of the tribal children are now attending school and education has provided these groups with positive changes.

**10. Do you have a specific short story you can share about your work that might inspire other CCs or teach us a lesson about interfaith?**

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said that, "Every institution is the lengthened shadow of an individual". Upasana Center is a living example of this. A great visionary called Fr. Dr. Albert Nampiarparambil is the founder. He has been a champion of interfaith relations, and has made a mark in the philosophical world of India. He has been instrumental in founding many interfaith organizations like Chavara Cultural Centre, Cochin, Sangamam Interfaith Center, Moonnar, and the World fellowship of Inter Religions Councils. Our founder's story is a great example to show how one single individual can achieve a peaceful revolution in the thinking of a lot of people. His exposure at the Vatican led him to become the first secretary of the interfaith relations desk of the Catholic Church in India. At the age of 83, Father Albert is an untiring champion of the interfaith dialogue. The inspiring leadership of such individuals has helped URI in gaining a higher visibility among the various sections of the society.



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### ***11. How is your CC's work helping to achieve the mission of URI?***

Our CC is a glorious example of living the mission of URI. We show how best a CC can contribute in the development of the society as a whole. We are also an example of a self-reliant organization. We create funds for our activities through a series of training programs as previously stated above.

### ***12. Within your CC, you have members from different faiths/cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation between these members? What are the challenges?***

Cooperation among our members is excellent. We have representatives of different communities on our board and they all work as one for the life and growth of our CC. Our challenge is to bring the tribes to the fore front, many of them are addicted to alcohol , and other substances and it is a big challenge to keep them away from these dangers.

### ***13. How is being part of URI helping your CC to achieve its goals?***

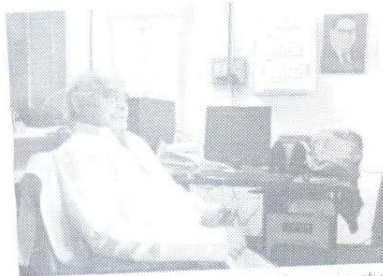
URI is an organization that rises up to our goals and its principles inspire our community. We learn from the experience of other CCs. Participating in two National Assemblies and in the Pune Asia Assembly of URI has helped us a great deal in learning about the spirit of working for URI.

### ***14. How can URI better support your CC in reaching its goals?***

We would like to come into contact with other CCs that have similar programs. The URI network has to be widened, so that it can attract likeminded organizations in different parts of Asia.



## Rev. Dr. Albert Nambiar Parampil Calls It a Day



Rev. Dr. Albert Nambiarparampil is the champion of interfaith pilgrimage in India. He started four movements, three of which became very active Cooperation Circles of URI. The World Fellowship of Inter Religious Councils, Chavara Cultural Center (Cochin), Upasana Study Center (Thodupuzha) and Sangamam Cultural Center (Munnar) are his brain children. The first three are registered URI units. Fr. Albert (83) is retiring in the month of May. It is the end of a glorious interfaith adventure. He was a beacon of hope for all the interfaith pilgrims in India for several decades.

Dr. Abraham Karickam (URI Asia Executive Secretary), Prof. John Kurakkal (URI South India Chairman) and T.G. Stephen (URI Liaison officer) met Fr. Albert at Upasana study center, Thodupuzha recently just to greet him and thank him on behalf of URI movement which is a real passion for him.

His interfaith expedition started way back in 1970s when he was called to become the first secretary of the Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India.

It was in 1971 that he started the Chavara Cultural Centre in Cochin. It had a humble start in a kitchen room. Today it is one of the very famous centres of learning in Kerala. Upasana has also become a beehive of interfaith activities. It was in 1971 that he started the three day live in sessions which mentored many of the budding leaders in India.

The World Fellowship of Inter Religious Councils was initiated in 1981 with the help of prominent figures like M.K.K Nair, Justice Shamsuddin etc. That occasion was very special as it marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sasthamkotta. World Religious meet under the auspices of Ayyappa Seva Sangham, 150 anniversary of CMI congregation and the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Chavara Cultural Centre. 400 delegates from different parts of the world attended. WFIRC conferences have become a regular feature today and it attracts a large number of interfaith practitioners every two years. It has also helped in creating a wide network of Interfaith Movements in India.

Fr. Albert considers that interfaith conviction is a very special personal call. He had to face so much opposition from within the church and outside. Even an interfaith prayer was very difficult in the beginning but today it has become the order of the day. He is happy to see such movements flourishing all around the world. He remembers that conversion was a big issue during all the initial conferences. But there has been a deeper understanding of this issue ever since the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 64)

It is a pity that the world is facing ever so many confrontations in the name of religions and ideologies. Fr. Albert is hopeful that the world will evolve into a better place for all to live in peace. He believes that URI has a leading role to play in this. He cherishes sweet memories of his association with so many stalwarts of the URI Movement including Bishop William Swing, Rev. Dr. Charles Gibbs, Sally Mahe and so on. There has to be a very strong network of committed interfaith practitioners and peace builders around the world so as to create a better tomorrow.

Ever since the dialogue subunit of the World Council of Churches was founded in 1971, Fr. Albert has been closely associating with its dialogue programs. He remembers with gratitude his long lasting friendship with its directors like Dr. Stanlee Samartha, Rev. Dr. Wesley Ariyaratna, Rev. Dr. Hansucko and so on. He collaborated with WCC and NCCI for a number of national and international conferences, especially with NCCI (National Council of Churches in India) during the tenure of Rev. Dr. Ipe Joseph, Bishop Sahu etc. He had so many friends like Russel Chandran, Marcus Bray Brook and others who moved closely in the ecumenical expedition.

Fr. Albert was an active member in various International Organizations like WCRP, IARF, World Parliament of Religions, Temple of Understanding and so on. When 14 such organizations formed a network called International Interfaith Organization Network (IIION), he was a founding member, on the capacity of being the secretary general of World Fellowship of Inter religious Councils.