

# Union Christian College



## Centenary Projects

2021 - 2022

### Union Christian College, Aluva

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Est. 1921



## The Union Christian College

Aluva, Kerala

The Union Christian College is one of the first colleges in India to have been established and managed by Indian Christians. It was founded in 1921 by four young graduates- **Prof. K. C. Chacko, Prof. C. P. Mathew, Prof. V. M. Ittiyera and Prof. A. M. Varkey** - who had studied in Madras Christian College along with Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, one of the distinguished Indian scholars in Indian Philosophy, academician and statesman, the first Vice-President and the second President of India.

At a time when the Indian churches and foreign missionary societies looked upon the nationalist movement with suspicion, the new college openly identified with it by inviting Mahatma Gandhi to its campus. In March 1925, on his way to Vaikom to participate in the Satyagraha against untouchability, Gandhi visited the college. Impressed by what he saw and understood of the college, he wrote in the visitors' diary: 'Delighted with the ideal situation.' In 1922,



Rabindranath Tagore also visited the college and laid the foundation stone for the first men's hostel, the Tagore Hostel. He was taken in by the striking resemblance of the college with the ethos of his own institution, Visva-Bharati, in Shantinikethan.

In one of the principle documents addressed to the well-wishers of the college, the founders expressed their commitment to serve the nation on unambiguous terms: “...the Christians in India are today, called upon to give their best without stipulating terms for their service... We have no greater desire than that like our Master before us... shoulder our humble share of the day's burden among the many tasks that confront the nation at present time.”

The college, which was established in an old court house situated on the 18 acres of land donated by Mulam Thirunal Rama Varma V, the Maharaja of Travancore, was a rare and united endeavor of individuals from various Christian denominations who otherwise never saw eye to eye; and it still stands as a monument of unity in service and witness to God's love in Jesus Christ. The college has always remained secular in its commitment and cosmopolitan in its outlook.



Begun as a residential college, the founders envisioned the academic life of the college on the lines of the traditional gurukula system of education. They sought to make the college rooted in the best of what the eastern tradition represented and 'keep the college near to the spirit and genius of our people.' At the same time, they were keen to keep its doors and windows open 'to profit from the best counsel that western educational experience can provide', especially its humanistic and liberal tradition. Needless to say, it is this spirit of remaining close to one's own civilization yet being open to 'cultures of all lands' that drew the attention of personalities like Gandhi and Tagore to the college.

The college began with 63 students enrolled in the Junior Intermediate Class in Group III, and affiliated to the then Madras University. Today, it has become a premier higher educational institution with about 2200 students, enrolled in 15 graduate and 14 postgraduate courses in diverse disciplines. The college is now affiliated to the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, with eight of its departments being Research Centres recognized by the university, providing guidance and resources to more than 120 research scholars. It is one of the two colleges that went in for the first cycle of NAAC accreditation in 1999 and received a five star accreditation. It completed the fourth cycle of accreditation in 2017 with an A grade (3.45 score). It had also been awarded an A grade during the previous cycle.

Though the college was compelled to discontinue a large part of its residential facilities for men, it continues to accommodate more than 300 women. At the earliest opportunity, we wish to restore the residential facilities for men. The college has an unostentatious and simple campus life, various clubs and societies that provide for maximum student-teacher interaction and promote the innate interests and skills of our students, and a green and lush campus with ample bio-diversity. The college also strives to do all that it can to provide a safe, inclusive and free environment for students to find and express themselves, and create their own niche in life.

The college has always maintained financial austerity and resisted the compulsions of the market. It has had an impeccable history of probity in public life, and accountability and transparency in its financial management. We remain poor but rich in giving our best to nurture intellectually competent, morally upright and spiritually inspired citizens for our country.

The college has an excellent alumni network, which is its most valuable asset. It is proud to have produced an array of leaders, statesmen, artists, writers, teachers, and others of eminence: Paravur T. K. Narayana Pillai (First Chief Minister of Travancore-Cochin, b. 1890), M. P. Manmadhan (Gandhian and Sarvodaya Leader, b. 1994), Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan (Emeritus Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, b. 1917), C. M. Stephen (Former Minister in the Union Cabinet, b. 1918), P. C. Alexander (Former IAS Officer and



Governor, b. 1921), Nitya Chaitanya Yati (Noted Philosopher and Writer, b. 1924), P. Govinda Pillai (Marxist Ideologue and Writer, b. 1926), P. K. Vasudevan Nair (Ninth Chief Minister of Kerala, b. 1926), Varkala Radhakrishnan (Former Speaker of Kerala Legislative Assembly, b. 1927), Malayattoor Ramakrishnan (Former IAS Officer and Writer, b. 1927) and Dr. D. Babu Paul (Former IAS Officer and Writer, b. 1941) are only a few among them.

As the centenary year of the college approaches, it is an opportunity for us to reflect upon and take stock of our past – our accomplishments as well as our shortcomings in fulfilling the great ideals of our founders. At the same time, it is also an occasion for us to dream new dreams and envision a future that would be in accordance with the pressing needs of our society and country. We are committed to mentoring students who would be willing to take up the challenge of building a more just, humane and benevolent India that would become a beacon of moral rectitude among the community of nations.

Drawing from the unique tradition of the college and keeping in focus the specific challenges posed by global realities, by 2021, we want to commit ourselves to catapulting the college to a developmental trajectory that recognizes the dignity and value of the human self and its inherent potential to flower and be of sacrificial service to humankind, that equips it to take on the challenge of making knowledge that is subservient to the creation of a just and more humane world, and affirms the renewed concern for global interconnectedness and global citizenship.

The college was founded at a time when the world was just coming out of the miseries caused by the great war, when India was in the throes of the non-cooperation movement, and when the world was reeling under the sufferings caused by a pandemic similar to the one we are facing now, the Spanish Influenza. Even in the midst of these adversities, a large circle of well-wishers and the Travancore Government were generous in their support for beginning and sustaining the college. We remember that with much gratitude. At this time, our country and the world at large are going through a crisis of a similar nature. Yet, we have faith that the Central and State Governments, the UGC and the RUSA, the MG University and all our alumni and well-wishers, both inside and outside India, will extend all the support and help they can in order to maintain all that is good in our tradition, to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing educational scenario and to help our nation in its march to greater freedom, justice and peace.



## Centenary Projects: Our Needs and Concerns

### 1. **Autonomy:**

Attaining an autonomous status would enable the college to grow academically and further carve out its distinct identity in promoting the cause of higher education in the country. The autonomy that the College intends to achieve is not one of freedom from social responsibility and accountability but rather academic autonomy to innovate and remain relevant to the needs of a fast changing global scenario. It is the freedom to live out the values of inclusivity, simplicity, and sacrificial service that the College cherishes so dearly as essential to its identity. The College hopes to do it, firmly grounding itself in the liberal arts and science tradition in a cultural climate of education being defined as shaping human resources to saleable products in the job market.

Though the University and the State government had recommended the college to UGC for autonomous status and the UGC expert team had visited twice, the process could not be completed due to reasons beyond our control. In the last two consecutive NAAC accreditation processes, the college secured an A grade with 3.35 and 3.45 points respectively. As per the Gazette Notification of the UGC 6.4 (ii): “colleges which have a score of 3.26 and above, up to 3.50 for one complete cycle... and also accredited accordingly in the second cycle, shall be considered for grant of autonomous status without onsite visit by the Expert Committee.” Since the college fulfils this requirement, it is our prayer that the State government and the UGC grant us autonomous status, especially considering its 100 years of significant contribution to the nation and the state of Kerala. If the State government gives a fresh recommendation, the UGC would be accorded Autonomy to the College without having to go through a visit by an expert team.

### 2. **College with Potential for Excellence (CPE):**

The Union Christian College is in the process of applying to the UGC for recognizing it as a College with Potential for Excellence. It has 15 undergraduate and 14 postgraduate departments; 8 of our departments are Research Centres of the Mahatma Gandhi University with more than 120 research scholars working for their Ph.D. in different disciplines.

### 3. **Introducing New Courses:**

The college feels the need to introduce new courses that have contemporary significance and relevance and thus expand the frontiers of its knowledge. The college does not want to pursue self-financing programs but prefers to opt for a Public Private Partnership model that would emphasize sustainability and not profiteering. While it is a minority institution, it is a college with secular credentials and will be at the service of the state for any noble and pioneering initiative in higher education without any motive of self-aggrandizement.

### 4. **State of the Art Library:**

The present library, which is nine decades old and has a building space of 9300 sq.ft, is not adequate to meet the demands of more than 2200 students, 120 research scholars, 144 faculty, and 58 non-teaching staff and other people from the nearby community approaching us for reference. It has a collection of 83,000 books (some of them invaluable,





dating as far back as the 1880s) and journals. Now it is fully automated with the international software, Alice for Windows, and has been networked with all the teaching departments. Today, we are faced with acute space constraints both for the users and for the books that result in an unhealthy physical ambience, and an inadequate facility for online teaching-learning activities. It is also expected to be a hub of knowledge exchange



with an international community. Given the present educational requirements, it is important for the library to strengthen its digital infrastructure. The conventional storage of hard copies of books, journals and other reference materials is undergoing tremendous



changes and it is imperative for the library to have (a) digital storage facilities, (b) accessibility standards and procedures, (c) archiving of resources, (d) security of resources, (e) necessary bandwidth to accommodate anytime access of users, (f) customizing suitable remote ware (software), subscribing to digital databases and quality digital resources in terms of quality publications, etc. Moreover, it is also important to have a full-fledged digital library section to accommodate at least 15 to 20 percent of the student population at any given point of time.

Hence, we propose to construct a state-of-the-art library building of 22,000 sq. ft. costing Rs. 6.50 Crores which would have such facilities as free and easy access to information resources from across the world, facilities for information commons, appropriately equipped space for the visually and physically challenged, a technology training centre for women and children from the neighbourhood, special cubicles for research fellows, audio-visual room, space for video-conferencing, space for the production of digital teaching/learning resources, archives, seminar rooms, etc. This will also be a facility accessible to teachers and students in the neighbouring educational institutions for a nominal fee. We need the support of all educational agencies to make this library the knowledge hub of not only the UCC but also the backward communities in the neighbourhood and local self-governing institutions.

## 5. International House:

Tagore in his address to the students and faculty of the college in 1922, stressed the importance of extending our hospitality to the world, sharing with the whole world all that is best that our nation can offer, and of making our institutions centres of world culture. The far-reaching changes brought about by information technology have further facilitated this





process, opening up new vistas of cultural exchange across the globe. It is in keeping with this spirit that the International House is being envisaged. It will have a place to stay for visiting Faculty from abroad such as Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence Program, to organize semester programs with foreign universities that enter into partnership with us, organize international seminars, and to



facilitate overseas student exchanges, thus helping the college to restore its liberal and cosmopolitan ethos. The estimated cost of such an International House would be Rs. 1.80 Crores, a cost that, we hope, would be borne by our alumni in North America and Canada.

## 6. Technology & Incubation Centre:

Our labs are full of laboratory equipment procured using funds from minor and major research projects which our faculty have received from scientific organizations. It is unimaginable how we will manage to accommodate such equipment if more of our faculty, most of whom are scholars with Ph. D. and Post-Doctoral Fellowships, continue to receive such projects. Moreover, we must opt for a more judicious use of our funds without duplicating costly lab equipment and also ensuring their optimum use in an interdisciplinary research framework and opening them up for research to other research scholars from other institutions. We can, thus, turn this centre into an incubation and start-up centre with greater opportunities for tie up with the industry and business communities and for consultancy services to raise the badly needed revenue for future development. A new building, with 10000 sq. ft. built-in area is being planned for this purpose beside the International House costing Rs. 1.5 Crore.

## 7. Restoration of the Kacheri Malika:

The college was begun in the old Kacheri building dating back to the 1800s, which today remains as a blend of Dutch, British and Indian architecture. In 1993, the Government of Kerala declared the Kacheri Malika a protected monument and the Department of Archaeology, Government of Kerala, restored it spending funds from its own resources. Since then, nothing much has been done to maintain it. The college also does not have the



freedom to alter its structure without the permission and supervision of the Department of Archaeology. We expect the Department of Archaeology to conduct an on-site inspection and do what is necessary to keep the building strong and fit so that it may be able to face the vagaries of changing weather conditions.

## **8. Renovation and Upgradation of Classrooms and Seminar Halls:**

Classrooms require basic technological upgradations like Wi-Fi connectivity and also amenities that help in teaching learning and ensuring the comforts of students. Equally important is the need for a few smart seminar rooms where we can hold seminars of a national or international nature.

## **9. Restoring Residential Facilities for Men:**

The college was started as a residential institution for men. But today, the majority of the student population are women and we have facilities to accommodate about 300 female students. But, we only have one men's hostel which accommodates about 45 male students. If we have to attract students from outside Kerala and create a cosmopolitan community and a vibrant campus life, we must have more men's hostels that can accommodate another 200 students, particularly those being admitted by the Kerala State Sports Council.

These are a few initiatives related to the centenary. We hope to garner financial resources from corporate sources and by tapping the good will and resources of our alumni across India and abroad. However, a grant from the State Government would mean a lot to the college as a gift of land and a court house from the Maharaja of Travancore meant a lot to the founding fathers who preferred to sign the Conscience Clause (that Christian scripture will not be taught against conscientious objection of students), forfeiting the generous financial support of foreign missionary agencies to start this college. This commitment to a humanistic and secular ethos continues to remain our cultural capital to move forward with.

**Rev. Thomas John**

Manager, Union Christian College

14 October 2020







# Centenary Projects

