Chinmaya Mission Dallas/Fort Worth hosted the 23rd Chinmaya Aradhana Mahasamadhi Camp (MSC) at the Hyatt Regency hotel in DFW from July 30th to Aug. 03rd 2016. It was like a family reunion with approximately 1200 Chinmaya family members from across the globe who attended the amazingly memorable event. Every aspect of this event was an aradhana (worship) to Param Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda and it reminded us of His life and our Guru Parampara (lineage). Appropriately the camp theme was ‘Vande Guru Paraparam’. The homecoming ambiance for the Chinmaya families was adorned beautifully by the décor team. The decoration backdrop of Guru Parampara over the main stage - from Lord Shiva as Dakshinamoorti to Veda Vyasa to Adi Shankara to Swami Sivananda to Tapovan Maharaj and finally to our Param Pujya Gurudev. Additionally, the giant “elephant” art work at the Enterprise Ballroom foyer were as though constant reminders and pointers to the Supreme.

Grace. That was indeed what everyone experienced and precisely what Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda expounded upon as he inaugurated the Mahasamadhi Camp. Grace, he explained makes difficult things easy, and transforms the seemingly impossible into possible. He introduced Chinmaya Mangalam to everyone and shared his vision about it. This property has been acquired by Chinmaya Mission West and just like Chinmaya Vibhooti in Kolwan India, Chinmaya Mangalam is currently kept busy with Swami Sarveshanandaji led activities. Pujya Guruji hopes to hold the Vedanta course here in a couple years. During the camp, everyone had an opportunity to visit this place and see how the entire North America was engaged in it. Approximately 300 adults visited the site.

**Inaugural Ceremonies**

Grace works when we work. Hence this was the motto adapted during the centennial year – Unto Him Our Best. We have been celebrating Pujya Gurudev’s birth centenary year since May 2015. While every center has celebrated the centennial year in different ways, the Chinmaya Jyoti Yatra has been one of the many milestones seen during this year.

The Chinmaya Jyoti Yatra recognizes, honors, and celebrates the greatness of Pujya Gurudev’s life in a fifteen-month-long event, starting on Gurudev’s 99th birthday on May 8th 2015 and culminating on Pujya Gurudev’s Mahasamadhi day on August 3rd, 2016. During this time of his
centennial birth celebrations, the Jyoti Yatra expressed our gratitude for Param Pujya Gurudev's blessings, guidance, and immortal vision of enlightenment for the world. Jyoti Yatra had been planned and executed by the CHYK West members, under the guidance of the Chinmaya Mission West, each local Chinmaya Mission Center, and Chinmaya Mission West Acharyas. The Chinmaya Jyoti traveled through 53 centers in 28 states over 454 days from May 8, 2015 to August 3rd 2016.

During the camp, four Chinmaya Jyotis that had travelled extensively all over North America culminated at Dallas on the inaugural day of the Chinmaya Mahasamadhi camp. These were received with great pomp and show. The MSC 2016 inauguration ceremonies began with Pujya Guruji gracing the Chinmaya Jeevan Darshan (CJD) exhibit and lighting the first Chinmaya Jyoti at Param Pujya Gurudev's altar.

Pujya Guruji was then offered a specially made orange feta (turban) by the CJD team. Swami Swaroopananda-ji personally placed that feta on Pujya Guruji's head, who then picked up Param Pujya Gurudev's padukas from the CJD altar. Other Swamis and Swaminis picked up the other jyotis and Pujya Gurudev's pictures from CJD and thus began the Chinmaya Jyoti Yatra from CJD altar to the altar in the main hall.

The procession began in grand style with the blowing of the conch and the Chenda melam, a percussion ensemble that is played for all festivals and rituals in Kerala. This was followed by Velakali, Poikaal kuthirai aattam, Karagam, KavadiAttam, Kolattam, Vanchi paattu (boat song), Sambalpuri, mohiniyattam in praise of Gurudev, lezhim and dindi procession and a simple dance Dolayam.

The four Jyotis will be kept at Chinmaya Mission in San Diego, Chinmaya Saaket, Chinmaya Chitrakoot and Chinmaya Mangalam in Texas.

Discourses for Adults

Vande Guru Paramparam, the central theme, reminded us of our rich cultural heritage. Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda spoke on Shri Dakshinamoorti Stotram. He explained that this hymn in praise of Lord Shiva extolled His glorious expression in the creation. Lord, as our first guru, dispels our ignorance by shedding upon us the light of knowledge. When the veil of ignorance is removed, we become aware of our splendid magnificence infinite nature which is none other than the Supreme Lord Himself.
Swami Swaroopanandaji’s insightful talks on Mahamrutyunjaya Mantra reinforced the introspective Self reflection and helped us understand our inherent swaroop (nature). The inspired fearless seekers were shown the means of how to conquer our death phobia and abide in Trayambakan (the Supreme Lord Shiva Himself). Yajamahey (adoration) of the sugandhim (fragrant) nourisher who helps us grow and releases us from all sorts of bondages and leads us on the path of liberation to taste the elixir of immortality.

Swami Shantananda expounded upon Bhagwad Gita Chapter 12 and discussed the path of devotion. Many doubts such as which path of worship was better - that of the saguna (attributes) or nirguna (attributeless); attributes of a great devotee that are dear to Lord Shri Krishna; and how to sincerely strive to build up the bhakti bhav (devotion) were clarified through these discourses. In addition, Swami Shantananda held a Q&A session on one evening after dinner which was well received.

Camp organizers introduced, at a short notice, an additional Q&A session by Swami Ishwarananda which was also well received.

All participants had plenty of activities to choose from throughout the day that began with meditation and yoga followed by Pujya Guruji’s talks. Different groups such as Balavihar, CHYKs (youth), Setukaris (young adults) and Adults, then dispersed for their age-specific activities. The CHYK group’s assistance played a huge factor in ensuring the seamless flow of events – whether it was to assist with Balavihar kids’ recreational activities or to manage logistics for 1200 people throughout the day.

Chinmaya Setukaris

Param Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda envisioned Chinmaya Setukaris (bridge builders) to be a link between the Yuva Kendra and the broader mission. His vision for Setukaris combined continued spiritual learning with service to society. During the 2016 Mahasamadhi Camp, Chinmaya Setukaris enjoyed a number of lectures, workshops and other activities that were consistent with Gurudev’s vision.

Led by Acharya Vilasini, the Setukari group covered the text "Art of Contemplation" by Swami Chinmayananda, a book on meditative techniques. This text was chosen to help Setukaris calm and focus the mind in order to meet the growing number of responsibilities they face with equipoise. Further, the Setukari group enjoyed an interactive "Social Media/Social Pressure and Sadhana" workshop to understand how to employ Vedanta along with meditation to meet their responsibilities and challenges dynamically.
Perhaps the biggest highlight for the Setukari group, was the opportunity they had to interact with Swami Swaroopananda in an intimate Q&A session. Swami Swaroopananda touched on themes relevant to Setukaris including the importance of compassion, strength, and service. He also talked about the growing needs of the mission and encouraged Setukari's to take on more leadership roles within the mission. Finally, Setukari's toured ChinmayaMangalam together and had a glimpse of the long-term vision for the project which will serve Setukari's and their families well into the future.

**ChinmayaYuva Kendra (CHYK)** Along with this cultural program, the CHYKs also entertained the attendees with an impromptu comedy show that had everyone splitting in laughter. The audience couldn’t stop laughing and were well entertained for the entire one hour program. The CHYKs presented their version of the Life of I (where I = a typical Indian Balavihar child growing up in USA); how to qualify to become a member of the prestigious Yuva Rhythm group; and the various prospective interviews conducted for choosing the successor for Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda.

**Balavihar Program**

Around 260 kids from grades K – 12 attended MSC Balavihar program. Children learned that each Guru taught us some powerful techniques to be successful in the path of realization. For example, Shri Dakshinamoorthy, taught us the power of silence; Maharshi Veda Vyasa, the power of openness; Shri Shankaracharya, the power of Knowledge and non-violence; Swami Tapovanam, the power of self-discipline through tapas (austerity); Swami Sivananda, the power of service; and Pujya Guruvdev, blessed us with this great vision, the Chinmaya movement and the Balavihar program, a platform for self-realization. Children participated in Chinmaya Aaradhana day and enjoyed their “Texas Satvic Howdy day”. They wore Cowboy hats decorated with Chinmaya Om and wore the Chinmaya OM T – shirt that they painted. In addition to activities such as coloring, word puzzles, games, discussion and bhajans and songs, the camp theme song was a popular teacher appreciation song " You Have Made a Difference" by Brian Asselin and Eric Disero. Balavihar children enjoyed a special satsang with Swami Swaroopananda and the children sang
the camp theme song for him as their humble Gurudakshina to the great Chinmaya Guruparampara. Swami Swaroopananda shared with them the story that Param Pujya Gurudev told him when Swamiji had met him as a child. Through that story Swamiji conveyed a very powerful message - Crack your shell, Spread your wings, Fly and Fly High. Change the “Impossible” to “I’m possible.”

Chinmaya Jeevan Darshan (CJD) provided priceless glimpses into Param Pujya Gurudev’s life. The mesmerizing display of various artifacts enabled us to experience His divine presence. Visitors were exposed to Pujya Gurudev’s teachings, life, vision and work. Special Q&A sessions for Balvihar children via interactive "The Master Answers" kiosk was another highlight. Balvihar children were engrossed in Q&A with Pujya Gurudev and they thoroughly enjoyed watching Gurudev answer their selected questions on diverse topics.

This exhibit showcased a unique crystal altar and Param Pujya Gurudev's personal items along with beautiful Guru Parampara wall and banners paying tribute to the vast spiritual and social work of Chinmaya Mission. Next to Gurudev’s personal items, two huge photo walls depicting Param Pujya Gurudev’s life and work along with a unique large 7 feet x 7 feet Guru Parampara Wall were some of the major attractions all camp attendees. Numerous art works all created by Balvihar students from different centers in North America was another attraction attendees enjoyed.

Many member attendees and Swamiji/Acharyas attending the camp have requested the special collages CJD team had created for the exhibit. The CJD team will share the collages with CCMT for the archival purposes.

Chinmaya Swaranjali (CMDFW)

Swara to Ishwara (from melody to Almighty) “May our swarasadhana lead us to Ishwara and may His nature of Satyam Shivam Sundaram pervade our life”
- Swami Tejomayananda

This was the music team’s vision for the camp. Over seventy participants - children, CHYKs and adults – offered nAdopAsanA prior to each discourse at the camp. The songs were carefully chosen to show variety in style, language, and composer. Aligned with the birth centenary celebrations, the team also collected Guru bhajans and prepared special compositions for Guru Paduka Puja, some of these set to tune by the teachers themselves. These bhajans set the mood and createda peaceful divine atmosphere preceding each discourse. The dedicated Audio-Visual team helped ensure the right sound quality and balance between the singers and the
instruments. We consider this opportunity to be a great blessing for His grace to flow through us in the form of music to the world around. The soulful music by CMDFW Swaranjali teachers/students and visiting CM guests was definitely one of the highlights of the camp.

Another major attraction of the camp was the Chinmaya Aradhana, when Pujya Guruji led all 1200 of the Chinmaya family members through soul-stirring bhajans on PujyaGurudev and Gurumahima.

Chinmaya Vaani, our bookstore served the needs of the attendees. Many recent publications that were released were available for the people to purchase. Amongst them was the commemorative centennial coin set released by the Government of India, Life of I, Journey into Health, the MahaMrutyunjaya (CD), Prahlad Upanishad (DVD), and Cintan. Interestingly, sarees, kurtas, and kurtis with Chinmaya Mission OM embroidery were in demand too.

Chinmaya Yuva Rhythms presented an exclusive live performance at the camp. A few of their songs from the latest CD Om Gam Ganapatey rocked the hall. It was indeed a blessing to have been able to share the music and devotion in the presence of so many Swamis, Swaminis and Acharyas.

Food Team

While it was a challenge, the food team catered to the varied culinary demands regardless of the age group. Their nutritional international cuisine offered multiple meals and snacks to satiate everyone’s taste buds. There were plenty of choices for Indian, Italian, Mexican and Mediterranean palates. The health-conscious were also assured that these meals were meticulously well balanced in terms of their nutritional value for the carbs and proteins intake.

Guru Paduka Puja

The camp concluded with the solemn Guru Paduka Puja conducted by all the attendees. The puja team was instrumental in ensuring that the necessary materials, in minutest details, were in place. The large crowd seated themselves with the puja thalis in an orderly manner and was treated to a blissful shoDashopachara puja (16-step worship) led by Swami Paratmananda and performed with Guru Paduka Stotravidhana. Flower offerings with Param Pujya Gurudev’s ashottarashatanamavali (108 names) while the namavali was being
rendered in raag Yaman by the CMDFW Swaranjali group, imbued the kind of *bhakti bhava* (devotional spirit) in the room that only those performing the puja could experience! The audience’s craving to silently soak in the vibes that were generated in the process was palpable. Families offered their *guru daksina* and humble prostrations to Param Pujya Guruji one last time during his final visit to the USA before His *kshetra sanyas* becomes effective from January 2017. Performed with proper understanding and in the spirit of complete surrender, the Guru Paduka Puja (prostrations to the holy sandals of guru) is supposed to bestow upon the devotee the essential qualities such as *Viveka, Vairagya* etc., the foundational elements needed for spiritual progress.

**Summary**

Overall, the number of camp attendees (nearly 1200), the largest attendance ever for a Mahasamadhi camp – was no challenge for this team of energetic volunteers. From the celebratory inauguration, with Pujya Guruji leading the procession, to the multicultural cuisine, to the Yuva Rhythms Live and the Comedy Hour by CHYKs, the soulful music by CMDFW Swaranjali teachers/students and visiting CM guests, adult discourses by Pujya Guruji, Swami Shantanandaji and Swami Swaroopanandaji plus satsangs/Q&A, activities and/or workshops by various Swamis/Acharyas for the non-adult attendees, Chinmaya Jeevan Darshan exhibit of Param Pujya Gurudev, and the visits to Chinmaya Mangalam were made possible because of the 11-month-long meticulous planning and diligent execution by the volunteer teams. Chinmaya Aradhana, a musical tribute to Param Pujya Gurudev on Day-4 and Guru Paduka Puja on the last day of the camp were like “icing on the cake,” as expressed by many camp attendees. *CJD and Chinmaya Vani* (book store) drew big crowds and the "Green Screen" photo booth was a big hit. Every family was provided with a commemorative family portrait with the seal of excellence as the background – Param Pujya Swami Chinmayanandaji’s centennial year (1916-2016) with the motto “Unto Him Our Best”.