

Report From India

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

November 7, 2009

What a wonderful blessing to be a part of the Maranatha Ongole team working in Cuddapah and Ongole this fall. We had a wonderful time! There is so much to report; so much to say! The Lord is good!

We arrived in India (Chennai) on October 21 at 3 a.m. and were taken to a hotel to get a bit of rest before being driven in cars to Cuddapah, about a 7 hour trip, where a boarding school and two “small children’s homes” have been constructed. We stayed there till Sunday morning. I had been there in 2007 when the first small children’s home was opened. Since then, amazing transformations have taken place in the construction of many buildings to serve the needs of the boarding school (capacity of about 1,000) and second children’s home. I was hardly able to believe that I was at the same place, so much had been done! The way I had remembered it was “dwarfed” by the beautiful buildings that now grace the campus. I was able to meet Mr. Reddy, the kind Hindu man who donated the property.

Thursday morning the children of the school put on a special program for us, in which we were welcomed with garlands and flower petals being tossed on us as we walked down the aisle to the front of the auditorium. The children are grateful for having the opportunity of attending a Christian school. It truly is a life-changing experience, with advantages for this life and especially the next being given. The children learn English and other skills like computer literacy which enable them to have a better quality of life. Instead of earning the “dollar a day” wage that would be the typical remuneration of the village laborer, a student can earn a much better salary as a teacher, nurse, pastor, engineer or information technologist. Of course, learning about Jesus is the central point of the whole program. While there, their education, food, clothing and medical needs are met for a sponsorship fee of only \$30.00 per month.

During the daytime of Thursday and Friday, we operated a medical and dental clinic and gave worships at the school. Some went on shopping trips to the town of Cuddapah, about an hour away, to get a head start on obtaining the clothes for the children who will be entering the small children’s home in Ongole. On Sabbath our team of 33 split up and visited three churches, as well as some staying at Cuddapah to worship with the school children. The church I went to was about an hour’s

drive away, but we were well rewarded by the blessing of worshiping with our Indian brothers and sisters. We couldn't understand the words to their songs, but the universal language of love to God was spoken.

I had been asked to preach there, and so on the way I prayed that God would give me the right words to say. Since this would likely be the only time in my life I would ever have the chance to speak to this group about Jesus, what should I tell them? The Lord impressed my mind to share with them, in a very simple way, the story of God creating a perfect world that was marred by sin, but that He devised a plan that would put fallen humanity back in favor with Him through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. We must accept Him, confess and forsake our sins and obey His law as a sign of our loyalty to Him. His plan will come to fulfillment shortly, when Jesus will return in the clouds and take all those who have put their faith in Him to heaven.

On the way to the village, there was a detour in the road. A large drainage pipe was being installed and so we were diverted for a short time from the main road. Interestingly, they don't use the word "detour" there to describe that process, but rather the word "diversion," which makes sense since we were diverted from the main road for a brief time. The Lord impressed my mind that this life, this existence, is a "detour," a "diversion," with eternity in the past, and eternity stretching forth toward the future. This short life of sin and tragedy is but a detour in the path of perfect harmony, but it will end soon when Jesus comes back and we are able to enjoy the wonderful life He has prepared for us by His grace. We don't deserve His favor, but because of His great love for us He has made it possible to live with Him forever.

Saturday night after the vespers, there was a "talent show" with many of our team participating in songs and skits. The children at the school seemed to enjoy it immensely. Awards were given out to the students who had advanced in their typing skills, some better than 20 words per minute. They were challenged by an offer of 10,000 rupees (about \$225.00) if anyone were to come up to the skill level, this time next year, demonstrated by Jacquolyn Dietrich, a member of our team, who typed 118 words per minute.

Sunday morning found us driving to Ongole, about a six hour trip eastward. Actually, our destination was just outside of Darci, which is about an hour west of Ongole. At this site we found a campus being constructed which, when finished, would become very similar to the campus at Cuddapah. Our objective was to put the finishing touches on the small children's home, providing clothes and bed

sheets for the children who would be the first occupants. With that in mind, Monday morning there was a shopping trip to Ongole to obtain more clothing and personal items for the children.

Our day began officially at 8 a.m. with group worship and team meeting which included announcements and instruction. This was followed by breakfast which included a combination of American and Indian food. We were treated royally with delicious and ample food provided. Supper came at 4 p.m. each day. That week there were available a number of activities; shopping for, organizing and distributing clothes and personal items for the children; construction of “one day churches;” village visitation; medical and dental clinic and interacting with the children in worships and VBS. Every night that week (with the exception of one “rain-out”) we attended an evangelistic meeting supported by the churches of 10 local villages.

In a nearby village a plot had been obtained for the construction of a “one-day church.” This is a concept which had been pioneered by Mr. McNeilus, an Adventist businessman who constructs trucks for concrete transportation as well as trucks for trash hauling. The concept involves a simple steel framework kit that is milled here in the U.S., then shipped around the world. When built, it consists of steel “studs” that support trusses on which are placed panels which form a water-proof roof. The siding of the structure is left to local discretion.

In this case it had been decided that the siding would be made of blocks; the same blocks which are made on-site for the construction of the buildings on the Ongole school campus. These are “mortar-less” tongue and groove blocks formed by a compression process. Obviously, with the block walls a part of the construction, the completion of it could not be accomplished in merely one day! But significant progress was made and a nice looking structure will be there when finished in which the village can worship on Sabbaths. Monday and Tuesday mornings Rick Meyer and I, as well as other members of our team, worked on the site of the church. We came back later in the week for a dedicatory service.

Medical and dental clinics were set up to screen the children admitted to the children’s home. I was able to serve as a novice “dental assistant” to Dr. Ed Dewar of Houston, Texas, as he examined, evaluated, cleaned and in some cases filled teeth of children and staff, despite many challenges due to equipment malfunction and voltage irregularities. Two medical doctors were next door examining children and staff. The clinics operated through the week.

At the same time, many of our team conducted a “VBS” for the children, led by Sue Smith of Bonita Valley SDA church. Crafts, Bible stories and games were offered to the children. They were thrilled!

Members of our team visited local villages, where they were able to meet and pray with the people in their homes. Thousands of Steps to Christ in the Telegu language were passed out.

In the evening, we were transported to a location about 20 minutes away where an evangelistic meeting took place, supported by 10 villages. Large open trucks, usually 10 or 11 of them, each conveying a hundred or more people arrived at the site. Some of the people had ridden in these trucks for a hour and a half to arrive at the meeting, and of course would have to ride back to their village after the meeting ended at 10 p.m. or later! Yet they greeted us with smiles and were happy to be there to hear the Word of God. I couldn't help but wonder if people in America would be willing to ride an hour and a half, standing or sitting on the floor of an open truck, to sit on a hard plastic chair or on the floor of an uncovered, bug-infested make-shift “building” (just cloth side walls) in the heat and humidity and then return to their home close to midnight, to hear the Bible preached.

The featured speaker was Dr. Wilson, an Indian national who serves at the ministerial secretary of the Southern Asia Division. He is a dynamic preacher and gave excellent messages. Although we couldn't understand his sermons (they were not translated), his passion and zeal came through prominently. He also went with us on village visitation and freely mixed with the people.

God has blessed the pastors of India with talent, and they are doing a tremendous job. The amount of work that went into the preparation for these meeting is staggering. Our attendance was somewhere between 1,000 and 1,300, with the attendance growing through the week. About 1,450 people were baptized that week in conjunction with the meetings. The people of India are open to the presentation of the Gospel and eagerly listen to the Bible preaching. Children, teenagers and adults crowded into the tent from night to night to hear the Word.

Included in the program each evening were parts in which our team participated. There was a nightly health talk, children's story or skit, song teaching and a personal testimony given. We listened as Tasha of Canada told her conversion story; how God had rescued her from an empty life of drug addiction. We listened as Shane from Australia told of his coming back to the Lord, and how just a month ago he was speaking to a small boy about Jesus when he felt something on his

shoulder, as if he had been touched. A pleasant, warm sensation went down his side. The boy with whom he was speaking asked him, “Did you know you were just touched by an angel?” Shane asked him, “How do you know it was an angel?” The boy replied, “Because he had wings.”

We were given the chance to have the benedictory prayer at the close of the service. Additionally, when the meeting finished, our team spread out and prayed for people who came up to us. On some nights we prayed for 20 or 30 minutes after the meeting was over with these dear people. Then we would be hustled into our cars and driven back to the school campus. On the way we passed long lines along side of the road (this would be typically about 10:30 p.m.) of the villagers who had walked to the meeting, carrying their Bibles and returning to their homes. What a beautiful sight! When people ask if the Adventists of India are sincere and committed, I can’t help but recall scenes like those. My response to that question is, “Yes!”

Sunday I was privileged to be invited to the home of Elder John, the director for that section of India. His home was in the city of Ongole, about an hour away. His wife made a delicious meal for us and we enjoyed the food and fellowship tremendously. Elder John reported that only ten years ago, there were 8 churches and about 1,100 members in his section. Now there are 453 churches and 124,000 members! There are 27 full time pastors plus about 100 Bible workers to serve the needs of the members. On any given Sabbath, a pastor will meet with 4 different churches; one on Friday evening to open the Sabbath, then three others during the Sabbath day; in the morning, afternoon and evening. The pastors work hard there (for a monthly salary of about \$100.00) to keep in touch with their people and spread the Gospel.

We had several “close calls” during the time we were there, but the Lord preserved and saved. On one car trip (I believe it was the trip from Cuddapah to Ongole), the car in which I sat had a very narrow miss. We were traveling through a village at the time. The driver would toot his horn repeatedly, announcing his presence to other vehicles, cattle (seemingly ever present in the roads) or pedestrians. At this time, there was a small girl, perhaps 10 years of age, who began running to cross the street.

The driver honked loudly, expecting that she would stop, but she did not. She just kept running. The driver slammed on his brakes, and I fully believed that we were going to hit the little girl. I listened for the thud of the impact. It seemed impossible with her momentum and the car’s motion, that impact could be avoided. The look

on the face of the little girl, as she turned and saw our car approaching will remain in my mind a long time. Somehow (I believe an angel moved her back), we avoided her and went on our way. A fatality in the village would have pleased the devil well and put a severe damper on our mission. The Lord intervened and saved the little girl and us from that disaster.

On the job site of the one-day church construction there was a “chop saw” equipped with a 14” carborundum blade used to cut the blocks. There was no guard on the saw. I remember the first time I cut with it and as the blade was whirling, realizing that the knuckles of my hand, gripping the handle and trigger were about ½ inch away from the blade. I made a mental note to make sure that I carefully withdrew my hand away from the blade when the cut was finished. While working nearby, I heard the saw come on and saw to my horror that a small village boy had turned it on! Thank God that somehow he didn’t cut himself on the unguarded blade!

While traveling to Chennai at the close of our trip (we left about 3:30 a.m.) our driver was being severely challenged to keep awake. At one point the cars in our caravan came to a sudden stop and the reactions of our driver were not as sharp as they should have been. How we avoided rear-ending the car in front of us, I’m not sure, but God helped us avoid a disastrous accident. We also had an encounter with a cow on the road. An assortment of water buffalo and other cattle occupy the roads frequently and cars must maneuver around them as carefully as possible. On this occasion, our driver was trying to get around them when one young cow suddenly veered left and although the driver slammed on the brakes, we made impact. Fortunately, the cow didn’t seem permanently injured and hobbled off the road, leaving a small dent in the right front portion of our Toyota.

Altogether, it was a very short two-week adventure that will live in our minds for a long time. The work of God is going forward! People are being blessed by the preaching of His Word! Children are being benefited by Christ-centered education! The Gospel is being spread to the people of India and around the world!

While there, I had the use of a telephone purchased in India and lent to me by a dear friend who had been there on a previous trip. We were able to charge up the battery and obtain the proper “sim” chip for it, and then purchase minutes so we could make calls home. The time was calibrated in rupees; I purchased 423 rupees (a little less than \$10.00) which gave about 150 minutes of talking time. I tried to budget the time so that it ran out as we left. It made sense to me that it would not

be prudent to leave any rupees on the phone when we left, because they would be of no use after we came back home to America.

Then the Lord spoke to my mind and showed me that it is the same with our earthly assets. We should be wise to spend our dollars for the Lord now and invest our material blessings in the work of the Kingdom now because they will be of no use to us or to anyone after Jesus comes back. If you would be interested in sponsoring a child in the new Ongole school, or if you would be interested in providing funding for the construction of the building on campus or one-day churches, please contact Maranatha or myself. What an opportunity to make a difference for God!

Jesus is coming soon! The work of God is going forward in India and throughout the world. Let us recommit ourselves to Him that He might prepare us and that we might bless others in getting ready for that great day!