



THE JOY OF THE JOURNEY Year Two

January 1, 2014

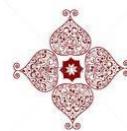
You might be surprised to be receiving an India report from us now, especially since we were unable to return to India in 2013! This is the newsletter that you should have received last March as we were winding up our stay in India at that time. Before we left Guntakal several things beyond our control interrupted our efforts to get this letter completed.

Toward the end of our stay we made the decision that we would not be able to return to India in the fall of 2013 because of foot surgery that Lola-Margaret needed. During our flight home from Chennai, Lola-Margaret's already developing case of bronchitis worsened. When we got home she was two weeks recovering. Shortly afterward, she mysteriously lost the sight in her right eye. After a complete evaluation at the Vanderbilt Eye Institute, the prognosis is that the optic nerve is dead. Since then she has dealt with a second basil cell carcinoma. With all of that now healed and out of the way, the foot surgery was finally scheduled for Halloween day. Surgery successful, and just when you think you have passed the worst, two days later she ended up in ICU with double pneumonia! Thankful for the prayers of many and the One who heals all, she is now feeling much better. She has graduated from "foot not touching the floor" to a knee scooter, to a wheel chair and crutches and a lot of hobbling around. We were able to enjoy Christmas in our home here in Tennessee with all our family.

Now we pray for God to give us physical and spiritual renewal as we anxiously look forward to October 2014 when we will again be with the work we love in India.



MEANWHILE
BACK IN
INDIA



The featured highlights of this report will be the last two months of our previous trip spent in Guntakal. A report that you should have had six months ago, but as you can see, Lola-Margaret has just not been able to coordinate our thoughts.



This is the town where Bill helped to establish the church about 20 years ago. It has a population of about 200,000. We have reported before about our efforts to mature churches. This is a work that brings with it many challenges.



The Guntakal Church of Christ

We have been asked how we deal with living without things like running water, modern toilet facilities, American food, ice cubes and not knowing the language. These are not the most important challenges we face.

Even though this congregation now has three elders, five deacons and a Sunday attendance of about 160, the real challenge is the lack of maturity in these Christians.

Many have a habit of not arriving to worship until halfway through the song service or until the preaching begins. We are trying to teach that the singing is not a call to worship – it is an act of worship, and all of us need to be there at the beginning of each service in order to worship in song together and therefore please God.

Another problem that has arisen in recent years is the cell phone. (Yes, believe it or not, wealthy or poor it seems like everyone in India now has a cell phone.) They do not seem to understand that using their cell phone is distracting during the worship service. We want to impress on them that cell phones are interruptive both to the one using the cell phone and to their brothers and sisters around them.

During the Lord's Supper, more reverence needs to be observed. Additional teaching is needed about the deep spiritual emphasis that should be given to this portion of our worship.

While these things may seem elementary to us, this congregation has only been in existence for 20 years. For the most part they have come out of an idolatrous/pagan world. These attitudes of worship are vital to their individual, as well as congregational, spiritual growth. They are concepts that have just not been given proper thought as a mature Christian would. They need guidance. Bill has preached about these very issues and we can see improvements being made and their attitudes are good and they remain receptive. This is the work we are committed to, and with God's help we will one day leave the churches in the hands of mature Christian men and women who will insure that strong congregations carry on the work until our Lord comes again.

Please don't misunderstand the above observations. These people are some of the most prayerful people we have known, and they are diligent about their Bible study.



Mariamma came to the church in Guntakal seeking help for badly needed medicines. She had contracted aids from her unfaithful husband. The church was not only able to help her with her medical needs, but it opened up the opportunity to study with her. When we first met she was very nervous, worried that the other women would not accept her. We could hardly get her to smile.

Her study of God's Word convinced her that life as a Hindu could not offer her hope. She also knew that turning her back on Hinduism would leave her an outcast from her family and community.

She chose hope and to put on her Lord in baptism. Whatever time her health allows her on this earth, she will live it out with the peace and joy of Jesus Christ. As a new babe in Christ, she now had great reason to smile.

During our stay in Guntakal Bill and Brother Suresh conducted a Bible training study designed for those desiring to further their Bible knowledge, as well as

advanced study for those already preaching the Gospel. Bill taught his series on God's Eternal Plan to bring about the Kingdom of Christ. We had about 35 who attended these classes regularly, 30 men and 5 women. These classes were held in the Guntakal church building, for five hours a



day, five days a week for four weeks. Twenty seven received certificates on the last day of classes. It was an intense study, as Lola-Margaret can attest to. She was quite excited to be one who qualified to receive a certificate.



One of the exciting results of this training study series was the attendance and graduation of Brother Suresh' nephew, Prakash Kanna.

Prakash has a college education and is a deeply spiritual young man.

Following graduation exercises, Prakash committed his life to Christ and put his Lord on in baptism. He will be a great help in the Guntakal congregation.



Word is spreading about Christ and His church. This

young man, who was going to school at one of Guntakal's colleges, heard about the teaching taking place at our church building. He came asking for someone to study with him. He is now our brother in Christ.



Indian weddings are always great celebrations, and it doesn't get much greater with the Christian brethren than when it is the wedding of a former member of the church's youth group. This young girl is the niece of one of our deacons, who is also her guardian. It was his responsibility to arrange a "suitable boy" for her, and he did arrange for a fine Christian young man for her to marry.

Indian weddings are festive events and this was no exception. It was a time for wearing a sari (even if it makes you nervous!) and all the gaudy jewelry you can get your hands on! And of course the henna tattoo.



Giving of the wedding necklace



The bride and groom

Prem Kumar and his wife begin attending services during our time in Guntakal. He is a member of the Communist party of India, but had a denominational Christian background. His wife is Hindu. We were invited to visit in their home. He speaks good English and asked for someone to study with him, and also for an English Bible. Prem Kumar was baptized into Christ, and we only hope that he will be able to have an influence on his wife



It was another great day when we were called to the church building to meet with a group of people from a local denominational church. They had been visiting regularly during our time in Guntakal. Their hearts had accepted the truth, resulting in the baptism of six people, five of the same family.

This is Jaegon. He is 55 years old, and years ago he became a liability to his family. He was



in the way of a greedy brother-in-law who wanted to get his hands on Jaegon's inherited land. To make a long story short, he was taken out of town, beaten with a club that broke both legs, and then beaten in the head resulting in blindness, and left for dead. Jaegon is now a street beggar and he basically has lived on the street in front of the Guntakal Church of Christ for over 6 years. This place is his comfort zone. It is a busy street and many people, including the members of the church bring him food. What you see is all he owns. He is dirty, and he is just one of thousands of street beggars in any city.

I (Lola-Margaret), am going to speak for myself about Jaegon. I don't feel it is fair to make judgments about someone else's feelings. Did I say Jaegon was dirty? I don't do dirty very well. At least not with a street beggar with whom I have no connection. And then one day everything changed. As we were leaving one of our Bible study classes we heard the most beautiful singing. Our Muslim rickshaw driver was waiting for us. He had gotten to know Jaegon and had him singing hymns that he had learned from sitting just outside the door of the church building. I really believe that God was showing me that Jaegon had a soul that was beautiful. I found that Jaegon could speak some English and understand even more. He had also been listening to the sermons and lessons coming from the speaker system in the church. After the men spent some time talking with him, we all realized that he knew enough to obey God's will, and Jaegon wanted to be baptized. After his baptism he immediately broke out into songs of praise to God!



We have to understand Jaegon's comfort zone, and his is on the street. However, the church wanted to do something to give him protection in bad weather, a place that he can call his own. So a small lean-to was built on the side of the church building.

Bill, the first visitor to "Jaegon's Place."



We always return to Eluru before leaving for home. It gives us a chance to be with the children one last time and to take care of any unfinished business. During this time we gave out rice to the widows. It was also a chance to check on the progress of the construction on the widow's home. We still have work today before we can move in the 15 ladies who have been chosen to live there. Cost of materials has increased tremendously, so we are still in need of funds to complete the home and all of its furnishings.



We spent time talking with our 10th (the equivalent of our high school) about the seriousness of their future in higher education. We are fortunate to be able to fund this schooling and give them the opportunity to have a secure future if they apply themselves. Naomi and Anitha plan to be teachers. Pudma and Monica (sisters) want to be nurses.



We have been so blessed to live in the home with these orphan children. We are very committed to this work. However, from time to time we have sponsors who need to drop out of the program, so we are always in need of additional sponsors. Let us know if you would like to be a part of this work. The cost is \$20.00 per month to sponsor one child.

During this stay in India Bill has conducted 7 preachers meetings and preached 48 additional sermons. He held 4 devotionals in homes and taught 53 lessons in preaching school. We had 16 baptisms at Guntakal, 37 in Eluru and 14 in Palakol. He said he wasn't quite sure what Lola-Margaret did, but I shall speak for myself. Between loving on 55 orphans, spending time with lonely widows, holding a ladies day and teaching several ladies classes, I managed to complete Bill's course. I also feel like I learned some valuable lessons along the way, not the least of which is that God does not view dirty as I have. For we are all totally "unclean" until we are washed in the blood of the Lamb.

We plan to return to India in the fall of 2014. Please pray for our health to return to normal so those plans are possible.

We wish all of you a happy and blessed 2014!



We thank the following churches for their support of our work.

West 7th Street Church of Christ, Columbia, TN

Calvert City Church of Christ, Calvert City, KY

Corinth Church of Christ, Mt. Juliet, TN



DECORATING FOR THE NEW YEAR AS INDIA DOES IT!