
Linnea's India Blog XIV: Sharing the Faith

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Dear Friends,

Our apologies for the lateness of this India Blog; it was lost in my software spam filter.

Linnea's India Blog XIV: Sharing the Faith

“You can always tell the CMC-trained doctors,” says Dr George Chandy, former director of the place. “Norway had a programme to train doctors from Ethiopia, but it was not successful because none of the students went back home. So, they began training them here at the CMC. When I used to walk into a roomful of Ethiopian doctors, I could always spot the CMC-trained doctors. They had a brighter, more hopeful look; they had seen healthcare at work in India and knew that it was possible back home.”

They say that two-thirds of help is to give courage. I hadn't seen medical training quite this way before I heard Dr George tell this story. The Christian Medical College Hospital stands out as a beacon of hope in a country marked by rapid change. I have joked here quite a bit about how I prayed for a “deeper experience” of this hospital before our last trip - and ended up in its care for five days, recovering from dengue fever. The truth is, I did receive that deeper experience - one that was marked by the prayerful and attentive presence of nurses, doctors, college students, leaders and chaplains. One of those people was my co-conductor for our carol and lessons service, Dr Stephen. Since our last visit two years ago, Stephen has moved to Bihar and back, taking up a position at a local government hospital here in town. He describes a very clear difference between the two work places. “We forget while we are at the CMC - where everything is so ingrained and our ethics are clear. Everyone at this hospital knows I am a believer. Here, it is the practice to come to work late and leave early. They help each other by signing each other in by proxy. The first time someone asked me to do this for them, I said to them, “I will not do this for you and I will not ask you to do it for me. That is not my practice of medicine.”



Christian Fellowship at the Government Hospital

I was so interested to talk to the students who form a small group for Christian fellowship at the nearby church (The government hospital is nominally non-religious, although every department is to have a picture of a particular Hindu goddess displayed, and Christian groups may not meet there). I respect all religions and pray for religious peace and freedom. At the same time, I am very interested to know how these students have decided they will share the Good News in a way that is respectful and caring. “Sometimes it is just by the way you act,” says Prithi, a student who bubbles over with answers. “My friend and I are both studying for the same exam. She is in the depths of despair and I am calm. She says to me: ‘Why are you not freaking out?’ I say, ‘Because my God has brought me here and God will take care of me’.”

In India, there is great interest and openness to spiritual questions in general. While in Canada, bringing up one’s “religion” is seen as invasive in many cases, an act of inhospitality or even duress, here people openly ask for prayers for their family members or for spiritual guidance. Sarah, a physician and member of Peniel Church, says, “People often ask me to pray for someone, as I treat them. I tell them, ‘I pray to Jesus Christ’ and they say ‘OK’.”

It is our role to share the faith and bring refreshment to people who offer care and those who receive it. We visit students’ groups in the evening and a number of villages in which the community has been moved to help the poor with food, shelter, schooling and the Word.

If you met Beulah Newton who is in charge of the Voice of the Shepherd outreach, you might make the mistake of thinking she was an ordinary person. With a beaming big smile that rarely fades, she runs bible studies, organizes volunteers and missionaries. She brought a team to our biblical storytelling conference. In 2008, she learned of horrendous riots that had taken place north in Odisha state. Learning that Christians were being attacked, tortured, and driven out of their villages, she felt an undeniable impulse to go there and be part of a relief effort. "I checked and re-checked the call," she says. "It was clear. So, I approached my husband. He said, 'If God is calling you, you must go.'" So, this woman and a team, backed by supporters, many of whom are CMC staff and faculty, travelled to the state and gave out food, clothing for the children, money as they were able - until it ran out." Later, when the earthquake hit the mountain-bounded states, she travelled with another relief team. "I just cried when the money ran out," she says. "We can only do so much."



Wise Faces: Missionary and Community Woman

What a sweet thing it is to be welcome amongst strangers! Beulah has arranged for us to join the VoS missionaries as they visit three of the villages they are helping. We drive off the highway and over undulating dirt roads to reach them one afternoon. A group of women comes out to the road to greet us. The translating missionary says to us that the women who are inviting us into their home are so pleased and grateful that anyone would come and visit them at all; they feel that the world has forgotten them.

We sit down on the floor of the little sparsely lit room, and we sing our Tamil

favourite song (actually the only Tamil song whose words I can manage!), “Yesu Nallavar” (Jesus is so Good), and they sing a song to us. Rev Giftus says to me: “These women can tell you how God has been good to them. Ask them.” And so I do. Around the circle, women speak about the new sense of hope they have because they have this room to gather in, because the meal makes life so much better, because people care about how they are doing, because God has listened to them.

I ask them about their lives - what their day is like. On a typical day, they rise at 5am and make breakfast for themselves or their family. The workday begins at 7am, when they begin planting or weeding the rice paddies. This work, except for a lunch break, goes on until 7pm or so, when they go home to make the evening meal, watch a little tv if they have one, sleep. I feel exhausted just hearing it. Most of these are not young women. One weeps as she tells us she has leg pain.

The mother I am sitting beside is holding her fitfully sleeping little boy. She gets up to bring us each a plastic cup of 7-Up, and sits to hold her little one again; he is recovering from typhoid. I didn't know typhoid still existed.

The woman who has turned her main room into this worship space tells me that her sister has given her this house to live in, since her husband died. She shows me, as we leave, a picture of a child on the wall, with a garland of flowers on it. It is her son who was an adult when he died of electrocution in an accident. She tells me that she had a baby girl at one point, too. It makes me sadder still to imagine that this must be the only photo that she has of her son, this yellowed school shot, now framed on the wall.



Kuppam Elder Group

Rev Joseph takes us for a little visit with an elders group in a village called Kuppam that is under the care of the RUHSA, CMC's Rural Unit for Health and Social Affairs. In a room that is cooled by the hard cement floor and walls, the elders gather to sit on the floor. We sing and bring greetings from Canada - and they smile shyly at us. The elder man sitting at the front says he would like to offer a song to us. He has a beautiful voice, weathered and true. As we rise to have a group photograph before leaving, I notice that most of the men and women standing with us have glasses on. Glasses alone would have such a transformative effect on people's lives.



Everybody is the boss in the Gypsy Village

“I was one year away from a partial pension in my school teaching,” says Jean Jepagnanam, “when God laid it on my heart to leave that work and devote myself to the Gypsies. People said not to do it, that I should work for one more year and get that pension. But I said to them, ‘And what if I die this year? What will I tell God I have done with the call He gave me?’” She took us to one of the villages she has helped start up, and the greeting there was immediate and genuine. In their small church room, we teach the children and adults: “I thank-you, thank-you, Jesus”, a Swahili and English song, and we video it so they can sing it again. Gypsies are a landless people, and their reaction to being offered a house and community of their own has been mixed. It is largely the women who have welcomed the Christian faith and the schooling for their children. Many of the men still drink away the family money. Jean and the other leaders have taken to paying the women for the beading work they are now doing - by passing it to the women’s own hired help, to distribute as needed. That seems to work.



Former leprosy patient making cotton balls for surgery

I often tell the Luke 17 story of the Ten Lepers and how they were healed and told to go show themselves to the priests. In Jesus' time, a sick person presented her/himself to the priest in order to be declared "clean" or well - and only then could they re-join their home and community. Not so today with Leprosy. While 18 new cases present themselves to the Karigiri Hospital every

month, the disease is not yet eradicated. Those who have it have fingers and toes that are eaten away, and sometimes eyes and faces that have been re-shaped by it. When we visit the hospital, we learn that those who have had the disease are never free to return to their families and former lives; they are banished. So, the Karigiri Hospital has set up a community and provided houses for those who are recovering or recovered. We visit one weaver who had been doing his craft for 50 years - one of the last of his kind.

What stands out again and again is the hospitality and gratitude of people when we visit. Each one of these groups asks that we and our friends would pray for them. So, we extend the invitation to you to join us in supporting them and the extraordinary things that God is doing through them, by taking the time to lift them up in prayer. Thank-you for this!

Please pray with us for these extraordinary people

I have not done justice to the people and their stories in this quick recounting of the places we have been. Like Paul who runs out of breath, finally, in Hebrews 11: "What more can I say?! I do not have the time to tell you the stories of... and of... and of...". I can say no more.

But, I cannot miss the opportunity to write one more blog to tell you about the children who we visited and sang with.

That will be a treat.

You are receiving this blog because you contributed to Linnea and David's mission to India in one way or another. Please be cautious about who you show this blog to. Some of the institutions and schools with whom we have worked are under scrutiny for their Christian ties, and we do not want to exacerbate the situation. Feel free to privately pass this along to kindred, trustworthy spirits. Linnea and David plan to return to India next year for a spring break month; we invite you to contribute to their Music Ministry: <http://www.linneagood.com/>

Please be cautious about who you show this blog to. Our status in the country is not entirely stable, so we are not publicly posting our doings on social media. Feel free to privately pass this along to kindred, trustworthy spirits.

To contribute to Linnea and David's Music Ministry: <http://www.linneagood.com/>

Linnea Good

"Enlivening Faith through Story and Song"



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