

ACTION FOR LIFE NEWSLETTER #8
Asia Plateau, 7th January 2004

Happy New Year to our friends all over the world.

Christmas and New Year

In small town India, Christmas creeps up very quietly. There's no rush to the shops, no loud carols playing for months before Christmas and no feeling that it's mainly an excuse for consumerism. Our celebrations at Asia Plateau were simple yet joyful - hilarious at moments and profound at others. "Mama Claudia", Liliana's mother from Moldova, Eastern Europe, has thoroughly spoiled us with an endless supply of cakes and other treats.

Peter Heyes from Canada summed it up - "I felt doubly blessed being surrounded by Muslims, Buddhists and those of no official faith; all helping me celebrate Christmas. In the packed church I was squeezed between a Buddhist and a Hindu, who had never been in a church before. For a few days before Christmas we were all secret angels for someone else. It was lots of fun leaving little notes and gifts for a special person and we all appreciated the joy of this simple approach."

Christmas dinner had hardly ended when four of the AfL team -- Kofi, Liliana, Pilar and Frederic -- set out on a 30 hour train journey to Orissa, East India. They had been invited to contribute to a 3-day student camp convened by a young MRA team in Bhuvaneshwar. Rajiv, its organiser, reported that "the camp went much beyond my farthest expectations, as if God himself had taken charge of the whole event."

For a few days after Christmas AfL met with the trustees and members of the Indian MRA team -- to look together at how to respond better to the challenges of this Asian region and to kindle the passion which is the heart of our mission.

Before we knew it, New Year was upon us. We were treated to a fabulous Indian banquet peppered with spontaneous performances and games (secretly planned by New Year angels) -- and even a Punjabi dance energetically performed by many of the female AfL team members. Celebrations went on through the night. "New Year was really different from anything I've ever experienced. It was beautiful to watch the stars on the Plateau and see the sunrise on the dawn of a New Year," shares Keith, from England.

AfL Hosts Open House at Asia Plateau

From the evening of 1 Jan till the 4 January, the AfL team hosted an 'Open House' with about 50 visitors our vision to 'be the change you want to see in the world.' A lot of hard work and creativity went into the 3-day program- from art, drama, singing, Irish dancing and 'self-discovery' workshops to a new PowerPoint presentation on AfL's message. Christina, from Australia, set the tone with an inspirational welcome. We were thrilled to be joined by a number of Iranian students the Pune team met in December, as well as the enthusiastic 'baby MRA' group recently formed in a town called Baramuti, who hosted an AfL group for 3 days.

Violetta, from Moldova found Open House an opportunity to open her heart to people she had never met before. "We were all people of different nationalities, ages and backgrounds, yet I felt we were all touched in the same way by the beauty of the sunrise, the power of multi-faith prayers, and the moments sharing together in our 'family' groups."

In the midst of Open House activities, 80 accountants from Mumbai arrived on a quest to learn about 'dynamics of change' and 'professional ethics.' AfL team swung into Action yet again and drove home the message that change starts with oneself.

One evening during Open House we watched the film "Tuesdays with Morrie", about a retired university professor dying from a debilitating disease. During his final days he shares his wisdom

on life with a former student. The film touched us all. Wambui, from Kenya said this was a wake-up call. "I finally realised that I have only today to do what I have to do - tomorrow may never come. Today lies in my grasp to use or loose for eternity."

More farewells

AfL is a series of hellos and goodbyes. Three of our Indian friends from AfL will return to their normal duties at Asia Plateau. Pravin has found the last two months very absorbing. "I had a chance to see my own countrymen from a different perspective. I have learned to focus and re-engineer my life through changing my attitude towards it." To Pravin, Bidisha and Kedar we thank you for the many gifts you have offered us, particularly during our time in Mumbai and Pune where you probably saved our lives! Bidisha, your contagious laugh will ring through our hearts over the coming months. They're not really 'leaving' our team -- they will remain part of our growing AfL community at Asia Plateau. Val and Wal Nuske, honorary grandparents, also left us to return to Australia. We will greatly miss their youthful participation and clog dancing. Please keep us in your hearts and prayers that we may touch the lives of many over the next two months. You remain, as always, in our hearts.

The AfL team

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