

ACTION FOR LIFE 2 NEWSLETTER #15

10th March, 2004

South India team: Bangalore and Coimbatore

Hello, Jambo, Privet, Nihao, Apa khabar, Kodalar, Chiom Reap Suer, G'day, Hi y'all, Vanakkam, Xin Chao, Bonjour to all the world from the South team.

Boarding the sleeper train at 5am in Coimbatore we prepared for our 27-hour journey back to Pune. We slept, read, wrote our thoughts and talked as the towns and countryside we had visited rolled past, reminding us of our time over the last two months.

FORWARD IN FAITH

This was the motto of the Cathedral High School in Bangalore where we attended the graduation ceremony of the final year students. A few days earlier as Peter Heyes lay in a dentist's chair he was asked to be the chief guest and keynote speaker. The invitation came from the dentist's wife so he quickly accepted. He talked about embracing our failures and using them to help others, to keep our dreams alive and not to follow the plans others might have for us.

We visited a school for the blind called Mitra Jyothi (friends of light). Miss Madhu Singhal, founder of the school, had experienced depression because of her own blindness since childhood. Hearing about the problems of others with similar disabilities she began to think on what she could do. With family support she started a training centre for disabled people, the vast majority of whom are hidden away from society. From small beginnings she founded a centre for training the blind, created jobs for people with disabilities (to date they have found employment for over 300 people), increased community awareness, and developed the only library in southern India for the blind. This contains thousands of books in Braille and on tape.

From the bustling city we travelled across the border into Tamil Nadu for a two-day visit to Navadarshanam, an organic farm run by six couples. They want their community (based on Gandhian principles) to offer hope and answers to the problems in society. Their aims include exploring and adopting holistic and natural ways of fulfilling our outer and inner needs; giving up a path of development which fans consumerism, profiteering and growth measured purely in material terms; and rediscovering our relationship with creation and the Creative Power. We had our quiet day there, along with walks, evenings of song and discussion, and wonderful vegetarian food.

On another occasion we were privileged to meet with Barkos Warjri, a Khasi from Shillong in Meghalaya State. He is a senior civil servant with the Indian Administrative Service and now works in Bangalore. He described situations where refusing to tolerate corruption and injustice had meant great personal risk, including threats on his life. He holds a position of considerable power and authority, yet we saw in him the humility and faith needed to submit that authority to the higher leading of God. We were challenged to be similarly ready for the cost of committing our lives to God's will.

Ngan Le from Vietnam writes:

"Even though changing myself still feels a long way off, I am getting there by putting one thing right at a time. I have written a letter apologising to my aunt for stealing her money when I was old enough to realise that it was wrong. Deciding whether to write the letter gave me a headache, and I had to think twice before sending it for fear of how she would react. If she looked down on me or asked me to pay back the money, what would I do? And during my quiet times I thought, 'I just need to do my best and let God take care of the rest.'"

Ren Jou and Grace Liu have been kept busy running family workshops in Coimbatore, Bangalore and Salem to the benefit of many. One of the participants and hosts of AfL in Bangalore was Shruthi Sampath. Here she shares her experience:

"I attended the family workshop which helped me resolve some of the conflicts in my family. One of the main problems was that we never discussed important issues. The atmosphere was tense and there was a lack of understanding. It was really affecting me. I persuaded my parents to attend the workshop on the second day. We were able to tell each other what was really going on in our minds. I learnt more about my parents' past and began to understand the reasons for their behaviour. Also, learning about the inner child has helped me love myself and get over my past.

Being with AfL taught me to listen to my inner voice and it restored my faith in God. They were all very encouraging and helped me look at things differently. They have helped me 'be the change I want to see in the world' and I'm seriously planning to attend the next AfL."

- Five members of our team are smiling a little more broadly after Dr Ravi Rao gave them some dental treatment.
- Six members of the AfL team attended a marriage preparation course. One of them wanted to go on and get the full certificate...but we cannot disclose who that was.
- Peter and Glenys Wood have returned to New Zealand now that all the Orcs and Dragons have been slain in the final episode of the Lord of the Rings trilogy. They will be sorely missed (and we don't mean the Orcs and Dragons).

Meanwhile, the 'Famous Five' were in Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu) for two weeks of follow-up: Nandor, Laura, Ngan, Chris, and Naro. We relished both working in a smaller team and having quality time with the people we met on our first visit. The highlight was meeting each afternoon last week with a group of students to experiment with quiet times, and to listen to each other's life stories. The setting was idyllic (an outdoor cafe under tall, over-arching trees), and the openness and commitment of the young people who came very touching. By the time of our last event, a one day seminar on 'The Heart Of Transformation' we felt we had made real friends. We have promised to support them from afar through friendship and prayer.

THE HEART OF TRANSFORMATION AND MOVING FORWARD IN FAITH The AfL team from Bangalore joined the five in Coimbatore to help them in the days prior to the final seminar. It was due to begin at 10am; only two people had arrived. We all kept busy so as not to look worried. We practised our songs, Ngan got the tea ready, Nandor and Peter waited on the registration desk. By 10.30am we had five people. We had booked lunch for sixty. At 10.45am we decided to begin with the seven participants who were there. Miraculously at lunch our number was exactly sixty. For the afternoon sessions there was a hard core of 35 -it was reassuring to know that lunch was not the only "Heart of transformation".

At the end of the day we broke into small groups and looked at two questions: Where do I need transformation in my life? And what steps can I take today? We finished with a candle ceremony where people shared the decisions they had made. One student shared that earlier in the week he had fought his friend and decided never to speak to him again. During a quiet time one afternoon with AfL he decided he would apologise. Having done so he brought his friend to the seminar.

We finished with a song, some prayers and the Indian national anthem - a strong bond of fellowship was amongst us. It was a fine finish to our two month outreach during which we felt God's blessings in all we had done.

With grateful greetings,

Christina DeAngelis (Australia), Peter Heyes (Canada), Nigel Heywood (Australia), Aparna Khatri (Fiji/India), Vuth Kim (Cambodia), Chris Lancaster (Australia), Ngan Le (Vietnam), Nandor Lim (Malaysia), Ren-Jou and Grace Liu (Taiwan), Wambui Nguyo (Kenya), Naro Thiek (India), Laura Trevelyan (UK), Katia Zirjanova (Russia).