



Initiatives of Change

AfL Encounters

News from the Road of Action for Life 3

Visit: www.afl.iofc.org Email: afl@iofc.org

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Dear Reader,

Our travelling from Salem to Yercaud, and then onto Hossur, Dharmapuri, Navadarshanam, and finally Bangalore, wouldn't have been possible without our hosts, families and friends. So, behind every line in this newsletter we want you to see people, who made this journey special for us.

Follow-up and trust

On 7th February we hosted a follow-up workshop for students in Salem. As we met that morning the team was apprehensive as to what will happen – we had to change the time and the place of our workshop twice, it was a difficult planning process and teamwork. At 4pm, the start time, only two people had arrived. So, we put all our trust in and began. One hour later we had a good gathering of 15 people including seven young Kenyans (students of AVS College) with whom we created a link for our outreach in Kenya later this year.



AfL team with young Kenyans, Salem

“The Retreat”...

Just half an hour bus trip from Salem and we are in the world of another reality: *Jnanodaya Salesian College*, “*The Retreat*”, where brothers run philosophy studies for young men preparing for priesthood. Their community based on guidance, reflection and action works with young boys from deprived backgrounds and their playground is regularly filled with kids from the local villages.

Anna Pozogina (Latvia): “This visit was an important part of my faith quest, and a chance to better understand the religious background of my mother (Roman Catholic). My negative attitude

was challenged after a conversation with College Principal, Father Pathiaraj, on the Catholic perspective of evolution, religion, faith and emotional development. I questioned myself: while expecting her to support me in my “faith quest”, have I been appreciative to her tradition? And instead of blindly following the labels put on Catholicism by society, I have decided to study more deeply the foundations of my mother's beliefs.”

Hosur to Dharmapuri

Hosted by Muthu Kumar and the local *Lions Club* we visited many small and large scale industries and social institutions, like *Sneha Bhavan Institute for the Mentally Disabled* which is providing a caring home for many from all over India who would otherwise be isolated. They believe that those with autism and multiple disabilities should have equal rights and have a contribution to make.

In the *Seva Bharathi Orphanage* we witnessed the fruits that have come from the inspired care of Sri Saradha Niketan who took in five orphan boys in 1994. There are now more than one hundred children being cared for.



Performing mime of the heart at deaf and dumb school

Hosted by *Jayam College* in Dharmapuri we visited the local Rotary club and interacted with the children from the deaf and dumb school, which Rotarians helped to establish. No talking could ever give us such a feeling of joy and understanding as we received from playing, singing and acting with children from this school.

Bringing science and spirit together...

“Navadarshanam” means ‘new vision’ or ‘searching for reality’. This is the name given to the inspirational 110-acre bio-dynamic farm just outside Bangalore. It is hosted by Ananthu and Jyoti who, along with other friends, wanted to develop “alternatives to the modern way of living and thinking, keeping in mind ecological and spiritual perspectives.”

With the first five years without power and after 15 years of work, they have developed barren land into a forest of over 100 000 trees. Jyoti explained that before taking the plunge on this difficult journey they consulted their spiritual teacher who

told them, “Your commitment is your decision, but if you commit then there is no running away.”



Ananthu explains the vision behind Navadarshanam

Both of them have found that the discipline of meditation has helped to keep them on the path to a meaningful and sustainable way of life.

(For more information, see: www.navadarshanam.org)

The physical journey has also influenced our inner journeys over the last three weeks. Here is what a few of our team have to share about their experiences of change:

“In trying to avoid and escape emotional pain during this trip, I have brought huge amounts of it upon myself. Pain is unavoidable, and as I continue to take responsibility for my past, I realize the extent to which I need a new map from which to travel the world. With attention to my feelings, thoughts, and dreams, I am currently forming this Universal map.” (Justin Walford, Canada)

“I grew up in an agnostic family, and I often felt like a boat floating without any guidance and direction. I am in the process of searching for faith and accepting it as the foundation for my life. Someone once told me that if you were searching for God, He will come to you. I’ve begun to find that to be true: He is bringing me light and making my faith clearer. The daily practice of quiet time, and using the absolute moral standards (purity, honesty, unselfishness and love) for guidance, has become an essential part of my life and has helped

me discover what I need to put right. The light of faith has come into my life. The most challenging step that God is giving me is to strengthen it, and to live out my faith for the rest of my life, implementing His plan despite any circumstances. God has a plan and I am a part of it.” (Tuan Anh Nguyen, Vietnam)

“The last two months have changed me. The daily practice of quiet time (listening to my inner calling and applying the moral values) has become crucial to my life. The journey has challenged me to grow up, to eliminate my depression and to begin to smile and laugh more. I have begun to love myself, which is great because love always makes things positive. I have also begun to plan a program for my country entitled “Apsara, I Care.” I hope to implement it during the third AfL outreach to Cambodia.” (HongEang Sith, Cambodia)

Many individuals have left lasting impressions on us, and we have touched many others throughout our travels. Indeed, it has been a successful and rewarding three weeks, and a fitting way to begin to draw our Southern outreach to a close. After a few more adventures in Karnataka, our crew will return to Asia Plateau in early March. There we will meet with the other four AfL teams, and evaluate our two-month long journey.

Yours, South team