

Andhra Pradesh, India
Another Story of Grace,
Faith and Joy
November 2009

It is with great joy and a little trepidation that I begin this account of our third visit to Carmel Ministries, based in Eluru, Andhra Pradesh. Trepidation, because whatever I write cannot do justice to the grace of God and the love of the people of India.

The day before we left, I remember standing before our church along with the six friends who were to make up the team. As we received prayer, my faith rose knowing that in ourselves we had little to offer but in God's hand, it was a different matter. God had already shown us great favour, in just two months we had raised £12,600 in cash for various projects and had more than enough gifts to fill Air India's generous 46 kg baggage allowance!

We arrived safely, 11 pm Tuesday after a 36 hour door to door journey via Mumbai and Chennai. This included a six hour rest at the YWCA in Chennai. We praised God

that we passed through the thermal screening for swine flu unscathed. However, the journey was not without incident having 'lost' June for 20 minutes - an over-zealous porter whisked her away in a wheelchair. We also 'lost' Julie, taken away by a security officer to have her hand luggage rechecked. Five of us boarded the plane, the others were no where to be seen! Thankfully, they turned up in time for take off!

At Chennai, roses and smiles on faces of Pastor Ebenezer and his son Isaac gave us the warmest welcome imaginable. Having negotiated Chennai Railway Station and seen first hand Pastor's adept dealings with porters who carried our 14 heavy cases, we settled down for the seven hour journey to Vijayawada. In the confusion amidst fresh bartering with porters we ended up with only 13 cases! The



'lost' case was never to return, but if we were to choose one case to lose that would have been the one!

We took dinner at Vijayawada, the first of over 35 curries! Wonderfully, with a few days exceptions our stomachs stood up and Imodium stocks stayed high!

In the restaurant, two men followed me to the rest room and asked for prayer. This was to be repeated over and over again - in the street, on the hotel landing, in homes - people sought prayer. Pastor Moses accompanied us on the 90 minute car journey to our hotel in Eluru. We sank into bed just before midnight, happy but exhausted.

We chose to start each morning with a shared breakfast and fellowship. These times were so precious and helped to sustain us throughout. Before the Pastors' Conference started we were greeted with garlands and showers of petals by the school children at Carmel. What joy to see their unbridled happiness and shouts of "Welcome to India". The genuine hospitality we were afforded, whether by Pastor's wife Mani, his sister Shaleam or in the humble abode of a



village pastor profoundly touched our hearts. After breakfast we went to the Pastor's Conference, held over three days of eight sessions. About 600 pastors came with Carmel providing the cost of transport, three meals a day and overnight accommodation (sleeping on the floor at the venue!). The team shared testimony and some sang. I was the sole speaker - the topic was "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (taken from Revelation 1-3). This was an awesome responsibility but, by the grace of God, He took our loaves and fish to feed spiritually hungry men and women! The Holy Spirit was present in an amazing way throughout. The Conference culminated with the ordination of 34 pastors. What joy! One pastor who was blind clutched his Braille Bible to his chest while he was prayed for. The worship throughout was passionate and challenging!

We met many old friends, some were pastors ordained in previous conferences - the welcome was tearful and warm. It is so encouraging to see how the work of God is developing here despite increasingly difficult circumstances. For two of the team, this was their first visit to this amazing country; full of vibrant life, extremes, colours and smells.

On the last day of the Conference the police came to the venue and asked to see Pastor Ebenezer, they requested copies of our visas. That evening Pastor was called to see a police inspector who was clearly anti-Christian. He insisted that our visas did not permit us to preach or teach and we should desist from such activities. We thanked God that this has happened after and not before confer-

ence. Pastor made a strong stand and took the matter higher, meeting an even more staunch Hindu. It meant a slight change to the programme with the Women's Conference being moved to another town and the evening crusades planned for Eluru either moved or cancelled. In the event, the changes worked for good (Romans 8:28!!).

On Saturday we went to Khandavalli to see the school and especially the orphans at Carol Moore's Children's Home. An eye specialist, Dr. Solomon, travelled with us on the 1½ hour journey to give the children sight checks. This resulted in ten of the 100 children examined needing prescriptions for glasses (these were subsequently supplied). Others needed eye drops and vitamins due to nutritional deficiencies.



Eye Tests at Khandavalli

What a wonderful welcome - garlands, showers of petals and tears from the head teacher, Mr. Rao. We sat down for a meal and then gave the 25 children gifts provided by their UK

sponsors, four of whom were members of the team. It was the first time they had met the children - after a little reservation, unbounded joy! The children were visibly touched and clung to their newly found 'parents'. The picture of the children excitedly showing one another the contents of their gift bags will linger for a long while! We saw the progress that has been made at the school and home (which shares the same building) since our last visit. The school caters for about 180 children; the home has new beds and toilets thanks to the sponsorship of the children at a local primary school in Mountnessing.

We travelled home on a 'motor way' along with buffalos, over-laden cars, avoiding clothes laid out to dry, through paddy fields and coconut plantations with huge statues of Monkey Gods looking down on us. In the evening, we walked through the bustling streets of Eluru - even in this town of over 300,000 people they rarely see foreigners. We were greeted with warm surprise and the

usual cacophony of horns from traffic filled roads.

Sunday saw us visit four rural churches. The church at Surraopet was built four years ago with money we had donated. It is wonderful to see the church's development. Previously, the people met in a palm-thatched hut;



they were in the main rat catchers with poor personal hygiene. Now their numbers have grown and they are transformed. Each church has a distinctive flavour but all had a great joy for the Lord. It is a measure of Pastor Ebenezer's heart to be committed to support and plant small rural churches at great personal cost. The weekly offerings at some of these churches may amount to a little over 100 rupees (less than £1.50) along with gifts or rice and other food-

stuffs! One pastor and his wife & three children live in a single room, thatched hut. We ran late throughout the day but the people waited patiently for us and welcomed us with great joy.

We moved on to the villages of Praghathipuram, Patchsnagaram and Timmakapalem. Enjoying the drum-led worship and teaching from the Word of God. Meeting these remote fellowships was such a blessing. During our stay, we visited 16 such churches bound by the love of God and all planted by Carmel. In all, Pastor oversees 52 churches and 42 pastors.

The church has a Bible College with 40 students, training over two or three years. At present the senior students are away gaining practical experience serving other ministries.

They return next month. Each Friday the students visit state schools, telling moral stories, while others pray for the patients in Eluru's General Hospital. From 20th November through to end of January the students will go out every night with Pastor for Gospel meetings. Our visit to the college was uplifting - Brian taught about Fasting and the Gift of Tongues. The teaching was excellent and well received by hungry hearts. I returned in the evening to share with the students. Two wonders: the electricity came back just as I stood to speak and, despite warnings, we did not see one mosquito or bug! Earlier Pastor wanted to move the meeting to his church because we would be interrupted by swarms of insects. The students prayed!!!

The Bible College is 7 km outside Eluru, strategically placed on a main road. Two of the four storeys are built but the first needs to be freed up for a girl's home. The priority now is to build upwards. In the afternoon the ladies in the team led a women's home group - this was



Carmel Bible College

blessed and gave women, who do not have much of a public voice, the opportunity to share.

On Tuesday we visited four tribal churches in the interior of Andhra Pradesh. We left at 6.45 am for a three hour journey to the first church. It was amazing, travelling through beautiful countryside, on rough roads to hamlets that had never seen a white man before. Rural villagers look quite different and speak their own language; this means the preaching must be interpreted twice. I cannot imagine what came out the other end!

Once again, we arrived late. The first pastor was so distraught - his congregation could not wait and had returned to work in the fields (for £1 for a 12 hour day!). He banged his drum to call them but sadly we could not wait. At the third church we were welcomed by tribal dancers, male in full regalia including horned head dresses. They were happy because yesterday they had killed a wild buffalo and had lots of meat to eat. At the final church we were thrilled to be reunited with Pastor Emmanuel, who had lost his eyesight through an attack from fundamentalists. His church is now too small for the burgeoning congregation, in the self same village where the attack took place! It

was an immense privilege to stand with this man!

All but two of the team returned home exhausted, Judy and I stayed on for the evening crusade in Srinivasapuram where the students had been busy throughout the afternoon setting up the staging, lighting, PA and matting (people here sit on the ground!). In this small village about 300 people came to hear the gospel. We thanked God that 15 responded to the call of Christ.

Next day, we visited the leper colony that Pastor helps to support. The residents recognised us from previous visits and welcomed us with excited smiles. The leader, a man with lepro-



Tribal Dancer

sy, joyfully sounded a gong as people joined those already waiting. One man who was near to death when we saw him two years ago, was alive and well. What a pleasant surprise to see him once more praising God. Seeing these dear people come, some on frames and crutches, others gingerly under their own steam, was touching enough. But what brought tears to our eyes was hearing them sing so enthusiastically and clapping, some with seriously deformed hands. Carol shared a word with them and then we gave gifts of rice, bananas, soaps etc. and also bags & bags of cement!! At Pastor's initiative, the local authority has under-

taken to build proper homes for this community of 50 people. The cement will be used to render the houses. Eluru's Mayor met us - he is a friend of Ebenezer's and a valuable contact.

We then went back to Carmel to see the water purification equipment purchased for the home, orphanage and bible college. When installed, this will provide up to 60 litres/hour of drinking water. We dedicated three new sewing machines for the tailoring project which provides training for

young women. There we met one young woman who had been an orphan at Pastor's home, whom he recently married and now she has almost completed the 4-month tailoring course.

These humanitarian/social projects are a real part of the work which touches the community with the love



of Christ. We were profoundly challenged when we met 25 children with HIV/AIDS. They each received a sack of nutritional food which they must take in order for their medication to be effective. Carmel works alongside an organisation run by, and for people affected by AIDS. It was heart rending to talk to grandparents caring for their orphaned dependents, along with widowed parents, some of whom suffer from AIDS themselves. We felt compelled to help in some way. After lunch, taken with Pastor's



On Thursday the team went separate ways, Brian & I went to visit a friend of mine Suresh while the ladies went to lead a hastily re-arranged, Ladies Conference. The venue was chosen only days before, some 30 km from Eluru because of the police. Ladies were invited by word of mouth. Pastor had no idea how many women would come

family, some of the team went shopping. In the evening Julie, Brian and I spent some of the evening with the Bible College students, speaking about God's desire to change us into the 'likeness of Christ'.



but in faith they catered for 500 (lunch provided) - in the event 680 arrived! It was an amazing event and many women committed their lives to Christ!

Brian and I travelled a similar distance to Chekkapalli to visit a school, dedicate a new church and speak to about 150 pastors. Suresh,

Women's Conference



two meeting in court-yards of houses. In some churches we sang but in every church I shared a message and people gave their hearts to Christ. Carol and especially Cornelia became proficient tribal dancers!

We rejoiced in the third church where the Pastor's wife gave testimony of her miracu-

our host, is not part of Carmel; I met him at a crusade two years ago. It was a joy-filled and moving occasion with a tearful farewell. In the evening, we celebrated Pastor Moses' birthday with his family - such times were a highlight, despite cultural differences we had become 'family'.

Friday was a long and inspiring day. We left at 6.45 am to travel over three hours to the first of five Lambadi (gypsy churches). These are tribal churches planted by Carmel in remote Andhra Pradesh - on each occasion we were welcomed by the most dedicated of Pastors together with dancers, bedecked in bangles, jewellery and the most colourful dress. In most cases, we walked along earthen paths, following drummers and dancers, in temperatures in the upper 30's, along with most of the village to the church - three with buildings and

lous recovery from a near fatal snakebite she had received a year earlier. In the first church, Pastor Timothy had such a testimony in Tell-egavaram that the village leader allocated land for a new church building to be used for community purposes. We were able to give £1,000 for the completion of the building, at the moment it is just a shell. The leader (not a Christian) asked us to his home for prayer. In the last Church, the Pastor (named Charles Wesley!!!) who was disabled through polio, moved around with great energy using a bamboo pole in the fashion of a pole vaulter. A noble man with a disarming smile and obviously respected by the village - almost all of whom must had crowded together to hear the message - interrupted by lowing cattle just yards away and excited children. A truly amazing day culminating with a meal back at Moses' Aunt's before



Corrie dancing
- she's on the
left!

What a great joy to get back to Khandavalli School and the Children's Home. The warmth of the children, especially those seeing their UK 'parents' once more was heartrending! Brian's little girl had to be pried away from him as we left.

arriving home joyful yet shattered at 9.30 pm.

There are too many personal testimonies to mention but it was miraculous how June, 77 years young, on her first missions' trip, suffering with spinal problems and a recent hip replacement was up for everything and even donated one of her crutches to a dear old lady at the leper colony. This is the grace and power of God!

On our final Saturday, we stopped by a church on the way to our second visit to Carol's Children's Home. The church had grown significantly since we visited two years ago. The building is newly constructed with an adjoining room for the Pastor - not an office but his family home! His young son played the drums like nothing on earth. Over ten people committed themselves to baptism here.

Sunday morning church at Eluru started with seven baptisms in the bright morning sun, followed by a lively service. The new beds (bunks) arrived for 20 children!

In the evening three of us went to Pastor Moses' Church (rather a plot of land where a church will be built, adjoining paddy fields and infested by every bug imaginable). When we arrived the bulldozer was there, still flattening the ground! The adjacent paddy field had been drained and over 300 snakes removed!! The students had set up lighting, PA, matting etc. - it was a great time, 15 people committed their lives to Christ! We arrived home late but encouraged.

On Monday our last day in Eluru, Judy led the Youth Conference, once again God was with us and 20 young people rededicated their lives to Christ.

PTL! We gave the children in the school (most of whom come from a nearby slum district) gifts of pencils and note books.

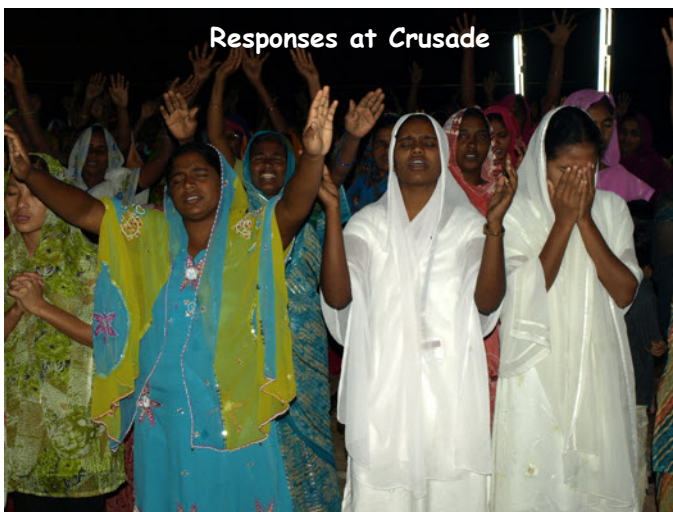
In the evening we were guests at Carmel to celebrate Pastor's 38th birthday and a special performance put on by the orphans. It was unforgettable, especially as we listened to them sing and dance to the song, "Pray for India". The children were given a new set of clothes and money provided for another at Christmas.

What Ebenezer has achieved in nine years is truly amazing. If there is



anyone who reads this and wants to get involved in this ministry then please contact me. We arrived home elated, tired and severely challenged.

Thank you for your invaluable support and prayers without which this mission would not have been possible.



I pray that in some small way this report will encourage you to reach out in faith.

May God bless you!

Pastor Ebenezer, Mani, Isaac, Vinay and Ian



ed us with their love and concern. It's just like a festival for my family and for Carmel. I have to say that the Bible College students are radically changed in their spiritual lives after the ministry in Conference and the college. It made me so happy to see so many

The last word:

souls coming to the Lord.

Dear beloved Pastor Ian,

Praise the Lord and Greetings in Jesus' Holy Name!

We are so happy to know that you reached home safely. We thank God for His grace. Pastor, we are missing you all - it seems a big vacuum after your departure from India.

We are so thankful to you for bringing the team to Carmel Ministries, India. Your visit was a great blessing to us; every time you come there is a great joy. Pastor, this year your visit was more personal and everyone felt the presence of God. All the pastors, children in the Home and the Bible College Students are so blessed by your ministry. The whole team bless-

Once again, we express our heartfelt thanks to you and to mum and to Judy, June, Cornelia, Brian & Julie. Thank you for coming to India and spending your valuable time. Thank you for your generous support for the various projects. Please convey our thanks to each and every donor.

Please continue to pray for us, we will be praying for you. We pray that He will strengthen our relationship even more for His glory and the extension of His Kingdom.

Mani and my family send their love.

Yours in Him, Pastor Ebenezer