

CLEVELAND CHURCH OF CHRIST

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A REPORT FROM INDIA

By David Kester, Minister

On January 3, 2008, Katie Swedberg and I joined four individuals from First Christian Church in Council Bluffs, IA, and headed for India. Forty some hours later, we arrived to 90-degree weather and a gift of flowers. India was amazing. Our senses were assaulted with a barrage of colors, sounds, smells and tastes. Everything was alive with activity and there were people everywhere. 32 million people live in the state of Kerala, in an area roughly 1/7 the size of Minnesota. Vehicles drove on the left side of the road, the right side of the road, and down the middle of the road. Horns blared. Motorcycles dodged. Herds of cows walked nonchalantly down the street. Traveling was kind of like riding a roller coaster with cars going both directions. It was choreographed chaos. There was curry in almost every dish, redeemed, in part, by the fresh squeezed pineapple juice at breakfast every morning (except the morning we had fresh watermelon juice). We saw more elephants working than tractors. Fresh bananas were for sale in every shop. Rubber trees were being tapped. There was a pervasive smell of wood smoke and curry in the air. Did I mention there were people everywhere? With our white skin and size, we stood out like sore thumbs. At first, I wondered what in the world are we doing in India.

Then we met people and began to get to know them. They were kind, generous, warm, and excited to meet us. They gave us more flowers to welcome and honor us. I received more flowers in India than in the rest of my life put together. It was risky to say you wanted something, or liked something, because they would immediately do everything in their power to satisfy your desires. The kindness and generosity of the people was reminiscent of the Apostle Paul's description of the Macedonian Christians. "Their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity." (2 Corinthians 8:2)

The first Sunday in India, we worshiped for three hours. We found that that was kind of the standard length for a worship service. The only words I could understand were from the sermon and that was because I was preaching it. The singing was great, a capella, with much clapping. Though separated by the barriers of culture and language, we were reminded that we were one, when we came to the table of our Lord and broke bread together. God's family is so large – composed of people from every tribe, language and people under heaven. Though we were halfway around the world, we soon discovered that we were still with family – brothers and sisters in Christ.

We had opportunities to share our testimonies, to preach and teach. Katie sang with great power and grace. She even allowed me to sing with her one time. I am not much of a singer but it was blessing to sing with Katie and my old friend David Erickson.

We visited Grace Christian Home. Twenty-five boys and girls met us. They greeted us with fresh coconuts. We drink the coconut milk directly from the coconuts with a straw. The children captured our hearts. They sang to us, some songs in English. I will never forget them singing, "Every single cell in my body is happy." Looking at their faces, it seemed clear that those words were true. It was humbling to discover that the boys and girls prayed for America every day.

We were privileged to be a part of Grace Christian Ministries' annual General Conference (attended by over 600 individuals). 200 individuals camped and ate on the grounds of Grace Christian College. It was reminiscent of our Friend Day, although the tent was bigger, more colorful and had overhead fans and the conference lasted from Thursday evening until Sunday morning, instead of just one day.

Both hand-dug wells on the grounds of Grace Christian College were pumped dry by Saturday. So Lubies, one of our drivers and a servant extraordinaire, hauled water by truck for the people, and worked most of Saturday night to fill the baptistery. It was worth his effort, for on Sunday, before the worship service began, twenty-five men and women professed their faith in Jesus and were baptized in His name. It is a costly

decision for a Hindu person to decide to follow Jesus. Many are ostracized by their families, even the most impoverished lose their right to government assistance when they become Christians. Even in Kerala, one of the most Christian states in India, only 19% of the population is Christian. This compares to 2-3% in all of India. There is much work to be done in India.

We rode an elephant and took a boat trip on the backwaters of the Bay of Bengal. We laughed, and took good-natured teasing, because some of us were unmarried. We made friends that will last through this life and for all eternity. We came to minister and serve and give but received far more than we gave. When we returned home, we found that we had left a little of our heart behind in India. I am still not sure what I was doing in India but it was a privilege to see what God was doing there.

We were impressed by the caliber of the pastors, Bible College professors, and workers at Grace Christian Home. Babu Samuel's vision and leadership were readily apparent. It was amazing to see how much was being accomplished with how little money. \$30 a month provides resources for a child in the children's home. A beginning pastor receives \$60 a month. A new professor at the Grace Christian College (with a Master's Degree) with his wife and baby daughter, lives in one small room on the campus. He receives only \$60 a month. For the students at Grace Christian College, Grace Christian Ministry currently provides room and board, and covers all the tuition and fees.

Additional funding is the chief factor slowing the continued growth of all facets of Grace Christian Ministries. Students are turned away from the Grace Christian College each year because of lack of space and funding. Dozens of children are denied a place at Grace Christian Home, again because of lack of space and funding. More churches would be planted if there were funds to support additional pastors and to pay for meeting places. Still, Babu Samuel is confident that his dreams for Grace Christian Ministries will be realized. His dreams are: 100 churches, 100 Bible College Students and 100 children cared for by Grace Christian Homes. It would not surprise me to see that happen. There are already 23 churches, 30 students at the Bible College, and 25 children at Grace Christian Home.

Thank you for allowing me to go to India and for helping me with the trip. Pray for revival in India. There are almost a billion people there who do not yet know Jesus. Pray for them. Remember that God has made us rich, not so we can enjoy a life of comfort and ease, but so we can make a difference for the kingdom of God. Consider how you might leverage what you have to make a difference for God's kingdom.

David

Read about it / see pictures → [India mission trip](#)



Calendar of Events COMING IN February 2008

- Feb 3 — Special Offering for Pine Haven Christian Assembly to help restore the lodge
- Feb 6 — Wednesday Program – 5:45pm Meal and 6:30pm Bible Study
- Feb 7 — Bible Study at Centennial Plaza in Le Center – 6:30pm
- Feb 10 — Pancake Breakfast at church – 8:30am – 10:20am
- Feb 10 — Monthly Building Fund Offering
- Feb 10 — 7th-12th Grade Youth Group at church – 6:00pm
- Feb 12 — Dorcas Fellowship at church – 1:30pm
- Feb 12 — Board Meeting – 7:30pm; Graydon D, host
- Feb 16 — Open House at the parsonage – 4 - 8pm
- Feb 18 — Church Elders' Meeting at church – 7:30pm
- Feb 20 — Wednesday Program – 5:45pm Meal and 6:30pm Bible Study
- Feb 21 — Ladies Nite Out at Perkins on Madison Ave in Mankato – 6:00pm
- Feb 21 — Bible Study at Centennial Plaza in Le Center – 6:30pm
- Feb 22 — Fish Fry Cancer Benefit for Anna Dickie,
Cleveland American Legion Community Room, 4:30pm until fish is gone

- Feb 24 — Gideon presentation during the worship service
- Feb 24 — 7th-12th Grade Youth Group at church – 6:00pm
- Feb 29 — Nursing Home Service, Central Health Care, Le Center, MN – 11:00am

COMING LATER THIS YEAR

- March 2 — Movie night, [*One Night with the King*](#), the story of queen Esther – 6:00pm
- March 20 — Maundy Thursday Service and Meal – 6:00pm
- March 21 — Good Friday Service – 7:30pm
- Mar 28-29 — 30-Hour Famine for youth grades 7-12. Plan to come and invite a friend!
- March 30 — Movie night, *Narnia* – 6:00pm
- April 4-5 — [Minnesota Christian Convention](#) at Rochester, MN

SPECIAL CAMP OFFERING On Sunday February 3, we will receive a special offering to help Pine Haven Christian Assembly restore the Lodge. Since [Pine Haven Christian Assembly](#) began, the Lodge has been the center point of the camp's facility. After many decades of faithful service, the Lodge needs some major repairs in order for it to continue to serve the camp. Pine Haven and the Lodge have been a blessing to this congregation, so we have decided to help restore the Lodge by receiving a special offering on February 3.

BUILDING UPDATE We will receive our monthly building fund offering Sunday February 10. In December \$16,892.58 was given to the building fund, including gifts of \$13,711.58 designated towards surfacing the parking lot. \$358,038.92 remains to be paid on our building loan. Building fund giving in 2007 totaled \$84,153.61 which included \$27,984.62 towards surfacing the parking lot. Thank you for your faithful giving.

OPEN HOUSE Although it is a little late, you are invited to my annual Christmas / New Years Open House Saturday February 16 from 4:00-8:00pm. Come for food, fellowship and fun. Everyone is welcome. David K

The **FRIENDS OF ANNA DICKIE COMMITTEE**, announces a Fish Fry Cancer Benefit for Anna Dickie. The Fish Fry will be held Friday, February 22, at the Cleveland American Legion Community Room from 4:30pm until the fish is gone. Adults: \$8.00; Children 5-10 years old, \$4.00; pre-school, free.

PINE HAVEN CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY is looking for young people with a servant's heart to work at Pine Haven this summer. Juniors in high school or older may apply. Applications can be downloaded at www.pinehavencamp.org.

REBUILDING TRIP TO NEW ORLEANS Plan to go on a rebuilding trip to New Orleans, October 11-19. Cost is \$410, which includes roundtrip by coach bus, 6 night hotel accommodation, complimentary hotel breakfast, worksite lunches, group t-shirt, shrimp boil or some other group activity. This trip is open to those 14 or older. Those under 18 must have a parent or "supervisor" responsible for them. Habitat for Humanity has work restrictions on those under 18.

NEW ORLEANS TRIP TIMELINE AND PAYMENT SCHEDULE

- Sunday, March 16 — \$110 non-refundable deposit due
- Thursday, May 1 — Second \$100 of \$410 due
- Tuesday, July 1 — Third \$100 of \$410 due
- Monday, Sept 1 — Final \$100 of \$410 due
- Sunday, Sept 21 — Team Meeting at Southeast Christian Church, Mpls, MN – 6-8pm
- Saturday, Oct 11 — Departure – 8:00am
- Sunday, Oct 12 — Worship with Journey Christian Church and Check in at hotel
- Mon-Fri, Oct 13-17 — Workdays: 6:40am — Leave hotel

7:30am - 2:30pm — On job site
 Rest of day — Dinner options / free time,
 Group Reflection, Bedtime

- Friday, Oct 18 — Depart from New Orleans for home
- Sunday, Oct 19 — Arrive home

CLOTHING DRIVE: In an effort to give back to the community, we are planning a clothing drive. Please donate **good** used clothing to be given to those in our congregation and the surrounding community. Our first distribution will be in the spring of 2008. Adult and children's clothing are welcome, but children's clothing is especially coveted. Start collecting items now and bring them to the church any time. Label them "Clothing Drive." We will also need individuals to help sort the clothes and to display them for the distribution. Contact Mary H for further information.

DID YOU KNOW...?

- Kim Bultman has recorded a CD of original songs and made it available to us for a donation to the PTL fund (Praise the Lord or Pave the Lot). Pick up a copy of the CD on the church building foyer table.
- We recently received a gift in memory of Ed Phillips (Brian's father). Thanks!

CASSETTE TAPES of the worship service are available upon request. **PRINTED COPIES** of each Sunday's sermon are also available. Contact David K if you are interested in a copy of the sermon. You may also receive a copy of the sermon each week via **EMAIL**. Send your request to office@clevelandchurch.net



PRAYER is an important ministry of the church. We have many people who are willing to pray for you if a special need arise. To activate our prayer chain, call David K at the church office (507) 931-5924, or the parsonage at (507) 931-4044, or (507) 380-1985, with your request. If you are unable to reach David, please call Carrie M at (507) 357-6296 (H) or (507) 357-6444 (W) or (507) 261-0279 (C).

BIRTHDAYS: February **2** – Carrie M; **8** – Anna D, Marvin T; **13** – Bernice D; **14** – Julie D; **15** – Rich K; **20** – Scott T; **27** – Mark H, Glenn S; **28** – Steve D, Austin G

ANNIVERSARIES: February 20 – Steve & Mary D

SERVING LIST

A PDF file of our December 2007–March 2008 Serving List Chart may be downloaded from www.clevelandchurch.net. This hyperlink → [Serving List](#) ← will take you straight to the page.

CHURCH OF CHRIST

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 David Kester, Minister
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SUNDAY SCHEDULE

9:00am – Bible Classes for all ages
 10:00am – Fellowship Time
 10:30am – Worship Service

Office Phone: (507) 931-5924
 Parsonage Phone: (507) 931-4044

If you wish to no longer receive our email newsletters **or** to update your email address, please reply to this address: newsletter@clevelandchurch.net
 If you wish to email our minister and / or the church office use: office@clevelandchurch.net
 Thank you, Church of Christ meeting at Cleveland, Minnesota, USA