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1127 KILOMETERS

After a period of three weeks, which took me from Atlanta to Nepal to South India, I arrived in Dindigul on April 5th. The next day was spent on the school property discussing with the brothers what needed to be done about the fieldwork and construction needs. The monsoon rain season is due shortly so if we are to get any corn and beans planted for the school kitchen we must plan now. Speaking of the construction work you will be pleased to know that the new assembly hall, which was being built to replace the temporary one with the thatched roof, has now been completed and it will be used for the graduation on May 6th. The main project we must take on at this time is the building of a new dining hall and a place for foreign guests to stay when they come to teach. At the present time we must stay in Dindigul which is eight miles away. The dining hall and the guest quarters will be one unit so we asked an engineer to advise us and to draw a set of plans. The same man drew a previous set of plans for us and charged \$27.

PARAMATHY: On the morning of Friday the 7th J. Sagayaraj and I left on a six-day trip that was to take us on a circuit of 1127 km or just over 700 miles to cities, towns and villages where five of our one year schools of preaching are located. This time of the year is what local people call the summer season and it is hot, for the daytime temperature stayed between 96 and 104 while we were traveling. Our purpose for the trip was to give Bible exams and to interview prospects for these schools for the 2000 – 2001 school year. From Dindigul we left by bus at 6:55 a.m. to go the small town of K. Paramathy, which lies about 62 miles to the northwest of Dindigul. The first bus took us to a town called Kurur, where we grabbed another one and reached our destination just before 9:00 a.m. The school of preaching at Paramathy is the oldest of our one-year schools having been started in 1993. The director or principal as they say in the British usage here is K. Doraisamy. On this day he had 54 applicants on hand. Of these 26 had all their documents in order.

Just here I must briefly explain that we have to be very careful to ascertain who is truly faithful (See 2 Timothy 2:2) as they seek to enter these schools. Even though the stipend (support) for the two weeks each month the brothers are in school is small, we still have those who will come just for the support. The major reason for this is the few jobs available for the people. Often men with college degrees are working as common day labors in the fields for \$1.15 - \$1.39 a day when they can get the work. So we require that a man be a faithful Christian for two years before entering the school, that he have at least an 8th grade education with documentation, that he be married and be able to document it. We have had some to lie and say they were married when they were not. If they have children they must have proof of that also. Yet, it is not always easy for them to get such records for often there are bureaucratic log jams, but it can be done and if all the records are in order then the brother may sit for the Bible entrance exam. Another unfortunate thing is that many procrastinate and do not give themselves enough time to get the needed proofs. These we tell to try next time.

Of the 54, 26 had all their papers in order and 12 of the group passed the Bible entrance exam. This giving of entrance exams for applicants was introduced last year and it has really become a wonderful way to improve the quality of students. Students were coming to the school after being Christians for two years, but showing little or no evidence that they had been studying the Bible. Now the local brotherhood is learning that those who come into the schools must have spent time reading and studying the scriptures. Before the day was over we handed out certificates to 15 who have completed their year of study at Paramathy.

PANDAMANGALAM: From Paramathy we took a car the 22 miles to Velur where we got a small room in a small hotel. There were windows only on one side of the room with no screens. There was an overhead fan, but due to the shortage of electricity in this developing nation the power stayed off most of the night. In the morning Sagayaraj went to a local food stall for breakfast and I drank a half-liter of good cold milk from a plastic bag. The principal for the Pandamangalam school of preaching is S. V. Paulraj. We handed out Bible certificates to 25 who have completed their year in this school. There were 52 applicants on hand for the coming year and of these ten passed the entrance exam. The examining of the records and the testing took the whole day so it was seven when Sagayaraj left to return to Dindigul to preach on Sunday.

ERODE: I got a car to take me the 47 miles to Erode to the home of K. M. Peter. Peter and his family live on the first floor of their house, the church and school of preaching meet on the second floor and on top is an open kitchen where food is prepared

for the students on weekdays. Peter has also built an Elisha room on the back of the roof for visiting preachers so I stayed in that. Actually I slept outside on the open roof, as it was much cooler. Erode is a city of about one million and the church has shown phenomenal growth in the decade since the first school of preaching was begun in the region in 1989. On Sunday (April the 9th) I was invited to preach for the local church and for a second congregation in the evening.

Peter serves as principal for the Erode Bible Institute, which is the largest of the seven one-year schools of preaching. At that school we handed out certificates to 36 who are completing their one-year. Eighty-six applied for 2000-2001 and of these 34 qualified.

MORUR: From Erode Sagayaraj, who had arrived from Dindigul early in the morning, and I got a car to take us the 78 miles (car and driver cost \$25.58) to Morur where G. Perisamy is the principal of the Bible school. When we arrived about 10:00 he was sleeping just outside the door of his small house. He and his wife have four children. They have two rooms for sleeping and they gave one to me. It had a fan, but again the power "outage" was a problem. The next morning Perisamy's wife made us a good breakfast. The area about Morur is the most rural area where we have a school and the church has grown rapidly in the last five years. Many young couples have been obedient to the gospel. Thus there were 96 present with their papers and of these 32 qualified for the coming year. Also we handed out 20 one-year certificates to those who are completing this year's work.

ARAKKONAM: From Morur we took a bus and then a car the thirty miles to the railway station in Salem. From there we caught a train at 10:00 p. m. to Arakkonam. When Sagayaraj called me at 3:30 I was dead to the world. Had it not been for him I would have waked up at the end of the line in Chennai. In Salem I had sent a brother to buy a can of insect spray for me because the last time we were in Arakkonam we had stayed in a hotel that had mosquitoes like flocks of starlings. However, G. Stephenson, who is the local preacher and director of the school had arranged for us to stay in a neat and clean little hotel. He had arranged a room without air conditioning and it only cost Rs 200 (\$4.65). The clerk said we could have AC for Rs 150 more (\$3.48). Since the temperature had been about 40 C (104 F) during the day, I decided to go all out and pay the \$8.13. Brother Sagayaraj decided to go to Stephenson's house for the rest of the night. Fortunately the power did not go off and I slept from 4:15 until someone knocked on my door at 6:30 and handed me a newspaper.

Stephenson had 43 on hand to take the Bible exam. Of these ten passed. We handed out one-year certificates for five brothers who are just completing their first year. By 8:00 p. m. Sagayaraj and I were on a local train to the state capital, Chennai, which is 60 miles from Arakkonam on the eastern coast of India. We wanted to get a night train to Dindigul, but even at 10:00 there were two or three lines of people waiting for tickets. This as I mentioned is the school holiday season and families flee the hot humid coastal area in droves. We had to settle for what is called a "tour bus." It had comfortable seats but it took eight hours (11:00 p. m. – 7:00 a. m.) to make the first 205 miles of our journey to a city called Trichy. From there we caught a bus with straight back seats to take us the last 60 miles to Dindigul. I had to put my bag under my feet because the overhead racks were too small. Just three-miles from town the bus had to stop because a group of people who had a long-standing grievance against the local government was blocking the road. Even though several hundred people were being inconvenienced by this action no one reproached them because many know how difficult it is to get bureaucrats to act. We got off and walked a half-mile until Sagayaraj could phone home and get someone to send an auto rickshaw to pick us up. After one day in Dindigul we left for the other two schools at Dharapuram and Polarai to test their applicants.

The last two weeks of April will be spent in Coimbatore where I will be teaching a combined class of the young single men and single women on the book of Revelation just prior to graduation day on May 6th. Then my return trip to the States is scheduled for May 9th.

We want you to know how very much we appreciate the wonderful way in which all of you continue to support this work. God is truly blessing our efforts here and much good is being accomplished. Members of our Lord's body are being strengthened and many preachers are being trained to carry out His great commission. Please continue to pray for us.

In Christian love,

Jim E. Waldron



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