



# India 2004

I have just returned from my fourth visit to India, the first for four years. I was both humbled and thrilled to witness the continuing development of IREF's work.

## Significant Growth

The number attending the **Bible Conference** this year was noticeably higher than in previous years. Over 1200 women, 550 men and 180 evangelists registered for it. The 1200 children, whom IREF cares for at Repalle, together with IREF's 600 Degree College students, were also present for the meetings, making a total approaching 4,000! I spoke from the first two chapters of Ephesians; Craig Darling (IREF's USA director) spoke from the Old Testament book of Malachi; and two other pastors from the USA spoke from the Gospels. So the delegates were given a well-balanced diet of spiritual food!

The number attending the **Evangelists' Conference** during our second week was also significantly up on four years ago. Up to 250 evangelists, Bible Ladies and Bible college students met in IREF's magnificent Repalle church building for the Bible teaching sessions during the day. On my previous visits, the number had been around 75! IREF now has about 300 evangelists on its books serving around 900 churches, some as far as 200 miles from Repalle. I spoke from the Psalms, Craig Darling spoke from the Sermon on the Mount, and another USA pastor ran a series in the book of Jonah. So again, those present received a good mixture of spiritual food.



Attendance at the evening **Evangelistic Rallies in Repalle** broke all previous records. My conservative estimate put the nightly figure at around 8,000-10,000. Emmanuel Rebba (the Indian President of

IREF) reckoned the figure was two to three times that number! Well over 100 tractor-drawn trailers, hired by IREF, brought villagers into the meetings from up to two hours drive away. So many people responded to the messages preached on the last two nights that it was impossible to call them all to the front of the meeting area for prayer and further instruction. We must pray that the seeds of the Gospel sown during the four days of meetings will bear much lasting fruit in the weeks to come.

The crowds attending the **evangelistic village meetings** during our second week were also much larger than on my previous visits. Up to 4,000 attended the meetings at Cherukupalli on each of the two nights we preached there. I was speaking the first night and had to stop for a break around 10.00pm because so many people were still arriving for the meeting! They were creating a bit of a disturbance at the back of the crowd because it was so hard for them to find anywhere to sit – even on the ground!

IREF evangelists will be following up all these meetings with **village campaigns** in strategic centres during the coming weeks. Please pray for much fruit to be reaped as a result of our visit. A new bridge is being constructed over the River Krishna near Repalle and this will greatly facilitate the expansion of the work to the north of the river.



On the central Saturday of our visit, we shared in **the baptism of 141 new believers** in the River Krishna. Over 40 of those baptised were girls from the Degree College. One was from a Moslem background and had waited for over a year for her parents to give her

permission to be baptised. Several others were from Hindu backgrounds and so we shared in the joy and privilege of giving them new Christian (Bible) names.

### **Small can be big**

Interwoven with the excitement of the large-scale events, there were smaller cameo moments of great encouragement too. We visited one of IREF's **village churches** on our second Sunday afternoon. In the congregation was a young woman who had been brought up in IREF's Repalle home. She was originally from a Hindu background but had accepted Christ as her Lord and Saviour and was now attending the village church with her two young children. I am sure this kind of story will be repeated many times over as the number of former orphans returning to their village backgrounds grows in the coming years.

### **New Facilities**

The new **Degree College building**, which was opened last year, is magnificent. It must be the best building in Repalle by far! I was struck too by how well the science labs are equipped. Some of the students were sitting nationally set practical exams during our stay. IREF(UK) contributed over £6,000 to the cost of the College, and it is good to see that the money has been spent so well. So on behalf of all the students and staff at the College, let me pass on their sincere thanks to those who contributed so generously to the project. The College now offers an MA course in English Literature and MSc courses in some of the sciences, as well as its BA and BSc courses in a wide range of subjects.



The John's Elementary and High School building now has an extra storey to accommodate IREF's **Teaching Training College**. Many of the graduates from the Degree College will go on to take a two-year BEd qualification at the TTC. IREF is seeking

to generate its own teachers for its current and future schools. So it was encouraging to meet one of the teachers at IREF's Arumbaka Tribal Colony School who had been trained through the Colleges in Repalle.

**New dormitories** have been also constructed since my last visit to accommodate the growing number of Junior College boys, aged 16-18 years.

### **New Developments**

It was exciting to visit IREF's first **Child Development Centre** (Day School) which is now up and running. It is based in a small village about 40 minutes drive from Repalle. The school meets in a church building constructed about two years ago. It is staffed by five teachers and has around 80 children on its books. The start-up costs provided from the UK have enabled cooking facilities to be constructed alongside the church building so that the children can be served with three nourishing meals each day. Our start-up funds were also used to purchase textbooks for the children.



It was good to visit **the village church in Ullipallem**, which was constructed about a year ago with funds donated by Airdrie Baptist Church, in Scotland. As it is one of the next candidates for a CDC, we spent some time thinking about how we can best support the future development of CDC's from our UK support base.

- One suggestion put forward was for us to introduce a '**Sponsor a Teacher**' scheme. The starting salary for an IREF teacher is about £150 per annum. It then rises annually according to experience and responsibility. Each CDC requires about five teachers. **Could we sponsor the five teachers needed for Ullipallem from the UK**, so that the CDC can be started there? *Let me know if you think you could help.*
- The pupils at each CDC also need to be sponsored. It is anticipated that the CDC at

Ullipallem would initially cater for about 50 children. ***It would be wonderful if we could sponsor all 50 from the UK!*** Sponsorship money helps provide each child with books, food (three meals a day), and a school uniform. We realise that not everyone who would like to sponsor a child can afford the normal sponsorship figure of £200 a year. So we have come up with the idea of **co-sponsorship** for the children who will be attending the CDC at Ullipallem.

- For only *£50 a year* (£1 a week), someone could be one of four sponsors for a child. We would supply all four sponsors with a photograph and profile of the child so they can all pray for him/her. The figure of £50 a year would be reduced to just under £40 a year if given through the Gift Aid scheme.
- At *£100 a year*, someone could be one of two sponsors for a child (£80 a year via Gift Aid).
- At *£200 a year*, a person would be a child's sole sponsor (£160 a year via Gift Aid).

*Let me know if you are interested in investing in a needy child's future in this way; and see if you can encourage some of your neighbours, friends, and work colleagues to do likewise.*

### **More stories to tell**

The £2800 raised in the UK for IREF's **Cyclone Appeal Fund** was very warmly received. It was the first money remitted to India in response to IREF's appeal. We visited one area that had lost all its banana plantations during the cyclone.



In a nearby village, we dedicated a new church building amidst scenes of great celebration. The church's pastor had lost his own home during the cyclone, and was now using one half of the old thatched church as a temporary home for himself, his wife and three young children – a single space about 12 foot square. It brought home to me the real need

for our relief money. Once again, on behalf of all those who will benefit from your generosity, let me say a very big 'Thank you'.

The four-strong **medical team** from Scotland did a magnificent job, ably supported by colleagues from the USA. Around 1500 children and over 200 evangelist and Bible Ladies were screened and treated by the team. There will be extensive news from the medical team in our next News Letter.



Thank you for your prayers for us during our time in India and for your continuing prayers for the work.

David Hunt

If you think your church would like to hear more about the ministry of IREF then please contact:

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