

News of Recent Teams in India

A team of students from **Trinity International University**, USA, travelled to India on 27th December. They spent two weeks in Repalle working with IREF's students in their classrooms. They also went out and about sharing the Gospel through giving their testimonies in many villages. Here is a report from Cooper Smith, Director of Global Community Partnerships at Trinity International University.

“Hearty Welcome: Trinity Team - USA”. These were the words on a banner greeting us as we arrived at the school compound in Repalle! Hundreds of students lined the roadway welcoming us with fireworks, flowers, and cheers. After hours of meetings, preparations, and travel, the team was ready to learn about the work of IREF and serve alongside the staff in its various ministries.



The team consisted of eight college students and two leaders from Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois. We were all excited that God had provided this opportunity to witness His work in rural India and establish meaningful relationships. During our ten days in India, our time and opportunities revolved around two locations - the IREF site in Repalle and church plants in surrounding villages.

While in Repalle, the team enjoyed interacting with staff and students. During tours of the facilities, the team heard first-hand stories revealing God's providence in meeting various needs for IREF. Talking with students, we learned how God is providing a place of safety and hope in the midst of often difficult life circumstances. As a team, we shared stories of God's work in our own lives, led a Bible school for 250 of the primary aged children (easier said than done!), and worshipped through song.

Travelling to IREF church plants in the surrounding villages was a highlight for the team. God is

evidently at work in rural India. Stories of perseverance and faith frequently surfaced in the different villages during our impromptu services of singing and prayer.

The essence of our time in India can be summarized in one word: relationships. The team regularly interacted with the people in and around Repalle in many ways. We spoke through translators and acted out Bible stories. We sang and performed dramas.



You can't imagine the amount of happiness that comes when you bring out a bottle of bubbles, play with chalk, or take a swing on the cricket field. Exchanging smiles and prayers with a pastor or Bible woman in one of the villages is a privilege transcending the obstacles of language. We came with a message of encouragement but it was the love and welcoming of our friends at IREF that will be permanently impressed on our hearts.

When describing their experience, the team uses many words: “surprised” - at the poverty, yet at the joy; “grateful” - for the privilege and opportunity to learn and serve; “excited” - at the opportunity to go and serve on the mission field. For me, I use the word “hopeful” - hopeful that the God of this world is actively redeeming his creation and drawing one unified people to himself; hopeful that one day the brokenness will be healed and I will be joined with brothers and sisters around the world because of the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

By God's grace, IREF is undertaking holistic Christian ministry in Andhra Pradesh. In a world corrupted by sin, we long for the new heaven and new earth. But we know that Jesus is at work to provide both physical and spiritual healing today through IREF's remarkable work..

IREF hosted its annual **Youth Conference** from 11th-15th January. Here is a report from Dave McMahon, the Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Cadillac and an IREF(USA) Board Member.

The theme of this year's Youth Conference was "What shall I do to inherit eternal life," the question a rich young ruler put to Jesus - and a question that countless Indian men and women are still asking today. We were privileged to address young people (and a number of village pastors, Bible ladies, and IREF staff) with messages and teaching that, we trust, helped them answer this critical question.

Lively worship music was led by Emmanuel and area village pastors, and the lovely voices and appearance of the College Girls' Choir. I even got the chance to play the trumpet a couple of times and lead some singing with a new guitar that our friends from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School blessed IREF with a few weeks ago. It's always a joy to hear several thousand people singing "Lord, I Lift Your Name On High" and "I Belong To Jesus."



Mornings, afternoons, and evenings made for long eighteen hour days, but "the joy of the Lord was our strength!" From the morning welcome by all the students on our arrival, to the daily "Good morning, Uncle!" we took great pleasure in connecting with youth of all ages. We even had an afternoon of encouraging the pastors who were in attendance!

When I see so many of the faces I've come to recognize over the past seven years since my first visit to IREF in 2006, God has made us one and brought us into a family relationship in Christ that I would have never dreamed of. And it was more than humbling to see how God had answered prayers through the years. Several times throughout our time in Repalle, students would stand and give testimony as to how they had come to faith in Christ. And while we always pray that God will produce "fruit that will last," to hear witness (through Dee's interpreting) of that actually happening is fabulous!

One young man, in his last year at IREF, stood to say that he had opened his heart to Christ at the Repalle Crusade on the night I preached back in 2006. One young woman, now in the Teacher Training programme, stood to recount how she came to faith and was baptized during the 2007 Youth Conference, which I was privileged to be at.



Later, in the girls' compound, she met me with her

baptism photo of me baptizing her in the Krishna River! Wow! God is so good! And He showed up in power during those meetings. I was told a record number of youth committed themselves to Jesus at this year's Youth Conference. 72 took baptism on the final day of the conference.

God is working powerfully, as only He can, through this ministry. And that's not just my witness; that is also the witness of the enemy of our souls! One night following the meeting, a young girl came forward, evidently being oppressed by a demon (her family worships idols). As Emmanuel, the village pastors present, and several others of us were praying for her and for the enemy to be put to flight, the evil spirit was speaking back through her in an obviously perturbed manner. Finally, however, she was released. Afterward, Emmanuel said to me, "Before she was released the demon spoke through her and said, 'You have to stop this! You are converting too many of these young people!'" By the way, that young woman was one of the 72 who was baptized! The Bible says that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. Here you have it coming from "the horse's (devil's) mouth!"



I thank God for the day I met Craig Darling on the campus of the Moody Bible Institute at a Pastor's Conference when he introduced me to the ministry of IREF. Ever since that experience, for me, going back to IREF's compound is like coming home. I am sure that when I finally pass into eternity, I'll be standing open-jawed at the wonders of heaven, when all-of-a-sudden I'll hear a voice in Telugu saying, "Wow! There's no place like home!"

A further team from the USA travelled to India for IREF's **Annual Conference and Gospel meetings**, held from 6th-10th February, and to provide free medical care through a clinic on IREF's Repalle campus. We hope to bring you news of this team's work in our next newsletter.

Meanwhile, please pray for lasting fruit from the ministry of all these various teams. Praise God too for the thousands of viewers who are hearing the Gospel each week through IREF's television broadcasts. Many are saved each month and the impact that IREF is making in India is rippling out far and wide, with Christ always central to everything that IREF does.

David Hunt [Chairman, IREF(UK)]

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