



# Our Mission Field in **INDIA**

**MISSION NEWS & HELPING HANDS**

Evangelical Lutheran Synod

*Sharing the Gospel in South America and Asia*

**SEPTEMBER 2018**





## From the Editor—Rev. Thomas Heyn, Board for World Outreach Administrator

Mr. Dan Browning, Chairman of the BWO and member of the Asia field committee, joined me in January 2018 on a visit to the field in India where we work together with the Lutheran Mission of Salvation - India. In this edition of *Mission News & Helping Hands*, he writes about two parts of that visit that caught his attention. We hope you enjoy his articles and share his enthusiasm and concern for the important work being done in India.

**Correction**—In the July 2018 special edition of *Mission News & Helping Hands*, the article on the history of mission workers and volunteers who served in Peru was mistakenly attributed to Rev. James Olsen. The article was, in fact, written by Rev. Wayne Halvorson. We regret the error.

*Jesus answered (Nicodemus): "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit," John 3:5.*

# Baptisms—and Nicodemus!

By Dan Browning

A **TRIP** to the mission fields of India and the work of Lutheran Mission of Salvation - India (LMSI) will usually last ten to twelve days, visiting several of the more than 200 congregations which make up LMSI. While a few LMSI congregations are in larger cities, many are located in small villages. On visits of the Board for World Outreach to India, we place a high priority on visiting these small village congregations, many of which may not have had a BWO visitor for years.

A visit to these village congregations is often cause for a large festive gathering of church members (and numerous curious village-onlookers). They assemble early to await our arrival and pass the time singing praise songs and hymns. They often sit cross-legged on the floor—women and girls on one side, men and boys on the other.

Upon our arrival we are seated up front in the altar area. After some opening remarks, prayers, and portions of a liturgy, Pastor Heyn delivers a short devotional message with Pastor Mamidi or Pastor Raju translating from English to Telugu, the main language of central and south India where most LMSI churches are located. After the close of the service, the other BWO visitor will deliver words of welcome from their brothers and sisters in the ELS, along with thanks and gratitude for the warm greeting to the guests that day.

Inevitably, then follows a long-standing custom in Indian culture—a “felicitation.” Chosen representatives from the congregation come forward one after another and drape a fabric shawl over the shoulders of each seated guest. After the shawl comes a large fresh flower necklace. Shawl after shawl, flower necklaces piled upon each other until the honored guest’s head is barely visible above the stacks of flowers! The congregation takes great delight in honoring their guests in such an effusive manner.

In one visit last January to a small village congregation in Hebron, a serene hamlet in the middle of a grove of tall coconut palm trees, Pastor Heyn was informed there was a baptism for him to perform for a 12-year-old girl. The girl could not move from her waist down, and was carried in the arms of her mother to the front of the church. She had an ailment as a young child that left her with a debilitating, lifelong paralysis. Pastor Heyn baptized the girl with prayers for a medical miracle.

The local Gospel Worker told Pastor Heyn that there would be a few more baptisms to do. “Good!” Pastor Heyn replied. “How many?” “About twenty,” said the Gospel Worker! Up they came to the front, children of all ages from infants to 10-year-olds. We were told that some parents will wait for a special or honored guest pastor to perform a baptism. Pastor Heyn performed each one, asking for the name and pronunciation for each child as he administered this Means of Grace.

The last child was brought forward by his mother, a two-year-old boy. At the usual point, Pastor Heyn asked for the boy’s name. He was told the boy did not yet have a name; his family was waiting for the special guest to baptize him and to also give him his first name! Pastor Heyn made sure he heard that correctly, and he thought a moment. He then said in translated English to the assembly that the boy’s name would



**Paralyzed girl receiving the waters of Baptism**





Children with mothers awaiting their turn to be baptized



My name is now Nicodemus!

be “Nicodemus,” as it was in the third chapter of John that Jesus explained and elaborated to Nicodemus about the importance of baptism through water and the Spirit to enter the Kingdom of God.

By the end of this 2018 visit to India, Pastor Heyn had performed a total of 29 baptisms! And, somewhere in central India, a little boy is running amongst the coconut palm trees who is likely the only child in that village (and for many villages around) named Nicodemus.

During the annual trip to India by representatives of the Board for World Outreach, a theme emerged as to what was accomplished during the visit. The trip by Pastor Heyn and me in January 2018 would certainly have to be known as the “Baptism Trip.”

*Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these,” Matthew 19:14.*

## Workers for the Lord—Worthy of Their Wages

By Dan Browning

**EACH YEAR** two representatives of the ELS Board for World Outreach (BWO) visit our field in India where we work with the Lutheran Mission of Salvation - India (LMSI). This past January, together with BWO Administrator Rev. Thomas Heyn, I flew more than 20 hours to visit our brothers and sisters in Christ in India.

LMSI is largely centered in two major cities in the central and southern portion of the Indian subcontinent: Hyderabad with a population of 8 million and Rajahmundry with a population of 4 million with a smaller mission operation in the north of India. Pastor Solomon Mamidi is the president of the Hyderabad district while Pastor Ananda Raju serves as the president of the Rajahmundry district. Both leaders are ordained pastors trained at the WELS-affiliated seminary in Guntur, India. They are experienced and inspiring leaders for their respective flocks.

LMSI consists of 22,000 members who worship and serve their Lord in over 200 congregations. Increasingly, the LMSI congregations are in the larger cities, but a great many of the congregations continue to be in small, rural villages known as “tribal areas.” Members’ livelihoods center around farming and harvesting of rice, coconuts, palm oil, cotton, and other crops. Pastors Mamidi and Raju each have around eight ordained pastors who serve congregations in their assigned areas while also supervising the work of Gospel Workers and Bible Women.

**250+ Gospel Workers**—Gospel Workers are laymen in various stages of theological training who tend to pastoral duties in their assigned congregations under the supervision of ordained pastor-supervisors in their respective areas. Currently ten promising Gospel Workers from each of the two districts are enrolled in a five-year seminary program to become fully-trained, ordained



Seminary training class



pastors. Gospel Workers in seminary training travel once a month to Hyderabad and Rajahmundry to stay and study for one week. They often come from long distances via train or motorbikes and sleep at night on the floor or on cots set up in the two main churches. They receive a daily allowance for food which they buy at food stalls. In Hyderabad they shower in makeshift stalls with a water hose and buckets on the open rooftop of the church.

Gospel Workers, usually married with children, cannot work part-time to support their families. They work full-time serving and properly tending their dispersed flocks of believers in villages in the middle of rice paddies and palm grove jungles. These dedicated men serve their Lord for \$25 a month. And, in general, they have not had a raise in nearly 20 years!

**Bible Women**—Bible Women are like their Gospel Worker counterparts: they serve the congregation of believers in their towns and villages in many helpful ways. Often, they are the elderly and widowed women of a congregation who have little financial support due to the loss of their husbands or separation from their children. Since India has no social or welfare safety net for women in these circumstances, it is up to their family or friends to help them survive. In the case of women who belong to an LMSI congregation, it is often LMSI who assists the women by asking them to perform certain services for that congregation.

If their congregation supports children in an orphanage of the congregation (LMSI cares for about 300 children in a dozen orphan homes), they may assist with its operation. If their health allows, they often provide cooking and housekeeping services.

Bible Women often supply a very critical service in support of the outreach efforts of the pastors and Gospel Workers of their respective congregations. Bible Women will visit people in their homes in the village who are not members (likely Hindu) and tell them about the salvation won for them by the perfect life, death, and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. What an important job for these Bible Women! For the past 20 years, the Bible Women have performed these services for the equivalent of nine dollars per month.

**“... worthy of their wages.”**—Gospel Workers and Bible Women are the workhorses of LMSI. They, and all of LMSI, are largely dependent upon the generosity of the Marvin M. Schwan Charitable Foundation, administered to them through the BWO. Increasingly, they will depend upon the generous donations of ELS members and congregations.

*And the gospel must first be preached to all nations,” Mark 13:10.*



**Bible Women honoring Dan Browning**

## Call to Action

What can you do to help?

- Pray that God would give the BWO the funds to give these Gospel servants an overdue raise in their monthly stipends.
- Help fund travel expenses and allowances for both Gospel Workers and Bible Women so they may attend several training sessions during a year.
- The Schwan Foundation supports the work of LMSI on a regular basis, but its support may be decreasing. More is needed. Please—prayerfully consider a gift or regular donation to the LMSI Gospel Worker/Bible Women Fund.
- If you have questions, please contact us in the following ways:

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Rev. Thomas Heyn  
BWO Administrator

## News from Other Mission Fields

**SOUTH KOREA**—A new exploratory mission is being planned for opening in Song Do, a city about an hour from Seoul. Song Do, a newly created city, is a place where international businesses will locate their headquarters. Executives and young professionals from around the world are expected to relocate there. A large English language training center will operate to aid in communication among all these people arriving from many countries. The whole city will be connected by the Internet. A tremendous opportunity to share the Gospel will lie before us.

**CHILE**—The congregation in Linares is worshiping in their new sanctuary. The church is growing and needs a resident pastor to serve them with Word and Sacrament. The La Cisterna congregation in Santiago has purchased property and is looking forward to renovations and worshiping in a new church home.

**PERU**—Leadership training continues among the Shawi Indians in the jungle regions of Peru. The church in Chimbote, north of Lima, continues to grow. Worship services are being “live-streamed” via Internet to regions of Peru and elsewhere in South America.

**LATVIA**—Renovations continue on a century old building in Jelgava to serve as a house of worship for the congregation that gathers there under Pastor Ivo Sildeggs.

**CZECHIA**—Martin Luther School in Plzen hosted a VBS where numerous U.S. volunteers helped with teaching, music and crafts.

**UKRAINE**—The mobile dental and medical clinics completed a spring/summer tour to towns in rural areas away from the city of Ternopil. After some R&R, the teams will be back in service and preparing for offering winter clinic services in the bus garage.

**KENYA**—Pastor David Jay Webber is preparing an educational program to help Lutheran pastors in Kenya learn more about biblical, confessional Lutheranism.