

March 2026 Mission News

Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Board for World Outreach
*Sharing the Gospel in
South America and Asia*

A First Visit to *India*

by Rev. Jacob Kempfert
BWO Board Member



A New Administrator and Editor

Rev. Jay Webber
ELS World Outreach Administrator

This is the first issue of *Mission News* for which I am serving as editor. I was installed as the new World Outreach Administrator for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod on Epiphany Day, January 6. Since then I have already gone on my first field visit—to India—and will soon be going on two more, to Australia and South Korea. The featured article in this issue is by Rev. Jacob Kempfert, a member of the Board for World Outreach, who accompanied me to India.

Our visit to India was very fruitful, as we visited various congregations of the Lutheran Mission of Salvation—India (LMSI), in and near the city of Rajahmundry, and as Pastor Kempfert and I each taught a course in the LMSI seminary. Because of certain problems that remain unresolved, and in recognition of its stewardship responsibilities to those who donate toward the work in India, the BWO reached the difficult but necessary decision to suspend its relationship with a second group with which it has been working for many years, the Lutheran Mission of Salvation—Hyderabad (LMSH). This is a distinct church body that is not organizationally connected to the Rajahmundry-based group, in which we have full confidence.

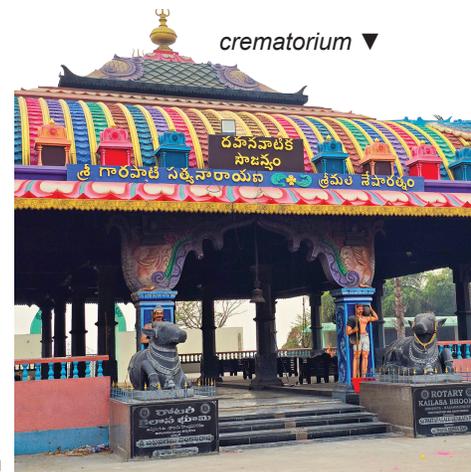
The congregations, orphanages, and school that are operated by the LMSI (based in Rajahmundry) remain as deserving and trustworthy recipients of our Christian generosity. They consistently use the funds that are contributed toward their work for the purposes intended. Another of the articles in this issue of *Mission News* tells the inspiring story of Pastor Balaswamy Jujjavarapu and the members of his congregation, who have been finding opportunities to reach many in their community who do not know Christ, with the saving gospel. May God bless our brothers and sisters in India as they faithfully carry out the work of the Great Commission in their homeland!

I look forward to serving the synod and our Lord in this position. I welcome invitations to preach for congregational mission Sundays, and to make presentations about the world outreach work of the ELS. ■

When in India, many visit the majestic Taj Mahal. Many explore tiger and wildlife sanctuaries. Many flock to ancient temples, modern towers, and cricket matches. When in India, I, on the other hand, visited the crematorium. (Those of my readers who know me well will not be much surprised or scandalized by this confession.)

India, though increasingly secular, is still saturated with pagan Hinduism. Idols to various false gods adorn temples down almost every street. The city of Rajahmundry is located on the banks of the Godavari River, considered one of the most sacred rivers in Hindu beliefs and rituals. After death, Hindus are cremated and their remains scattered in the waters of such a “sacred” river. When LMSI President Rev. Kalyan Gollapalli and I visited the crematorium, four cremations were occurring. Multi-toned bells rang from the nearby temple as Hindu priests performed rituals for the dead. One of the temple attendants, wielding fire poker and broom, chatted with us while the nearby pyres burned.

Suffice to say, the experience truly impressed upon me the truth of God’s Word to Adam: “Dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19); and to the Preacher of Ecclesiastes: “All is vanity and a striving after wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:14). The pagan Hindu profession of faith regarding death is especially vain and futile, as it denies the resurrection of the flesh in glory, embraces the destruction of the body, and offers no certain hope beyond a vague assumption that their loved one will be reincarnated in a different body, perhaps human, perhaps animal, possibly insect, maybe divine, depending on the karma they’d earned for themselves.



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India continued

Contrast this with the hope and everlasting life Christ Jesus gives us in His Means of Grace! Earlier that morning in the Divine Service, Rev. Kalyan administered the Sacrament of Holy Baptism to a young man who'd been born and raised in a Hindu family. He came to know His Savior through the faithful witness of Christ's Word and grace from several members of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Rajahmundry. We were blessed to witness this miracle of the ashes and dust of Adam washed away in the precious Word and Spirit of the living Christ joined to water, "the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom [God] poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-8). A precious soul darkened by sin and pagan unbelief was now joined through repentance to Christ's own living body in Word and water and rosy-red blood, poured out on the cross from Christ's own heart for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2).

This is but one of countless personal stories from the frontlines of ELS gospel work in India. As the Evangelist notes, the world itself cannot contain the books that could be written of such overlooked and unknown miracles of our Lord (John 21:25). In the children's homes, orphans without any parents or family now have an everlasting family in the household of God, with God Himself as their own Father and the Lord Christ Jesus as their own brother. We shared this comfort with these children, and then blessed them according to the promise of their Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 10:13-16). Miracles and treasures, all! In the village churches, believers gather around Word and Sacrament in humble settings, on cement floors, without indoor plumbing, with bare feet and shawl-covered heads, yet do so with joy, praise, prayer, and unparalleled hospitality. Truly like the Apostle Paul they are treated "as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything" (2 Corinthians 6:10).

In His holy Word and Sacrament, Christ and His kingdom truly are in our midst, and His Spirit is at work powerfully for His people. We give you heartfelt thanks for your continued prayers and support of Christ's mission of salvation in India, for your prayers and support are eternal treasures for those who are brought to the light of God's Word through them. You may never see their harvest in this life—you may never meet any of your Indian siblings in Christ, on this side of heaven. But by God's grace you will know them, even as you are fully known, in the Life of the world to come. ■

baptism of Hindu convert—1 ▼



baptism of Hindu convert—2 ▼



Rev. Kempfert preaching and Rev. Kalyan Gollapalli translating ▼



temple ▼



Outreach Among Hindu Neighbors

by Rev. Balaswamy Jujjavarapu
Lutheran Mission of Salvation—India

Twenty-five years ago I was a poor tailor. I made seat covers and upholstery for motor vehicles. I was a Christian, but I never imagined that God would call me into pastoral ministry. I was married, and the Lord had blessed our family with three sons. Life felt normal. We did not realize that God had a bigger plan for us.

In 2002 something unexpected happened—something that changed my life. A Lutheran pastor visited our village. Because I respected pastors, I introduced myself to him. He introduced himself as Pastor Ananda (the late G. J. Ananda Raju), a Confessional Lutheran pastor and the President of the Lutheran Mission of Salvation—India (LMSI), based in Rajahmundry. I welcomed him into my small shop so that he could pray and speak a blessing over my business and my family. He did that kindly and gently. But as he was leaving, he looked at me, called me by name, and invited me to visit his church and attend a monthly workshop for Lutheran instruction and Bible teaching. My late brother, Rev. Jujjavarapu George Livingstone, was already serving as a Gospel worker in that Lutheran group. So, the next month, I went with my brother to the workshop. That visit became another turning point.

Rev. Ananda then invited me to study God’s Word at their seminary. They were organizing a new cohort of candidates. At first I said okay, but honestly, I did not have a strong desire to become a pastor. I was a working man with a business and responsibilities. But Rev. Ananda encouraged me again and again. He urged me to pursue theological education. Looking back, it is clear now that the Lord was leading me. So, in 2002 I joined the LMSI seminary as a student. During those early years, I also began a small congregation in my home with my family and a few neighbors. Step by step, through study, prayer, and the support of Rev. Ananda, I left my upholstery work and became a full time Gospel worker.

The Lord blessed that little home congregation in a wonderful way. By the time I graduated from the seminary in 2024, the membership had grown to around two hundred. After my ordination, the Lord opened another door for ministry. Near my home there is a village where my sister lives. Through her contacts I began meeting with Hindu families in that community. In the beginning my visits were simple. I spent time with people, heard about their struggles, learned about their needs, and ended each visit by speaking

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a brief blessing and praying for their families. For six months I continued visiting, praying, and gently sharing the Gospel. Then another wonderful thing happened: one family offered their veranda for Sunday worship services. So we began. At first, only five people gathered for worship on that veranda. Slowly, by God's grace, the group grew. Today we have 20 to 30 people attending worship regularly. Attached are some pictures of this new congregation's Sunday worship services and special events the Lord has allowed us to enjoy together. It is a great privilege to be a shepherd under Christ, and to share the Gospel among Hindu neighbors in our communities. It is also a great privilege to live and serve in fellowship with LMSI and the ELS.

One more joy the Lord has given is this: one of my sons is now studying God's Word to become a pastor in LMSI. Seeing the Gospel continue into the next generation is a blessing beyond words. I give thanks to all who support this mission work in India. The Lord is using these gifts to bring His Word to hearts and homes. God bless you, and thank you for standing with us in this work. ■



How Can You Help?

■ Pray for each of the mission fields, for the national pastors of these churches as well as for the members of their congregations who live where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not always welcome. May God work all these challenges for the good of his people as he has promised.

■ Please—prayerfully consider a gift or regular donation for the work in the various fields. Every field, and some more than others, has many needs where God's people can provide much needed assistance.

■ You may designate a gift to a particular field or project on the memo line of a check.

■ To make an online donation you may go to els.org/bwodonations

■ Scan the QR code below which will take you to the donation page.

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