



Pastor's Page

Impressions of Calcutta

After what felt like days of travelling we eventually touched down at Calcutta airport on Wednesday 5 November. It was approximately 8.00am local time and already the temperature was approaching 30c. As soon as I and my seven ministerial colleagues were reunited with our luggage we headed for the exit where two vehicles were waiting to take us to The Baptist Missionary Society's guesthouse – our home for the next 12 days. As we set off our senses were soon assaulted by the unique sights, sounds and smells of the city. But more than this our nervous systems were fully tested as we dived with death on the roads! Cars flew at us from all angles often just missing us by the narrowest of margins as they weaved in and out of the traffic. Horns constantly sounded as cars, buses, trams, rickshaws, bicycles, pedestrians and cows all jockeyed for positions on the highway. We even encountered a vehicle going the wrong way down the busy thoroughfare and heading straight into the oncoming traffic! We swerved to avoid hitting him!!

After about 45 minutes of this we arrived safely at the guesthouse where we downed a cup of tea and a couple of tranquilisers! Recovering from the journey we unpacked and then met with local BMS staff and other Christian workers and ministers before being taken on an orientation tour of the area. As soon as we walked out of the gates we were bombarded by helpless people begging for money (we'd been advised not to give on the grounds that it only exacerbates the problem and actually puts children at greater risk) I found it so difficult to refuse when we saw people lying in the gutter reaching a hand out and others sifting through rubbish dumps looking for food whilst little children in bare feet followed us saying "Uncle, Uncle, hungry, hungry". I must confess I gave money to a number of them as I talked and walked with them. Late one night I was walking back to the guest house when amidst all the hustle and bustle I noticed a little girl standing near the entrance to a house, I smiled at her and she beamed back at me. Next thing I knew I heard a little voice behind me saying Uncle, Uncle, hungry, hungry. I put my hand on her shoulder and said "I'm sorry sweetheart, I really can't give you anything" I expected her to carry on pleading as most children did repeating the same words like a mantra. However, she didn't, instead she patted me gently on the arm and said "That's ok" and skipped off into the night! Bless her, I pray that she is ok.

In this diverse city of Calcutta (Kolkata) where pollution, poverty and pomp, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, Freemasonry, Humanism and New age-ism, all co-exist, God is truly at work Christianity is spreading, new churches are being planted, Hindus and Muslims are becoming Christians and miracles of healing in Jesus' name are regularly reported. It was a great privilege for me to witness this move of God and play a small part in it as I preached in local churches and helped take the gospel to villages that had never heard about Jesus.

But the final picture that I'll leave with you is one of street children going to a mobile school run in a local Methodist church. Hatibagan Mobile school is an initiative of the BMS and is served currently by an "Action Team" A small school bus picks up about 30 of the estimated 150,000 street children in Calcutta and takes them to this school. There they are washed, put in school uniforms, fed and given an elementary education. They are also taught the bible.

As we journeyed home after a morning in the school I was sitting next to a little girl who was probably about 6 years old. I asked her a few questions but she never uttered a word. Assuming she knew no English I gave up. Then suddenly she took out a piece of paper unfolded it and showed me this lovely drawing of a bearded man. She then uttered one word to me "Yesus" (Jesus) and folded it up and carefully put it away.

Thank God that Jesus is the hope for Calcutta and Jesus is being made known in Calcutta.

23rd November 2008