

# Malabar Mission Newsletter

Spring 2009

Vol. 16, No 1

## Our Mission

The Malabar Mission Society is a group of Christians interested in assisting the Malabar Mission Circle in India as it shares the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ along the Malabar Coast by supporting, with prayers for God's blessings,

- the spread of the Gospel, and
- the Circle's witness



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P.O. Box 32045

Regina, SK, Canada S4N 7L2

Email: malabarmission@sasktel.net

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Editor: Mark Dickinson  
Layout & Design: Arlene Hiller  
Advisor: Rev. Dr. Roland Miller

## Malabar Mission Society

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## CURRENT HARDSHIPS OF CHRISTIANS IN INDIA

- Rev. Dr. Roland E. Miller



The occasional persecution of Christians in India has recently increased, creating surprise and concern. What has happened needs to be put into its wider context. India has an enviable record of religious tolerance and is proud of its secular constitution. Not all Indians, however, have always adhered to the principle of live and let live, and from time to time there have been interreligious problems. The people of India refer to them as "communalism." They fear it as the worst of human evils and deeply regret communal incidents when they do occur.

After India became free in 1947, its population was stabilized at about 80 per cent Hindus, 12 per cent Muslims, 3 per cent Christians, and the remainder Buddhists, Jains and others. There was great leadership, the secular ideal was widely accepted, and conditions were relatively peaceful. The tranquility was upset after the 1960s when right wing Hindu movements became strong and began to argue the cause of "Hindutva," the idea that the land of India is intended only for Hindus. Their first target was Muslims, and there were many serious communal incidents. Now Christians have also been caught up in the rising communalism. The chief charge against them was that they were trying to induce backward tribal people to become Christians by wrong methods, by using foreign money, and by anti-conversion laws that were introduced in five states. By 2008 the physical persecution of Christians had dramatically increased.

To an extent there had always been some Christian suffering. There were hardships for new believers as predicted by the Lord. Those from Islamic background in particular were socially ostracized by their community, and sometimes physically harassed. Converts from the dalit community who comprise the bulk of India's Christians were shut out from social privileges enjoyed in the new India by outcastes who remained in the Hindu ambit. But the situation today is materially different from the occasional distress of the past. It is now intentional harassment in every section of the nation, even in southern regions. The new oppression does not usually emanate from local populations but from organized rightist Hindu groups bearing names like the RSS, the VHP, the Sangh Parivar and the Bajrang Dal. Their aggressive approach that once centered on Muslims has now also turned against Christians. The persecutions have the following qualities:

- They have the appearance of pre-planning;
- They are sporadic rather than general;
- They are primarily directed against backward dalit and tribal believers;
- And they are violent, including the destruction of homes and churches.

Continued. See *Christian Hardships* on page 2

## Malabar Mission Society

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

will be held

1:00 p.m., May 23, 2009

at

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

627 Taylor Street East, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

All regular and honorary MMS members are invited to attend.

## CHRISTIAN HARDSHIPS (continued from page 1)

The forthright and sometimes insensitive evangelistic methods of some fundamentalist Christians have made them particular targets. There have been public demonstrations against their outreach activities, and in some cases evangelists and/or new believers have been beaten, and some martyred. The persecution that attracted international attention came in 2008 in the state of Orissa. A zealous right-wing Hindu leader and ashram director, Swami Lakhmanananda Saraswati, widely known for his anti-Christian sentiments, was killed by Maoist terrorists, but Christians in the area were blamed. The end result of the sad events that followed included thousands of Christians made homeless, many churches and prayer halls destroyed, and 87 confirmed dead. Kandhamal in Orissa was an extreme example of the new trend.

Christians in India identify two major problems in that trend: outright atrocities against evangelists and converts, and the lack of timely support from legal authorities. They are wondering how to react. Their response has two prongs. There are those who see their hope in the secular constitution and in government action. "We want to raise a clear call for the restoration of our plural and secular identity. . . for the protection of the constitutional rights of all citizens." There are others who place their emphasis on a spiritual approach. The Malankara Orthodox Archbishop in Kerala declared, "I exhort all Christians in India not to take revenge and to respond with calmness and peace and patriotism." And from his bed of suffering, one Christian in Orissa said, "I forgive them, for my Lord Jesus has shed His blood for me."

How may we sum up this development that has direct implications for a mission society? We need to be aware of the following:

- The India government in principle and the vast majority of India's citizens by choice remain fundamentally opposed to

communalism.

- Christians as a rule are not being mistreated and in the main are still carrying on normal lives and ordinary church activities. This is especially true in Kerala where 19 per cent of the population is Christian.
- Nevertheless, the rise of the communalist movements has introduced problems. Various forms of persecution are on the increase. Muslims are nervous. Christians are watchful.
- In Malabar our Gospel workers and church members, thankfully, have been safe. They need to be more careful now in public events. In Kannur District there have been frequent clashes between RSS and Marxist adherents. Pray for our brothers and sisters in Malabar. Do not forget K.K. Alavi and his staff who are vulnerable. Pray fervently for Shaikh Ismail, and the Anantapur evangelists and new believers who live on the edge of hardship.
- The MMS members are also called to a wider prayer ministry. Pray that the persecutions in different parts of India may lessen, that those who are suffering may be sustained, that the nation's spirit of tolerance may be sustained and the Gospel have free course, that the Government may find ways to protect the distressed, that Indian Christians may maintain their resolve, and that as the Global Council of Indian Christians put it, "We may pray for the persecuted and the persecutors."
- The MMS needs to give careful attention to our Lord's admonition and caution, "Work while it is day, before the night comes when no one can work."

*"Built on the Rock the Church shall stand,  
even when steeples are falling."*

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT: LENT — FROM RAGS TO RICHES

- Rev. Howard Ulmer

**S**lumdogg Millionaire was recently nominated for 10 Academy Awards and received 8, the most for any film of 2008, including best picture and best director. The film begins with a police inspector in Mumbai, India interrogating and torturing Jamal Malik, a former street child from the slums. Accused of cheating, Jamal Malik, a contestant on "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?," explains how he has been able to answer the various questions. Jamal, a "slumdogg," is able to call Latika and answer the final question and win the grand prize.

The "rags to riches" story of an orphaned child, Jamal Malik, reminds us that Jesus has rescued us from our sinful and hopeless condition through his death and resurrection. Through the Holy Spirit, God's means of grace works within us and renews our faith. Our "rags" and sinfulness are washed clean in baptism as he gives us faith and hope. Lent illustrates the journey of Jesus, who gave everything, including his life on the cross, so that we might receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. God provides the "riches" of salvation and eternal life through his grace and mercy in Jesus Christ.

The Malabar Mission Society continues to support the Gospel Workers in India as they share the Good News of God's love with the people of their communities. Many people have heard the Good News and believed. Jesus began his ministry, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15) This is God's message to us and also to the people of India. God continues to open doors for sharing the Gospel in Malabar and beyond. Thank you for your faithful prayer and financial support that enables this ministry to continue. †

## UPDATE FROM THE FIELD: THE RIEMERS SPEND FOUR MONTHS IN INDIA (Part 1)

Rev. Carlton Riemer, MMS Project Officer

*From January until May 2009, our Project Officer and his wife are spending time in South India. Rev. Carlton Riemer, along with his wife Arlene, are living in Nagercoil while he teaches at Concordia Theological Seminary. As part of time spent 'away from the seminary,' the Riemers are traveling to many of our station outposts in Malabar. Please keep them in your prayers as they share the love of God with the people of India. - Ed.*

Arlene and I arrived at Concordia Theological Seminary, Nagercoil, India, on January 13, 2009. We had a day of rest on the 14<sup>th</sup> to overcome jet lag, but we also celebrated *Pongol*, the Tamil harvest festival. We joined the Tamil seminary students in shouting "*Pongol!*" ("It boils!"), as the first new rice of the harvest is cooked. Chewing on a stalk of sugar cane is also part of the celebration.

The next day I taught my first class as a visiting professor in Islamics and Muslim-Christian encounter. There are 53 students combined in one class: 33 are first year; 19 are third year; and one is fourth year. I balance the course between basic information about Islam as a religion and making suggestions and giving pointers on how to share the Gospel with Muslims.

The seminary has a rich worship life. Monday through Friday there is a student-led devotion at 6:30 a.m. In the men's hostel the students have devotions each evening at 7:00 p.m. They sing heartily, especially the songs in Malayalam and Tamil, most of which they sing from memory, accompanied by a small keyboard with hand operated bellows, drums, and tambourines. I am also teaching music for one hour each week.

Each Friday the students gather for "Gospel Work" in the afternoon. Students lead devotions and present a Bible story. Many of these are done very creatively and with original songs and lyrics written by the students. Then they go out in teams of two or three to places in the Nagercoil area to visit Christian, Hindu, and Muslim homes and pray with the people, gather neighborhood children together for a Bible lesson (often the lesson presented at the training session), and sing songs. Several new congregations have developed from this Gospel work over the years. At 7:30 p.m. the students report on the number of people/families visited and contacted with the Gospel through conversations, Scripture readings, songs, and prayers. What a way to spend a Friday afternoon and evening!!



Rev. Carlton and Arlene Riemer at the entrance gate to Concordia Lutheran Seminary, Nagercoil beneath the welcome arch to the Inservice Training for Church Workers of the Nagercoil District Synod of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church on February 23-24, 2009

I am impressed with the full schedule the students have every day. In addition to their full load of courses and daily devotions and library study time, most of them use their Saturdays and Sundays to preach, teach, and lead worship services in congregations in remote villages as far as 100 kilometers away. They are being well trained academically and receive practical experience for service in the Church.

We enjoy regularly seeing Mr. J. Stalin and Mr. W. Sujith, former evangelists in the Malabar Mission Circle. Their fellow students recognize and appreciate their leadership abilities.

We look forward to the day when they will serve as pastors in Malabar. Mr. Stalin is slated to graduate on March 14, 2009.

At the invitation of Rev. J. Samuel, the president of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church, I have conducted in-service training for pastors in the three synods of the IELC: Ambur, Nagercoil, and Trivandrum. I led two sessions on "Witness Among Muslims," and the Rev. William Meyer led three sessions on "Leadership Training." [Rev. Meyer is a retired pastor (45 years in the ministry), now living in Bethel, Connecticut and serving as an assistant to the president of the Atlantic District of LCMS.]

His wife, Marie Meyer, is a Deaconess and met with the IELC deaconesses in all three synods to give them encouragement and to help form an organization to more effectively represent and recognize the service of deaconesses in the IELC. Given the traditional gender roles of women in Indian society and in the Church, deaconesses can and do perform an indispensable and unique ministry among women. Arlene worked closely with Mrs. Meyer, and she is following up on the progress made now that the Meyers have returned to the USA.

Continued. See *Update from the Field* on page 4

## NEWSLETTER EDITOR CHANGES

– Rev. H. Ulmer, MMS President

**T**HANK YOU to Emerald Schoepp of Edmonton for serving as MMS Newsletter editor since 2002. Her involvement began in 1996 during a speaking tour by Rev. Dr. Roland Miller in Edmonton. In 1999, following a trip to India and visit to the various Malabar mission stations, her commitment and involvement intensified. We give thanks for her faithful service.

**W**ELCOME to Mark Dickinson of Ottawa for his willingness to serve as editor. Mark became interested in Malabar in 2004. He has visited the Malabar area twice in the last few years.

**S**incere THANKS to the various contributors and supporters. Special THANK YOU to Arlene Hiller for the layout and design of the Newsletter, as well as maintaining the mailing list and website. †

## YES, PLEASE ENROLL ME. . .

**Y**ou can now help the Malabar Mission Society through convenient monthly donations. Our monthly giving program is an easy, safe and secure way to support the ongoing mission outreach of the MMS. Your monthly donation will be withdrawn from your bank on the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month; you may change or cancel your pledge at any time by contacting us.

If you are interested in participating in this new program, please write the Malabar Mission Society, P.O. Box 32045, Regina, SK S4N 7L2 (or email malabarmission@sasktel.net) requesting a pre-authorized offering program application form. Please include a void cheque for bank processing with the completed application form.

Your financial contributions greatly assist the Malabar Mission Society in continuing, and expanding, our programs of help and assistance in Malabar. **Your tax-deductible donation, however large or small, makes a big difference.** We are sincerely grateful, and continuously thankful, for your ongoing gifts – and prayers – in supporting our efforts to bring the Gospel message to the people of India. THANK YOU so much! †

### *In Appreciation*

The Malabar Mission Society sincerely thanks the following who have so generously given special gifts ...

#### *In memory of:*

- **Anna Wagner**  
Ernie & Arlene Hiller  
Lorna Pederson  
Emerald Schoepp
- **Rev. Walter Schoepp**  
Emerald Schoepp

#### *In appreciation of the dedicated service of vacancy pastors Rev. Howard Ulmer and Rev. Lowell Guebert*

Trinity Lutheran Ladies Aid,  
Wilkie, SK

#### *In honour of Gordon & Marilyn Haglund for English as a Second Language (ESL) in Kannur, India:*

Klaus & Barbara Lang



*Memorials and gifts honouring special occasions are welcomed by the Malabar Mission Society, and are used to support the Lutheran Church in India to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with those who do not yet know His love. All donations are receipted for income tax purposes. Special-occasion gifts and memorials will be acknowledged in future issues of the Newsletter.*

*Send your gifts to  
The Malabar Mission Society  
P. O. Box 32045, REGINA, SK S4N 7L2*

## UPDATE FROM THE FIELD (continued from page 3.)

Marie Meyer is a first cousin to the late Rev. Henry Otten, a Christian missionary to Muslims in the cities of Wandoor and Calicut and a close friend of the Miller family while Dr. & Mrs. Miller lived and worked in Malappuram. Ever since Mrs. Meyer was a little girl, she has wanted to visit India, and she wrote many letters to Missionary Otten. The Meyers were not comfortable to travel to Wandoor by themselves, so Arlene and I offered to accompany them and thus fulfill Marie's long-felt wish. We traveled by car from Ambur to Malappuram, Wandoor and Calicut, and returned to Nagercoil by night train. The Meyers were thrilled to see the homes where the Ottens lived; the site of the dispensary started by Mrs. Mary Esther Otten (which developed into Karunalaya Hospital); and to meet the hospital staff members who are still cleaning, maintaining, and protecting the hospital even though it is closed. As well, together we visited the Henry Otten Memorial School and Christ Lutheran Church, and the grave site where Rev. Otten awaits the resurrection.

While in Chennai on the way to Ambur, Mr. Rejidas, former evangelist at the Open Door Friendship Center in Kannur, hosted us on a tour of Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, and we attended their Sunday evening English worship service. He is completing his first year of training with scholarship help from the MMS.

The Gospel Workers in Malabar are getting ready for Vacation Bible School! Please pray for growth for the Church through this effective outreach activity. †

**(To be continued in the next issue of the Malabar Mission Newsletter.)**

The **Malabar Mission Newsletter** is now available by e-mail in PDF format (requires free *Adobe Reader*). If you would prefer to receive the Newsletter in this format, e-mail your request to malabarmission@sasktel.net