

A Brief History of the CLC's Work for Him in India
(God's Work with Gideon's Band)

David Koenig

Initial Contact -- The CLC Board of Missions (BoM) received a letter from John Rohrbach, a member of Zion, Ipswich, SD, dated Dec. 10, 1981. In it he wrote, "This past summer I went to Sri Lanka and India... While there I became sick and was hospitalized for ten days. During my stay at the hospital a schoolmaster and his wife came to me with three pastors. They were looking for a Lutheran body to belong to." When John communicated this to his brethren in the CLC, there was joy aplenty which then led to action.

July 1982 -- The BoM in a supplementary report to the CLC convention made mention of a meeting with John, correspondence with both John and the contact in India, Mr. Benjamin, a West Central Conference Memorial on the issue, and a projected budget for the effort. The report stated, "Recognizing the apparent mission opportunity the Lord may be laying before us, we recommend disseminating this information about India to our people as well as pursuing various ways and means of answering this request."

January 1983 -- A visitation team representing the CLC embarked for India to investigate the field of labor around Nidubrolu, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh State, India. The team consisted of John Rohrbach and Pastors David Schierenbeck and David Koenig. They held doctrinal discussions with V.S. Benjamin in which it was observed that we were in doctrinal agreement and he was willing to continue to learn with us. David Schierenbeck as chairman of the BoM submitted the report to the president of the synod.

April 1983 -- Based upon doctrinal agreement with V.S. Benjamin's Church of the Lutheran Confession of India (CLCI) and with a prayer for a missionary to be sent, the BoM authorized the purchase of a Mission House in Nidubrolu at a cost of \$9,500. The building was then used as a residence for Pastor Benjamin and as a headquarters and meeting place of the CLCI.

Again January 1983 -- While the visitation team was in the Guntur area of India, a letter from the far southern tip of India was winging its way to the CLC/USA. Pastor Mohan Bas with his Bharath Evangelical Lutheran Church was looking for a missionary and support for their work. Like the CLCI, they were separate and had left other Lutheran churches. Pastor Bas had found our name in an international directory of Lutheran churches. He did not know of our visitation. Correspondence began with him on the teachings of the Word.

Again April 1983 -- The first meeting was held by the committee which would, under BoM supervision, oversee orphan work under Project Kinship. There was enthusiastic support to assist the orphans under Pastor Benjamin's care. In June it received its official designation of Project Kinship (Kids in Need-Source of Help for India's Poor.)

January 1984 - A visitation team was sent to India, consisting of Pastors Norbert Reim and David Koenig. They were to hold doctrinal discussions with Pastor Bas at Trivandrum and visit Pastor Benjamin and his people. Discussion disclosed an agreement on the teachings discussed and a willingness of Pastor Bas to continue in the Word.

July 1984 - The CLC Convention formally recognized that "the Holy Spirit has established fellowship between the CLC and the CLCI. With grateful hearts we praise His holy name..."The convention authorized the construction of an orphanage building to house 25-30 orphans. Though the cost eventually ran somewhat higher, the first estimate for land and building was \$11,327. John Rohrbach went over to assist in the construction.

January 1985 - Calling of a missionary to India began. As developments proceeded that year, David Koenig accepted the call.

November 1985 - Visas were applied for to enter India. Different avenues to gain entrance were investigated but proved unworkable. The BoM decided to send the missionary to Nigeria.

Late 1984 - A Bible correspondence course, developed by Pastor Bertram Naumann, was advertised in several newspapers in India, with CLC laypeople then correcting the mailed worksheets. A Mr. V. S. Willard led many young people through the course in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.

July 1986 - The CLC in convention formally recognized that confessional fellowship existed between us and Pastor Bas and the Bharath Ev. Lutheran Church (BELC). As of this date the CLCI consisted of 22 pastors and 35 congregations representing about 2,800 souls. The BELC consisted of two pastors serving six congregations with approximately 300 souls.

February 1989 - A visitation team of Pastor Norbert Reim and Mr. Lee Krueger (member of the BoM) visited our sister churches in India. Besides reporting that they thoroughly enjoyed every day they were over there, they came back with recommendations which were carried out. They recommended that three more acres be purchased, to add to the two already purchased, upon which rice is grown for the orphans. They recommended that Pastor Benjamin's Son, Jyothi, be brought to the USA for training at ILC to return then to India to assist his father in serving the Lord.

September 1989 - Jyothi Benjamin began his courses at ILC and, upon finishing the two-year program, returned to India in July 1991.

Spring 1990 - A cyclone ravaged the area where our sister church, the CLCI, is located. There was extensive damage to property. The Kinship Committee, upon learning of this, immediately sent over \$3,000, sure that our people would respond to this need. Pastor David Koenig was sent to the ravaged area to consult with Pastor Benjamin on how best to use the CLC Disaster Relief monies. By December \$34,101 had been given to help our brothers and sisters in Christ with their losses.

June 1992 - It was reported to us that the CLCI had over 30 congregations of approximately 5,000 souls. In 25 years of work by Pastor Benjamin, nearly 8,000 souls have been baptized. We were assisting in the care of 25 orphans at Nidubrolu. The BELC consisted of approximately 2,000 souls. Pastor Bas was still working outside of Madras at Uthukottai in his Martin Luther Bible School, having relocated his center of activity from Trivandrum for a while.

January 1994 - A visitation team of Pastor Daniel Fleischer and Mark Bohde was sent by the BoM "to give encouragement to our brethren...and provide us with a better understanding of the Lord's work that we are sharing in..." They returned reporting, "...most distressing beyond the physical poverty we saw was the spiritual poverty that holds the masses in its grasp. Hindu temples and shrines appear on public grounds and on private land..."

August 1995 - The Kinship Committee approved sponsorship of 15 orphans taken care of by Pastor Bas outside of Madras. The number of orphans at Nidubrolu under Pastor Benjamin was 35 at this time. Project Kinship continues to operate under the Scripture direction of James 1:27 to visit orphans in their affliction. One of the men of the Kinship Committee wrote what certainly applies to the India field, "The fields are white unto harvest and the hour is late. Doors are opening to the gospel all over the world, and we are the workers. Any question or difficulty concerning the work is first of all a call to come to our knees before our heavenly Father in Prayer...Please pray with us...that we all would clearly know His will...and then in faith to step ahead and do."

July 1997 - A visitation was carried out to India by seminarian T. Ohlmann and Pastors W. Schaller and D. Koenig. The new field of the BELC at Nellore was visited and meetings held with the preachers who want to affiliate. Many recommendations were made to the Mission Board especially in the area of training of preachers in India. It was observed that the CLCI was expanding into a new tribal area and doing repeated evangelistic efforts at Kakinada. The BELC was centered in three areas: Uthukottai, Nellore and at its beginning area in Kerala.

February 1998 - The called missionary to Nigeria was to work about three months in India each year. A preliminary visit of holding seminars and visiting congregations was conducted.

May 1998 - Pastor Jyothi Benjamin began his Bible Institute program on a two year basis at Nidubrolu. Previously in the BELC Pastor Bas had started his Martin Luther School two year training program at Uthukottai in 1990.

June-August 1999 - The first extended period of time in India of preaching and teaching in the fields was carried out.

January 2000 - A visitation was conducted by the Mission Board members, Pastor Bruce Naumann and Jack Mayhew, accompanied by Pastor Koenig.

Statistics

CLCI - There are over 5000 souls served by 44 workers. There are 6 students studying in their institute. 9 students (2000)

BELC - In the Uthukottai area there are 1926 souls served by 22 workers. In the Nellore area there are 1119 souls served by 27 workers. In the south in Kerala there are two workers serving 325 souls. Pastor Bas has seven men in the first year of training at Uthukottai.