

India 2017 Trip Report

Prepared by Ed Harrell and Russ Roberts

January 1-22, 2017



Ed kicking off the classes at Moul-Ali

Without the generous support of those contributing to our efforts, these evangelistic trips to India would not be possible. We want to express our sincere thanks to those who have contributed to our annual visits and to those who have given support to Indian preachers we have recommended. The spiritual growth in India has surpassed anything we could have imagined more than twenty years ago.

Many of the Indian preachers and congregations we have known from the beginning, when Ed and Deedee Harrell resided in Hyderabad from 1993 to 1995. Our relationship with these preachers and their families has become very strong. It is

encouraging to witness the constant spiritual growth in these individual Christians and local congregations that we've worked with for over two decades. All throughout India, many young congregations see their potential in becoming self-sufficient churches, with qualified leadership. Several of these congregations, particularly in the large cities, are now filled with well-educated young men and women. They are strong in faith and rooted in sound doctrine.

This year, we gathered a team of 11 men in order to meet the demands of the schedule. During our January trip we taught more than 400 preachers in Bible classes and Gospel Meetings and preached in more than 30 churches. We were able to visit personally with almost all of the preachers whom we have recommended for support. Specific summaries are appended to this general report for those who are supporting men based on our recommendations.

In the past seven years (particularly after the Harrell/Waldron debate in Bangalore in 2009) we have made many new contacts with able men, some of them skilled in the use of English. Still, most of the preachers we are working with speak a variety of Indian languages (including Telugu, Tamil, Kanada, Hindi, and Paiti), therefore our classes and meetings are conducted in eight large cities and nearby villages.



Nathan with Thang in Delhi



Baptism at Balanagar



Ryan in Mumbai

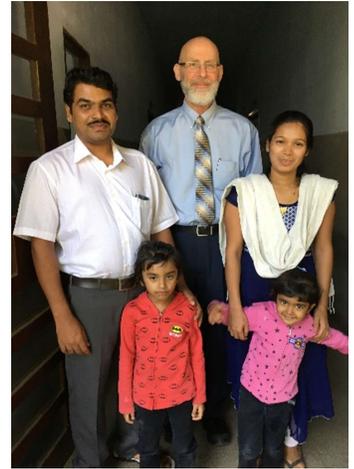
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The focus of this trip, as it has been for the last several years, is four-fold:

1. To encourage and instruct Indian Christians in classes and weekend meetings.
2. To assess the potential of the evangelists seeking support through personal interviews.
3. To teach and encourage preachers with the aim of grounding them in sound doctrine and teaching how to build solid, self-sufficient congregations.
4. To try to improve the ability of those supported by Americans to report on their work and to stay in touch with those in the United States who are interested in their work. Language remains a serious problem for many of the non-English speaking preachers.



Tom with James Ingole and his family

The Team

Although most of this year's team was composed of veterans who have been several times in the past, four of our members had either not been to India before, or had only traveled with the team once. Our new members quickly became well-adjusted to the Indian brethren and the way in which we work in India. From left to right: **Ed Harrell** (Jacksonville, FL), **David Barnes** (San Jose, CA), **Ryan Boyer** (Ellisville, MO), **Boyd King** (Wylie, TX), **Jason Cicero** (Annandale, VA), **Alan Cornett** (Lexington, KY), **Russ Roberts** (Sembach, Germany), **Tom Kinzel** (Kingsport, TN), **Nathan Johnson** (Birmingham, AL), **Lance Bowman** (Lubbock, TX) and **John Weaver** (Abilene, TX).



Schedule of Work

The team went to eight cities this year. Week long classes were conducted in Hyderabad, Delhi and Coimbatore, while one or two day classes were conducted in Mumbai, and other cities where gospel meetings were held on the weekends. Each Sunday we preached in congregations in the surrounding areas. As in the past few years, the preachers from the Northeast suggested that we not hold classes in their area this year - political unrest in that region continues and the Indian government strongly warns foreigners not to go into to these states. As a result, 16 men journeyed to Delhi from Northeast India and Myanmar (Burma) where they joined the church there for the weekend class and meeting.

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Bible Classes

<u>City</u>	<u>Team Members</u>
Hyderabad 206 attendees	Full Team
Delhi 65 attendees	Ed, Tom, Ryan, Nathan, David, Lance, John
Mumbai 50 attendees	Tom, Ryan, John, Boyd, John, Russ
Coimbatore 65 attendees	Ed, Nathan, Jason, Alan, David, Tom

Gospel Meetings and Preaching

<u>City</u>	<u>Team Members</u>
Hyderabad	Ed, Lance, David
Chennai	Tom, Ryan, David, Boyd, Russ
Coimbatore	Ed, Jason, Nathan, Alan
Bangalore/ Mysore	Tom, Ryan, Nathan, John
Delhi	Ed, Lance, Nathan, John
Mumbai	Tom, Ryan, John, Boyd, Russ
Vijayawada	Boyd, Russ

Growth of the Lord's Work in India

We have seen remarkable growth in the Lord's work in India since Ed and his wife Deedee lived in Hyderabad twenty-three years ago. In the last six years, our opportunities have grown to staggering proportions. Among the approximately 400 preachers who attended classes and gospel meetings, many came to study with us for the first time, including some seasoned and very capable preachers. The Indian churches are becoming more firmly established, grounded in the truth, and they are embracing the idea of trying to become self-sufficient. As mentioned in our last report, we have been particularly pleased in the improvement of the work in Mumbai (one of the ten largest cities in the world) which has many American visitors. Through a contact of brother Thomas David (capable preacher from Coimbatore), we are now working with an impressive young congregation in the south central part of the city. The church is made up of about 30 members, mostly under the age of 40.



Boyd preaching in Mumbai

Several of them are well-educated and English speaking. The church was able to find a rented facility in the heart of the Dharavi slum, exactly where they want to be.

Through this church, we were able to find two more impressive congregations in some of the more developed parts of Mumbai. Now American congregations have picked up the support for the preachers at each of these locations. All of these Mumbai churches are multi-language congregations.



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Evidence of Local Congregational Growth

During our interviews and personal interaction with the Indian preachers, we were able to discuss the physical and spiritual growth of each local congregation. Hundreds of photos and stories were shared by preachers, demonstrating their efforts in their perspective churches in their villages, towns and larger cities. It was edifying to our team to see how the Lord's work continues throughout the year in the local Indian congregations. The Indian preachers' photos of baptisms, gospel meetings and various bible studies were so encouraging to the Americans as the growth over the last few years was so evident.



Surender translates for Dave

Model Congregations and Individual Preachers in India

One of the major objectives of our evangelistic effort is to establish churches that will eventually develop into spiritually mature congregations, independent of foreign support. In India, planting the seed of "self-sufficiency" has been a long process. It has taken time for the local Indian brethren to understand this responsibility and to foresee that they can function as an effective congregation without relying on American brethren. During our visits, we stress to preachers and congregations the importance of becoming more self-sufficient.



Blesson translates for John



Alan teaching a class of preachers

More than 25 congregations we are working with in India are now totally self-sufficient in taking care of the needs of local churches, no longer needing American support. While the most striking examples are in the larger cities such as Hyderabad, Mumbai, Coimbatore, Delhi, and the Northeast, these churches support around twenty preachers in surrounding areas. In addition, congregations in a dozen smaller towns and villages fully support their work and a number have requested that all outside funding be terminated, including for their preachers.

An example in particular of how this self-sufficiency has become contagious among the Indian congregations, involves one of the leading men of a Mumbai congregation named Pushparaj. When he worshipped with the Balanagar church in Hyderabad, he witnessed firsthand how a congregation with similar beginnings as his in Mumbai has now developed into a well-established congregation, with qualified deacons and elders. Brother Pushparaj remarked, "we can do this." In short, the message of self-sufficiency has spread through the Indian churches to great effect.

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Reliable Indian Co-Workers

Through years of experience we have developed strong partners among the Indian evangelists. We have complete confidence in the honesty and soundness of these co-workers. They have weathered the storm from the ever present institutional influences and are constantly teaching and demonstrating how to build effective local works. Below are brief sketches of a few of the growing list of talented and devout men upon whom we depend:



Class photo at Balanagar



Ed preaching on Sunday in Delhi

V.J. Benson and **Y. Surender** (Hyderabad) preach in the strong congregations at Moula Ali and Ballanagar. Both are skilled translators and preach and teach widely throughout India. Brother Benson is the most widely-known and respected faithful preacher in India. He is the most important facilitator for our work in India. His brother-in-law, Yerra Surender, has earned the respect of many of those working in the Hyderabad area.



Benson and Soikholian

Thang Guite (Northeast and Delhi) and **Roy Ebinezar** (Madurai- South India) are both very bright and impressive young preachers who should be effective workers for many years. Both are skilled translators. They are in their early 30's and have boldly and resolutely taken stands for the truth. As a result, they and have been targets of harsh attacks. Brother Thang has been supported in his work in the Northeast and in Delhi by **Dr. T. C. Guite**, one of the most respected Christians in Northeast India, and a number of very talented and respected preachers including **S. Soikholian** and **Langkochin**. Brother Roy's father, **Panneer Das**, has preached and taught for over 30 years in South India and is highly respected among all Indian Christians. As a result from Ed's 2009 debate,

Panneer Das left his job and joined his son in building a Tamil-speaking congregation in Madurai. Many others have followed his example.

Gopal Dass (Coimbatore) taught in an institutional School of Preaching for 16 years. A fearless defender of truth, Gopal has taught scores of his former students who hold him in high esteem. He has been an important point of contact for us in the southern part of India. Gopal is an able Tamil translator and has introduced scores of new preachers to our classes. **Thomas David** of Coimbatore, an extremely skilled Tamil translator, has taught classes throughout the region and has opened several doors to sustainable congregations in the Mumbai area.

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Classes, Preaching and Interviewing- the Heart of Our Work

This year, we scheduled our week-long classes in three separate locations; Hyderabad (central India) for Telugu speaking preachers, in Coimbatore (southern India) for Tamil speakers, and in Delhi for Paitin speakers. The topics this year were practical lessons on the work of the local evangelist and congregational growth, which included *“Organization of the Church, Spiritual Qualities of a Preacher, Church Discipline, Works of a Local Church, Worship of the Local Church, Building Strong Churches, Need for Local Churches, and Lessons on Institutionalism.”* The lessons were well received. This arrangement of three classes is possible because we are now working in most of these cities with competent men who can arrange for the gospel meetings and daily classes.



Tom preaching in an evening meeting in Chennai

On Sundays and during several weekend meetings, the eleven of us preached in approximately 30 churches. Cumulatively, the team probably preached to more than 4,000 people. As usual, the meetings often resulted in baptisms (usually performed by Indian preachers). Indian brethren arranged several special events that brought together Christians from a surrounding area for meetings in tents or in a rented facility.



Jason speaking on church organization

Church Buildings

Having a public place to worship in India is highly desirable



Madurai was completed last September



New building at Raju Colony

because of the lingering influence of the abolished caste system. Many Indians are still reluctant to enter the home of someone of a lower caste and having a public meeting place overcomes those prejudices and also brings stability to a congregation.

Another reason why congregations desire their own buildings is due to the recent change in the political climate in India. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a right-wing group heavily connected to the Hindu nationalists, is currently in power. We have witnessed the influence of the BJP over the past few years as more and more Indian brethren are being vacated from public rented halls for their Sunday worship. Though the enforcement of laws varies from state to state, many churches in the larger Indian cities can no longer use schools, community halls or libraries as their place of worship. Their membership is often too large for a single house so many are searching for place of their own.

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The building at Lamka

Ed and other Americans have helped raise funds from individuals in America to aid in building over twenty buildings in India and Burma. In every case, the Indian Christians have shown the ability and a willingness to contribute to these building projects. This past year, four buildings were completed in India. The first one was at **Raju Colony** in Hyderabad. This congregation has grown to 60 members and has been established over 25 years. The building at **Madurai** was completed last September and is situated on a piece of land near the heart of the city and has the potential of residential and other real estate

development around their property. Another building was constructed at **Paidipally** outside of Hyderabad. The church purchased the land and built the foundation. This facility will provide a place of worship for a very strong and active congregation.



Lance teaching on church discipline

The last church building completed this past year was in **Lamka**, in the northeast part of India. The congregation has an average attendance of 200 each Sunday and has been an influential church in the state of Manipur for many years.

In the villages, American contributions of \$2,000/\$3,000 have enabled congregations to complete structures that they have erected with their own labor and funding. Like the United States, in India land in the large urban areas is expensive. Most of the city

churches continue to meet in rented facilities. Many are saving to try to buy property, and we do receive occasional large donations to help them. We would be happy to supply further information about current needs upon request.

This trip was very difficult for most of us due to the untimely death of **Robert Harrell** last summer. Everywhere we traveled this year, the Indian preachers expressed their condolences and shared many stories about Robert that we had not heard before. It was evident that in the few short years that Robert joined our team, he made an enormous impact upon the lives of the Indian brethren and their work in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. Traveling the same roads and staying in the same lodging as we had in previous years with Robert reminded us of the influence he had upon our lives as well. **We miss Robert so much, especially in our work here in India.**



Robert teaching in Mumbai - 2016



Sharing thoughts with Surrender between classes - 2016

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We would like to once again express our thanks to those who have had fellowship with us in this work. We interviewed approximately 100 preachers during the trip and we put particular stress on their need to have better communication with those who financially support them.

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Class attendance at Mumbai



Surender with Russ



Class photo at Mouli-Ali



Lance with preachers from NE



Ryan in Bangalore



Thomas David and Jason



Boyd in weekend meeting



Tom interviewing a preacher in Hyderabad



Alan at Coimbatore



Sermon in Delhi



Interviews- a major part of our work