

# **SOMA VISIT TO INDIA**

**March 14<sup>th</sup>-April 9<sup>th</sup> 2001**

## **REPORT**

**Edited by Don Brewin**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### (A) The invitation

This invitation originated at the 1998 Lambeth Conference, when Moderator KJ Samuel (at that time Deputy Moderator) invited SOMA to lead a “Millennium Retreat” for the bishops of the Church of South India and their wives, for April 1999. The Retreat had had to be postponed. Now Bishop KJ Samuel has become Moderator, he has resurrected the invitation.

In 1997 the Lord seemed to speak to me clearly about two different areas of the world. One of these was the subcontinent of India. I sensed God saying that the Church in India is the key to the evangelisation of the whole of that part of Asia; but if it was going to be able to fulfil His purposes, it had to wake up and begin to take seriously its call to mission.

### (B) The Team

The Moderator has throughout been keen that we should recruit a team of a seniority commensurate with that of the delegates. We are delighted that Bishop Eddie Marsh and his wife Emma (who were going to be the episcopal representatives on the previous team) are once again coming with us.

The invited members of the team (at least for the first part of the mission) were: Edwina Thomas, Eddie & Emma Marsh, Bernie & Danny Curran, Niall & Gerry Griffin, Phil Leber and Don Brewin (the team leader). However Bernie & Danny were unable to get confirmation of their flight tickets, and had to withdraw.

### (C) The travel

Eddie & Emma Marsh left home first, on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> March, spending a day of two with friends in England before continuing their journey. Edwina flew from USA on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup>, meeting up with Don Brewin and the Marsh's at Heathrow on Wednesday morning 14<sup>th</sup> for the flight to Bombay. After a long but uneventful flight, we landed there at 0030 local time on Thursday morning 15<sup>th</sup>, to be met by the minibus from the Suresha Hotel. After a thanksgiving prayer meeting at 0200 (is this a record for SOMA?!) we got to bed at 0300.

The next morning we had a leisurely breakfast, before taking a day tour of Bombay. We returned to the hotel at 1730, and after supper had a worshipful Eucharist together, one of many meaningful acts of team fellowship on the trip. We had to get up early on the Friday morning 16<sup>th</sup>, as we were required to check in at 0730 for the flight to Chennai (Madras) and Madurai. In fact we discovered that the flight had been rescheduled from 0920 to 1100 – we eventually took off at 1120, reaching Madurai at 1420.

At Madurai airport we were met by Revd Milton Jeganathan (Synod Missions Coordinator) and Revd Samuel (the Diocesan Treasurer), whose generous hospitality was only matched by the efficiency with which they cared for our every need. We were entertained to a late lunch, after which we were taken to the Hotel Supreme, where we were to stay until Phil Leber arrived in Madurai at lunchtime the next day. After an evening meal with Milton, Samuel & their wives at the hotel's rooftop restaurant, and a team meeting to pray, we were glad to get to bed, our long journey nearing its end...

The following morning (Saturday 17<sup>th</sup>) our friends gave us a conducted tour of Madurai, including the exciting fish-shaped CSI Cathedral, the Church of the Divine Patience (where one of Don's uncles had previously been the pastor), and a huge and ancient Hindu Temple. Phil arrived at lunchtime, and we set off for Kodaikanal shortly before 3pm.

The journey seemed to be going well, and we thought that the estimate of 3½ hours we had been given had been pessimistic. That was before we started climbing! We had two hours of steep hills and winding bends, when we thought we could not possibly go any higher – then we emerged around 6pm at this beautiful hill station, and our destination of the Holiday Home. We had been told that this location would be “chilly” – but we were unprepared for the cold! Everyone was forced to look for extra blankets and sweaters, and we were thankful that the staff were unfailingly helpful in this as in every other way during our stay.

After supper at 2130, the team so far met to pray; then we were delighted to hear the sound of Irish voices outside, signalling the arrival of Niall and Gerry, exhausted but relieved after a 12-hour journey from Trivandrum.

## Chapter 2

# The Bishops' Retreat

### (A) Programme

#### (1) Theme – “Be Refreshed”

God put on Edwina's heart that we should be agents of “refreshing”; and this has seemed right to the rest of the team. On 17<sup>th</sup> August Edwina wrote to the Moderator: “God the Holy Spirit is moving in wonderful ways, by refreshing His people as they worship and wait on Him – as they rest in His manifest presence. We anticipate talks directed towards the spiritual life of God's leaders...”

To quote from what Edwina wrote in her message of 6<sup>th</sup> December: ‘Worship, both Western and Indian style, should be a large portion of our ministry, as well as the concept of “resting” or “waiting” in the presence of God in worship. I expect God will release the gifts of prophecy, words of knowledge, healing, inner healing, etc. This retreat is primarily for encouragement. Surely there will be some teaching, probably about the Holy Spirit and related topics. I want us to be prepared, but my sense is that it should be in response to their expressed needs, their questions, rather than a “teaching program”.’

#### (2) Bible Teaching

Eddie had prepared to give a Bible exposition each morning. Bishop Henry Orombi, of Nebbi Diocese in Uganda, said: “You initially must help them begin to be real with one another. Small groups would be good. Where do bishops empty what is inside? ... I think you should work on turning their mind to focus on God. Bishops are used to gathering to do business. Can you help them learn to hear corporately what God is saying?”

#### (3) Daily Timetable

We anticipated each day to include some or all of the following elements:

- Worship (we had Eucharist each morning at 0815)
- Prayer
- Teaching
- Discussion, including time in couples
- Testimony
- Fellowship
- Silence, and waiting on the Lord
- Ministry

### (B) Team Preparation (Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday morning 20<sup>th</sup>)

This was a profound period of revelation from the Lord, as we waited on Him, and allowed Him to speak to us in a variety of ways. The headings below are thematic rather than chronological.

#### (1) Song

“Who is this, coming up from the wilderness,  
Leaning on the arm of the Beloved” (Cant 8:5) (Ruth Fazal)

This song, and others by Ruth Fazal, were important to Edwina and Phil in particular, in helping to create for them an atmosphere of “soaking in the presence of God”

- How can we encounter God in worship? (Edwina)
- It is hard – which is why we have come so far (Don)

#### (2) What has God been saying about this mission?

- (a) Edwina: Preparing the bride for her bridegroom – cf jars:
  - heartbreak of the virgins who had no oil
  - the cruse of oil (2 Kings 4)
  - a jar in the ark along with the tablets & Aaron's rod
- (b) Gerry: Ex 17:4-6 – “get your hands dirty”
  - Jer 31:10-14
- (c) Niall: Is 40:9-11 (“high mountains” = Kodaikanal)
  - India the focus of the new age – influences on Europe
  - Dalai Lama bringing mandalas to rivers in England & Ireland
  - Problems: no boundaries; entry points; the enemy is still “there”
  - Declare on the high mountains “Jesus is Lord”

- (d) Don: India is the key to the mission of the Kingdom in Asia
  - Radical change needed: comfort must lead to desperation; denial to truth; reliance on qualifications, to humility (Phil 3:4b-11)
  - Isaiah 62: “desolate” to “delight”; “abandoned” to “married”
  - Jerusalem: from receiving to giving; transformation requires death – Christ on the Cross; and ourselves (Romans 6:1)
- (e) Emma: God’s 3 questions to Cain:
  - Why are you angry?
  - What have you done?
  - Where is your brother?
- (f) Eddie:
  - Bishops come with an awareness of problems
  - The Lord is saying: (1) Be quiet, let me love you; (2) Do not ask “What can I do”; but “what is wrong with the body of Christ?”
  - [Don: SOMA’s founding vision: to care for the nervous system of the Body of Christ. We need to re-sensitise people to the love of God.]
- (g) Phil: a priest in Mityana had for us Isaiah 29:13f:
  - v.13 – quoted by Jesus (Matt 15:8) against the lawgivers; our traditions have often been more important than His commands
  - v.14 – impact of “wonder upon wonder”
- (h) Gerry: the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Luke 19):
  - “Untying” – the traditions
  - “the colt” is the CSI
  - their failure would result in the stones crying out in worship, and the weeping of Jesus

### (3) Dreams

#### (a) Gerry

The team was climbing a hill towards the meeting place. Edwina was behind – “She’s interceding for the Church” The Lord said “prophesy to the Church”. How are we to prophesy?

- (Palm Sunday) “The Lord has need of you”
- “Tell them My commands”
- “Untie [them] and bring them to me” ... then the colt can carry them to Jerusalem [their diocese]
- Prophesy to the Holy Spirit within them

Interpretation:

- To Bishops who have lost their spiritual vision “The Lord has need of you”
- “Tell them my commands” – they know them but had lost sight of them (Isaiah 29:13f)
- “The colt will carry them to Jerusalem [their diocese]” so that (via death & resurrection) it can become a centre of mission
- The Bishops need to invite the Holy Spirit to bring life to dry bones. They can only do this if they are cleansed channels

#### (b) Edwina

A home prepared for a wedding:

- dead flowers to be removed
- a room with glass on 3 walls
- everyone kept outside, but she went in
- the only thing in the room was a collection of Victorian dresses on clothes-racks

Interpretation:

- Façade / traditions / “trappings”
- get down to the bare foundations

**(C) The Retreat Sessions**

**(1) Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup>**

- (a) 1500 Introductory session
  - Welcomes & greetings by individuals
  - Worship
  - Don: Expectation, and Pilgrimage
  - Gerry: her dream
  - Presentation of shawls etc
- (b) 2000 session
  - Edwina: “choose to put on the shawl”
  - Eddie (1) on Genesis 4:9-13; John 15:9-12
  - Meditation verse: Matthew 17:1-8. “How do you see Jesus?”

**(2) Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup>**

- (a) 0930 session
  - Worship led by George Isaac & Lily
  - Feedback by Niall
  - Teaching: Phil “Worship & praise”
- (b) 1130 session
  - teaching & practical by Phil: “Entering into the holy place”
- (c) 1600 session
  - Eddie (2): Acts 2:1-11
  - Discussion groups
- (d) 2000 session
  - D’s testimony
  - Response: Bps Kumar, Furtado, Gladstone, Jabenasan

**(3) Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup>**

- (a) Phil ill, then healed
- (b) 1000 session
  - Niall & Gerry: testimony of Niall’s operation: fear & faith
  - Bishops’ sharing
- (c) Lunch at the Carlton Hotel
- (d) 1630 session:
  - Don: “Hearing God’s voice in a time of crisis”
  - Discussion groups (wives on their own)
- (e) 2000 Celebration:
  - Edwina: testimony of Greg’s healing
  - Bp Rufus
  - Soaking song “Who is this” sung by Phil

**(4) Friday 23<sup>rd</sup>**

- (a) 1015 session
  - Emma: monk’s advice “Become like fire”
  - Eddie (3): Luke 9:28-36
- (b) 1115 session: thanks, presents
- (c) 1900 fellowship meeting at Pradip’s parents’ house

**(D) Reports**

**(1) Phil Leber**

I returned from [the] SOMA mission deeply moved by the ways the Lord touched the hearts of the bishops of the Church of South India. The mission was quite difficult at first – it was apparent that the idea of a “retreat” was foreign to most of the bishops – but soon they became more vulnerable and shared their testimonies of extraordinary ways that God had used trials in their lives to increase their faith and their reliance on Him. It was truly a time of needed refreshment and drawing near to the presence of the Lord. Many of the bishops expressed the view that the retreat would have far-reaching effect on their ministries.

We met with nineteen of the twenty-one CSI bishops in the small village of Kodaikanal, a beautiful venue high in the mountains about four hours from Madurai in southern India. The head of the CSI, Moderator KJ Samuel, welcomed us with open arms and encouraged the bishops to take seriously the message of the Holy Spirit that we shared. One bishop asked the question, “How can we hear the Lord’s

voice in times of difficulty?” The Lord had given the team specific Scriptures that served as a backdrop for the mission, including many about the need for the power of the Holy Spirit to bring strength, healing, and direction for ministry. We were able to share these and other Scriptures to encourage the bishops to seek the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in their work.

Although the retreat was a very fruitful mission, it was not always clear that would be the case. On the first morning, I spoke about the power of the Holy Spirit in worship, and was startled when one of the bishops walked out in disagreement. I had clearly hit a raw nerve in the minds of some. The point of contention was over my description of the Biblical words “praise” and “worship”. The traditions of the CSI are so strong that my talk was seen by some as a challenge to the spirituality of the church. The bishop returned to hear the rest of my talk, but he was still confrontational. Later, we learned that the bishops were also offended by certain other things said or done by the team. Before dinner, we were very discouraged and perplexed. During our prayer together, however, the team recognized the brewing spiritual warfare and agreed with the Word the Lord gave Edwina Thomas – “be repentant, not combative”. We prayed for forgiveness of OUR pride, and not the bishops’. That evening, on behalf of the team Don Brewin asked forgiveness for anything that may have offended them. The next day, we found that the entire mood of the retreat had changed. The bishops were extremely warm and agreeable. The contentious bishop even asked if I would be coming to his diocese to teach, and expressed regret that I would not be doing so on this trip! Forgiveness reigned - the Holy Spirit had brought us together in a wonderful way.

One evening we were invited to the home of a local family where we were treated to more of the gracious hospitality that had become a part of our daily routine with the people of Kodaikanal. They asked if I would share several songs, and then shared one of their own in native Tamil language. It was a beautiful evening of memories.

My faith was strengthened to see how God had built on the solid foundation that He laid. I left a large part of my heart with the warm and incredibly hospitable people of the Church of South India.

## **(2) Edwina Thomas**

This event proved to be very difficult, and at the same time an extraordinary spiritual experience... The Bishops are used to a very different style of meeting; they were not prepared for an agenda that focused on their own spiritual relationship with God – “Refreshment”. We learned that we needed an “interpreter” to help us be aware ahead of time of some of the dynamics. The team training seemed to go well. Together we focused on being prophetic in our thoughts, actions and relationships. When we approached the “expectations” section of the training, we listened to what God had been saying to the team and to the intercessors. He had a lot to say, that day and throughout the week! It seemed that we heard from Him every morning through a team member’s previous night’s dream. We learned that the release of the prophetic was vital and powerful. We desperately needed God to lead us in words, Scriptures, songs, dreams, actions, etc., and He did in a mighty way.

The next day (Wednesday,) the SOMA retreat continued, but we made several mistakes:

- a speaker offended in their style of delivery [some mannerisms offended the bishops];
- a speaker lost some notes with important quotes and therefore seemed unprepared;
- a speaker did not adapt the message to the intellect and experience of the audience;
- I made a decision to postpone a “listening” opportunity, etc., which would have given the bishops “voice”.

God clearly directed us to respond in the opposite spirit – humility. [When Don spoke] that evening he apologized for the specific things that we had done or left undone. Because he “bowed low” on behalf of the SOMA team, there was no target left for the arrows to hit. This led to a tangible change in the spiritual atmosphere of the retreat.

On Thursday, Philip Leber awoke feeling terrible, so sick he couldn’t get out of bed. When I went to check on him, he said, “Ask the team to pray for me, and, oh, tell them I had a dream. Jennifer and I were on the way to the hospital for me to get treatment. A man who wanted to sell me a shotgun stopped us. I looked it over. The stock was beautiful, but as I looked more closely, the barrels were plastic and drooped over.” The team did pray mighty warfare prayers, knowing that this was an attack of the enemy. On our way to the early morning Eucharist, we stopped by his room. “I forgot something important in the dream” he said. “I was reaching into a mail sack when a snake, a cobra, that had been placed there bit me. That is why I was on my way to the hospital.” Niall anointed his arm where the snake had struck in the dream and also his head. A few hours later, he was shaved, showered and full of life. We felt, in retrospect, that the shotgun represented the temptation to “hit back” after the difficult things said the day before, but like the gun, would have been very ineffective.

By the time we left on Friday, we had had the opportunity to pray with some of the bishops and wives. A number of them had invited one or another of the SOMA's to come visit their dioceses. Moderator KJ Samuel has invited SOMA to focus attention on India for the next five years. In fact, God seems to be saying to us that the Church of South India is the vehicle He has chosen to take the gospel to all of central Asia.

The extended family who owned the facility where we were staying became our friends and personally attended to our every need. Rarely have we been hosted with such love and blessing. We were guests in their homes for meals, twice we were hosted in a fancy hotel, and we shared an evening of prayer and song with an intergenerational gathering of about 20 persons in the family.

**In summary of the Bishop and Wives Retreat**, I would say this: God astounded me with His leading through dreams, scriptures and words. From the beginning, He took care to reveal the "next steps". There was a release of the prophetic dimension as never before. And yet ... Looking back, all of us would wish those things had been more polished, prepared and well received. We all wish that we had made different decisions, or presented material in a different way. However, I am personally convinced that God is glad and not sad! I think that in the spiritual realm, perhaps the most effective achievement was to minister humility, it was just painful "getting there". Perhaps from God's point of view, more, much more may be achieved following our "face on the floor" experience than would ever be accomplished otherwise. Those bishops who invite us know something of the spirit in which we come.

**Yet Further Reflection on the Retreat** After being home a week, my daily discipline of Bible reading took me to 1 Peter where I found so many applicable principles. Chapter 2 speaks of submitting to rulers and masters. I know that in our heart and actions, the SOMA team submitted to the House of Bishops. I know that our presentations contained Truth and were delivered with a good heart and spirit. I believe that we endured "suffering" for doing good, something Peter calls "commendable before God" (1Peter 2:20). The chapter goes on to say in v. 23: "When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." Chapter 3 continues dealing with suffering for doing good, admonishing us "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (1 Peter 3: 15, 16).

In conclusion, walking out humility, gentleness and respect may have been God's highest calling to the SOMA team: a lesson for the Church of South India not taught by words.

**(E) On from Kodaikanal**

**(1) Saturday 24<sup>th</sup>**

- 0800 prayer with Pradip & Ashitha
- 0930 Niall & Gerry depart for Coimbatore
- 0945 Depart for Madurai
- 1300 Reach Hotel Supreme; lunch, shopping etc
- 1845 Depart for station; Milton & Samuel haggle with porters
- 1950 Sleeper train to Bangalore

**(2) Sunday 25<sup>th</sup>**

- 0715 Arrive Bangalore Cantonment; Thankamma Varkey haggled with porters
- 0745 arrive Vishranthi Nilayam ("Abode of Peace")
- 0800 breakfast, unpack etc
- 1300 lunch, then chapel to worship & pray
- Meet with Thankamma & Pushpa

# Chapter 3

## The CSI Sisters' Retreat

### (A) Introduction

#### (1) Background

Sister Thankamma had for some time been asking for a SOMA team to come to the annual Retreat for the CSI Women's Fellowship. We had arranged to go to Bangalore in 1999, immediately after the proposed Millennium Retreat for the Bishops. However, when that Retreat was postponed, we had to ask her to postpone this one as well! Sister Thankamma has had previous contact with SOMA on a number of occasions, notably at the Canterbury 98 Conferences, and the ACLC Conference in Singapore in 1999.

We were delighted to learn that the Warden of the Centre at which this retreat was to be held is Revd Pushpa Lalitha, with whom Edwina has had previous contact in the Diocese of Nagpur.

#### (2) Team

Three of the team from the Bishops' Retreat (Niall & Gerry Griffin, and Phil Leber) were unable to stay on for this Retreat. However, Revd Justus Solomon, one of the two Indian representatives on the SOMA International Board, was with us. So the team was: Don Brewin, Edwina Thomas, Eddie & Emma Marsh, & Justus Solomon.

#### (3) Teaching Themes

Sister Thankamma had said "As regards selecting the theme, there are certain issues to be considered like, empowerment of women in different areas including spiritual matters and leadership and other allied matters". So the team were asked to pray in advance about the following topics:

- The spiritual life of God's leaders
- The work of the Holy Spirit
- Developing renewal in a Diocese
- The leadership of women in Indian Christian culture

At a preliminary meeting with Sister Thankamma, additional ideas were shared:

- Encouragement
- Renewal in the Holy Spirit
- Worship

In the event, the programme for this Retreat "emerged" day by day ...

### (B) Daily Programme

0730	Morning Devotions
0815	Breakfast
0930	Session
1100	Tea
1130	Session
1300	Lunch, followed by team meeting
1500	Session
1600	Tea
1730	Session
-1830	
1930	Supper
2030	Evening devotions
-2130	

### (C) Diary

#### (1) Monday 26<sup>th</sup>

0730	Devotions: Eddie
	- Psalm 84
	- Luke 9
	- "Actions speak louder than words"
	- "Keep your promises"

- 1100 Opening Session
- Introductions, prayer for SOMA team
  - Introductions by Sisters
- 1530 Session: Emma
- Things in the past which can prevent us from receiving God's refreshment
  - Song: "Come to the waters, stand by my side;  
I know you are thirsty, you won't be denied.  
I felt every tear-drop that in darkness you cried  
And I want to remind you that for those tears I died."
- 1645 Session: Don (testimony)
- 3-fold crisis
  - Tears bring transformation
- 2030 Evening devotion: led by Edwina
- Worship
  - Invitation to the Holy Spirit: ministry, prayer for healing, prayer in 3's
- (2) **Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup>**
- 0730 Devotions: Justus
- Psalm 51
  - Luke 7:36 ff: example of a woman who gave sacrificially
  - Acts 1:8 – power for witness
- 0930 Session: Edwina
- Report back on last night: repentance, reassurance
  - The work of the Holy Spirit
- 1130 Session: Don
- "Listening to God"
- 1500 Session; Eddie
- Ephesians 4:14-15: "How can we remain firm?"
- 1700 Memorial Service for Revd Sister Betty Paul
- 2030 Evening devotions: Emma
- Worship
  - Sharing
  - "Move out to pray blessings on one another"
  - Report forms
- (3) **Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup>**
- 0730 Morning Devotions: Emma
- Psalm 133
  - "Bind us together Lord"
- 0900 Final session - Holy Communion: Eddie
- Readings: Psalm 122; Hebrews 12:1-2; John 13:1ff
  - Sermon: Don "The Holy Spirit at work in transformation"
  - Foot-washing
  - Communion
- 1145 Visit to slum area
- 1400 Many Sisters departed; Justus left for Vellore  
Tidying up, washing, shopping, chatting!
- (4) **Thursday 29<sup>th</sup>**
- 0730 Devotions: Don
- Psalm 145 (see message from Hilary)
  - Romans 8:18-27 – "the three groans"
- 0930 Visit to United Theological College
- (5) **On to Vellore (Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> contd)**
- 1400 Depart for station (porters require Rs150 for our 14 pieces of luggage!)
- 1440 Train arrives, not much time to load up ...
- 1810 Reach Katpadi  
Help from Joseph (a "SOMA Angel"), an engineer whose wife is Dr in Bangalore  
Brief chat with Justus, who was about the leave back to Trivandrum.

## **(D) Reports**

### **(1) From Edwina's report to her intercessors (see below):**

Team members found rest and refreshment for ourselves in the middle of Bangalore at the oasis where the sisters have their mother house (along with a guest house, offices, and the headquarters of the Women's' Fellowship of the Church of South India (CSI). The large trees spangled the courtyard with shade and sun and harbored some interesting birds to notice.

The retreat for 18 or 20 sisters was held in the chapel, a structurally round building from the 60s. A number of the sisters were retired and lived on the compound ("characters" who should write books!); others had traveled long distances by train or bus to attend. The time was precious, really sweet. None of us will forget a time of ministry one evening when the nuns were praying for each other. Don and a group of three or four ended up face down on the floor. Two sisters and I were draped around each other and other little groups of folk were praying or just sitting together in God's presence.

While in Bangalore we visited a slum where Sister Thankamma Varkey, General Secretary for the Sisters and for the CSI Women's' Fellowship, has begun a work. We visited pre-school classes held in a tiny building, the same shelter where a health worker visits each week. We walked through unbelievable filth to visit with folks with smiling faces and indomitable spirits. I will not forget this. [Do read *City of Joy* by Dominic LaPierre, if you have not yet done so.]

### **(2) Feedback from the Sisters** (some translated from Tamil)

- In this retreat there was good time to listen to God and hear the Word of God. There was united worship when there was time to listen to God. The ability to understand the English language was not a barrier when expression in one's own language was allowed to be used which is good. I could relax with Jesus which I needed.

- I learned how to be with my co-workers. If any problem arises, I have to change, not the others. Demonstration – soft vessels. It is very useful to me. I could confess all the obstacles that hinder the Holy Spirit not to fill me.

Your SOMA group's humbleness made me think how I am. Really I thank God that He brought me here to be with Him these days. I expected that all the times must be just preaching, but I had different experiences, sharing and praying. It was very nice. I felt more unity.

You asked us to go and bless others. I did not do this because I am not worthy to go and bless others. Everybody put their hand upon others and blessed. I did not dare to do.

- Actions speak louder than words – the love, oneness not only among yourselves but with us and the humility of the SOMA group witnessed what the Lord can do to us and me.

The Lord helped me to empty an unwanted thing in me.

The Lord put a greater burden and a stronger conviction and hope that desert life of people could blossom through God's compassion in us and prayers.

God's persistent love changing our nature through the Holy Spirit brought to my mind His loving dealings with me, and filled me with praises and adoration and a determination to see people and circumstances with Christ's eyes.

Listening to God and others – sometimes I hurry and may God help me to be always available to Him and others. The conviction that it is an opportunity and responsibility God has put in my mind more firmly.

Control of my thinking, feeling and action by the Holy Spirit, uninterrupted by "self" in my may our Lord help me to maintain.

The Lord reminded me how troubles were blessings in disguise leading me closer to Him and making me a blessing to others. I praise God for the same.

I experienced closer fellowship with the Sisters and was soaked in God's presence through the Retreat. I came expecting God to give me a greater love for Him and for others. A deeper love and revival among all the Sisters. This our Lord wonderfully fulfilled through your ministry – praise the Lord!

- I enjoyed the stillness and quiet through which I was able to feel the presence of the Lord and moving of the Holy Spirit comforting, strengthening and encouraging during the worship time. The whole sessions were encouraging to face challenges that stand before us with the assurance of God's leading and guiding even in our weakness and unworthiness. Praise the Lord and thanks for your love and concern to lead us closed to the Lord. Thank you.

- As Christians we had been singing and praying and enjoying God's gifts. God expects us to pour on these blessings to those who do not experience the Holy Spirit. We have to pray for those with whom we work.

In many villages they don't accept the ministry of women. So pray for change of mind for the pastors and the Church people to accept the ministry of women in Church, even some women who object. So the pastors wife are jealous – so please pray that God should open a way for women's ministry and proper understanding and acceptance from other women. There are more farmers who own land and get money they don't accept the women's' activities by giving wrong guidance to work against the Churches and win people with their money.

- When you prayed for me, God told me to take courage and be brave. Thank you.

- After I came here, the pain in the leg has reduced – I want the Lord to heal me completely and ask for prayers.

I want to be a channel of grace to let flow the Holy Spirit to bring the joy and peace to many people and thus to be a blessing to all around me.

I do not know much English and so I was asking the Lord to make me understand what you spoke and the Lord helped me so I learnt to rely on the Lord in all my need.

- Because this is Lenten season, I expected some messages on the sufferings of Christ on our devotions. I expected some messages on the sufferings of Christ on our devotions. Even though it was not as to my expectation to know and experience the power of the Holy Spirit was very helpful. Because I had a cold, I stayed away from the group but the leaders came and prayed laying hands on my head and I felt filled with the Holy Spirit and I praise God and thank you for your prayers.

- When I attended some meetings I expected to get some spiritual food. I feel glad that I attended these meetings. I received more blessings than what I expected. Being strengthened in the power of the Holy Spirit, I can do my ministry with more power and in His Holiness.

- I learnt that it is essential to receive the Holy Spirit. I learnt that He can do miracles. Just like how Samaritan woman witnessed to her people and brought them to Christ, I will also minister to the people around me and win them for Christ.

I need the gift of tongues. I wish that these meetings could be extended for two more days. I have learnt much and am eager to learn and experience more.

- The Lord helped me to remove obstacles. But for years I have a longing in my heart that I must have a sign that I am filled with the Holy Spirit. This time also I did not get that. But I believe the promise that He has sealed me with the Holy Ghost.

- The Retreat [made] me examine myself before God and renew my spiritual life.

Whatever may happen, I have to trust in the Lord who is always the same, faithful to His children. We are all travellers in this world whichever way we have to travel – always we have to ask the Holy Spirit to guide our path.

- I have attended a lot of Charismatic Conferences and meetings, but this was a small group with free heart and openness shared. My inner hurt was released but pray that it may not disturb me again and again.

More time [needed] to be given for shared prayers as two days were not enough.

Thanks for all the team that we shared so much. We like you to come again to teach and for prayer and share again.

# Chapter 4

## The Diocese of Vellore

### (A) Introduction

#### (1) Background

The original suggestion for this visit came from Justus Solomon, following a discussion he had had with the Bishop. When we were planning the visit to the Bishops' Retreat, a number of suggestions were made regarding dioceses that members of the team might visit for a SOMA mission while were in India. Don wrote to Bishop Rufus, and his formal invitation to us was the result.

#### (2) Team

The SOMA team was as for the Sisters' Retreat (Don, Edwina, Eddie & Emma). It was unfortunate that Justus Solomon was not able to be with us. The Bishop had been asked if he could appoint a team from the Diocese, numbering the same as the SOMA team, to work with us, in planning, prayer ministry, translation etc. Possible people for such a team in the future were discussed during this visit.

### (B) Suggested themes:

#### (1) General:

SOMA has been working recently on the theme of "Community Transformation". It is important that we do not skate round the necessity of teaching about the baptism of the Holy Spirit as an essential foundation for renewal, and giving an opportunity for ministry in the power of the Spirit early in the programme.

In addition, we were told that there had been some deep divisions in the Diocese, the nature of which had not been made clear. It was important therefore that we taught about forgiveness and reconciliation, and gave a practical opportunity for this to take place amongst the clergy.

#### (2) Topics suggested in advance for the daytime teaching sessions:

- Introduction to Teaching Theme
- The work of the Holy Spirit
- What can help bring about God's purposes for our community?
- What can hinder that process?
- Forgiveness and reconciliation
- Key elements in the history of our community
- Healing of the land
- Where do I really belong ?
- What kind of leadership does our community need?
- How can our community discover God's peace?

#### (3) Titles suggested in advance for the inspirational teaching in the evening "celebrations":

- "What attracts the presence of God to our communities?"
- "Sanctified hearts & lives"
- "Forgiveness in practice"
- "What is God saying to my community now?"

### (C) Daily Timetable

0730	Breakfast
0830	Morning Worship (led by the diocesan clergy)
0900-1030	First Teaching Session
1030	Break
1100-1230	Second Teaching Session
1300	Lunch & Rest; Team Meeting to review programme
1500-1630	Third Session – Practical Session / Workshops etc
1630	Feedback / Discussion etc
1800	Supper
1900-2030	Celebration (Worship, Testimony, Teaching) & Ministry

**(D) Diary**

**(1) Thursday 29<sup>th</sup>**

1810 On arrival at Katpadi, taken by bus to the Nursing School in Vellore, for their Graduation Service. Needed to wash, so taken to the Guest House – but “the man with the key had gone ...”  
1915 Arrived at the end of the Graduation Ceremony at the church opposite  
2000 Supper  
2100 Somewhat hairy drive back to Katpadi  
2200 Arrived at the Guest House. Another SOMA Angel (Chris, a US Doctor) helped us, as no staff were in evidence. He found one of the wardens, and eventually 4 rooms with AC were prepared.  
2330 Lights fused when Don tried to use the electric kettle ...

**(2) Friday 30<sup>th</sup>**

0600 Set off for nursing school (still no light in GH)  
0700 Morning devotions: Eddie – “the foolish landowner”  
Tour of hospital. Met 6 YWAM nurses on placement, including Moana (from NZ, via Diocese of Bor) & Kate (who met Niall & Gerry at DTS in Ireland)  
Visited schools: Teacher Training, Village school project  
1300 Lunch in hotel  
1430 Return to GH. Still no power – found a (dead) snake in the fuse box. Electrician came, removed the snake and the faulty kettle, and things began to work!  
1630 Suresh (Bishop’s Chaplain) came to discuss the programme  
1900 Supper  
1930 TV Room – BBC World News  
2000 Team meeting: shared feelings re role, embarrassment etc

**(3) Saturday 31<sup>st</sup>**

0915 Team meeting:  
- Emma: “Not a message, but a mission”  
- Edwina: The Lord leading her into a new form of mission service  
- Don: Need for team to listen to each other as individuals  
1000 Leave for Katpadi Industrial Institute:  
- Metalwork, electronics, carpentry  
- Devotional service:  
- Eddie: talk  
- Don: closing prayer “Lord Jesus, Master Carpenter of Nazareth ..”  
- Presents: garlands, trays  
- Lunch  
1400 Return to Guest House, preparation  
1650 Team meeting (including supper at 1900, brought by Nathan (driver), his wife Violet and their grandchildren):  
- Issues re George W Bush’s rejection of Kyoto Agreement  
- Plans for Ordinands’ Retreat  
- Plans for Clergy Conference

**(4) Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> April**

0700 Breakfast  
0730 Depart: Don, Edwina to Katpadi, Eddie & Emma on to Vellore  
0830 Morning Service at Katpadi (Holy Communion)  
- Don on 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (followed by summary in Tamil)  
- (Whole row changed at a time, after “Benediction”; then many left church!)  
Morning Service at St Paul’s Vellore: Eddie preached  
1130 Met up again at St Paul’s Church (new building)  
Lunch at home of Mrs Marianna Wilson (Treasurer of building project)  
1300 Talk with Revd Jacob, pastor of St Paul’s  
1400 Transfer to Bishop’s House for rest  
1530 Confirmation at CMC Memorial Church: Eddie preached (Acts 1:8)  
1800 Supper at Dr George Matthew’s (Director of CMC)  
1930 Called at house of Dr Savarirayan after news of his DD  
2000 Debrief at Bishop’s House

(5) **Monday 2<sup>nd</sup>**

(a) **Dream**

In a living room, neat & tidy, watching someone moving about the room. Comes to a corner cupboard (TV?), pulls it out, finds dirt, rubbish, cobwebs behind. Looks for something to remove this, but finds nothing – so pushes the cupboard back again.

Interpretation:

- we cannot deal with sin
- we often prefer the illusion of neatness

Who does this refer to?

(b) **Ordinands' Retreat**

1030 Welcome and introductions. There were 7 present: Edwin, Emmanuel, Kennedy, Meshak, Nityanandam (“Niti”), Priem Rajaparam, and Ravachanbran (“Rav”). All except Kennedy were deacons awaiting priesting.

1100 Session 1: Eddie

- your call & your motives:
- key questions in the ordination service

1215 Session 2: Don

- The place of the Bible
- Devotional study
- Leading worship

1400 Session 3: Emma

- What about your family?
- What about your prayer life?
- Who prays for YOU?

1500 Session 4: Edwina

- What is true spiritual authority?
- “Equipping the saints” (promise to share ministry)

(c) **Voorhees College Candle lighting service**

Voorhees College is a university college linked to the Diocese. This is an annual occasion for the final year students. We were expecting Eddie to give the address, but the Bishop invited Don to speak just as we were waiting in the Principal's Office.

The service was in very traditional English, and seemed to follow the same pattern each year. Two students led thanksgiving prayers, and the service included the Methodist Covenant Renewal, as a prayer of dedication by those students who were about to leave. The final act was a candle-lighting, passed from the platform to the students via the Heads of Department. Then everyone processed outside, trying hard to keep the candles lit for the group photographs which followed.

The Principal and senior Staff then entertained the team and the Bishop's party to dinner at a local hotel.

(6) **The Clergy Retreat (Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> – Thursday 5<sup>th</sup>)**

(a) **Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup>**

1100 Opening Session: Welcome & introductions

1210 Session 1 – Edwina “The work of the Holy Spirit”

1500 Session 2 – Don: “Renewal is for the world”

1630 Group Discussion – “Why does the Gospel flourish more in some places than others?”

1830 Celebration:

- Worship songs
- Testimony from Eddie & Emma
- Prayer Ministry (4 pairs: SOMA team + team chosen from Diocese)

(b) **Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup>**

0930 Morning Devotions – Revd Paul on Mark 2:1-12

1000 Bible Study (1) – Eddie: “Leadership – (1)”

- A leader must be a visionary
- The importance of belonging
- Follow the Leader – Jesus Christ
- Leaders must be people of prayer
- Leaders must wait upon God for future direction

- 1130 Session 3 – Don: “God’s purpose for our communities”
- 1430 Session 4 – Don: “What is God saying about our community?”
- Questions and comments encouraged but not forthcoming!
  - Stories of reconciliation from the team
  - (session lengthened because tea was delayed ...)
- 1700 Group Discussion: “What is there about the history of your community in the past which has affected things today?”
- 1930 Celebration – Edwina: “Overcoming Evil in our Community”
- Testimony from Bp’s Amah (Sheela)
    - Vellore founded after a mutiny (1857)
    - Community of Dalits who were united then
    - Now divisions have arisen as a result of a desire for power
    - Resolution only through prayer and fasting
  - Edwina: pain of the past is the key to the present power struggle
  - Revd John:
    - Vellore is a city of healing & redemption (through CMC)
    - “7 Wonders of Vellore” need healing:
      - A river without water [“Living water”]
      - A fort without a king [Jesus is the King]
      - A police force without power [Power of God]
      - A college without knowledge
      - A temple without a god [Jehovah is the True God]
      - Hills without trees [Ecological balance]
      - Women without beauty [Sexism → equality]
    - Need to repent of experience of being “untouchable”
  - Prophetic Reading: Isaiah 62
  - Prayer Ministry: Jabez Prayer (1 Chron. 4:9) in 3’s
- (c) **Thursday 5<sup>th</sup>**
- 0730 Team meeting
- 0915 Holy Communion in Henriette de Valois Memorial Chapel
- Reading: Isaiah 62
  - Sermon by Bishop Rufus:
    - Follow out this change of name
    - Does God rejoice in our ministry?
    - Work together to make the sound of Zion a reality here
- 1045 Session 5 – Eddie “Leadership –(2)”
- Leaders need to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit
  - Relationship between husband and wife
  - A call to holy living
  - Resist the temptation to be spectacular, or to hold onto the glory
  - We need to allow God to love us
- 1200 Feedback “What is God saying?” (8 groups, then 4, then 2 ...)
- Minister with experience of the Holy Spirit
  - Reconciliation and renewal
  - Sharing of leadership resources
  - Leadership based on value system; transparency & integrity
  - Holiness and prayerfulness
  - Obedience to the word of God – Bible study focussing on the mission of the Church
- 1255 Closing word – Don:
- Psalm 84:6
  - Grace must permeate nature, rather than the reverse
- 1310 Closing session: thanks from
- Revd Dr Savariryam
  - Revd Dr Satyi Clarke (son of Bp Sundar Clarke, who teaches at UTC Bangalore, and specialises in Dalit Theology)
- 1500 Rest at hostel in local school for orphan girls

- 1700 Visit the Kasam Agricultural Institute, conservation & tree-planting project  
 1830 To house of Director, Samuel Sankar, & wife Mary (Dr, leprosy specialist)  
 - Review with Bishop Rufus (see below)  
 - Supper  
 2130 Return to Guest House
- (7) **The last few days**
- (a) **Friday 6<sup>th</sup>**  
 0800 Leave for BN Pilayam (in Andhra Pradesh, but still in Diocese)  
 0930 Breakfast at pastor's house  
 1030 Met by procession: firecrackers, water & camphor poured on the road  
 "Beating the bounds" under umbrellas (sunshades)  
 Dedication of community centre  
 1100 Dedication service:  
 - PA system not helped by people sitting on the wiring  
 - Reading: Psalm 84  
 - Address – Don: 3 journeys  
 - Presentation of shawls to everyone ...  
 1400 Return to Vellore via Chittore  
 1600 Tour of CMS Hospital  
 1645 Check return tickets  
 1730 Tour of Vellore Fort  
 1830 Return to Bishop's House  
 2030 Supper at River View Hotel  
 2300 Return to Guest House
- (b) **Saturday 7<sup>th</sup>**  
 0930 Team debriefing meeting  
 1200 Leave for Bishop's House  
 Lunch, shopping  
 1500 Leave for Ponnai for Harvest Festival  
 - 107 year-old tradition: stalls, drama etc  
 - Many people came forward for prayer  
 - Preaching went on to the (mostly uninterested) crowds  
 1900 Return to Vellore  
 2130 Supper at Guest House: bread etc
- (c) **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> – Palm Sunday**  
 0715 Load up luggage & depart for Vellore  
 0745 Eddie & Emma at Central Church  
 0830 Edwina & Don join procession of congregation of Church of the Redeemer,  
 from old church to new church  
 0900 Morning service:  
 - Were we expected?  
 - Translation needed but not provided ...  
 - Address, followed by invitation to receive blessing from God  
 1100 Return to Bishop's House, shower & change, lunch  
 1200 Depart for airport  
 1430 Arrive at Chennai Airport

(8) **The journey home**

The journey to the airport took less time than we expected, so we had to sit and wait until we could check in for the flight to Mumbai. Eventually we were allowed to board and the flight was uneventful. We then took a shuttle to a local hotel where we rested and had supper, until it was time to return to the airport (international terminal) to check in with BA. This was long-drawn out, with a departure tax suddenly required, but there were no other problems. We eventually boarded – a full flight to London so no horizontal meditation, but some sleep nevertheless.

The team were decommissioned at Heathrow, where Edwina, Eddie & Emma transferred to their cross-Atlantic connections and thence to home. Don returned to a country under siege, with foot-and-mouth disease causing havoc to the rural population and the tourist industry.

**(E) Edwina's summary report**

This diocese is an interesting place, and we spent much of our time discerning roots of the current situation. Bishop Rufus was elected recently because he refused to participate in corruption, the exchange of money for votes, parish assignments, favors, etc. This tells us that the past included these very practices. The divisions among clergy leaders are deep. Factions have taken the diocese [read, "Bishop"] to civil court. Verbal attacks on Bishop Rufus continue; and we need to pray for him.

Most of the 60 clergy attended parts of the retreat, but about 5 who oppose the bishop refused to come. Of those who came, almost all received ministry. The retreat was structured around "Healing Community Memories". In our presentations, we learned that 100% of the clergy come from the Dalits, formerly known as the "untouchables". It is not that the Dalits were lowest of the caste system, they were not considered in the caste system at all: they were "no people". The pain of this is still felt today. One priest expressed to me "I often ask God why I had to be born into so much pain". It occurs to me that this is very like the deep racism that has caused pain and anger among people groups in the USA.

I believe that a heritage of being "no people", and therefore having no position and no power, is perhaps the root of striving for position and power in the diocese today. [This idea needs to be further discerned and tested in this diocese and others across CSI where SOMA will work.]

God led us to speak Is. 43 as a prophetic word to the diocese. We believe it was received because the next morning, the bishop used this scripture as he preached in Tamil to his clergy. Bishop Eddie presented a series of Bible studies on leadership that were meaningful to the clergy: have a big vision; belong together; follow Jesus; be people of prayer; allow God to love you; be transformed by the Holy Spirit; strengthen the relationship between husband and wife; live a holy life; resist the temptation to be spectacular; reach the deepest problem (to love and be loved.)

Bishop Rufus has invited SOMA to return.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Diocese of Coimbatore**

#### **Report from Niall Griffin**

Gerry and I travelled from Kodaikannal to Coimbatore on Sat.24<sup>th</sup> March by taxi, arriving late afternoon. We were looked after by Bishop and Mrs Durai, in one of the diocesan guest rooms.

On Sunday we attended the church in the compound (All Saints) and spoke about SOMA after the main Service. Those who remained were very interested in the healing ministry and the power of the Holy Spirit. There happened to be 54 doctors in the congregation! They would welcome further contact.

On Monday and Tuesday all the clergy were gathered for their annual "Retreat" at which the Moderator of the CSI addressed them. We also had several opportunities to speak to the clergy.

During Wednesday and Thursday we visited other parts of the diocese and met a variety of people. Before we left we talked with the bishop about the possibility of a further SOMA visit to the diocese. The outcome was that he has invited us to bring a team to the diocese in early June 2002.

We travelled from Coimbatore to Trivandrum by train on Friday 30th March to meet Bishop Gladstone (South Kerala diocese) and stayed as his guest until we got our flight home on Sunday 1st April.

We sounded him out about a future SOMA visit and he confirmed that he would be in touch with Edwina about the possibility of a visit to his diocese combined with a neighbouring diocese.

The whole trip does seem to be bearing fruit for SOMA.

# Chapter 6

## SOMA's Future Work in India

### (A) Introduction

#### (1) South and North

It is clear that the Church of South India, although faced with many problems, has an internal coherence and structure which gives it a strong foundation for continued development, especially as a source of future mission to the countries to the north.

At this present time the Church of North India is recovering from the tragic death of the Moderator in a road accident. In addition, it is situated in an area of political and religious ferment. They need our prayers at this time.

Although SOMA national bodies will continue to send teams to different individual dioceses in the North, my own view is that the South is better prepared for inter-diocesan strategic mission, and that therefore SOMA should focus more on CSI at the present.

#### (2) A vision and a challenge

Before this visit we had the sense from the Lord that He wanted to use the Christian Church in India as His agents in the evangelisation of the whole of that part of Asia. This sense was reinforced in various ways during the visit.

The Moderator of CSI has issued a challenging invitation to SOMA to give special attention to India over the coming 5-year period. This period extends beyond his present term of office. He is eligible for re-election for a second two-year term, but this is not automatic. We therefore need to pray that whoever is the Moderator during this period, SOMA will actually be given favour by the episcopal leadership.

#### (3) Increasing persecution

Although the South of India has not yet experienced much overt persecution, the discrimination against Christians in the area of jobs, allocation of college places etc is notable. In the North, the effect of the policy of the fundamentalist Hindu BJP Government is more marked, with overt persecution of Christians. This is beginning to spread southwards into CSI territory, in Andhra Pradesh etc.

Many short-term mission teams have up to now been able to enter India on tourist visas. This is now coming under increasing scrutiny. Even though SOMA teams do not get involved in evangelism (which is the particular target of the Government), teams are being advised by the Moderator to apply for a visa to enable them to teach at Christian seminars. A clear letter of invitation is required for this, which the Moderator has agreed to supply.

### (B) SOMA's relationship with the Church in India

#### (1) In the past

Different SOMA national bodies have sent teams to India.

Teams have gone to CNI Dioceses from Australia

Teams have gone to CSI Dioceses from Ireland, UK, USA, and joint teams involving all 3!

#### (2) Lessons from the Bishop's Retreat

##### (a) From Don's report to intercessors:

The Bishops' Retreat will probably emerge later as being a defining moment for SOMA - but at the time it was very difficult. Although we believe we sensed the Lord's word correctly, that we should focus on "Refreshment", we made some mistakes in the way we conducted some of the sessions. The Lord enabled us to respond to the negative statements made, by "going low" in genuine humility - and this led to a tangible change in the spiritual atmosphere.

##### (b) An "interpreter" for SOMA in CSI

SOMA International is blessed with two representatives from CSI – the present Moderator, Most Revd KJ Samuel; and Revd Justus Solomon. Both of these have a great deal of wisdom on the situation in CSI, and can facilitate invitations for us into key dioceses or regions.

We also need to work more closely with Revd Dr Milton Jeganathan, Justus Solomon's successor as the Director of the Department of Mission & Evangelism in CSI. He was very supportive of our work, extremely helpful in every way, and we wished we had had more of his wisdom earlier in this visit!

**(3) The effect of this Bishop's Retreat**

It is too early to say in detail, but we can note the following outcomes so far:

**(a) On the Bishops**

It was interesting to see the change in their attitude (particularly those Bishops who have not previously had a SOMA team) during the course of the Retreat, from suspicion to a more positive respect. We need to give God thanks for this. One indicator of this change has been the amount of interest expressed in teams coming to CSI Dioceses in the future – see the list below.

**(b) On SOMA**

As the team faced some severe criticism (some of which was deserved), we had to discern together before the Lord how we should respond. Two key points come to mind:

- Without falling into the trap of false abasement, to respond to criticism “in the opposite spirit”, in repentance and humility.

- Recognising that we had made mistakes, to hold onto the original vision we believed the Lord has given us for the Retreat, both in subject matter and in methodology

- The team leaders were able to work together by the grace of God, on a new level.

- In a challenging situation, the team were enabled to work prophetically.

We need to ask the Lord how this might affect our policy for such missions in the future.

**(C) SOMA's strategy in southern India in the future**

**(1) Existing invitations from CSI Dioceses in India**

**(a) Australia**

- Madhya Kerala

**(b) UK**

- Krishna-Godavari

**(2) Contacts, and/or indications of future invitations**

**(a) Ireland** Coimbatore, Jaffna, Medak, South Kerala, Tirunelveli (or USA)

**(b) UK** Dornakal, Rayalaseema, Trichy-Tanjore (or USA), Vellore

**(c) USA** Chennai, Madurai-Ramnad, Nandyal, North Kerala (via Phil Leber),

South Kerala (or Ireland), Tirunelveli (or Ireland)

**(d) Other** David Harper has been invited by Zac Koshy to speak in Kerala

early in 2002

**(3) Towards a corporate SOMA strategy in the CSI region of India**

**(a)** In discussion with the key leaders and “interpreters” in India, discern dioceses in different regions which have a vision for mission. This might be arranged in relation to the four main language groups in the region (Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil & Telugu). Possibilities might be as follows:

- Karnataka: Karnataka South (Kannada)

- Kerala: East Kerala (Malayalam)

- Tamil Nadu: Vellore (Tamil)

- Andhra Pradesh: Medak (Telugu)

**(b)** Discuss the possibility of “two-phase” regional conferences in each of these centres, during 2002.

**(c)** Discuss the possibility of a major SOMA-sponsored convention for CSI in 2003, in the Silver Jubilee year of SOMA.

# Appendix

## Intercession

### (A) Reports from Intercessors, via Hilary Steynor

#### (1) From Lesley Cooper (UK) dated 29<sup>th</sup> March

Good to hear news of India. For the last couple of days I have been led to pray for the team that the Lord will “strengthen their weak knees”. When I looked it up, Hebrews 12:12, it comes in a whole section on disciplining God’s sons. Although the team were in Bangalore when I first received it, I felt it was for Vellore. Just a hunch!!!

#### (2) From Stuart Ringrose (UK) dated 1<sup>st</sup> April

It is so good that Don is able to find time to report back to us as he does, particularly in the middle of such a busy schedule. Please assure him of the way this makes us feel included and actively involved in this most valuable work in the Lord.

We continue to pray that God will continue to uphold him and all the team as they have now moved on to the Diocese of Vellore and particularly for a fruitful outcome to the discussions with the Bishop of Dornakal.

#### (3) From Rose Marie Edwards (USA) dated 2<sup>nd</sup> April

Phone call from India, exciting!

My PC is out of business and I am looking for a replacement. It was a very rarely used PC so far as PC use goes, however that seems beside the point.

A general sense of refreshing and blessing follows prayer for India. That they should be made one as we are one, echoes, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. The Bishops and their wives, followed by the Bishops and their clergy, followed by the Bishops and clergy being of one mind, one heart, one Lord, one mission with the body of Christ in India. The Lord being the very air they breathe.

#### (4) From John Watson (UK) dated 29<sup>th</sup> March

Thank you for sending the various prayer news and requests. I am often on the move and am able to draw down all you send through my GSM phone. The recent news from Don and Edwina in India sounds very significant and most encouraging. Just let them and the teams out there know that they are often in our prayers and thoughts.

#### (5) From Hilary Steynor to all Intercessors, dated 4<sup>th</sup> April

Thanks for your greetings and encouragements for the Team as they moved to Vellore. Don hasn’t made contact since they arrived, but his last Briefing was very full. I’m only sorry that I haven’t yet been able to pass on the words from you - but they will tie-in and encourage in retrospect.

The word that is with me today is “Expectation”. Others have felt that, at this late stage, we should pray that the Team will be strengthened, especially Hebrews 12:12 “feeble arms and weak knees” (but note also the context of disciplining God’s children and its relevance to the Team’s task). Let’s pray that, as they are strengthened, so the expectation will enable the Spirit to do His work. And keep praying for good health, right up until they land on Monday, and beyond!

### (B) Messages sent to Intercessors from India

#### (1) From Kodaikanal, dated 19<sup>th</sup> March

We are now settled in this hill station - beautiful but very cold at night, being 7,200 feet! Everyone is fit and well, and aware of your prayers. We are praying for you.

The Lord has been preparing us for the arrival of the Bishops tomorrow morning, and the start of the Retreat tomorrow afternoon. He has been encouraging us to listen to Him in different ways. Especially we have been led through a dream that Gerry had, to go to the story of Jesus about to enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, with some key statements:

- \* The Lord has need of you
- \* Tell them My commands
- \* Untie it [them] to bear my Son to Jerusalem [their own home place]

#### (2) From Bangalore, dated 29<sup>th</sup> March 2001

Thank you so much for your prayers - we have been aware of them!

We finished the Sisters’ Retreat yesterday, and are preparing to travel to Vellore this afternoon, where we are expected to go straight away to a meeting of the Nurses’ Christian Fellowship at the Christian Medical College Hospital - one of the most famous Christian Hospitals in Asia.

The Sisters who came to the Retreat - about 18 of them, from different parts of India - were transparent in their openness to the work of the Lord. They need a great deal of encouragement as they have not been well treated by the Bishops (and sometimes the Bishops' wives), and as women are looked down on anyway. Their dedication to work amongst the children and other disadvantaged groups in the villages has been a challenge to us. Please pray for them. We just had a small group, as many of them were finishing their accounting for the financial year which ends on 31st March - but this meant that we could really get to know the ones who came.

After the Retreat finished yesterday morning we visited a slum area near here, where Sister Thankamma Varkey, Secretary of the CSI Women's Fellowship (which includes the CSI Sisters) has set up a school, and they provide some medical care etc. Two months ago 177 of the shacks were destroyed in a fire which many think was started deliberately by the local government, to discourage the people from living there. Some of the team had never seen anything like this before, and were shocked to the heart to see such poverty in the centre of a wealthy and prosperous city.

Please pray for the team as we move on to the Diocese of Vellore. There is so much litigation in the CSI. Please pray that we will not get caught up in the arguments, but be a force for peace between the different factions.

Please pray also for the CSI Synod Executive Committee as it meets tomorrow (Friday), so discuss the problems of four dioceses. Pray for the Moderator, Most Revd KJ Samuel (a member of the SOMA International Board) as he chairs this meeting.

Please pray also for the advertisement that is due to go into the Christian press in UK tomorrow and next week, for an Associate Director for SOMA UK.

We have heard that Niall & Gerry Griffin are being used greatly during a clergy retreat in the Diocese of Coimbatore. Phil Leber should now have reached his home in Uganda.

The team are well, but tired - please pray for new energy as we focus on another new, important spiritual assignment. The clergy of Vellore are due to come together for a retreat/conference from Monday to Thursday next week. We are looking forward to it, but ready to come home ...

**(C) Report to intercessors, from Don via Hilary, dated 10<sup>th</sup> April**

**(1) Hilary's message**

Here is a fairly full report from Don on his return home, which will clarify various leadings during the time.

Praise for the way the team were led during difficult times, for the opportunity to minister to those who felt unaffirmed, and for good health.

Continued prayers for the "fall-out" from the Bishops retreat - only yesterday I was reminded how we have the victory in that everything works for good to His purposes.

The attack my family experienced was through high-tech things (which I interpreted as the intellectualism, and one aspect of which was that I got stranded on a dual carriageway late at night! PTL for mobiles) and relational (reflecting the divisions?)

Again, many, many thanks for your prayers and upholding.

**(2) Don's Report**

(a) The team were wonderfully protected, health-wise and in other ways. All the travel went without incident, and the hosts were very kind and generous to us. However we need to be aware that some of the families & those of intercessors (including your own) were under attack. My son Kester was mugged in broad daylight last week, and although not seriously hurt was badly shaken. You are probably aware of the problems being experienced by Anne Bookless, John & Jenny Simons' daughter - which praise God have now receded.

(b) The Bishops' Retreat will probably emerge later as being a defining moment for SOMA - but at the time it was very difficult. The Lord enabled us to respond to the negative statements made, by "going low" in genuine humility - and this led to a tangible change in the spiritual atmosphere.

(c) The Sisters' Retreat was a wonderful interlude - they were so deeply prayerful and open to the Lord. Of course there are difficulties, and they are unappreciated by the Bishops and Clergy, but the short time we spent with them was very worth while.

(d) The Diocese of Vellore is typical of many, in that historically it has been riven asunder with factions, corruption and court cases (in the civil courts, whether justified or not). The present Bishop, elected not long ago, has taken a stand against this, and has experienced serious verbal attack since. The situation gradually seems to be improving.

The Retreat focussed on material from “Healing of Community Memories”, and helped the clergy to see some of the historical reasons for the present divisions. These include the Mutiny against the British in 1857, and the dynamics of the formation of the Diocese out of the Diocese of Madras nearly 25 years ago. The clergy are almost entirely from the Dalits (formerly the “Untouchables”, off the bottom end of the caste system); and this has contributed to the great desire for self-advancement.

Virtually all the 60 clergy came to the Retreat for at least some of the time, with the exception of a hard-core of those opposed to the Bishop (around 5). There was much discussion, and many of the clergy received ministry of one kind or another.

The Bishop is keen to follow up this visit with another, which will involve working with a team from the Diocese. The details of this have still to be worked out.

**(D) Report to her intercessors, from Edwina Thomas (Easter Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> April)**

Thank you for praying me home and welcoming me home. As of today, I have been home one week. Lets see what I ... Lucy asks Charlie Brown to reflect on his life and write down what he knows. He thinks and thinks. He thinks some more. More thinking. He turns to Lucy and says, “What is it that I know?”

(1) **Re-entry:** Travel home was fairly good, in the very long and non-eventful way the SOMA traveler always wants it to be. Once I arrived home, I went through several days of nausea and other tummy upset. Imagine, just getting used to eating “normal” food with a fork and drinking home water did that! Maybe spinning halfway around the world in a few hours also had something to do with it also.

(2) **General:** The team was physically well for the entire trip - except for one special time that I will tell you about. The trip was too long - almost one month. I was feeling “touch deprived” when I arrived home, an interesting feeling as we had ministered to persons who are still considered by some to be “untouchables”. Rose Marie loaned me her CD player and I took some of Ruth Fazal’s music of the heart, love songs to Jesus, to “soak” in. This proved to be so powerful. I found out just how powerful by giving away the CDs to Philip when we separated after the Bishops retreat. The “before and after” of soaking was dramatic and a true learning experience for me.

(3) **Bishops’ and Wives’ Retreat** (included in Chapter 2)

(4) **Sisters’ Retreat** (included in Chapter 3)

(5) **The Diocese of Vellore** (included in Chapter 4)

(6) **Thanks:** You can be sure that I appreciate you! There were many times on this trip that I asked God to awaken you and call you to prayer. There were many times when I felt as though we, the team, could not “see” from a heavenly perspective, a view that you could easily have as you information and direction would come from Him alone.

**(E) Report from Edwina of meeting with her personal Intercessors, dated 20<sup>th</sup> April**

I have met with Ron and Gail, my personal intercessors, twice since my return. I also debriefed with the SOMA staff and John Guernsey. This last Wednesday I spent two hours with Mary Beth Adfelt and Brenda Dormstetter, who headed the prayer cell here at All Saints.

This debriefing process has been very helpful, almost like mining gold and finding nuggets that keep me excited and eager to mine more. Actually, God has proved Himself AWESOME as I have discovered how he led others to pray and I have had the opportunity to weave their words together with my experience. I want to give you a taste of my joy also. Happy mining.

I took notes and listened as Mary Beth Adfelt read from her prayer journal describing the intercessors meeting on Sunday 18, just before the Bishops retreat. [Some of the last notes below are from later journal entries and are noted.] Mary Beth had more complete notes than did Brenda - but Brenda added things as they went along. These are my notes of what she read. Brackets [ ] indicate my understanding at the time.

(1) **About the Bishops retreat:**

I saw a man in a parka standing in sub-zero snow by a metal building. He had put his armor on “in reverse”. This was “self-done” - he was doing this to himself. He was isolated. He built walls of protection [around himself] in an icy place.

We prayed. I saw the snow melting, lush greenery, and a spiritual brush-fire begin. This flame was on India. I saw a gentle rain fall also, as though someone were shaking a wet sponge and water drops fell all over. We prayed against the spirit of offense.

I felt this [picture] deeply prophetic for South India and [felt it] told of a melting of the heart attitudes. Someone with him [seemed to refer to the man in the parka.] would not let the hard-hearted walk away.

We saw that there were termites in the foundation. In prayer, rooted them out, exposed them and killed them.

We prayed they not confuse the loss of dignity with lost of iciness, which we discerned was pride. We prayed that they have a childlike spirit, [yet] that they would wear His cloak of dignity.

Brenda described a meeting of Word and Spirit. "I saw this as a cataclysmic event. I know that cataclysmic things are usually negative, as in an earthquake or a volcano erupting, but this was not negative. I was Word and Spirit as two gigantic waves hitting each other. Explosion of water. Spray over everything. Everything was covered with this water."

God said "My arm is not too short to revive all of India".

**(2) Of the Sisters' Retreat:**

God took us to the Song of Solomon and we prayed many of those scriptures over the Sisters meeting. Prayer for this retreat was "sweet".

God spoke this to Mary Beth on March 28: "I have poured my heart out to them. My love will sustain them in what I am calling them to do. I have filled my daughters and they are ready. They return to carry on my work. I am pleased they stopped to rest with me. They will now do greater works because they rested with me and were refilled. Learn to do this more and more. It is key to busyness within lives and for effective ministry for the Kingdom. Wait on me, as in Is. 40. I will renew your strength."

**(3) Of the clergy retreat, Vellore:**

Prayer for Vellore was so much different. We prayed with so much HOPE, although the prayer was more work than for the Sisters retreat. We had good feelings [about this retreat.]

We prayed a Joshua anointing for Bishop Rufus.

Scriptures we got and prayed were Col. 1:9-12 and Col. 1:19-20.

Ps. 63:1-4 "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, and my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name will I lift up my hands."

A major scripture [and subject of a lot of our prayer] was Rev. 21:1-7, the building of a new Jerusalem. Brenda mentioned that in scripture the new city descends from the sky. What she "saw, in the spirit" was not a city descending, but a city being built [from the ground up.]

On April 2, [Monday] prayed Is. 50.

On April 3, [Tuesday] prayed "Break down the walls of resistance", and I saw the walls dismantled.

Song [sung again and again over this retreat] was Purify My Heart.