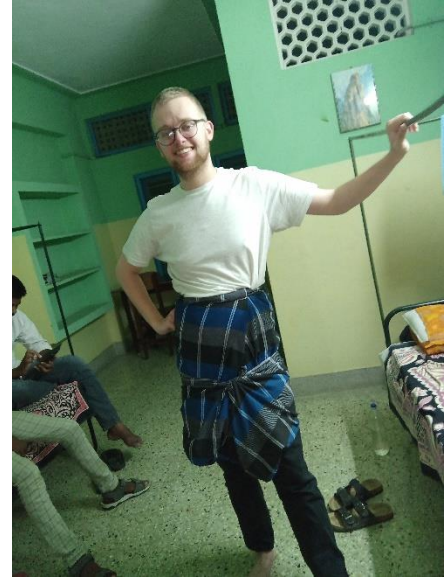


SOUTH INDIA NEWSLETTER – WEEK 1

Greetings from Chennai! May God's blessing be with each and every one of you.

It baffles me to think that I've already been here for one week as it only feels like yesterday that I was landing in Chennai Airport. I've been absolutely amazed by the warmth and kindness (and patience!) I've been shown since arriving here.

This week has been very "full on" and it's very much felt like I had to hit the ground running once I got here. On the 26th, the CSI (Church of South India) Synod Centre where I am based was hosting a conference for women from the Dalit and Adivasi community to help empower them and raise them up as leaders in their local churches. I was impressed by the passion that was shared by all to see women here in India take a more prominent role in the church (CSI has even recently appointed its first female Bishop!). I assisted during the day by helping to serve tea (Chai) and coffee in between the sessions. After the final session, time had been scheduled to take those attending to Marina Beach and I was lucky to be able to join them. I was in awe of the sheer size of the beach (one of the longest in the world!) but also struck by how familiar it felt to me as I stood at the waters edge. Fortunately, it began to rain (I say fortunately because at this point it hadn't rained in Chennai in over 200 days) so we ended the day huddled under some "holy" tarpaulin trying some traditional Chennai street food.



The next day I travelled to Vellore, which I've been told is one of the hottest cities in South India. I had been invited to attend a Youth Skills Enhancement Training Camp for those in rural churches. What I hadn't realized until I arrived was that the term "Youth" in India actually meant those aged 18-35 (what we called "young adults") so it was actually a wonderful opportunity to interact with those my age and get some perspective on what church in India is like for them. In the picture above you can see me modelling a traditional men's "lungi" which some of the other young people had me try on. The next evening at the camp, a group of young men all gathered in our room and I was given the opportunity to share some of my testimony with them and some of them also shared with me.

The training itself was enjoyable and very interactive, it consisted of lots of team games and problem solving exercises and it surprised me that Dr. Jacob, who was leading the training camp, hadn't had any drama training as many of his games and exercises closely resembles many drama workshop games I was already familiar with. One of the games involved getting dressed up as a Raja(?) (King) using newspaper and I was very impressed by the crown that the other young people managed to fashion for me. I made lots of new friends whilst in Vellore and am hoping to get the opportunity to visit there again before I return to the UK.



After a two- and half-hour train journey, I arrived back at the CSI Synod Centre, and am currently in the office working on a drama workshop which I hope to deliver during my stay here.

Prayer Points: 1) for the young people of Vellore Diocese 2) for the Dalit and Adivasi women across CSI 3) that I might be blessed with boundless energy (as the heat seems to be draining me and making me quite tired and slow) so that I might be able to get involved in even more activities here at the Centre and further afield.