

SOUTH INDIA NEWSLETTER – WEEK 5

Vanakkam to you all! Another week has passed so of course that means another newsletter from yours truly. I am going to pre-warn you that this newsletter may be a little bit longer than the last ones, but only because I'm going to include lots of pictures of what I have been up to. The majority of this week has actually been fairly quiet, again I have been helping out where I can here at the Synod Centre offices in Chennai. However this weekend Ela, one of the staff in the Communication department offices here, invited me to join his church's Youth Fellowship day.

I was picked up very late on Saturday evening to stay with Ela and his family at his home, and we made it to bed at about 1am. The next day I was given a t-shirt to wear saying "CSI Immanuel Church Youth Fellowship" and a very big breakfast (I think maybe Ela's mum thought I need feeding up!). We arrived at the church at about 9.30am to a packed out church of over 150, with 40+ youths all in their youth t-shirts. In the picture above you'll see a picture of all the young people later in the day after the



service had finished, as you can see I have had to work on my 'Selfie Posing' since being here in India! The service itself was put together by the young people and involved lots of singing. The young people had also rehearsed a mime performance highlighting the issue of conserving water, something very relevant given the current water shortage here in Chennai. In the picture to your left you will see me trying my best to help with the face-painting for the mime performance, I think you can certainly see the concentration on my face!

After the service, Ela had invited a group called "Matthew 19:14" to come and lead the young people in a day of talks, games and worship. The group were very engaging, and I could see they were a great encouragement to the young people, and despite the language barriers it was a blessing to see the youths be blessed and uplifted by this day. It was nice to share in fellowship with the young people and they were all very welcoming and kind, and by the end of the I had face ache from smiling so much, although again I think that might have also been because of all the selfies! Below on your left you will see the youths standing outside the church at the end of our last session.



After this a friend of Ela's was having a "Baby Shower" and I got to attend and be a part of the festivities. As you can imagine a baby shower in India is very different to how we do things in the UK. When we arrived we were escorted up to the rooftop terrace of the house which was finely decorated with colourful drapes, a marquee and beautiful flowers; the priest had already started the formal blessing of the couple who were sat side by side, the mother-to-be sitting on some sort of throne. Truthfully, I felt a little bit sorry for her as even though it was late in the evening it was still very hot and at this point she was 9 months pregnant and dressed in a full sari with thick, stiff looking fabric. However, the couple both seemed very happy and

were blessed with a great number of friends and family there to support them.



After the priest finished the formal “service” part of the baby shower it was time for the gifts. In India traditionally the gift of fruit is given from the home of the mother of the woman who is pregnant as a symbol of her fruitfulness in bearing a child. Surprisingly, in a way it reminded me of our harvest festivals at home as plate after plate of all different kinds of fruits was laid out before the couple. After this, a number of other items were placed before the couple that would be used by friends and family as symbols of blessing upon the couple and their child. It was lovely to observe this in practice and to have Ela to explain to me what each item was to be used for and what it symbolized. Firstly the mother-to-be was given 9 different flavoured rices to eat to represent the nine months of pregnancy. Then there was a yellow paste that is supposed to resemble turmeric and is a recognized symbol of happiness, this is smeared on the cheeks and forehead. A collection of bangles is also placed on the mother-to-be’s wrists as it is thought that the baby will be able to hear the sound of these jiggling together in the ninth month of pregnancy. Petal’s and Holy water are also sprinkled on the head as a general sign of blessing. I shall attach a video to my email that shows me awkwardly attempting to give these traditional blessings to the couple (truthfully I was petrified I might do something wrong!). After this the guests shared in food together (which I briefly helped to serve) and before I left I was able to pray for the couple and their family (as

you can see in the picture above).

After this we returned to Ela’s home. We ended up talking until late in the evening and I was able to ask him the many questions I had about what I had observed in India so far (even the silly ones!) and he graciously answered them for me. We also shared with one another about our hopes and aspirations and what we felt God has put on our hearts. It was a true blessing to share with Ela, and it just goes to show that your prayers really are working, so I thank you all for those (I will quote my prayer request from last week at the bottom).* The week ahead is very hectic indeed. I have temporarily moved to the Ecology Department here at the Synod Centre to assist in putting together an International Ecology Conference being hosted here in Chennai with those attending now amounting to about 300+ people. Again thank you all for your support on this journey, I certainly couldn’t do it without you all, until next time!

Prayer Points: Again I ask for lots of energy, especially during this large conference we are hosting, but also the wisdom to know when it is time to rest. Also for all those attending that they will gain something both intellectually and spiritually.

*To make firm friendships with those I am working with, especially with those in the offices at the department of communication and department of youth here at CSI Synod Centre.

