

SOUTH INDIA NEWSLETTER – WEEK 7 & 8

Namaskar to you all and welcome to what will most likely be my last newsletter as in just 3 more days I return to England. It's been such an immense journey over these past few months and I cannot wait to come home and share so much more of my experiences with you all. But for now, I shall just tell you about my past week and a bit, where I left the city of Chennai to stay with a family in Pallikonda, Vellore. Some of you may remember that in my first week here in India I was invited to attend a Youth Camp in Vellore and was made to feel very welcome by the other young people there, one young person in particular called Jones made me feel very welcome and helped me greatly as I navigated my way around the camp. Afterwards it was suggested that should I find time during my trip I might return to Vellore to stay with Jones and his family, and thankfully time was found to make this happen (praise the Lord!).

Our first day was mainly spent travelling, it was my first long-distance trip I'd made by bus, but I feel I certainly got to see a lot more of India travelling this way. When we arrived, Jones took me to his church (St. Peter's Pallikonda) where I got to see how the congregation were rebuilding their church as the construction of a new motorway had forced them to demolish a large section of the original building (see picture left). Jones told me that they hope to complete the work by January 2020 and that the new building will also include a community hall.

The next day we spent the morning at Katpadi Industrial Institute where Jones had recently started helping to teach some engineering classes. The students seemed very happy to receive me as a visitor (more selfies!) and it was interesting to be in rural schooling environment in India (picture left). In the afternoon we visited the CMC (Christian Medical College) Hospital, known for being one of the best hospitals in all of India and fortunately we managed to get a short tour of the facilities there. Truthfully it was all quite overwhelming, the sheer size of the campus and the number of patients but amazing that it is all still rooted in Christian mission (picture bottom left).

On Wednesday I spent the morning at Faith TV headquarters, an online Christian streaming service that a man named Alfred has started as his own personal ministry. The session I sat in on was a biblical Hebrew lesson being livestreamed on Facebook. After this, Jones took me to Zion Hills Church, and because Vellore is close to the border this meant entering another state of India, Andhra Pradesh (my third state since being here!). The church itself was built (as its name suggests) on top of a hill in a very rural location and is very old, a long staircase led up to the church creating a sense of journey and pilgrimage. There was such a holy atmosphere about this place, and it was wonderful to visit there and have the opportunity to pray in the church and also offer prayer for some other visitors in the courtyard. I took far too many pictures here, so I will just give a few highlights for you at the end of this newsletter.

The following day (15th August) was Indian Independence Day, a public holiday. We began the day by attending a flag raising ceremony held at the church, moving quickly onto one of the local schools to catch the end of their Independence Day celebrations. Soon after, we went to explore some of the more rural villages, Jones showed me the fields where his family grew ground-nuts and we even stopped by the roadside where farmers were sorting the sugarcane crops (picture right) and tried some Jaggery (a small round snack made purely from the cane sugar, very sweet!).

We then attended a two-day Mission Festival being held for the diocese of Vellore at Voorhees College. The festival was very well attended and the first day consisted of practical activities for people to get involved with like singing competitions and bible quizzes. I joined



Jones' church team for the quiz however I wasn't of much help as most of the quiz questions were in Tamil, however even a member done, the team still managed to make it to be one of the final 7 teams. Unfortunately, after this, it began to rain heavily so it was a hasty retreat home before the roads got too congested, looking at the positive though this did bring the temperature down dramatically.

The next day the rain still persisted and many of Mission Festival programmes were cut short, but in a dry spell we managed to visit Vellore Fort a tourist spot in the city. Inside the fort was a museum, church and Hindu temple, it was fascinating to learn a little more about the history of the city.

And on Sunday we attended the Sunday service at St Peter's Pallikonda Church, and despite the heavy rain (with holes in the roof) and two power cuts, still the congregation continued 'praising in the storm'. After this we visited the homes of neighbours and family friends of Jones as well as doing some sightseeing, briefly visiting Jones' family duck farm and the local vegetable market. Then for me it was home time. It was such a joy and blessing to stay with Jones and his family and see another side of life in India and I will miss them all dearly. And although I think my body is telling me it is ready to return home and take some rest, my heart is not ready to leave this place. But I know one day whether soon or in the future God will bring me back to India and the people I hold dear here.

Prayer Points: For Jones and his family, especially as Jones applies for a new job at CMC (Christian Medical College). For CSI and its



Christian witness here. For safe travels as I return to England.