My Return to New Life Leprosy Colony: A Year Later

...by Kathy A. Smith

When I and the Independent Church in India (ICII) Gospel team visited New Life Leprosy Colony for the first time about one year ago, we were both shocked and heartbroken to see the worst poverty and hopeless situations we could imagine. People who lived there had unspeakable deformities, blindness, disease, unsanitary conditions, horrifying open sores and wounds on their bodies due to the leprosy and lack of medical treatment. There was also starvation, poverty, hopelessness, and not one person with even a small trace of peace in their empty eyes. When we left this colony one year ago, I and the team were determined to go back and bring help on a regular basis. Since then, through the Lord and the love of ICII supporters, we were able to drill a well so the people would have fresh water, and a garden. ICII has also been taking vegetables, fruits, rice, clothing, medical supplies, and helps and gifts for the children on a monthly basis. Several of ICII’s missionaries who live closer to the colony have been teaching a Bible study and praying for the people.

On this visit to New Life, Lowell and I experienced a brand new colony from the one we visited last year! Yes, it was still poor, but the people were rich in Christ Jesus! It was no longer a colony filled with total despair and hopelessness, but one where Jesus Christ had transformed the lives into new creations who were living in that once dark and forbidding place. As soon as we got out of our van, we were greeted warmly with smiles and handshakes as we were surrounded by leprosy friends that had much joy on their once hopeless faces. They were very excited to show to Lowell and me the well that ICII had recently built for them, and their garden in which they had just started mango and banana trees, and some vegetables. After showing us their well and garden all the residents who
were able to gather together in anticipation to listen to our Bible study. The lepers sat and listened very carefully, taking into their hearts the Word of God that was preached to them. Many of the lepers shared with joy, “Since you came last year and told us about Jesus, we are now always thinking and praying to the Lord!” They also encouraged us by telling us they are praying for us each day! After the teaching, we gave them each a belated Christmas gift. We gave the women beautiful saris and the men each got a nice shirt with a dhoti (man’s Indian skirt).

Jesus Transforms the Lives of Children - For Christmas this year the children living at ICII’s Home of Compassion orphanage each generously donated one of their gifts so that each of the poor kids at New Life could receive a toy. In 2008, two children named Vinarasi (age 5) and Abdul (age 7) came from New Life Leprosy Colony to live at Home of Compassion since their parents could no longer take care of them. These children had been suffering in their difficult life, but thanks be unto the Lord, they were rescued from that place. The first time I saw Vinarasi I could see the pain and despair in her young face. Since she has been well taken care of and loved at ICII’s Home of Compassion, her whole countenance has completely changed from despair to total joy! We brought these two special children along with us when we visited New Life Leprosy Colony because their parents wanted to see them. When we gave the gifts to the children that lived at the colony, I asked Vinarasi and Abdul to help me hand them out. We wanted the children to feel special, so we gave each child two wrapped gifts (a toy and an umbrella). They also received a backpack for school that had been requested by their parents, and a children’s Christmas gift pack (a blanket, a snack, a notebook and pencil, toothbrush and toothpaste and more). They also got some games for the common use for all the kids at the colony. What a great celebration and joy it was to see the kids open their gifts! The toys and gifts brought true happiness to the children. One child said, “This is the first time anyone ever gave me a Christmas gift. I am very happy!”

Life Changing Testimonies - We also took the time to hear many testimonies of how the Lord was touching the lives of the adults at New Life Leprosy Colony. Here are a few testimonies:

One man shared, “After you stepped into this place, from then onwards we all have been feeling healthier. We really feel something is different in our lives. Before we were worrying a lot and thinking very low about our own lives, like, why do we have to live in this world? But now, after Jesus came into our lives, we feel a lot more comfort, and peace. We all are very thankful”.

A woman shared, “Before you came to us, we were empty in our hearts. We had never seen Jesus before, but we saw Jesus through you. Since ICII came to our place we are feeling so much more comfort and happiness here. Through ICII, God gave us satisfaction for our souls”.

Some residents could not come to the main meeting because they were not well enough. We visited them one by one to give them their gifts, pray for them and encourage them. Even those who were blind and had many deformities and problems said things were better for them since we had been there. The biting insect extermination last year had brought them all much relief so they could sleep better, and it was a big help to them to have better food to eat. Many shared that they were feeling much better. But best of all they also had the peace of knowing that Jesus loves them so much and that they have a relationship with Him! The Lord is even using New Life Leprosy Colony residents as witnesses. One leper shared to a relative that was visiting him, “I used to give milk and an egg sacrifice to the snake temple every Tuesday and Friday. But last year after ICII came to us I realized that it was not working. I began to think, if this snake god is so powerful, why is he not doing anything? I know that ICII’s God is working so I stopped everything and I worship Jesus now!”
Springs of Living Water! - The people all were very thankful for the water well that was dug due to the love of ICII’s supporters. They told us if the well had not been drilled for them, the whole colony would have been in serious trouble. The government recently began rebuilding the road in front of their colony, and both wells that they could use before were destroyed. These people would have had a big problem finding water. This well project has been an answer to prayer for them. One woman shared, “Before ICII drilled the borewell for us we were very worried because we had to use the water very sparingly. Every time we needed water we had to walk almost two miles to get water from a well. When we went to get the water we had to wait a very long time and then sometimes we could not get any water. Now it is so easy to get water”. Imagine a person with leprosy that does not have much strength having to walk almost two miles each way to bring back a jug of water so they could use it for cooking, bathing, and drinking. We give all the thanks to the Lord that the people are rejoicing because they only have to walk a few yards and they can get fresh water from their new well.

The name “New Life Colony”, that Pastor Britto had chosen for this colony to replace the Hindu goddess name, was truly prophetic. We witnessed new life in Christ in these leprosy friends. It was amazing to see how the Lord had touched all of the people who lived there (around 140 people). Also it was exciting to see how the Lord had used supporters around the world who had sacrificed by giving gifts and monthly support for these precious people.

New Hope Leprosy Colony - In last month’s issue of Finding Lost Souls we wrote a small section on how the Lord had transformed lives of hopelessness and despair into New Hope. We continue the story in this issue about the leprosy outreach trip we took reaching leprosy colonies and our trip on the fourth day visiting New Hope Leprosy Colony. One year ago when Lowell and I and the team visited this Leprosy colony to preach the Gospel we witnessed very devastating and severe poverty conditions. Even though these people had desperate physical needs, they were very spiritually hungry for the only One who could fill their lives with meaning and purpose. We remembered how the Spirit of the Lord moved at this colony and how most of the precious souls there received Christ into their broken lives. ICII immediately sent one of their branch pastors to hold Bible studies there twice a month. The lepers living at this poor government-run colony began to get on fire for the Lord, so ICII decided to name it New Hope Colony. Shortly after this, the Lord raised up a leader there within the colony to gather the lepers together for church each week. The colony had even started their own church services and were praying for one another. That one visit one year ago had changed their lives forever! Now Jesus was a part of their everyday lives, and they again had hope for tomorrow!

After we had arrived this time at New Hope Leprosy Colony, many of those living there gathered together to greet us and hear the Word of God. They had known we were coming because we had sent two of our missionaries ahead of us by bus so they could arrange for a special meal to be served called chicken briyani, a South Indian favorite. The people began to worship the Lord and sing songs and many of them sang and clapped their hands with pure joy and a true spirit of praise before the Lord. It was so encouraging to see the smiles on their faces as they worshipped even in spite of their terrible disease and poverty. They had found what mattered most in life, and that is Jesus Christ! Lowell shared the Word of God with Pastor Britto translating, and after this we prayed for each person. Then it was time for...
Preaching the Gospel in Every Leprosy Colony - ICII’s vision is to preach the Gospel in every leprosy colony, hospital, and to every homeless leprosy victim in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. The great news is that close to 12,000 leprosy victims have been reached since this project has started. The kind and generous support of a sole sponsor has made this possible so far. Sadly, the sponsor can no longer support at this time, so we are asking others to get involved with this extremely important project. These leprosy victims are truly an unreached people, and are wholeheartedly receptive to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thousands have given their lives to the Lord, with around 90 percent having responded to the Gospel. We want to finish Tamil Nadu by bringing the good news of the Gospel to these heartbroken people and see more colonies transformed like those of New Life and New Hope and others we have witnessed. We have half of our debt paid on our leprosy outreach van, but we still need another $8000 to pay it off. This van is needed so the ICII team can travel, haul blankets and medical supplies, food and helps for the starving lepers and children living in the colonies. There is much yet to be done among leprosy victims in Tamil Nadu alone, and we humbly ask you to take part in this harvest of souls for God’s kingdom. We can only continue these outreaches with your kind and generous support.

Reaching Children Whose Parents are Affected with Leprosy - One evening on a recent leprosy outreach, the ICII Gospel team visited a hostel where over 50 boys and a few girls lived. These children all had parents who are affected with leprosy. Since the parents are unable to take care of their children they were living at this home. Lowell and Pastor Britto preached the gospel to them. Each boy and girl listened to the message for one hour with great interest. Then Lowell asked if any would like to receive Christ into their hearts and lives. Every one of them raised their hands and prayed with very intense seriousness to invite Jesus as their Savior! Afterward, we gave them each a blanket. We gave them New Testament Bibles to those who did not own any. The woman who set everything up for us to visit the hostel told us that she had never hear the Gospel message preached with such clarity before. Even though these children lived at a Christian-run home, they had never heard how to receive God’s gift of salvation before! The boys were very serious to receive Christ and they seem very thankful that we had visited them and had given them the blankets and Bibles. All glory given to the Lord Jesus Christ!