



All over the world, this gospel is bearing fruit and growing! (Col 1:6)

What was true in Paul's day, almost 2,000 years ago, is certainly true in our own day and age through the work of IREF in Andhra Pradesh!

During this year's annual Youth Conference, held from January 11th-15th, we saw God move in a mighty way to draw young people to Himself and build them up as His disciples.



Although this was my seventh visit to India, it included many first-time experiences for me. It was my first visit to IREF's Youth Conference; and what an inspiration it was to see 5,000 young people (including IREF staff, pastors and

students) gathered to hear the Gospel and learn how to grow as Christ's disciples.

I enjoyed my first visit to a village church's New Year/Harvest Thanksgiving service and celebratory meal, complete with a cake-cutting ceremony (my first since our wedding, 32 years ago!)

I paid my first visit to IREF's Industrial Training Centre, about half a mile from the main campus site in Repalle. The Centre is currently training about 160 young men in mechanical and electrical engineering skills.

I went on my first March of Witness through the streets of Repalle, as the Youth Conference moved towards its climax.

And I even enjoyed my first games of 'ball badminton', a five-a-side racquet sport unique to South India. We wish the IREF's girls' team well as they defend the regional title they won last year, and the boys' team who took the runners up spot in their competition last year.



As I reflect on my recent visit to India, a number of features of IREF's work stand out to me, features that our western churches would do well to emulate.

Concerted Praying I was woken up on my first morning in Repalle at 4.30am by the sound of happy girls gathering in the courtyard below to sing God's praises and seek His blessing for the day, through prayer.

I had the privilege of speaking 14 times during my visit; some of them were planned opportunities, others were unplanned. My first invitation to speak (unplanned!) was to a group of 200 Degree College girls who had gathered for a time of prayer and fasting to seek God's blessing on the forthcoming Youth Conference.

And after each of the evening conference meetings, huddles of students could be seen gathered together to pray home the message delivered that night.



The whole work of IREF is undergirded by concerted praying.

A Passion to see People Saved The theme chosen for this year's Youth Conference was The Great Salvation that God has provided for us through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. But the verse from which the theme was taken also contains a warning. "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3). "Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name given to men under heaven by which we must be saved!" (Acts 4:12). The evangelistic meetings carried a great sense of urgency for people to respond to the gracious invitation of Jesus to be saved for all eternity.

Tearful Repentance Those who came forward in response to the Gospel appeals were often weeping tears of repentance as they had been deeply convicted of their sin by God's Holy Spirit.

Fruitful Evangelism Between 250 and 300 young people came forward on the Friday night in response to the Gospel appeal, with a further 100 or so standing where they were, because there wasn't sufficient room at the front of the tent to contain them all! A further 100 or more stood in response on the Saturday night.

On the Saturday afternoon, we had the joy of baptising 51 people in the Krishna River, all of whom had come to put their faith in Jesus during the Conference.



Costly Discipleship Several of those who shared a word of testimony during the Sunday morning service were tearful as they contemplated returning home to a potentially hostile reception from their non-Christian families. We assured them that "through faith, we are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold ... may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:5-7). Pray that this may be so!

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