

Greetings to my sponsoring congregations! It is winter here in Vellore which doesn't mean the same thing as it did where I grew up in Minnesota. The nights are nice and cool for sleeping, but the days are still in the low 90s. It's an improvement over upper 90s and 100s, but winter means people don't turn on fans. After all – it's winter. So many rooms and places are still warm and stuffy to me. The palliative care staff are very good about switching on the fan when they see me coming.

In the summer, everyone is hot. In the winter, it's only me!

After returning from my trip to Malaysia and Bangladesh, I spent about three weeks at home in Vellore. I spent time with the palliative care team, worked on reports on my trip to the ELCA Global Missions, preached at Christ Lutheran on Sundays, and planned my next trip – inside India this time. There are a lot of other things I am working on as well. I spoke with a doctor from Padhar who is willing to travel to Bangladesh and help the surgery staff there learn about a different method and different agent to make giving anesthesia simpler. I also spoke with a psychologist here about traveling to Malaysia with me when I go back for more palliative care classes. Part of my job is to get the right people to help in the right situations.

Toward the end of November, I was off traveling again. My Thanksgiving dinner was a tomato, cheese, and cucumber sandwich on Indigo Air's flight to Guwahati. The people I was supposed to meet with had emergencies and so I will need to return in January. After that, I went from Guwahati to Kolkata to Howrah Station to Sainthia Station to Dumka.

Taxi, plane, taxi, train, car – all went smoothly and took 12 hours. It was Sunday and there were no English services so I went the “cathedral church” to a worship service in Santal. I was introduced and “garlanded”

which is a bit like getting leis in Hawaii only they are short and fat and they came up to my nose. Unlike the Hawaiian lei, you take these garlands off, which was a good thing as I might not have been able to see or breathe. It was a two hour service in a language I didn't understand and that is always a bit of a challenge.

The next day I sat in on the Executive Council of the Synod meeting. I greeted them and talked a bit about what I have been doing and will be doing in the future. They invited me to stay for the rest of the meeting but gave me an out – which I took. The meeting went on in English but much of the discussion was in either Hindi or Bengali or Santal or Boro.

I don't speak any of those!

After that I went to Mohulpahari for the day. I was warned that the road was very bad and the trip would be long, but I have seen much worse roads and the drive took less than an hour. I talked to a lot of people there and was able to deal with several problems for them. One nurse is interested in getting a PhD and I did some networking for her.

Back at Dumka, I called Padhar and was invited to be the guest speaker at their first ever capping ceremony. This is a very important milestone in a student nurse's life and I really want to be there. My capping (badging for us guys) was 37 years ago and I remember it very well. If I can get the right trains and planes and automobiles, I will be there!

Then another full day of travel to get back to Kolkata, the guesthouse, and pizza. The next two days I traveled to Tata – just a 20 minute car trip. I spent time both days with the psychiatrist who is doing palliative care. He's a very nice guy and I enjoyed our time together.

We have a lot of people in common from CMC – Christian Medical College.

I also met with the Navigation Coordinator which is a kind of social worker/facilitator. This woman worked on the US for 25 years and then moved back to India. The first day I wanted to stop for bread and peanut butter on the way back but my driver spoke no English so I couldn't ask him. The second day, I had someone ask him about stopping before we left. When we stopped, I was in a hurry and didn't really look at the bread I grabbed. It turned out to be garlic cheese bread. Not the best with PB, but interesting!

Next stop, Delhi and a few days of classes and presentations. And McDonald's. And pizza. Then, by the time you read this, I will be back in Vellore in my own room at Sneha Deepam. I will be here for Christmas, and as I celebrate the baby in the manger, you will be in my prayers.

Please keep me in yours. Have a blessed Christmas! Peace, John