

The day after Christmas I awoke to find my door decorated for my feast day which is also Father Johnny's feast day. The sisters and staff had a party for me with flowers, cake, chai, and a present. For many people, feast days are a bigger deal than birthdays. Since my birthday is a national holiday - August 15th is India's Independence Day - it's always a big day for everyone!

Then there was the Palliative Care Christmas party. I dressed in dhoti and jubah which is a very Indian look while the Indian chaplains were in suits and ties. The dinner menu was a nice mix of vegetarian and non-vegetarian with ice cream for dessert. That was the end of the Christmas celebrations which began early in December.

One of our team members came down with chikungunya - an illness caused by a rare but nasty virus spread by mosquitos that causes a fever lasting a few days followed by pain that travels from joint to joint and goes on for weeks, even months, and sometime years.

I had a brief illness and I found out how well the staff and the doctors at Christian Medical College take care of their patients. They had me feeling better in time for a small New Year's celebration with cake and singing and a Bible fortune. Mine was "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." New Year's Day I was off to a beach hotel on the southeast coast for a couple of days before going on to do a presentation on palliative care in a center in Trivandrum. Some of the students there were from Iowa!

Then I was back to Chennai to meet Jamie, a young nurse from Minnesota who is my sister Melinda's niece. She came to India on a sort of working vacation to learn more about India and the medical care here. She has done this before in Africa and finds it very rewarding. She got to know our staff at Sneha Deepam and worked with them and was invited to shop with them and go to their homes to celebrate Pongal - a sort of harvest festival. She visited the school at Sneha Deepam and taught the kids kickball. She went on home visits with the CMC Palliative Care Team and went to a Hindu wedding with one of the team members. She bought a beautiful red saree and looked stunning in it.

In mid-January, I attended a Comprehensive Rural Health Program in Jamkhed. I was in a group of twelve that included doctors and nurses and clergy and a teacher - all related to Global Health Ministries. This program has developed strong village health workers and have decreased infant mortality from the 1970 level of 190 per 1000 to about 20! They have eliminated most water borne diseases and just plain have a healthier population. They have a training center that has become the place to go for community health training. They have a lot of foreign visitors - many from the US and Australia. They have done an amazing job and have demonstrated how much can be done with preventative medicine.

Daily power cuts are a way of life here, but it is a problem when they happen during our Sunday worship service. I got a battery for the keyboard so we could have music, but we have to remember to keep the battery charged.

And then there is the problem of keeping a fan going on the pastor who is preaching. Pastors here are chided when their sermon is too short, and it's hard to keep preaching when you are melting!

As I write this, I am on another trip - this time to the north. I'll go to the states of Jharkhand and Assam, spending about three days at Mohulpahari Hospital and three days at Parkijuli Hospital, and then to Delhi where I will do four different presentations - two for nurses, one for clergy, and one for a mixed group of people from different faiths. Please keep me in your prayers as I travel, and please pray for that receiving hospice care here and where you live. Thanks you for your continued support.