

Greetings to my sponsoring churches! When I wrote to you last time, I was in Mizoram in north eastern India, and it was cold there. It was nice sleeping under three blankets, but when I wasn't under cover, my hands and feet were pretty cold. This former Minnesotan has lost his tolerance for cold weather! I did my Bible studies and workshops there and then I was given a tour of the local hospital by the doctor who runs the HIV/AIDS Hospice and De-Addiction Unit. The hospice was very nice but they have problems getting the resources they need. The De-Addiction Unit is very sad - - a lot of young men who either inject a Darvon-like drug or drink alcohol (illegal and likely homemade). I'm hoping to find people working in the substance abuse field to visit and help this program develop and branch out into the community.

After that, I flew to Guwahati for a meeting. I hoped it would be warmer but it wasn't. My room was a little warmer, but the bath didn't have a geyser (a kind of water heater). I had to heat my bath water with a coil which is a rod you plug in and put into the water to heat it. It didn't work very well, so my bath was warmish which is better than cold. To prepare for the meeting I needed two things. A pizza and a copy shop.

The pizza was good and the copying was very slow. I had my Kindle along so I could read while feeding the copier one page at a time.

I have been working on a distance learning course based on the End of Life Nursing Education Consortium (ELNEC) classes I have mentioned in previous letters. First, for two week in Malaysia and then I hope is to begin with a year long program with that material in 2013 and then in 2014, possibly expand the curriculum to include spirituality and social work. This is still in the planning stages and I could use a few prayers to help me see where to go with this.

There would be a 10-day contact session where the students would meet and then continue their work online. We'd also want to include some kind of hospice experience other than what the students might already be involved in. We'll see what happens.

The Palliative Care Team did a retreat and I wanted to do something special so I asked each member to bring something that symbolizes their role on the team. To illustrate, I showed a picture of a bag of cement and explained that if you thought of yourself as someone who holds the team together, you could bring a bag of cement. But I discouraged bringing anything that weighed more than ten pounds. I brought a clay tea cup because I am always saying, "I hung out with the team and had a cup of tea." One of the doctors brought the Joker from a deck of cards.

Two brought water but one also had dirt and seeds. There was also a bag and a wheel. Here's something to think about – what would you bring to your congregation to symbolize your role? We also went around the circle and as each person was spotlighted, the others said what they liked and/or admired about that person. Try that sometime. It's great! Robert Twycross, a retired British physician and writer, and his wife also joined us. He was a pioneer of the hospice movement during the 1970s. He is a very good speaker and it was great to have him there.

I have been working on a Tumor Board for Liberia – a group of doctors and surgeons who work with cancer and who I hope will be able to help out with cancer detection and treatment in Liberia. One surgeon offered his assistance via email and Skype and was open to doing a two to three week teaching mission in Liberia. The doctors suggested that cancer treatment would be better if we could get a cobalt machine for Liberia.

One of the radiation oncologists may be willing to spend time training a doctor and help get a program started. Now we just need to find mega-bucks for a cobalt machine!

I spent a week in Kolkata at the yearly conference of the Indian Association of Palliative Care. Robert Twycross was the keynote speaker and the highlight of the conference. The one reason I enjoy these gatherings is that I get to meet new people in the field and see old friends. I will be on home assignment this summer and I hope to hear from those of you who want me to visit. Until then, please keep me in your prayers.

Peace, John