

The weather is still pretty hot. Once in awhile, it rains and cools down a bit, but the heat and humidity do not stay away for long. It was very hot for my final anointing service after eight and a half years doing them. My last service was busy but not overwhelming – about 25 for Communion and 50 for prayers. Two chaplains from Christian Medical College (CMC) will continue the anointing and prayer. I will miss doing that service but I will not miss the sweating! No fans and wearing a cassock made for serious over-heating.

Sr. Victima, the Religious Sister-nurse who came to start the hospice four years ago, is leaving us for another assignment. We welcomed Sr. Porkodi to lead the staff of the hospice. She has a good heart and she is interested in the patients and in leaning more about palliative care. We think she will be a good match. Just a few days ago, she was joined by Sr. Julie.

I prepared for my trip north by coming down with a cold, sore throat and fever. I should have just settled for packing my suitcase! It would have been a huge hassle to try to reschedule the trip so I just went and hoped to feel better. The 23 hour train trip to visit the hospital at Padhar was mostly uneventful except for the sweating and chills. The food was bad (I should know better than to depend on train food by now) but the company in my compartment was nice and A/C was welcome.

The big news at Padhar was the delivery of conjoined twins. A woman came to the hospital with no prenatal care. When her labor didn't progress, an exam showed the conjoined twins and a Cesarean Section was done. It is too early to know what organs they might share, but there are doctors in India who will be able to do the surgery when the time comes. Their names – translated into English – are Praise and Worship. I was asked to bless the babies and was happy to do that. Padhar also has a new nursing school that was just approved by the India Nursing Council so there was a lot of excitement about that. I spent time with two lovely families who fed me very well, and I also did some presentations on palliative care – well, that's why I was there!

I was driven from Padhar to Chhindwara to meet the Bishop and I even preached in his “cathedral church.” Then it was back to Padhar to preach at the evening service. The next morning I met with the palliative care doctor and made rounds with her and then had dinner with her and her chaplain husband. The next day I took the train to Nagpur and then flew to Kolkata where I spent a night at the guest house before visiting Serampore which was once a Danish colony. I met with people from the Senate of Serampore University. They seemed open to adding palliative care content to their syllabus and offering some courses. Serampore grants the degrees for many of the seminaries in India, so this would impact the education of many theological students.

From there, I flew to Guwahati to visit the hospital there. If you recall, the doctor there has been basically alone for almost 20 years. Other doctors don't stay – it's too remote and the pay is not at all good. I worry about him, he has children and needs to earn money for their education and think about his retirement.

Then I went back to Kolkata and during my time there, I visited the Mother House of the Missionaries of Charity – Mother Teresa's order. I also visited the newly opened Tata Medical Center. The Tata Group is India's largest business group and an international company, and they built this modern hospital with the mandate to provide 50% charitable services. Their building is beautiful with lots of windows and natural light. There are 300 pieces of original Indian art throughout the building – most donated when asked by the Tatas. They were very eager to work with me and CMC in providing palliative care. Also visited three other palliative care services where we refer patients.

When I got back to my room at Sneha Deepam, there was a surprise waiting for me in my refrigerator. It was full of ants and moldy food! I guess the housekeeper accidentally forgot to turn the fridge back on after cleaning it. My silly sister wanted to know if the ants spelled out “Welcome home” - they didn't!

Now I am planning for my trip to Malaysia and Bangladesh in September and October. More on that next time. Until then, keep me in your prayers. I can't think of any place I'd rather be. Peace, John