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## Linnea's India Blog V: The Mission Begins at CMC

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The Chennai delegation - thinking about a future mission...



### Linnea's India Blog V: The Mission Begins at CMC

The last time I was in the city of Chennai was in 2015, when we had just picked up our three weary children at the airport and begun our India journey together, through roads gutted by rains and flooding. The roads no longer are potted and pooling, but houses on the way from the airport seem more make-shift than usual, structures held together by a mixture of tarps and ropes, metal slices and plastic sheeting. We drive under a flyover to a hotel nearby - the last to arrive on the team from the Network of Biblical Storytellers International.

How surreal and yet how ordinary to see these friends who have been planning

and skypping virtually every week since August about this moment. Though I have been in contact with our Indian hosts since our last trip here 2 years ago, praying and consulting with them about the possibility of a biblical storytelling mission, our team first saw each other at the last annual Festival Gathering in August. Now here they are, waiting with a semi-packed mini-van, as weary and dazed as we, but ready for the adventure.

Ron Coughlin is our team leader. I am the instigator, but he is the one who holds it all together - both the team and the itinerary. He is the only person I have ever heard say that he doesn't really get stressed.

Our drive from Chennai to Vellore takes us on a 3-hour route that is rarely unpeopled, ending after dark in the city. As David and I peer out the window, it seems to us that, in a mere 2 year span, businesses have grown up, more strings of lights illuminate stores and signs, there are more cars, more scooters. But, if we find it changed, that is nothing compared to our New York pastor-friend, Bonnie Orth. Bonnie served at the CMC hospital eighteen years ago when taking a pastoral counselling course. Whole areas of town have sprung up since she was here. As we roll into the CMC, the first thing that we notice is that the red soil streets of the campus have been covered in paving blocks - a welcome improvement since the flooding of 2015.

The CMC is dear to David's and my heart - the anchor to our past 2 family missions. Founded by a woman named Ida Scudder more than 100 years ago, it began as a place to train women to give needed health care to women. By today, it has expanded to accept students and patients of all kinds, serving some 2.5 million in- and out-patients a year. By this third visit, I am overjoyed to see folks who greet me like a long-lost friend.

Our host at the Christian Medical College is Rev Giftus Joseph - one of the 20 CMC chaplains on staff. Giftus has put up banners and posters and phoned and phoned and phoned to let people know that the Heart and Voice conference is coming to CMC. Still, nobody ever knows what "Biblical Storytelling" is, wherever we go, so we wonder if anyone will come. He greets us on our first morning meeting to say: "When I first began publicity for this event, I set my sites on 100 participants. A little later, I changed that to 60. Later, I decided maybe 30." I prepared to hear him say, "Now, I wonder if 10 will show up." But instead, he says, "This morning I learned that 70 are signed up to come." He is scrambling to arrange the extra food, while we are rejoicing. In fact, ninety-two students, staff, youth and children sign up for our 3-day

conference.

Our days begin with singing with David and me - joined by Larry Brown, our “good ol’ boy college professor” from Missouri - on guitar, and a plenary address, to orient the students to what biblical storytelling is: an animated telling of Christian text by heart from an inner knowledge and embodiment of the words. It’s telling by heart. Then, all break up into 7 small groups, headed by one of the leaders. These workshop groups are taken through the 7 steps of learning by heart:

- 1) Pray (to be open to God speaking through the text to you)
- 2) Read the text aloud to yourself at least 3 times
- 3) Write out the passage (formatting with indenting, colours, highlighting) to give form and understanding to it
- 4) Picture the story (sounds, smells, colours, and the placement of people and things)
- 5) Meditate: Explore feelings and any connections you have to the story
- 6) Learn the Passage by Heart: Walk around, use gestures for memory’s sake, practise many times
- 7) Tell someone!

It’s incredible to see people seated in circles of plastic chairs out on the campus lawn, working hard and long, taking apart a story together. What is immediately apparent is their devotion to their faith. This is, for them, a way of deepening a relationship with God that is central to their lives. Leaders explain and encourage, and in a little while, couples of students are wandering together around the campus grounds together, checking their booklets, reading aloud, remembering, helping each other succeed. Bursts of cheers erupt periodically from groups from across the lawn - sign of a successful team-telling. It begins to sound like a sports field.

I absolutely marvel to watch it all begin to take shape. What has been, for me, fully two years of praying, imagining and worrying dissolves into the liquid of gracious hosting, student devotion, expert teaching leadership and trusting God.

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Linnea Good

"Enlivening Faith through Story and Song"

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To contribute to Linnea and David's Music Ministry: <http://www.linneagood.com/>



Faye, Bonnie, Barbara and Juliana - NBSI





Rev Giftus Joseph - our host



Workshop groups cool in the shade



Larry, David and Ron





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