

# Report on a visit to India

## 7-14 February 2019

### Partnership Coordinator Asia/Pacific – Steve Pearce

#### Aims

- To make a visit to the Church of South India (CSI)
- To chair the South Asia Forum

#### Background



The Church of South India was formed in 1947 when Methodists (of the British tradition), Anglican, Presbyterian and Lutheran traditions united. The Methodist Church which at the time was part of the UMC opted out of the union at the last minute and later formed itself into the autonomous Methodist Church of India, but is still in association with the UMC. MCB has consistently maintained partnership with the CSI (and not the Methodist Church) even though relationships with overseas partners have been somewhat turbulent over recent years.

CSI is one of the largest of our Partner Churches, having around 4 million members. There are 24 dioceses governed through a Synod which meets every three years.

There are four such united churches in South Asia, the Church of Bangladesh, the Church of Pakistan, the Church of North India (CNI) and the Church of South India (CSI). Over the years their European partners have combined their meetings, forming what is called the South Asia Forum. It meets at least once a year either in Europe or India.

#### Visit

The visit did not begin well. My Air India flight was delayed leaving Heathrow by 37 hours. Nevertheless, I finally arrived in time for the third of the planned three days of exposure visits before the meeting actually began.

We travelled for a couple of hours to reach a village where the local CSI churches run a programme of events, including poverty alleviation, vocational training and lunches, for women who, by virtue of being dedicated to one of the Hindu deities, are living in real need.

The people who gathered in the church to meet us had all been dedicated early in their lives, to the deity. This means they undertake duties at the temple, dance at festivals, etc. Unfortunately they are now also sexually abused as a matter of course. The practice has been





illegal since 1988, but still continues. Since the women are not allowed to marry, they are vulnerable, isolated and poor. The six women pictured are the staff members of this project, all Christian women from local villages.

The meeting of partners began the following day and we were fortunate in having contributions from the Revd Asir Ebenezer, newly appointed General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in India, Dr Aishwarya, founder of DORCAS and campaigner on rights for people with disabilities and Mr Prince Gajendra Babu, General Secretary of the State Platform for Common School System in Tamil Nadu (SPCSS). These presentations enabled us to look at a variety of issues in South Asia and the churches' responses.

The Church of South India, who generously hosted us for this meeting, has developed an impressive headquarters team and we heard reports and engaged in fruitful discussion in relation to several of their departments, including Ecological Concerns, Dalits and Adivasis, Communication, Social Service, Education, Mission and Youth. The Christian Education Department is headed by Revd. Dr. Jayachitra Lalitha who is funded by a Methodist Church in Britain Nationals in Mission grant, but unfortunately she is ill and was unable to be present with us.



Find out more of the exciting work of CSI at <https://csisynod.com/>

*Steve Pearce*

*February 2019*