



India

Lesson 5

History of the CLC in India

The Story Begins

Reverend V. S. Benjamin

² And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.(Joh 9:2-3 ESV)

In December 1981, the CLC Board of Missions received an unexpected and surprising letter from a member in Ipswich, S.D.

"This past summer I went to Sri Lanka and India... While there I became sick and was hospitalized for ten days. During my stay at the hospital a schoolmaster and his wife came to me with three pastors. They were looking for a Lutheran body to belong to."



The man who was sick and wrote the letter was named John Rohrbach. One of the men who visited him in the hospital in India was named V. S. Benjamin.

Which Hymn from our Hymnal makes reference to the Island of Sri Lanka but with a different name?

At the time the Mission Board had neither the funds nor any missionary to send to India to pursue this contact; nevertheless they correctly perceived that the Lord had called them to action. A report was sent to the West Central Conference. A team of three men consisting of John Rohrbach, Pastor David Schierenbeck, and Pastor David Koenig was sent to India where they held a conference with V. S. Benjamin. These men through prayer and study recognized that V. S. Benjamin was in doctrinal agreement with the CLC and therefore it was right and God pleasing that

we should join in fellowship and assist him in the work of the Kingdom in India.

In April of 1983 although the Mission Board was not able to send a missionary to India, it did send money for the building of a mission house in Nidubrolu, Andhra Pradesh, India. This mission house was to be a home for V. S. Benjamin. It was also a headquarters for Pastor Benjamin's church the CLCI. Later it would grow to include both a bible school and an orphanage.

In July of 1986 the CLCI numbered 22 pastors and 2800 souls.

Pastor Mohan Bas

Unknown to the three men visiting with V. S. Benjamin, there was another man at the far southern tip of India who was also seeking support, biblical training and fellowship with a Lutheran church body. In January of 1983 while the delegation was in India meeting with Reverend Benjamin, a letter was making its way across the world



Figure 1: Nidubrolu, Andhra Pradesh, India

from an India pastor name Mohan Bas to the CLC Mission Board. Mohan Bas found the name and address of the CLC in an international directory of Lutheran Churches. Mohan Bas had previously been trained in Lutheran Doctrine but had since started his own church the Bharath Evangelical Lutheran Church or BELC. The following year in January of 1984 Pastor Norbert Reim and Pastor David Koenig visited Mohan Bas and his small group in Trivandrum, Kerala, India. In July of 1986 the CLC recognized confessional fellowship with the BELC. At this time the BELC consisted of 2 pastors and 300 souls.

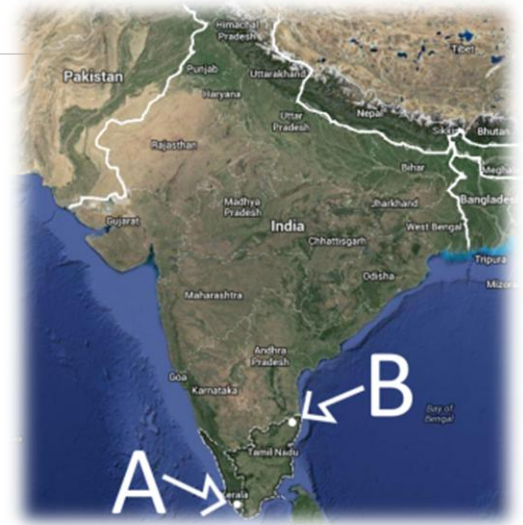


Figure 2: A - Trivandrum, Kerala, India
B – Uthukkottai, Tamil Nadu, India

Four years later in 1990 Pastor Mohan Bas moved the center of the BELC to Uthukottai near the northern border of Tamil Nadu, just a couple hours' drive from Chennai (Madras) India.

More than Teaching

¹⁵ **If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that (Jam 2:15-16 ESV)**

All of the men who went to visit India brought back reports that were energetic in their desire to share the Gospel in the poor and distant land of India. They saw the great mass of people and the equally large mass of temples and shrines to false idols. They saw the dedication and love with which many of the Indian pastors approached the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But they also saw the great poverty which abounded in India. They saw how many people lived in great difficulty. Seeing this poverty they were stirred with pity and desired not just to bring the Gospel but also whatever earthly help they could to the Indians. Both the first group which met with Pastor V. S. Benjamin and the second group that met Bas in the south urged in their reports to the CLC Board of Mission the great material needs as well as the spiritual.

In April of 1983, a group of men met which would under the supervision of the Board of Missions attempt to assist in India the poor and destitute. Specifically they were thinking of the orphans. This committee came to be officially designated Project KINSHIP (Kids in Need – Source of Help for India's Poor). From the beginning Project Kinship received overwhelming support from the members of the CLC. They began in 1984 with the building of an orphanage in Nidubrolu with a capacity of 25 to 30 orphans. All of whom are supported by funds donated through Project Kinship. Later in 1995 Kinship began supporting 15 orphans under Pastor Bas in Uthukkottai and the number of orphans being supported in Nidubrolu under Reverend Benjamin has increased to 35.

The city that is now called Chennai used to be known as Madras. When did the name change and why? When was Madras founded and by whom? Is there anyone involved with the beginning of Madras whom you know from American history?

What does Bharath mean?

The Lord Blesses the Work

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. (Act 13:48-49 ESV)

From the very beginning the mission board saw the great opportunity present in India and was eager to send a missionary to India to aid the pastors and church bodies the CLC was now working with. Even though the Lord led one man, Reverend David Koenig, to answer the call a means for an extended stay in India was not available. Eventually Reverend Koenig was sent to Africa instead. If the doors to India were closed to men they were not however closed to the Lord. The Lord worked through the men in India and both churches grew.

In September of 1989 Jyothi Benjamin, son of Pastor V. S. Benjamin, flew from India to the US to begin training for two years at ILC, in Eau Claire WI.

In 1990 in Uthukottai Pastor Mohan Bas began a two year bible school for the training of young men in the ministry.

In May 1998 Jyothi Benjamin began a Bible School in Nidubrolu, Andhra Pradesh, India.

In July of 2000 missionaries from the US traveled to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to visit a new field the BELC was exploring.

In June 2000 the first two men, Isaiah and Jacob, graduated from the Bible School in Nidubrolu, under the teaching of Jyothi Benjamin.

By the year 2000 the BELC had grown to include 150 congregations with about 4,500 souls. The CLCI had also grown to 68 congregations with close to 7,000 souls.

Man's Sin, God's Grace

²² **Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. ²³ They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. (Lam 3:22-23 NKJ)**

In December of 2000 information was brought to the attention of Pastor David Koenig that Pastor Mohan Bas was receiving money from another Lutheran Church body that the CLC was not in fellowship with. When confronted with his sin Pastor Bas repented and asked for forgiveness. Although

Although 1989 may seem like a long time ago to you many of the adults in your congregation were alive at that time, and some of them may even have gone to school with Jyothi Benjamin. Ask around. See if you can find someone in your congregation that met Jyothi Benjamin while he was here. Ask them what they remember about Jyothi



Figure 3: Andaman and Nicobar Islands

What major historic event took place the same year that Jyothi traveled from India to the US?

Missionary David Koenig assured him of forgiveness he also asked that Pastor Bas step down as president of the BELC. Pastor Bas refused. In April of 2002 Bas closed both the school and the orphanage.

Although Pastor Bas was unwilling to bring forth fruits of repentance, many of the men who had previously been studying under Bas came to missionary David Koenig desiring to remain in fellowship with the CLC. This was the beginning of the new BELC.

A new name was chosen, Berea Evangelical Lutheran Church, and a new building available for rent was found in Nagalapuram, Andhra Pradesh. This was only a short distance from the old BELC center in Uthukkotai.

On October 18th, 2002 five men from the BELC (Moses, D Paul, T. Sampath, John Victor, and Bhasker) were ordained by Pastor V. S. Benjamin from the CLCI. These five men were later joined by two more, Rajamani and Deepak. These are currently the seven men who serve as leaders and district chairmen of the BELC. They work closely with the CLC missionaries to train men in the districts of the BELC throughout Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

The Lord Gives the Increase

The Lord gave the word; Great *was* the company of those who proclaimed it: (Psa 68:11 NKJ)

In July of 2001 the Joint Asia English Pastoral Conference (JAPC) was held for the first time in Chennai. A total of 6 men from the CLCI and 12 from the BELC gathered together for a few days of fellowship and study. This conference has since been held every year and has grown to included representatives from Nepal and Myanmar.

In February of 2005 Missionary David Koenig shifted his base to India. This is what the Mission Board had been praying for since the beginning of our work in India in 1981, a full time missionary living in India. In February of 2008 the Lord blessed the work in India by adding a second full time missionary, Pastor Matthew Ude. In October of 2013 Pastor Edward Starkey also arrived in India to replace Missionary David Koenig who retired from his call to India, but continues to serve the Lord part time in other areas.

By early in the year of 2012, the BELC had grown from the original 5 districts in 2002 to 16 districts. But there was still much more that could be done. Many of the pastors and leaders of the BELC were excited about the learning and biblical doctrine they found in the BELC and talked to their friends and relatives. Consequently many heard and desired to become a part of this church body. There were many requests



Figure 4: Nagalapuram, Andhra Pradesh, India



Figure 5: BELC Chairmen
Top: Victor, Deepak
Bot: D Paul, Rajamani, Moses, Bhaskar, T. Sampath

from pastors asking to join current district as well as requests asking that new district be started in different parts of the country. A few of these areas and men were visited but nothing could be done at this time due to budgetary concerns. The Lord however provides for his people. At the CLC convention in June of 2012 the Mission budget received a large increase. This extra money was partially used to open seven new districts in in the BELC as well as adding a large number of new men to the current districts. The BELC leaders and the two US missionaries began teaching in these new districts in January of 2013. By the grace of God the BELC was also able to begin exploratory work in Odisha, a state to the north of Andhra Pradesh. In Odisha, a stronghold of Hindu radicalism, large numbers of pastors flocked to the Seminars being held by District Chairman Deepak and Missionary David Koenig.



Figure 6: Odisha, India



Figure 7: CLCI Leaders
JyothiBenajmin, V S Benjamin, John Rohrbach,
Nireekshana Benjamin

The work in the CLCI was also being richly blessed by the Lord. As of the end of 2012 the CLCI has grown to include 13,689 souls, 288 pastors, 38 seminary students, 288 congregations, and 230 preaching stations.

*For more maps, including one that shows
all the current districts of the BELC, visit:
lutheranmissions.org/category/maps*