

# Derbyshire Churches North India Partnership Newsletter April 2008

## Churches burnt in Orissa

The feast of Christmas, an event of joy and peace, turned out to be a tragedy for the people of Kandhamal district in Orissa (Diocese of Phulbani, Church of North India). Hard-line Hindu rioters torched hundreds of churches, institutions and houses. Thousands of people were stranded in the forests and on streets.



The CNI General Secretary, the Revd. Dr. Enos Das Pradhan, said: “The year 2007 ended with a black spot of hatred and communal disturbance in the state of Orissa, where there were shocking and most distressing atrocities against tribal and dalit Christians in Kandhamal hill district (where most of our CNI Churches under the Diocese of Phulbani are situated) in the Christmas week from December 22<sup>nd</sup> 2007 till January 2008. The story is a real tragedy, with political and official condoning, if not actual support to the activities of criminals and political activists spreading bigotry, and the ideology of hate and violence. It is also a painful narrative of police and administrative indifference, repeated complicity and consistent incompetence. Finally, it is the documentation of an utter collapse of the law and order machinery on 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> December 2007. The destruction and desecration of churches and burning of the houses of innocent people are outrageous, and violate any norm of civic societies”.

At the time of writing the situation was quieter but still unstable, and a planned visit by a group from Wingerworth had had to be cancelled. Do keep Orissa in your prayers – maybe even hold a special prayer event, such as the all-night vigil which took place in January at St. Mary & All Saints’ church, Chesterfield.

## **Diary Dates**

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> May:** The Annual General Meeting of the Derbyshire Churches North India Partnership at All Saints' Church, Church Street, Ripley DE5 3DA. Indian lunch available from 1.30 pm, AGM begins at 2.30 pm. There will be presentations of recent visits, including those by members of Wingerworth Church and the chairman's visit to Assam. All welcome.

### **Visit by twenty CNI bishops and their wives, 10<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> July:**

Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> July: Arrive and met by hosts

Friday 11<sup>th</sup> July: **Welcome service at St. Peter's church, Belper: Coffee at 9.30, service at 10.00 – all welcome**  
Followed by sightseeing and church visits

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> July: Morning with local churches; tea with Bishop Alastair in afternoon

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> July: Morning with local churches; lunch at Hulland Millennium Hall; **Songs of Praise Festival at Carsington Water, 3.00 pm – all welcome**  
(preacher: Bishop Alastair)

Monday 14<sup>th</sup> July: **10.30 am: Schools service at Derby Cathedral;** afternoon – schools visits, tea with Mayor of Derby

Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> July: **Open conference on contemporary issues in our churches, with the CNI bishops, Wirksworth church hall: coffee at 9.30, first session at 10.00 am. All welcome.** Bishops' wives attend Mothers' Union event at the Winding Wheel, Chesterfield during morning. All gather at Wirksworth after lunch for final session and debriefing.

Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> July: To Canterbury for Lambeth Conference.

**More details can be found on the partnership website (see overleaf)**

**All are welcome to attend the events highlighted in bold**

**At the time of writing two more hosts were needed – can you help? Please contact Christopher Harrison if you can do so.**

**September 27<sup>th</sup> to October 11<sup>th</sup>:** Visit to North East India by a group of headteachers and teachers from Church schools in Derbyshire.

## ***Visit to Assam – note by the chairman***

In early February I went to North East India on the invitation of the Northern Assam Deanery, to attend its Golden Jubilee festival. Northern Assam – which lies between the great Brahmaputra river and the mountain kingdom of Bhutan – is one of the poorer parts of India, inhabited largely by various tribal peoples who mostly make a living from farming and working on the tea plantations. The churches there had been founded in the late 1800s by a USPG missionary, Rev. Sydney Endle, who is still regarded with great affection by North Assamese Christians as their spiritual father.



The Golden Jubilee celebrations brought together around 5,000 Christians from the Bodo tribe. These had built a camp site of massive tents made from bamboo and straw for each congregation, with the centrepiece being a huge marquee capable of accommodating them all. This was the venue for four days of services running more or less continuously from 7.30 am until well into the evening. I was asked to give the address on three occasions – they said that if I spoke for less than an hour, people would feel short changed!

Assam in general, and the Bodo tribal area in particular, is thought by many of its residents to have been neglected by central government in past years, although there are now signs of rapid economic growth in some parts, especially in and around Guwahati. Sporadic unrest and agitation for greater regional rights has been going on for some time now, with occasional bombings and shootings in some parts of Assam. The churches of the Northern Assam Deanery are in very good heart, however, and would like to continue and develop our links. The Churches of the Alfreton area of Derbyshire, and Crich in particular, have a partnership with the diocese of North East India, although they have so far not had much contact with Northern Assam. We were told of some prayer needs, in particular a new primary school and mission station which is being set up within the Deanery. Neither the Deanery as a whole nor any of its clergy have a car or other vehicle - a major problem, given how scattered the various churches are.

The churches of the Northern Assam Deanery are a great inspiration to their diocese, and a shining example of the way in which the Holy Spirit can move whole communities to renewal and growth in faith. I hope that the seeds of much mutual enrichment between the Derbyshire churches and Northern Assam have been sown, and that we can continue to walk together as partners in mission in the years to come.

***Christopher Harrison***

## ***Visit to Durgapur***

In January and February, Liz and Tom Thomas from Wirksworth visited Durgapur diocese. The high point of the visit was a tribal awards ceremony and thanksgiving service, which was attended by 4,000 people. Liz wrote in her diary, "Seeing hundreds line up for communion was a wonder in itself. It'll take a few days for it all to sink in!".



Liz and Tom also visited schools, a slum project for children, and hospitals, and presented the diocese with two rickshaws. This is part of a scheme whereby the Wirksworth churches are helping Durgapur Christians on low incomes to earn a living.

### **Volunteering opportunities – at St. Stephen's hospital, Delhi, Community Health Project - including the Sunder Nagari slum**

Dr Amod Kumar, Director of this project, is looking for volunteers aged 18 and above to help with the work of his clinic. This can involve assisting with the medical needs of the centre, if you are qualified to do so, or being of general support in facilities such as the day care centre for elderly people, or the after school classes for poor children. Board and lodging are provided at nominal cost. If you are interested, contact the chairman, Christopher Harrison (see below) for more details.

**This and future newsletters are being posted on the partnership website, where many more details of its activities are available:**

**[www.northindia-derbyshirechurches-partnership.org.uk/](http://www.northindia-derbyshirechurches-partnership.org.uk/)**

**Could you help us by opting to receive notification by email each time a new newsletter is available, as well as other news items?**

Please contact the chairman of the partnership to join the email list:

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