

# CARRYING THE GOSPEL TO INDIA

Story by Luann Yarrow  
Photos by Roger May

**A buzz of anticipation filled the air. Three thousand pastors and church leaders were waiting to get into the conference center. Pastor Rodney Finch was excited, but his team members were anxious. Only 2,000 pastors had registered for the National Pastors and Leaders Conference in Hyderabad, India, and they weren't sure what to do with the extra 1,000 who were lined up outside desiring to get in.**

“Get them registered and the Lord will provide,” Rodney told his team; and sure enough, He did.

That unquenchable thirst for solid biblical teaching is one reason Rodney and a team from CC Cary, NC, led the National Pastors and Leaders Conference in India. The Indian pastors and church leaders gathered from October 9–12, 2008, in the city of Hyderabad in central India where they received instruction on the verse-by-verse teaching style that characterizes Calvary Chapels worldwide.

## **Because of a Boy**

Nine years ago, Rodney made his first trip to India with a couple from his church. Little did he know that meeting a young Indian boy, Bhanu Pradesh, would forever change his life. Bhanu was a five-year-old,



**A new believer lifts her hands in prayer at an outreach festival in Hyderabad in the Indian**

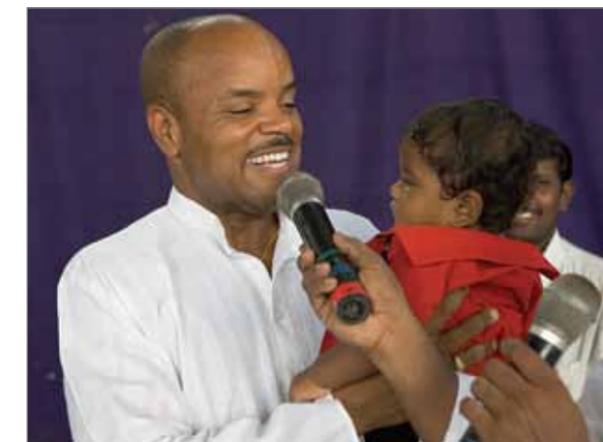
**state of Andhra Pradesh. More than 100 people accepted Christ during the four-day outreach, which was led by Rodney Finch and a team from CC Cary, NC. Indian women**



**Pastors and leaders from all over India gathered at the National Pastors and Leaders Conference.**



**Molly Randall of CC Cary prays with a new believer at an outreach festival that was held during the Conference.**



**Pastor Rodney dedicates a baby at a church in Secunderabad.**



Rodney holds Bhanu Pradesh, an orphan with AIDS he met nine years ago on his first visit to India. Bhanu was a catalyst for Rodney's love for India.

HIV-positive orphan living at the Freedom Foundation orphanage. At first sight, God planted in Rodney's heart a strong, fatherly love for the boy. Although India does not allow international adoptions, Rodney thinks of Bhanu as his own child—his voice cracks with emotion when speaking of him.

"I picked up that little boy, and I have not put him down in my heart since. It's because of Bhanu and my love for him—he's like a son to me—that I have traveled to India

many, many times," said Rodney. The CC pastor eventually got an apartment in India, a driver's license, and a motorcycle. Due to his many trips there, he started encountering pastors and sensing their needs.

"My heart went out to India because I saw a people who were perishing for a lack of knowledge," said Rodney, referencing Hosea 4:6. On his first trip to India, Rodney's hotel was across the street from a Hindu temple, and he observed Indian people buying



Nick Armogida plays worship songs for children at the Freedom Foundation, an orphanage that houses abandoned, HIV-positive orphans.

sacrifices to bring into the temple, removing their shoes, walking around the temple seven times, and then going in and ringing a large bell.

"Basically, you are ringing the bell to wake the gods up—to let the gods know that you are there. ... And it occurred to me, people are perishing for a lack of knowledge," explained Rodney. "It became very practical for me. I thought, *If someone teaches them, maybe they won't do that.* And then I thought, *The place to start is with the pastors because they're the ones in the villages reaching the people.*"

In 2007, Rodney held what he describes as a "small" pastors conference in Hyderabad. Five hundred pastors attended. The need was so great and the attendees so hungry for biblical training that initiatives for another conference began. While riding in the back of a rickshaw, Rodney and other leaders decided that the following year they would have a "large" pastors conference: 2,000 pastors from all over India under one roof.

Rodney went back to his congregation at CC Cary and shared his vision. The response was overwhelming. The church raised \$130,000—enough to pay for travel



A little girl lifts her hands in praise at a church.

expenses, accommodations, and the cost of the conference for 2,000 pastors and church leaders across India to attend.

### Extending the Invitation

The next step was getting the word out. Because many pastors in India live in remote locations, communication was a challenge. Rodney spent five months in 2008 crisscrossing India, inviting Christian pastors of all denominations and backgrounds to go to Hyderabad in October for an all-expenses-paid National Pastors and Leaders Conference. It was during this time of travel that Rodney personally witnessed the persecution of Christians, especially in the northern state of Rajasthan.

"In Rajasthan it is illegal to be a Christian. ... I saw pastors worshipping the Lord who had had their right arms cut off because they love Jesus, but they lift their left arms in praise and worship to God. You've never seen anything like this," Rodney shared.

But even persecution wouldn't stop these Christians from attending the conference. When October arrived, pastors and church leaders came from every state in India, some traveling for as many as 15 hours. When team members reported to Rodney that an additional 1,000 pastors had shown up—none of whom were registered—Rodney got excited. He said he knew God was up to something big. Thankfully, most of the unregistered attendees were from the surrounding area and did not require housing—



Nelson Henry, left, of CC Cary, oversees a group of more than 200 children at an outreach event focused on sharing God's love.

and those who weren't able to return to their own homes at night managed to squeeze into the facilities already reserved.

### Grace Alone

The messages were translated into 10 different Indian languages, with attendees congregating in rooms specific to their native tongue. But no matter what language was being spoken, the message was clear: The blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient. God's grace is all that is needed for life and for salvation.

"The gods of Hinduism are not gods of grace," explained Rodney. "In order to appease the 300 million gods of Hinduism, the Hindu people have to offer the gods a sacrifice—usually produce such as coconuts, bananas, or milk," said Rodney.

Nelson Henry, a team member from CC Cary, added, "These people were being set

free from legalism and dead orthodoxy as Pastor Rodney reintroduced them to the simplicity of the Word of God. Many of the pastors were astounded at the simplicity of the message."

"[Rodney] encouraged them to teach the Bible, to teach it in its entirety, and to do what it says," explained Nelson. "You could feel the atmosphere in the conference changing each day as more of the pastors were set free, filled with joy, and filled with praise."

### Grace in Action

Besides the Pastors and Leaders Conference, the group from CC Cary also held a medical clinic in a remote village. People walked for miles to attend the free clinic. Fay Smith, a nurse practitioner from the team, worked alongside two Indian physicians. She was astounded by the turnout. Fay shared that the hardest part of the day was when they

had to close the clinic and there were still people waiting.

"People traveled many miles on foot to come to that medical camp. ... It's possible they walked all morning to get there," she said with sorrow in her voice. Although Fay has seen a lot in her years as a nurse practitioner, nothing prepared her for the conditions she witnessed. "It's a sadness deep in your heart knowing there is such a need for the basic care of humanity. ... It hurt my spirit to know that these people have to survive without the things we often take for granted."

The team visited the Freedom Foundation, an orphanage for children who are HIV-positive. Nelson commented, "One of the greatest privileges was to visit the orphanage with the children. We just played with them, hugged them, and loved on them. They don't get too many hugs."

For Rodney, visiting the orphanage brought him full circle with his first trip to India nine years ago. Once again he visited Bhanu, the little boy who has touched his heart so deeply. Because Bhanu is suffering with advanced-stage AIDS, he is unable to run and play like other children. But Rodney prays with him, reads him Bible stories, and dispenses lots of hugs. And although Bhanu doesn't talk much, the workers say they see a change in him when Rodney is around.

"The [orphanage workers] tell me that when I come to visit, his spirit changes. He seems happier and becomes more playful, and I can tell he knows who I am. He grabs my face and grabs my nose and tries to take my ball cap," said Rodney with a chuckle. "I don't know why, but he is obsessed with my ball cap!"

Rodney will never forget the little boy who changed his life. In fact, his next mission is to build an orphanage in honor of Bhanu—but Rodney says all his accomplishments are only because of what Christ has done in his life.

"I'm blessed. I'm a street kid from Philly. People say that you're a product of your environment. I disagree with that. ... God saved me and set me free, and God's been using my life ever since," said Rodney.

"There's a whole big world out there that needs to hear about Jesus. ... I'm just doing what the Word tells us all to do." 

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A city of more than 7 million people, Hyderabad is largely composed of Muslims and Hindus. It is the fourth largest city in India, located in the state of Andhra Pradesh.



Rodney prays for new believers at one of four outreach events in Secunderabad, the sister city of Hyderabad.



Rodney helps a leper on the streets of Secunderabad.