

Six Christmas services in the Wannu townships and farm villages
‘Being In The Dark’ We See the Light



*“I see a smile in a poor people’s face and see Christ”
Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah*



*“It is with great joy that we welcome you “
Wanni people*

Jaffna Diocese

The Wanni: An Oasis of Hope

Victor Karunairajan reporting from the Wanni



Christmas, 2010: Despite the inclement weather, news forecast of heavy rains in the Wanni and already flooded roads on the way, we left Vaddukodai at 4 30 AM: Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah, Bishop Ammah Thaya and I with Pradeep at the wheels.

It was a torturous ride to Kilinochchi, a tossing and turning sixty miles of it on the A9 heavily damaged by the monsoonal showers. It also pathetically reflected the quality of road works and maintenance, a perpetual curse from which there seems no deliverance.

Ahead of us for the day were six Christmas services in the Wanni townships and farm villages horrendously devastated during the chaotic war period of three decades and visiting families that had gone through unspeakable horror and sufferings far too often caught in indiscriminate bombings, landmines, cross-fires and even used as human shield. Many families were forcibly evacuated from their homes to nowhere to be used as camps by the warring factions. There was also forced conscription of young adults, teenagers and even children and every family was affected. As for the damage caused to their homes and farm structures, it was indeed extensive with all the bearings of the Cambodian nightmare

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We visited Bharatipuram, Murukandy, Kilinochchi, Shalomnagar (Murippu) and Visvamadhu. We were forced to abandon Konavil a village marooned by floods but took comfort because a few days earlier we had a largely attended Festival of Lights Carol Service there. This diversion however enabled us to meet Sugirtha, a young lady who had lost both her legs and her friend helps her to get about on her bicycle. We met them quite by chance on the roadside. What she really needs is a 3-wheeler and Bishop Ammah has assured her one as soon as possible. **She has been fitted with Jaipur legs.**



Sugirtha is determined to enter university and have a career of her own. Her glowing smile and friendly nature had an inspiring effect on us. It was super tonic that generates hope.

As we drove through the Wannu most of the time on low gears, the violence that caused so much destruction to the region was evident all over; ruined houses, polluted wells, burnt-out vehicles in heaps in some places, bulldozed industrial plants, destroyed farms, crownless palms, damaged water channels, and all kinds of communication infrastructures and utility facilities seemed virtually non-existent. A rich agricultural region had suffered the worst and that demands immediate and intensely concentrated reparations.

The people of the Wannu have been the helpless victims and as for the perpetrators, it was a region they used against their will as a war zone. They were slapped with illegal intolerable taxes too. The scale of compensation they are entitled to is immense and the entire Sri Lankan community and the government must have this as their top priority. The rehabilitation efforts need to be fast-paced with permanent structures; certainly not tarpaulin handouts anymore. Schools must be returned to their respective communities. Army camps in schools is bad in principle. Caution must be exercised to prevent corruption sabotages whatever assistance is due to the people. Corruption in Sri Lanka is hydra-headed and each head that crops up should be dealt with instant dispatch without fear or favour.



Even the Diaspora must recognize the help the people need as urgent and immediate. We have to help foster a new generation of people committed to peace and goodwill among all communities, a message Bishop Danny Thiagarajah carried to the people of the Wannu.



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The sacrament of Holy Communion had a very special meaning at all the services held on this Christmas Day. The message from the bishop was shared in the style of a family head calling them to heal their wounds and move forward with tolerance, compassion and love. He assured them the backing of the church.

The wayside meeting of Sugirtha was symbolic of this gesture. Whoever she is, she is our child as much as all the children and young people. They are the torch bearers of our future. It was quite evident that in a little over a year, the smiles have returned to the faces of the children. I saw them cuddling around Bishop Danny at Mankulam as if he was their own and dragging him under the mango tree to have photographs taken with him. They will cherish that experience for years.



We visited six communities and another one, two days earlier and found no family has been spared the ravages of the war with lost members, seized young people many of whom have perished and those who have lost one or more of their limbs. There were others even more seriously injured and crippled for life. A war-widowed aunt has to take care of her children and three of her nieces who lost their parents. The extended family is the refuge for many children.

Thousands have been traumatized and there are those who carry irrecoverable shrapnel and quite a few in the front lobes of their heads. The number of people who have suffered serious shock and need help is beyond count. Bishop Ammah Thaya, a psycho-analyst who heads the JDCSI counseling services said that their work is an enormously exacting, unending and emotionally distressing one to the extreme.

Our people are precious to us and this is the hour we must stand by them fully, she said.



“Wanni is a farming community and the managers of this region have a special significance at Christmas. We are able to rejoice with the people of the Wanni because there is a new hope for them, said Thaya Thiagarajah. She already has a ground team of helpers trained by her, all of whom have suffered in the war.

Their quick recovery can be accounted to the meaningful spiritual leadership of Bishop Thiagarajah and the guidance from Bishop Ammah and their priests in the region. Theirs have been a Herculean challenge and remains so and it will be for some years too.

Many a time the people of the Wanni had to flee without knowing to where and what awaited them when attacks were made on their communities often incessantly by aerial bombardment and infantry action.

At all times civilians were the victims and they perished in their hundreds. In their flights some families encountered armed groups who gunned them down mercilessly. Most of the time young people would be seized and pressed to take arms leaving them only two options, either join the group and carry arms or be shot on the spot.



A young lady described her ordeal in vivid details how she saw the dead and the suffering, smashed up and scattered limbs that shivered for a while, dead bodies under her feet and many in various stages of putrefaction, bunkers into which they took shelter not aware they were half-full of corpses, injured begging for help that they could not offer, women and young girls in torn and tattered clothes and children crying for their parents either killed or got lost among the hundreds in flight.

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"Never for a second, I expected to come out alive through this hell on earth especially after I was forced to carry a gun that I never knew how to use or had any intention of using it either," she said with an intensity of feelings for those who perished in the war. Had she not accepted the gun, she would have been shot. She is now a JDCSI staffer working in her community caring for small children as her life's commitment.

These are children who have suffered the war. It is on these children we must lay the foundation for a new nation that will yearn for peace and goodwill, she said. She was proud of the work the JDCSI is doing among her people in the Wannu.

People like her and communities like hers are the primary focus of the Rt Rev Dr Daniel Thiagarajah, the Bishop of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India, his wife Dr Thaya Thiagarajah, a psychoanalyst and their church which has several parishes in the Wannu. Some of the Wannu churches were founded and developed community-style by Bishop Danny and Thaya when he was an incumbent priest there; this goes back to twenty-five years.

Mankulam which was badly damaged is virtually their second home. They worked in the Wannu with the vision that it is a farming community and development of a nation must be like roots that develop into shoots from the people convinced Mother Earth is a great provider.



Their work is totally committed to the people of the Wannu immaterial whether Christian, Hindu or others and have adopted a number of children as members of their family. Apart from their work with their churches developed with a real priest cum parental relationship with them, the JDCSI is very involved with Wannu's rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation programmes. Despite all kinds of constraints and challenges, theirs is a role model NGO commitment determined to help the region back on its natural farming feet and much sooner the better.

Bishop Thiagarajah is an advocate of grass roots socio-economic development programmes and truly believes that real liberation of the people have to come from them with socio-economic stability and the respect and love we value of our cultural heritage and traditions. It is his philosophy that liberation is for both, the victim and the perpetrator if it is to be meaningful.

Visiting six of their parishes with them gave me an impression of how much they loved these people and vice versa, how they knew each of the families intimately as if they were their family and how much they are devoted to their cause and welfare. In Visvamadhu I met a group of elderly ladies who described their terrible ordeal of being the last of the survivors wading through neck-deep waters at Mulliyawalai and all they had on them was one piece of clothing they had worn for several days. They saw how guns were turned on them to prevent their escape.



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On an earlier flight, one of the ladies described how thousands sought refuge in the Visvamadhu JDCSI Church compound and while all around them bombs were falling on the entire village but not one bomb fell on the church property. "This is God's own refuge," she said with her hands in an act of gratitude clasping her palms together above her head towards the church.

Shalomnagar in Murippu is a hundred-acre farm and the army had cleared a very small portion of it of landmines to have the Christmas service. The entire farm has been destroyed and needs to be cleared of landmines; it was heart-rending to see such a rich farmland in dis-use. The JDCSI is sparing no pains to have this land readied for its rehabilitation programme.

In Mankulam plans are afoot to have families settled in lands belonging to the church and develop a cooperative farming venture. It was no surprise Bishop Thiagarajah and Thaya decide to spend the Christmas Day with their people in the Wannu, bearing gifts and conduct Christmas services at every one of those parishes assisted by the Reverends Joseph, Dixon, Selvantha, Annalingam and Devasagayam. A tri-lingualist the Rev Joseph makes things happen with his wit and congeniality, Rev Dixon with his readiness to undertake any task, Rev Annalingam an expert in improvisation making the impossible become a reality in Visvamadhu and Rev Devasagayam doing a good public relations work at Kilinochchi. There is also the Rev Selvantha for whom the Wannu is a new experience after serving in the east for some years. He was a victim of the 2004 tsunami horror.



Gifts of dry rations also came from the Colombo JDCSI Church and others that were distributed to each family in the various parishes. Previous evening, preaching at the Midnight Christmas Service at the Cathedral Church at Vaddukodai, Bishop Thiagarajah referred to how the Angels appeared to the shepherds tending their flocks by night and announced the great news of hope of peace and goodwill and how they will find the newly born Baby Jesus, the redeemer Saviour, Messiah and Lord wrapped up in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

The shepherds promptly went there, paid their respects and went back to their fields.

It was still night but it was a different darkness to which they returned, a darkness pregnant with hope for peace and goodwill towards all men.

The Wannai Christmas Day experience had the same feelings. The people have returned to their farms and they have a new hope blessed by the inspiring visions of Bishop Danny Thiagarajah and his church.

இந்த கிறிஸ்துமஸ் காலத்தில் உங்களை வாழ்த்துவதில் மகிழ்வுறுகிறேன்

The Bishop's Christmas Message

பேராயர், கலாநிதி டி. எஸ். தியாகராஜா
தென் இந்திய திருச்சபை யாழ்ப்பேராயம்



கிறிஸ்துமஸ் என்பது கடவுள் கிறிஸ்துவில் மானிடத்தைத் தேடிவந்த நிகழ்வாகும்.

இது கடவுளுக்கு மானிடம் அவசியம் அல்லது தேவை என்பதை சுட்டி நிற்கின்றது. மானிடக் கூட்டுறவில் கடவுள் கொண்டுள்ள வாஞ்சையையே இது எடுத்தியம்புகின்றது.

மட்டுமல்ல, கடவுள் மானிடத்தைத் தமது சாயலில் படைத்த படியினால், அந்த சாயல் மங்காமல் பாதுகாப்பதும் அவர் பணியாகின்றது. எனவே கதறியமும் மானிடத்தை அதன் சாயல் இழந்துபோகாவண்ணமாகப் பாதுகாப்பதும் கடவுள் தமது குமாரனை அனுப்பியதன் இன்னொரு நோக்கமாகும்.

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கிறிஸ்து மானுடத்தைத் தேடிவந்த நிகழ்வு ஏதோவொரு வெற்றிடத்தில் நடைபெற்ற ஒன்றல்ல. மாறாக, சரித்திரத்தில் மக்களது அன்றாடக வாழ்வு அனுபவங்களில் நிகழ்ந்த ஒன்றேயாகும். அன்று பலவகையான சமையல்களினால் பாதிக்கப்பட்டவர்களாய், சொல்லொணா வேதனைகளைச் சமந்தவர்களாய், துன்பசாகரத்தில் முழுகியவர்களாய்க் காணப்பட்ட மக்களை மீட்பதற்கென்றே இறைவன் கிறிஸ்துவில் மானுட அவதாரம் எடுத்தார். காரிருளில் பேரொளி உதித்தது என்பதன் அர்த்தம் இதுவே.

எம்மவர்களைப் பொறுத்தவரையில் போரொன்று முடிந்துள்ளது. இது மகிழ்ச்சியே. ஆயினும் போரற்ற நிலை சமாதானத்தின் இருப்பிடமென்றோ அல்லது அமைதியின் நிலை எனவோ அல்லது முழுமைவாழ்வின் உருவாக்கம் என்றோ நாம் கூறிட முடியாது. மக்கள் அனைத்து நிலைகளிலும் நிறைவைப் பெறுவதுவே அவசியம். இன்று மீள் குடியேற்றங்கள் நடைபெற்றுக்கொண்டு வருவது எமக்குத் தென்பூட்டுவதாக இருப்பினும் துன்பசாகரத்தில் சிக்கித் தவித்து வாழ்வின் ஆதாரங்களையே இழந்திட்ட நிலைய-லில் புதியவாழ்வினை ஆசித்து அதற்காக ஏங்கித் தவிக்கும் மக்களது துன்பியல் அனுபவங்கள் இல்லாது ஒழிக்கப்படுவதால் சமாதானம் அல்லது அமைதி கிட்டும் என்று நம்புவதோ அல்லது அவர்கட்குச் சொல்லுவதோ எந்தவொரு நன்மையும் பயக்காது. மாறாக, அவர்களின் துன்பியல் நினைவுகள் குணமாக்கப்படுவதே அப்பேர்ப்பட்ட மக்களது புதுவாழ்வுக்கான அத்திபாரம் என்று உணர்ந்தவர்களாக மக்களின் நிறைவாழ்வுக்காக எம்மால் இயன்றளவு பணிகளைச் செய்ய முன்வருவது அவசியம்.

இந்த நம்பிக்கையை உடைய மக்களாகிய நாம், அனைத்து மக்களுக்கும் இந்நம்பிக்கையை ஊட்டிட இறைவன் அழைக்கின்றார். எம்மைப் பிடித்துள்ள காரிருள் நீங்கிட வரலாற்றில் தலைய-டு செய்திட்ட இறைவன் ஏற்ற விமோசனத்தை அருளுவாராக. மக்களுக்கு நம்பிக்கையூட்டும் ஊடகங்களாக நாம் எம்மை உருவாக்கிக்கொள்ளுவதே கிறிஸ்து பிறப்பின் செய்தியை நாம் உண்மையாகவே உள்வாங்கியிருக்கின்றோம் மற்றும் அந்நிகழ்வை இன்றும் உயிர்ப்புடன் வைத்திருக்கின்றோம் என்று சொல்லுவதன் பெ-ராருளாகும்.

இறைவன் இந்த நம்பிக்கையுடன் நாம் இந்த வருடம் கிறிஸ்து பிறப்பு விழாவைக் கொண்டாடவும், இதே நம்பிக்கையுடன் இன்னுமோர் புதிய வருடத்தினுள் பிரவேசிக்கவும் அருள் புரிவாராக.

அனைவருக்கும் கிறிஸ்து பிறப்பு மற்றும் புது வருட வாழ்த்துக்களைத் தெரிவித்துக்கொள்ளுகின்றேன்.

New year lunch at the psychiatric hospital at Tellippalai



Patients of the Tellippalai Psychiatric Hospital were treated to a grand Christmas Tree event led by S R Jesupalan at which many participated from the community.

The evening was marked by a great deal of singing and dancing in which the patients participated spontaneously. Their enthusiasm was such; they danced and sang late into the night. They would have danced all night.

The JDCSI treated them to lunch on New Year's Day and this operation was carried out by Rev Benjamin Jeyarajah, Victor Jeyakumar and Pradeep Kumar. Mr Jeyakumar who participated in the cooking of the main dish in the backyard of Bishop's House, Vaddukoddai commented that treating these patients was an overwhelming experience for him and a great way to begin a New Year.



Rev Benjamin Jeyarajah

Jaffna Diocese

Tellipallai Church should be a national monument



Tellipallai Church of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India (JDCSI) caught up and marooned within the Northern High Security Zone for thirty years is in a sad and pathetic state. Thanks to the efforts made by Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah there is now the hope of bringing it back to its pristine glory, and more especially to have it renovated and a declared as a national historical monument. With a fast-growing banyan tree, the front gives an Ankhor Wat characteristic.





It was in Tellipallai almost 200 years ago Jaffna's forays into modern medicine and education began when the earliest of the missionaries from the US arrived in 1816 and began their services to the community. The memorial grounds next to the church indicate the sacrifice these missionaries made especially the deaths at very young age of their wives.

New Year afternoon was a memorable event with a service of Holy Communion led by Bishop Thiagarajah assisted by the Reverends Sivaguru Joseph, Antony Saverimuttu and Benjamin Jeyarajah with Bible readings rendered in Tamil and Sinhalese and Bishop's message also interpreted in Sinhalese. Among the worshippers were members of the 515 Brigade who had earlier cleaned up the missionary graveyard and the church, which was no easy task, and made it ready for the service. They also provided the chairs for the congregation.



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The Rev Catherine Joseph and Thaya Thiagarajah led in the singing of some choruses in three languages and Nithi Kanagartnam sang "Just a closer walk with thee," as a special.

Following the church service, the entire congregation moved to the missionary graveyard for an act of gratitude to the missionaries acknowledging the difference they made to our people at great price, and for the final blessings. He also acknowledged the help rendered by the officers and men of the 515 Brigade and their understanding that this place of worship is precious to us. Although weekly services are not held, Tellipallai being a deserted township, special services are held by the JDCSI from time to time in which Tellipallai residents who live outside the zone participate.

We have to be grateful and proud of some historical landmarks in the north and if there is anything so important and memorable in particular, it is the Tellipallai Church. Its renovation along with its mission bungalow will be a grateful testimony of our people to the pioneers of modern medicine and education let alone the Good News of the Gospel they propagated.

The previous night the Uduvil Church and surrounds were gaily decorated with electric lamps by the local Brigade 513 and officers and men also participated as or with the community they surprised everyone after the service with gifts and also provided cakes and coffee.

Brisbane, Asustralia



HERO OF FAITH

Brother Thiviaharan Nalliah

Remembering

Brother Thiviaharan Nalliah by Christy Thiagarajah

The reality of mortal life has its inevitable end. No human being is an exception to this fate. A loss of someone dear can have painful tremors and deep sorrows; Brother Thiviaharan Nalliah, my dear friend who said his final earthly amen, will leave in my heart a deep vacuum for a long time to come; that is until I can reconcile to the reality of the inevitable.

I came to know him in 1989 on the day Saku and I got married. He is a relative by marriage. From then onwards he created an impact on me especially in respect of our faith and its spiritual dimensions. I learnt a great deal from his living example and would often consult with him when I needed some direction and guidance. So much so, he became virtually a spiritual guru to me.

More than a pastor with a dedicated evangelistic calling Thivia sincerely cared for the soul and spiritual well being of all those he came into contact with and served as a faithful steward. He planted trees and nourished them and the fruits of his labour were precious to him.

Dedicated his life to the work that God wanted him do. His influence on today's Tamil Christian society was immense.

Aussie children are prime example



Christmas , Children and Christianity

During a short holiday in Sri Lanka, Vijayan, Nilani and their three daughters visited Jaffna particularly to visit our children at the Homes in Uduvil and Pandateruppu. Not only did they spontaneously befriend the children they also entertained to lunch, following which they gave gifts to them.

The event was smart with a great deal of dancing and singing in which all the children freely participated. The Australian children were greatly heartened by this experience and they are looking forward to continue their relationship with these girls from the Girls' Homes.

Nilani is the daughter of Kingsley and Rev. Mrs. Angela Thambiappa.



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