

Greetings to my sponsoring churches! I ended 2010 by staying up late in a Watch Night Service, and started 2011 by having chocolate cake before breakfast! Then I was invited to a special New Year's lunch in the Sneha Deepam dining room. There were five different kinds of rice - regular white, coconut, mango, lemon, and curd. It was a tasty lunch.

The day after, I had the English service at my church and then as invited to speak at the Tamil service too so I was in church for three hours. Getting me ready for Liberia and the long services there?

A couple of days after New Year's, I had a cup of chai with Basha, the owner of the medical shop where we use to get some of our medications for poor patients. I am hoping that he can find me a source for geriatric chairs. I would really like to get some for the hospice - I don't like to see patients sitting in plastic chairs with their feet up on another plastic chair. It doesn't look comfortable. He's pretty sure that they are available in India - just not popular yet.

A pastor friend of mine and her husband came from Ohio for a two week visit to India. She was instrumental in helping arrange for the financial support of our chaplain, Grace, for several years. I took her to see Grace and she met the palliative care team and chatted with them. The next day I took her on a tour of the hospice and study center. She was impressed with what she saw and she sat in on the team meeting. Then she helped with the anointing service where she and Grace and I stayed busy anointing. She was impressed with that service too.

We have had a priest - Father Sebastian - staying in the hospice for almost four years. He was diabetic and at first came for daily dressings and then stayed on to live there and say the daily mass.

Recently he's had some chest pain, and he made a clear decision that he didn't want to be admitted to the hospital. After a few days of the condition worsening, he died peacefully at the end of the first week of the new year. There was a small service at the hospice and then a funeral mass in the Cathedral with the local Bishop and a retired Archbishop presiding, and a hundred priests or so. There were also a lot of Sisters there - as Father Sebastian was the Bishop's secretary during the time many of these congregations set up their convents. It was about two hours long and all but one person spoke in Tamil. Father Sebastian's nephew is a priest in Australia and he came for the mass.

He was the one who spoke in English.

The Medical Council of India has just approved an MD in Palliative Medicine and it looks like Christian Medical College will have the first MD in Palliative Medicine program in India. The Medical Council requires certain things such as relevant journals in the library. The hospital doesn't subscribe to any palliative care journals and they are very expensive! So I have been exploring what could be done.

I have also been working on my assignments from the University of Cardiff. My tutor said my first paper was good, but the grade I got was a 69. I was told that is a B or B+, so that sounds good. I guess I don't understand the British grading system! I have another paper awaiting grading and another I am working on.

And of course I have been making travel plans. I will spend about two weeks in February traveling to the north, and then I'll go south to Kerala for a friend's wedding. I booked four planes and a train, so I think I'm ready. Then it will be time to go to Liberia for a couple of months.

I thank you for your continuing support of my work and I thank you for your prayers! I could not cope without those prayers so please keep them coming! You are all in my prayers as well. May God bless you and give you peace. John