

Around the World

Reaching the Unreached with Hope

Women Conduct Groundbreaking Outreach Program in India

Andhra Pradesh, India [Bettina Krause/ANN]



More than 1,100 people were baptized earlier this month during the first women-led evangelistic series held by Seventh-day Adventists in India. The 11-day program, held in the southeastern state of Andhra Pradesh, demonstrated the tremendous impact women can have when they share their love of Jesus through preaching, says Ardis Stenbakken, women's ministries director for the Adventist world church.

Hepzibah Kore, women's ministries leader for the Adventist Church in India, came up with the idea and made it happen, says Stenbakken. Ten teams of local pastors and their wives prepared the way in the weeks leading up to the series, with the women taking the lead in meeting with people in the villages, and their

husbands assisting. The teams worked in 10 villages around the city of Thanuku, where there is already an established Adventist church.

Stenbakken, who was the main speaker for the series, says she tried to introduce listeners to basic Christian teachings, starting with a talk entitled "Love at First Sight," concentrating on the life and mission of Jesus Christ. "People were very responsive," she says. "I tried to keep each message very simple and very biblical. So often we try to make things too complicated."

The series was funded in part by the Adventist world headquarters' Council on Evangelism and Witness, as part of its new program to encourage world headquarters employees to engage in public evangelism. Nancy Van Pelt, an expert in family issues, traveled from the United States to attend the event, speaking each evening on family and interpersonal relationships. She was sponsored by Adventist-Laymens Services and Industries, a supporting ministry of the Adventist Church.

"The biggest challenge now is to ensure continued follow-up and nurture for these new believers," says Stenbakken. "There are 10 new congregations in the area, and they need to have permanent places of worship and ongoing pastoral guidance." She says that three pastoral teams will stay to assist new church members, and church leaders in India are working toward constructing church buildings in the area.



Although initially cautious about the idea of women playing a leading role in this evangelistic series, local church leaders have since changed their minds, requesting that the women hold similar meetings every year, says Stenbakken. She emphasizes that the series was not about women reaching out only to other women, but rather women using their talents to minister to everyone.

Adventist women have historically played an important part in building up the church in India, adds

Stenbakken. Educators Georgia Burgess and Anna Knight both worked in India during the late 1800s and early 1900s and are seen as pioneers of the church in that country.