

Case Study

A PASTOR AS A CHURCH PLANTER: HOSUR BIBLE FELLOWSHIP CENTRE

By Aji Thomas

Francis Foulkes in his book titled, The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, states

“Apostles and evangelists had a particular task in planting the church in every place; prophets, for bringing a particular word from God to a situation. Pastors and teachers were gifted to be responsible for the day-to-day building up of the church.”

But then what do we have to say if a man of God with a heart and passion of a pastor is instrumental in planting a church?

“I don’t have the gift of an evangelist. The capacity in which God has called me to serve Him is as a Pastor-Teacher.”

– Pastor Saji Abraham, HBFC.

THE PLACE

Hosur is an industrial Town and a municipality in Krishnagiri district in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. It is a taluk of Krishnagiri district. It is located about 40 kilometres south-east of Bangalore. Hosur is known for its manufacturing industries and its mediterranean climate.

Before industrialization began in this part of the state of Tamil Nadu, Hosur was a village surrounded by forests. During 1980s industrialization began with the help of [SIPCOT](#) and Hosur gradually developed into a busy industrial town.

As Per 2001 India [census](#), Hosur had a population of 84,314. Males constitute 53% of the population and females 47%. Hosur has an average literacy rate of 75%, higher than the national average of 59.5%: male literacy is 80%, and female literacy is 70%. In Hosur, 16% of the population is under 12 years of age. This town has a uniqueness of having 30% population consisting of Bachelors (Singles). The present statistics is not available and surely the figures must be on the higher side as the town is developing at a very fast rate.

Hosur houses a lot of industries right from abrasives, automobiles, bakery to welding and wire mesh industries. [TVS](#) Motor Company and [Ashok Leyland](#) are famous Indian automobile companies which have their manufacturing units in Hosur. Another significant establishment is [Titan Industries](#), which happens to be India’s largest and world’s sixth largest watch manufacturer. There are more than 750 industries classified as Large - 85, Small and Tiny - 512 and remaining are either unregistered or sole proprietorships type industries. The [Bangalore](#)-Hosur highway has been witnessing a lot of development over the last few years.

Hosur is famous for its hill temple whose presiding deity is **Thiru Chandirachoodeshwarar** (a name for Lord Shiva). The panoramic view from this hill is enchanting. It is in this city that Hosur Bible Fellowship Centre, one among the established church of the Asian Christian Academy exists. This church is located at a pivotal point of this big town, Hosur.

THE PASTOR:

Pastor. Saji Abraham is a graduate from ACA hailing from Kerala, South India, and presently resides in the same premises of Hosur Bible Fellowship Centre. He pastors the children of God at this centre.

He is a graduate of Asian Christian Academy. Towards the completion of his Masters degree in Theology in the year 1996, the Lord had worked through Dr. Joy M George, President of ACA and Mr. Tim MacManigle, Director of Missions, Fellowship Bible Church, Winchester, Virginia, USA, to be an instrument for God in church planting and mission work.

He had many opportunities to visit the villages of Hosur during his student life and a great conviction and the leading of the Holy Spirit which came as a part of outreach and evangelism dawned on him to work in this area. He willingly accepted the offer put forward by them to work with ACA in the church planting department after much prayer.

After praying for a strategic location from where he can have easy access to all the villages of this big town, Hosur was selected as it is also the Taluk headquarters. So with single minded determination to establish a local church in this area, he thought it best to select Hosur region. He has been involved in this ministry since 1996.

The initial call for ministry was a sudden one and it happened in the year 1990. The gift he had received at salvation is the gift of service. Many false calls were received after salvation but after conversion God's calling were to be a missionary. He now believes that the capacity in which the Lord has called him is to be a Pastor-Teacher. He is fully confident of the fact that the Lord has called him for this kind of ministry.

He believes that the utmost gift a church planter should have is a love for God and love for people. He also believes that the gifts he has as a church planter are availability, adaptability, compassion, showing mercy, willing to listen to the problems of people and leading people to God. The missionary organization were also able to identify his availability and willingness to serve the Lord and the founding members also recognized the call he had received from the Lord.

His family members include his wife Mrs. Elson Saji Abraham, and two daughters Timya and Tanya. His wife has been a moral support in his ministry, instrumental in counseling, encouraging and also motivating other women folks to the church. She's got a remarkable gift of hospitality. She is

balanced in her role as wife, mother and a social worker adding strength and confidence to the ministry of church planting.

THE BEGINNING:

“I was very sure that God wanted me to establish a local church which is God focused, Christ honoring and Bible centered. Christ is the only hope for any community.”

In 1996 a room was hired in Hosur to establish a local church which exalts Christ, exhorts people and expands its borders. Initially to get an acceptance in the community, a Logos reading room was opened with different language literature to meet the multi ethnic community. Slowly free tuitions for school children in the evenings were offered. A free spoken English coaching class was also conducted for more than a year. In all these areas, the students and staff from Asian Christian Academy had helped Pastor. Saji Abraham. As more opportunities to interact with people increased and when they got to know the people, the gospel was shared. Many heard the gospel reluctantly, some others were really interested.

Such interactions was on a one to one sharing in the beginning and slowly open air preaching, house visitations and evangelistic public meetings were arranged. Many hindu families facing many problems shared their interest in coming for meetings.

Thereafter Sunday Service began with a few interested people from the local community and people from ACA. Around 25 children from nearby children's home also began to attend the Sunday service resulting in the beginning of a Sunday school as well. The presence of the children made a difference in the church service.

Pastor Saji recollecting the beginning day's shares,
“It took two to three years to form a small community of believers.”

THE MINISTRY

Hosur Bible Fellowship Centre is a pioneer ministry in partnership with ACA. During the survey of the locality, it became clear that there were hardly any Christians in most or all the villages. So in order to establish a base, a core group of Christians were needed to stand with Pastor. Saji Abraham to reach out to the unreached as a team. So the initial focus was to contact some nominal Christians whose spiritual needs were not being met.

Pastor Saji about his initial plan shared saying,

“Primarily, I wanted to focus the unreached people groups in the villages. For this I needed a core group of believers who would stand with me and support me. Therefore, I began to visit some nominal Christians who were not regular in going to their respective churches.

They had many struggles in life and their spiritual needs were not being met.”

The ministry of HBFC basically began with meeting the some social needs of the people like reading room, free tutoring, spoken English classes etc. But, the Sunday school, Vacation Bible School programs etc. helped the church in advertising about the existence of the church in the locality. It was an avenue through which they could get access to several houses and it also resulted in starting Bible studies at different houses.

In order to reach others for Christ, personal evangelism, household evangelism for interested families, open air preaching and literature distribution were the means adopted. In the villages, it was found that the best method of church planting was to focus the children of the villages by conducting Sunday school program and then to follow it with house visitation.

In the Indian context, a building for prayer and worship is of some importance. After Pastor Saji had been married they had rented a house and the church was moved from the rented hall to this rented house. But some folks found it difficult to gather in a house for worship. Later a piece of land was purchased and a church building was constructed in January 2003 and thereafter there has been a steady growth in the membership in the church as believers from other churches also whose spiritual needs were not met and the people from the unreached populace began to attend the church services.

Pastor Saji about the growth of the church says:

“Church growth was slow but steady as through these years. We never focused on quantity but always looked for quality. Our focus and concern was always to mature believers in Jesus Christ and also to equip them for the work of the ministry.”

Today after the inclusion of two assistant pastors, the church is buzzing with many programs and ministries. Bible studies at three different locations are being held, prayer meetings are conducted every Wednesdays, and cottage meetings every Fridays. They mobilize new converts to be witnesses to their family members and to their community. They identify the gifts of each believer and get them involved in various avenues of ministry. Separate men and women fellowships are arranged for the believers to share from God’s word, to encourage each other through their testimony and also to voice their opinions and get their questions answered.

Pastor Saji on training leaders in the church says,

“We have identified the potential leaders among our believers. We meet them atleast once in a while to spend time with them for discipleship and prayer.”

The church has recently started a training program called Grace Bible Training Center to train believers, elders and pastors of other churches to equip them for the Lord’s work and ministry

THE OBSTACLES

Pastor Saji commenting about the struggles and problems faced in church planting says,

“Indeed, it is difficult to open a pioneer work among people whom you don’t know.”

There were various problems and frustrations that Pastor Saji went through when he began this ministry. There was a feeling of isolation at times in ministry. But it was overcome as he started to work in partnership with ACA.

“The management and friends from ACA were a great source of encouragement.”

Fear was another greatest obstacle to start the house visitation. In Indian situation, especially in a village set up, it is not very desirable for a man to visit houses alone since women are always available at home and men meeting women is not appreciated nor will he get acceptance into the houses.

“As a bachelor, I had plenty of time to move around and focus on ministry. But it had its own limitations. To meet with families and discuss their issues and problems was difficult.”

When Pastor Saji started his ministry he was a bachelor but after his marriage, his wife was always with him especially whenever he went for any ministry related to the church. Marriage helped him to get acceptance and a rich welcome in visitations and there was opportunity for sharing and solving problems more effectively.

Yet another fear faced by Pastor Saji was the fear of language. In Hosur multiple languages are spoken and he was not well versed with any of these languages. This compelled him to be selective in house visiting.

“To start with I was very choosy in selecting houses, unless and otherwise I was invited for prayer or sharing. Most of the time dialogue began in a friendship level.”

There were also times when there were difficulties and problems in Pastor Saji’s life. There were doubts if he was really called for such type of a ministry. Even thoughts ran through his mind that he would have been more useful in another place with another sort of ministry. He would even get discouraged when things don’t work the way he had intended, when God seemed to be distant and when answers to prayers is delayed.

But during such difficult times God always dealt with him and encouraged him.

Pastor Saji says,

“But God always brought me to the right focus, with the faith that He is the one who brought me here, and I need to be here as long as he wanted me to be here. He comforted me saying, that all type of ministry are equally important in His sight.

God also cleared my doubt and strengthened my faith through, my wife and friends from ACA.”

There were also few disruptions in the church when people prohibit believers who have trusted the Lord from Hindu families. Their own family members oppose their coming to church. As a result few stopped coming to church meetings and Pastor Saji still keeps in contact with them counseling them to be patient and willing to suffer such difficulties so that they can win their family members in the future. Such an approach helps them from being expelled from their family and their community.

THE GOAL

The vision and goal of the church are the following:

- To establish a Bible based, Christ centered church where Christ is exalted, member exhorted and expanding its borders by reaching the unreached.
- To see the members maturing in Christ.
- To see the members active in evangelism.
- Each house of believers to be a Bible study centre for others.
- Other daughter churches to be established.

Pastor Saji sharing about his dream about this ministry says,

“I wish to see this ministry to be a self supporting, self promoting and self reproducing church.”

THE CONCLUSION

This being the story of the establishing of Hosur Bible Fellowship Center under the leadership of Pastor Saji Abraham, what do we have to comment on the statement made by Francis Foulkes?