

## SVP TWINNAGE

### SVP VISIT TO THE INDIAN TSUNAMI ORPHANS JANUARY 2008



I undertook a visit to India on behalf of the National Twinning Committee from 28 December 2007 to 13 January 2008. I was accompanied by Bro Peter Salvatori and his wife Pamela. After travelling extensively around India we finished our trip in the Central Council (Diocese) of Kottar located at the very southern tip of the sub-continent where the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal meet. This coastline of India was extremely vulnerable to the Tsunami in the same way that Sri Lanka suffered and so many innocent people were killed.

#### **Kottar**

On Friday 11 January we were taken by Bro Xavier James Raj (Kottar Central Council President and Indian SVP National Education Officer) around the district to meet some of the Orphans and to see some of the areas devastated by the Tsunami. In the morning we visited some of the local schools where many of the Orphans are being educated. The main aim of the Appeal we launched soon after the Tsunami was to ensure an education for the Orphans for at least five years after the disaster occurred. Of the 2,961 Orphans supported, 1043 live in the Kottar Diocese. It therefore represented a good area to visit to get a feel of how the Appeal was affecting the lives of these unfortunates.

One village we visited that will remain in my memory was Colachel – essentially a fishing village. On the approach we crossed a rebuilt bridge over the river estuary. The picture left below shows the remains of the previous concrete bridge that was swept away by the Tsunami. We were amazed to discover that the middle section of this bridge (remembering it was concrete) was swept away by the outgoing current and has never been found as it was dragged somewhere out to sea. The picture on the right below showing its unknown destination out to sea.



The force of the Tsunami can perhaps be imagined but never appreciated by any of us that did not experience it. It was unstoppable.

The village of Colachel itself is very attractive and obviously provided a home for many fishermen and their families. It must be remembered that the morning when the Tsunami occurred was the ideal time for families to visit the beach to buy fish from the returning boats. So many lives were thus lost.



The above picture shows the beach at Colachel and I stood for a little while trying to imagine what it must have felt like if you were standing on the shore with the Tsunami wave approaching – completely helpless I should think! We visited the shrine in Colachel that has 414 of the victims buried there. The next picture shows the shrine and the one on the right shows a section of the names recorded – those with ages of 11 and 21 followed by a word in Tamil represent days-old babies

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392	சகாய	8
393	ஜிஜு ஜிவன்	1
394	சஜன்	5
395	சகாய ஜிவன்	13
396	ஜெனதிக் மேரி	60
397	யபிலா	11 பள்ளி
398	ஜலிதா	8
399	ஆனாணி மரிய	7
400	சகாய அருள்	10
401	எட்வின்	3
402	டேனியல் அஜாய்	1
403	மரிய வில்லி	30
404	ரூபன்	5
405	ரூபல்	1 1/2
406	சேம் குமார்	1
407	சகாய தனுஷா	5
408	அருள் வாணி	8
409	ஆதித்யா	5
410	மேரி கரக்கிணி	5
411	காட்வின்	21 பள்ளி
412	வ ஜேனியன்	53
413	சிறுவன் தாசன்	40
414	பேயி	60

In the evening we visited the village at Kanyakumari to meet a couple of hundred of the Tsunami Scholarship Students (Orphans) supported from our Appeal. The pace was frenetic and although we intended to try and put names to photographs it simply became impossible. The following are some of those we met:



On Saturday morning 12 January we attended a large meeting of some 1,500 people at the Jubilee Memorial Building, Chungankadai where we met several hundred more of the Tsunami Orphans and were able to distribute their grants to some of them. The ceremony also took the opportunity to inaugurate the new Indian Student Higher Education Scholarship Scheme and we were delighted to have this blessed by the Bishop of Kottar, the Most Rev. Dr Peter Remigius who was clearly a very intellectual, articulate and well-loved Bishop.

From the first hand evidence we saw, the sponsorship funds that **you** gave and continue to give undoubtedly made a complete difference to the lives of so many Orphans. They were visibly well-fed, housed, educated and perhaps most important of all **happy** with **Hope** for the future. As the works had been undertaken by indigenous Indian SVP members, **ALL** the money given has reached the Orphans as promised. My only private concern was how these Orphans would continue with their education and lives after the five-year funding stops. I will have to leave that in the hands of God and the National Council of India. I will let the remaining photos tell their own story but I thank all benefactors on behalf of the SVP England & Wales, the National Council of India SVP **and all the Orphans**.



David Wiles  
National Sponsorships Officer, International Relations Committee, St Vincent de Paul Society (England & Wales) July 2008