

Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW)

27th Triennial Conference - Chennai, India

Our Association, the ICA, is an affiliated member of the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), so it was important that Ireland was represented at the 27th Triennial Conference. My colleague Catherine and I accompanied by 3 other delegates Paddy and Anne Marie attended as Voting Delegates at the Conference in Chennai, India from 26th September to 3rd October 2013.

Theme of this, the 27th Triennial Conference was: Empowering Women World Wide; Encourage, Educate and Enrich. I can honestly say that this must have been achieved and the results will hopefully be implemented by all our members worldwide. On a personal note, I feel that I have been enriched in every aspect through knowledge and broadening my horizons.

The Host Society DMI (an order of nuns also affiliated to ACWW) prepared a wonderful programme and all the arrangements ran very smoothly. Some of the highlights included: delegates being picked up by bus each day to take us to the Conference Centre, (Chennai Trade Centre), experiencing 30/39 degrees of heat, the traffic at peak times, five lanes of traffic in a three lane roadway, motorbikes and scooters carrying families to school and work, cows wandering as the side of the road. Our meals were supplied at the centre, the cuisine of India was a big change for us all but so interesting, served by young Seminarians, endless cups of tea (India tea no doubt!) and bottled water. What a rich and diverse culture.

During the Conference itself we had reports from 9 Area Presidents including Africa 4 centres, Asia 5 centres, Canada, Caribbean Central, South America, Europe, South Pacific and USA each provided highlights of the work carried out in their respective areas. There were 6 Resolutions for discussion at length, debated and voted upon and I hope Catherine will deal with these. This work was concluded with Special Area meetings and workshops which proved very successful and beneficial.

Entertainment: We were entertained by hundreds of school children (aged 5 to 16 years) from various schools in Chennai. We had an India Night. "An Entertain the World Evening" given by all of us delegates and of course Ireland did well! We had song and poetry as Gaeile which was appreciated by all.

Voting took place towards the end of the Conference, where we voted in the new World President and her Board of Officers and various Area Presidents. So we said goodbye to a wonderful World President May Kidd of Scotland and welcomed new World President Ruth Shanks of Australia.

The Host Society offered us an opportunity for field visits, an opportunity to see firsthand the host country's rich diversity. Many projects have been funded which have helped to empower women to help themselves, their families and their communities and we saw some of the results. 11 buses left the Centre and our bus brought us to a small village named Kosavanpalayam about 29 kms from Chennai, pop 3900, literacy rate 78.87%, average monthly family income RS5000 under 50 euro. Paddy and groundnut are the main cultivation of the village. Pottery and brick champers are also important occupations of the village and they have 3 important Temples and we visited one of these. We were welcomed there by the Community, honoured and blessed individually and entertained by the group. A group of women were helping there to implement the various DMI Programmes for the Community.

As Westmeath International Officer I have collected 'Pennies for Friendship' (a fund to help women worldwide) from our members over the years so I felt proud and perhaps humbled to think that our

few pennies might have helped to improve the quality of life for some women worldwide. This visit was really another highlight of our visit to Chennai.

Tours: Of course we had tours, visited Churches, Mosques, Temples of all shapes and sizes. We visited the Basilica where St. Thomas was martyred and buried in AD72. I achieved one of my personal wishes when I paddled in the Bay of Bengal! Needless to say we went shopping!

We met and interacted with the Delegates from diverse backgrounds and cultures who had most interesting stories to share about their families culture and countries. I must mention one delegate from Canada, her address was Westmeath, Ontario! We hope to link up sometime!

While we were in India we celebrated the Birthday of Mahatma Gandhi and if I may I would like to quote two of his sayings: "The future depends on what we do in the present" and "Be the change that you wish to see in the World". So perhaps we in the ACWW might try to work on these.

On October 2nd the closing ceremony took place with various speeches, procession of Flags representing the ACWW, "a Song of Peace" by Sibelius was sung by all the delegates. An unforgettable experience.

Thanks to Dan, Anne and Donal for their encouragement to go to India and Catherine's beautiful photographs are much appreciated. It was really great to go to India but also good to come back home safely. Thank God.

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