

AILELC

Anna Irbe Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Foundation Creating Caring communities in Tamil Nadu.

In 1933 Anna Irbe, daughter of Bishop Karlis Irbe, Riga Latvia, established a Mission station in the Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu India, under the auspices of the Swedish Missionary society.

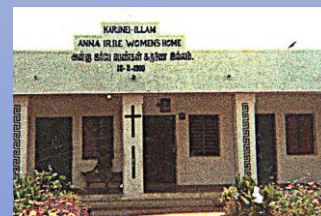


Reverend G and Mrs Mabel Stephen, fourth generation Christians, joined her, working together for 14 years. Together they developed an holistic Christian centre with a farm producing all necessary provisions, Homes for children and elderly residents, an elementary school with Mrs Mabel Stephen as principal, a Primary Health care centre and attached compounder (pharmacy) with Anna Irbe as head nurse and with Outreach, Spiritual, Educational and Special needs work in the surrounding villages.



In 1938, Dr Robert Feldmanis, seen here in old age with Violet Stephen, then Latvian Lutheran Church Secretary of Mission in Latvia, attended the third International Mission Conference in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. He visited Anna Irbe's Karanagaripuri Mission for two months and later wrote "The message of love was preached to the villagers in the context of their lives"

In 1968 Reverend Stephen, then 62, with the active support of Anna Irbe who wrote to exiled Latvians in USA, set up the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Mission in some of the most backward areas of Tiruchy and Cuddalore Districts following Anna Irbe's pattern of meeting the needs of the poor and disadvantaged.



Now in 2015 the Mission Work continues in 10 villages: -
 1. St Pauls, Kaludur; 2. St John's, Orangur; 3. St Thomas, Elathur;
 4. St Luke's, Tholudur; 5. St Yovan's, Aharam;
 6. St George's, Melakalpoondi; 7. St Peter's, Korakkavadi;
 8. St James, Lakshmanapuram; 9. St. Matthias, Keelakalpoondi;
 10. Mabel Stephen Women's Centre Chapel, Chittoor



The Church is the focus of the community, breaking through barriers of caste by holding communal meals, evening homework classes, healing prayers at the end of services, and providing such help as walkers for disabled Church members. As well as Sunday services, morning and evening prayers and “Carol Rounds” at Christmas take place.



Two Pastors and three evangelists visit homes giving counselling and healing prayers to comfort people combating fears of illness, operations or evil spirits and helping the sick, despairing and AIDS patients.



At the Kalpoondi Boys Home there are 15 – 21 boys between 6 and 16 years – depending on their family’s demands - from difficult backgrounds- alcoholic and / or violent fathers, one or other parent having died or unable to cope. Their day starts with prayers in the chapel at 6.30, then duties such as sweeping and raking the grounds and watering trees and plants, then study hour and breakfast before school. Healthy meals, a Christian caring environment emphasizing moral values, help with school homework, and learning to live as a group are aspects of the Home. Some of the boys have had awards for academic studies and sport. This last Christmas – 2014 - three old boys stayed at the Home for 3 days helping with the Nativity play - one acted Herod, another the angel, and all directed rehearsals.

Evening classes take place in 5 villages, in the Church, on a street under a street lamp, in the teacher’s house or in her backyard with the cow and calf. 7 teachers take 7 classes with an average of 25-33 in each class. The children are aged from 4 to 15 years. The teachers who have passed 10th standard school leaving examination are generally mothers. They have an all-day training session every month with Roselyn the co-ordinator who was a teacher training instructor until she joined her husband Amose in his work as an evangelist. At the training days they practice speaking English and conduct model lessons so their students learn to speak Tamil and English also reading, listening and study skills and how to speak in public. The government schools appreciate the help and often ask that difficult lessons be re-taught. The evening class children generally achieve higher marks in school exams than other village children. Some of the 7 and 8 year olds exchange letters with Frankly Holly Hill School in Birmingham so learning about each other’s different with lives.



Home boys being active and inactive; washing clothes, slicing vegetables, waiting for school, helping with Christmas lunch, Joseph, Mary and the donkey seek lodging



Sewing class in MSWWT and an evening class in Chittoor



The Mabel Stephen Women’s Centre in Chittoor village was established in 2010 as a Trust separate from AILELC Foundation but associated with the Church organisation. Founded by Violet Stephen in memory of her mother Mabel Stephen, with donations from U.K. and Ausma Vilcina, a Latvian lady from Iowa, USA with the desire to arrest the appalling number of suicides of young village women.

Five women have been counselled away from killing themselves and social groups have been formed where women can meet and talk.

A Sewing class of 10 women meet each week to use the two sewing machines bought the last couple of years.

A diet and exercise group of young women and senior school girls meet regularly to talk about food, diet and general health

15 to 20 older women meet weekly in a health group to have their blood pressure, weight, height and general health checked and discuss related topics such as vitamin deficiency and female health issues.

The Evening class teachers use the Women’s Centre as their base for monthly meetings and courses.

The Chittoor village evening class meets at the Centre and the Sunday services are held in the Chapel.

The AILELC Foundation and Workers are in the fore-front of helping villagers be it from filling official forms for the illiterate and elderly, comforting and combating their fears of calamity or evil spirits or taking someone to hospital.

