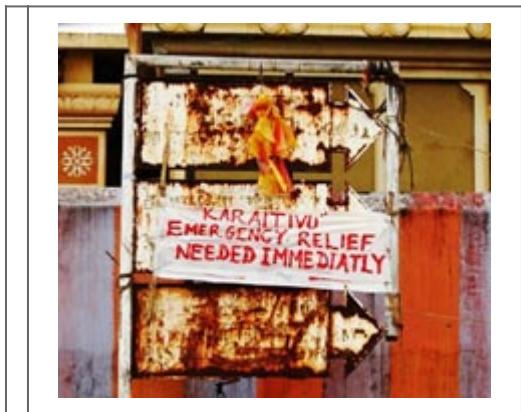


Baptist Child & Family Services team stunned by destruction_12405

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Dr. Andrew Bentley of Grace Community Church, Tyler, along with pastor and translator Anthoney Anoprathepan, Believers Church in Batticaloa pray for a man he just examined and treated for minor injuries received by the Tsunami. This man and his family have been involved in violence against the pastor S. Vijayaraj (far right with hand to mouth) Several members of the man's family involved in violence which has included beating and burning of the home church were killed in the waves. At right, one of many hand made signs seen throughout the Batticaloa and Ampara regions on the east coast of Sri Lanka.

Baptist Child & Family Services team stunned by destruction

By Craig Bird

Baptist Child & Family Services

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (ABP) — Even the most graphic television images and emotional verbal descriptions couldn't prepare the American volunteer team for the devastation that is coastal Sri Lanka, one of the countries hardest hit by the Dec. 26 tsunamis.

The six men from the Baptist Child & Family Services of San Antonio were reduced to admitting, "It is impossible to even start telling you how bad it is."

Their initial impression, after arriving in the capital of Colombo Jan. 8, was multiplied by the knowledge they were headed to where the human and physical damage is much worse.



CERI/TBM team members pray together and with others and Gospel For Asia reps at a home of a believer where they have been hosted in Batticaloa.

What they didn't know was they also were headed into a politically volatile zone. News reports said a "rare" outbreak of violence between Christians and Hindus on the east coast left at least three people dead and 37 injured. The religious preferences of the Sri Lankan population are estimated to be 60-to-70 percent Buddhist and 15 percent Hindu. Both Christianity and Islam are believed to be followed by 7-to-8 percent of the population.

The country has suffered through decades of civil war, but the battles are almost always between Hindu insurgents and troops from the Buddhist-dominated government. This explosion could be the result of highly visible Christian aid groups arriving in the area.

The tsunami heavily battered Colombo, but its full brunt fell on the southeast coast of Sri Lanka. That is where the Baptist Child and Family Services and its international relief arm have been asked to set up six emergency shelters for orphans. The Texas Baptist agency also will begin the process of training Sri Lankans to run not only the shelters, but also a permanent foster-care system.

The six-member team worshiped in a Sri Lankan church Jan. 9 before beginning a spine-battering, 12-hour drive across the country on roads that would be impassable if not for the urgent need to reach the hardest-hit areas. There have been reports of infants dying of starvation on the east coast, even after arriving safely at shelters, because of the lack of food.



Dr. Andrew Bentley conducts a medical clinic at Heavenly Mission Harvest Church in a small fishing village near Eravur in the Batticaloa District on the east coast of Sri Lanka. He saw at least 150 persons including dozens of children. At least two and possibly as many as ten villagers died in the Tsunami. Christians in the village totaling 27 families were spared as they were worshipping in the church in the home of the pastor S. Vijayaraj when the wave struck. The pastor, the first believer in the village, won the 27 families in five years.

The death toll for the country is estimated at 80,000. The devastation has delayed and complicated relief efforts. The 60-mile stretch of coast where the shelters will be located has left an estimated 30,000 survivors victimized by the tsunami, many of them children. The six emergency-care centers will house an estimated 800 to 1,000 orphans each. Baptist Child and Family Services was invited to Sri Lanka by the government on the recommendation of Gospel for Asia, a Christian ministry that has numerous permanent staffers in the country. The two organizations have partnered together before.

The San Antonio-based BCFS provides residential services for emotionally disturbed children, assisted-living services and vocational training and employment for special-needs adults, mental-health services for children and families, foster care, and pre-natal and post-partum health services. Through its Children's Emergency Relief International, it provides

humanitarian aid for children living in poverty in Moldova, Mexico and Russia.



At Carmel Fatima College Refugee Camp, Ampara District, Sri Lanka, (left) the blackboard displays the statistics on the residents of the camp. Several camps are located in similar facilities that provide shelter and basic services. Many are more primitive with refugees sleeping in tents with limited services. The second TBM team arrived in Batticaloa late Wednesday night following an eight-plus hour bus ride from Colombo, where they plan to conduct well cleaning, water purification and possible feeding operations. At right, Dick Talley of Lakeside Baptist Church in Dallas with Texas Baptist Men and Kevin Dinnin with Baptist Child and Family Services meet with Ebenezer Samuel, India director for Gospel For Asia, and David Beckett of Curry Creek Baptist Church, Boerne, a missionary in Sri Lanka working with Gospel For Asia, to discuss ways to partner in relief efforts in Sri Lanka.

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