

# my trip to... the ICMDA World Congress 2018

I had the privilege and unforgettable experience of attending the 16<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA) from 21-26 August 2018. The Congress occurs once every four years (like the Olympics). It is a gathering of doctors, dentists and medical and dental students who are passionate about mission and seeing God's kingdom come through their work and studies.

This year it was held on the outskirts of the bustling city of Hyderabad, hosted by the Christian Medical Association of India (CMAI) with the Evangelical Medical Fellowship of India (EMFI – India's equivalent of CMF). The theme of the conference was 'Reflect, Repent, Renew: In the footsteps of the Great Servant Leader'.

On arrival at the lush Leonia International Centre for Exhibitions & Conventions, we were greeted with a warm Indian welcome, *namastes* galore, tea, coffee, kiwi juice (!) a badge and a goodie bag (importantly containing a free ICMDA pen and notebook).

There were 847 people from 84 countries in attendance, with strong UK representation (24) including staff from CMF HQ, with some leading sessions throughout the congress. As well as accommodation for all the delegates, the huge grounds included swimming pools, a spa, a cinema and even an international go-karting track (which many of us, especially CMF National Field Director John Greenall, thoroughly enjoyed racing on).

## programme

The week was split in two, with the first three days being for students and junior graduates and the second part for everyone. Of course, some older doctors and dentists found their way into the first part and I think the excellent teaching was still relevant for them. There were also some optional pre-congress seminars, including Saline Solution



and Whole Person Medicine, which catered to those who had arrived early.

The structure of each day was similar to that of CMF conferences with a mix of main talks and seminars (or 'breakout' sessions) interspersed with coffee breaks, buffet lunch and dinner. The students' and juniors' conference kicked off with a wonderful spread of Indian and other world foods for lunch. Following that, music was very ably led by two bands, Shiloh Worship Band (from Christian Medical College, Vellore) and Sounds of the Nations; the contemporary worship got us all up singing and dancing.

Main speakers for the students' and juniors' conference were Dr Daniel Ho, an engineer and General Secretary of the National Evangelical Fellowship of Malaysia and Dr Helen Sigua, a GP and managing director of a clinic in the Philippines. Daniel engaged us with his sense of humour as he spoke in very practical terms on how we can bear the hallmarks of a covenanted and distinct people, rallying us to pursue our calling of being a light to the nations. I was especially challenged by his anecdotes on how he shared the gospel with anyone and everyone he met (in a taxi, on the plane, in public toilets...) even in the face of persecution. Helen spoke on how we can influence our workplaces and campuses through servant leadership, using her own personal experience as an example. We had a Q&A session with both speakers, where pertinent questions such as 'What



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do you think about women in leadership?’ were asked. There was also time for small group reflection and discussion in our regional groups.

The breakout sessions covered wide ranging topics such as leadership, mission, practicalities of setting up a community project, mental health, palliative care, hyper-connectivity, world views, and cults and corruption. There were also parallel workshops which ran across two breakout slots. It was hard to choose what to attend, as we were spoilt for choice!

For the main congress, we moved to a bigger hall, set up with decorated tables and chairs, much like a huge wedding reception! The congress included an inspirational series of talks from Dr Rajkumar Ramchandran and Rev Charles Price with plenary sessions by Dr David Stevens, Dr Daleep Mukarji and our very own Dr Peter Saunders speaking on medical ethics. Charles Price from Canada gave an exposition on Isaiah 42:5-7 (the theme passage for the conference) and Jeremiah 31:33-34 across three talks, taking us through the three phases of the New Covenant: a new redemption, a new relationship and a new righteousness through which the character of God can be expressed in us. Indian engineer-turned-evangelist Rajkumar’s Scripture-filled talks complemented these as he spoke on how to take the fragrance of Christ with you and how to share the salvation message with others. Every speaker

was presented with a certificate of thanks, with a tree planted for every certificate issued.

Besides the impactful talks, beautiful worship and scrumptious food, another highlight for me was International Night. The organisers decided that one was not enough – so we had two truly amazing international nights, one at the students’ and juniors’ conference and another equally exceptional night at the main congress. The all-singing, all-dancing evenings of fun (with a bit of stand-up comedy thrown in for good measure) were a showcase of talent from all over the world, complete with many different styles of traditional dress. Writing about it really doesn’t do it justice, but some videos on social media give a small glimpse of what we enjoyed. The UK crew even managed to get the whole world ceilidh dancing, following our ‘Strip-the-Willow’ demonstration with our Head of Students Ministries Rachel Owusu-Ankomah calling out instructions.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time at ICMDA World Congress, meeting missionaries, NGO directors, student leaders and receiving encouragement from many more inspiring people from all around the world. Worshipping alongside over 800 like-minded people from 84 different countries is an experience that will forever stay with me. Some were saying, ‘Is this what heaven will be like?’, I do not know, but even if it was just a small foretaste, we have a lot to look forward to!

Your next chance to attend an ICMDA World Congress yourself is in 2022, in Arusha, Tanzania (at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro). Start saving! Details should become available via the ICMDA website ([www.icmda.net](http://www.icmda.net)) where you can also find details about other ICMDA events. I would like to thank CMF UK for giving me a generous bursary towards the cost of attending this amazing conference. ■

REF

1. Revelation 7:9-10