

## INDIA

### **How our donations help to break the cycle of poverty**

One of the charities we support as a church is the fund established by two members of the Bonn congregation, Carol-Ann and Josie Pereira. This fund finances the school fees for approximately 50 underprivileged boys and girls in schools in and around the city of Belgaum in southern India. Since August this year our son, Tom, has been working as a volunteer at one of these schools, St. Paul's, and in October we went to visit him.

St. Paul's, was founded in 1856 by the Jesuits and provides education in English for around 2250 boys from different faiths. Tom's special responsibility lies in looking after the "hostel boys", approximately 75 boys aged between 3 and 16 who board at the school because they live too far away to go home every day. They need a lot of care and attention "24/7" and Tom is in his element helping to support them in their daily lives, assist them with their school work, provide activities for their free time and help the little ones adjust to being away from their families. He also helps out at the school, acting as a substitute teacher when a member of staff is ill, and generally tries to make himself as useful as possible. There is always plenty to do and Tom is enjoying all the challenges that come his way. We are very grateful to the Pereiras for setting up this wonderful opportunity for him – and for giving us a reason to visit India!

During our stay in Belgaum we met many of the children supported by the Pereiras' charity and were taken by the Jesuits to visit some of them in their homes. This was a very moving experience for us not least because of the warmth of the hospitality we were shown wherever we went. Although several of the homes we visited consisted merely of a single room in which every activity takes place – washing, cooking sleeping, studying – the families were so proud to show us their few belongings and to offer us a cup of tea and something to eat. All the parents we met expressed their immense gratitude for the support of the charity which enables their children to have a good education and the hope of a better future. One recently widowed mother told us that she earns the equivalent of only 6 € a month working in a kindergarten. Hardly surprising then that she cannot afford the annual school fee of 40 € for her son. Such insights were extremely humbling.

We were also privileged to be able to witness at first-hand how donations from our congregation are making a real impact on the lives of individual children and their families. The reality is that without the help of the charity most of the children we met would simply not be at school. They would be at home working in the fields or elsewhere, earning money to help keep their families going. They would not be receiving an education and as a consequence would have little or no prospect of breaking out of the cycle of poverty which traps so many children in India.

During our conversations with the Jesuits we were also able to appreciate how directly the children benefit from our donations since the beauty of the Pereiras' fund is the absence of any administrative costs whatsoever. The Pereiras themselves

pledge to meet any costs arising here in Germany and the Jesuits undertake the administration of the monies in India as part of their work in the community and require no remuneration. As Josie promises – 100% of every euro donated reaches the children in India. Not many charities can boast that!

It was a very humbling, at times heartbreaking, but overall joyous experience in Belgaum. We bore witness to the wonderful work being achieved by the Pereiras' fund and commend it to you wholeheartedly!

*Helen and Thilo Rensmann*

For further information see: [www.carol-ann-and-joseph-pereira-children-s-education-fund.com](http://www.carol-ann-and-joseph-pereira-children-s-education-fund.com)

You can also follow Tom's experiences on his blog: [trensmann.wordpress.com](http://trensmann.wordpress.com)