

Reverend Joseph John, Deenabandupuram

In 1946 the young pastor Joseph John and two of his friends met Mahatma Gandhi. He paraphrased Matthew 25, verse 40: “I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.”

He told the young men that this was the very essence of Christianity for him and it acquired urgent significance in the context of nation building, which was essentially community building. Gandhi called upon the young pastor, as a Christian, to start a venture as a memorial to the Anglican priest, C.F. Andrews, known as Deenabandu, “friend of the poor”, one of Gandhi’s closest followers.

Joseph John was a pastor in Katpadi/ India. After this encounter with Gandhi the young pastor resigned his work, as did his first wife Ranji (Aaron) John, a doctor, with whom he had three children: Karuna, Prem Chandra and Hannah (a doctor). Later as a widower he married Padma, with whom he had more children.

In 1948 he left the ministry to serve the poor and casteless in a remote area in the former state of Madras without outside support.



Joseph John talking to farmers

Together they moved to a remote corner on the border of Andhra and Tamil Nadu states to start Deenabandupuram, “Village of the friend of the Poor”.

With little money but a vision in his heart, he believed in people's ability to help themselves if someone gave them initial support. Joseph John acquired 500 hectares of land that was considered uncultivable. He wanted to show the farmers that a better life was possible. John moved there with his wife and dug for water in what had always been regarded as “wasteland”. At 60 feet he found it in abundance.

The Christian Church did not look upon this action with favour for it believed that a pastor should be “behind the pulpit and not behind a plough”. The upper caste landlords took his work as a personal affront as any work among the poor was wont to remove the hold the landlords had over them. Therefore, opponents of the programme burnt the pastor’s house, filled a

newly dug well with rubble and made serious attempts on the life of this young couple, till the leader of the opposing group fell grievously ill and was treated at the Centre. After that, things became relatively easier.

Early accomplishments at Deenabandu were medical work, especially among the large number of leprosy patients; a school and an orphanage; and also a small agricultural programme based on improved seeds and on practices which were just then coming into vogue. From these small beginnings has grown a large multi-sectoral programme covering 100000 population today.

Today this once barren land is a flourishing model farm. What was then a dream is now the Deenabanduparum Rural Life Center, which serves scores of villages in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

The valley in which Joseph John's Deenabanduparum Rural Life Center is located is known as the "Home of the Friends of the Poor". He has worked to settle landless people on empty land provided by the Indian government. He has also been able to find water in even the most uncompromisingly barren tracts.

Since 1955 his ideas were supported by World Neighbors. Money was not given to people but borrowed by them from a revolving loan fund. Those who were helped repaid their loans. Not only were they establishing their self-respect but they knew that their repayments would help others.

A new dimension to the work of Joseph John in the Deenabanduparum Rural Life Center was attributed by his two sons Karuna John and Dr. Prem Chander.

Karuna John is a graduate in agriculture, from California. He directs the Center's agricultural extension program, urging local farmers to use irrigation, fertilizers, better seed and a variety of crops. Farmers learned to store their grain and rice in earthen bins to discourage rats.

With support of World Neighbors Karuna and the other workers are training villagers in such employable skills as carpentry, metal work and printing.



Teaching metal work



Community and Health and Development leadership training at Deenabandupuram (1985)

Dr. Prem Chander John and his wife Dr. Hari John – both physicians – direct the medical phase of the Center, which offers low-cost medical care and an extensive family planning program now reaching out to villages within a 30-mile radius. Joseph John and his family are involved in establishing a comprehensive community health project, a move to preventative medicine which treats the causes, not just the symptoms. This approach emphasizes sanitation, nutrition, increased food production and family planning like the inter-uterine device (IUD) insertions. In 1975 his clinic had 25 beds and some mobile units.



Family Planning campaign propagating a family with two children

Dr. Prem Chander John also has a Master of Science degree in public health from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, where he specialized in leprosy, “India’s biggest disease”. To combat this, the John family has created the Nava Jeevan (New Life) project for lepers, for whom this name has a greater meaning. Nava Jeevan’s purpose is to move lepers from dependence to independence, to bring them back into society as contributing, productive members. This is one area in which Joseph John has found Rotarians to be very helpful providing manpower for a total public health survey of the area. They started to resettle lepers from Madras in rural areas. There these families live in houses provided by the Rural Life Center, also providing them with seed and water for farming while their medical treatment is in progress. The leprosy rehabilitation center in the Deenabandupuram Rural Life Center enabled the affected people to earn their living with work in a vegetable garden.



Now able to support her family with the yield of her vegetable garden, this young woman once had to beg in the streets of Madras (Chennai). She benefits from the services of the nearby leprosy rehabilitation center begun by the Deenabandupuram Rural Life Center. (The Rotarian p.26)



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Rev.Dr.I.Isaac Kadirvelu:

“I am a son of CSI Vellore Diocese and American Arcot Mission. After losing my parents at an early age, I grew up in Deenabandupram under the care & Rev. Joseph John, a person of Gandhian principles, the founder of Deenabandupuram, (a haven for the downtrodden) which spanned over 1000 hectares. He was like a Godfather to me, led me to Christ, taught me Christian values, gave me hope and a new life in Christ.” After 1984. I worked as a Social Worker and Catechist for 3 years in Deenabandupuram.

<https://isaackadirvelu.wordpress.com/journey/>

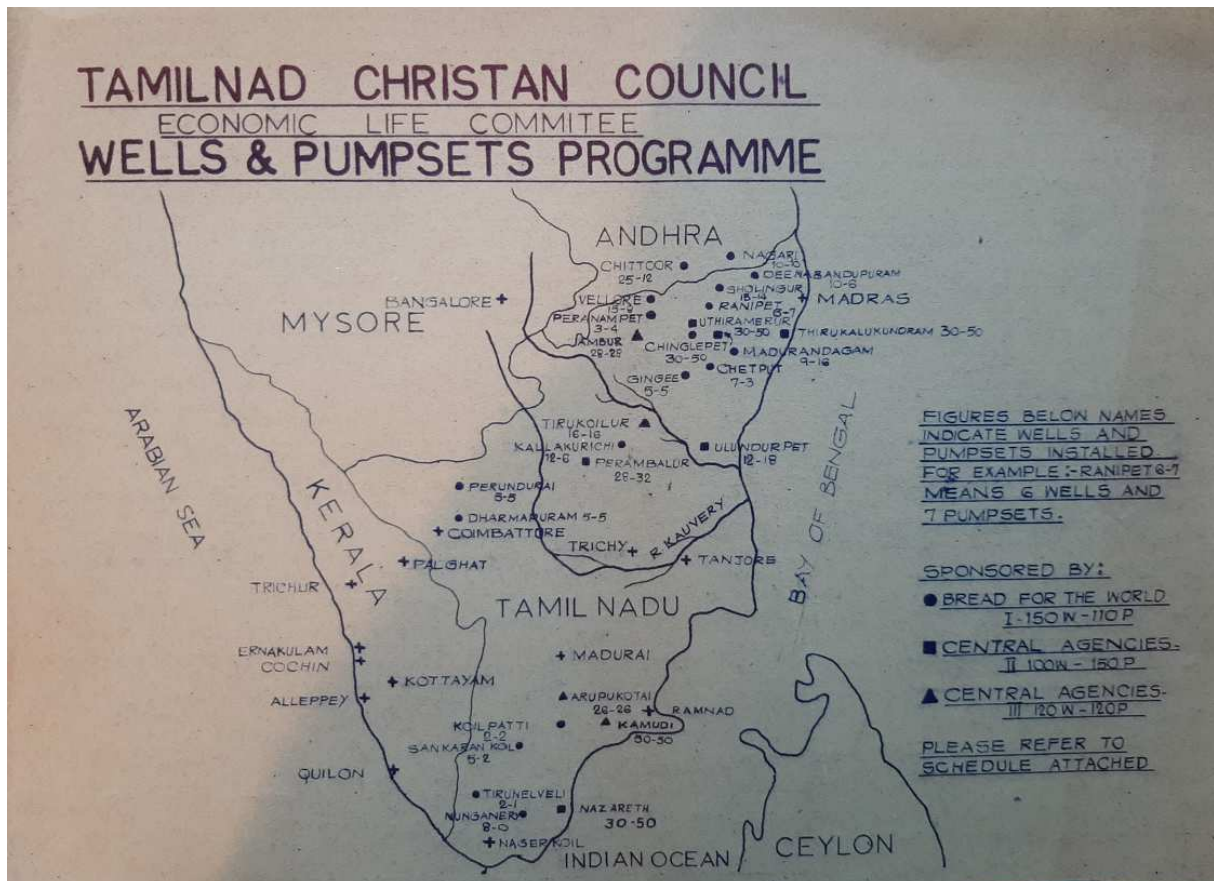


Joseph John in the middle (left)



Rt.Rev. Sam Ponniah and Appa Joseph John in Keerasath New Life Centre

Tamilnad Christian Council
Economic Life Committee Wells Pumpsets Programme



1. Wells Pumpsets Programme - 1966

An unprecedented drought hit many parts of Tamilnadu during 1965-66 and the sufferings of the poor farmers kindled the feelings of the Rev. Joseph John of Deenabandupuram. He himself had opted to live in the rural area, sharing the sufferings of humanity as a true Christian with Gandhian ideals. He was determined to alleviate the sufferings of farmers by digging wells and installing pumpsets so that dry areas awaiting monsoon rains could be immediately cultivated. With this in mind, a programme was chalked out to dig 150 wells and install 100 pumpsets to the poor and marginal farmers. The Wells and Pumpset Department of the Tamilnad Christian Council commenced operations in 1966 to relieve the sufferings of the poor farmers caused by the drought due to the failure of the monsoon by digging wells for them. The first scheme was started in 1967 to dig 150 wells and install 110 pumpsets. It was sponsored by the Bread for the World, West Germany, and United Church of Christ, USA respectively. Mr. Lüder Lüers a good friend of Rev. Joseph John did a wonderful work with valuable assistance of the Pastors for the upliftment of the poor farmers. They completed the first phase of 150 wells and 100 pumpsets successfully in 1969. Lüers had been sponsored by the German Church organisation „Dienste in Übersee“.



Lüder Lüers from Germany, founder of KNH (Kindernothilfe), visits Deenabandupuram Centre with a team. (On the right Joseph John)

Milestone - Two Wells-Pumpsets – Phase II -1969-1970

The second phase of 100 wells and 150 pumpsets sponsored by the Central Agency, West Germany started in 1970. Since Mr. Lüder Lüers wanted to concentrate on his work with Kindernothilfe, he handed over the Agricultural Department to Dr. Mithra Ebenezer, who was an Agricultural Graduate, in 1972. When he left in March 1972 Mr. Lüers had almost completed the task, leaving the final stage of completion to Dr. Mithra Ebenezer.

The Central Office when Mr. Lüder Lüers was Head was situated in Deenabandupuram. After Mr. Lüder Lüers left in April 1972; the office was shifted to R.K. Pet about 5 miles from

Deenabandupuram. In October 1972, the office was shifted to Madras for administrative convenience.

Wells-Pumpsets Programme – Phase III- 1973 The third phase of 120 wells and 120 pumpsets was started in April 1973 sponsored by EZE, West Germany.

