

Following is the testimony given by Pastor Arputharaj which gives the historical background for VOCCM-INDIA (Valathi Outreach Church Ministries)

Dear praying friends,

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

IN THE BEGINNING.

Whenever people ask me how VOCCM, the acronym for VALATHI OUTREACH CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES, came into existence, I tell them that it all started with a flat tire. For many this may sound too ominous, but for Ms. Betty Shelton this flat tire episode paved a way into the hearts and minds of the people of Valathi.

Once, Ms. Betty Shelton took a few of her Bible college students on a tour to Gingee fort. While they were passing through a village called Valathi, the bus suffered a flat tire. Since there was no facility to mend the tire the students and Ms. Shelton had to wait on the roadside for 3 hours. In order to have a cup of coffee, Ms. Shelton went to a nearby tea shop owned by the village headman. While having the coffee she asked the headman whether she can share the good news of Jesus Christ to the assembled few. The Headman refused, saying that theirs was a non-Christian village and there is no place for any God especially a western God. After 2 futile attempts and having 3 cups of coffee the headman finally relented. The bible students joined in the singing and a short message was delivered. I don't know how many of the assembled lot understood her message, but there was one person who came out wiser by the experience. It was Ms. Betty Shelton. From that day she had the burden for that long lost souls of Valathi.

WHO IS Ms. BETTY SHELTON?



Ever since Ms. Betty Shelton was doing her studies in the U.K., she was very much involved in alleviating the suffering of the people in the war zone. She was very much troubled to see the suffering and death of innocent people. She decided not to marry, but commit herself for the Lord's work. Her father who was serving in the British Army in India, once brought her a map of India. Holding that map, she used to pray for India. She applied to a mission who was sending people to India as Missionaries. At that time, she had an eye problem and the doctors in U.K advised her not to go to India as her eye problem may



be aggravated and make her completely blind. However, Ms. Shelton refused to heed their advice. She said, "The Lord called me to go to India. How can I change His will or call? Whether you accept it or not, I will go there on my own." Finally, the Director relented and she set sail to India in 1954. She reached Mumbai and served as a principal of Queen Mary's school. In 1974 she came down to Chennai for a biblical training program and later started teaching in the same college.

HOW I MET AMMA (Ms. SHELTON)

I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal savior through my mother, who was a pious and God-fearing lady. The very next year, I met with an accident and was hospitalized for a long time. It was at that time, that I promised to the Lord that if I get well, I will do His ministry. Miraculously I was healed and in 1979 I joined the Gospel team working among the people in villages. It was during that time, I had a VISION. In that vision, the room that I was staying in suddenly filled with light. There appeared the Lord's hand giving me the Bible, and behind me there appeared an English lady. She put her arms around me and said, "Son, Come. We will go this way." I was confused and scared of it. I then came to Chennai and joined a Bible college. One day Ms. Shelton returned from furlough, saw me and presented a Bible to me. I was really surprised and only then I understood the significance of my vision long ago. During my college days, I frequently visited her to learn English and hymns. She was my guide for writing my thesis.

THE MISSION IN VALATHI.

The Bible college went through a crisis, between the students and faculty. The management suddenly closed the hostel and hostellers were asked to fend for ourselves the remaining 3 months of the coursework. All the students went to Ms. Shelton's house and cried for help. She comforted us and asked us to pray for God's guidance. It was that night that God reminded her of Valathi. The very next day, Ms. Shelton rushed to Valathi, met the headman and requested him to provide a rented house for her and for her students. The headman gladly showed her a big house and in return requested her to teach English to the village students. As she started to teach the children, gradually the Lord opened a way to preach the Word. A woman named Kannamma who was working as a cook became a Christian. Her relative, Mr. Mannu, too became a Christian. Even the village headman's daughter started showing interest in Christianity. Within 3 months people have started to come for prayer. Because of her commitment with the Bible college in Chennai, Ms. Shelton used to visit Valathi every alternative weekends.

HOW I JOINED IN THE MISSION.

After graduating as a Bachelor of Theology, I was appointed as a pastor in a small village. Due to marital problems I decided to commit suicide. On my way I happened to pass by Ms. Shelton's home. The spirit of the Lord provoked me to meet Ms. Shelton for one last time. So, I went and rang the doorbell. She opened the door and the very first words she uttered when

she saw me was “Arputharaj, Do you know that Jesus loves you. Jesus never fails. The Lord told me last night that you are going to visit me today. See, I’ve adopted you as my son.” Hearing this I broke down. Ms. Shelton comforted me and laying hands on me she prayed for me. I felt confident and determined to truly serve the Lord along with her. She invited me to study TAFTEE courses with her.

In the year 1984, Ms. Shelton registered the mission in Valathi as a charitable religious, educational trust and received the permission from the government of India for getting funds from overseas. Thus, was born VOCCM, from a flat tire incident. One of her students, Rev. Durairaj, joined her in the ministry. She brought Joseph Jesudoss and myself from the Madras Bible College to VOCCM. Initially I was asked to work as an Accountant for VOCCM replying to mail sent from the Government of India. She even provided me a room to stay in.

BEING A PART OF A FAMILY.

In the year 1985, Ms. Shelton invited us to live with her in the same house. During the week I translated for her in the Bible college and in the weekends, we travelled to Valathi to minister for the people there. Once while I was translating about David’s passion for building the temple of God, I was given the burden to build the village churches. That was the beginning of the church planting ministry around Valathi area.

Right from the time we came to stay with Ms. Shelton in Chennai, we made a covenant with each other that no matter what happens, we will always stay together as a family. She always introduced me as a son to everyone who visited her. The Lord solemnized this. Even unto her time of passing away she repeated that we are a family. She never ever demanded any special treatment from us. Every evening we used to have family prayer, she taught us the word of God and built our spiritual lives. She lived frugally and above all taught us to pray for every single need. Miraculously every need was met through our prayers.

THE ANSWERED PRAYERS.

Once we happened to travel from Valathi to Chennai in an old Morris Minor car. We started our journey at 7 am and reached home the next day at 9 am, all because of car troubles. Ms. Shelton suffered a lot because of this delay and we started to pray for a new car. Finally, the Lord provided and presented the new car for her 50TH anniversary of her ministry in India. In that presentation meeting, she said,

“I never got a chance to buy a car, but now the Lord provided it. Unless Arp (myself) takes me in it, I can’t drive, so I will give the key to him.” Just like a mother to a son.

One Christmas week, we did not have anything to eat at home. So, I asked Ms. Shelton whether can I go and borrow money from my relatives. She said, “Where is your faith? Ask God for your need. We can’t do anything on our own.” Suddenly one student came and

bought a course material for Rs.50. She gave me the money and said, “This is faith, depend on the Lord for everything.” The next day the postman brought us a money order sent by a friend. On 24th Dec morning we received a parcel from another friend which had a lot of sweets.

One day Ms. Shelton gave me one rupee and asked me what can I do with it? I replied that I can buy a sweet, because it has very little value. She told me to change this into 10 paise coins, give each one to 9 people and take one yourself. Then the Lord will say that you are faithful in small things, so I will give you more.

Once a person from U.S.A. visited me and gave me a lot of money as a gift. Surprised and scared I went to Ms. Shelton’s room and gave it to her. She said return it back. Immediately I returned the money to him. He was so shocked and asked whether I did not want it. I replied that my mother (Ms. Shelton) asked me to return it and that’s it. Another person invited me, my wife, Pemi, and my son, Jabesh for a four-year study in U.S.A. and later to start a ministry in the metropolitan cities of India. I shared the information with her. She asked me, “What is your call.” I replied, “Village ministry.” She said, “Don’t go on your own way, follow the will of God.” I stayed back and later became the secretary of VOCM.

Once Ms. Shelton had to submit a project in U.K. within 3 days and we had very little time. We started to pray for help. Then we came to know that an England Cricket team came to Chennai to play world cup match along with a chaplain. I rushed to meet him in a church where he was preaching, when I explained the urgent need, he accepted to post our letter in U.K. itself. That was the providence of God, even for trivial things he is ready to answer.

THE PRESENT STATUS OF VOCM AND VISIONS FOR THE FUTERE.

The work of VOCM, begun by mother Shelton in 1975, has grown like a planted mustard seed. Currently 14 families are working in VOCM in 18 village churches with prayer cells reaching out to many more. There are 3 schools, the first at Valathi going to matriculation grade, another at Neelampoondi a



nursery/primary school going to 5th grade and the largest school RR School at Kannyalikuppam where there are almost 1000

children going for 10th grade. The RR school is the center for outreach into a new area and the gospel is gradually being made known in a strongly Hindu area. Two farms are also operating at Vadapalli and Thellampoodi. The first is

used for paddy cultivation and the other for coconuts. The aim of the farms is to bring some self-sufficiency to the work of VOCM. However, we are still reliant on the love bridge from the U.K.



and thank you one and all for your consistent prayers and practical support that we continue to need. We ask that you continue to uphold us in this work of the Lord in an area that was previously untouched by missionary activity.

LIFE AFTER Ms. SHELTON

Ms. Shelton passed away a few months ago. After the funeral we were specially comforted by the kind pastoral visits from the U.K. During Ms. Shelton's funeral my very own biological mother visited me and with tears in her eyes said, "today you have lost your mother." The pain of her loss still lingers in our hearts and minds. We are feeling very lonely now and sometimes find it very difficult to sleep. Sensing this, a friend from Sri Lanka invited us for translation work for European Pastors visiting there. We readily accepted and on the first day of our visit, the Lord gave both of us 1 Corinthians 16:9, "A great and effectual door has opened unto me and there are many adversaries." It helped us to understand more about our call and commitment to carry on the labor of VOCCM as begun by our beloved mother Shelton. Whenever I face problems, I cling on to my vision which I had in my youth. I know and believe that the hand of God along with the presence of my mother Shelton, will lead me on in the days to come. As Gertrude Curtis says,



"I cannot trace the onward course

My ship must take;

But, looking backward, I behold its shining wake,

Illuminated with God's light of love; and so I onward go,

In perfect trust that he who holds the helm,

The course must know.

ARPUTHARAJ

Co-founder of Valathi India