



## Spring 2019 Newsletter

### **This Newsletter is a Follow-up to the Saga of the Hope Center**

The MCA newsletter in the Fall of 2018 summarized the Saga of the Hope Center in India by Rita Corbett. The story of the Hope Center is a story of committed members who joined hands with SDA Administrators to build a conference center to promote the message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Andhra Pradesh, South India.

It began with an agreement between the Williams Lake Seventh-day Adventist Church in British Columbia and the South East Andhra Section (Conference) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Pursuant to the agreement, donors released funds for the purchase of ten acres of land.

When they arrived in India, they were told a plot of five acres had been identified as preferable. The donors could get no itemized accounts of the expenses, or title documents. Most distressing were the government notices identifying the land on which the Hope Center stood as “village land” that could not legally be purchased.

Systemic monitoring by state authorities of the illegal Hope Center activities were countered by complaints against the donors from the very SDA Administrators who had defrauded the church. Because of the donors’ desire to see the church grow in Andhra Pradesh they didn’t abandon the project, but instead requested an audit. They were told that an internal audit was conducted and that it found no irregularity, but the donors were never allowed to see that report.

It was then that the donors decided to engage a private legal professional, an attorney registered with India’s High Court, to conduct an independent inquiry into the matter. **The Independent Researcher confirmed that the five acres of barren land that was represented to the donors as ideal property was in reality land that belonged to the indigenous laborers, and neither they nor their descendants could sell the land.**

Indian SDA Church officials told the donors that they had spent a substantial amount of donated money to purchase the land, but actually it was acquired for a

pittance of a few thousand rupees to create illegal documents. During construction false bills were created to inflate costs, as was testified by the contractor. The contractor now believes that Seventh-day Adventists are a “bunch of cheats”.

When the donors asked Indian church leaders for accounting records and insisted upon transparency, it was apparent that leaders at multiple levels “circled the wagons” to protect each other and squelch accountability. The donors initially thought that the Hope Center issues were a simple case of local corruption, but after the independent inquiry, which included extensive interviews and documentary research, it is clear that these problems are systemic and deeply rooted.

Donors tried to make contact not only with the General Conference (GC) President’s office, but also with current and former GC vice presidents. Although the Hope Center allegations of fraud had been an issue at all levels of SDA Church administration for over two years, the donors received the following communication from the office of the GC president:

“Thank you for the email you have sent over to the General Conference and regretfully we are not able to attend the meeting that you have invited at the time and venue you have selected as, the GC personnel is not available in the date you have selected since their **calendars are filled up for months in advance** and they have other appointments scheduled. Sometime after Annual Council is over, ...[and] the division officers are available, something could be arranged, but this will need to be mutually agreed upon with only the directly involved in the matter attending.”

This summary has been extracted from articles posted on the MCA website.

The Saga of the Hope Center has prompted MCA to write a letter to GC President Ted Wilson, also posted on the MCA website.

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