

Unification Theological Seminary Brings School to Students in Chennai, India

Michael Mickler
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Dr. Michael Mickler (fourth from the left) with students from his class, "World Religions and Global Conflict."

There is a saying, "If the mountain will not come to Mohammed, Mohammed will go to the mountain." UTS launched a new chapter in its history by offering two week-long, credit-bearing intensive courses in Chennai, India during the summer of 2011. Rev. Dr. Mark Isaacs, Assistant Professor of Ministry and Management offered "Congregational Development" the week of July 4-8 and Dr. Michael Mickler, Professor of Church History, offered "World Religions and Global Conflict" the week of July 11-15.



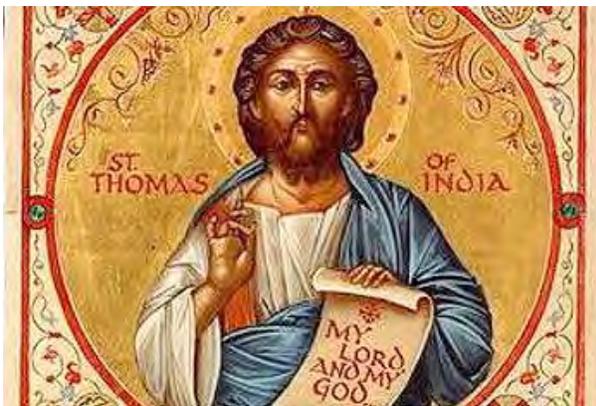
Rev. Paul Rajan, UTS Director for Interfaith Development.

These offerings were the result of efforts by Rev. Paul Rajan, UTS Director for Interfaith Development. A native of South India, Rev. Rajan traveled there the previous summer and discovered significant interest in UTS programs. Unfortunately, several dozen who applied and were accepted for admission had their student visa applications turned down by the American consulate. As a consequence, the Seminary administration and board decided to take UTS to India. Rev. Rajan began efforts in early May, sending e-mail blasts and advertising the courses in local papers. He arrived in June, preached in churches and met with candidates. In the end, 56 students registered for the two classes and more were turned away. A number traveled more than 12 hours by train to attend.



Rev. Paul Rajan (second from the left), Dr. Mark Isaacs, and a pastor, preaching barefoot in Chennai.

Rev. John Sathyakumar, Anglican Bishop of South India and a friend of Rev. Rajan, contributed a great deal to the courses' success. Not only did he recommend students but he also contributed a car and driver to transport UTS faculty from their lodgings to the institutes where classes were held. He made arrangements for faculty speaking and preaching engagements in local churches and for Rev. Rajan to be awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from the Bethania Theological College and Seminary.



St. Thomas of India, one of Jesus' twelve apostles who introduced Christianity to India in the first century.

Although Christians make up only 2.3 percent of India's 1.2 billion population, they are a lively presence in Chennai and South India. St. Thomas, one of Jesus' twelve apostles, introduced Christianity to India in the first century. His martyrdom and burial site is marked by a beautiful cathedral on the Bay of Bengal and neon crosses light up evangelical and Pentecostal churches in Chennai, reminiscent of Korea. Communal conflicts involving Hindus, Muslim and Christians are not uncommon and make UTS' interfaith peace-building orientation attractive especially since comparable studies are not available in theological seminaries there. Virtually all of the students who enrolled in the summer intensives wish to study at UTS in the U.S. and have applied. As of this writing, four applicants had interviews at the U.S. consulate and two obtained student visas! More will have interviews in the coming weeks.