

Center for Counseling Director Teaches/Learns in India

By Trisha Taylor



When Dr. Kathy Galvin (*fourth from right first row*) was invited to speak at a pastor's conference in Bangalore, India, she initially felt ambivalent. Although she was excited about the opportunity to share with Indian church leaders, she also questioned what she had to offer in a challenging cross-cultural setting.

Galvin, a psychologist and the executive director of the UBA Center for Counseling, had never traveled to India and was not an expert on the Indian church. However, the conference—

entitled Caring for the Wounded: Basic Strategies for Christian Counseling—was planned in response to Indian pastors voicing a need for training and guidance in managing mental health needs in their churches. Galvin knew she wanted to be part of meeting that need. She and a team from Asbury Theological Seminary spent about half of the month of July in Bangalore, India training pastors, lay leaders and professional counselors to use Christian counseling as part of their ministries. In a recent interview, Galvin shared the details of her experience and its impact on her life.

Trisha Taylor: As far as you could tell, what mental health issues confront ministers/churches in India?

Kathy Galvin: India has absorbed some of the worst parts of western culture. They experience the fragmentation of the family, marriages falling apart. In Bangalore, there were 19,000 registered suicide attempts last year.

TT: How is counseling similar and different in India as compared to the U.S.?

KG: Indian Christians are at the place of integration in Christian counseling, integrating academic psychology with Christian principles, similar to our culture 30 years back. Primarily, pastors are coming from a healing and deliverance ministry approach, but they recognize that there is more. They want to integrate psychology and spirituality.

They voiced to us that the general population continues to face a great deal of stigma where counseling is concerned. But we felt that many pastors were far ahead of their Western evangelical counterparts. They recognize that Christian counseling enhances discipleship. There is a tremendous hunger for this; that feels different to me than our own church.

TT: Tell me about what you experienced as you interacted with these Indian leaders.

KG: One of the pastors has developed a family-oriented ministry called Urban India Ministries. They have a staff of eight master's level counselors and offer programs for marriages, parenting, mentoring, and a program called Trendsetters that goes into the public schools. They even put out a beautiful magazine for release into the secular public.

Another minister pastored both Baptist and Methodist churches for many years but left his preaching ministry and developed a recovery ministry. With only pastoral training, he works very successfully with addicts.

TT: What did you believe your team had to offer the ministers you were meeting with?

KG: We realized that God did not necessarily need us over there—he was already at work. At the same time, we may be helpful in helping them focus on the integration of psychology and faith. Most of us have been thinking about that and working on that for years.

TT: What did you learn that the Indian church had to offer you and your team?

KG: It was so humbling to discover how much God is at work there. Whereas we wait for resources to become available, they are doing ministry. They are standing on the front lines, trusting that God will provide, and provisions are being made. Resources are being provided even as they go. And it was humbling to see what they're doing with so few formal resources.

Also, our team talked often about their tremendous graciousness in how they welcomed us. They were very hungry to learn more and yet very, very productive in what they are already doing—wonderful combination of both things.

TT: What challenges did you encounter in terms of taking your message to a different culture?

KG: We recognized from the beginning that India is not a monolithic culture; there is great diversity. Even though the population is only 2 to 3 percent Christian, there is diversity among the believers. Also, many of the people we worked with travel to the U.S. for education, for seminary training.

I wondered about how I would be received as a woman but I felt very respected, maybe even more so than in my own culture sometimes. A woman expressed to me that it was important to hear a woman's voice. Another said, "I feel I've had a voice speak on my behalf." One man told me, "I feel as if I've heard from the voice of a mother," which has deep meaning in their culture. There was great richness.

TT: How did your trip change you?

KG: One of the most powerful and humbling things about being there was that we did lots of healing prayer. That's not something I've done a lot of and the combination of healing prayer and the teaching I was doing was very, very powerful for me. It's still hard to talk about.

Also, it put me very much in touch with the fact that these are the wounded healers—that their work with hurting people has made them also aware of their own needs. I saw their willingness to bring that with them into their ministries. In the west, we tend to package that all up and not share it openly, maybe privately with only one or two people. But they understood their deep need to be in a community of healing.

Trisha Taylor works with the Center for Counseling, a network of Christian therapists dedicated to professional mental health care guided by a Christ-like model for growth and transformation. Therapists are available for workshops, individual counseling, and working with church staffs and other leaders.