Students help bring Jesus to Buddhist community

Brenton Stacey
Public Relations Officer, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW

Pre-service teachers from Avondale have modelled its ethos of holistic education during their annual mission trip to one of India's most impoverished states.

Students from the School of Education first visited AoZora Adventist Academy with lecturer Jason Hinze seven years ago as part of Ministry of Teaching Overseas. MOTO is now the subject of Jason's PhD thesis. Senior lecturer Dr Andrew Matthes joined the students in 2008 and has been leading the teams since.

The team's holistic approach included caring for the physical wellbeing of the children, their families and the community—the students prepared meals and organised health, hygiene and outdoor activities. This provided social opportunities—a concert showed parents the progress their children were making during the students' three-week teaching experience. The team added a spiritual dimension after the school asked Andrew to share his belief in God. He extended the invitation to his local church minister, Pastor Peter Watts, an Avondale alumnus who is also the evangelist for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in northern New South Wales. Peter's 10 presentations encouraged 160 Hindus to follow Jesus and five to join the Adventist Church through baptism.

A former sponsor child of not-for-profit Christian organisation Asian Aid is now ministering to the group each Saturday under a nearby mango tree.

AoZora is located in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, where Gautama Buddha is said to have obtained enlightenment. It is supported, in part, by the 1% Club, alumni and friends of Avondale who donate a small percentage of their wages. Additional funding has also been raised to purchase land and a school building. The first level with six classrooms has been completed. Levels two and three will as funds become available. TEACH

> *"The team's holistic approach included caring for the physical wellbeing of the children, their families and the community"*



Pr Peter Watts, with Dr Andrew Matthes, baptises Ramu Kumar

[Photograph: Madeleine Talty]