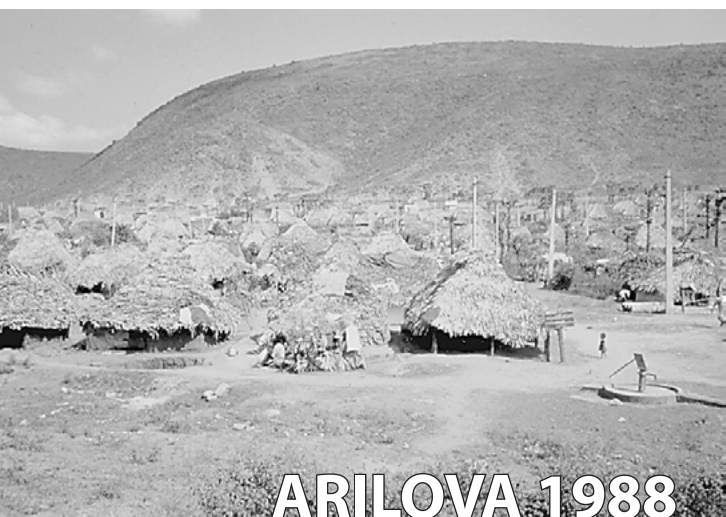


# A New Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles

While the Doulos was visiting Visakhapatnam (Vizag), India in 1988, a ship team and some local believers preached the gospel in Arilova, a slum village with about 500 huts on an open field. After preaching the gospel from Tuesday to Friday, we saw about 20 people converted. The Doulos team then erected a humble tent on Saturday, gathered them as a church and had a worship service on Sunday, 17 January 1988. That was the birth of Emmanuel Church.

Following the ship's schedule, however, we had to leave Vizag before their second Sunday, leaving behind one teenage girl baptised. Others couldn't be baptised due to strong opposition from Hindu family members and neighbours. What could anyone expect from this church?



**When I returned to Vizag 14 years later in July 2002,** I saw that the Head of the Church had blessed this infant church: not only to survive and grow, but also to plant 25 more churches within a radius of 320 km, each having their own pastor and place of worship. I had had regular correspondence with them ever since I was deeply involved in the birth of this church as the then

Evangelism Director of the Doulos. But it was special to see with my own eyes what God had been doing in and through them.

How could their success happen? Humanly speaking, what elements were 'done right' and contributed to it? I would like to highlight key factors in their model that we all can learn from.

## Key 1: Regular and continuous outreach

After the Doulos left, a small group of local believers continued to visit Arilova to follow up new converts and to preach the gospel. They held worship services on Sundays in the tent. Regarding this humble tent, Senior Pastor Vincent Edwin wrote, "[The tent] was the mother church and the foundation for the origin of Emmanuel Ministries. It was like the tabernacle, filled with the glory of the Lord (Ex. 40:34)." By the time the tent was removed by local authorities some eight weeks later, the members were committed enough to build their own small thatched church. These new believers didn't need instruction in techniques of evangelism. With great

passion for the lost, they simply told non-Christians what Christ had done for them. Furthermore, a group of 4–6 people carried on regular, continuous and prayerful outreach. Although Vincent's team went out only one or two days a week, within a few years he baptised over 100 people in Arilova.

Jesus said, "Go" but the church—through selfishness and indifference—has often refused to go. The world would be much different if every church sent out an outreach team a half a day per week.

## Key 2: Gathering converts as a church

From 1992 they began to reach other remote areas where the gospel had not been preached. By then, the church had about 15 people on the evangelism team, using the same pattern as in Arilova. A group of 4–6 people at a time went out twice a month for some months. When they sensed the leading of the Spirit, they stayed there 3–4 days. They then did two things learnt from the Doulos team: they gathered the converts as a church, and then secured a place of worship, however humble, as soon as possible. By God's grace they grew as sharing, comforting and praying churches for each other, united in worship and vision.

They didn't just preach the gospel; like the Apostle Paul they brought converts together as a church, and appointed leaders to look after it. Christians often fail to do this after the initial work. In evangelism, conversion is not enough; converts must be put together as a church for their mutual and ongoing growth. To do so requires concentrating on an area for a period of time on a regular basis until a reasonably-sized congregation is established.

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CHAE**



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*Father to three daughters, Daniel and wife Helen served on MV Logos ('79–'84) and MV Doulos ('87–'88). He pioneered OM's Taiwan summer campaign in 1981 and continued as Campaign Director until 1992.*

### Key 3: Leadership with dedication and vision

As the work grew, Vincent felt that the Lord was calling him to full-time ministry. After much prayer and struggle, he gave up his well-paid job as a civil servant at Vizag Harbour Authorities at the end of 1991. His dedication marked a new turn in the expansion of the church. His enthusiasm for and example in doing evangelism soon attracted more leaders to join him. He now has 25 pastors, including five regional co-ordinators. God honoured the leadership, vision and dedication of this small and frail man. He is now 60 years of age, and to date he has had four heart attacks, yet never grows weary in going out with the gospel.

### Key 4: Spirit of self-support

The outpost churches have maintained a spirit of self-support. They did not depend financially on the mother church, who therefore felt unencumbered and able to plant more churches. What impressed me during my return visit was that few pastors received salaries, and yet all the churches had secured their place of worship. They have never asked me for money. Help from outside was useful, but they didn't rely on it.

Christians often say that they could plant a church only when they are big enough to split or rich enough to support a daughter church. That's why they never plant another church! But the Arilova mother church that planted 25 churches was unbelievably small—smaller than some daughter churches which have congregations of several hundreds. They plant churches not by splitting or sending money; rather, they send evangelistic manpower and raise a few, but powerful prayer warriors.

### Key 5: Partnership in the gospel

They did have a partner church in Korea, who supported them right from the beginning. When my friend, Pastor Hong, heard about the church in Arilova, his church decided to support them in prayer and with finance, even though they themselves were young and small. They then raised more support for Vincent's family when he quit his job, but only after Vincent had made his decision. Their regular support and occasional support I raised elsewhere secured his family of six with a reasonable standard of living, and enabled him to travel to distant places.

It was great for Pastor Hong to visit these churches with me last July. He assured them, *"For the last 14 years, we prayed for Pastor Edwin and the churches at every Sunday service and Friday prayer night. As long as your churches exist and our church exists, we will continue to pray for you and support you."* What a commitment in partnership!

My partnership with Vincent over the years was linked through prayers and correspondence. Vincent wrote: *"The letters you sent strengthened us during the days of trials and difficulties. They have comforted us with the love of Jesus, and encouraged us to continue to work with the same zeal for the Lord. The valuable advice you gave helped me to work even more faithfully in the sight of the Lord."*

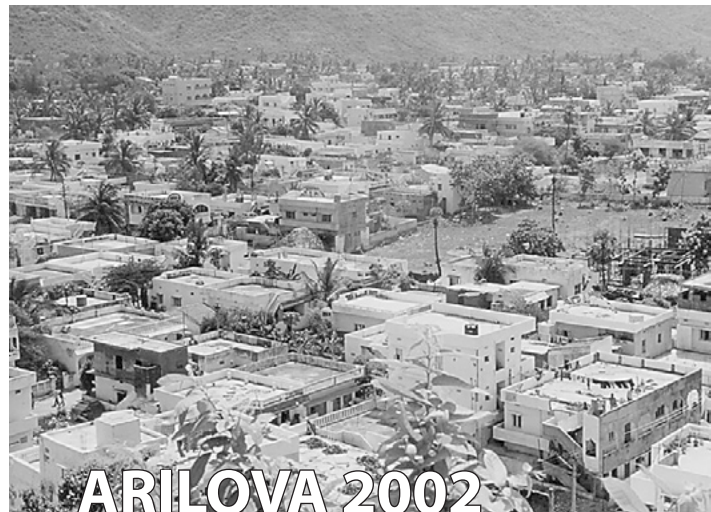
Paul often wrote letters to churches he had planted to teach and strengthen them. The Apostle visited them, or sent someone else. Ongoing fellowship and partnership in the gospel are vital for young churches (cf. Acts 15:36). Concerning our return visit, Vincent commented, *"All the pastors were encouraged and strengthened, and they committed themselves to work harder for the Lord until the end."*

We were mutually encouraged. What a blessing to see what God has been doing, and a privilege for Pastor Hong and me (and for OM) to be a part of the Lord's great work! We did small things; the Lord himself has done great things.

### Key 6: The work of the Holy Spirit

So far we deliberately focussed on human aspects for their success. But it is the Holy Spirit who has led their ministry. When we began in Arilova, the power of the Spirit was clearly demonstrated in miracles of healing. As the church grew, the Spirit kept Vincent from pastoring there and guided him to wider remote areas. The original church is no longer there, but Arilova is a blessed land: there are about 3,000 believers in Arilova today! The hut village has totally been transformed to a new town with over 10,000 inhabitants with many 2–6 storey brick buildings. The original believers became the founding members of many churches which started when the village was redeveloped.

Fervent prayer to seek the Lord's guidance and power is a hallmark of the Emmanuel Churches. Pastor Hong and I had to pray for individuals for over an hour after preaching about 20 minutes. A number of miracles were reported while we were there. They are very bold in praying for healing, and God honours their faith.



They are not perfect churches; far from it. They have constant problems and challenges from within and without. But Vincent and his people have passion for lost souls, a heart for new believers and vision for the Lord, despite their extreme poverty. This is what God honours, and so the hand of the Lord is with them. We have seen the Holy Spirit continuing a new chapter of the Acts of the Apostles in that corner of India. **T**

