

GRANT STORY

Serving Others

A MISSION IN INDIA

The Agape Dental Clinic

by Larry D. Herwig, DDS

My dental school graduation over 40 years ago was quite a turning point in life, and once my dental practice became established, I thoughtfully reconsidered my personal goals related to dentistry. Again, I concluded it was not just about making money, but also about making a difference. When discussing this with some of my peers, it was evident that dentists are some of the most caring and giving people in the entire health care industry.

As I weighed the many opportunities available to make a difference via dental philanthropy and charity, I decided to focus first on my local and state community before going anywhere else in the world. After all, this was where I lived and worked. Initially, my version of "Serving Others" included director positions on several foundation boards, volunteering at numerous local events including TMOM and GKAS®, and hosting other charitable efforts in my office. All of these efforts supported the needs of the underserved people living in and around Dallas.

One day I got the call that I was being nominated for Fellowship in the ICD, and I was humbled and honored to become a Fellow in 1995. The ICD USA Section is renowned for recognizing dental professionals with their ICD Fellowship Award in accordance with their Vision to be known as the leading honorary dental organization committed to improving global oral health, their Motto "Serving Others", and Mission point to address oral health needs and education throughout the United States and the world. It is noteworthy that the ICD Fellowship Award comes with the expectation that we Fellows subscribe to these tenets and will continue to serve via leadership, education and/or providing oral health care in the US and abroad.

Fast forward into the new millennium and the year 2002. That is when I had a unique opportunity to go on a mission trip with my family to a remote campus in India that housed an orphanage, a K-12 school, and a hospital that my church helped found in 1976 and continues to support. The timing seemed right for me to expand my horizons. Little did I know, this experience would lead to the formation of a permanent dental clinic within the Agape Hospital of the Asian Christian Academy (ACA) in South Central India near Hosur. Later, the mission would expand with a second dental clinic in the nearby village of Bagalur, helping many needy people in one of the most underserved areas of the world.



Fellow Larry D. Herwig treating dental patients in the Agape Dental Clinic of the Asian Christian Academy in India. Dr. Herwig is provider, consultant and fundraiser for the dental clinic in the Agape Hospital of the ACA in Hosur, India.

My calling to the Agape Hospital over 22 years ago to establish the Agape Dental Clinic has been one way I fulfilled the commitment I made as an ICD Fellow. My first dental mission visit was very limited, as I examined and treated 25-30 patients per day for a week. I had solicited a few donations and gathered all of the new and used instruments and dental supplies I could find available for use in the minimally-equipped facilities. The majority of these patients were seeing a dentist for the first time and it was quite an eye-opening experience for us both.

Over time, we equipped the Agape Hospital clinic with a used dental unit and air compressor, so that on my second trip to India I could treat patients with contemporary restorative care, instead of being limited to cleanings and extractions as before. Today we have a modern, fully-equipped dental operatory including an X-ray unit, high-speed hand pieces with suction, and sterilization! We are also finishing a second dental clinic in a neighboring village.



Outside front view of the Karunya Community Medical and Dental Clinics in Bagalur, India.

The ICD USA Section Foundation, in conjunction with Henry Schein Cares Foundation, provided over \$13,000 in dental supplies that I brought with me for my third trip to India in August 2023. In January 2025, the ICD Foundation granted \$5,000 to help purchase dental equipment such as a complete dental chair unit, digital X-rays, and sterilization equipment for the new Karunya Dental Clinic in Bagalur, India. What a joy it is Serving Others and making a difference. I hope my story encourages you to take the first step when you find your calling to serve.

