continued from front

hours. And on Christmas day, we had an inspiring service that was overflowing with new visitors and friends. Our room was packed! This was our biggest Christmas service yet, and it was incredibly encouraging to my wife and me.

We spent two entire days at one of the leading children's hospitals in the country, working specifically with autistic children and their parents. Some of the children's parents travel for countless hours in order to get medicine and counseling for their children, because this hospital is one of the only places in the country where they can receive this kind of help. I was shocked when I first walked into the room to see our volunteers, all on their own, striking up deep and meaningful conversations with every single set of Sri Lankan parents. The volunteers encouraged the parents to form a support system for themselves in order to help each other in their difficulties. I was inspired! Many of the kids will rarely speak with strangers, but the volunteers were so excellent with children, that every single child felt compelled to speak and even play games with our group. What a miracle! The staff was of the hospital were in awe of such serving hearts in the special needs wing of the hospital.

Our last days were spent teaching English to orphans of all ages at an orphanage in the city centre. We split up into several small groups, and taught the children basic English. This was no easy task. Sri Lankan schools teach very little English to their students, so our teaching will give them more opportunities for more jobs when they get older. The children desired to learn English and were incredibly respectful to all of our volunteers. One of the workers at the orphanage showed me the closets for the children, and some of our volunteers offered to purchase new ones for them! And after that, a volunteer offered to pay to take them out to a movie, and pay for every single child's ticket. The entire orphanage was strengthened by our actions. They said that they were lucky to have us, but I really believe that we were the lucky ones.

We ended our days with a life-changing spiritual retreat in the palm tree filled outskirts of the city. We started the retreat with three hours of solitary time with God, praying and reflecting on what we had done, and learned during our time in service to others. Then we had lessons for two days about getting out of our comfort zones, and moving forward with faith in God!

Afterwards, our new year's party began! We started the night with prayer, a message on the cross, and a memorable communion to prepare us for the new year ahead of us, and then we danced the night away! There was an incredible amount of fun, dancing, food, and fireworks. It's ironic that most people wait all year to go on vacations and shopping sprees that ultimately disappoint them, when our volunteers spent their holiday season serving others, and they had the time of their lives! During our time, I was reminded of when Paul said to the Galatian church in Galatians 5:13, "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

You wouldn't expect a small group of strangers to sacrifice their holiday season in order to serve other strangers in an unnoticed corner of the earth, but I guess that fits in with 2016's theme of the unexpected doesn't it? So heading into 2017, I will remember this: If you accept unexpected opportunities with a godly attitude, it will change your life.

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- ***This Week at the One Year Challenge***
  One Year Challenge — Tuesday, 17 January 2017
  Meet the OYC Guys! In this week's newsletter we're sharing the first of a series of videos featuring four guys at an OYC site sharing about all kinds of topics—everything from money to love and lots more. This...
- ***"Reach Every Beach": New Video on Caribbean Missions***
  Richard Beadle, St. Georges ICOC, Grenada — Friday, 13 January 2017
  There are 40 million souls who live in the Caribbean region, hungry for the saving power of God's Word. As a unified effort, the Caribbean ICOC churches are forging together, more united than ever, committed...
- ***Limited Time: Lower Prices on Hawaiian Fellowship Cruise***
  DT Travel — Friday, 13 January 2017
  As you are digging out of the snow and cold weather, how does Hawaii sound right now? You will not want to miss the chance to visit all of the main islands (Honolulu, Oahu; Kahului, Maui; Hilo; Kona...
- ***Zagreb, Croatia Church Invites You to Summer Fellowship Week***
  Tomislav Zrinski, Zagreb, Croatia — Tuesday, 10 January 2017
  We wish to invite you to a summer fellowship event that will be held from July 31 to August 6, 2017, in Zagreb, Croatia. We would like to have family time as brothers and sisters in Christ, having spiritual and...

• UPCOMING EVENTS

ICMC US West
2017 ICOC Spring Leadership Meetings
Dallas, Texas USA
April 4-8, 2017

DT Singles Cruise
Galveston, Texas USA
April 23-30, 2017

Austin, Texas USA
June 29-July 1, 2017

Middle East Conference
Cairo, Egypt
July 2017

ICMC US East
Asheville, North Carolina USA
August 4-6, 2017

2017 Family Ministry Conference
Denver, Colorado USA
September 1-3, 2017

2020 World Discipleship Summit
Orlando, Florida USA
July 2-5, 2020

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INTERNATIONAL & LOCAL NEWS BULLETIN
To Inspire, Inform, Unify and Grow the International Churches of Christ
DT DISCIPLES TODAY
WWW.DISCIPLESTODAY.ORG • ISSUE 590 • JANUARY 22, 2017

HSC Sri Lanka: Accept the Unexpected

Written by HOPE worldwide



Over this past Christmas and New Year, a group of singles from all over the world (Australia, Singapore, the US, etc) spent their holidays in Sri Lanka, away from family, serving at a school for underprivileged children, an orphanage for boys, and a pediatric hospital for autistic children. They also greatly encouraged the local church, the Colombo Church of Christ, as you can read in this article written by David de los Santos. David and his wife Nadia are the young couple leading the church in Sri Lanka.

All around the world, 2016 was a year of the unexpected. This year marks the year where our church here in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, officially tripled in size by the hand of God, and that was certainly unexpected! We weren't expecting an offer to host a HOPE *worldwide* Singles Corps right here in Sri Lanka, but we accepted it! We were humbled that Sri Lanka would be noticed and served in such an incredible way. While we were putting together all of the projects, I had no idea that this was going to be such a life-altering experience.

It was such an incredible feeling to be serving alongside people from all over the world with a shared purpose. I was personally moved by the sheer number of disciples that signed up to come to our relatively unknown island country of Sri Lanka. Our hopes and our expectations were exceeded by the volunteers who sacrificed their entire holiday season to just humbly serve a people that they had never met before. These brothers and sisters not only inspired the church, but the community in Colombo as well.

The first three days were spent serving in our HOPE *worldwide* preschool for disadvantaged children. The volunteers were building bookshelves, teaching simple lessons, painting gigantic murals, repainting fading ugly brick walls, teaching hygiene and parenting lessons. We ended our time there with a heartwarming Christmas party.

We got to take a break and visit a beautiful getaway beach in city called Una Wattana. We sat on the beach, talked, took pictures, and laughed for

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