

# Giving hope to suffering Christians



In Bihar State a child holds a candle waiting for the beginning of a Small Christian Community prayer group. For more about the work of the Small Christian Communities see inside.

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**There was no sign of anti-Christian violence abating during India's COVID-19 lockdown. In the first six months of 2020 one Indian NGO recorded 293 cases of persecution.**

Five Christians have lost their lives for their Faith so far in 2020 – two of them were raped before they were killed. The latest death was that of 25-year-old Suman Munda whose murder in Redhadi, Jharkhand was linked to ongoing harassment she

faced for converting to Christianity.

Bishop Gerald Almeida of Jabalpur told ACN: "It is a cause of concern with the Church because Christians are being killed and beaten... There are much more attacks than ten years ago. Fundamentalism is a real problem."

Religious minorities – Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and others – have experienced more attacks from Hindutva extremists since Prime Minister Modi's BJP political party came to power in 2014. Extremists see these faiths as foreign religions, even though

Christianity came to the country almost two millennia ago.

ACN is offering hope to a community facing the twin threats of extremism and COVID-19. Many of those facing extremist attacks are Dalit converts – Dalits are also contemptuously called "untouchables" – or from tribal areas, and inside you will read about projects supporting these communities.

At a time when the Church is bowing under the burden of persecution and the coronavirus your love can give hope to our suffering brothers and sisters. ✝

**Helping the suffering Church today**  
[www.acnuk.org](http://www.acnuk.org)



Aid to the  
Church in Need

ACN UNITED KINGDOM



# “I was hungry and you fed me”

(Matthew 25:35)



Thousands of labourers' families live in very basic conditions – with the breadwinner working long hours for a few pounds a day in conditions that are often unsafe, says Sister Christin.

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Sister Christin Joseph of the Sisters of Charity of the Holy Cross oversees the work of a number of Small Christian Communities.

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**Overnight, millions of labourers found themselves without work when the Indian government announced its coronavirus lockdown, prompting a mass exodus from the cities.**

Sister Christin Joseph told ACN: “There is an endless stream of tens of thousands of people trying to return on foot to their home villages, some of which are over 1,000 km [620 miles] away, carrying their children and their belongings with them. All transport has been stopped, except for essential services, as the authorities struggle to contain the virus”.

Sister Christin said that in states such as Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh labourers had been walking home in temperatures of

102-104°F (39-40°C) with cafes where they used to stop for a drink closed because of lockdown.

But across India there are some 85,000 Small Christian Communities – which organise Bible studies, prayer meetings, and other forms of outreach to help strengthen and deepen the people’s faith – and many of these have met the challenge of the returning labourers.

Sister Christin said: “Many of our Small Christian Communities are responding to this situation with thousands of simple initiatives. While still adhering to the measures imposed, for example in Bangalore, Chandigarh, Calcutta and Poona, they are seeking out those in need and giving them food. They are helping everyone – Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, Muslims – without any discrimination whatsoever.”

Sister Christin added: “I am extremely grateful to ACN for the help they have given us over so many years in supporting and sustaining our Small Christian Communities. I’m quite sure that the benefactors of ACN could never have imagined that their help would now be such a source



Members of a Small Christian Community bringing food for the hungry.

of consolation during the coronavirus crisis. But the tragedy is a grave one. India needs your prayers. Please don’t forget us! And may God bless you all!”

## A lockdown lifeline

**Aid to the Church in Need provided emergency support for religious Sisters caring for some of the most vulnerable in society – after they lost their income because of the COVID-19 crisis.**

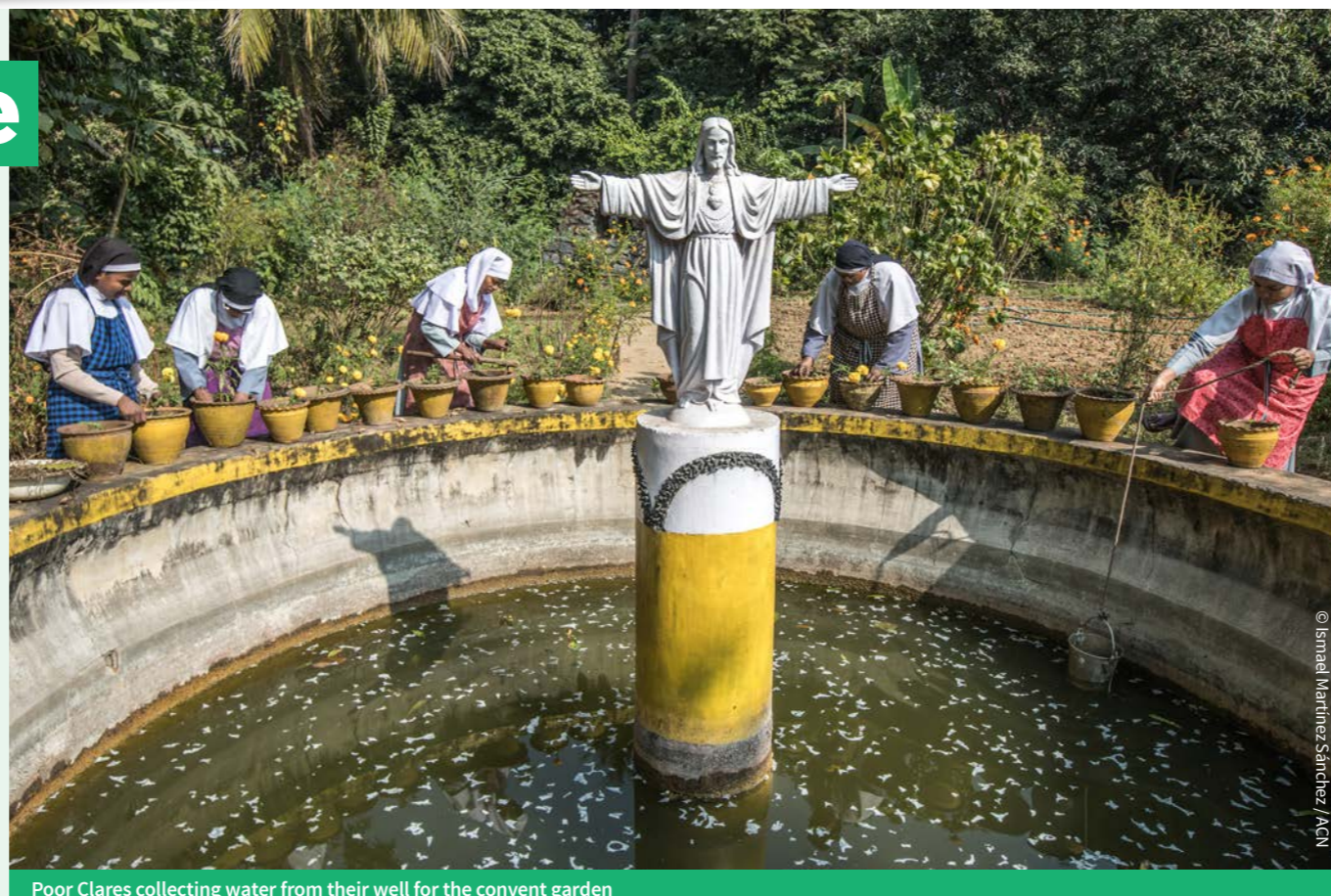
The Daughters of St Anne and the Adorer Handmaids of the Blessed Sacrament and of Charity in Odisha State, eastern India, help in parishes, provide medical aid and educate children. They also work with tribal communities – whose converts face a higher risk of attack from extremists.

But Archbishop John Barwa of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar told ACN how as a result of the coronavirus pandemic they have had to stop their educational and other activities which provided the Sisters with a modest income.

He said: “They are having some vegetables which is all they have to eat. All their savings are gone and what little they have left is reducing day by day. There is no certainty when they will resume the pastoral and other services where they generate some income for their survival.”

ACN responded by providing a lockdown lifeline to the Sisters, including food, help covering electricity costs and essentials required for the pandemic including soap and hand sanitiser.

Thanks to your love, Aid to the Church in Need has been able to provide vital help for religious communities across India – such as the Carmelite Sisters in Tapovan. Only through your generosity could we aid these communities in their time of need.



Poor Clares collecting water from their well for the convent garden

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## Revving Up

Priests, Sisters and catechists cover enormous distances to reach the faithful living in the far-flung parts of rural parishes – including tribal communities. ACN has given motorbikes to help speed them on their way, including the one above helping the Daughters of Mary in Marthandom, Kanyakumari District carry out their ministry.





# Drink water from your own well

(cf. Proverbs 5:15)

**Water was running scarce at certain seasons, causing problems for St Joseph's boarding school in Dhabhagudam, Eluru Diocese which cares for up to 150 children.**

The children come from poor villages in remote jungle regions – and boarding is the only way they can attain an education. Very few of their parents can read or write.

So when the Daughters of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary in the Temple appealed to us we agreed to give c. £7,000 to provide the school with its own well. The Sisters thank you from the bottom of their hearts. 🙏



A priest joins Sisters and workers at the site where the well is being dug.

## Building up the Church of God



From small beginnings the new church in Bishrail slowly takes shape



**The original chapel of Saint Anthony Claret in Bishrail, West Bengal State, was a tiny structure with mud walls – and it was in danger of collapsing!**

They had a tight squeeze holding Sunday School and other activities in the old chapel – let alone Mass. And it was difficult holding outdoor Masses in the rainy season or under the scorching summer sun. Coming from tribal communities struggling to support their families, they could not afford a new chapel.

Although the diocese's 94,000 Catholics are only c.1 percent of the population, numbers are growing and vocations are booming – most diocesan priests are local men.

Thanks to your love, ACN was able to help with a contribution of £33,000.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2020 was a big day for the faithful: not only because it was the parish's silver jubilee, but also because their new church was consecrated.

Father Martin Soren told us: "Our heartfelt thanks to all the benefactors of ACN for their generous financial support, which has now made this project a reality.

"Once again, we want to reiterate our sincere gratitude to you all. Without your tireless prayers, your help and financial support, this undertaking would never have been possible. Thank you for everything you have done for us!" 🙏

