

# Sisters offer Christ's **compassion** in COVID crisis

**With a new wave of COVID-19 hitting India and deaths surging past 485,000, the Church has not only been tackling the pandemic and caring for those overlooked by society, but also supporting refugees fleeing from neighbouring Burma (Myanmar) – where the military junta has once more tightened its grip on power (see back page).**

Bishop Aplin Senapati of Rayagada described the emergency facing the Church: "This unprecedented crisis has highlighted how India remains badly placed to tackle the rapid spread of [a new] wave of coronavirus."

**With your help, the Church has come to the assistance of the poor – who are at higher risk of death as they cannot afford medical care, including migrant workers who have lost their jobs.** The bishop told us that "COVID-19 has spawned a humanitarian crisis – even without a national lockdown in place, economic activity has been disrupted and livelihood distress is increasing."

**Bishop Senapati warned gravely: "Failure to act decisively now will have a doubly deadly impact on the millions of impoverished persons in India."**

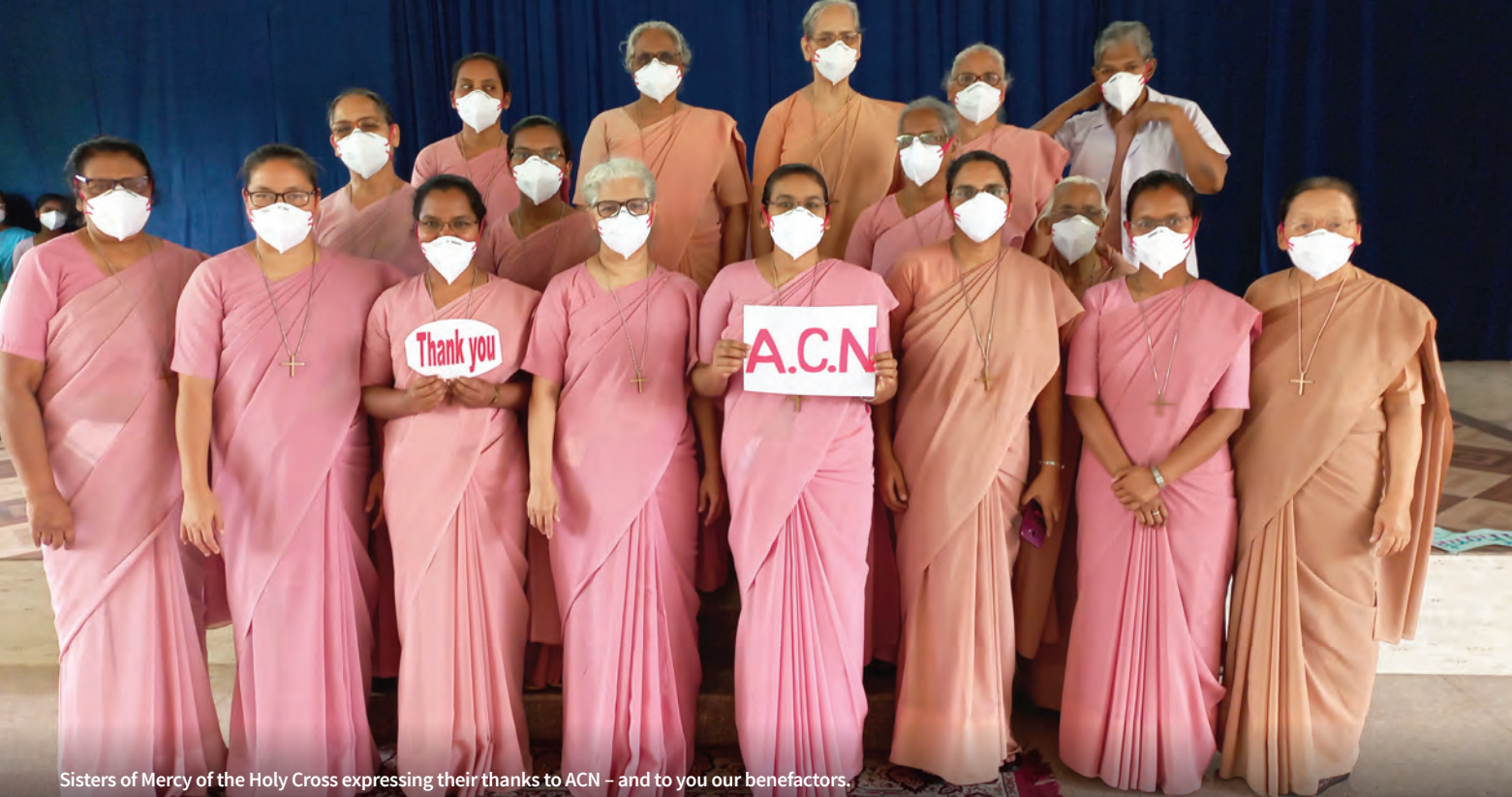
ACN has responded to the pleas of India's bishops by supporting Sisters and priests carrying out essential pastoral work across the sub-continent – including PPE to keep them safe. But we can only continue our work with your support. Your love can help Christ's compassion shine forth in the midst of India's coronavirus crisis. 🙏



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# On the front line of the battle against COVID-19



Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross expressing their thanks to ACN – and to you our benefactors.

**The Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross are on the front line of the battle against COVID-19. India's second wave of coronavirus struck people particularly hard in West Bengal State, where the Sisters are showing the mercy of God.**

They told ACN: "We are helpless in the face of the situation. **There is a shortage of vaccinations, oxygen, hospital beds and medication generally.** It is not even possible to conduct funerals properly.

"Every day we hear news of the death of friends and relatives. The sick are being cared for in their homes, in the convents and in the presbyteries".

**As well as medical help, the Sisters are providing spiritual support, especially for the poor in remote outlying villages,** as depression hits those who became unemployed as a result of the pandemic. They are also accommodating migrant workers who, having lost their jobs, are unable to return to their villages elsewhere in India.

And the Sisters' income evaporated. They supported themselves by

running schools – but these are closed because of the pandemic, becoming quarantine stations for the poor who could not self-isolate in their own cramped homes.

ACN is providing vital PPE, so the Sisters can continue caring for the sick and continue to show the love of Christ. 🙏



Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross providing rice for the poor.



Sisters at 12<sup>th</sup> Faith Sharing Exposure Programme in northern India

## Sharing the Good News

**The 650 participants listened with rapt attention, as Father Sojan told the story of a man who had plotted to kill a Catholic priest – but then had a change of heart and was baptised.**

Father Sojan was addressing the 12<sup>th</sup> Faith Sharing Exposure Programme in northern India, where experienced missionaries and evangelisers spoke about bringing the Good News and the practical love of Christ. **Priests and Sisters were learning how to spread the Gospel on the margins of society – with a special focus on helping young people.**

The programme ran during a lull in the COVID-19 pandemic last year and was attended by Archbishop John Moolachira of Guwahati and Bishop Michael Akasius Toppo of Tezpur. Gathered in Ambagaon Parish – one of the poorer rural villages in Tezpur Diocese – lay people came from neighbouring parishes to join in prayer and faith-sharing sessions every evening. Each day began around dawn with Adoration and Morning Prayer before the talks.

**The Faith Sharing Exposure Programme will help proclaim the word in season and out of season, and make the love of God known to all.** 🙏

## “Life poured out as a libation” (cf. 2 Timothy 4:6)

**“When Sister Flora and Sister Suchita became very seriously ill, they were shifted to Hi Tech and to Jai Prakash hospitals. The charges in those hospitals were very high. I was in the hospital and was wondering how I would manage to pay the bills. God came to our rescue.**

“We approached the management requesting them to consider our case and the management consulted the government. They came in our favour and the government waved away the expenses. It was a big blessing for us.

**“Of course we could not manage to save Sister Suchita and she died.** The whole Province and the congregation were shocked. We are trying to overcome this tragic event but it will take time.”

The provincial superior of the Daughters of the Cross shared the congregation's heartache in a letter to ACN. But the congregation's struggles did not stop there. **Nine more Sisters from the same order, who had been working sacrificially during the coronavirus pandemic, also fell seriously ill.**

Vatican figures show at least 400 of India's priests and Sisters have died of COVID-19. Will you help us provide medical care for heroic Sisters who are pouring out their lives to help God's children? 🙏



Funeral for a priest – more than 400 of India's priests and Sisters have died battling COVID-19.



Across India, ACN is supporting Sisters in their important work: a medical visit in Thrizino, north-east India.



# Flight from Terror



Sisters providing aid for refugees.



Refugees from Burma (Myanmar).

**The Church has been caring for refugees fleeing across the border between India and Burma (Myanmar) following the dramatic military coup in February 2021.**

With Burma plunged into chaos as army soldiers crushed opposition protests, more than 8,000 Burmese have sought sanctuary in India – but upwards of 5,000 have been sent back. **One former police officer who fled Burma described being ordered to open fire on unarmed protesters with a sub-machine gun.**

Sister Rose Paite detailed the journey to India: “Women, old men and women, and children travelled through the jungle on foot, climbing hills and crossing rivers. Some got sick on the way and others went hungry. The old who could not walk were carried by the stronger ones.”

In the border towns and villages of India’s Mizoram State, refugees found temporary relief and housing. But Sister Rose added: “**The local people are caring and hospitable but how long can they shelter someone amidst the pandemic?**” So the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians launched an emergency project to help refugees with:

- Basic food – such as rice and dal – for 500 refugees in particular need.
- Medical care prioritising the sick, the elderly, pregnant women and children.
- Skills training for young people to prevent human trafficking. Training from tailoring to basic computer skills will help keep them out of the clutches of the gangs.

Describing the first food distribution, Sister Rose said: “In the midst of a hike in corona infection in Mizoram, the activities of distribution of food relief in Champhai town was carried out immediately... **The COVID situation made movement very**

**difficult and the staff and volunteers could not help but risk their life and safety many times.**

“The monsoon and the torrential rains made transportation very challenging. Vehicles were scarce and drivers were not willing to take risks in driving the hilly terrains and winding roads.” Yet despite the challenges, the Sisters managed to deliver the aid.

**Only thanks to your charity has ACN been able to support the work of the Sisters caring for the refugees against all these odds.** May God bless you for your generous love. 🙏



A make-shift shelter.



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Church in Need

ACN [www.acnuk.org](http://www.acnuk.org)

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