

How the Churches in India Are Responding to the COVID Calamity

If you have heard the horror stories from India during this second, deadly wave of COVID—stories of people dying in the streets for lack of beds and hospitals—those stories are true. That's why, for weeks now, I have been hearing from friends and colleagues in India, each of whom has lost family members or co-workers or friends to COVID.

And with the government and medical system stretched to the limit, what have the churches done? They have sprung into action.

But that's what followers of Jesus always do during times of calamity and plague and natural disaster. They give and serve and help, even as they themselves are suffering. That is the heart of the gospel.

Bro. P. Yesupadam, the founder and president of Love-N-Care Ministries in Visakhapatnam, is one of my closest friends in the world, and he and his family and ministry work have suffered some real losses as well.

Yesupadam, who was raised as an untouchable and became a violent Maoist Communist before his conversion, has served the hurting and the poor for decades, to the point that the government has recognized and appreciated his work. ([Go here](#) to see his amazing story.)

But he and his team have done much with little, working without wealthy donors or large budgets while supporting orphanages, schools, homes for the elderly, hospitals, training centers for the handicapped and pastors working in impoverished tribal regions. They simply pray, believe, give

and serve.

In recent days, Facebook posts from Monika, Yesupadam's wife, have announced: "Gave rice and groceries to 50 pastor's families today!" And, "Gave food packets to 32 pastor's families today!" And, "Preparing to give 500 more pastor's families food supplies!" (For the record, in many cases, this is the difference between eating and starving.)

"We gave out food packets in our neighboring state of Odisha (Orissa)!" And, "500 bags of rice arrived today ...!!" (This means *large* bags of rice.) And, "Gave away 120 food packets with 10 kg. rice bags to pastors and poor families." And, "We just gave away food to around 100 widows!"

Perhaps you could join with them in this lifesaving effort? Having worked side by side with Yesupadam and his team in India almost every year since 1993, I can assure you that your funds will make a massive difference. To give, [click here](#).

And how does a massive, megachurch respond, a church that grew from 25 people to 130,000 people in its first 10 years of existence? Last year, they provided millions of meals during the first wave of the pandemic.

But now, as reported in *India Today*, one of the nation's leading publications, "Hyderabad's Calvary Temple opens its doors to become a free Covid care centre." The article was actually titled, "Sacred Duty."

Yes, "On Calvary Temple's sprawling campus in Hafeezpet in west Hyderabad, next to its imposing church, a 300-bed Covid care centre has been set up for patients who cannot afford medical treatment elsewhere. With the help of staff from two hospitals in the city—Ankura and St Theresa—the centre admits patients from both Telugu states, providing round-the-clock Covid care."

Satish Kumar is the pastor of Calvary Temple in Hyderabad, and

when I visited his work in 2015, I was astounded at its breadth and scope. (For my article, see [here](#).)

In recent weeks, people within his congregation, people he knew personally, were hit hard with the virus as well.

One church member got COVID and could not find a hospital with an open bed. He called the church for help and with much difficulty, the pastor found an open bed.

But a few days later the man jumped from the second floor of the hospital and broke his legs. It was because he couldn't handle the situation inside the hospital, with people dying in front of his eyes every day. He finally panicked and wanted to die himself.

Another church member called in need of a hospital bed, He was in an ambulance going from hospital to hospital for 12 hours while the church staff was searching for the next available bed. They finally managed to find a bed for him, but there was no proper food. And so, dying with hunger and COVID, he ran out of the hospital and died two days later.

Those were just two stories out of many.

That's when Kumar felt inspired to turn his church buildings (since they now have campuses in several locations) into COVID-care clinics, with doctors and nurses providing totally free, highly professional, medical help around the clock. (This video, in Telugu but filled with moving images, will help paint a picture.)

In the last two weeks, they have cared for 500 patients, with 12 doctors and 25 nurses working around the clock. They also have cooking teams and even teams to bury the dead (since many families are afraid of being in physical contact with their deceased loved ones), with as many as five or six funerals per day. They have also provided more than 500 tons of food to help the poor and hungry.

And, as Calvary Temple has proclaimed loudly and clearly, as an expression of Christ's love, "We provide free bed and treatment irrespective of caste and creed, race and religion." This, in turn, has inspired other ministries and social organizations to seek ways to provide free medical care as well.

That is the gospel in action, leading the way in compassionate service and inspiring others to do the same.

And this is what Jesus meant when He said, "let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Tangible demonstrations of God's great love for a hurting world are irresistible.

May He have mercy on the suffering people of India. May light come out of the darkness and healing out of the pain. And may the gospel go forth throughout that massive, heavily populated nation. Each person is important to the Lord. {eo}

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