

Bringing the Gospel Into India's Slums

Vidya Verma* edges in closer as the American students share a Bible story. "I am hearing every word," Verma says.

Verma and her husband, Ankur,* who live in the slums of Mumbai, are immigrants from another state in India. Like all of their neighbors, they are Hindu.

Millions of South Asians live in slums. And, unlike the lucky lead in the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, most of Mumbai's slum population never get a ticket out of the mud, mire and moneyless life.

Students from Tennessee Tech University recently came to share the gospel in these slums with men and women like Verma and her husband. Ministry in the slum utilizes short-term teams who are partnered with local believers.

The students journeyed to South Asia to partner with Indian believers from a church network and convention. In this city of 20 million, the students prayed over the sick and shared Bible stories with anyone who would listen.

Many people had a chance to hear about a better life through these American college students. On one of their trips, the students ministered in a fishing village and met the Vermas.

Ankur used to be an alcoholic, but he decided to follow Jesus before the students came. After hearing the Tennesseans' testimonies and Bible stories, Vidya also decided to believe.

Regina Seabolt,* a Christian worker in South Asia with her husband, Kaleb,* says she has seen a 180-degree change in the Vermas.

"This couple is on fire," Seabolt says. "He [Ankur] was a

complete drunkard and now has the most gentle and patient spirit of any man I've met in India."

Ankur, a day guard at a local supermarket, has shared the gospel with all of his co-workers. He also bought Bibles for them with his own money.

The Bibles Ankur bought cost around \$6 each—a fortune for families in the slum.

Each week in the Verma home, eight men and women gather. Ankur asks questions and teaches from the Bible.

The Seabolts report that short-term teams play an important role in the ministry in Mumbai's slums. Each team that has come has produced between two and six new believers.

"That's how single girls in college can impact a husband and wife in a fishing village—by just bringing the gospel, just being obedient," Seabolt says. "That's what Jesus does—He brings the harvest and the increase and the fruit when we are motivated by our love for Him to go."

The Seabolts host around 100 short-term volunteers a year who partner in ministries in the slum as well as with two other ministries in Mumbai. Journeymen and college students who want to spend a semester helping these ministries are also welcome.

Volunteers encourage and motivate Indian believers to reach out to their community. "We love volunteers," Seabolt says.

"[Volunteerism] mobilizes the American church and the Indian church into the Great Commission, which is our passion," Seabolt continues.

Waikiki Baptist Church of Honolulu, Hawaii, has caught the Great Commission vision and is a strong ministry partner in the slums of Mumbai. The church not only sends short-term teams but also provides orientation and training for other teams before they head to South Asia.

"It's a neat 'model' of how a small church can adopt a people/place and take it on without a lot of resources," Seabolt says. "It's training up potential church-planting partners and pastors and builds the church in evangelism and discipleship."

The Seabolts and the local church network in Mumbai are working together to build a community center in one of the slums. The center will offer literacy courses, spiritual education, domestic skill training and discipleship.

Local believers also plan for the community center to act as a church. They hope this will enable future volunteer teams to expand their ministry.

A major need, the Seabolts say, is for funding for this community center and for basic necessities for families living in the slum.

Churches and individuals can make a significant difference in the slums of India. In addition to donating money for hot meals and tarp roofs, more short-term teams to share the gospel in Mumbai's slums are also needed.

Students or churches who want to be involved can learn about this slum ministry through "OneSlum," an advocacy project through OneLife that connects U.S. college students to volunteer opportunities in Mumbai's slums.

Visit to learn how you can pray, donate or volunteer.

** Names have been changed.*

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