

Christians Rise Up as COVID-19 Pushes Families to Brink of Starvation

Faith-based humanitarian group Gospel for Asia (GFA World,) is helping to sustain desperate families pushed to the brink of starvation as South Asia battles the deadly coronavirus.

More than 5,000 cases of the disease are confirmed in India alone as of April 8, with more than 100 deaths, according to *The Economic Times*. Meanwhile, there are fears COVID-19 could spread significantly because of limited health services and overcrowding in urban centers where “social distancing” is difficult to practice and hygiene education is lacking.

India, the world’s soon-to-be most populous country, is currently in a national lockdown that is intended to prevent the spread of COVID-19. More than a billion people are already living on the margins of society, and many of them are now forced to stay home. The lockdown has left many low-paid day laborers, who barely make enough to get by, without food or money to buy any.

Members of Believers Eastern Church congregations and Sisters of Compassion workers have been distributing emergency supplies in response to the crisis, which also spotlights their ongoing health and wellness efforts to fight disease. In many urban centers and rural villages, the helpers have been giving away bags of vegetables, rice and spices, which are helping sustain some of those who have nowhere to turn for help.

School Bus Turned into ‘Free Store’

In one village, their volunteers turned a school bus into a mobile “free store.” Residents, mostly day laborers at a local

brick factory, were invited to take one of the bags of food hanging from the side of the vehicle. Organizers of the distribution chalked out waiting areas to ensure people followed official “social distancing” guidelines.

In one large city, Believers Eastern Church has been feeding 500 people a day. Members cook and prepare meal packs that are then left in the open at strategic spots for people to come and collect, while keeping a safe distance. Elsewhere, teams have been taking food to some of the most vulnerable: the poorest of the poor living in the open and forced to beg.

Among the grateful beneficiaries is Venkatamma, a 37-year-old widow who was given food when helpers visited her village. “Due to the lockdown, my survival became so hard,” she said. “Like me, there are many in our village who are starving. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank Believers Eastern Church for providing the food supplies.”

Local authorities have given Believers Eastern Church permission to offer help while strictly limiting the general public’s movement. One local official gave the go-ahead for a food distribution outreach after hearing that the church wanted to feed people of all faiths who were hungry. Visiting groups have also given advice on how to help avoid spreading the virus through good hygiene practices.

Demonstrating the Love of God

The coronavirus threat has underscored the importance of GFA World’s long-time health efforts in South Asia. For years, they have helped to provide freshwater wells, construct community latrines, run medical clinics and teach about personal hygiene as a practical demonstration of God’s love for the needy.

“One of the amazing things that happens in the midst of catastrophic events like this coronavirus is that you will always find the body of Christ, the holy church, rising up because of the love of Christ,” said GFA World founder Dr.

K.P. Yohannan.

The efforts of South Asian Christians to help their neighbors echo the actions of the New Testament church, Yohannan said, noting how back then, believers in Macedonia supported churches elsewhere because they were “willing to give out of their poverty to help people who didn’t have anything.”

Yohannan challenged Christians everywhere to match the example of the Macedonians, who were commended in 2 Corinthians 8 for their generosity.

“It is extremely important at this time to fast and pray, and give our resources to help people who have nothing,” he said. “We have an opportunity to help demonstrate the caring love of God, as Jesus spoke about in Matthew 25,” Yohannan said. “He said that when we look after ‘the least’ by feeding the hungry and caring for the needy, we are feeding and caring for him.”

Those interested in supporting GFA World’s hunger relief efforts in Asia should go to: .