



MAY 2019

MISSION NEWS & HELPING HANDS

Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Sharing the Gospel in South America and Asia

INDIA

The Woman in *distress*

Rev. Bradley Kerkow, Asia Committee Chair, BWO

From the Editor—

Rev. Thomas Heyn, Board for World Outreach Administrator

We recently completed our Holy Week and Easter celebrations. Perhaps, on Good Friday, we heard some or all of the seven declarations Jesus made from the cross. One set of pronouncements were directed at the Apostle John and Mary, the mother of Jesus. “Woman, behold your son.” And “Behold your mother.” It was important that Mary, apparently widowed at this time, had someone to care for her—a believer who understood God’s love for widows and orphans.

God’s special love for widows and orphans is reflected in our work in India. On a recent field visit to India in February, Pastor Brad Kerkow experienced a brief encounter with a widow during a return from a visit to a rural village. He tells his story in this month’s issue of Mission News / Helping Hands. We hope that you are not only moved by his story, but that you also would join us as we pray for and support this important work in India.

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...” James 1:27

I don’t think that I will ever forget what I saw that day.

We were driving across a small concrete bridge, haphazardly dodging the other vehicles as is the norm when driving in Indian traffic. It was a hot, sunny day. Our delegation of American and Indian pastors had spent the day visiting village churches and orphanages and we had hit the road for the hour-long drive back to the city of Rajahmundry. The bridge had four foot high concrete barriers skirting its sides. I had called “shotgun” and so was sitting in the front passenger seat which in India means I was on the left side of the vehicle.

The following sequence of events are like a slow motion replay in my mind. As we were approaching the midpoint of the bridge I saw what I thought was a pile of garbage—brown cardboard boxes or something—leaning up against the concrete barrier. But as we got closer I could see that it was a person. Closer yet, and I realized it was an elderly lady perhaps in her 70s or 80s. She was wearing rags and covered in dust, kicked up by the tires of each consecutive passing car. Our vehicle passed within a yard of her, the concrete barrier behind her. She was completely exposed to the traffic. As we drove past I could see her holding out her hand. She was begging. As we came directly alongside of her, she looked me right in the eyes. She had some similar features that my own mother had. But her sweet face and big eyes were filled with hopelessness and distress.

And then she was gone.



Hindu Indian widow



Hindu Indian widow



Hindu Indian widows

Time sped up and we were whisked off into the thick, chaotic, Indian traffic. I thought to myself, “What did I just see?” One sees a lot of unexpected things in India, sad, happy, and unusual, but this struck to the depths of my heart. My eyes teared up. “What did I just see?” That poor lady. Undoubtedly a widow. A woman in her golden years should be enjoying her grandkids, not begging for food on a hazardous, dirty bridge.

We are not so accustomed to seeing poor widows in the U.S. as we have many helpful welfare programs. But in India there are millions of widows living in poverty. This is not only due to a lack of welfare, but also because certain segments of Hindu culture teach that a widow is responsible for her husband’s death. Her shadow or touch is believed to bring bad luck. Widows are often shunned by their families, forced for the rest of their lives to wear white (the Hindu color for mourning), no makeup or jewelry, and to live in isolation.

The Book of James tells us Christians to do the exact opposite—to look after widows in distress. **“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...” James 1:27**

Remember that the Book of James does not answer the question, “How am I saved?” No, for that we should read Romans or Galatians where the Apostle Paul addresses that question thoroughly, pointing to Christ who was cursed with our sin on the cross and rose triumphantly from the grave. We are saved through faith in Christ alone. Rather, James answers the question, “Now that I’m saved, how should I live?” If we want to do sanctified works now that we are Christians, James directs us to care for the demographic of society that suffers first when social structures fail—orphans and widows.

What could I have done for that widow? I have prayed for her many

times since that day. We may not be able to solve the problems of all the widows in India, but there must be something we can do.

Praise the Lord for the LMSI! The Lutheran Mission of Salvation India, follows the teaching of James in spite of the culture around them. Widows in many of the LMSI’s congregations are cared for both physically and spiritually. Some are given jobs helping in church-run orphanages. Others join other women and are employed as Bible Women. They go door-to-door helping women in need and sharing the Gospel of Christ. What an important task! These Bible Women are paid the equivalent of nine dollars a month. Such a small amount but

it radically changes their lives. Unfortunately, due to reduced annual support, the LMSI has recently had to reduce the number of Bible Women serving their congregations.

- Please join me in praying that no widow in the LUTHERAN MISSION OF SALVATION (LMSI) is uncared for.
- Please prayerfully consider a gift or regular donation to the LMSI Bible Women Fund.

*Reverend Bradley Kerkow
Asia Committee Chair, BWO*



Hyderabad Bible Woman



Widows at Good Shepherd in Rajahmundry



Widows at Telangana, 4 hours from Hyderabad

News from Other Mission Fields

- **SOUTH KOREA**—BWO representatives will visit this field in May. We especially look forward to seeing how the Seoul congregation is doing under the new leadership of Rev. Sam Choi and how the new mission outreach in Song Do is progressing under Rev. Young Ha Kim. A Korean-Chinese seminary student will gain experience this summer as he serves a congregation in China.
- **PERU**—Worship services are being “live-streamed” via internet from the church in Chimbote to regions of Peru and elsewhere in South America. A new mission outreach project is being considered in Cajamarca. The Peruvian synod is holding an annual convention in June.
- **CHILE**—After a recent visit by the BWO Administrator and another ELS pastor, plans have been proposed for providing pastoral services to the church in Linares which has not had a resident pastor for years. Lay leadership will take a prominent role as workers are trained and options are explored for a longer term solution. With this change, the pastor and vicars in Santiago are able to spend more time on outreach and ministry in their Santiago congregations.
- **LATVIA**—Pastor Ugis Sildegis continues his work on a Latvian hymnal with a strong emphasis on Lutheran doctrine. Faithful pastors continue to proclaim the Gospel in a country that lost its appreciation for its Lutheran heritage and needs to be evangelized once again.
- **CZECH REPUBLIC**—Martin Luther School in Plzen is wrapping up another school year. Pastors Krakora and Vršecký continue to share the Gospel in the congregations and school. A summer VBS is a likely event this summer. Pray for outreach opportunities in this field.
- **UKRAINE**—The teams are wrapping up their winter clinic services in the bus garage and in a few short months will once again be on the road. The counselors continue their important work in the pregnancy crisis centers. Gift of Life administrators, Nick and Kerry Laper, will give a presentation at the ELS convention in June.

Other News

- **KENYA**—A severe famine has hit various parts of eastern Africa. As ELS pastors continue their educational efforts with a number of Kenyan men, the famine has made it difficult for many to attend the sessions. We pray that the Lord will provide relief to this country and bless the people we work with in Kenya. Later this year, talks will resume with pastors and leaders of this group to help them deepen their understanding of biblical, confessional Lutheranism and to further work toward doctrinal agreement.

What can you do to help?

- Pray for each of the mission fields in this newsletter. Pray for the national pastors of these churches as well as for the members of their congregations, that they might remain faithful in their homelands that often do not welcome the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Please—prayerfully consider a gift or regular donation to the work in the various fields. You may designate a gift to a particular field or project on the memo line of a check. You may also go to els.org and click on “Donate” in the top banner on the right-hand side.
- If you have questions, please contact us in the following ways:
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