

COVID 19 & Church of South India

The rapid spread of the novel corona virus globally has sparked a wave of tension worldwide. As the outbreak continues, CSI is concerned about its impact on the most vulnerable communities of India.

As of 29th March 2020 (10:15 AM), according to the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW), a total of 1053 COVID-19 cases have been reported in 26 states/union territories. These include 86 who have been cured/discharged, 1 who has migrated and 27 reported deaths. Hospital isolation of all confirmed cases, tracing and home quarantine of the contacts is ongoing all over.

Challenges that we are facing:

The Challenge of coming together as a faith community is very evident due to corona virus pandemic. As the church world wide is observing the season of lent and the faithful preparing themselves to celebrate Easter, the worship services are called off in keeping the safety of the community at large and also in abiding to the call given by the government. Church worship services are streamed online through the use of social media, however for many who live in rural India an exposure to use social media in itself is a challenge.

In this lock down of 21 days for now, social distancing has become the rule. Gatherings and public spaces are curbed and people are instructed to stay indoors without much contact with anybody due to the spread of COVID 19 infection. However for many in India Social distancing is not an option at all. Most of the urban poor reside in close contact with their neighbours and in knitted communities called slums. People living in such cramped living spaces are more prone and are at greater risk of transmitting infections to others.

To combat COVID 19 the entire nation has come to a halt, all sectors of work have called off their work routines except for the essential government services. This has impacted the lives of thousands who are a part of the unorganised work sectors in India. Most of them do not have jobs and were daily wage earners, the construction labourers, farmers, and so on... this will push them to more poverty stricken situation and malnutrition and low immunity can make them prone to ill health and sickness.

Another challenge is the plight of migrants who are unable to travel back to their own home towns and villages at the wake of this lock down. Not enough travel facilities at this time has caused more plight on them as they have to commute on foot for hundreds of kilometres to reach their own home towns in search of safe spaces. Many are still stranded on streets with elders and children and are waiting for help and support at this time.

The worst hit due to this pandemic are the disabled, the aged, women and children who are economically poor without enough necessary resources to survive.

There is a huge lack of awareness of the pandemic among people from marginalized communities. Maintaining hygiene and sanitation is way out of reach as there is a sudden price hike in hand sanitizers and other essential commodities like groceries. These communities are already vulnerable as they don't have adequate income or sufficient resources. They are on the brink of starvation and many of them have exhausted their monthly ration supplies and do not have access to avail rations due to lack of awareness.

Most of the students who study at government run schools rely on midday meals which have also stopped since many schools have shut down. The street vendors struggle to sell whatever they have. Women employed in household activities are instructed not to come. While the government has

been making efforts to provide ration and food supplies to the marginalized communities, India's current economic situation, population, poor health care system and distribution of resources make it a struggle.

Response of the CSI in terms of immediate relief:

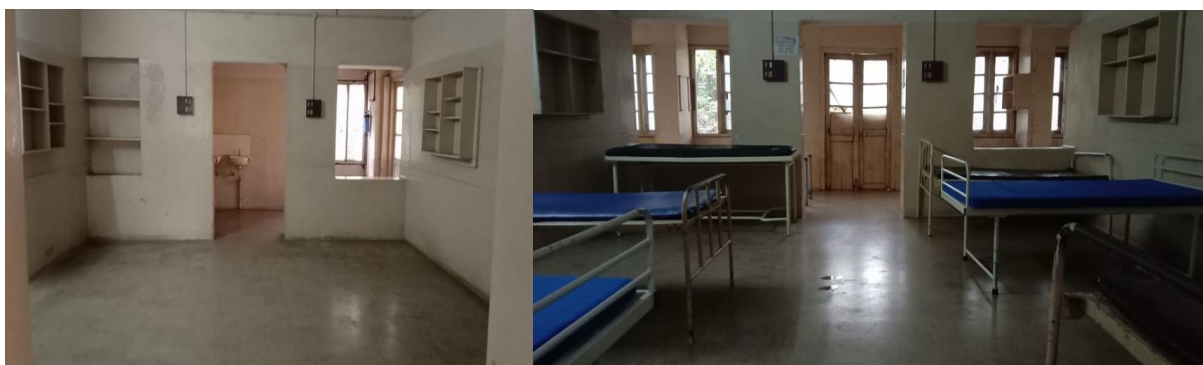
Most Rev. Dharmaraj Rasalam, the Moderator of the Church of South India (CSI) sent out a communique of assurance and prayers against the backdrop of COVID 19 Global Pandemic. Representing the leadership of the CSI Synod, the Moderator exhorted the clergy and the believers of the Church to be responsible citizens at this crucial time. The main point in the communique is the concern for the poor and the marginalised people who will be seriously affected by the added financial crisis this pandemic will create.

Many Dioceses all over CSI are coming up with meaningful initiatives, here we just give a glimpse of how CSI is serving people amidst this pandemic

CSI schools as space of living and shelter for Homeless people



Hospitals run by Church of South India sets apart isolation ward for those who are under surveillance for the prevention of the spread of CORONA Virus. A dedicated team of Doctors, nurses and health care workers are working in association with the respective district government authorities in kerala, Tamil nadu and Andhra pradesh





Community kitchens and Distributing food packets and essentials to the Daily wage workers and the needy across CSI



CSI Youth actively engaged in preparing hand sanitizers and masks, distributing them and spreading awareness among public on safety and sanitization. They are helping the respective district authorities as volunteers



The church inspite of the challenge of not coming together in one place is able to communicate, network and partner with people and authorities to educate and empower the lives of weak and

marginalised in our midst. This pandemic in the days to come will also bring the challenge of class inequality and perpetuate the oppressive systems of patriarchy and caste through various means. A strategic planning will help the church to come up with substantial interventions to help people and the work of the Government to combat this COVID 19 pandemic. Certainly the church will be in need of more resources as we continue to engage in a larger level of saving lives through our programs and projects.

As CSI goes through all this we request your prayers and solidarity at this time of test. Though we are away from each other, knowing that we are all together in this and with the assurance of support and solidarity we wish you all well.