

Southern Baptists rush food to already-impoverished nation ravaged by COVID-19

NATION OF INDIA (BP) – Kiara and Aayush, an elderly couple living in a rural region of India, had already been ostracized from their community for being steadfast followers of Jesus Christ. Because of their faith, they were forced to bear alone the weight of losing their 36-year-old son, a pastor, to COVID-19 coronavirus complications.

Their daughter-in-law also combats the illness in isolation, so Kiara and Aayush are now caring for two young grandchildren and unable to go to a grocery store. Send Relief, the compassion ministry arm of Southern Baptists, provided groceries to Kiara and Aayush through a food distribution hosted by Send Relief partners in the area.

“We really needed this ration kit today,” they said. “Thank God and also those who gave. May the help we received be used by the Lord to bring the whole family to Christ!”



DELIVERING HOPE – A worker for a local partner of Southern Baptists’ Send Relief compassion ministry hands over food supplies to a family in India during the far-reaching COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak currently underway in India. (Special photo)

Send Relief has been mobilizing through partners in the region to serve those in need following the major surge in COVID-19 cases across the nation. Efforts include distributing emergency food packs, face masks, and portable oxygenators as well as conducting awareness campaigns to teach preventative measures in response to the crisis.

“The disease has been a slow onset that has rapidly accelerated over the past week,” said Tim Patterson, Send Relief’s South Asia area director, “but thankfully now the large media outlets are covering it and the government is doing its best to respond. It’s snowballed, and we’ve reached the crescendo this week. Send Relief is proactively reaching out to try to help.”



Wright

Send Relief President Bryant Wright, former two-term president of the Southern Baptist Convention, noted the need for Christians to pray for and encourage their brothers and sisters in India. “The news of just how rapidly this disease continues to spread is heartbreaking,” said the retired longtime senior pastor of Johnson Ferry Church in Marietta, Ga.

“We’re hearing stories of hope in the midst of the tragedy, but the needs are overwhelming. I am praying for our partners on the ground as they provide resources and minister to people in need, and I ask my fellow believers here in America to do so as well.”

On average, 350,000 people are infected in India every day; more than 3,000 die each day as a result of COVID-19 infections. Those who were already struggling with poverty and undernourishment are suffering the most from the outbreak.

The pandemic has worsened the circumstances of impoverished families, leaving many without food. Forty percent of India’s children already suffer chronic malnutrition, but the food crisis is steadily escalating that number and could threaten the wellbeing of an entire generation.

An elderly grandmother named Prisha lives in a village that has no access to the Gospel and no church near her community. Last year, she lost her only son and daughter-in-law to the coronavirus, leaving her to care for three small children on her own.

Her 13-year-old granddaughter is the only one able to make an income for the family, working as a day laborer on a farm for little pay. Though the hours are long and work is increasingly hard to find, the family has no other way to keep food on the table.

Prisha currently hosts a Bible study in her home and continues to look for ways to relieve her granddaughter's workload. She met Send Relief distributors with tears in her eyes. "I am a widow and don't have much," she said. "I was in great need of this food. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to those who gave to me!"

A local pastor with whom Send Relief is partnering also commented on the distributions. "We are ready to go out into the communities to help people physically while also helping them spiritually by sharing the Gospel," he said. "Most of the people have no jobs because everything is locked down, which means they have no way to buy food for their families.

"If we can help in any way, they will be able to see the love of God."

To learn more about how to help those in India during this time of crisis, visit <https://www.sendrelief.org/>.