



Equipping women, children and families
in India to discover a brighter future.

A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP CANNING



Dear friends in Christ, warm greetings to all from the Diocese of Calcutta (Kolkata) and Cathedral Relief Service (CRS). I want to convey my sincere gratitude to each of you who have been supporting CRS in various ways. May the good Lord bless you for strengthening the work done to help the poorest of the poor in the slums and across the Diocese of Kolkata.

While I feel delighted to write this short message, we all are aware that the COVID-19

pandemic continues to harm health, social and material wellbeing worldwide, with the poorest children, including homeless children and those in detention, hit hardest. School closures, social distancing and confinement increase the risk of poor nutrition among children, their exposure to domestic violence, and anxiety and stress, and reduce access to vital family and care services.

I am particularly thankful for your prayerful giving towards the nutrition programme, which will help to reduce the malnutrition level of 450 to 1,000 children at the eleven project areas during these most difficult times.

Women have also been disproportionately affected by the social and economic effects of the pandemic. They've experienced the brunt of care and responsibilities as schools have been closed and their family members have fallen ill.

The women's empowerment projects and Nari-Dana initiative have enlightened and ushered in a sense of hope and livelihood for these vulnerable women in the areas where CRS operates its skill development and livelihood activities. Through the smartphones project, women and mothers have benefitted immensely from the support received from you.

For millions of people the world over, the COVID-19 pandemic seems never-ending. People are weary. Many are grieving, and others are impatient. We all continue to face individual struggles, persevering through difficult days. Those who were the most vulnerable before are even more vulnerable now. The lockdowns being experienced around the world have heavily impacted those without access to secure housing, regular income, food, water and sanitation.

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Your support is appreciated now more than ever, and we thank you for it. May you and your loved ones stay safe during this time, and may the words of St. Paul from his letter to the Philippians church comfort you:

'Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made

known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.' (Philippians 4:6-7)

With all my love, blessings and best wishes,

The Rt. Revd. Dr. Paritosh Canning, Bishop of Calcutta (Kolkata) and Chairman of Cathedral Relief Service (CRS)



Top and above: Women, children and families attend a CRS Christmas party in Kestopur.

CONDUCTING CLASSES VIA SMARTPHONE

The smartphone project has increasingly become the backbone for CRS programmes during the pandemic. Smartphones have been provided for teachers to use to conduct classes, and for two centres running groups for mothers where they are being used to interact with teachers in connection with classwork and homework for the children. The women's empowerment, health and Nari-Dana programmes are all using smartphones to conduct online activities, which have proved

to be a lifeline during times of social distancing and isolation. In total, 579 children, 436 women and nine local committees have benefitted from the provision of the smartphones.

The Derbyshire School Links project is planning to share some online professional development training with CRS teachers in the near future, making use of the smartphones to communicate. Watch this space!



Above: A Nari-Dana class is conducted via smartphone.

GABBI BURSARY FUND TO ENABLE STUDENTS TO COMPLETE EDUCATION

Set up in memory of Gabbi Basra, a supporter of CRS, the Gabbi Bursary Fund will enable several students in Kolkata to further their education. This will happen through a holistic sponsorship programme that provides financial assistance to bright students who lack the resources to complete their education.

The programme will also provide mentorship to prospective bright yet needy municipal school students. It serves as an incentive for parents to continue the education of their children and as a motivation for students themselves to keep studying. At present, twelve students have been carefully selected from CRS schools to benefit from the scheme. They will

each be financially supported through their primary studies in private and government schools.

In addition, four former CRS students who have graduated high school have started a year-long diploma course in hotel management (a six-month course and six-month internship) at the Bishop Canning College of Management and Administration in Kolkata, accredited by City and Guilds.

It is hoped that the programme will run on an annual basis, offering many more talented students the opportunity to reach their potential and to find employment in the future. CRS is honoured that Gabbi's family have chosen to

remember Gabbi through this project, and is grateful for the significant generosity of so many at Derby High School who have made donations in her memory.

Gabbi was a beautiful, intelligent and kind person who was deeply touched by the people she encountered on her visit to Kolkata, and by the potential of the young people she met through CRS. This scheme seems a very fitting way to remember her and give thanks for her life, and we look forward to updating you in due course on the progress of the participants and their hopes for the future.

Below: A CRS children's class in action. It is children like these who will have the chance to further their education thanks to the Gabbi Bursary Fund.



WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT UPDATE

Between October and December last year, 220 women and girls were enrolled in the CRS women's empowerment programme. Each of them will now have the opportunity to complete a professional sewing and beautician course, through which they'll gain skills and knowledge that they may never have had the chance to previously. We're delighted that 35 women from the centres in Geonkhali, Kestopur and Kulberia have completed their sewing courses and each received a certificate of merit.

The Nari-Dana project also continues to empower women and girls, who recently received training in how to use industrial machines to improve the quality of the products they produce.



Above: A student receives a certificate of merit in sewing.

WHY IS EMPOWERMENT IMPORTANT?

Women's empowerment is critical in achieving equality, so that both men and women are of equal status. Enabling opportunities for women to better themselves helps to raise their own self-esteem and gives them the chance to become equal role models within India. The work that is being carried out through CRS ensures that women gain skills and receive training to make informed decisions and engage in purposeful work which impacts upon their community and the workplace in which they are an integral part. The women work in an environment where they are able to challenge, question and learn skills that they can share with others, including their children.

Throughout the pandemic, many lives have been challenged. Millions of families have suffered and have been left to fend for themselves. The women attending the CRS programmes have been equipped with the skills to continue through this hard time and remain focused in earning money to care for their families and keep them safe. They've also had the opportunity to understand the importance of keeping themselves safe and to share the health authority messages throughout the rise of the pandemic. In essence, women have been empowered to make decisions, support their local areas and produce vital goods for their communities.

NUTRITION AND HEALTH UPDATE

The pandemic has resulted in many heads of families in the poorest parts of society losing employment as they are likely to be non-salaried or day labourers. These families are struggling to provide their children with basic nutrition.

The State Government is trying to address this issue, but the magnitude of the situation calls for the assistance of many more civil society partners, which is where CRS is able to play a part.

Until recently, none of the CRS schools provided mid-day meals for their children, although other NGOs operating in the area have introduced such initiatives. In November 2021, CRS introduced a nutritional meal, as advised by a professional dietician, for around 430 children in the following areas: Topsia, Bibibagan (two schools), Hastings, Sukantanagar, Dum Dum, Gobindo Banerjee Lane, Geonkhali, Kulberia, Brace Bridge and Scott Lane (CSS).

The cost of this programme will be around £10,000 per year, for which CRS will require ongoing support from local and international partners.

Alongside the nutrition programme in Hastings, Topsia, Bibibagan and Sukantanagar, health clinics have been launched to provide much needed care for the community. Meanwhile, the Bosekati health clinic is being run three times a week, providing check-ups and medication. This is proving invaluable in an area where there are no hospitals or other forms of health care provision. CRS is also providing COVID-19 awareness sessions with small groups, aiming to equip people to minimise transmission of the virus.

Left: Children in Kulberia receive food supplies. **Below:** A health check-up at St Luke's Church in Bosekati.



THE PEOPLE YOU HELP

In these newsletters, we want to share with you real-life stories from people in India that your support is impacting. This time, you'll hear from two women whose lives have been changed through the Nari-Dana project.

Dola Ghosh is part of the Nari Dana project at Gobinda Banerjee Lane. She says, *'I know that I can stitch better now. This was made possible in this one year after I joined Nari-Dana. I love to work here now. The earnings from Nari-Dana is invested in my child's education'*.

The Nari-Dana project has been a lifeline for many women throughout the pandemic, including **Sumitra Dey (pictured right)**.

She says, *'As soon as the lockdowns slowly got eased, I was able to come to the Nari-Dana production unit, following all COVID-19 protocols, for production of masks, as this was most needed. Along with ten women from our project who came to the production unit in small numbers, we were able to mass produce masks and earn about Rs.2500/- Rs.3000/.'*

This income helped us all during this time where most of our male members were forced to remain at home.'



MEET THE TEAM IN KOLKATA

We also want you to meet the people running CRS in Kolkata and celebrate the incredible work they do. Here are two of those staff members who make CRS possible.



Dipankar Sarkar is part of CRS' core team. He oversees the entire accounts implementation and has worked for CRS for 11 years. His colleagues describe him as *'very sober and diligent'*.



Mrs Kuheli Dasgupta is one of CRS' professional consultants, specialising in education. Kuheli has been with CRS for 39 years and coordinates the overall education programme. She has several years of grassroots experience in educating children from poor communities, and is described as *'a very hardworking lady'*!

KOLKATA THROUGH A CHILD'S EYES

Three years ago, a professional filmmaker in Kolkata was hired to take footage of the lives of three children who attend CRS schools. This has been beautifully filmed and will be used as a resource for schools in the UK, enabling students to learn about education, women's empowerment, climate justice and making a difference, all through the lens of the children's experience

in Kolkata. The project has been made possible through funding held by the Derby Diocesan Board of Education and volunteers generously offering their time.

Despite delays due to the pandemic, personal circumstances of those involved, and various day jobs getting in the way, we're delighted to announce that

the film and accompanying teaching resources will be available at Easter. The film will also be of interest to churches and other supporters of CRS as it gives a real flavour of the life experienced by the people that CRS helps, and the wonderful work that CRS does to alleviate and lift people out of extreme poverty. We'll let you know how you can access these resources soon.



TRUSTEES' UPDATE

Trustee meetings have, inevitably, been conducted by Zoom over the past few years, and that is the way we continue to meet as we are geographically quite spread out (although we no longer have a trustee in Washington DC!) This has enabled us to invite Bishop Canning and Rig David to join us, and we were pleased to welcome both of them to the last Trustee meeting in January. It made an enormous difference, enabling us, as a body, to discuss and ask questions about the various CRS projects, and it is

something that we hope will be a pattern for the future. The governing body of CRS in Kolkata is an Executive Committee chaired by the Bishop, and we hope that representatives from the UK Trustees can join their online meetings as well. So, while some of us may groan at the prospect of Zoom meetings, there are some advantages.

It is hoped that Bishop Canning will be coming to England for the Lambeth Conference later in the year, and that Rig David will

accompany him, so there will be a chance for some of us to meet them in person. And who knows, perhaps we shall be able to visit India again before too long!

In other news, the Friends of CRS Trustees are pleased to welcome to the team Ade Miller, who is taking on the role of Treasurer and looking after our finances and accounts. Ade is a recently retired company director and brings with him a wealth of business experience. We're delighted to have him on board.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

In your last newsletter, we said that the Indian Government had tightened the regulations which control foreign transfers of money to NGOs in the country. All donations now have to go through the National Bank of India in Delhi, and every NGO has to have an account with the bank.

With some relief we are able to report that the new system is working efficiently and we were able to resume payments to CRS last year. So far during this financial year (from April 2021) we've transferred £42,369 to Kolkata, of which £18,607 was 'restricted funds', that is money paid for specific

projects. The two largest items were the bursaries in memory of Gabbi Basra (£5,220) and the nutrition programme (£8,723). We still have over £11,000 of the Gabbi Bursary Fund remaining for future use, but all the nutrition programme funds to date have been spent, so money will need to be raised to keep that important project going.

The CRS accounts to December 2021 (a nine month period) showed income of nearly £63,000. Two thirds of the money came from the Friends in the UK, so we remain the most important funding resource for CRS. It is pleasing

to see that there is an increase in funds from local sources amounting to £14,000, so it shows that Rig David's efforts to raise money locally are producing results. Other overseas funding during the period amounted to £6,200.

CRS expenditure to December 2021 was £47,500, of which £36,000 was spent directly on the projects.

Thank you to all who have made this possible, and please keep up the good work.

WAYS TO SUPPORT CRS

To donate towards general CRS funds, please visit **justgiving.com/calcutta-ccrs**

If you wish to give regularly by standing order, or to make a bank transfer, please email **secretary@friendsofcrs.co.uk**

Cheques made payable to 'Friends of Calcutta Cathedral Relief Service' can be sent to:

Friends of CRS c/o Reverend Anita Matthews
St Peter's in the City
St Peter's Street
Derby DE1 1SN

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