

Gift for Life and Covid

The past year is one we are unlikely to forget in a hurry - a world pandemic, hospitals and medical services overrun, tragic deaths of loved ones, families without income due to job loss. We've also experienced the loss of freedom to meet friends and loved ones and take part in services and share with our parish community, all of which we hold dear. We owe a debt of thanks to the teams of dedicated scientists developing the vaccines which are now enabling us to enjoy greater freedoms again.



For the extended community that we support through *Gift for Life*, their struggles have been even greater. Each day we hear of how Covid is making the lives of some of the world's poorest people even more difficult.

Update from Balamma Satram

In Balamma Satram in India they were faced with the illness then the death of Fr Sarves. The home continues to be managed well by the sisters. Throughout the Covid restrictions they have provided home schooling for all their students along with books and stationery. They have been able to purchase fire wood to last another 6 months and paid to carry out eye operations on elderly residents. More recently the sisters purchased a new cow which supplies milk to the village.



Several new religious sisters have joined the community but sadly another priest who worked with Fr Sarves has also died following a stroke. The community is delighted to report that one of their students has completed online exams in catering and is now opening his own road side eatery.



Mary Skaag, our contact with Balamma Satram, wrote very recently:

'Very often something good comes out of a bad situation and I truly believe that through this Covid Pandemic we are able to see on our TVs and in our newspapers the 'Dichotomy of India' and the plight of the poor people who are not able to receive the same medical treatment as those who are in a position to pay and bribe the authorities.

The poor suffer these circumstances day after day and every day. Prior to this pandemic such scenes and situations were hidden from us and only witnessed if one was prepared to travel through the rural villages of India. Giving witness to our faith we have sheltered the lonely, the sick and fed the hungry. We have listened to their cries and given them hope against all hope. After this pandemic let us think no longer in terms of "them" and "those" but only as US. To quote the words of Pope Francis "Blessed are all those who love their brother/sister as much when they are far away in another country as when they are living with us"

Update from Kenya

In Kenya the recent news is that the pandemic is very much present in Subukia with a strict lockdown in place. Sr Vicky and the medical teams are under pressure to support local hospitals and villages. Two sisters have also sadly died very recently from Covid.



The women's empowerment group goes from strength to strength as they plant and harvest food for their families and local community. An exciting piece of news is that the health centre at St Antony's has been developed into a hospital, which has just been completed, increasing capacity from 25 to 80 beds, as well as offering X-ray services, surgical operations and an Intensive Care Unit. Food parcels continue to be distributed to the destitute.



While these are very positive developments - supported by the generosity of our parish community - the recent reports from Sr Vicky paint a very concerning picture – she writes:

'The reality of the Covid19 third wave has hit Kenya. We have witnessed massive deaths of friends, relatives and colleagues. What is worse is lack of simple commodities such as gloves and when available it is costly. Lack of the most essential item for Covid19 management is Oxygen - this the most frustrating as we watch patients gasping for air helplessly. The lockdown is a silent killer for the poor casual worker who earns daily bread daily so hunger and frustration. In short and in my own words "The situation is angry and depressing!" We lack basic life support when it comes to managing Covid19 and this adds to our frustration as patients are rushed to us for help. Most public hospitals are full. But I am positive all this will come to end.'

Thank you

The difference that *Gift for Life* makes is possible *only* because of your generosity – whether through regular Standing Orders, one-off donations or by purchasing Christmas cards and the *Gift for Life* Calendar. Thank you on behalf of those who benefit from every penny you donate – please continue to support them.

We would welcome any ideas for, and assistance with, fundraising as our reserves are depleted at present and, as you have read, there is much that we would like to help with. The *Gift for Life* Group has continued to meet monthly through Zoom during the pandemic and we would love to add new members to extend our capacity and develop new ideas and approaches.

For more information about *Gift for Life* or to contribute in any way please e-mail: giftforlife20@gmail.com