



February 1, 2023

Dear Ministry Partner,

I hope you are off to a wonderful new year!

Let me assure you of this: *You're already making it a wonderful new year for the children and families of India!*

I just got back from India where I witnessed the power of your generosity. There was one highlight: a tremendous Christmas-in-January party . . . with 300 Hindu children who had prayed to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior through the schools and Bible teaching programs that your support makes possible.

These children have been memorizing Scripture over the past year. Many of them proudly quoted Bible passages as part of the Christmas program. One great favorite was Psalm 23. Those well-known words, “the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” take on a powerful new meaning in a land of sadness and stark need . . . the result of centuries of “shepherding” by strange gods.

- Certainly the enemy is still hard at work in India. There's a huge movement to take India back into all the Hindu traditions. Even the notorious *sati*, or *suttee*—the Hindu practice of burning a widow alive with her husband's dead body, a ritual now technically illegal—is being promoted again.

Hindus believe that a woman who chooses the *suttee* will be transformed into a goddess, with supernatural powers to bless other family members. But some will quietly admit a more practical motive for the *suttee*: Family members may encourage a widow to sacrifice herself because the couple's inheritance will be passed on to the rest of the family immediately.

The *suttee* is evil personified. In some cases, a wife begins to feel the agony of the flames and tries to escape—but there are multiple provisions for restraining the widow to keep her from “disgracing” herself by choosing to live!

Back when India was a colony, British governors desperate to save widows from such a cruel fate—often wives as young as 18—sometimes placed a hand on the woman's shoulder, which would render her “unworthy” of self-sacrifice. Yet a woman determined to give herself up could bathe in the Ganges River, supposedly purifying herself.

The threat of a return to the *suttee* is just one more reason why our work in India is so urgently important. What a heartrending contrast to think of the countless women who died in such a ghastly way—and then look at 300 joyful, bright-eyed children singing and dancing in celebration of their newfound faith in Christ!



And what a joy to witness your love, God’s love, overcoming generations of spiritual corruption. Hundreds of children, parents, and teachers dressed in colorful garb, brimming with hope . . . I rejoiced to see your compassion and generosity bearing such beautiful fruit.

Each step of the way I was representing you. I wish you could have been with me in person to award special gifts to leading students for “most verses memorized.” You would have loved the 12-year-old boy who won the prize for “most Bible reading.” He had read the Bible *twice through, end to end*, in the allotted time!

Each school played a part in the Christmas program, reenacting a Bible story or performing a dance to a Christian song. To hear Hindu children sharing biblical convictions with such fervor gave me a feeling of *victory*. This was fabulous evidence that “the gates of hell shall not prevail”!

And I wish you could have heard the parents, so overjoyed by the Christmas party—and giving testimony of their gratitude for the school program, especially the tutors who have helped students’ academic performance dramatically. Truly you are making a great impact in every region where our schools are operating. Again and again, the theme of the parents’ comments was the same: *Please keep these wonderful schools open!*

You’re not just providing education for these children; you’re also providing a quality meal every evening. Some of the parents confessed that they initially feared the “school food” would be inferior—but they were delighted to discover quite the opposite. Some, in fact, are asking for recipes!

But the Christmas party was only one brief focus of your ministry to India during this sojourn. All day every day, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., our team held training seminars with some 75 pastors and church planters of the region. These people are absolutely passionate about learning all they can, by any means, to serve the Lord more effectively. None have ever had any formal training. ***You have been their only hope.***

I was surprised, however, by one detail. The pastors and church planters listened eagerly to everything I shared—but then at the end of each segment, when I opened the floor for questions, there was nothing but silence. I’ve never experienced this in all my years in ministry!

But then I learned what was happening. In the culture of India, it’s regarded as embarrassing to ask a question in public. So we provided pens and paper to the participants, and set up a “question box” so they could make their inquiries anonymously.

Now the floodgates opened! They had questions not only about the subject matter, but on many, many issues. These are people who carry innumerable burdens, many beyond our imagination, and they simply have nowhere to turn for answers. Once again, *you were their only hope.*

The days, to be honest, were grueling. I stood to teach the entire day, covering material with concentration and taking great care to be precise. We studied numerous Bible passages, exploring context and explaining theological concepts. It was laborious—because these participants had so little knowledge. They had no foundation to refer to, so every concept had to be built up from the most fundamental truths.



Still, I was thrilled to see the light go on in people's eyes as they absorbed truths with such zeal. And I was grateful all over again for your faithfulness.

This moment in India has been a miracle in the making for a long, long time. Our leading partners in this field are a remarkable family that I first met nearly 15 years ago. At that time the father of the family—pastor of a single church—was fighting for his life. **Cancer had spread in his body; chemotherapy represented the only way he could possibly recover.**

But the family was devastated to learn that chemo would cost \$4,000—an absolutely impossible sum for them. Yet God had a plan. I was carrying that exact amount of money, intending to fund a few projects in the area. But in the Lord's perfect timing, the projects were behind schedule—so I was able to cover the cost of chemo for this desperate man.

In that moment of relief and joy, the family knew that God was in their midst. And from that day, a special bond was established between us. We've been working together for the Lord and His church ever since.

In the weeks and months that followed, this family learned to think big. Their vision had been quite small, tethered to what they figured a church could do. The need of the *region* was too big for them to consider. But now they saw the amazing things God was doing through our ministry strategy. With other partners elsewhere in India, we were in the process of launching more than 1,000 churches!

Soon the family was hard at work on a plan to open 11 new churches. Word spread fast. Others enthusiastically joined this “bold initiative.” Soon there were 83 church planters in their coalition—each one launching an average of three churches.

Today, the legacy of this family is fantastic. The pastor's children are now adults and hard at work in various facets of the ministry. Eldest son, Samuel, directs the schools and pastors of one of the main churches. Second son, Johnny, is pastoring another main church and helping with the training of the church planters. Elder sister, Shiva, and her husband coordinate food services. Younger sister, Gracie, oversees training school children in various areas.

We've had the pleasure of watching God work in wonderful ways. As the ministry grew, Samuel pursued academic training and ended up with a doctorate. Meanwhile, he grew more and more burdened for the education of destitute children. He began to envision establishing district schools for marginalized children.

He proposed the project to us, and the strong support of friends like you enabled us to say “yes.” The four new schools filled instantly. Soon we had to find more teachers and cooks to teach and feed so many children—twice as many as Sam expected! Soon there were eight schools—and demand kept growing.

I visited several of the schools—one gathering on the grounds of a Hindu temple! In this otherwise silent edifice, children were quoting Scripture verses and praying to receive Jesus. The Christian activities are getting bigger and bigger.



But outdoor events won't be feasible when the brutally hot season arrives in just four months. The weather in this part of India is "hot, hotter, hottest." It seemed we perspired simply by standing still. The humidity was unbearable, as we were less than 50 yards from the ocean.

Hindus, however—deeply offended by Christian activities in public venues—have complained, and the authorities have said big activities need to be held in "our place," under "our own roof." The police have said that we won't be driven out as long as we're "in our property."

Which means, before long, we're going to need a bigger facility—to handle as many as 400 people.

Another adventure! We're off and running in another year of glorious ministry, celebrating the good news that "unto us a Son is given." At the dawning of the year, we're proclaiming to India that *there is a Savior!* Hundreds of locals have come to faith through the clear Christmas message—the coming of One "to seek and to save that which was lost." Response has been sensational.

What will God do next? Let's be part of it.

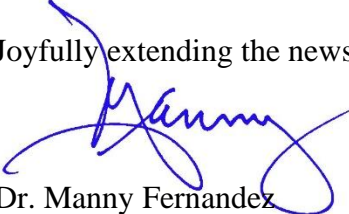
- I see you in 3 John 8 NASB: "Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth." John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is stating a universal truth: We who support God's work become "fellow workers with the truth"! This is how God sees your part in the equation!

We're underway in another year of meaningful and fruitful service. What an incredible privilege, what a marvelous blessing, to be part of such an initiative—going global with the saving and sustaining Word of God! God is building His church; we are commissioned to join Him.

Thank you for joining Him. As a dear friend pondered the challenges before us in 2023, he said with a smile, "I am glad we can tackle it together!" That's how I feel too!

Please give today. Give generously according to the blessings God has brought into your life, the resources He has entrusted to you. And pray with me that this will be a banner year for our achievements together in the Lord!

Joyfully extending the news of the Savior,



Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. Every child of India joyously singing praises to Jesus is a testament to the power of your love. Every young person proclaiming the Scriptures from memory is another example of what God can do when you give. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you in advance for giving your best to the work of the Lord in India and around the world!

