



Cluny Sisters in India Flood Relief in Kerala

Cluny Connections is grateful to our sisters who gave their all in this amazing response in the wake of devastating floods, and to Sister Teresa Rai (General Councilor) who forwarded the accounts of the sisters. What follows is a summary from the sisters' report. Sister Marie Cooper

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. (Is. 2)

Continuous, torrential rain required the opening of almost all the dams in Kerala. In two hours, the waters had reached the convent in Vandiperiyar. Like everyone else, Cluny Sisters fled as the flood waters roared through their compound, felling the walls, and invading the convent and school buildings. The water rose so quickly that by the time the last sister left the convent, the water had risen up to her neck. After several days the waters subsided allowing the sisters to return to face the damages to the convent and school buildings.

Before very long, however, with the support of Cluny Sisters from three provinces in India (South, South East and South West) the sisters sprang into action to reach out to the poor who had lost everything. Stagnant water had become a breeding ground for mosquitoes, posing hazards of vector-borne diseases. Houses filled with mud had become a refuge for snakes.

The sisters focused on the remote village Panamram of the Waynad District that lacks access to transportation, medical, educational and social services. After a visit to the Collectorate to study a model temporary shelter, the sisters proposed and obtained funding to build 30 temporary shelters. These houses comply with the three principles of the United Nation's convention on disaster management shelters: they are cost effective, capable of immediate completion, and are re-usable. The roofs and sides of the houses are made of sheets of galvanized tin and supported by steel pipes. The front and back are made of local materials like bamboo or plywood.

Many local volunteers came to work and contribute from the little they had. They were joined by many others, including sisters from the other Cluny provinces. The Association of Engineers of Kerala provided technical support.

Cluny school teachers, parents and students, and many other benefactors contributed cash and gifts in kind to support outreach for immediate needs. The Catholic Church and Caritas-India were quick to respond. Cluny Social Services collected and distributed food, clothes, toiletries and other essentials. Our school at Changanacherry became a relief camp, housing over 250 people until they could return home.

The sisters also organized counseling sessions, yoga classes, medical camps and entertainment programs to help the victims of the disaster overcome their fear and anxiety and to begin the healing process.

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Work in progress.

Photo: Cluny Sisters, Kerala