

## ST. MARTHA'S STRETCHED OUT ITS WINGS.....

### TO THOSE AT THE MARGINS.....

*“For I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me in to your house.... whenever you did this to one of these you did it to me”. Mt: 25:31-46.*



‘Don't be afraid to pitch your tents on distant shores if sheep are there to lead to the fold.’ – St. Mary Euphrasia.

**E**ver since the entry of the deadly Corona virus into India and the immediate lockdown of the entire nation, has made thousands of people penniless and as result many were deprived of their most basic necessities of life. In this context, there was a constant appeal from our Archbishop, His Grace Dr Peter Machado, to be sensitive to one's neighbor. He encouraged the faithful to reach out in charity as much as possible; to feed the hungry by providing them with food grains and to offer shelter to the perplexed and stranded migrant labourers in these uncertain times.

We at Martha's tried to reach out to the needy with food grains and accommodation as much as we could within the campus. But there was a deep desire within me to go beyond our walls in

search of the sheep who need our generous hearts and hands.

So, on 3rd June 2020 along with Dr. Abraham, our community medicine doctor, Mrs. Umavathi, hospital social worker, Sr. Shanty RGS and I, set out on our journey



to a place 20 km away from the city of Bangalore. It is a place beyond Magadi Road on the main highway.

We had taken food grain packets and masks with us. The food grain packets contained rice, dal, pulses and oil. After a 45 minutes journey we reached the



spot on the side of a main road. The vehicle suddenly stopped taking a turn to the right little inside a vacant land that was supposed to be Government property filled with bushes grown wild. As they saw our vehicle stopping near their abode, they came quickly one after the other to us. We could see in between the bushes here and there some hut's top covered with torn plastic sheets attached to one another in different colors which was hurling in the wind. Not one but eighteen of such huts. This is the shelter for eighteen families with fifty-five members all in all. They include men, women, youth and children. We could see young girls with one or two children. When we enquired their age, none of them knew their age!



Our conversation with them slowly unfurled their story. They are a family of rag-pickers picking up all the waste of the city to beautify our city. The very people who clean our city are living in such an inhuman situation not knowing what is ahead of them. One moment I thought to myself, the whole world is struggling, wreathing in pain because of corona virus. But to these people, what is corona? Where to stay safe? When and where to keep social distance? Let alone how to wash hands frequently with soap, when they thirst and struggle for drinking water! These phrases or slogans have little or no meaning in their lives. Yes, there still exists a

world of such human beings deprived of their basic needs. They were a family of one couple with six children who migrated from Chennai (a city from another state in South India). That single family expanded to eighteen families over a period of fifteen years. Interesting but they remain in the same situation. They speak Tamil



and Kannada. They said, they are chased by government authorities now and then but ultimately, they come back to the same spot and start again.

Look at these houses behind us. With the help of a few wooden sticks they have managed to cover the top with pieces of plastic bags. Inside just the mud as it is not smeared even with cow dung. So, they sleep in that mud with minimum sheets. One side we could see a heap of plastic bottles and other things picked up by them from various locations in the city.



We took a chance of creating little social and health awareness among them and distributed the masks to them and made all to wear them. How did they feel about it? We do not know. We told the need for keeping themselves clean. Then, they raised their problem of getting water. We tried to listen to them for some time.



They have endless problems but no one hears them. So, there is no other go but to live with what is available. Generation to generation they hand over the baton without flame on it. We then distributed each family one packet each of the food grains and to some two packets where more members are there in the family.



Meanwhile Dr. Abraham saw one or two small children who were with scabies. He immediately prescribed some medicine for it assuring them he will come back with some essential medicines for a health screening. He asked them to collect it from the nearby pharmacy for which, he himself will make the payment. He also planned to visit the area to conduct a medical camp for all.

About an hour being with our these less fortunate brethren we returned with a question in our mind how to rehabilitate these children to some shelter homes so that they can have basic education and better living.

We specially thank **The Arise Foundation** (New York) who made it possible for us with their second round of Covid 19 Emergency Fund. We know our contribution is very minimal and they

need real rehabilitation if they have to be freed from the present inhuman conditions and to live a dignified life. May God keep them safe!

We hope some generous people will come to our aid to fulfill our dream for these 18 families. As we took our journey back Sr. Shanty RGS got a call. It was from Dr. Padmini Isaac, the senior



most Gynecologist at our hospital who has association with us for about 40 years. When she heard that we had gone to a ragpickers colony to give food grains, she said immediately ‘ oh... how much you are all doing.... I marvel at your zeal going beyond the hospital which itself is a heavy responsibility’. Then came her spontaneous offer of a cheque for Rs.50,000/- !

*“Zeal does not consist in continual preaching, in giving good advice, in constantly exhorting to virtue, but rather in giving good example. Example speaks louder than words and often achieves astounding results.” Conferences p. 467*

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