



India



The Republic of India is located in southern Asia. It is the seventh largest country in the world by land area and the second most populous country with over 1.2 billion people. Though some people in India are wealthy, most are quite poor. In the north, they live in rural

that faith: India comes from *Indus* which comes from the Old Persian word for Hindu.

The Christian faith was first brought to India by the Apostle Thomas and survived in small numbers until the first western missionaries arrived in the 14th century from Italy by way of China.

One of the more famous missionaries to minister in India was Saint Francis Xavier. He worked among the poor in southern India spreading the word of God through charitable works. For more information on the life and works of Saint Francis Xavier, please see our Saint of the Month from December 2018 (attached to this e-newsletter).

Though just over 1.5% of today's Indian population is Catholic, the Church is very active in schools, hospitals, feeding programs, and homes for children.

One such place is the Marialaya (say *Maria – lay* – a) Children's Home in Chennai run by a Salesian Sister named Sister Clara Deveraj (pictured at left). Sister rescues young girls who have been stolen and sold into child labor.



Sister Clara with her students at Mass

mountainous areas; in the south, they live in tropical climates and are mainly farmers. India is a democracy, which means they elect their government leaders.

Most people who live in India practice the Hindu religion. In fact, the country got its name from

MCA Supports Marialaya Children's Home

In India, this kind of life is a reality for more than 12 million children. While some are stolen, others are sold into a life of domestic service or street begging by their own families who are desperate to feed the rest of their children.

Since Marialaya was started in 1990, the Sisters have rescued more than 2,000 girls. Today, over 100 girls between the ages of 4 and 14 are cared for by the Sisters, receiving daily care, education and vocational training.

Sister Clara is passionate about the spiritual formation of the girls as well. Every day, she teaches them about our Catholic faith, telling them that they are all precious children of God and deeply loved by Him.

The Salesian Sisters also operate a "help line", working with the local police, community members and especially taxi drivers. Children in India know that if they are in danger, they can call this help line (very much like we call 911) and the Sisters will come to them and rescue them from whatever situation in which they find themselves. Even people on the streets who suspect a child is in danger can call to report a child begging or being exploited and the Sisters will respond.

One of the girls lucky enough to be rescued by Sister Clara and the Sisters of Marialaya is Vandoosha (pictured above, center). She was 10 years old; when she was very young, she was sold to a neighbor to work in the family's home. That neighbor sold Vandoosha again. "I had to work from 5 AM to midnight every day," Vandoosha says. "I was doing all the washing, cooking and cleaning for the whole family and looking after their 2 year old child."

Vandoosha does not take anything in life for granted after her rough start. She is



Sister Clara with Shorti (left) and Vandoosha (center) after their rescue

determined to study hard and one day become a police officer so that she can give protection to street children and bring them to Marialaya!

UPDATE: It has been five years since we first brought you the story of Sister Clara and the Marialaya Home. For Vandoosha, the memories of her time as a domestic worker are still fresh in her mind. Thanks to the Sisters at Marialaya Children's Home, she and Shorti both are now healthy and happy and doing very well at a local boarding school.

During a recent visit with Sister Clara, the girls were asked what Sister meant to them. Both girls agree that one word fits for Sister: "Mother. She is our Mother," they replied.



Sister and the girls today

At last report, Missionary Childhood members sacrifices \$4,000.00 for the support of the Marialaya Children's Home.