

# India



The Republic of India is located in south 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 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 the religion: 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 for centuries until the first western missionary (a Franciscan named John of Montecorvino) arrived in the 14th century from Italy by way of China. Now, just over 2% of the population of India is Christian.

The Catholic Church is very active in India, however, through schools, hospitals, feeding programs and orphanages in service to God's poor.

Health care is a large problem in India. Many diseases that we have conquered are still a problem for everyone, and the number of doctors available is very low: there is less than one doctor on average for every thousand people in the country.

Education is also a challenge, particularly for young Catholics, both boys and girls

MCA supports a large number of schools and religious education programs in India. Children not only learn their faith and to read and write: in many cases, they learn life skills that will then allow them to support their families.

The Santhwan School, for children with special needs, in the diocese of Allepy. It's run by Sister Linda Joseph, a Visitation Sister who's been working at this boarding school for the past 15 years. Fun fact: when she was 10, she got a kiss on the forehead from Mother Theresa.

## Info

**Population** 1.408 billion

**Religion**

79.8% of the population of India practices Hinduism, 14.2% adheres to Islam, 2.3% adheres to Christianity, 1.7% adheres to Sikhism, 0.7% adheres to Buddhism and 0.4% adheres to Jainism.

There are over 20 million Catholics in India, representing around 1.55% of the total population, and the Catholic Church is the single largest Christian church in India.

**Other data**

There are 10,701 parishes that make up 174 dioceses and eparchies



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Located in the Indian diocese of Tiruchirappalli (Trichy), some 2,000 miles south of Mumbai, the St. Francis Xavier School for Boys teaches young men eight different trades guaranteed to give them a future as carpenters, mechanics, welders, book binders, machinists or electricians.

There are 80 boys who live in the school, coming from all over the region, and 110 other students from the city of Trichy, all of them eager to learn. Students here know that the skills they are learning will allow them to make at least 1,000 rupees a day (9\$), significantly more than what they would get as State-subsidized day laborers, who earn in an average 450 rupees, 100 days a year.

Founded in 1906 by the Salesians, the first missionaries to reach this region of India, the school today is run by the diocese, and receives support from The Pontifical Mission Societies USA. This help is particularly channeled through the Missionary Childhood Association, which through programs such as the Mite Boxes, helps bring school-aged children in the United States closer to the realities of children in other parts of the world.



According to Father John Peter, the principal of the training center, "the people here are economically very poor, but they have a faith that can move mountains."

Most of the student's parents are daily laborers, which means they only have a guaranteed yearly income of 400USD, coming from the government, that gives them the equivalent to 4USD a day, but only 100 days a year.

The St. Francis Xavier school is run by Catholic priests and a dozen teachers, many of whom are engineers, and the process is very hands-

Last year, The Pontifical Mission Societies USA sent over three million dollars to Catholics in India, in support of dioceses, parishes, schools and hospitals.

on for the students, who get hundreds of hours of experience in the trade(s) they chose by the time they graduate from the three-year program.

The priests, and even a handful of seminarians, take care of lessons of both faith and morality, putting special attention to promoting the God-given human dignity we all have. Beyond fostering the personal faith of the children, this helps break the cycle of violence against girls in a country where child marriage of girls is banned by law but not by culture.



Christianity- and the acknowledgment of our God' given dignity, has helped a lot in the fight against this practice. For instance, Ramaye, 51, was born Hindu but became a Christian a long time ago. She was forced to marry as a child to her maternal uncle. He is 30 years older than she is (yes, she was around 12, he 42 when she was forced into marriage).

Her 3 daughters, however, were able to marry for love, as did her 3 sons, two of whom have died.

"Life is truly a struggle. And when I think about the future, yes, I am afraid. And I fear the political situation will make our life even more difficult in the future. But still, we remain strong in our faith. And we know that, in our Church, we are not alone," she said.

