



MINUTE FOR MISSION

April 1, 2007

Recycling Lives in India

All of her life, Rukumni has known she is considered disposable in Indian society. A mother of two daughters, she was abandoned by her husband. A Dalit, she is treated as an outcast, as untouchable. In India's caste system, Dalits aren't even a part of the strict Hindu social ladder.

She is triply oppressed. She is poor, female, and Dalit . . . and therefore, disposable. Rukumni's only marketable skills are those of a farm laborer, and those jobs are scarce since small farms are being replaced by farms run by agribusinesses.

Desperate to earn money to feed her family, Rukumni found her way to Chethana, a network of organizations and people's movements in southern India linked with the Joining Hands initiative of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Chethana came into existence as a collective in 2000. It organized to find ways for India's marginalized poor to break into the market and out of centuries of poverty. As a way to provide economic development for Dalit women, small collectives of women are organizing to create alternative ways to support themselves and their children. One such program collects garbage and recycles the biodegradable items for alternative uses, like compost for the organic cultivation of land or gas for cooking. This is a salvage effort that not only cares for the earth, but for the lives of women who have no access to other jobs. The women recycle newspapers to produce environmentally friendly bags for use by companies, hotels, and other businesses to reduce reliance on nondegradable plastics. They are also weighing such opportunities as leasing land and cultivating organic crops.



photo by Lionel Derenoncourt

A Dalit woman holds her child at a Chethana gathering.



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A Dalit woman holds her child at a Chethana gathering.

This program began in 2007 with a focus on empowering women, alternative markets and preserving the earth. Each member of a group receives a \$22 loan to generate income. By 2010, the organization hopes to expand its work in four Indian states and to create an alternative marketing chain.

For women like Rukumni, the campaign not only puts food on the table, but resists a centuries-old notion that some people are disposable, that their lives do not matter. Rukumni wants her daughters to know that dignity is possible. Mothers like Rukumni—and their children—are asking that you pray with them on Palm Sunday as they raise their voices in hosannas of hope:

God of power and mercy,

We continue to worship you and thank you for the gift of this day, the day when we are reminded of the little children greeting your Son with shouts of Hosanna in Jerusalem. The simple laughter and spontaneous jubilation of these children and other children in our midst make us aware of your gift of life itself. Help us to be good stewards of the world you have created so that these and all other children may grow in a world where peace and harmony and justice reign. . . .

Our thoughts and prayers are for all the people here and everywhere who struggle for the values of your kingdom. There are Dalits who are crushed by the system of caste discrimination and violence. There are women who are deprived of their humanity by age-old patriarchy. We continue to ask, how long do they have to suffer?

Yet we remember with gratitude all those who fight with great determination to preserve their dignity and rights. We marvel at their courage, and our hearts go out to them. In solidarity with all who suffer, they derive new life and power. You are a God who makes all things new. The church universal is your creation. You raise up men and women in every religion and in social movements to be the sign and instrument of your kingdom. Tomorrow is in your hands. You have given us today in which to work and celebrate. Let there be greater peace and justice in this world of yours. Amen.

Material was supplied by the Rev. Thomas John, PC(USA) Mission Personnel and Joining Hands facilitator in India. Prayer is by the Rev. Dr. K. C. Abraham, a presbyter of the Church of South India and a leading third-world theologian

To donate to the work of the Joining Hands initiative, access the website at www.pcusa.org/joininghand/support.htm.

Do you have a mission story to tell? Would you like to read inspiring stories of Presbyterians in mission? Visit the Witness Season Web site: www.pcusa.org/witness. New minutes for mission are posted on the 1st and 15th of each month.

For more information on the Witness Season mission education emphasis contact Billie Healy, Associate for Mission Education Resources (888) 728-7228, ext. 5689, or Bhealy@ctr.pcusa.org.

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