

THE MSC Message



Missionaries
of the
Sacred Heart
MSC MISSIONS



**COVID-19:
MSCs caring for a
world in crisis**

Pictured: MSC COVID Relief Aid in India

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MSC Missions Office,
PO Box 23, Western Road,
Cork, T12 WT72, Ireland.

www.mscomissions.ie

From the Director



Dear Friends,

Blessings of the season! After a year like no other, this summer will, please God, be a brighter one for us all. Many of us are vaccinated, with more receiving the vaccine every day. We're taking steps towards a safer society, where we can enjoy our freedom once more.

The unfortunate reality for many is not as hopeful. Our MSCs have been ministering through the pandemic in dreadful conditions across the world. None of us could fail to have been touched by the heartbreaking images coming from India, while in June, Brazil's death rate hit 500,000 people, the second-highest in the world. In the Philippines, typhoons and storms have made it all the more difficult for local communities to manage in the face of the COVID pandemic. And our MSCs have been there, with these people, every step of the way.

The pandemic has reminded us just how finite many of our priorities can be. Holidays, working towards a new car or a bigger house, even going out to socialise; these things can be taken away at the stroke of a regulation. At a cough or an infection, they're gone. But there is something inside each of us, an inner strength, a way of being; this is the way of the heart. It reminds us of what really matters, of God's love, and nobody can take that from us.

It is this way of the heart, and the compassion that lies within each one of us, that I call on now. This summer edition of our *MSC Message* is a little bit different, as we share with you some of the COVID relief projects that our MSCs have been working on around the world. If you are in a position to be able to help, we would be very grateful. May God bless and protect you, and bring you peace and joy this summer season.

With every grace and blessing,

Fr. Michael O'Connell MSC

Director of the MSC Missions Office

MSC COVID-19 Outreach in India



“Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have carried out COVID relief for those in need with dry rations, medical aid, and educational help for disadvantaged children. Unfortunately, we have not been able to continue our relief work due to a lack of funds. It would be a great blessing for the poor people if you would help us to help them.”

“Individually, we are just one drop. Together, we are an ocean.”

*- Fr Darwin Thatheus MSC,
Regional Superior in Bangalore*

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MSCs protecting lives in India

It has been impossible to avoid news reports of the horrific effects of COVID-19 in India. The disease has run rampant throughout the country, infecting millions and killing hundreds of thousands. MSCs in India have been doing their very best to help those in desperate need; however, it is a case of trying to do an awful lot with very little.



“We have helped those affected by the pandemic in whatever way we could,” writes Fr Darwin Thatheus MSC, Regional Superior in Bangalore. “While adhering to all safety and hygiene measures, we began our relief service by providing meals or packed grocery kits to the marginalised in our society, including daily-wage workers, migrant labourers, and needy people at old-age homes and night shelters in the states of Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala.”

To date, the MSC Mission Office in India have provided:

- Food for daily-wage workers who have lost their income.
- Groceries and dry-ration supplies for poor families and migrant workers in Bangalore City and beyond.
- Dry-ration relief supplies for rural parishes ministered to by MSCs.
- Food and provisions for widows and elderly women.
- Medical assistance for COVID-19 patients.
- Dry-ration supplies for school staff at the Chevalier Academy. The school caters for students in a rural parish, where poverty is rife. The school has not been able to function properly during the COVID pandemic, and so the staff have been out of work, without pay. The MSC Indian Mission Office have supported 57 teachers and staff members with food and essential provisions.
- Distribution of hand wash, face masks, and sanitiser for residents of homes for the elderly, along with nutritional food such as eggs, buttermilk, and Ragi, a whole-grain rich in fibre, calcium, and Vitamin D.

“We want to continue to help people during this ongoing lockdown situation,” says Fr Darwin. “But due to a lack of funds, we have not been able continue our service for the people.”

“These are unprecedented times and we are a close-knit community in the Heart of Jesus. We would greatly appreciate it if you would help us to fight against this pandemic in whatever way you can.”



“Together, we are stronger. Together, we can overcome.
Big or small, every effort counts and it will all have a great impact on someone’s life.”

-Fr Darwin Thatheus MSC, Regional Superior in Bangalore

MSCs fighting COVID-19 in Brazil

The coronavirus has torn through Brazil, where the death toll of half a million people was the second-highest in the world in June 2021. With the situation labelled as “critical”, the pandemic continues to have a devastating effect on health, employment, and social and financial security - and our MSCs across Brazil are doing their best to help those who need it most.



Caring for families in Pinheirinho

The ongoing plague of the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated existing problems of violence, marginalisation, and poverty in the area of Pinheirinho, in the city of Curitiba, and MSCs in the region are working to help vulnerable families who are struggling with a lack of facilities, a lack of support, and often, a lack of the most basic necessities.

The Projeto Família Viva, or the Living Family Project, hosts weekly meetings for 120 families in the area, with talks on themes such as addiction, health, family values, and spirituality. Monthly meetings also promote self-help, with particular emphasis on support for those struggling with alcoholism, or with family members who are dependent on alcohol.

Home visits are carried out by volunteers, who provide help and offer much-needed social interaction to those who are alone. Workshops are also held, teaching skills including knitting, embroidery, painting, and making clothes and rugs. Monthly bazaars are held to sell the products made during craft workshops, with all funds raised diverted back into the project.

The ministry provided by the Projeto Família Viva is invaluable; in addition, the group supply essential care packages to families in need every month, containing food, medicine, and basic necessities. MSCs in Pinheirinho are working to raise funds to continue the work of the Projeto Família Viva, and the provision of essential items to families who have been left without the means to support themselves as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

A donation of just €19 will provide a monthly care package for a family in need in Pinheirinho.

Providing a safe haven in Minas Gerais

The Pró-Moradia Housing Project was founded by Fr Tiago Prins MSC in 1992, in Muriaé, Minas Gerais, a region of Rio de Janeiro that is significantly affected by poverty. Fr Tiago developed this project with the aim of being able to give low-income families access to safe, secure, and comfortable housing.

Sadly, the number of people living on the streets in Rio de Janeiro is increasing rapidly due to the harsh rise in unemployment brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbated by the lack of support from the Brazilian government.

Each house costs approximately €1,600 to build, and the houses themselves are built on a volunteer basis by their future residents. MSCs in Muriaé are appealing for the funds to build 10 new houses, to help those families who have lost their livelihoods and their homes due to the coronavirus pandemic.



€1,600 will build a displaced family in Brazil a new home. Can you help?

Ministering through COVID in Brazil

Distributing care packages in Muriaé

The São Paulo Social Work Project is based in the city of Muriaé, in Minas Gerais, Brazil, where MSC missionaries help the poorest people every day. The project works daily on two main purposes: The provision of essential medicines which are expensive, or unavailable via public health services, and the distribution of food baskets, containing basic necessities.

In addition to food and medicine, the project also provides families in need with nappies for young children, and hygiene and cleaning products, which are more crucial than ever in the current pandemic.

The São Paulo Social Work Project is funded by donations from local people, and additional resources made available by the parish. The distribution of food, hygiene products, and medicine takes place from the project's head office, or care packs are sent by volunteers to the homes of those who are unable to collect them in person.

The monthly cost of the project is estimated at approximately €770. This currently provides food baskets for around 80 families every month, along with the distribution of over 200 medicines monthly.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, requests for help from the São Paulo Social Work Project have increased significantly, as many people in the region find themselves unemployed and without the means to support their families. MSCs in the region are currently trying to raise funds for a year's worth of relief aid, amounting to €9,240 in total.

Just €9.60 will provide food, medication, and cleaning products for a family in Muriaé for a month. A donation of €115.50 will give that family these necessities for a year.



Sowing seeds for the future in Rio de Janeiro

The São Francisco de Assis Social Work Project was founded by MSCs in São Gonçalo-RJ, Brazil, in March 1988. The project originally began with the establishment of a community crèche to help single mothers and their children, before the implementation of a larger-scale project in 2005, which aimed to support disadvantaged parents and children in the area, providing opportunities for personal development and professional qualifications. With the help of this programme, single parents and vulnerable families have been able to work towards gaining education, qualifications, and paid work, all with the aim of providing independence, dignity, and an improved quality of life.

The São Francisco de Assis Project are now raising funds to help vulnerable families in Rio de Janeiro in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Their latest project, named *The Desert Also Produces Flowers*, will focus on:

- Promoting health and wellbeing following the pandemic, with specific attention on women's health.
- Working with the local community employment centre to run workshops for people who are lacking in the necessary skills to find employment. These workshops will include computer skills, caregiving for the elderly and infirm, sewing and clothing production, and beauty courses.
- Developing and running educational courses to help people in financial difficulty to gain qualifications, prepare for the world of work, and improve their quality of life in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic.

MSCs in Rio de Janeiro are trying to raise €2,900 to be able to run their new project for a period of 10 months. Can you help to give a family in Brazil a second chance?

MSC COVID Relief in the Philippines

The MSC Mission Office in the Philippines is currently raising funds to continue their mission outreach programme for thousands of families in need, whose daily lives have been severely affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, millions of people in the Philippines have lost their jobs and livelihoods, and have been relying on government assistance and charitable donations to survive. This is of particular concern in areas where poverty has long been a pressing issue, where families were already living hand-to-mouth and struggling to put food on the table. Now, with another wave of COVID-19 wreaking further havoc across the Philippines, following a string of powerful typhoons that laid waste to homes, farms, and businesses, many families have the very real worry of how they are going to feed their children, as well as the overwhelming fear and uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus threat.



“The COVID-19 pandemic has affected so many lives of Filipino people,” writes Fr Samuel Patriarca MSC. “Millions have lost their jobs and businesses, which has had a serious impact in the livelihood and food system of the country. Food security is one of the main adversities that every Filipino has been dealing with since the start of the pandemic. As the country is on the verge of another wave of COVID-19, more and more people are becoming hungry, and most rely on relief drives organised by the government and other civic organisations.”

The MSC Mission Office in the Philippines has been providing relief assistance where possible since the pandemic took hold, providing food and essential items to families in need. Their next mission outreach programme, which they aim to run this summer, will see relief distributions to 3,000 families across three of the most badly affected areas in the country: Luzon (Sta. Quiteria and Caloocan), Visayas (Camotes Island and Cebu), and Mindanao (Butuan and Agusan del Norte).



Each relief pack will provide food and necessities that will be a lifeline to one of 3,000 families, at a cost of €8.50 per pack.



“We hope that through this project, we will be able to help the most vulnerable sector of our society, the poor.”

- Fr Samuel Patriarca MSC
Director of the MSC Mission Office Philippines

Life in Mission

Hello from the new Vocations Team,
Fr Tony Nolan MSC and Fr Con O'Connell MSC.

Last August, we took over the Vocations post from Fr Alan Neville MSC, and despite COVID, we have been busy. Most of our work has been remote. Like a lot of people, we've been Zooming like mad; in fact, the two of us haven't met physically since before the pandemic. Fr Con is living in Dublin and covers the 32 counties, and Fr Tony is in England looking after Britain.



The need for missionaries of God's love is greater today than ever. As a world, we have been through a difficult year. We have witnessed the devastating impact of the virus on families, on businesses, on schools, and on the very fabric of our society. Many families have experienced the death of a loved one, finding it difficult to fully grieve their loss. Social isolation and financial insecurity have caused deep distress, undermining health and well-being. In the midst of all this difficulty, can we still hear the voice of God calling us? Calling us to reassess our priorities in life? Calling us to treat one another better, to treat the Earth better? Often the beginning of a call from God, a vocation, comes in the midst of change and confusion.

As Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, we try to respond to God's call with hope, with generosity, with love, and above all, with humour. If you know anyone who would like to help us in bringing God's love to the most needy, please ask them to contact Fr Tony and Fr Con at vocations@mscmissions.ie.

*Please keep praying for vocations. As our Lord says,
"The harvest is plentiful; the labourers are few".*

Trusting in God's love and mercy

Bro Giacomo Gelardi MSC writes on ministering through the pandemic.

"Killinarden, west Tallaght, Dublin. The concerns encountered here range from material and financial poverty, to unemployment; from joyriding around the park, to drug dealing around the corner; from people struggling with poor mental health, to families shattered by addiction with resulting neglect of children, or worse, abuse.

I have been in pastoral placement in Killinarden for the last four years during my theological studies, and on a daily basis since October 2020. COVID and lockdowns added an extra burden onto the already precarious living conditions of these families. COVID meant children at home for months, with no in-person access to health services - GPs as well as mental health support. For families that struggle in normal times, COVID meant uncertainty; extra mental strain for both parents and children, often assessed only over the phone and resulting in the prescription of anti-depressants to children too.

COVID for us meant flexibility and adaptability. When schools were closed because of the lockdowns, there was a high risk that some children might miss out on their daily meal. In collaboration with the School Meal Scheme and supported by the local gaelscoil, we provided food hampers to the most disadvantaged families, about 80 families every week. 'Masked up' and sanitiser in hand, we shopped, packed, and delivered. Often, the delivery was an opportunity to link in with families and to keep the relationship with them alive, which was otherwise impossible due to the restrictions.

Even now that some restrictions have been lifted, we are the only people knocking at the door and willing to listen to people's stories. People do not miss the chance to let out their frustration, tiredness, anger and their sense of helplessness, all multiplied by the forced isolation. In fact, thanks to these calls, we have come across and dealt with domestic crises that otherwise would have passed undetected.

COVID has forced everybody to slow down or even to stop, and has reminded us of our powerlessness - reminding us that, ultimately, we can trust only in God's love and mercy."

Bro Giacomo Gelardi MSC



Global Ministry through the Pandemic



As the COVID pandemic rages on around the world, our MSCs continue to minister to those most in need. While we await vaccines and pray for global healing, our missionaries are caring for the poorest and the most vulnerable, providing food, medicine, and hygiene supplies to those who are living a hand-to-mouth existence.

We are living through truly harrowing times, and your support and friendship are a lifeline to those who have nowhere else to turn. Thank you.

Please cut here

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