



Brick by brick: building homes and churches in South Asia



New houses being constructed for homeless Christians in India with help from Barnabas. They are built close together in this particular location to protect them from elephants

Kuhe, a Christian widow, and her three children are living in a primitive tarpaulin tent. They have been there for over a year. Her meager earnings as a laborer are not enough to support her children. Two years ago, when she and her husband fled from their home in northern Sri Lanka to escape the violence from the civil war, her husband was killed by artillery fire. Kuhe saw him suffer and die in agonizing pain, and because of the ongoing shelling around her, she had to leave his body behind without a burial.

Appalling living conditions

Thousands of Sri Lankan Christian families are living in makeshift tents and shelters without direct access to clean water and sanitation. Even though the civil war ended in 2009, many *still* have nowhere permanent to live. And since Christians are part of a despised minority

in Sri Lanka, they may find themselves overlooked in the building process.

In India and Pakistan, this tragic story of extended homelessness repeats itself. Despised or ignored by their own society, Christians are languishing in sub-human conditions.

In Orissa State, India, around 56,000 Christians became homeless in 2007-2008 when Hindu extremists set fire to Christian homes and churches, or forced Christians to leave unless they would convert to Hinduism. After all these years some are still living in makeshift huts in the jungle.

In Islamabad, Pakistan, 250 poor and vulnerable Christian families became homeless in 2009 following a housing dispute and ended up living in tents along the center of a highway. The only water supply ran beside an open pit latrine and waste dump. They are now

living in a primitive tent camp outside the city without access to electricity or clean water.

Building homes

Moved by the desperate need of Christians in these three countries, Barnabas Aid launched a major campaign this summer to raise awareness and funds to build proper homes and churches for our brothers and sisters in South Asia. Local Christian partner organizations will then construct the homes.

Building costs are extremely low compared to those for a house in the West. Just US\$1,100 can provide a simple but good-quality one-room brick home, with a cement floor, tin roof and toilet and including a toilet, for a Christian family in India. An overhanging roof at the front of the house creates a veranda for cooking.



Fundraising ideas for your church

Want to start a brick by brick campaign in your church? Here are some ideas.

Lego house: members of the congregation "buy" a brick

Find someone who is willing to lend about 60 or 70 lego or duplo blocks. Write amounts on the blocks: say, USD\$50, USD\$20, and USD\$5 and some USD\$1 to get the children involved. Station a lego board with a sack of the blocks on a table near the coffee corner or another place where people meet together informally. Add a sign and hang up a house-building poster nearby. Tell the congregation about the project during the services and challenge them to buy a brick. A church member can then symbolically "buy" the lego brick at the price that is on it and place it on the board. Everyone can see a small house slowly going up.

Camp out in your church building

Be homeless yourself for a night by camping out in your church building. Ask members of the congregation to sponsor your homeless night.

A four-room house in Pakistan with kitchen, bathroom, toilet and shower, including electricity, can be built for USD\$4,000-USD\$5,700. In Sri Lanka, a basic home with indoor kitchen, toilet and water supply costs USD\$5,700, while at a typical cost of USD\$9,800, a new church building for worship can be provided.



Some homeless Christians in Sri Lanka are currently living in temporary shelters



Khazan and his wife Basharian in front of their tent

Homeless in Pakistan

"Without a proper home we feel insecure and vulnerable."

Seventy-year-old Khazan expresses the fears and concerns of many of the 250 Christian families with whom he lives in a tent camp in Pakistan. He and his 65-year-old wife Basharian have been without a proper home for over two years.

Life in the camp is squalid and desperate. The only way to cook meals is over a small fire after collecting wood from the forest. For clean water all the Christians must go to one tube well outside the colony. Washing is done inside their tent. Mosquito bites are causing many illnesses, especially amongst the children. Their tents are not resistant to the heavy rains during the monsoon season.

Can you help us build these homes and churches? Why not get your church involved through prayer and giving? Any gift, however small, will help.

More details at www.barnabasaid.org. For free leaflets to hand out at your church, please contact us by phone or email (contact details on back cover).

"One night they came to our house and told us to become Hindus if we wanted to continue staying there. They had targeted to kill my father and brothers. With fear we all fled to the forest. They followed us in the night searching to catch and kill us. We had to run away from the forest and came to [a town] where we stayed in a relief camp... Our house is completely burned down and our belongings are no where found, we have no place to stay."

Smrutilata, a girl from Orissa, India