

STIPENDS FOR PROBATIONERS-AS-
CHURCH PLANTERS IN INDIA
\$23,100



*Four recent graduates of Concordia Seminary in Nagercoil.
They are serving in newly planted churches as “probationers” or vicars.*

STIPENDS FOR PROBATIONERS

Within the borders of the Republic of India live more than one billion people, one-sixth of the world's population. Since gaining independence from Great Britain in 1947, India has become the largest democracy in the world. India is also a land of great diversity. In 1991, more than 4,600 distinct people groups were identified within the country. Moreover, racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity is made even more complex by the caste system, in which there are an estimated 6,400 castes. Each caste is a distinct group divided by social barriers. Despite efforts at social reform and the fact that caste discrimination is forbidden by India's constitution, the caste system—which is fundamental to Hinduism—influences all religious and social structures in India. Hindi is the official language, though there are 406 other languages spoken by India's indigenous people groups.

Though India's cities are crowded, 60 percent of the people still live in villages. Some Indians are extremely wealthy; however, 60 percent of the people live in deep poverty with an annual per person income of about US\$370. Consequently, 40 percent of the people cannot afford an adequate diet. Two-thirds of the labor force works in agriculture. India is the seventh largest industrial nation in the world. It has an outstanding educational system, so people come to India from all over the world for higher education. Twenty million Indian nationals live outside the country, primarily as engineers and computer experts. India has become a worldwide hub for the technology industry.

India is the home of Hinduism, which has become an umbrella of religious practices with two themes—belief in many gods and reincarnation. Almost 80 percent of Indians are Hindu, 12 percent are Muslim, 2.4 percent are Christian, and 2 percent are Sikh. India's constitution provides for full religious freedom for all religions, though in the current political environment, this liberty has eroded in some areas of the country. The rise of Hindu extremism has resulted in persecution against Muslims and Christians since the 1990s. The people of India recently replaced the Hindu nationalist government with a moderate coalition party. In the state of Tamil Nadu, where the India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC) has much of its work, the government rescinded the anti-conversion laws it had passed in response to the electoral results.

In 1895, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) began mission work in India—the first “foreign” mission field in the Synod's history. The IELC became an LCMS partner church in 1959. The LCMS invested human and financial resources in developing a total Christian ministry of congregations, pastoral training, lay training, school education, and human care. A large LCMS missionary presence continued until the 1980s, and the last LCMS career missionary retired in 2003. Beginning in 2003, LCMS consultants have gone to India each year to conduct various leadership training seminars.

The IELC operates Concordia Seminary in Nagercoil. This institution is key to the ongoing development of the church. It graduates 25-30 pastoral and deaconess candidates every three years, and averages 25 lay people each year in the one-year evangelist training course. Since 2001, new seminary graduates, called “probationers,” have been sent out as church planters on three-year assignments to unchurched areas, under the supervision of a nearby pastor.

The next class of probationers-as-church planters will be going out in June 2010. They are expected to start a congregation during their probationary period, and those who do so are given priority in receiving ordination. They give an account of their daily evangelistic activities to their supervising pastor, and return to the seminary quarterly to report and receive guidance. Many people are being baptized because of the evangelistic efforts of these men and women.

Funding will be used for:

Funding of this project will provide the probationers with a stipend for living expenses, which includes rent and program expenses, until they are ordained and placed in a congregation. For 22 probationers, this would be approximately \$1,000 per probationer, with \$700 as their stipend, \$200 for rent, and \$100 for program expenses for one year.

Prayer needs:

- Give thanks to God for relaxed political conditions that will allow greater outreach to the 800 million Hindus in India.
- Pray for the probationers who have concluded their studies and will now go to unchurched areas for the next three years to begin new churches.
- Pray for the many new congregations that God is raising up through the work of the probationers, pastors, evangelists, and lay evangelists. These new believers face a great deal of pressure to reconvert.