

Plymouth & Exeter District *of the Methodist Church*

Partnership with the Diocese of Cuttack

The churches of District and the Diocese of Cuttack unite in the Spirit and, through prayer and preaching, remember and encourage their partnership.

The Church of North India (CNI) is a united church established in 1970 by bringing together the main Protestant churches working in northern India. 2020 saw their Golden Jubilee year but the celebrations have been postponed or cancelled because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The Diocese of Cuttack is situated in Orissa, one of India's seven poorest states. Approximately 2% of the population of Orissa (estimated at 45m) are Christian. It is an area which retains a heavy Baptist influence from the work of the Baptist Missionary Society. The Rt. Revd. Surendra Kumar Nanda is the Bishop of Cuttack.

The Diocese is divided into 4 Pastorate Unions, each comprising a number of Pastorates, around 140 congregations, and an estimated 12,500 communicant members.

The Diocese works with partners to support a number of educational establishments, including 5 Stewart Schools, a Skills Centre at Mohana, and teacher training college, as well as a Christian Hospital at Berhampur.

The area includes the large urban populations of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, the coastal tourist resort of Puri with its historic Hindu temple, as well as numerous fishing communities.

Inland, the area is predominantly rural, mountainous and remote. Between 80-90% of the population in this area is made up of scheduled castes (Dalit) and scheduled tribes (Adivasi).

'Dalit' is the name
the people have
given to themselves
- it means 'broken'

As partners, we have agreed that the Sunday before Lent will, each year, be an occasion when we will pray for each other and, if possible, preach about unity in Christ.

Please will you join with us on Sunday, 14th February 2021 as we pray for our sisters and brothers in the Diocese of Cuttack? They will be praying for us.

The theme for 'Cuttack Sunday 2021' is **Treasure in Earthen Vessels** focussing on our humanity and the abiding presence of God, particularly in the worst of times.

The suggested Lectionary readings are:

- 2 Kings 2:1-12
- Psalm 50:1-6
- 2 Corinthians 4:1-10
- Mark 9:2-9

2 Kings 2:1-12: This account of Elijah's transfiguration from earth to heaven describes journeying with Elisha and preparing him for the moment when Elijah would be taken up by horses and a chariot of fire. The two prophets encounter others along with way who confirm that something spectacular is due to happen. Afterwards, Elisha tests out his status with God in a way that describes his emotion and loss. He has the 'treasure' (spirit) of Elijah/God but his vulnerability is clear. Our vulnerability has been laid bear by the virus. The suffering has been the same the world over but is more pronounced in places like Orissa where the daily economy collapsed and wage earners did not have the where-with-all to feed their loved ones.

Psalm 50:1-6 tells of the beauty and shining presence of God. Verse 3 links to the passage from 2 King 2 with reference to fire and wind. And verse 4 speaks of God gathering those who are faithful. Have we seen God? Have we heard God in the pandemic?

2 Corinthians 4:1-10: There are many wonderful opportunities to expound the things of God within the verses in this extended version of the lectionary reading. Verse 7 provides the reference for our theme and we see it repeated in each of the passages for today. Of the many 'handles' available to those who lead worship, a focus on the light of the Gospel in verse 6 could be linked to the statement that 'we preach Jesus Christ as Lord' (verse 5) as a way of enlarging on the treasurer that we find in our earthen/earthbound vessels. As humanity is essentially the same the world over, we find ourselves with the same responsibilities in both District and Diocese but our contexts are very different and we have much to learn from each other.

Matthew 9:2-9: The Transfiguration - though not always easy to understand - offers a further example of God abiding/indwelling in humanity. Jesus has as much of God as God can get into one human frame - treasure in an earthly vessel. Jesus - who is both human and divine - is the supreme example of treasure in an earthly vessel.

A recorded service, based on this year's theme, has been prepared with friends from the Diocese and those who have travelled to India from the District taking part. All or parts of the service are available to use. They also remain available for use on other Sundays of the year.

The prayer requests received from our partners in the Diocese of Cuttack are:

1. Please pray the Diocesan Board of Social Service as they seek to feed the poor and minister to those in need during the pandemic.
2. Pray for the presbyters and evangelists of the Diocese and for Bishop Nanda as he leads them in mission and ministry.
3. Pray the court cases that are being brought against the Diocese as others seek to acquire their property. May justice be done.

In addition:

The Plymouth & Exeter District has established a 'Cuttack Fund' to support the development of our Partnership. The Fund seeks to make it possible for some from Cuttack to visit the District, also to give small grants to those from our District who could not otherwise make a visit to Cuttack.

Contributions to the Fund are welcome and should be sent to the District Treasurer in the usual way.

Cuttack Sunday 2022 - 27th February 2022

Cuttack Sunday 2023 - 19th February 2023

You might like to know that the following prayer requests have been submitted to the Diocese of Cuttack:

The Methodist Church in Britain is also going through lockdown and restrictions because of the spread of Coronavirus. We are challenged about the future and how the Church might emerge from the current situations. Meanwhile, we continue to worship and serve as best we can, using the opportunities and tools at our disposal.

Therefore, we invite our sisters and brothers in the Diocese of Cuttack to pray for:

1. those most affected by Coronavirus: the bereaved, sick, lonely and unemployed and especially those who are fearful of the future.
2. the Methodist Church in Britain, that we may remain united as we discover our mission in a post-pandemic world and difficult decisions are made.
3. Commitment and faithfulness at a time of cultural and societal change in our nation where the voice of God is not heard as clearly or as loudly as it could be.