

Seeking out new leprosy cases in Liberia

Today, not everyone who lives in the Liberian village of Massatine has leprosy but it began as a leper settlement when no cure was available for the disease that had been the scourge of the region for decades.



Massatine was the perfect location for a leper settlement. It is miles from anywhere and a two-hour journey from Tubmanburg, the capital of Bomi County. People could hide away here and avoid being subjected to the stigma and discrimination caused by fear of the disease.

Now that effective treatment is available the disease has slowly been overcome in Massatine, though many are left with the scars and disabilities of leprosy. Since 2008, grants from St Francis Leprosy Guild have been supporting a leprosy programme run by the Society of African

Missions. The programme cares for those who have been disabled by leprosy and helps prevent them from suffering complications. It is also actively engaged in seeking out new cases for treatment.

Programme Manager, Fr. Firmin Konan Kouassi, reports that they have been able to train eight healthcare workers and one volunteer to conduct active case-finding in their area. Last year alone, they detected eight new cases in the village, which are now being treated with multi-drug therapy.

The village clinic also conducts education and awareness-raising work. In order to increase its effectiveness, the programme has enlisted the support of trusted village and religious leaders.

With the help of your kind gifts, villagers in Massatine now have hope that leprosy will not destroy the lives of successive generations. They long for the day when their children and grandchildren will grow up leprosy-free, and can choose to spread their wings beyond Massatine and enjoy the opportunity to realise their full potential.

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NEWS

† SFLG ST FRANCIS LEPROSY GUILD

FROM THE FRONT LINE

AUTUMN 2020

People disabled by leprosy struggle to survive during the COVID-19 pandemic

The Guild has given New Hope Rural Leprosy Trust, in India, an emergency grant of £1,890 to help feed vulnerable people affected by leprosy during the country's lockdown.

Just as we experienced in the UK, strict travel restrictions during India's COVID-19 lockdown made it harder for those families still living in leper settlements to access enough food. It was also more difficult for organisations like New Hope to reach them.

Eliazar Tomati Rose, Director of New Hope, said, *"Essential food shops were open for just three hours a day. In larger towns like Sambalpur, Bolangir and Attabira where we provide support for elderly and disabled leprosy sufferers, the towns were divided so you were unable to cross from one suburb to another."*

Thankfully, members of New Hope staff were able to secure special government passes and with the emergency grant



from the Guild, they delivered rice to families affected by leprosy, travelling to their villages by bicycle rickshaw or by hiring a boat to cross the river at Sambalpur.

The grant has also helped New Hope to feed 80 people who are severely disabled by leprosy and would normally make a living by begging. These people were in danger of starving during the lockdown restrictions.

Thanks to your support, the Guild has also been part of a jointly funded project with LEPROA, which has been distributing dry food rations and self-care kits mostly to tribal people across five districts of Madhya Pradesh, India. These people are disabled by leprosy and have no livelihoods, and have therefore been struggling to survive during the pandemic.

The Guild marks its 125th anniversary

On 23 October 2020, St Francis Leprosy Guild will be celebrating its 125th anniversary. On this day in 1895, members of the Guild's committee met for the very first time under the inspiration of Kate Marsden, our founder.

Kate was a young nurse when she first encountered people with leprosy. In 1890, having learned of a rare herb in Siberia said to cure the disease, Kate set off on an epic journey halfway round the world to find it. Sadly, the herb proved ineffective, but Kate stayed on in Siberia and set up a hospital for 70 leprosy patients in the village of Vilyuisk. On her return to the UK, she became the moving spirit behind the founding of the Guild.

Since that first committee meeting, St Francis Leprosy Guild has gone on to



support more than 100 leprosy centres – clinics, hospitals and care homes – across more than 30 countries in Asia, Africa and South America. Today, we are focused on supporting our partners to beat leprosy once and for all, by seeking out and curing new cases before the disease takes hold.



Working towards a leprosy-free world, one community at a time.

A leprosy-free world is now tantalisingly within sight and in order to reinvigorate the global effort to beat leprosy for good, the World Health Organisation emphasises the need to detect the disease as early as possible through active case finding.

In the current pandemic, we've seen just how vital it is to test and trace people with COVID-19 so we know where the virus is most active. This is the only way we can control its spread. The same is true for leprosy.



The Guild has therefore decided to provide long-term grants for partner organisations whose focus is to actively seek out new cases of leprosy in poor and remote communities across the world. Often these communities have very little access to healthcare and therefore the spread of leprosy may go undetected, especially since people can remain asymptomatic for many years




enabling transmission to happen before first signs of the disease begin to appear.

The Bombay Leprosy Project, which works in the slums of Mumbai, and the hospital ship run by Dr Tony Lopez Gonzalez, which cares for people along the Amazon, are both excellent examples of this case-finding work.

These initiatives train healthcare workers and volunteers to conduct their outreach work. They monitor communities continually for early symptoms of leprosy, diagnose new cases swiftly and provide curative treatments long before disabilities can occur. Both projects also run education and awareness programmes to help reduce the stigma of leprosy. Individuals - and especially children – are taught how to spot very early symptoms of the disease and are encouraged to present themselves promptly for diagnosis and treatment.

It is thanks to kind gifts from supporters like you that the Guild is able to support this painstaking work. If you are able to spare a gift today to help, please visit www.stfrancisleprosy.org/donate or you can use the donation form attached to your letter. Thank you.

Join our celebration on YouTube



We had hoped to hold a special Annual Mass to celebrate our 125th anniversary with our supporters. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, we have decided to mark the occasion with a celebratory event on YouTube instead. Not everyone uses the internet but, if you are able, and you would like to join us in a brief time of reflection and prayer with an update on the Guild's work this year, then visit our website www.stfrancisleprosy.org at 11am on 24 October 2020. There you will find a link to the streamed event - a video lasting about 20 minutes. The link to the event will be available on our website for four weeks after the video is shared.