

India

SIM is involved in education, leadership development, children's and women's ministry, and HIV and AIDS work in India.

India is a stunning land stretching from the snowy peaks of the ancient Himalayas to Cape Comoran jutting into the sea.

Though some may associate India with the major religions of Hinduism or Islam, Christians have enjoyed a long and rich history on the Indian subcontinent. Today the Christian church in India is finding creative ways to meet the physical and spiritual needs of others.

"Nothing can fully prepare you for India, but perhaps the one thing that best encapsulates this extraordinary country is its ability to inspire, frustrate, thrill and confuse all at once." — Lonely Planet India, 2005



Current SIM Ministry

SIM is developing new partnerships with Indian organisations with a strong focus on reaching unreached people groups — many of which have populations greater than entire nations in Africa or South America. Areas of strategic focus also include leadership development within selected seminaries, supporting health & community development/outreach ministries, empowering Christian organisations for a response to HIV, and working with children and young people.



State Religion

Although India has a majority of Hindus, no official state religion is named. India has been careful to preserve freedom of religion in its constitution.



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History of Christianity

The apostle Thomas is said to have set foot in Kerala, South India, in 52 AD. Tradition claims he was speared to death in 72 AD. Orthodox Christianity was well established in the south by the year 200 AD. By 345 AD, over 500 Christian communities thrived in South India. The church was later influenced by Nestorians and became strongly ritualistic.

In 1835 a reformation took place within the Orthodox Syrian Church of the East, resulting in a new church, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, which broke away from the parent body. The Mar Thoma Church is less ritualistic and more evangelical than the parent body. Today the Orthodox Syrian Church of the East, with 10 dioceses and over 1,412,000 adherents, and the Mar Thoma Church with over 350,000 adherents, remain as the result of Thomas' work. Only the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of South India are larger.

Vasco da Gama's visit to India led to the start of Roman Catholic mission work. By 1533, the coastal diocese of Goa was established. Francis Xavier, a Spaniard, arrived in 1542, to begin Jesuit work. The Jesuits won converts from Orthodox followers as well as non-Christians. Catholicism has grown over its long history and is the largest Christian church in India with over 8,500,000 adherents. Since Vatican II, there has been an important shift away from folk religion, authoritarian clergy, and Western dependence. This movement has addressed issues such as increasing Indianisation of the liturgy, participation by the laity in the structure of the church, a more liberal stance on birth control, a clearer statement on social justice, and more open training of clergy and religious personnel. Anglican clergy served under the British East India Company beginning in 1612, but few converts were made due to the company's policy of opposing mission activities.

Protestant missions began with the arrival of Danish-Halle Lutherans in South India in 1706. They located in Tranquebar, Tamil Nadu, and translated the New Testament into Tamil. The work gained a following of 20,000 by 1800. The Baptist Missionary Society's first missionary, William Carey, arrived in 1793, and established work at Sarempore. This marked the beginning of the modern era of Protestant missions in the world.

Several other British groups soon followed: the London Missionary Society in 1798, the Church Missionary Society in 1813, British Methodists in 1819, and Scottish Presbyterians in 1823. American boards also arrived during this time including American Congregationalists in 1810, Presbyterians in 1834, Baptists in 1836, Lutherans in 1840, and Methodists in 1856. The German Gossner Mission sent its first missionaries in 1839, and Scandinavian Lutherans in 1867.

Over time, the early Protestant missions began to combine their respective churches. Two important churches that have resulted are the Church of South India and the Church of North India. Today the Church of South India is the result of several mergers. In 1901, two reformed groups joined to create the South India United Church. In 1905, two congregational groups merged to form the Congregational Union of South India, with 16 dioceses. In 1908, these two bodies joined to form the United Church of South India. In 1947, the church took its present name when Anglican and Methodist bodies also joined them. In North India in 1924, Presbyterian and Congregational churches combined, and by 1929, 11 denominations had united. Discussions continued over the years with other groups until in 1970, Anglican, some Baptist, some Brethren churches, Disciples, Methodists (Australian and British) and United churches came together to form the Church of North India, with 20 dioceses.

Many Baptist groups that did not join the Church of North India in 1970 formed their own association (the Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India) in 1975. The Baptist Church of Mizo District also declined to join the Church of North India. In the south there are also several Baptist groups that have remained outside the Church of South India.

Nine Lutheran groups spread throughout the country have combined to form the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India. The Salvation Army has developed a significant work from 1882 to the present, founding over 4,000 churches with over 500,000 followers. Presbyterians who did not join the Church of North India formed the Presbyterian Church in Northeast India, and have over 325,000 followers.

Over 200 other Protestant missions used to work in India. But foreign missionaries have been decreasing rapidly due to government policy since independence. On the other hand, the number of national missionaries and independent indigenous churches has increased tremendously. Some formed by division from parent churches, and others were started as indigenous independent movements.

SIM, resulting from the merger of several other missions, commenced work in Ceylon and Pune (then spelled Poona) in 1893. Today SIM ministers in several areas of north and south India.

Please pray for

- the continued growth of the house church movement amongst Muslim Urdu and Bengali speakers and amongst Hindus.
- effective discipling of young believers who have made a commitment to follow Christ.
- the Lord to raise up more international personnel to work in India. wisdom for the SIM leadership as they work with a young and growing team.
- strengthening of local partnerships and identification of new Indian partners with whom to minister.
- further development of ministries to the enormous population of children and young people.
- encouragement and joy in the midst of what can be an intense and stressful living and working environment.
- training of pastors and Christian leaders to result in effective ministries to the unreached resulting in fruit for God's kingdom.
- the ministries of compassion to human need through HIV, health, and community development programmes; that whole families and local communities will come to know the Lord through these holistic outreach initiatives.

Opportunities

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