Blog

Social Justice



The generalate or the headquarters of the Sisters of Visitation congregation in Alappuzha, Kerala, southwestern India. (GSR photo/Thomas Scaria)



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Two Visitation Sisters, who were part of a Catholic team that a Hindu radical group assaulted in eastern India, remain traumatized, their superior told Global Sisters Report.

On Aug. 6, Srs. Eliza Cherian and Molly Luis joined two priests and a catechist to celebrate a requiem Mass for two Catholic men at Gangadhar, a remote mission station of Jaleswar parish under the Diocese of Balasore.

As they were returning from the village after Mass and a community meal, some 70 members of the Bajrang Dal, a Hindu militant organization, attacked them at a narrow stretch some 500 meters from the station, accusing the Catholic group of forced conversion, they said.

Attacks on Catholic priests and nuns continue at regular intervals, especially in Odisha, said Sr. Dolly Manual, deputy superior general of the Visitation Sisters, at their headquarters in Alappuzha, a town in the southwestern Indian state of Kerala.

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Sr. Dolly Manual, deputy superior general of the Sisters of Visitation congregation. (GSR photo/Thomas Scaria)

The incident was "unfortunate, but an expression of God's providence," Manual said, adding that sisters have worked in Odisha for more than 50 years with no such attack before.

Sr. Jacintha Thomas, the sisters' provincial, said Gangadhar was one of the diocese's oldest mission stations, where hardly any anti-Christian violence has been reported.

Narrating the incident, the provincial said the mob first targeted a catechist who was on a motorbike. They beat him and damaged the vehicle. Later, they attacked the vehicle that carried the priests and nuns. The mob physically assaulted the priests, snatched their phone and abused them, she said.

The women from the village escorted the sisters to the house of a Catholic and protected them from physical assault, she added. The provincial thanked the local

police who intervened and took the Catholic team to their station, an hour after the attack.

One of the priests, Fr. Lijo Nirappel, parish priest of Jaleswar, told the media that they were assaulted physically and psychologically.

"They punched, pulled and beat us," he said, adding that the village women came to their rescue.

Manual said the incident has sent shock waves among Catholic nuns serving villages mission stations. "But we are prepared to face challenges. Christianity has only grown wherever the missionaries were assaulted," she added.

She said they have asked their sisters to stay away from prayer meetings in the evening and wear civil dress when they want to travel alone.

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Their young sisters have shifted to civil dress, but the senior sisters continue to use their habits, she added.

Thomas said most people in the region where the sisters work are agricultural workers and they are free only in the evening for religious practices. "That's why our nuns go for home visits in the evenings," the provincial explained.

The province covers the states of Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan in northern India, besides Odisha.

Meanwhile, the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India has condemned the increasing hate campaign against Christians in the country and pleaded with the federal and state governments to protect the freedom and dignity of the religious minorities.



Mercy Sr. Mary Haddad, president and CEO of the Catholic Health Association of the United States, talks about adverse effects for the poor June 24, 2025, at the U.S. Capitol in Washington. Haddad joined a group of some 200 sisters and supporters speaking out against the Big Beautiful Bill, passed by Congress in early July, one that sisters fear will gut social safety net programs for the poor to extend tax breaks for the rich. (GSR photo/Rhina Guidos)

Network webinar looks at what's coming up in Congress

As Congress gets ready to return from summer recess, Network, the sister-founded Catholic social justice lobby, will host a webinar Aug. 28 to discuss upcoming legislation as well as the recently passed "Big Beautiful Bill," which the organization opposed.

"The damage done by this cruel, un-American bill will be devastating, intergenerational, and require decades-long reform to repair," Network said in a July 3 press release after the bill, which makes major cuts to social safety net programs,

passed.

"People will die if the country robs millions of us of access to food and health care, creates even more obscene wealth inequality, and funds increasing detention, deportation, and ICE raids. The United States will be unrecognizable, and it will take a very long time to rebuild."

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The Congressional Budget Office projects that the bill, which reduces taxes and increases spending for immigration enforcement and military spending, among some of the provisions, will increase the budget deficit by $3.4 trillion over the next decade.

Network's "Welcome Back, Congress" webinar starts at 7 p.m. Eastern time and requires registration.

Sisters of the Holy Cross launch billboard campaign

Sr. Sharlet Ann Wagner, president of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, said her community plans to put up billboards reminding people in the South Bend, Indiana, area about Gospel values during a turbulent time in the nation.

All the billboards feature a short but simple Gospel quote, recalling "who Jesus is and who we are as the body of Christ," Wagner said.

One billboard is near a busy railroad underpass; another on a well-trafficked road near a retail shopping district. One billboard shows a young girl holding an empty dish with the message, "I was hungry and you fed me." Another shows the backs of a migrant group walking together but heavily laden with backpacks and says, "I was a foreigner and you welcomed me." A third shows a family or group of three hugging with the message: "What you did to the least of these, you did to me."

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"We decided that billboards might be an effective way of reaching out and asking people to consider how our actions line up with Gospel teachings," Wagner said.

The first billboard went up in mid-June, and the billboard campaign runs through early November, she said.

Though they've received a lot of thanks from individuals for the billboards, she said she's also seen online criticism: "Would Jesus be spending on billboards, or would he be feeding the hungry?" the respondent asked.

"My response is that we can and should do both," Wagner said. "Jesus used the means at his disposal to preach and spread his word. The Sisters of the Holy Cross proclaim the Gospel with our words, e.g. the billboards and through our ministries, feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, welcoming strangers."