

Witnessing Ministries of Christ



BY RUTH HAZELTON

In fall 2022, Presbyterian Women in Glacier Presbytery (western Montana) held a weekend PW retreat at Glacier Camp and Conference Center. Mission was the emphasis of the programming and also the location—the camp/conference center is a mission of Glacier Presbytery and is set near the Mission Mountain range!

Guest speaker Elizabeth Prasad described the ways that the caste system in India limits the lives of Dalit (“untouchable”) people in the caste system. More than 3,500 years of oppression via the caste system means that many people in India today lack access to education in an environment of equality. Families living in deep poverty may need their children to work at home and/or at any job that will bring in even a few rupees. Some families send their young children to primary classes and then take them back when they are old enough to work.

Elizabeth witnessed the impact and legacy of the caste system through her husband Philip, whom she met at Dubuque Seminary, where he had trained as a scholarship student from India. Upon his return, he founded Witnessing Ministries of Christ, a scholarship and sponsorship program of the Exodus Presbyterian Church of North India. Exodus Church is a fellowship of Dalit Christians, and Witnessing Ministries focuses on connecting children in Exodus churches with educational opportunities, ensuring their spiritual, financial and social needs are met.

Elizabeth said, “In my husband’s family, it took two full generations to move away from the outcaste culture into a world where seeking education was a normal event. This was possible



Through Witnessing Ministries of Christ, Elizabeth and Philip Prasad have facilitated educational opportunities for some of North India’s marginalized people.

through the American Presbyterian missionaries in the area where his family lived in Uttar Pradesh.”

For more than 25 years, Witnessing Ministries of Christ has provided scholarships to increase access to education for Dalit children. A network of support for the students and families include Exodus Church pastors, as well as teachers, principals and other school faculty and leaders. These individuals raise awareness in their communities about how education can lift individuals and families out of poverty. A key reason for the success of this ministry is because these faithful advocates for education understand the situation of the village families in their congregations since they share a cultural understanding. These leaders walk with Jesus and uplift families in every way they can with empathy, compassion and hope.

Witnessing Ministries of Christ supports 44 college students, 60 students attending village schools, and 150 students in residence. Additional students attend day schools thanks to buses

funded by the organization. Supporting a student through primary school and on through eighth, tenth (high school), twelfth (intercollege) or college is not easy. Elizabeth emphasized that even one year in a loving and empowering Christian school atmosphere can radically change the course of a young person’s life.

During the retreat, Presbyterian Women received an offering in support of Witnessing Ministries of Christ. Thanks to their generosity, four children will be sponsored for a year of education at one of the several schools operated by the Exodus Church.

The loving community of Presbyterian women will hold in prayer the young people from rural villages in India who are pursuing primary education and dreaming of graduation and even college education. Faith and education are key in providing these young people with an exodus from oppression and poverty. Their future is brighter thanks to the Witnessing Ministries of Christ and all who support this ministry.

Ruth Hazelton participates in Presbyterian Women at First Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Montana—a congregation sponsoring two Exodus children this year. She also serves as Mission Advocate for Glacier Presbytery.