

The Catholic Parish of Hampshire Downs

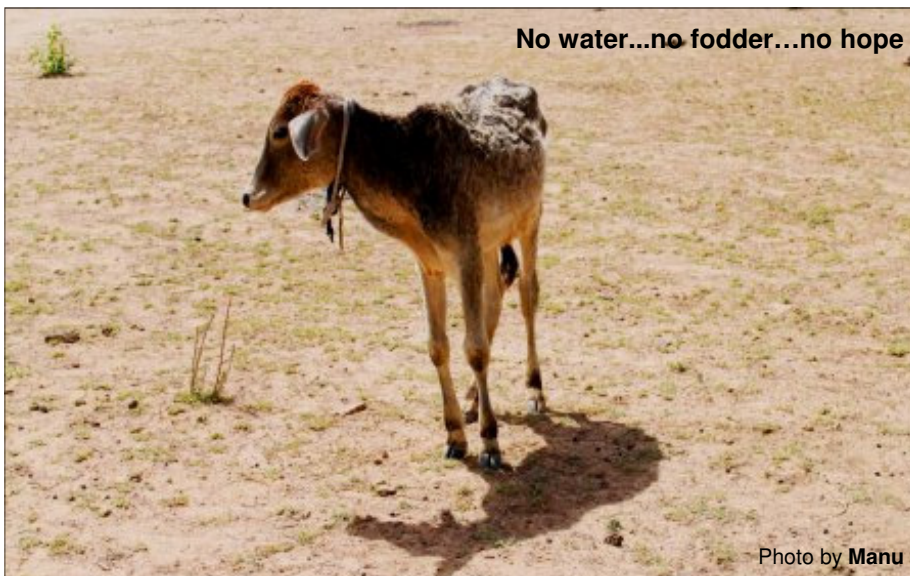
# *the promise*

News about our Covenant With the Poor

## DROUGHT, POVERTY & MIGRATING CHILD WORKERS IN INDIA

The Covenant With the Poor's appeal this first Sunday of Advent is the second in support of a project run by *Wells for India* and their partner *Mahan Seva Sansthan (MSS)* to provide water for drinking and agriculture to 5,000 people in ten villages in the Aravali Hills in southern Rajasthan at the cost of just £7 per person. *Mary Grey* describes some of the social problems, such as child migration, that the funds raised will help to tackle.

The people of Bansiwara – one of the villages we are supporting – are unable to rely for water on the River Wakal, which rises in the Aravali Hills, because it is dry for most of the year. Sixty years ago, thick forests covered these hills, but now the trees have gone. Each year the monsoon rains rush down the hillsides leaving behind bare earth, and the lack of water and the ever more degraded land mean that there are inadequate supplies of food and fodder for animals. People live scattered across the hillsides, surrounded by their small plots of unproductive land, and in these hostile conditions, with limited farming skills and few opportunities for education, it is very difficult for the villagers to make a living. Many families are below the poverty level.



*the promise*

No. 24 Advent 2011



*Asked to sum up in a word what Christmas means, someone said 'Hope'.*

*Hope looks forward.*

*Hope engages the heart, and lifts it.*

*Hope is not just something we do, it is something we have, and something we can give.*

*The birth of a child gives hope – Christmas gives hope.*

*This parish's covenant with the poor of the world is also about having hope. It is about imagining what might be and trying, in some small way, to make it happen.*

*It is also about giving hope – to those who might have lost it – by supporting projects by which they are able to reclaim power over their own lives.*

*We hope that you will continue to give your very generous support of our covenant with the poor,*

*and we hope you have a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year.*

Read *the promise* in colour on the Parish website at [www.hampshiredowns.org.uk/CWP.aspx](http://www.hampshiredowns.org.uk/CWP.aspx)

The next meeting of the CWP group is on Monday, 30 January, at 7.30 p.m. in the Convent.  
Everybody is very welcome.

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But poverty is not the only problem. The Aravali Hills are close to Rajasthan's border with Gujarat, where children are regularly taken to work on the cotton plantations – and a life of suffering. Here are stories of just two of the children forced to live this life.

### Amari's story

Amari is 15 years old. She comes from one of the very poor tribal families in Bansiwara. The income from their small piece of land is inadequate – it is wholly dependent on the monsoon rain. Even when her parents go out for other work their total annual income is only around £150.

So when she was 12, Amari stopped her education, and started working as a wage labourer. Each year from August to October she and several other children from her village have been migrating to Gujarat to do cross-pollination work on the cotton plantations.

Amari's routine is crushing, and violates her rights as a child. She wakes up at 4.30 in the morning to get ready by 5.30 to start working in the fields. At 7.30 pm, after a long day of hard labour in the scorching heat, she returns from the fields and prepares her own dinner – simple chapattis. Eighteen girls have to share one shed. For this Amari gets Rs 100 (£1.20) per day.



Back-breaking labour

### Ramila's story

For Ramila, a shy 14-year-old from Barna village in the Kherwara block of Rajasthan's Udaipur district, the joys of childhood are also fleeting dreams. She and ten other children from her village left the security and comfort of their homes also to work in the cotton fields.

Despite her father's reservations, Ramila's mother had allowed the Met (a labour agent from her village) to take her to plant **Bt-cotton** seeds (see page 3) at a plantation in Gujarat. But if the back-breaking work wasn't hard enough, Ramila had to endure her employers' verbal abuses, vulgar gestures and sexual advances.

Ramila recounted one terrifying episode when the Met had gone back to his village for a religious festival. At midnight, her supervisor and employer had come to the sheds where the girls slept, and asked two of them to step out. When the girls refused to go, the men entered the room hurling abuses. They pulled one girl out of her bed and told her to sleep on another cot. Because she refused, the pair beat the young children for the next three days, until the Met returned and was told of the beatings. The children had to leave the farm without their wages.

### What is the solution?

What our project shows is that by tackling the water problems we can change the far reaching social problems, like children migrating for work, that poverty brings. So the project at Amari's village, and nine other villages, will provide safe, accessible sources of drinking water for people and livestock, including the repair of wells.

MSS, working with the villagers, will improve groundwater levels through rainwater harvesting measures, such as gully plugs, check dams and larger dams across the drainage lines. Fruit orchards will be



developed with fruit tree saplings – as well as growing vegetables as cash crops. So farming productivity will be increased, and the health and nutrition of the animals will improve. Most importantly, the capacity of communities to manage their resources and participate in development activities will be transformed.



### What will this mean for Amari's village?

For the first time families in Bansiwara will have drinking water close at hand all the year round, and will be able to provide fodder for their animals, and grow fruit and vegetables. Fewer children will die from malnutrition, and they will no longer need to migrate to the cottons field for work.

With food and clean water, health improves as hygiene and sanitation become available. Children go to school, community life begins to flourish and the women, more free from the daily grind of searching for water, are able to undertake income generation activities. Family life is transformed and so is village life.

**The good news is that this has already started to happen, as migration levels are beginning to drop. But to reach our target of helping 5,000 villagers, and to give children like Amari and Ramila a chance to reclaim their childhoods, Wells for India still needs to raise £6500. Thank you for your support.**

**Bt-cotton is a genetically modified cotton, produced under licence from a multi-national agricultural company.**

Labour rights NGOs in Rajasthan and Gujarat say that its production in Gujarat is now almost totally

based on child labour. In 2009, 216,600 children under 18 years were employed in Gujarat's cotton plantations, including 91,200 children aged below 14 years. The plantations are owned by politically powerful communities, so the government remains silent.

Although Gujarat's labour department has instituted an inspection regime, the NGOs report that it has proved ineffective, as the communities are informed before the raids, so nobody gets caught. Now, the farmers have barred civil society personnel from farms.



**Last Advent, our appeal was for the Jesuit Foundation Prison Ministry in Thailand. As reported briefly in the last Promise, that single appeal raised an amazing £9,955. Here are some pictures of the work:**

- 1 Helpers packing basic supplies for the prisoners.
- 2 Bang Kwang Prison invited Vilaiwan Phokthavi, prison ministry director, to address prisoners before the distribution of Christmas items (in the upper right hand of the picture) to the building representative.
- 3 Origami with prisoners inside Khoa Bin Prison.



# Hope for street children in the Philippines

In Advent 2009 you raised money to support the *Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ) Sisters* working at the *St. Joseph's Boys Home (SJBH)* in *Maasin City* in the *Philippines*. SJBH is a residential facility for 27 street children, or orphaned, abused or neglected boys aged between 8-21. In June, *Sr. Elvisa D. Camilion fcJ* sent us news.

In April 2001 Sr. Margaret Sheehan began to collect children from the streets of Maasin. Since then, 66 boys have benefitted from SJBH's care, and the education they have received through the generosity of you and others like you.

As the June semester begins there are 27 boys in the home's care, 13 in elementary school, 11 in high school and three in college. This year all the boys were promoted to the next grade. All were monitored in their studies, with the social worker regularly meeting the teachers, and home assignments and tutorials being supervised in SJBH. One boy, who was among the very first group to be in SJBH, graduated college in Hotel and Restaurant Management and has been offered a job in a hotel in Manila.

Every Saturday, time is given to topics such as: catechesis, creative imagination, and discussions on fear and experience of anger. During the summer break a variety of activities were organized, including English and math tutorials, computer and music lessons, cooking, haircutting, rosary and bracelet making, and a variety of sports. There were also seminars on Personal Hygiene, Gender Sensitivity and Conflict Behavior Management, and a lesson on Developing Personality. As the result of the cooking lessons, the children are now in charge of cooking every Saturday and Sunday with the supervision of the child care worker.

During Lent the boys made the Stations of the Cross using pictures, and with a short reflection. One of the activities after Easter was an outreach on the streets, where the boys gave sandwiches and juice to children and the elderly, using money saved as their love offering during Lent and from the meatless Fridays. At the end of the school year in March, five children received awards from their school: Best in Math, Most Obedient, Most Cooperative, Most Industrious, Model Pupil of the Year, and we have one First Honor Student.

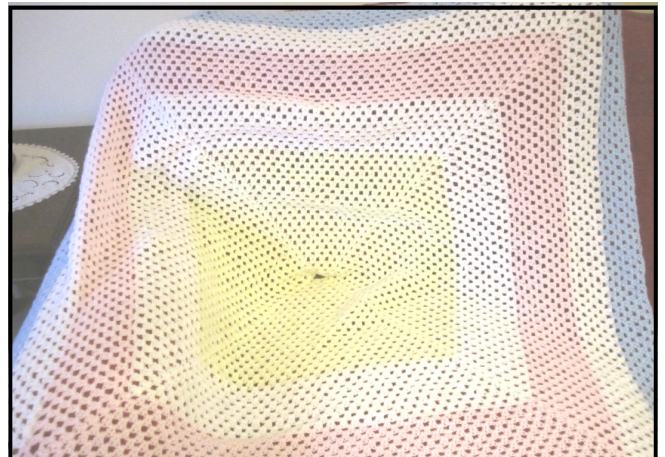
Two of the boys joined the District Level Sports Contest because they won the track-and-field, baseball and badminton games, and slogan contest in their school. With this report, we the FCJ Sisters would like to thank you for your generosity and kindness in helping us care for these children. Their successes would not be possible without your help. Your support and love for these less fortunate children gives them the opportunity for study and to have a good life in the future. May God be with you always and continue pouring His blessings on you and on your families, on behalf of the FCJ Sisters, *Sr. Elvisa D. Camilion fcJ*



Sr. Elvisa with some of the boys, June 2011

## Latest news...

The FCJ Sisters, who founded and up to now have been running St. Joseph's Boys' Home, are no longer living in Maasin, and on 1st June 2011 the home was given into the care of the Bishop of Maasin. Ms Karen (Christy) Dapunan, whom the FCJ Sisters have employed as a coordinator during the past year, will continue to be employed by the diocese of Maasin, along with the present staff of social worker, two child care workers and a cook. We hope that generous people will continue to support the children and the work of SJBH.



CWP has been given this beautiful hand-made blanket, made by Sally Eames. It is white with a pale blue edge, a pale pink inner band and a yellow centre. It is 52 inches (1.3 m) square and very soft.

To bid for it, email: [jenny.livy@btinternet.com](mailto:jenny.livy@btinternet.com) with your bid, or send your bid to Jenny Livy, Ailsa Craig, Cross Way, Shawford, Winchester, SO21 2BZ.

The Auction will end on 11th December and the person with the highest bid will win. Good luck!