# *Member Care Update*

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***Ethnê-MC Update*** **Issue 3: November 2008**

Welcome again to the *Update*, and to the start of the third year of the *Update*s! Our monthly reports inform you about important member care resources, news, and topics. We especially want to further equip people with member care responsibilities who are focussing on mission/aid personnel in least-reached people groups (LPGs). As part of the broad member care emphasis, the reports regularly contain material from the international humanitarian, health, business, human rights, and human resource sectors. Please share the *Update* with others and your networks. Each report is archived at: **http://ethne.net/membercare.** May the Lord bless you and your work.

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## In this Issue: Innovations in India: Missionary Upholders Trust

The focus this month is on a pioneering and highly respected member care organisation in India called **Missionary Upholders Trust (MUT)**. We are delighted to report on the work of MUT, now 15 years old, and include a short version of an article on this organisation from the *Christian Manager* (July, 2008), a publication of Christian Institute of Management in India. As you will see, MUT's commitments to member care over the years and contributions are noteworthy: Helping the bereaved, providing health care, setting up facilities to give workers a much-needed, break, offering affordable pension schemes, running seminars and conferences, and in general advocating for the whole-person needs of mission personnel. Also noteworthy are the special skills, personal sacrifice, and dedication of the many people associated with MUT, including staff, board members, and volunteers.

MUT is a great example to the global mission community and to the international member care field. Mission organisations and member care groups around the world would greatly benefit from studying MUT's model and ministry in light of how MUT has so effectively contextualised itself for India over the years. **www.membcaremutin.net**

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The *Update* is compiled on behalf of the *Ethnê-Member Care Network*. We are a growing *network of colleagues* from different nations and organisations. Our passion is to see the least-reached people groups (LPGs) experience the transforming love of Jesus Christ. We are committed to help provide and develop member care resources in order to support the diversity of people/senders who are working among LPGs. Our *Network* is part of the Ethnê to Ethnê Movement (**http://ethne.net**).

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# Missionary Upholders Trust (MUT)

## Synergising Member Care and Partnerships

Based on an article by Bennet Emmanuel (*Christian Manager*, July 2008, pp.16-23)

For the full article: **www.cimindia.in** For information on MUT: **www.membcaremutin.net**

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Shamala and Livingstone (names changed) are dedicated missionaries, serving God faithfully in Orissa through a mission agency. Tragedy struck when Shamala was detected with breast cancer and the malignancy forced her to undergo surgery. The chemotherapy took a severe toll on her. The tiresome process, the complete loss of hair coupled with incessant pain in her calf muscle, which is symptomatic of loss of blood, ravaged her emotionally. Prior to her sickness, Shamala had a reputation for being bold and she was a source of encouragement to all who knew her personally. Her characteristic smile disarmed everyone. But now the sickness brought despair and proved a testing time for Shamala and her husband. Livingstone recently lost his mother and his wife's sickness only aggravated the grief he was going through. The daughters, who had applied for leave to be with their parents, were now unable to bear the anguish of seeing their parents suffer. To make matters worse, the steady increase in the medical expenses had put the family under tremendous strain, pain and misery. The mission agency, already burdened with the task of sustaining the ministry operations was unable to provide the sizable amount for them. Apart from the immediate financial help, the family desperately needed spiritual and emotional support. Completely left in the lurch, they had to fend for themselves. Until MUT stepped in.

A story such as this is commonplace among missionaries who serve through mission agencies and work oftentimes in far flung and inhospitable terrains. An estimated 40,000 missionaries and their family members operate under the umbrella of different mission organisations in India. The sheer number of missionaries and the magnitude of needs in mission organisations have unwittingly created a gap in the care of its members. Some missionaries are fortunate enough to be taken care by the organisations or other sources, but most of them do not have any form of support. With their measly resources, most missionaries are unprepared to meet any eventuality in the course of their daily lives.

Barring few exceptions, missionaries have had to fend for themselves in other areas of need. This prompted the birth of Missionary Upholders Trust. Missionary Upholders Trust (MUT) was formed in 1993 as an off-shoot from Missionary Upholders family (MUF). Leaving behind his career in the corporate world, J.J. Ratnakumar, MUT's General Coordinator, volunteered along with his wife, as full time honourary workers of MUT. Ratnakumar has provided the leadership impetus for the movement since MUT's inception. The organisation's vision statement reads: "As followers of Christ, we care for, share with, and meet some of the common unmet needs of missionaries, at their affordable cost, working beyond all man-made boundaries, in a spirit of Christian love." The photo above is of some of the staff and volunteers who work at MUT headquarters in Vellore.

With over 100 missionary organisations as members, and serving well over 11,000 missionaries in different parts of India, MUT has truly lived up to its vision. The projects cover medical help, calamity relief, rest house facilities, training and post retirement assistance, precautionary steps such as preventive health education and master health check up assistance and medical assistance in times of sickness. Besides providing a slew of projects, MUT conducts consultation meetings regularly with mission organizations, missionaries, churches and leaders to deliberate on various member care issues, exchange ideas and encourage missions to make a concerted effort in implementing the projects.

Scores of mission agencies can vouch for MUT's unique contribution to member care development, which goes beyond merely being a catchphrase, and that has made a significant difference in missions. Samuel Prabhakar, General Secretary, National Missionary Society of India (NMSI) says, "In the past, a mission organisation such as NMSI had an inadequate understanding of missionary welfare. MUT has opened our mind and forced us to think clearly in the direction of providing better member care for our missionaries. They have been a great source of blessing for the mission community." As an inter-denominational body indigenously supported by several churches and approved by the CSI Synod, NMSI has more than 350 full-time missionaries and workers. MUT's facilities such as rest houses, master health check ups, IMPACT and Love Your Brother schemes have greatly benefited us".

Similarly, one of the oldest mission organisations in India, Indian Missionary Society (IMS), is no less an admirer of MUT's unique member care programmes. D. Vedhanbu, General Secretary of IMS, states: "MUT has given us a frame of thinking to understand the real plight of our missionaries and provided us with practical schemes to help them collectively." With more than 650 missionaries, spread across 20 states, IMS has been taking interest in missionary welfare development. "Member care as a concept was something I learnt from Ratnakumar, an advisor in our IMS Board"

## Some of the MUT Programmes

### Rest Houses

Meant exclusively for the personal use of missionaries, the rest houses are a big draw for MUT with three rest houses functioning in Vellore, Chennai, and Odanchatram (in southern India). The houses are well furnished with all the required facilities for missionaries to stay with family, when they go for medical check up or treatment in Christian Medical College Hospital in Vellore or for spending quality vacation with family. These homes are also meant for those who have admitted their children in boarding schools and are able to be with their wards only for a month or two in a year. Several missionaries are making use of these facilities and have found great spiritual, physical and emotional benefits.

The **Odanchatram Project is** a Rest House, Retirement Homes and Counselling/Training/Retreat Centre that is being built at Odanchatram in a 6.4 acre land (see photos above). Considered a dream project for the MUT family, the purpose is to provide full time Christian workers especially missionaries, a large comfortable facility, at affordable cost. Missionaries can seek professional counselling/debriefing, have prolonged rest after physical illness, receive continuing education, training and development in pastoral care, attend retreats to strengthen their spiritual life and obtain training to become Christian counsellors.

**Training**

Missionaries have expressed a strong need for effective programmes in personal development. Several Christian counsellors and trainers point to the lack of training and development facilities in many mission organisations. Most agencies, Samson Gandhi points out, have ministry orientation or evangelistic training programmes but hardly any priority given to all round personal development training. "The ratio between the care giver and the care receiver is too disproportionate. Counselling and personal development interventions in mission organisations are too few and far between," rues Gandhi, who heads the Hyderabad- based Person to Person, a Christian counselling ministry and works in sync with MUT when counselling missionaries. Kamaleson makes a telling comment on the vital need for holistic training for missionaries: "My experience with Friends Missionary Prayer Band over these many years has made me appreciate the need for the missionary in India to be competent in spiritual skills, professional skills and managerial-relational skills." Here are examples of the training offered or co-sponsored by MUT.

**Marriage Enrichment:** This three-day seminar helps missionary couples to develop the tools that are needed to build a healthy marriage with God as the centre of their relationship. The programme is conducted on a voluntary basis by three trained couples.

**Inner Healing Seminar:** Designed to enable the participants to discover inner damages and lead into fullness of life, the seminar enables them to lead themselves and others also into healing. The seminars facilitate reconciliation with God, the worker's past, and others.

**Life Revision Seminar:** This seminar is a time set apart in order to focus on the needs of the inner person. It is a time for sharing and learning from fellow missionaries and growing in intimacy with God. Dr. K.O. John and Dr. Kuruvilla Varkey, who facilitate this training, are veteran doctors who work at Christian Fellowship Hospital, Odanchatram. The seminar has also recently been offered in the USA.

**Interpersonal Skills:** The Sharpening Your Interpersonal Skills (SYIS) workshops are designed to enhance the knowledge, attitude and skills of a missionary in how they relate to one another, family, students, co-workers, friends and those from other cultures. These are taught all over the world and have been co-sponsored in India by various groups including MUT and the India Mission Association.

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**Calamity Relief (note: currently 50 Indian rupees = $1 US)**

IMPACT (Inter Mission Plan of Assurance during Calamity Times) is MUT's primary project. The highlight of the scheme is the assistance it provides to the bereaved family during the death of the missionary. Around 106 missions including sub groups with a combined strength of over 11,000 missionaries have joined this scheme contributing Rs.10/per death. Through this, each bereaved missionary family receives an immediate financial assistance of Rs.5,000 as funeral help, later Death Relief of Rs.1,00,000 followed by sustained annual care in child support & Christmas celebration gift. MUT also sees to it that the bereaved family receives sustained support after the death of the family member. This is critical as most mission organisations are not in the position to help them on a long term basis. The family of deceased missionary receives an annual support per child to assist with their education. During the year 2006-07, a total of 128 children from 68 bereaved missionary families received this benefit. Partial loan assistance up to Rs.25,000 is offered per annum per student for higher education beyond standard 12.

**Health Care**

Health care for missionaries and their families is a core MUT emphasis. Smaller mission organisations lack the infrastructure to provide basic medical check up for their missionaries. Other organisations find it very hard to give the required support for medical care of their missionaries. "Most missionaries work in cross-cultural contexts and work in areas far removed from any health centre where there are high incidences of diseases such as malaria and TB. Lack of knowledge, faulty theology and disregard for preventive care are some factors why we find missionaries on the receiving end," says Violet Jayachandran, co-ordinator, for the medical unit at MUT. In response, the Master Health Check Up project was launched in 2003 and now involves around 26 mission hospitals in various regions in the country that partner with MUT. MUT pays half the cost of the check up and the other half is met by the respective mission organisation. Through its health bulletins and special health care manuals MUT has keeping mission organisations informed on MUT health schemes and educating missionaries on preventive care.

**Love Your Brother (LYB)**

This programme provides an opportunity for missionaries to help each another in the event of major illness, accidents or complicated child birth. Each member missionary contributes Rs.10 per month. The maximum that can be availed is Rs.10,000. However, if the amount required is more than Rs.10,000, MUT will still try to assist through another programme. D.B. Kulothungan, who heads the Maharashtra Village Ministries, a pioneer ministry that specifically focuses on missions in Maharashtra puts it in perspective: "Both the IMPACT and the Love Your Brother schemes have proven very beneficial to our missionaries." Under this scheme MVM has claimed sizable medical assistance for its missionaries affected by illness or accidents.

**Shelter for Retired Missionaries**

MUT's plan is help missionaries in their old age after having spent their lifetime working with a registered mission organisation. The target group are those who do not have any property/land/own house, who do not have children to support them, who do not wish to spend their retired life alone, and those who have the desire to continue their ministry in some form or the other as long as they are healthy and have the energy.

**Member Care Consultations**

Every two years a consultation is held with leaders of member missions as well as other leaders of umbrella bodies and churches. The purpose is to increase organisational excellence through systems and procedures, methods to encourage and motivate staff for effective ministry, human resource development, etc. The consultations have seen the active participation of mission leaders through panel discussions, plenary sessions, keynote addresses, debates, case studies, and reports.

**Volunteerism and Sustainability**

A growing movement such as MUT is sustained and driven by the collective passion of its voluntary workers. Most of the full-time leaders at MUT are volunteers who do not receive any remuneration from the organisation, many of whom had left promising careers in order to be part of the movement. MUT has deliberately encouraged voluntary work in order to limit its operational costs and administrative expenses which currently stand at six per cent. MUT's financial policy helps assure donors and supporters that money received will be used for ministry.

For more info on MUT, and to receive the MUT publication *Care and Serve* contact:
email: **jjratnakumar@gmail.com** web site: **www.membcaremutin.net**

**Reflection and Discussion Items for the *Ethne-Member Care Update***

1. Which member care organisations are offering similar programmes in your region?
2. What additional programmes, similar to MUT's, are needed for your region, organisation, or setting?
3. How could you encourage the development of programmes in your region, organisation, or setting?