

INDIA TWINNAGE

The SVP arrived in India in 1852/53, just 10 years after the founding of the Society, when a French missionary priest set up 2 Conferences in the French colony of Pondicherry. They engaged in a variety of charitable activities, including running a Leprosy Home. Further Conferences were started in Calcutta in 1859, in Belgaum in 1860 and in Bombay in 1863. Progress was slow, however. By 1960, after a century of Conferences starting and closing, there were just 23 Conferences in total.



Twinnage started in 1960, when Pope John XXIII, speaking to a delegation of European Vincentians, urged the Society to look outward and support the poor overseas as well as at home. Twinnage has been of great value in sustaining and promoting the work of the Indian Conferences. The first twinings took place in 1960 when five conferences in India were twinned with Conferences in Australia.

Twinnage is the practical mark of solidarity and mutual support between the SVP in richer countries and poorer countries. It has 3 components - Prayer, Correspondence, and Financial support. Twinned Conferences pray for each other at their regular meetings. Many celebrate Mass on their and their twins feast days. The exchange of letters, Christmas and Easter cards enables members to learn about each other and about the work that they do for the poorest in their respective communities. The sharing of resources enables the work of the Indian Conferences to expand their work for the people they help. Currently financial support from England & Wales is £30 per quarter to each twinned Conference, a small sum for our Conferences, but which has much greater purchasing power in India.

Twinnage money is sent from National Twinnage Office to the Indian National Council and is subject to audit by the Indian Government. There is no deduction for expenses – what is given, is received by the Indian Conferences. With the start of Twinnage, the Society in India developed rapidly, with the support and encouragement of overseas Conferences and Councils, enabling the Society in India to expand its work for the poorest in their communities.

In recent years, the Indian National Council has encouraged “internal twinning” i.e. the twinning of Indian Conferences who are now self-supporting with an Indian Conference awaiting twinning. Complete self-sufficiency is the ultimate goal of the Indian SVP but this remains a distant target. There are over 6,700 Conferences there (compared with about 1,100 in England and Wales). Today, over 3,300 Conferences in India are twinned. Of these, over 1,500 are with Conferences in England and Wales.

Twinnage funding is used for the day-to-day work of the Conferences particularly supporting their “adopted” families. This includes providing rice, cooking oil and other foodstuffs, help with school uniforms, books and pens, assistance with the costs of health-care and much besides. Many Conferences have implemented training and self-help projects, aimed at helping families to become self-sufficient. (More on this in the Twinnage Projects section).

Indian Conferences are also able to annually nominate potential students for educational grants from Twinnage to help those who cannot afford it achieve qualifications and thus a better chance of self-sufficiency. (More on this in the Indian Student Sponsorship section).



For the future, the emphasis is on the continued growth of the Society in India, with a continuing call for Conferences to take on a twin or even a second or third one. The current Indian National President, Bro VMJ Balaswamy, has recently directed that the main objective of his National Council is the speedy development of the Society in the north and north east of India among the tribal lands. These areas, which include the “seven sisters” states, are heavily populated with Christians but the presence of the SVP is relatively new.