

The one-room shed where a day laborer and his wife and daughter were living, when Rose Cherian Vachaparampil began the "live crib" project to build a house for the family (Courtesy of Rose Cherian Vachaparampil)



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> "The needs and sufferings of humanity must find an echo in our hearts."
>
> —Sr. Anna Dengel, founder of the Medical Mission Sisters

This year we had Christmas in May. It all started with the distribution of COVID-19 kits last year. We met the family of a daily laborer who was living in a one-room shed with his wife and daughter; they had knocked on various doors for help to build a proper house, without success. Their plight echoed in the heart of a Medical Mission Sister.

On Nov. 12, 2021, I published a notice on my Facebook page and to WhatsApp contacts, and distributed it among my friends:

> Can you build a house with [1,000 rupees]?
>
> Surely, yes, if 1,000 people join you. May I invite you to join your loving hearts and hands to extend a little help to daily laborer to fulfill his dream to build a 644 square foot house during this year's Advent? If you cannot afford [1,000 rupees] lovingly donate whatever you can. Anything is welcome. Yes, many drops can make an impact. Kindly donate to his account so that this year we will be able a make a live crib for him.

I added his name, address, bank account number and phone number, and gave my name and address too.

I was hesitant in the beginning and few people encouraged me. But maybe the hearts of the family's deepest desire and ardent prayers, "Ask and it will be given to you" (Matthew 7:7) moved me to go ahead. I asked myself: Over this Christmas, how much money will be spent by each household for making a crib? In Kerala, it is a practice that all the houses will make cribs and decorate them with lights and beautiful decorations. The crib represents a child's bed, to remind us where Jesus was born. I wondered, why can't we make a "live crib" for a family?

Thus, the project "Live Crib 2021 for a family" was born.

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It was a first-time experience and so unique. Our neighbor joined with us and encouraged us. The faith of the volunteers was so great. When people responded, "Sister you are requesting, so we are responding," it was a great affirmation for me and the choices I have made in my life.

Still, I had fears and concerns. But many were giving me the confidence that it would work. The thought that "He who gave the inspiration will see the fulfilment of this dream" moved me forward. Within a month, more than 100,000 rupees were collected, besides the many people of goodwill who promised donations in kind. Some individuals began collecting money and motivating others. One well-wisher assured me that we would get the support in due time. I really felt Paulo Coelho's words: "When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it."

Being at the receiving end ... is it easy? For me it was not that easy. However, it is a fact that from our birth onwards we live our life depending on many people, whether we acknowledge it or not. I feel happy and proud when I am at the giving end. Now I was in a situation where I had to receive in order to give.



Local priests and sisters join the family to bless the cornerstone of the house (Courtesy of Rose Cherian Vachaparampil)

I felt humbled and privileged at the support and encouragement we received from many. A group of students from Alphonsa College in Pala surprised us with a big donation; they even refused to reveal their names. A big salute to them!

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Mother Mary's song was resonating in my heart as the foundation stone of the house was blessed on Dec. 23.

Looking back after several months, I felt this Christmas was very special as we were able to mobilize many people to join their hands and hearts to make a live "crib" for a daily laborer. Our neighbor, Mr. Albi, organized a Christmas carol singing event to raise funds for the house. It was performed by two families and children — and the star of the program was a 3-year-old, who surprised us with her unending energy. It was an unforgettable event and we all enjoyed it so much.

It was a miracle like the five loaves of bread and two fish satisfying 5,000 people, with leftovers: the foundation of the house was completed! As we began our joint endeavor, the image of a bird building a nest had come to my mind. A bird brings strands of fiber or twigs one by one, to start and complete its nest so beautifully. In just one month God allowed us to complete the concrete work on the house. The family worked very hard, and the man's colleagues did volunteer work, including many days of overtime.



The walls of the new house under construction (Courtesy of Rose Cherian Vachaparampil)

Then I really began to believe that the one who inspired me, and stirred the hearts of many to help, would see to the completion of the task. We had begun well, and God allowed us to complete the good work.



The finished, new house (Courtesy of Rose Cherian Vachaparampil)

As the construction was progressing, many people contributed generously. But I believe that it really is a house built by the Lord: "Unless the Lord builds the house those who build it labor in vain (Psalm 127:1) ."

On May 7 of this year, the envisioned "live crib" became a reality. And God allowed me to help bless it. On behalf of all who prayed for this venture, those who donated, and blessed it, I was invited to light one wick of the lamp at a blessing ceremony.

I do not know how to thank those who trusted me — the Medical Mission Sisters, their family members, my friends, the employees and ex-employees of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Hospital, unknown donors, and my family members.

In building the house for 1,000 rupees at a time, from many people, we truly experienced communion, participation and mission — the theme of the forthcoming synod.

This story appears in the **Synod on Synodality** feature series. View the full series.