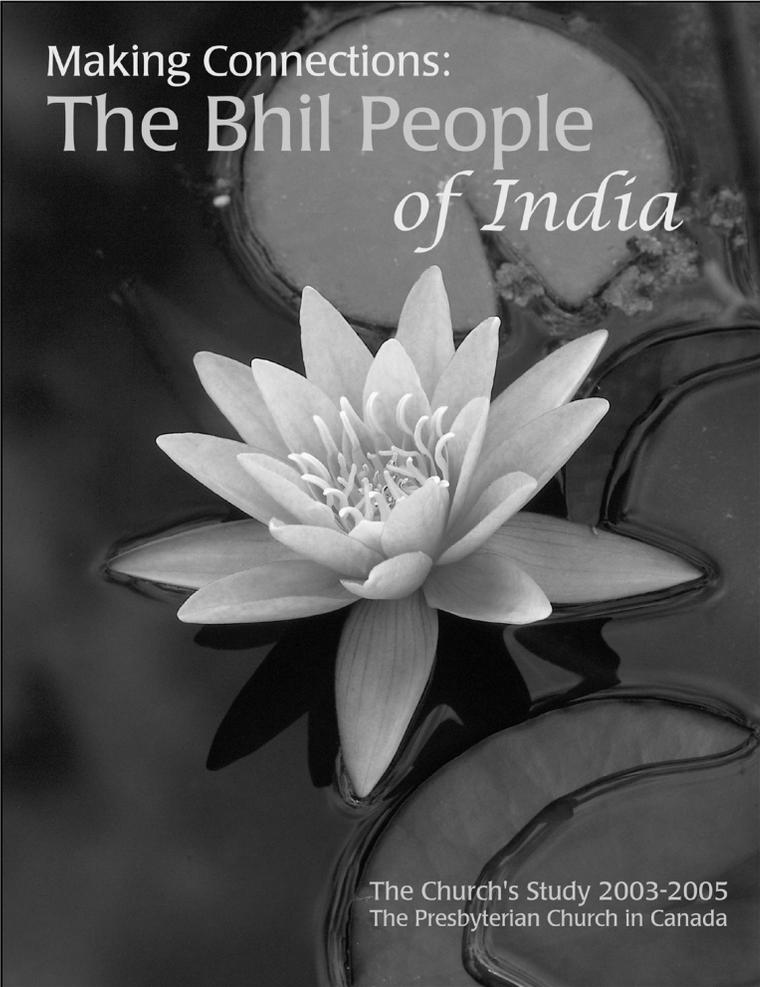


Making Connections:

# The Bhil People *of India*



The Church's Study 2003-2005  
The Presbyterian Church in Canada



Making Connections:  
**The Bhil People**  
*of India*

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## About this resource



This study is not simply about the Bhil\* people of India. Neither is it simply about a mission partnership between Canadians and Bhils. That would be like saying that the Acts of the Apostles is only about the Gentile people of the Roman Empire or only about the partnership between the early church of Jerusalem and the Gentiles. Like the book of Acts, this resource tells stories about the growth of the church in a particular region along with some of the opportunities, struggles, and celebrations experienced by members of that church. Just as readings and reflections on the stories in Acts can teach and inspire us, many readings and reflections on the stories of the Bhil church also teach and inspire us.

The Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the beginning of the church in the Roman Empire. It is a great adventure story that records how the good news was preached, the Holy Spirit experienced, and how lives were transformed. Since the 1st century, there have been many other stories as the church has spread from the Mediterranean world around the globe to other continents. In the beginning of the story of the Bhil Church, one might say that Canadian Presbyterians were like the apostles, travelling to preach the good news. But early on in the growth of the Bhil church, Christians like Padre Gangji Bai, Padre Daniel and Padre Tezlo joined in, becoming like the Ethiopian official, Lydia, and other leaders of the early congregations, ministering among their own indigenous people and even among other people of India.

This resource begins in session one with the story of Canadian Presbyterians going out to Central India to share the good news. In the following sessions we learn more and more about the Bhil people and the beginnings of the Bhil church as an extension of The Presbyterian Church in Canada – indeed it became a presbytery of the denomination. We learn how the

Bhil church grew to become today part of the Bhopal Diocese of the Church of North India. The study ends with Session Six and the story of the 1997 Bhil jubilee celebration of 100 years.

Of course, this is not the end of the story. The Presbyterian Church in Canada continues to walk with Bhil Christians through the partnership between The Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Church of North India – through mission staff and volunteers, financial support for ongoing programs and special projects, and through exposure tours and exchanges. And today, third and fourth generation Bhil Christians continue to reach out and serve in faithful discipleship. As one English churchman remarked, the Church of North India is a "servant church." Its mission statement attests to this and to current activities of our Bhil brothers and sisters:

"The Church of North India, as united and uniting together, is committed to announce the good news of the reign of God inaugurated through death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in proclamation and to demonstrate in actions to restore the integrity of God's creation through continuous struggle against the demonic powers by breaking down the barriers of caste, class, gender, economic inequality and exploitation of nature."

As in Acts, the stories in this resource are stories of evangelism and mission, of discipleship and leadership, of challenge and courage, of faith and joyous celebration. May these stories about our Bhil brothers and sisters help Presbyterians in Canada to reflect on themselves as apostles who proclaim the good news, are open to experiences of the Spirit, and who are commissioned to take their faith out into the world in a way that brings God's love, justice, and abundant life to all of God's people.

\* Bhil is pronounced "beel."

## How to use this resource



This resource can be used as:

### 1. A Group Study

Developed for use by study groups, this resource sets out material for six gatherings, each 45 to 90 minutes in length. It is suggested that groups select parts of each session according to the available time and the particular characteristics of the group.

### 2. A Personal Study

This resource includes prayers, scripture readings, stories, and reflection questions. While presented in a format for group study, the material is easy and interesting to read and could be used by individuals wishing to examine their own faith development in light of the experiences of Bhil Christians.

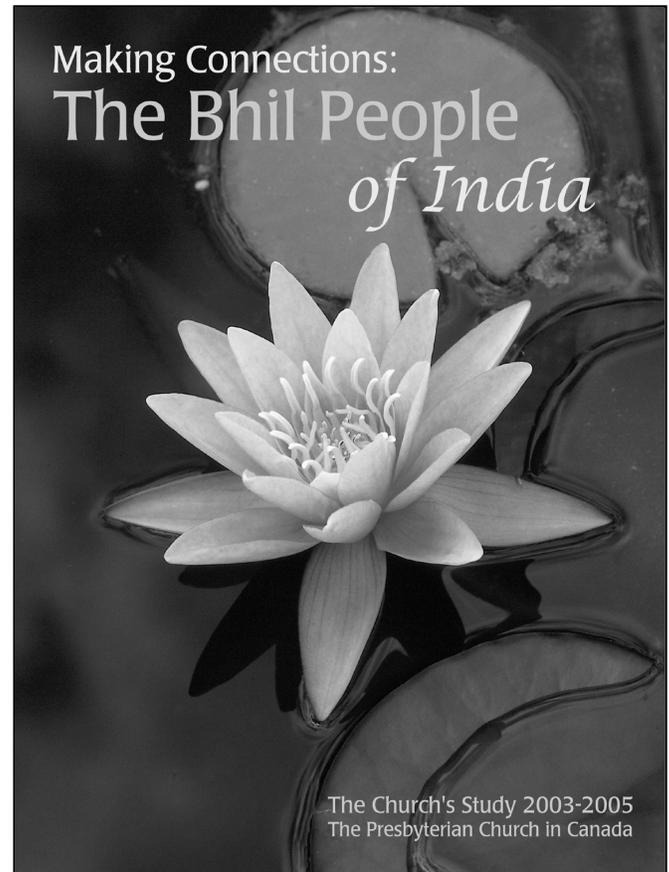
### 3. A Worship Resource

This resource includes prayers, hymn suggestions, scripture readings, and mission stories that could be used in worship services or in designing a special worship focused on mission or evangelism.

### 4. A Mission or Evangelism Resource

This resource includes material that could be used for

- Meditation or prayer at meetings addressing issues of mission or evangelism
- Retelling partnership stories
- Discussion topics and activities for groups focusing on mission or evangelism
- Holding a congregational mission or evangelism event.



The six sessions are developed out of the themes of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20. The first three sessions focus on God working through the activities of the Canadian Presbyterian missionaries, while the last three sessions focus on God working through the activities of the Bhil Christians.

Session one	Theme: Go out far and near	Focus: Beginning the Bhil mission field
Session two	Theme: Go out to everyone	Focus: Forming relationships across culture
Session three	Theme: Make disciples	Focus: Sharing the good news
Session four	Theme: Mark by baptism	Focus: Responding to the good news
Session five	Theme: Teach and instruct	Focus: Growing as a church
Session six	Theme: Remember and celebrate	Focus: Celebrating as God's people

## Each session includes these sections:

- Objectives
- Welcome and prepare (with a theme-related activity or discussion)
- Worship
  - Pray
  - Sing
  - Hear the Word of God
  - Reflecting on the Great Commission
- Hear the story (with stories from the Bhil mission field)
  - Reflecting on the story and session theme
- Respond (with options for discussion, activities, further actions)
- Go out into the world
  - Pray
  - Sing
- Side bars or boxes with information about India, the Bhil people, and the Bhil church.

Note: The suggested supplies are listed at the beginning of each session. The suggested hymns are from *The Book of Praise* (1997). All parts of this study may be photocopied.

### Alternatives to banner making

One option in the Respond section of each session is the ongoing activity of making a congregational banner. If this would be a new and unfamiliar activity for your group, begin by reading about banners in Craft Ideas in the Appendix. This activity is an active and visual way to 1) record the group's learning and 2) share the study experience with the broader faith community.

Banner-making may *not* be the best way for your group to achieve these two objectives. If you prefer a different ongoing activity, consider the interests, talents, and resources of your group members. Together brainstorm a list of alternative activities and then select one or more of them. Some alternatives might be

1. Recording in a journal or portfolio, adding words and images and photocopied material from each session.
2. Painting a mural or story wall with words and images from each session.
3. Creating a collage that is added to each session.
4. Researching on the Internet and/or in a library and compiling the results in an exhibit.
5. Designing a Power Point presentation.
6. Planning and rehearsing either an entire worship service or an hour-long presentation of readings and drama for a congregational gathering.

### Tips on presenting study material

1. Rewrite sidebars onto large sheets of paper for display.
2. Use an excerpt (e.g. a paragraph from a story, a quote from a mission worker, a side bar) to create a bulletin insert or flyer to invite people to the study.
3. Reproduce photographs, the map, some text to make a bulletin board display.
4. In the group study, involve a variety of people as readers of the text.
5. Invite group participants to read stories silently and then in small groups prepare to retell them dramatically, improvising lines or miming.
6. Share leadership, allowing different individuals in each session to select and make decisions about what sections to use and how to present them.

## Some background facts and statistics

- The Bhil church grew out of the activity of Canadian Presbyterian missionaries in Central India in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- The Bhil mission field was a major overseas mission endeavour of both the General Board of Missions and the Women's Missionary Society of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and later The Board of World Mission.
- Today Presbyterians in Canada and Bhils in Central India continue their partnership through International Ministries (funded by *Presbyterians Sharing...*) and Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D).
- From 1928 until 1968 the Bhil church was part of The Presbyterian Church in Canada as the Presbytery of the Vindhya and Satpura Mountains. Through a gradual process in the 1960s the Bhil Church became part of the United Church of Northern India.
- In 1970 the United Church of Northern India was one of six denominations that united to form the Church of North India.
- Today the population of India is more than 1 billion people. About 80 per cent of the population are Hindus, about 12 per cent are Muslims, and about 2.3 per cent are Christians.
- Tribal people in all India number about 8 per cent of the population.
- The population of Bhils in Central India is about 4,721,700. About .3 per cent are Christians.

For additional background facts and statistics about India see <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/in.html> or <http://www.indianetwork.org/res/demo.htm>

## A beginning prayer

Loving God,  
we gather together  
thinking  
about that part  
of your creation  
called India,  
and particularly  
thinking about the people,  
created in your image,  
called the Bhil\* people.

The lives of Presbyterians in Canada and Bhils in India  
have been interconnected for more than a century.

We welcome this opportunity to hear stories from this relationship.

May all that we say and do  
in our gatherings  
recognize and respect  
the partnership  
of these two peoples.  
May we gain  
new understandings  
of the land  
and the culture,  
and the spirituality  
of the Bhil people.  
And may these  
new understandings  
deepen our faith  
and lead us to proclaim  
your love and justice  
to those who are "the least"  
in our communities.  
We pray in Jesus' name.  
Amen.

\* Bhil is pronounced "beel."

## Session one: Go out far and near



# Beginning the Bhil mission field

## Objectives

1. To learn about the beginning of the Bhil ("beel") mission field of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.
2. To reflect on how Jesus commissions individuals and congregations.

**Suggested supplies:** a worship centre with white cloth; Bibles and hymnbooks; symbols of faith like a cross, pillar candle (and matches), pitcher of water and bowl; a copy of *The Book of Common Worship* (The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1991)\*; writing paper and pencils; or materials for banner making (cloth, dowelling, string, art supplies); taper candles for everyone (to be taken home or to be reused at the end of session two)

\*Ask your minister about this book or see Resources in the appendix.

## 1. Welcome and prepare

Welcome and introduce one another. Have everyone gather around a worship centre, which you create together with symbols of our faith: spread out a white cloth and place on it a cross, an open Bible, a pillar candle and matches, and a pitcher of water and a bowl. The story of Christianity and the Bhil people of Central India begins with the people who heard and responded to God's command.

The four evangelists, writers of the gospels, have provided accounts of Jesus' teachings and commandments to the disciples about how God wants us to live. Recall a time in your life when you heard God through a Bible passage, commanding you to do something (or when this happened to someone you know). Invite everyone to share stories in pairs or small groups about how people have heard God speak to them through scripture. What happened following these experiences?

## 2. Worship

### Pray

- All: God of all creation,  
though you are part of us  
we often struggle to find you.  
God, hear our prayers of longing for you.
- One: We listen imperfectly for your voice,  
sometimes doubting you and hearing nothing,  
sometimes not understanding and ascribing to you our own desires,  
and sometimes experiencing an amazing sense of your vision.
- Two: We persistently seek you in different ways –  
sometimes hearing you in prayer or in scripture,  
sometimes finding you when we talk together about our faith,  
and sometimes experiencing you in the words and actions of others.
- All: God of all creation,  
though you are in and around us,  
we long to feel your touch and to hear you speak.  
God, hear our prayers of longing for you. Amen.

## Sing

Hymn #592 "I, the Lord of sea and sky" or #767 "Lord, speak to me"

## Hear the Word of God

Ask for volunteer readers and invite everyone else to listen.

**Reader One:** At a mountain in Galilee Jesus appeared and gave this charge to his disciples: *God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.* (Matthew 28:16-20 in *The Message*)

**Reader Two:** Jesus said to the eleven disciples eating supper: *Go into the world. Go everywhere and announce the Message of God's good news to one and all. Whoever believes and is baptized is saved; whoever refuses to believe is damned.* (Mark 16:15-16 in *The Message*)

**Reader Three:** Jesus said to the eleven disciples and their friends gathered in Jerusalem: *Everything I told you while I was with you comes to this: All the things written about me in the law of Moses, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms have to be fulfilled. You can see now how it is written that the Messiah suffers, rises from the dead on the third day, and then a total life-change through the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name to all nations – starting from here, from Jerusalem! You're the first to hear and see it. You're the witnesses.* (Luke 24: 44, 46-48 in *The Message*)

**Reader Four:** Jesus said to the disciples gathered together behind locked doors: *Peace to you. Just as the Father sent me, I send you. Then he took a deep breath and breathed into them. Receive the Holy Spirit,* he said. (John 20:21-22 in *The Message*)

The words of Jesus in Matthew 28:16-20 are known as the Great Commission. These verses are the foundation for many, many Christian evangelical and mission organizations. An Internet search for "Jesus' Great Commission" reveals 259,000 sites! Each of the gospels includes a similar commission. The details vary slightly as one can see in comparing the contexts and texts just read.

## When I think of India, I think about...

When a group of Presbyterians with first-hand experience of living in India were asked "What words and phrases do you associate with India?", their replies included:

geographic beauty

tolerance

heat

poverty

conflict

lots of people and sounds

different (good and bad) smells

love

deep faith

acceptance

human rights violations

diversity

magnificent

full of contrasts

many religions

tasty food

Do any of these surprise you?

What are your associations with India?

## Reflecting on the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

Biblical scholars generally agree that Jesus commissioned his disciples as part of a resurrection appearance. The different gospels vary in their retellings of the encounter: Mark's account includes a rebuke (Mark 16:14), Luke's account includes an acknowledgement of the disciples' continuing doubt and disbelief (Luke 24:38), and John's account includes Jesus sending the disciples the Holy Spirit, followed by a request for them to forgive one another (John 20:22, 23). Apparently fully aware of their imperfections, Jesus still commissioned the eleven disciples to carry on his work.

What has been your understanding of the Great Commission? What personal reactions or questions arise with today's reading of the Great Commission?

### 3. Hear the story: The beginning of the Bhil mission field

Invite everyone to hear the first chapter of the story of the partnership between Presbyterians in Canada and the Bhil people of Central India. The story begins with those people who heard and responded to the Great Commission by going to India.

Ontario-born John Buchanan had just completed his theological studies at Queen's University in 1884. There he had heard about foreign missionary service from the newly forming student Christian movement. He was 25 years old. He heard God commanding him to go overseas. He thought he might go to China and he decided to equip himself by enrolling in medicine at the University Medical School in New York. At the same time a young Nova Scotia woman, Mary McKay, was also preparing herself in a similar way for overseas ministry. Born in Stellarton, Nova Scotia, Mary graduated from Women's Medical College in Toronto. Perhaps she had heard about work in India from missionary Rev. J. Fraser Campbell of Baddeck, Nova Scotia.

Although John Buchanan had thought of working in China, The Presbyterian Church in Canada was aware of a desperate need for doctors in India. And so it was that Dr. John Buchanan and Dr. Mary McKay went to India as medical missionaries on the same ship in 1888. Falling in love during the voyage, they married a month after landing on the sub-continent and began their joint ministry in a small house in Ujjain, in what is today the state of Madhya Pradesh. Ujjain is one of the twelve holy cities of Hinduism, where the doctors observed that "bubonic plague, cholera, small pox and leprosy were the order of the day." Despite rampant disease, unsanitary conditions, illiteracy, and a total absence of Christianity, the Buchanans committed themselves to healing and preaching to everyone they met.

Once involved in their ministries in Ujjain, they became aware of the needs of people living in the outlying rural areas. On a tour of mission stations, John Buchanan developed a particular interest and concern for the Bhil people, one of India's aboriginal or "tribal" people. He wrote, "We see them day after day as we pass along through the hills, as sheep having no shepherd, scattered, poor, and despised, the prey of wolfish neighbours." The needs of the Bhil people were discussed at mission council meetings. No doubt the members wondered about the church's ability to address those needs with the limited available financial and human resources. And in the Buchanan home, there was likely some uncertainty. Mary's health had been poor and she had had a kidney removed. However, the Buchanans did discern a call to serve the Bhils. In 1895 John and Mary Buchanan moved again, this time only a few hundred kilometers, to a small, remote village called Amkhut (which means "valley of the mangoes") in a valley of the Vindhya Satpura Hills, a place where no Christians had ever lived. The area was under the jurisdiction of a number of kingdoms ruled by Rajas and Ranas (titles given to Hindu rulers). Like most missionaries when first taking up residency or visiting in rural India at that time, the Buchanans initially lived and worked out of tents.

#### The Bhil mission field

The Bhils lived in the stony hills, in a neglected area and off the beaten track. There they remained in their own culture as distinct from the Hindu culture and religion around them. Look at the map of India (see centre insert). The main area inhabited by the Bhil people is in western central India, the shaded area on the map. Find the village of Amkhut where the Buchanans began the Bhil mission. Amkhut was – and still is today – remote, a small village in a valley of the Vindhya Satpura mountain range where the river Ur runs, 26 km from the capital city of Alirajpur and 65 km from the nearest railway station.

Today Amkhut is a village in the state of Madhya Pradesh. During the past 100 years the Bhil mission reached out to other centres including Mendha, Sardi, Jobat, Alirajpur, and Barwani. "The missionaries worked against a backdrop of epidemics, monsoon floods, difficult traveling conditions, and ill health. These, combined with the harsh tropical climate and the enormous cultural and linguistic barriers, did not stop the work of evangelism, teaching, and providing medical aid." (John F. Scott "Raja Yeshu Aiya: The Witness of Beatrice Scott" in *Gifts and Graces: The Profiles of Canadian Presbyterian Women*, p. 89.)

## "Going out" in the Vindhya Satpura Region

**The Buchanans** were the first in a long line of Canadian Presbyterians who, along with their spouses and children, responded to God's call to ministry in the Vindhya Satpura region. Travel was difficult in Bhil country. The jungle was inhabited by cheetahs, tigers, bears and other animals. Dr. Buchanan forged out a road through the dense jungle vegetation to travel to Amkhut on horseback. In the letters and journals of the early missionaries, many of whom were women, there are references to "tramping" along footpaths with guides and overnighting in tents as they took their faith out "to everyone" in the villages. Such journeys were always challenging, especially in the monsoon season. In 1916 Dr. Harry Colwell wrote vividly to his wife about one overland trip:

"We found a man who was ready to carry my suitcase on his head and be my guide for the walk to Mendha...I could not carry on a conversation with my man. In fact, we scarcely understood each other at all...In the fields we often passed Bhils who were busy ploughing, using a crude wooden plow pulled by a couple of bails or oxen. These men wear less clothing than we are familiar with. All they use is the narrow piece of cloth fastened to a string around their waist front and back and passing between the legs. People travelling along the roads usually wore more clothing and the women were always fully clothed, but this is the place for the simple life sure enough. The houses, too, are crude affairs, with roof of tiles but the walls often of open brushwork or woven bamboo...

"It was then about 5 p.m. and a storm seemed likely to break upon us. At this point we left the broad road and followed footpaths across the fields, where my guide had to make enquiries frequently as to which paths to take at intersections of the ways. Sometimes we got the wrong path...

"Just then the rain came...At first I tried to jump the little streams we came to, or to cross them on stone without walking in the water. But before long that made no difference to me at all as all the paths were running like brooklets, and everywhere I turned the water came high on my boots.

"When I came within sight of the Sneddons' bungalow at Mendha, I found a barrier in my way. Before me lay a rushing stream swollen by the storm and still rising higher. Already it was up to my arms and the man with me dared not cross it...[Mr. Sneddons] came with a rope and some of his men to the other bank of the stream. The rope was secured to a tree on our side while three of the men held the other end. Along this my suitcase was carried or slid...I got across by myself by holding on to the rope and wading, but the water came up to my arms." (From *Thursday's Daughter*, by Lorna Margaret Allen, p. 85-86)

### Reflecting on "Going out far and near"

Invite the group to imagine the courageous faith of the early Canadians living and serving in the Bhil mission field, an isolated region where the people lived closely in touch with nature, for the most part ignored by the rest of India. God spoke to the Buchanans almost two decades before they settled in the Vindhya Satpura valley and God continued to speak to them. For John, an early tentative sense of serving in China had over the years become a driving force to live, work, and minister among the Bhil people. More than fifty missionaries followed in their footsteps. Today the congregations in the Bhil mission field are part of the Bhopal Diocese of the Church of North India. Their pastors are Bhil people. These congregations continue to be involved in ministries of evangelism and mission in the impoverished areas where tribal people live and where day-to-day life has changed very little in the past one hundred years.

### Discussion options

1. Share your stories of "going out" as an individual or as part of a faith community.
2. Discerning where God commands us to go is an ongoing process. Missionaries to the Bhil field continually sought God's guidance in the choices facing them. How has discerning God's will been part of your faith journey? How does your congregation discern God's will for it "to go out"?

## 4. Respond

Choose one or more of these options.

### **Worship presentation**

Plan a worship presentation developed out of the theme of this session. It might be a prayer, a story of mission partnership, or a summary of the group's reflections in this session.

### **Commissioning**

Share experiences of attending a commissioning service or being commissioned. For whom are commissioning services held in your church? If possible, refer to *The Book of Common Worship*, looking up services of commissioning.

- What scripture passages and hymns might you select to be part of a commissioning service?
- What might you include in a prayer of a commissioning service?

Together, prepare a commissioning prayer for one another and/or for people in your congregation undertaking a particular ministry.

### **Congregational banner**

Set out supplies to begin making a banner for your church sanctuary. Today choose some words of commissioning from scripture for the banner. Symbols may be added in the coming sessions. (See "Alternatives to Banner Making" on page 5.)

### **Mission and evangelism**

Where are you, your study group, or your church being commanded to go? Reflect, discuss, pray about this together. If you are able to identify a possible place, discuss what you could do in this place to bring an experience of God to the people living there. How will you go about doing this?



Photo: Dr. H. H. Colwell

## 5. Go out into the world

John Buchanan and Mary McKay are two names in a long list of Canadians who have heard Jesus speak to them, indeed, command and commission them. For John and Mary, the command led them to leave their families, their home communities and native land to serve for the rest of their lives among people of another culture and religion. In the box at the end of this session is a list of mission workers that The Presbyterian Church in Canada commissioned to serve the Bhil people in the past 106 years. They have served as doctors, ministers, evangelists, nurses, and educators. One of them, Pauline Brown, continues to serve today as a nurse working in community health care. These people are remembered by name by Bhil Christians. They are remembered as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Hand out slips of paper and pencils. Ask everyone to write the name of a Christian they know personally or know about, who "goes out, far and near" sharing their faith. Then ask everyone to take turns placing their papers on the worship centre. As people add their papers, have someone quietly read out the family names of Presbyterian missionaries to the Bhil field, beginning with the words, "With thankful hearts we remember these faithful servants..."

Gather around the worship centre and light the pillar candle. Set out taper candles, one for each group member. Have one person read and lead the commissioning prayer:

This light represents the light of God.  
Let us remember God's light in the people named on our papers  
and in the people who have been named aloud.  
Let us remember God's light in the Bhil people.  
Let us remember God's light in ourselves.  
*(Take a taper and light it. Hand it to the person next to you.)*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *(name of person)*, go out far and near.  
Let God's light in you shine.  
May others see God's light in you,  
and may you see God's light shining in them.  
*(Repeat for each person and then continue, saying,)*  
Now let us all go out into the world, with one another  
and with God,  
filling the world with the light of God. Amen.

### Sing

Hymn #755 "Go ye, go ye into the world" or #777 "Send me, Lord"  
(Extinguish candles.)

## Mission workers of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to the Bhil field\*\*

(See also "Bhil Mission Field  
Timeline"  
in the appendix.)

Buchanan\*, McDonald\*,  
Robson, Colwell, Young\*,  
McConnell, Williamson,  
Toombs\*, Maxwell,  
Maitland\*, Draper\*,  
Howie\*, Wood\*, Douglas,  
Soutar, MacMurchy, Errey,  
Sherrick, Quinn\*, Knox\*,  
Winchester, Kennedy,  
Scott, Rollo, Agar\*,  
Nichol, Hislop, Brown,  
Simpson, Stringer, White,  
McIntosh\*, Cunningham\*,  
Gehman, Milne\*, Acton,  
Lankin, Williams\*, Murray\*,  
Prendergast, Sargeant,  
Polson, Morrison, Horrell\*,  
Carter\*, Bentley, Bertilias\*,  
Howard\*, Vanderzwerde\*.

\* Names that represent couples  
and/or families.

\*\* In addition, there have  
been many, many volunteers  
to the Bhil field.

## Session two: Go out to everyone



# Forming relationships across culture

## Objectives

1. To learn how relationships formed between the Bhils and the Canadian Presbyterians, enabling the beginning of the Bhil church.
2. To reflect on the implications of Jesus' commission that calls us to be in relationship with people outside our community of faith and our culture.

**Suggested supplies:** a worship centre with white cloth; Bibles and hymn books; pillar candle and matches, plate with grapes and bread; plate with raisins and chapati or pita bread; varied coloured note paper (e.g. sticky notes) and pencils; writing paper and pencils; materials for banner making (cloth, dowelling, string, art supplies); props for drama; a taper candle for each person.

## 1. Welcome and Prepare

Welcome one another to gather around the worship centre and review the objectives for this session. Place the pillar candle on the centre. On one side of it place some grapes and bread on a plate and on the other side some raisins and a chapati or pita bread on a second plate. In this session, the story of the Bhil mission continues with reflections on how God brings different people together into relationship with each other and with God.

People come to the Christian faith in different ways. Together list some of the different paths that people can follow to become Christians. In small groups or pairs, share some stories of how you, people in your family, colleagues and friends became Christians. Hand out coloured pieces of paper. Ask everyone to write down on separate pieces the names of people who have helped them grow in their faith. Place these on the worship centre, creating an array of colours reminding us there are many different people and paths that can lead to God.

## 2. Worship

### Pray

God of all time and places and people,  
We have found our way to you through Jesus.  
Silently we remember early experiences that brought us to you. *(Pause)*  
Silently we remember people who have helped to nurture and guide our faith. *(Pause)*  
We are your people, striving to follow Jesus in all we say and do,  
wanting to do your work, seeking ways to bring peace and justice to all the world.  
Thank you for your presence among us, and for your son, Jesus,  
whose ministry we seek to carry on  
so that one day all people may be united with you. Amen.

### Sing

Hymn #574 "With the Lord as my guide"

## Hear the Word of God

Read together John 4: 5-30, 39-41. (Option: Read the passage dramatically with three voices – one each for Jesus, the woman, and the narrator.) This passage tells the story of the encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman, a person who had little value in the eyes of most Jewish men. The Jews despised Samaritans as half-breed foreigners, a people created by inter-marriages between Assyrian conquerors and Jewish commoners in the northern kingdom of Israel. They practiced a religion that was based on Judaism but that included pagan elements. In addition, women were regarded as among the lowest in social standing. Even so, while traveling through Samaria, Jesus initiated conversation with this unnamed Samaritan woman at the well near her city. After some dialogue, she recognized Jesus as the Messiah. And "because of her testimony" other people in her city came to believe in him. This encounter changed the woman; this encounter changed her community.

1. In this story, who goes out and proclaims the Good News? To whom do they proclaim it?
2. Christian Bhil people easily identify with the Samaritan woman. Like the woman, they must go along a hot dusty road to the nearby well for water; like the woman, they are marginalized people; like the woman, through Jesus they have come to know that God's love and grace is meant for them; like the woman, they try to tell others in their communities about God's love for them. For Bhil Christians, their encounter with Jesus was made possible by Canadian Presbyterian mission staff. Reread the story, substituting the words "valley of the Vindhya Satpura Hills" and "Bhil(s)" for "Samaria," "Samaritan(s)."

### When I think of the Bhil people, I think about...

When a group of Presbyterians with first-hand experience of working with Bhil people were asked "What words and phrases do you associate with the Bhil people?" their replies included:

faith

family

exploitation

poverty

humility

growing sense of self

proud

more self-confident

more assertive

Do any of these replies surprise you?  
What do you know about  
the Bhil people?

### Reflecting on the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

Jesus' final commission to his disciples to go out to all nations (Matthew 28:16-20)-indeed, some translations say "to all Gentiles" – challenged the early Christians to a new tolerance and inclusivity. Jesus was asking them to change to include non-Jewish people. In the Luke version of the commission, the writer roots this idea in the Hebrew scriptures (Luke 24:46-47), showing its timelessness rather than its novelty, indicating that inclusion of all people has been God's plan all along. Thus Philip, Peter and John preached to, and converted, Samaritans (Acts 8:14) and an Ethiopian official (Acts 8:34-35), people previously kept on the outside by Jewish leaders.

In Peter's speech to the centurion, Cornelius, and his household (Acts 10:34-35) and in Paul's address to the Athenians (Acts 17:22), we glean the apostles' struggles with the idea of including Gentiles. We know from Paul's letters to the early churches that "differences" in religious customs and culture, and "inclusivity" of people who had not come to Christianity through Judaism, created tensions within churches. What is your understanding of the "inclusive" aspect of the Great Commission? What tensions might the Great Commission create within churches today?

### 3. Hear the story: The first encounter

The story of the first meeting of a Canadian and a Bhil has been retold many times among the Bhil people and passed from generation to generation. The following version comes from the late Dr. Margaret Kennedy who served as an evangelist mainly among Bhil women from 1939 to 1978. Invite everyone to get comfortable, closing their eyes while one person reads. Imagine gathering around a fire and a grandparent taking a grandchild on their knee and telling this story in answer to a question about how their family – in a community of animists and Hindus – came to know Jesus.

The year was 1898. It was late afternoon in the valley. Soon the sun would go behind the hills and the Bhil boy Chomriya must round up the goats and take them to his home. He and two friends were playing with stones in a shady spot. Suddenly they became aware of a horse approaching and two Indian youths walking behind it carrying large bundles. The man on the horse was wearing a pith helmet such as the British government agents wore when they came once a year to visit the Maharaja of Alirajpur. This could not be an agent, as men had not come ahead to set up the tents. The boys retreated more into the shadow of the banyan tree. The man swung off the horse and looked around. The boys watched—should they run or should they wait and see! The fair-skinned stranger ran his hand down his horse, caught sight of the boys under the tree and indicated that he needed grass and water for the horse.

Slowly Chomriya came out from the shadows. He was ten years old, in charge of the goats, a strong Bhil boy with his bow and arrows in hand, so why should he be afraid. Chomriya brought the grass and water and was amazed to be rewarded by a small coin, something unheard of! So began the story of love between Dr. John Buchanan and the Bhil people of Western Central India.

(From *Flame of the Forest*, p. 39-40)

The sight of Dr. Buchanan had frightened the Bhil people of Amkhut, who thought that fair-skinned people were ghost-spirits. (Some Bhils still believe this today.) Watching his contact with Chomriya, other villagers gradually overcame their fears and ventured forward. Some of the Bhil people include in their retelling of the story an image of Dr. Buchanan's humility and faith: he dismounted his horse and went on bended knees, praying to God for guidance. This first encounter marked the beginning of the partnership between the Bhil people and Canadian Presbyterians.



Photo: Allen Powell

### India's Tribal People

The aboriginal peoples of India are known as the "tribals" or "adivasis." India has the largest concentration of tribal people anywhere in the world except perhaps in Africa. According to the 1991 census, 8 per cent of India's population or about 68 million Indians are tribal people, belonging to 533 tribes, and inhabiting approximately 15 per cent of the total geographic area of India.

Unlike in Canada or Australia, there is no clear evidence that tribal people settled first. For thousands of years while other people settled and lived in other parts of India, the tribal people lived relatively isolated and self-sufficiently in the hills and densely wooded regions, speaking their own languages and following their own customs. The tribal people were always outside the Hindu caste system and among the lowest people in Indian society. As simple farmers and food gatherers, they lived close to nature with a strong sense of belonging to their habitat, adhering to a lifestyle conditioned by the eco-system and holding animistic beliefs—believing that spirits inhabit everything, even inanimate objects.

While the Bhil people have been protected by laws, their land has not been. In recent decades, new communication and transportation systems have opened up areas previously inhabited only by tribal people. Forests have been cut and slashed and tribal people have been placed on land to farm. Today many of India's tribal people live in poverty as exploited labourers; many of the hillsides are totally denuded of vegetation.

## The Bhil people

The Bhil ("beel") people are one of the largest tribal groups in India. The name "Bhil" comes from the word "billee" meaning "bow." According to legends, the Bhils were fine archers. Bhil bowmen are mentioned in the great Indian epic The Ramayana. They were highly regarded as warriors and depended upon by the Rajput rulers. The Bhils also used their bows and arrows to hunt animals like wild tigers, and even today some Bhils continue hunting small animals in this way. (The large animals have long disappeared.)

However, perhaps because of their reputation as warriors and forest dwellers whose way of life changed little over the centuries, the Bhils were also looked down upon as a wild people, and as being like animals. They were called "monkey people" by Hindu and Muslim Indians who regarded them as sub-human and, therefore, having no rights in Indian society. While today the constitution of India upholds the rights of all its citizens, there are still strong prejudices against the equality of Bhil people.

## The language of the Bhils

The language spoken by the Bhils is called "Bhili" ("beel-ee") and is completely different from Hindi, the language spoken throughout Northern India. Canadian Presbyterians serving in the Bhil mission field spent some time learning Bhili when they first arrived.

Try these words and phrases:

Awo ("ah-who") means "Hello."

Badia or bakay ("bah-dee-uh" or "bah-kay") mean "Thank you."

Thamay kewa ho ("tha-may key-wah ho") means "How are you?"

In this study you will sometimes see the words "bhai" ("bah-eye") and "bai" ("ba-eye") as part of a Bhili name. The Bhils say "bhai" meaning brother and "bai" meaning sister. Also, the suffix "ji" ("gee") is added to a name to denote respect for that person.

Modern-day Bhili is a combination of traditional Bhili and Hindi.

## The Bhil mission and cultural differences

The objective of the Bhil mission was not to change cultural habits. Missionaries in some parts of the world in the early 1900s imposed their own culture on the people they were serving. However, the Buchanans and those missionaries who followed them, showed respect and appreciation for the Bhil culture.

In the Bhil mission field, the Canadians accepted the Bhil people's way of life, joining them for tea and chapatis, using raisin wine and chapatis for communion, learning their language, and educating the Bhils locally. In fact, the mission placed a priority on preserving culture and increasing the people's self-esteem. John and Mary Buchanan's remarkable open-mindedness and commitment to the Bhil people and culture set the standard for the mission field. The following suggestions were offered by John Buchanan in an address to the Mid-India Christian Association on September 2, 1925:

- Identify yourself with the jungle people. Copying St. Paul, one must to the Bhils become a Bhil that by all means we may save the Bhils. One need not be afraid of that, if his estimate is not merely superficial.
- A Bhil is a country squire on his own land. He has grain in his house and his own mill to grind it; his ghee [clarified butter], his curds and his milk, his goats and his chickens are all ready to hand to feast with his friends or to supply the needs of a man with a message. So, we say, be a Bhil gentleman.
- The Bhil will fight to the death with his bow and arrows. As a doctor I have had to remove more than one arrow. A Bhil never cringes...nor is he rough...but he is brave, true and sporting. Be gracious as his swaying palms yet firm as his flinty rocks. The nearer one's message corresponds to his straight, steel-pointed winged shaft the more likely is it to go home.
- Get into their hearts by getting them into yours. Learn the best that is in them. His keen instinct will read you like a book. "Love never faileth."
- Be spiritually minded. It is here that we materialistic westerners fail and fail again. There is no use trying to fit a cold, calculating, plainsman's religion on to an animistic mountain folk. They are mystics, and we must have the mysticism of the highlands of Israel...Baghwan, God, is great and good, but very far off, and does not have anything to do with the Bhils. It is the demons that must be appeased, for the demons harass them with sickness in their families, maiming their cattle and blasting their cornfields. They [the Bhils] will swing on the hooks, lie down to be trampled over by wild racing cattle, or walk over a

bed of hot coals of fire as a substitute offering. We want to bring God near to them.

- Preach the gospel through the jungle people themselves, preserving as far as possible the fine independence of the hill people.
- Train your own jungle people as far as possible right in the jungle. In this way they keep in touch with their own people and your classes and schools are a help where they ought to be. You thus make your base for the propagation of the Gospel right among the people.

(From John Buchanan "How to present the gospel to aboriginal peoples" in *Jungle Tales*, The Thorn Press, Toronto, 1938. pp. 166-174.)

### Reflecting on "going out" to people who are culturally different

Imagine the differences in culture and way of life between the Bhil people and the Canadian Presbyterian missionaries. Life for the Bhils had changed little over the centuries. Imagine the initial contacts and the challenges in making friends with one another. In Acts 17:16-22, we learn of Paul's experience in Athens where he was upset by the proliferation of idols. He made a point of having conversations with Greek intellectuals and getting to know them. The Greeks became curious about Paul's religious beliefs and gave him the opportunity to speak publicly to the crowd that gathered. Paul spoke with respect and appreciation for the Greeks despite their different religious beliefs and practices. Paul began, "It is plain to see that you Athenians take your religion seriously."

### Discussion Options

1. What are your experiences of encountering people of different cultures, religious beliefs and/or socio-economic status? How have you formed relationships with people who differ in such ways from yourself?
2. Reflect on times in your life when you felt the good news so passionately that you have wanted to share it with others. What words could you substitute for "Samaria" and "Samaritan(s)" in John 4: 5-30, 39-41 to put yourself in this story?
3. How has your congregation responded to the Great Commission's command to "go out to everyone?"

### 4. Respond

Choose one or more of these options.

### Worship presentation

Plan a worship presentation developed out of the theme of this session. It might be a prayer, a story of mission partnership, or a summary of the group's reflections in this session.

### Some Bhil beliefs

"The Bhil has a vague idea of one God and, when questioned, will always respond, 'Bhagwan is great, yes, and good, but he is very far away and [yet] takes an interest in such wild looting people as Bhils.' But evil spirits, he believes, are everywhere about to do injury. His idea is to try to satisfy and divert, not a God, but a devil. He believes that the demons when angered are very spiteful. They blast the little hopeful fields of grain, they bring murrain among their cattle and disease and death in their families...The Bhils have many devices by which they try to satisfy the demons. This they do by offerings, by substitution of personal suffering and, in some cases, by trying to outwit the demon and so be left alone." (John Buchanan in *Jungle Tales*, p. 44, 45.)

"Ignorance, superstition and fear of losing their authority over the people on the part of the witch doctor are just some of the forces with which we have to contend when spreading the Good News." (Mrs. F. L. Knox in "Camp at Manduka" in *Bhil Field Stories* 1944.)

### Worship in Kukshi

Dr. W. R. Quinn tells of a communion service held in the 1930s in Kukshi, a village where weekly medical clinics, accompanied by preaching, had been held for some time. "Padre Jigiya of Jobat church went down last Tuesday and stayed there to hold classes for instructing the Christians. On Sunday I took those of the Jobat elders who were available and went down for the service. The only Christian in a village seven miles beyond Kukshi came to the service. At Kukshi there is now a group of twelve. Not a large congregation and no stained glass windows or beautiful organ music, only mud walls and [dirt] floors and a muddy lane outside, and for praise the somewhat weird music of our Indian Christian hymns, but I thought it was a good start and I felt that it was well worthwhile."

(From *Our India Story*, Women's Missionary Society, Toronto, p.16.)

## Mission partnerships

Today both Bhil Christians and Presbyterians in Canada value and thank God for their mission partnership. Yet, there were many barriers that could have prevented the Bhils and the Canadian Presbyterians from forming relationships and sharing faith.

1. What do you think were some of the barriers and how might they have been overcome?
2. What are some of the barriers between us and marginalized people in our society?
3. What do we do, or can we do, to overcome barriers so that mission partnerships develop?

Prepare a descriptive statement that might help guide members of your congregation in their mission efforts so that barriers between people diminish. For example, the statement might begin, "In responding to God's call to mission, we will always seek to..."

## Congregational banner

Bring the banner begun in the last session or begin to make one today. Set out the materials and art supplies. Reread Matthew 28:16-20. Add symbols to remind you of the meeting of people of two different cultures in the Bhil mission field and the beginning of the partnership between Presbyterians in Canada and the Bhils in Central India. (See "Alternatives to Banner Making" on page 5.)

## Drama

Christian Bhils often present scripture readings through drama. Prepare a dramatization of John 4:5-30, 39-41 or of a mission story of your congregation.

## 5. Go out into the world

Gather in a circle around the worship centre. Ask one member to lead the closing ritual and prayer.

**Leader:** (*Light the pillar candle and hand everyone a taper. Light your taper from the candle saying,*) "Following the Great Commission – doing mission and evangelism – takes us out beyond ourselves to touch the lives of others and to be touched by the lives of others." (*Light the taper of the person on the left. Invite that person to light the taper of the person on their left, and so on, until all tapers are lit. Then pray*)

Beginning from within the heart and sending out  
to those near to us, then in widening circles to others  
in our village or town,  
to those of our own nation,  
then neighboring nations,  
till finally the whole of humankind,  
living and departed  
is reached in the radiation in turn of  
goodwill,  
compassion,  
love,  
joy,  
peace,  
blessing,  
remembering that these lovely dispositions,  
start from God within ourselves  
and are reinforced by  
God's infinitely more generous radiation. Amen.

*\*George Appleton, who died in 1993, was an English Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem. He was engaged in the inter-faith movement and in fostering Jewish-Christian understanding. SPCK is an Anglican publishing company in England.*

"The Radiating Prayer" by George Appleton\*, *Jerusalem Prayers*, SPCK 1974

## Sing

Hymn #761 "Who's goin' to tell the story"  
or #765 "We've a story to tell to the nations"

(*Extinguish candle.*)

## Session three: Make disciples



# Sharing The good news

### Objectives:

1. To learn about the ways the good news was shared and disciples were made among the Bhils.
2. To reflect on how words and acts of evangelism, mission, and justice relate to making disciples.

**Suggested supplies:** a worship centre with white cloth; Bibles and hymn books; pillar candle and matches; flower or petal or picture of a flower; potted plant; copies of *Living Faith: A Statement of Christian Belief* (The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1984)\*; pieces of paper and coloured pencils; writing paper and blank greeting cards or paper and art supplies for making greeting cards; materials for banner making (cloth, dowelling, string, art supplies).

\*Ask your minister about this booklet or see "Resources" in the Appendix.

### 1. Welcome and prepare

Welcome one another to gather around the worship centre. Place the pillar candle on the centre and a Bible open to the Gospel of John. Place a flower, petal or picture of a flower on the page or add a potted plant to the worship centre. Then read out the text from "The Lotus."

In the Book of Acts there are twelve references to "the good news." Philip, Peter, John, and Paul are named as "proclaiming," "telling," "testifying to" the good news. Their listeners were people (men and women) whom most Jewish men avoided: Samaritans, Gentiles like an Ethiopian official, a Roman centurion and his family, and Greeks. In pairs or small groups talk about the meaning of the "good news" to you: What is the "bottom line" of your faith that you would want to share with someone who is without faith? What would you "proclaim" to someone who is struggling to understand the meaning of their life? What scripture(s) would you quote to sum this up for them? What hymn(s) would you want to sing with them?

### 2. Worship

#### Pray

Lord, O Lord our God,  
join with us;  
share the life of your people;  
Jesus the Son of God,  
join with us;  
share the life of your people;  
Lord, O Lord our God,  
show that you're one with us,  
one with the helpless, the poor and the humble,  
who pray for oppression to cease,  
one with your children, in fear and in poverty,  
bringing us all to your peace.  
Amen.

(Words: Nicaraguan traditional, public domain.)

#### The Lotus

A visitor to India can't help but marvel at the lotus. This plant grows up through muddy, murky waters and blooms into the most beautiful flower in the sunlight. Evangelist Margaret Kennedy compared Bhil Christians to the lotus: they had been yearning for hope and meaning in their poor and fearful lives. Once they heard the good news they emerged into a new life. The lotus flower is part of the emblem of The Church of North India.



## Sing

Hymn #332 "O Lord my God!/How great thou art" (a favourite with Bhil Christians) or #670 "Amazing Grace"

Alternatively, select a favourite hymn that proclaims the essence of your faith.

## Hear the Word of God

Read together John 10:7-18. This passage, "Jesus the Good Shepherd," comes between two encounters in which Jesus is accused of blasphemy: John 9 tells the story of Jesus healing a man born blind and then being investigated and challenged like a criminal by the religious leaders; in the latter part of John 10, people threatened to stone Jesus for his teachings. What do you think the story of the Good Shepherd would have meant to the disciples? What does this passage mean to you?

The Gospel of John is often read by mission staff to people seeking to understand our faith. It is the favourite book of the New Testament for many, many people including Bhil Christians. Many Bhil Christians can quote long passages from this gospel. Why do you think this might be? Share your knowledge of the Gospel of John, perhaps drawing on information available in a study Bible and by browsing through the subtitles of this gospel.

Pauline Brown, Canadian Presbyterian community nurse among the Bhil people since 1951 and continuing today, was asked, "What scripture passage do you associate with the Bhil people?" She immediately replied "John 10:10 – I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Read this verse in different translations. Share what the verse means for you. Talk about what the verse might mean for people like the Bhils who are among "the least" in their society.

## Tribal communities

In India tribal communities have been progressively alienated from their traditional rights over natural resources like land, forest, river, and that has eroded the basis of their existence. While 40 per cent of the general population lives below poverty, 94 per cent of tribal people live in poverty. Despite constitutional provisions like protective discrimination and reservations, on most development indicators like health and literacy, tribal communities continue to lag behind, even after 50 years of India's independence.

(From "Dams and Tribal People in India," a contributing paper to the World Commission on Dams by Amrita Patwardhan, India, 1997.  
[www.dams.org/](http://www.dams.org/))

## Reflecting on the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

After the command "go," the next action in Jesus' Great Commission is to "make disciples." Jesus was telling his listeners to have people become learners and followers. How was this to be done? What would people hear or see that might convince them to become disciples? Implicitly the sharing of the good news would mean the building of a community of followers. Douglas Hare writes, "The Gentiles are not to be converted to a philosophy but to a way of living together in the Messiah's community." What does it mean to you to make someone a disciple of Jesus? How does this part of the Commission relate to the ministries of your congregation?



Photo: Wilma Welsh

### 3. Hear the story: How the Bhil people heard the good news

Invite everyone to hear the story of the partnership between Canadian Presbyterians and the Bhil people of Central India. The story continues as we hear how Canadian Presbyterians proclaimed the good news and made disciples among the Bhils.

#### Building and constructing

In 1897, when John Buchanan returned from furlough to his tent at Amkhut, he had with him money he had raised for the construction of buildings. Instead of having experienced Indian builders from other areas come to help, he was determined to employ unskilled Bhil people. His reasons included:

1. The Bhils "knew nothing of outsiders except some form of unfairness or extortion;"
2. It gave the Canadian missionaries the opportunity to work alongside the Bhils, "getting into touch with an otherwise shy [i.e. cautious] people," getting to know each others' values and beliefs;
3. It could be a source of skill training and self-esteem building for the Bhil people;
4. It was economical, providing income to people while costing the mission far less than if outside skilled builders had been employed.

This approach to building and construction – employing local labour and working alongside local people – became an important principal in the Bhil mission field and in all the work of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

From the start, the Buchanans had a clear vision of ministry to the Bhil people: "The Word would be carried to all the Bhil people, wherever they may be. And with the Word would also come medical care, schooling, care for the abandoned and an overwhelming desire to improve the lot of the Bhil people through the message and example of Jesus Christ." The Buchanans liked to describe the task as five-fold: to improve the Bhils' lives physically, economically, socially, mentally, and spiritually. As leaders of the Bhil church recall today, "In all the mission's work, evangelism was carefully intertwined."

Scarcely a year into their work, the Great Famine — *chhapaniy kaal* — struck the Vindhaya Satpura region. The famine was said to be so terrible that some people turned to cannibalism.

Unswerving in their commitment to the Bhils, the Buchanans resolved to cook up food to feed anyone who came to them. As word spread, Bhil people came from miles around to be fed and clothed. Among those who came were children — weak, sick, and in many cases, orphaned. The mission purchased camels to carry the needed grain and other supplies across the hilly terrain, since there was no other means of transport!

At first the Buchanan house was a makeshift dispensary, a school, a church, and a dining hall—the entire mission under one roof. But once the famine subsided in 1902, Dr. John Buchanan mobilized the Bhil people themselves, along with materials, to construct separate buildings and roads.

#### Many ways of making disciples

The Buchanans and the missionaries who followed them to the Bhil mission field took on a wide range of activities. However, as early as the 1920s Bhil disciples were working alongside the Canadians and even on their own in some of the villages that were sub-stations to the mission. In addition to evangelism, their activities focused on child welfare, literacy, health care, and socio-economic development.

#### Child welfare

During the Great Famine, the Buchanans first became aware of the many abandoned, sick and orphaned children. They cared for some of them in their own home. Finally, in 1931 the mission began constructing a home for women and children. The home was named after Mr. M.G. Abey of Brandon, Manitoba whose wife donated funds following her husband's death. Mr. Abey had always been fond of children and his wife wished a home to be opened in his memory. Within three months of opening, the M.G. Abbey Home in Amkhut saw 120 patients and took in three orphans. By 1933, it was the home for eight orphans. All the children who lived there took the family name "Abey." Many of the Abey boys and girls grew up to become Christian leaders in their community and in the Bhil church. Musa Abey, the first child to live in the Abey Home, became a church minister. Today the operation of the Abey Home is under review.

## Literacy

In the Bhil mission field, the Buchanans saw widespread illiteracy and a complete lack of any means to achieve an education. In addition, the Bhils were spread out and their Bhili language was only oral and not spoken outside of their communities. The first school was started on the mission bungalow verandah. At first the classes were informal Bible study sessions led by Mary Buchanan. Recognizing the need for an educational program, The Presbyterian Church in Canada sent teacher Bertha Robson to Amkhut. Together with Mary, Bertha organized daily classes. In 1914 the school moved into classrooms attached to the church and became the central mission school of the Vindhya Satpura region. By 1935 a series of primary village schools had been opened. Early on, student graduates began filling the positions of teachers in these village schools. These village schools continue to operate today.

## Health Care

From the verandah dispensaries first administered by the Buchanans, the health work of the Bhil mission expanded to village dispensaries. In 1922 the mission opened the first building of the Jobat Christian Hospital. Today it has an out-patient dispensary, a large operating theatre, an x-ray department, laboratory, and 100 beds. Today the hospital supervision is under Dr. Deborah Tezlo, medical superintendent since 1986 and daughter of the late Bhil pastor, Padre Tezlo. The training of nurses takes place at the Isobel McConnell School of Nursing which opened in 1939 to train general nurses and midwives.

Community health care was done sporadically in the first 50 years of the Bhil mission. In 1950 a mobile health unit formed sending out nurses from village to village. They often brought ill patients to the Jobat hospital. In the last decade, village health workers have become an important component of this grassroots community health program. These women, many of whom are illiterate, have proven to be a great value to their communities, teaching and training their fellow villagers in the areas of personal hygiene, assisting in midwifery, immunization, and simple curative diseases. They also greatly assist the community health nurses in identifying the problems specific to their areas, and alerting the nurses of illness in the villages. The community health programs at Jobat and Mendha are run in close cooperation with the church and its village development program, which carries out community health care in over 80 villages. Today The Presbyterian Church in Canada continues to support the community health programs (see also Session Six).

## Socio-economic development

Sustainability of projects has always been important in the Bhil mission field. From the first construction project, when John Buchanan refused the help of outside skilled labour, the mission recognized the importance of developing self-esteem, pride, local skills and expertise, and a sense of ownership. The mission staff worked hard to improve the economic conditions of the Bhils as together they

## Denied justice

Oral histories of the tribal people narrate how 50 years ago, a Bhil was nailed and made to stand with a heavy load on his head in the sun for eating ripe wheat. His crime: he had not offered his grain to the feudal lord first. No tribal woman could wear jewelry or even clean clothes; and if caught violating these "rules" they were punished severely. Their foreheads were tattooed to make them look unattractive. Tribal men were branded on their lower arms in order to identify them as untouchables. Today they may not be stripped if found wearing clean clothes but the indignity that characterizes their lives is more or less the same as it was in the peak of feudal reign.

(From "Drought: An Oppressed Lot" by T.K. Rajalakshmi in *Frontline*, India's National Magazine from the publishers of *The Hindu*, Vol. 18, Issue 6, March 17-30, 2001, <http://www.flon-net.com/fl1806/18061330.htm>)

## Educational needs of tribal people

In contrast to the successes of the Bhil Mission Field in literacy and education, most approaches to education among tribal people in India have been dismal. As a group, tribal people lag behind on literacy rate, enrolment, attendance, and have much higher incidence of dropouts. Analysis of this grim picture which has persisted for years, shows that...mainstream schooling with its standard curriculum, alien language of instruction and negative attitudes of teachers towards tribal community, culture and knowledge systems makes schooling a negative experience for many tribal children. According to the 1991 census of India, the literacy rate is 52 per cent among the general population and 29 per cent among tribal people.

(From "Dams and Tribal People in India," a contributing paper to the World Commission on Dams by Amrita Patwardhan, India, 1997. [www.dams.org/](http://www.dams.org/))

## Social and medical problems

The community health program in the Bhil mission field is bearing the fruit of its many years of existence. As healthy habits and knowledge become the way of life, they are passed from generation to generation and the resulting improved health of villagers becomes pronounced. Older people can recall health risks that have been eradicated; and visitors to the region can readily distinguish villages that are participating. Unfortunately these experiences are not the norm for most tribal groups in India, and even for many Bhils. Along with underdeveloped economies and high illiteracy rates, the majority of tribal people still face major social and medical problems in their communities, like excessive drinking, unsafe drinking water and inadequate medical facilities.

undertook road building, community farming, and animal husbandry. At Amkhut, a butter-making initiative turned into a profitable ghee (clarified butter used in local dishes) enterprise and an early income generating activity for the women. Early economic development schemes led to specific programs over the years that improved conditions particularly for farmers: technological improvements in farm equipment that increased crop output; irrigation schemes, and animal husbandry projects. Today the Church of North India continues to support and coordinate the village development program in the Vindhya Satpura area.

## Reflecting on being made a disciple

Even today, the position in India society of most Bhils – Christians and non-Christians alike – is similar to the situation of the poor, exploited and outcast in the Bible. Like the Ethiopian official (Acts 8:26-39) who had been trying to understand Isaiah's words about oppression and the denial of justice (vs. 32-33), the Bhil people struggle to understand their life situation. The way of life and standard of living in most Bhil villages has changed little in the last 100 years. The lives of the majority of Bhil people are still dominated by societal rejection, economic poverty, illiteracy, and great health risks. Day-to-day survival remains a struggle. "Progress" has brought new challenges – relocation due to regional plans to build dams, shortages of fuel due to the loss of forested lands, and the invasion of HIV/AIDS due to the migration of workers.

Yet, Bhil Christians say their lives have changed. Pauline Brown tells this story:

"One day two men met about their work. One was a civil servant of the government of India, a Hindu. The other was his employee, a Bhil Christian. They sat in the civil servant's office — an office not unlike our business offices. They sat opposite each other on wooden chairs. They conducted their work conversation, and then the civil servant said, 'Tell me, why are you a Christian?' The Bhil man replied, 'Sir, look at how you recognize my worth! I have risen above being nothing. If I were not a Christian, I would be sitting on the floor while you alone sit upon a chair. Instead we have talked man to man. It is because of my religion this has happened — Jesus made me a man.'"

## Discussion options

1. Who are the least in your society who are being denied justice?
2. How are these people hearing the good news and being made disciples?
3. How is your congregation involved in making disciples?

## 4. Respond

Choose one or more of these options.

### Worship presentation

Plan a worship presentation developed out of the theme of this session. It might be a prayer, a story of mission partnership, or a summary of the group's reflections in this session.

## **Mission and justice**

Read Section 9.1 "Mission" and then Section 8.4 "Justice" from *Living Faith: A Statement of Christian Belief*. Hand out pieces of paper and set out coloured pencils. Invite group members to note a phrase or draw a symbol for each of these words: evangelism, mission, justice. Share the words and images as the papers are spread out on the worship centre. Talk about the connections between each of these concepts (i.e. evangelism, mission, and justice) and our faith. How do the ministries of your congregation help people who are "the least" to experience God's love and justice?

## **Sharing the Good News**

Prepare letters or cards (or make your own) extending greetings and offering a prayer or words of assurance from your study group to

1. a group of "the least" in your local community (and plan to deliver or mail it), and/or
2. a Bhil congregation. Send these to: Education for Mission, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 50 Wynford Dr., Toronto, ON M3C 1J7 for forwarding.

Brainstorm other actions you could take.

## **Congregational banner**

Bring the banner begun in an earlier session or begin to make one today. Set out the materials and art supplies. Reread Matthew 28:16-20. Add symbols to remind us of the significance of sharing the good news and being made disciples. (See "Alternatives to Banner Making" on page 5.)

## **5. Go Out into the world**

### **Pray in unison**

Life-giver. Life-sustainer. Nurturer. Comforter.  
God, you are all these and more.  
You created us. You mold us. You love us.  
Even when we slide back, turn around, lose sight of you,  
you offer us abundant life.  
Who are we if we don't know you?  
Who are we if we don't embrace you?  
Who are we if we don't centre our lives on you?  
Then we are nothing, we are afraid, we are lost.  
Thank you for your son Jesus  
who gives our lives meaning and hope.  
Thank you for your disciples  
who testify to us and make us disciples.  
May we go now and live our faith,  
proclaiming the good news  
in all we say and do. Amen.

### **Sing**

Hymn #663 "God, whose giving knows no ending" or #776 "Jesus, life of all the world"

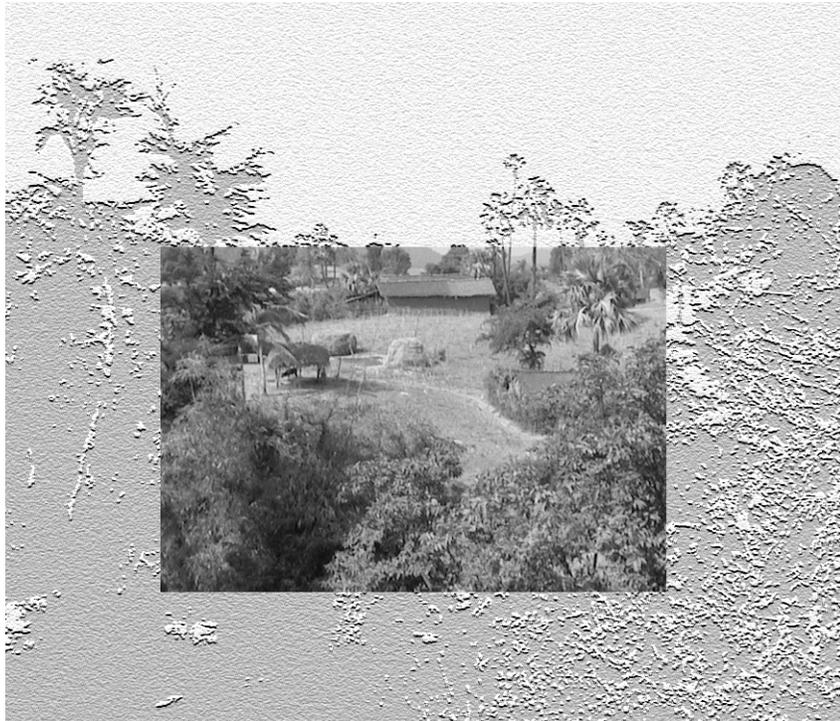


**India and its surrounding countries and bodies of water**

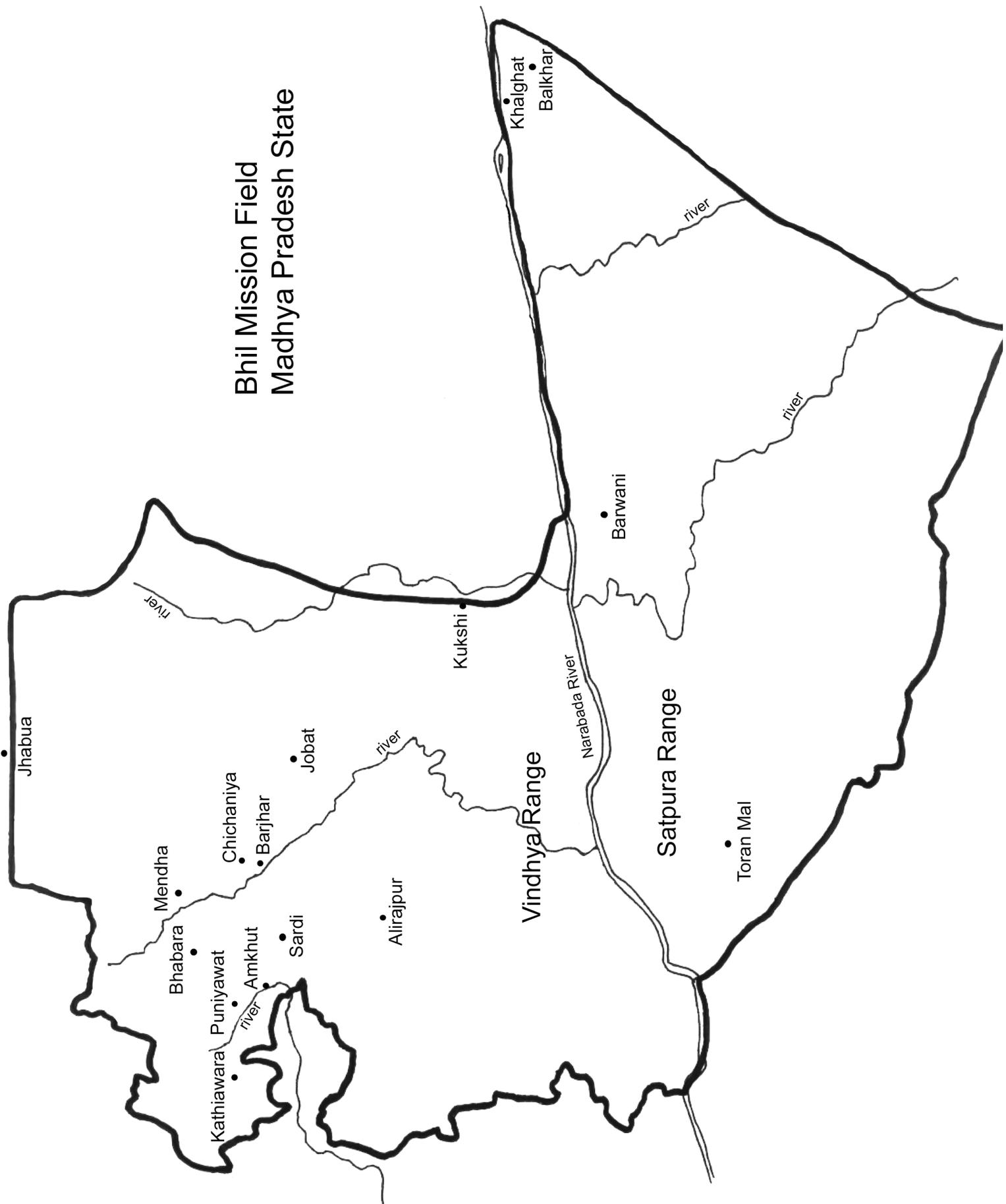


Photos: Wilma Welsh





# Bhil Mission Field Madhya Pradesh State



## Session four: Mark by baptism

# Responding to the good news



### Objectives:

1. To hear how the Bhil people responded to the good news with baptism and discipleship.
2. To reflect on our own experiences of baptism and our response to the good news.

**Suggested supplies:** a worship centre with white cloth; Bibles and hymn books; jug of water and bowl, hand towel; worship resource *Standing with the Persecuted* (Justice Ministries, 2003)\*; copies of *Living Faith: A Statement of Christian Belief* (The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1984)\*; writing paper, blank greeting cards or art supplies for making greeting cards; newsprint and marker; materials for banner making (cloth, dowelling, string, art supplies).

\*Ask your minister or see "Resources" in the Appendix.

### 1. Welcome and prepare

Welcome one another and gather around the worship centre. Place a large bowl and jug of water on the centre as reminders of the sacrament of baptism. Pour the water into the bowl explaining that in the Bhil mission field, baptism for the first decades marked adult conversions. Today, in addition to adults who come forward to be baptized, there are many third and even fourth generation Bhil Christians who bring their young children to church for baptism.

Together share your personal and community experiences of baptism. What difference does it make in your day-to-day life that you are or aren't baptized?

### 2. Worship

#### Prayer

Dear God, we have many stories of baptism – stories of our own baptism and stories of the baptisms of our relatives, friends, and members of our church community. But in trying to remember and share these stories, we realize that the memories are often vague; the details like dates are often forgotten – lost to church archives, buried beneath the photographs and videotapes of all the other memorabilia we have collected, from all the other celebrations we keep having. We continue to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries and so many other milestones, but we don't very often think about our baptism, never mind celebrate it. Often we don't remember it. Sometimes we don't even bother to be baptized or to bring others to baptism, though we think of ourselves as disciples of Christ.

Patient and forgiving God, we know that baptism is an occasion to receive and celebrate your grace, an occasion to respond and proclaim your love. Forgive us for the casual, superficial way we sometimes treat our relationship with you. We ask today for you to guide us patiently in our reflections on baptism and on our own commitment to discipleship. Help us gain new understandings as we hear about the faith of our Bhil brothers and sisters. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

#### Sing

Hymn #634 "Will you come and follow me" or #736 "For the healing of the nations"

## Hear the Word of God

Read together Acts 8:26-39. (Option: Assign the parts of narrator, Phillip and the Ethiopian and read the passage dramatically. Give other group members an opportunity to act out a role. How did it feel to be Phillip? The Ethiopian?)

In this story the Ethiopian official responded to Peter's proclamation of the good news of Jesus with a spontaneous request for baptism. Why do you think he wanted to be baptized? Afterwards the Ethiopian "went on his way rejoicing." It is believed that this man – the first non-Hebrew convert and missionary – returned home and introduced Christianity to the court of the Ethiopian queen. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has a history that dates back to the first century.

Baptism was part of the conversion experience in the early church. It is part of the stories of Pentecost (Acts 2:37-42), of Paul's transformation (Acts 9:18), of the conversion of the Roman centurion Cornelius, and of the jailor after the liberation of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:25-34). How do these baptisms compare with the baptism stories you shared at the beginning of this session?

### Reflecting on the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

Douglas R.A. Hare writes, "The most remarkable feature of Matthew's commissioning statement is the absence of any call to preach the gospel! Correspondingly, there is no demand for faith as a precondition for baptism. Matthew apparently can take for granted that the missionaries will proclaim the good news and call for faith...The tense of the participles ("baptizing," "teaching") does not indicate that the Gentiles must be discipled before they are baptized, or baptized before they are taught. It looks as if Matthew perceives baptism as occurring in the middle of a disciplining-and-teaching process that must continue indefinitely." (In *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Matthew*, p. 334.)

How do you think baptism – both adult and infant baptism – relates to making disciples of people and teaching them as Jesus' commissioned?

## 3. Hear the story: Baptism in the Bhil mission field

The Ethiopian official responded enthusiastically to the good news with a desire to be baptized, then he "went on his way rejoicing," returning home to share the good news with others. The history of the Bhil church includes many stories of baptisms that resonate with this same enthusiasm and these same actions. Invite everyone to hear another "chapter" of the story from the partnership between Canadian Presbyterians and the Bhil people of Central India. The story continues as we hear two separate tales, one about a Bhil person responding to the good news by being baptized and then wanting to proclaim the good news; the other about a Bhil who was unable to proceed with baptism.

### a) A village baptism

It was the Sunday morning on which Buddhiya had asked to be baptized with his family. The service was all in Bhili. After singing and prayer, Bhima Bhai read the story of the Good Shepherd that told so simply and effectively the happy relationship between the Shepherd and His sheep. The villagers had all been invited but many of them had left early in the morning, beginning their annual trip with cart loads of cotton to the cotton jinny 25 miles up the road. The remainder were afraid to be present. The small congregation, about 15, consisting of our own camp members and Buddhiya's family, sat on a carpet under the tent cover. The water for the baptism was in a brass receptacle on a low table. Rev. Musa Bhai was the minister and asked the solemn questions, reminding them that this step would possibly mean difficulty and persecution and if they were not perfectly assured they still had time to turn back. Just as solemnly they answered, reaffirming their faith and determination to be Christ's disciples and to obey Him. Then, with Buddhiya, his wife and their two girls kneeling, Musa Bhai, also kneeling, poured the water on their bowed heads. As the water trickled down Buddhiya's long black hair and to his shoulders and on down over his clothes, a smile of peace and contentment passed over his face. At last, after all these months of waiting, he had made his open confession in baptism and he was

happy. His wife, kneeling beside him, received the new name of Dayabai, meaning Mercy. Her old, unhappy name had been given to keep evil spirits from harming her as a child, and this happy day meant to her a new name because of a new life in Christ...Then followed a prayer of dedication, a hymn, and the benediction. As we lingered in that hallowed moment, our Lord so very near, no one wished to rise and break up that sacred time of fellowship. Then quite spontaneously, Buddhiya spoke: "Now you have brought me to the Lord Jesus. I know that this day I have taken upon myself the responsibility of bringing the people of my village to Him."

(From "A Village Baptism" by Rev. C.L. Wood in *Bhil Field Stories* 1944.)

## b) A step away from baptism

As in Bible times, so now in India, family ties prevent many from following Christ...such a would-be follower is Raoji...A long time ago when Raoji let it be known that he was going to receive baptism, he encountered opposition from his people. His mother came and wailed beside the gate of the mission bungalow. Three trails leading to the bazaar unite just there, so many passers-by could not help but see her. When they enquired what the matter was she would wail, "I have lost my son. He is going to become a Christian." The father and the other members of the family threatened to turn him out of house and home if he became a Christian. The mother threatened to hang herself either at Raoji's future home or outside the homes of those who tried to persuade him to be a Christian. Now Raoji loves his parents. The thought that his becoming a Christian would entail such misery for them seemed to persuade him not to take the step just then, so he did not receive baptism.

(Rev. F. C. Knox, "I will follow thee but..." in *Bhil Field Stories* 1944.)

## Reflecting on risks and rewards of discipleship

Baptism was a critical part of the Bhil Mission Field as it was the public act of conversion for Bhil adults. Baptism also truly "marked" Bhil Christians in the eyes of others, setting them up for rejection by their families, by members of their community and for persecution by people of other religions. It didn't even guarantee them fellowship among other Indian Christians since those Christians with family ancestry in the caste held prejudices against Bhil people – whether Christian or not – because of the Bhil tribal origins.

Religion is an important aspect of Indian society and Bhil Christians do not hesitate to say their faith is the most important part of their lives. In India people are always asking others, "What is your religion?" At great personal risk, Bhil Christians regularly and joyfully reaffirm their faith by replying to this question, "I am a Christian." With the certainty of God's love, they are not only freed from their previous fears of evil spirits, but also from the dehumanizing effects of a discriminatory, unjust society.

But if you visited the Vindhya Satpura region and saw the continuing poverty of the majority of Bhil people and realized the day-to-day discrimination and persecution that Bhil Christians risk, you might wonder what has been achieved. In secular terms you might ask: Have the benefits outweighed the costs? Has the Bhil mission field been "profitable"? Dr. Dawar, a

## Anti-conversion laws

Religious intolerance is not new to India. In the late 1920s the state authorities for the Barwani region passed a law preventing anyone from changing his or her religion without permission from a first-class magistrate. At this time Mr. and Mrs. Toombs were stationed in Barwani and found the Bhils to be cautious and even frightened. They had heard rumours that missionaries would take their children away from them. Still, the church community did grow with baptisms held in Amkhut. Finally in 1933, British authorities indicated the law would be disregarded henceforth.

Today similar anti-conversion laws are being encouraged by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), the cultural/religious wing of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This group has always openly opposed religious conversion from Hinduism and they have battled for "the souls" of tribal people. The Indian census automatically counts tribal people as Hindus and the VHP and BJP want to keep it that way. They want tribal people to be among the members and supporters of the Hindutva movement, which is aimed at creating a homogeneous, Hindu state.

Bhil non-Christian, was acting medical superintendant of the Jobat Hospital in 1968. At that time he spoke about the difference that the Bhil mission had made to his life and the life of his community:

"As far as a 'profitable market' is concerned, let us remember, the Lord Jesus himself was born in a very poor family. He loves the poor, and we are the poorest material with which the highly skilled workers have to work. He loved us and inspired His people in Canada to come and serve our people and to teach them the love of God. Now we, the offspring, are in some better position. We have been educated and are working and serving Him in different fields. We are learning to take responsibilities and some, to whom the chance has been given, are doing so very efficiently. Is that not the profit the Lord has received?"

(From *Flame of the Forest* by Dr. Margaret Kennedy, p. 140.)

### Discussion options

1. How has the good news "marked" you and changed you?
2. How does your faith free you to think and act differently from society? How does it sometimes create tension, perhaps even risk, in your relationships with others?
3. How do you respond to the good news, individually and as a congregation? How has this response brought the rewards of justice and freedom to people living in your community?

## 4. Respond

Choose one or more of these options.

### Worship

Plan a worship presentation developed out of the theme of this session. It might be a prayer, a story of mission partnership, or a summary of the group's reflections in this session.

### Freedom of religion

Bhil Christians face persecution for their faith, yet every day they pray for *us* – The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its members. Do one or all of the following:

- Prepare a letter or card extending greetings and offering a prayer or words of encouragement from your congregation to a Bhil congregation. Send this to Education for Mission from where it will be forwarded.
- Pray for Bhil Christians and all people of faith around the world whose lives are at risk because of their religious beliefs.
- Use an idea from the worship resource *Standing with the Persecuted*, produced by Justice Ministries, The Presbyterian Church in Canada (see Resources in the Appendix), to involve your congregation in standing with those who are persecuted for their religious beliefs.

### Risks and rewards of discipleship

Read Section 8.1 "Discipleship" from *Living Faith: A Statement of Christian Belief*. On a newsprint sheet make two columns, one titled Risks and one titled Rewards. Referring to your knowledge now of the Bhil mission field, list some of the risks and rewards of discipleship for our Bhil brothers and sisters. Compare these with the risks and rewards generally experienced by Presbyterians in Canada.

## Risking persecution

The 1947 constitution of India states that its citizens have the freedom to express their religious beliefs. However, powerful forces continue trying to ensure the dominance of the Hindu faith. A nationalist Hindu religious movement (the RSS), allied to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, has caused difficulties for members of our partner, the Church of North India. Violent acts have been committed against Christians and churches have been burned. Bhil Christians are among the victims of persecution. Those Bhils who have become Christian have often done so at great risk.

In the past year Hindu extremism and a vision of totalitarianism threaten to destroy India's founding principles of pluralism and religious tolerance. States like Gujarat and Tamil Nadu are openly allowing infringements of religious rights. As teacher and author Sunil Khilnani has written:

"Today, if you are a Muslim, a Christian, or a tribal, living in Gujarat – if you are not a Hindu – the authority of the state has ceased to protect you. Among the 30-odd regional states of the Indian Union, many contend for the prize of being India's leading dystopia. Now Gujarat has placed itself well ahead. What is happening there reveals the depth of the threat facing Indians today."

(From "Comment: This is the home of Gandhi?" in *The Globe and Mail*, March 26, 2002, p. A19.)

1. What actions do you, or might you, take as disciples of Christ that might mark you, putting you at risk?
2. What are, or might be, the specific risks and rewards of these actions?

### Congregational banner

Bring the banner begun in an earlier session or begin to make one today. Set out the materials and art supplies. Reread Matthew 28:16-20. Add symbols to remind us of the consequences of baptism and discipleship. (See "Alternatives to Banner Making" on page 5.)

## 5. Go out into the world

### Pray

Gather around the basin of water. Have one member lead the group in repeating in unison the following ritual with each person:

Creator God,  
may your love and justice fill ...*(say person's name. Then dip your finger in the water and make the sign of the cross on the person's forehead)*  
overflowing  
into the lives  
of everyone *she/he* meets,  
like a river  
overflowing its banks  
and bringing life-giving water  
to parched plants. Amen.

Pass the peace with one another saying:

**"Peace be with you. Shanti."**\*

And responding,

**"Shanti. With you also."**

\*"Shanti" means "peace" in Hindi.

### Sing

Hymn #513 "Now there is no male or female" or #515 "Out of deep, unordered water"



Photo: Karen Plater

## Session five: Teach and instruct



# Growing as a church

## Objectives

1. To hear stories about the growth of the Bhil church and the emergence of Bhil leaders.
2. To reflect on experiences of growth and leadership in our congregations.

Suggested supplies: worship centre with white cloth; Bibles and hymn books; pillar candle (and matches); plate with grapes still on the vine and real or artificial ivy vines; materials for banner making (cloth, dowelling, string, art supplies); props for mime; 20 tea light candles.

### 1. Welcome and preparation

Welcome one another to gather around the worship centre. Place on it a Bible open to John's gospel, a pillar candle, tea light candles, matches, and a plate with a bunch of grapes still on the vines. Drape vines of a plant (e.g. real or artificial ivy) around the centre. Today we will be reflecting on the way spiritual leadership spreads out as a church grows. Explain that if you were in Amkhut and it was the month of January you might have picked a blossom from the "Flame" tree. (See box "The Flame of the Forest.")

Jesus often spoke about how things grow – a mustard seed, grape vines, weeds and wheat, a fig tree. Sometimes he used these images for metaphors in his parables. In pairs or small groups, recall such parables or scripture references. Find one or two of these in the Bible and read them. What meaning do they have for you?

Come together as one group again. Pass the plate of grapes around and share the fruit. Notice the signs of past growth on the grape vine, and that there can be no further growth once the fruit has been picked. Then talk about the "fruit" that Christians produce. What are the signs of growth or lack of growth in a Christian community? In your group? In your congregation?

Photo: Rev. Bill and Mrs Lucie Milne



### The Flame of the Forest...

...is a crooked, twisted black-barked tree that grows in the Amkhut valley. In January when all is dry and barren, the tips of its branches are swelling, sheathed in dark green velvet. Then the sheaths split, beauty is disclosed, and the hillsides become a flame of glory, a riot of orange and vermilion flowers; masses of flowers, each one perfect; velvet deep orange shot with a silvery pink. The hidden potential bursts forth into unimagined splendor. (Margaret Kennedy, *Flame of the Forest*, inside cover.)

## 2. Worship

### Pray

God who loves us  
no matter what,  
we are like sheep  
protected by their shepherd,  
growing vines  
tended by the gardener.  
We are brothers and sisters in Christ,  
people of the new covenant,  
God's people, God's children,  
loved and cared for,  
called to be loving and caring for.  
May we always remember  
"who" we are and "whose" we are,  
that our very being might lead others  
to your love.  
Amen.

### Sing

Hymn #491 "God bless your church with strength"

### Hear the Word of God

Read together John 15:1-17. This passage is part of a four-chapter (John 14-17) discourse spoken by Jesus to his disciples. The gospel writer records it as part of the gathering around the table of the Last Supper. (The scene that follows in John 18 is in the garden where Jesus was seized.) In this reading Jesus, aware of the path ahead of him, reminds the disciples of their relationship with God through him. Jesus wants them to continue this relationship of love even when he is not physically present and to include others in similar loving relationships. By saying they are no longer master and servant, but friends, Jesus emphasizes the closeness of that love. Later in John 15:26 he speaks of the Holy Spirit – another Friend – joining them to confirm this relationship.

### Reflecting on the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

We might wonder whether the Great Commission was for the disciples only. Is it today a commission solely for those inclined to be mission workers? Over the centuries Christians have felt that Jesus' commission was intended for all who follow him – for both individuals and congregations; for those like the doubting disciples and those who believe without seeing; and for people waiting and wanting to be empowered with the Holy Spirit. All of us, not just our church leaders, are commissioned. How do we prepare? When are we ready?

We may identify with the disciples – many of us do not feel ready to tell others about a crucified and risen Messiah; many of us are unsure about including all people; many of us are unsure and even uncomfortable about talking about our faith. As biblical scholar Fred Craddock says, "After twenty centuries, preaching a crucified Christ and accepting all people equally continue as problems haunting the corners of the church, awaiting full and free resolution." Despite people like us and through people like us, Christianity has spread.

## 3. Hear the story: Growth of the Bhil church

Invite everyone to hear the story of the partnership between Presbyterians in Canada and the Bhil people of Central India. The story continues as we hear about Bhil people who emerged as leaders, establishing and serving Bhil congregations.

"A great and beautiful garden grew, being watered with the love of the faithful." —a Bhil Christian, 1997

From the start of the Bhil mission field, the Canadian mission staff expected Bhil people to grow personally and spiritually in Christ so that they could teach one another and reach out to their fellow villagers. The motto was "Each one, teach one." Close relationships did develop, Bhil leaders did emerge, and congregations did form.

Just as the Buchanans had begun Sunday services in Ujjain in their dispensary because of no place of worship, when they moved to Amkhut, worship was on the verandah of their bungalow. In everything they did, the Buchanans instructed people in the Christian faith: school was not only an opportunity to learn how to read and write, but the Bible was the study guide; at the dispensary, Mary Buchanan read and preached the Word to waiting patients; on agricultural and construction projects, the work was described as the Lord's work and at breaks or roll call scripture was read and prayers said. Regular prayer meetings were held in Amkhut and taken out to surrounding villages and sub-stations. Taking the gospel to Bhil people in remote areas was always a priority of the mission.

John Buchanan took on the task of training Bhil catechists, evangelists, and pastors. He instructed them in Hindi, an official language of India, but they were expected to preach to their people in Bhili.\* From his small theological class, he trained church workers who went out from Amkhut to other centers, gathering "little groups of Christians about them, who in turn went further afield." As more and more Bhils became Christians and more and more congregations formed, an identity developed of the Bhil church as a part of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, having little to do with other Christians in India — partly because of their isolated location and partly because of the attitudes of Indians, both Christian and non-Christian, toward tribal people, and because of all the support in mission staff and resources they had received from the church in Canada.

\*Author's note: I found little mention in my research of the missionaries teaching in Bhili or translating into Bhili. However, according to *Our India Story* (WMS, p. 18), in 1917 the Bible Society published a Bhili translation of Mark's gospel, and two other gospels were translated into Bhili by Miss Christian Maxwell, a Greek scholar, during her twelve years serving in Sardi.

### God raised up leaders

"God raised up leaders who received training, and they in turn began teaching their own people. There was not the bringing in of great numbers of workers, nor the spreading out to vast areas, but rather a concentration in a relatively small area where the believers would experience growth, spiritually, mentally and physically; where the community would thus evolve its own leadership, and would become self-supporting, self-propagating and self-ruling."  
(Margaret Kennedy in *Flame of the Forest*, p. 90.)

On November 23, 1928 the Presbytery of Vindhya and Satpura Bhil Mountains of The Presbyterian Church in Canada held its first meeting in Alirajpur with Padre Gangji Bhai in the moderator's chair. Padre Gangji had come to Amkhut at the time of the Great Famine at the age of ten. Studying theology under Dr. Buchanan, he became the first Bhil elder of the Amkhut church in 1925 and later was ordained as the first Bhil padre, minister of the Alirajpur congregation. He later served in Barwani. During his ministry he also composed 38 Bhili geets or songs, which are part of the Maihi Geet Sangrah, the Hindi/Bhili hymn book.

Before the close of 1930 a Canadian missionary was in charge of each station, each assisted by Bhil preachers and catechists, sixteen of whom were supported locally by the Amkhut congregation. Bhil preachers were stationed at five centres. By 1935 the presbytery consisted of four Bhil padres, four Canadian ministers, three missionary elders, and fourteen Bhil elders. Rev. Wood began the first class of a

theological college in 1932 with one student. In 1935 there were thirteen, and early in the next year the first Bhils were licensed and ordained by presbytery.

"On January 8, 1936, about 100 friends, Indian and missionary, representing all the congregations of the presbytery, also several non-Christian friends, gathered in the Alirajput church for the graduation of the first Bhil students to complete the three year course of theological studies and practical work. They were Daniel Nahaliya and Ashirivad Bhagwandas. Along with these two young men was Daniel's wife, Welibai, who had completed nearly two years of the course for women students. She had studied along with the men and had shown equal ability with them in her studies." (*Our India Story*, p. 20)

Bhil women active in their congregations, especially those who were teachers, often helped in teaching illiterate Christian women and in witnessing to non-Christians in the villages. These "Bible women" worked with Canadian evangelist Margaret Kennedy who went out to meet Bhil women in their villages, getting to know them in their homes. Later she brought women together in small groups and they studied the Bible, prayed, and shared concerns. Through such programs and with assistance of the Bible women and other Canadian women like Beatrice Scott and Lucie Milne, more and more Bhil women learned to read and write, to reason for themselves, to understand the Christian gospel; they discovered their own call to mission and outreach to others. Gradually they formed women's fellowship groups in their villages and later a presbytery-wide organization.

From the outset, the mission's objective was the formation of self-sustaining congregations with their own places of worship. Many of the early congregations met in the homes of faithful members until they could construct a church building. As soon as they were able, they supported their own evangelists, organized their own Bible training program, and went out to teach in the community. By the 1980s, the evangelism work of the Bhil church was completely the responsibility of Bhil pastors and community leaders. There were congregations in Amkhut, Mendha, Sardi, Chichaniya, Alirajpur, Toran Mal, Barwani, Jobat, Puniyawat, Kathiawara, Barjhar, and Jhabua (see map on centre insert). Some congregations had pastors from the beginning and proceeded to build a church building, a school, and medical dispensary. Others met for years in members' homes, and were led by lay leaders. Some congregations established schools of theology.\* (For more information, see "Bhil mission field timeline" in the appendix.)

\* Each congregation has its own story to tell. See "Story highlights from some Bhil congregations" in the Appendix.

### **Reflecting on church leadership and growth**

By the mid-1940s mission in the Bhil field was changing: "The Presbyterian mission to the Bhils was finding that more and more of the children it was teaching were coming from already Christian homes...The early evangelistic thrust of the mission had been so successful that a paradigm shift was inevitable. The institutions of the mission were now serving a large population of converts." (John F. Scott, *Gifts and Graces: Profiles of Canadian Presbyterian Women*, p.90.)

The world around the Bhil mission was also changing. With World War II in the background, the immediate political and social context of the Indian people moved towards independence. With independence in 1947, the Indian government began to close its borders to new Christian missions and to new missionaries. With shrinking resources and missionaries, The Presbyterian Church in Canada had to re-evaluate: Were Bhil Christians ready to lead their church?

"Official board policy began to stress training the local Christians to prepare them to take over the mission schools and hospitals and to lead the indigenous church that had remained dangerously dependent on foreign resources. But, in many ways, this direction had already been started by visionary individuals in the fields such as Margaret Kennedy and Beatrice Scott...The mission shifted from being one of evangelism to one of discipleship – with a view that only discipleship could lead to greater evangelism."

(John F. Scott in "Raja Yesu Aiya: The Witness of Beatrice Scott" in *Gifts and Graces: Profiles of Canadian Presbyterian Women*, p. 91, 92.)

Feeling the need to find strength in unity, in 1970 the Protestant churches of Northern India, including the Bhil church, united to form the Church of North India. For many Bhils it has been a slow process of feeling part of the united church. Many Bhil Christians retain strong emotional ties with their Canadian Presbyterian sisters and brothers.

### Discussion options

1. What personal relationships have helped, and do help, you grow in faith? How do you help others grow in faith?
2. What concerns or reservations do you have when learners (e.g. children or youth, adult lay people) "graduate" to become leaders. How do you feel about their "readiness"?
3. What might be some of the lessons we can learn from the growth of the Bhil church?

## 4. Respond

Choose one or more of these options.

### Worship

Plan a worship presentation developed out of the theme of this session. It might be a prayer, a story of mission partnership, or a summary of the group's reflections in this session.

### Evangelism, leadership and church growth

Together imagine that all the clergy of your congregation were moving away.

- Who in the congregation would continue the church's ministry?
- How have they been prepared for this?
- What instructions would you want the clergy to give them before they left?

In small groups, create different scenarios and then present them to the whole group. Then together name some of the ways your church instructs its disciples and enables them to lead others to God. Brainstorm other ways that could be tried. Share this discussion with your church's leaders.

### Congregational banner

Bring the banner begun in an earlier session or begin to make one today. Set out the materials and art supplies. Reread Matthew 28:16-20. Add symbols to remind you of the spread of Christianity. (See "Alternatives to Banner Making" on page 5.)

### Mime or liturgical movements

The Great Commission includes the actions to go, make disciples, baptize, and instruct. It is inclusive of "everyone" and "everywhere." Through drama or liturgical movements, create a visual re-enactment of Jesus commissioning the disciples and their response.

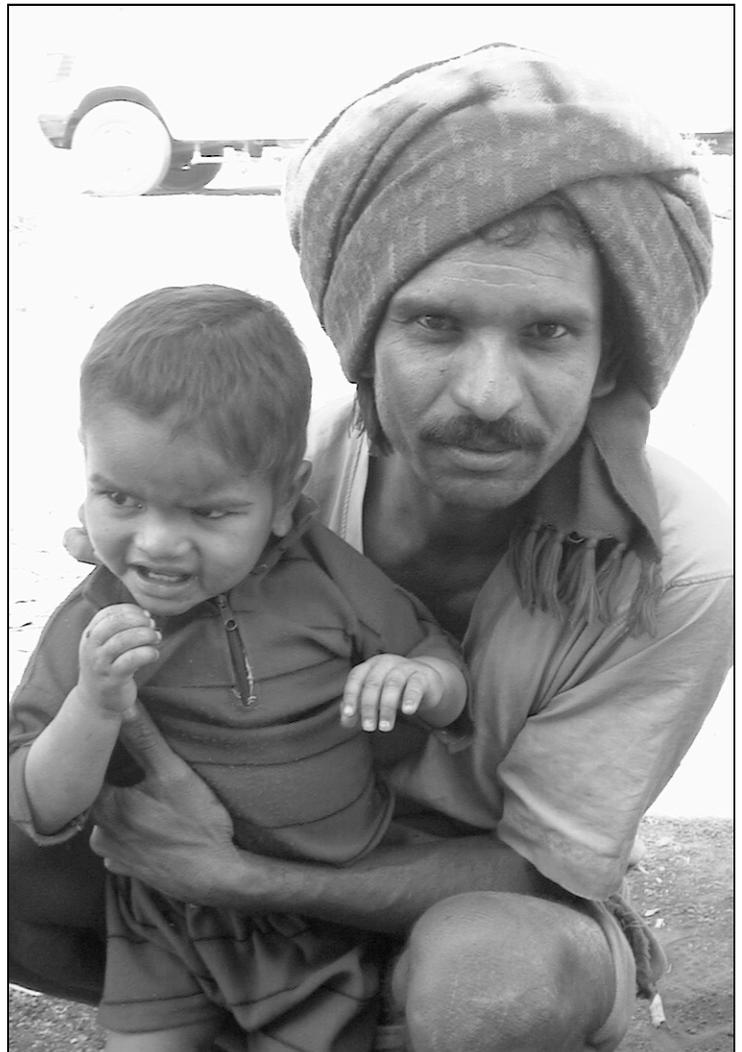


Photo: Wilma Welsh

## 5. Go out into the world

Set up a worship table before the group with the pillar candle, 20 tea light candles, and matches. Invite everyone to assume comfortable positions, and prepare to listen and watch. Have one person read and follow the instructions of the meditation below.

### Meditation

On the evening of March 3, 1948, hundreds of Bhil Christians gathered in the Amkhut valley. It was the end of the day and the end of their daylong celebration of 50 years of Christianity. They gathered in the darkness under a starry sky. (*Dim the lights if possible.*)

The moderator of the Vindhya Satpura Bhil Mountain Presbytery lit a candle. (*Light the pillar candle.*)

Then one by one the Bhil padres came forward and each lit a candle. There was...(as you say each name, light a candle and place it around the pillar candle)... Padre Tezlo Bhai, Padre Jigiyo Bhai, Padre Naku Bhai, Padre Musa Naku, Padre Daniel Hamir, Padre Bhima Ditiya.

Padre Gangji Bhai, the first Bhil minister, had died 16 years before. (*Light another candle.*)

In the 50 years ahead of them, others would be called: (*light a candle as you say each name*) Padre Samuel Tezlo, Padre Jalal Masih Daniel, Padre Salathiel Ezra, Padre Othniel Musa Naku, Padre Arthur Samson, Padre Balwant Rama, Padre Musa Abey who had been an orphan raised in the Abey Home, Padre Sandhya Nelson, the first woman Bhil minister, and Padre Emmanuel Ariel.

On that dark night in 1948 the elders came forward next and each of them lit a candle. Everyone remembered the first Bhil elders: Sri Chimliya and Sri Guman. (*Light two more candles.*)

Then one by one all the people, adults and children, came forward and lit a candle. (*Light two candles.*)

Among them were many lay teachers and Bible women. (*Light the last candle.*)

"Gradually, an ever-increasing sea of light lit up. Then the sea divided into rivers and streamlets as the candle bearers started homeward along many paths. The darkness had been lit and the candle bearers carried their light with them into other dark places."\*

See how the light has grown, spreading out in all directions!!

"What came into existence was Life,  
And the Life was Light to live by.  
The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness;  
The darkness couldn't put it out."\*\*

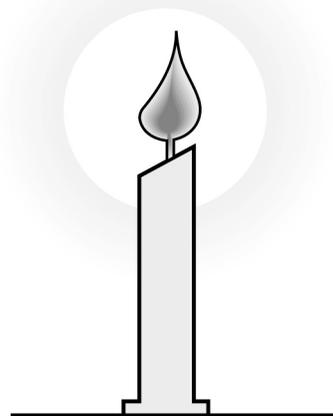
Let us leave this place,  
carrying God's light with us,  
letting it shine for others  
who are seeking God's love and justice. Amen.

### Sing

Hymn #376 "Lord, the light of your love is shining"  
(*Extinguish candles.*)

\* Margaret Kennedy, *Flame of the Forest*, p. 121

\*\* John 1:3-5 from *The Message*



## Session six: Remember and celebrate

# Celebrating as God's people



### Objectives

1. To learn about the ways Bhil Christians remember and celebrate that they are God's people.
2. To reflect on how we remember and celebrate our faith.

**Suggested supplies:** worship centre with white cloth; Bibles and hymn books; cross; goblet and bread (chapati or pita); decorations like flowers, ribbons, bows, tinsel, streamers; *Something Extra 2003\** (*The Presbyterian Church in Canada*), poster board and coloured markers; materials for making crosses or garlands; materials for banner making (cloth, dowelling, string, art supplies); large mat, carpet or blanket.

\*Ask your minister or see "Resources" in the appendix.

### 1. Welcome and prepare

Welcome one another and gather around the worship centre. Place on it a cross, a Bible open to John's gospel, a communion goblet and some bread/chapati or pita. Add decorations like flowers, ribbons and bows, tinsel and streamers saying that we are decorating because today we will be reflecting on how we celebrate our faith.

Print in the middle of a large sheet of poster board the word "JOY" in big, bold letters. Together talk about the feeling of joy – an emotion of extreme happiness. What other words and phrases do group members associate with "joy"? Invite everyone to add these words and phrases, as well as any images that come to mind, to the poster using coloured markers.

In pairs or small groups, share

- a moment of joy from your personal life.
- a moment of joy from the life of your church.
- a moment of joy from church worship.

Come together and talk about the different ways people today express their feelings of joy.

### 2. Worship

#### Pray

"Make a joyful noise to the Lord" by reading in unison, with joy, the following version of Psalm 100!

On your feet now – applaud GOD!  
Bring a gift of laughter,  
sing yourselves into his presence.  
Know this: GOD is God, and God, GOD.  
He made us; we didn't make him.  
We're his people, his well-tended sheep.  
Enter with the password: "Thank you!"  
Make yourselves at home, talking praise.  
Thank him. Worship him.  
For GOD is sheer beauty,  
all-generous in love,  
loyal always and ever. Amen.  
(Psalm 100 from *The Message*)

## Sing

Look in the back of your hymn book in the topical index for the topic "joy." Select one or two joyful hymns to sing. If members know "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart," sing it together.

## Hear the Word of God

Invite one person to read the following passage while everyone else listens:

"Fix this firmly in your minds: You're going to be in deep mourning while the godless world throws a party. You'll be sad, very sad, but your sadness will develop into gladness.

"When a woman gives birth, she has a hard time, there's no getting around it. But when the baby is born, there is joy in the birth. This new life in the world wipes out memory of the pain. The sadness you have right now is similar to that pain, but the coming joy is also similar. When I see you again, you'll be full of joy, and it will be a joy no one can rob from you. You'll no longer be so full of questions.

"This is what I want you to do: Ask the Father for whatever is in keeping with the things I've revealed to you. Ask in my name, according to my will, and he'll most certainly give it to you. Your joy will be a river overflowing its banks!" (John 16:20-24 *The Message*)

Jesus spoke these words to his disciples shortly before the Last Supper. He was reminding them of their relationship with him and with God, and giving their community the promise of a joy beyond measure. Bhil Christians can identify with a joy that is like "a river overflowing its banks." As Bhil Christians proclaim their faith every day in the face of discrimination, injustice, poverty and religious persecution, they remember God and give thanks for the good news of Jesus Christ and the difference it has made, and is making, in their lives.

### Reflecting on the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

Did Jesus' commission include words of joy? "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." With these words he ended his commissioning of the eleven disciples. He gave them words of hope and comfort. He gave the promise of his presence and the power of the Holy Spirit "day after day after day." Perhaps the growth of the Bhil church and gatherings of people like yourself to reflect on the meaning of your faith in your time and culture are the best evidence that the promise has been kept. Rejoice and give thanks to God!

### 3. Hear the story: The Bhil church remembers and celebrates

Invite everyone to hear the story of the partnership between Canadian Presbyterians and the Bhil people of Central India. The story continues as we hear a story about Bhil Christians remembering and celebrating their faith.

In 1997 the Bhil church was 100 years old. Thirteen Canadian Presbyterians accepted the invitation to celebrate with their Bhil sisters and brothers. And what a celebration it was! Nothing had prepared the Canadians for the outpouring of joy and thankfulness for the mission partnership that had brought the good news of Jesus Christ. The Canadians were also amazed at the outpouring of joy and thankfulness to God as the Bhil Christians openly expressed the deep faith that sustains them. Like at Pentecost, in the midst of cultural and language differences, came the overwhelming experience of a oneness of the Spirit.

In a show of hospitality characteristic of Bhil culture, the Bhils welcomed the Canadians with dancing and drumming, placing garlands over each person's head, presenting beaded necklaces to the women and jackets to the men, and one of the elderly men — who could recall the days of John Buchanan — had carved a teak cross for each visitor to wear as a pendant. Also, Bhil church elders were presented with shawls.

The celebrations took place over a weekend at the Amkhut mission. Bhil Christians — adults and children — came from the twelve congregations of the Bhil field, from their scattered villages, some walking for more than a day over the hilly terrain, carrying bedding, clothing, and food.



Photo: Catherine Inglis

The two-day anniversary program included words of welcome and formal presentations; entertainment of cultural dancing, singing, and drama; worship; and sharing meals. A huge canopied area was set up and decorated in a field just below the church. Mats and carpets were spread out on the ground under the tent and chairs were set up for the Canadian visitors who were less accustomed to sitting cross-legged on the hard ground for hours. Meals for the crowd were no easy feat. On the arid hillside with grazing goats and sheep, the outdoor cooking facilities were little different than 100 years ago. Women cooked the meals on open fires—imagine providing a hot lunch in such a way for so many people after church! Overwhelmed by the number of Bhil villagers who had streamed into the mission, the hosts wondered how their food supplies would last. Would there be sufficient food for the final meal? The people and their churches were poor. How would they acquire enough food to cook for all these people? Would they just serve tea and sweets? Someone donated a few kilos of rice; someone else donated a few kilos of dal. One by one additional donations came and before the planning committee knew it, there was enough food to feed the hungry participants—a handful of steamed rice, a ladleful of dal, a chapati all served on a large leaf. No utensils were provided except to the Canadian guests. The Bhils were adept at breaking off pieces of the chapati and manipulating them to scoop up the food.

The most moving part of the celebration was undoubtedly Sunday morning. The Canadians gathered outside the bungalow—the first building that Bhil people had constructed under John Buchanan's supervision, still standing firmly atop the hill overlooking the mission. The scene below included the church, school and dispensary — a reminder of the original vision of the mission, to minister to the whole Bhil person. Looking across the mission, the Canadians could also see the line of Bhil Christians coming toward the mission from town—people of all ages, some being of the third and fourth generation of Christians. They were all dressed in their finest white clothes—the women wore traditional saris or pant suits called "shalwar kameez"—for this was a celebration of God's great love. And as the Bhils paraded toward the tent for Sunday worship, and as the Canadians weaved down the hill to meet them, they called out to one another, completing each other's sentence.

"Ye-su Ma-sih..."\*

"...Ki Jai..."\*

"Jesus Christ..."

"...reigns..."

\*Pronounced "Yey-zoo Maah-see Key Jighe"

The phrases came like echoes from the hills, reminding the Bhils of other great occasions in the history of their church when they had shouted out their faith.

Removing their shoes as they entered their place of worship, almost 2,000 people gathered—Canadian and Bhil—as one body under the canopy. They heard the word of God, they prayed, and they sang familiar hymns in both languages. Communion was celebrated the "Bhil way" with pieces of chapati and raisin juice poured into cups made from folding tree leaves. "The body of Christ broken for you...The blood of Christ shed for you... Eat... Drink... in remembrance of me." The familiar acts and words of worship took on new meaning for the Canadians who were learning how the good news quenches the spiritual hunger and thirst of Bhil people. For the Bhil Christians, the 100th anniversary celebration of their church was more than a celebration of mission partnership with The Presbyterian Church in Canada, more than thankfulness for the ministries of Canadian missionaries, more than a recognition of 100 years of active evangelism. For Bhil Christians, they were celebrating what God has done among the Bhils, what God is still doing, and what God will continue to do for God's people.

### **Reflecting on celebrating our faith**

"We do not celebrate our faith well."

"We do not know how to celebrate our faith."

These are comments from Canadian churchgoers who have been part of weekly worship services where church members sing praises halfheartedly, daydream during prayers, evaluate the entertainment merits of the sermon, and emerge as though they are just glad "that's over with" for another week. Why do our worship services so rarely resemble the "little Easter celebrations" that each Sunday is meant to be? When was the last time we "shouted out" our faith?

People of faith like the Bhil Christians often wonder at our frequent absences from worship – even our church elders may go only once or twice a month and "take the summer off," at our reluctance to speak about what God has done in our lives, at the lack of joy in our worship, and at our tendency to celebrate one another's accomplishments – or our congregation's years of existence, or our church building projects – more often and with more emotion than any celebration of God's greatness.

Rev. Ann Blane sometimes finds herself straddling two ways of expressing her faith. Being the daughter of Rev. J.W. (Bill) and Mrs. Lucie Milne, she was raised in the Bhil mission field. She grew up playing, learning, and worshipping beside Bhil Christians. Today, as a minister at the one-point charge of Centreville Presbyterian Church in South Monaghan in central Ontario, she misses the frequent, uninhibited emotional expressions of faith of her youth. She appreciates how Bhil Christians remember and celebrate God not only in worship, but also through their everyday living. In 2002 Ann attended the funeral visitation for Padre Jalal Daniel. Ann's father and Padre Daniel had worked together in Jobat in evangelism and literacy. Padre Daniel had spent his last years living in southern Ontario. After spending some time with other family members, Ann was about to leave the funeral home when she passed the main room. Friends and relatives were having an impromptu worship service, singing hymn after hymn, joyfully praising God, praying for Padre Daniel and his family, and sharing stories. Ann joined the group. At the end of the worship service of celebration, much to Ann's surprise, one family member invited her to pronounce the benediction. As she sang and prayed with them, she thought about how rarely Canadian Presbyterians express their faith so spontaneously or with such joy.

### **Discussion options**

1. Bhil Christians remember daily what God has done for them and they respond with joy. How does this compare with the way Presbyterians in Canada live their faith?
2. What does it mean to you to celebrate what God has done, what God is still doing, and what God will continue to do for God's people?

## 4. Respond

Choose one or more of these options.

### Worship

Plan a worship presentation developed out of the themes of this session. It might be a prayer, a story of mission partnership, or a summary of the group's reflection in this session. How can you bring into your worship some of the emotional, celebratory faith of our Bhil sisters and brothers?

### Celebrate

Plan an event of celebration for your congregation at which time they could learn about and from their Bhil brothers and sisters. Make this an event that is in full view of the broader community. Refer to the Appendix for recipes and craft ideas, as well as the children and youth study *Partners – Meeting Bhil Friends in Central India*. As you discuss plans, make crosses or garlands (see Craft Ideas in the Appendix) for one another today.

### Mission and evangelism and justice

- Pray for the Bhil church, their leaders and their members, and for all Bhil people. Bhil Christians say over and over again how they pray for us, their Canadian brothers and sisters, almost weekly.
- Support one of the two programs of our mission partner, the Church of North India (see "Supporting our mission partner").
- Share the love of God with other people who, like the Bhils, are marginalized and impoverished, cut off from God's love. Who might they be?

### Make a congregational banner

Bring the banner begun in an earlier session. Set out the materials and art supplies. Reread Matthew 28:16-20. Add symbols to tell about the joy of the good news and Jesus' promise to be with us always. Plan to present the completed banner to the congregation for hanging in the sanctuary. How might it become part of commissioning services in your church?

## Supporting our mission partner

Our support for the partnership of Presbyterians in Canada and the Bhil people in Central India continues today through *Presbyterians Sharing...*, Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D), and special gifts; it includes mission staff, special projects and programs, and exposure tours and exchanges. For example:

- We continue to walk with our Bhil brothers and sisters as they keep up the tradition of educating children. With our support, our partner church, the Church of North India, continues to operate the Helen MacDonald Memorial School in Jhansi and the Isobel McConnell School of Nursing in Jobat that provide opportunities for disadvantaged Indians like the Bhil people. Dr. Deborah Tezlo, medical director of the Jobat Hospital, and several of her sisters attended Helen Macdonald Memorial School. Dr. Tezlo has said that it is only because of such schools, and the Christian witness of the teachers, that she and her sisters have become what they are today: a Christian doctor, nurse and teachers, all born tribals, and currently leaders among leaders in the church and in their communities.
- We continue to work with our Bhil brothers and sisters as they strive to improve health care in their communities. With support from Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Church of North India runs the Synodical Board of Health Services community health program, based in Jobat and Mendha with sub-centres in Amkhut and Sardi. This program trains village health workers to teach people in their communities how to prevent diarrhea, tetanus, and other diseases. They combat malnutrition by teaching the importance of good nutrition and help families set up gardens for fruits and vegetables. They work with local hospitals in immunization campaigns, which are greatly improving the children's survival. They educate villagers about the importance of proper sanitation and clean water and they help women through pregnancy, at birth, and in the post-partum period. Bhil woman, Mercy Ravikant, born and raised in Amkhut, is currently the director of nursing of the program.

Groups interested in supporting a project in the Bhil region can check out the *Something Extra* book (see "Resources" in the Appendix).

## 5. Go out into the world

Spread out a large mat, carpet or blanket in the middle of your meeting space. Invite those who wish to remove their shoes and stand in a circle on the mat. Practice saying the phrase "Yesu Masih ki jai" (pronounced "Yey-zoo Maah-see Key Jighe"). With feeling, pray together:

All: Alleluia!  
Group One: Yesu Masih ki jai!  
Group Two: Jesus Christ reigns!  
Group One: We are God's people!  
Group Two: God loves every one of us!  
Group One: God loves all creation so much –  
Group Two: So much that God gave Jesus, God's one and only Son.  
Group One: Now no one needs to be destroyed –  
Group Two: Not by discrimination or hate!  
Group One: Not by bullying or abuse!  
Group Two: Not by injustice or greed!  
Group One: No! No child of God needs to be destroyed by anything.  
Group Two: God loves us so much that anyone who trusts Jesus –  
Group One: Anyone who works and lives in truth,  
Group Two: Anyone who welcomes the light of God –  
Group One: Can live as a conductor of that light,  
Group Two: Can radiate God's light in all their living.  
Group One: Yes! God loves the world that much.  
Group Two: Yesu Masih ki jai! Jesus Christ reigns!  
All: Alleluia! Amen.

(Inspired by John 3:16-21 in *The Message*)

### **Sing**

Hymn #557 "Shout for joy! The Lord has let us feast," #772 "Christ for the world we sing" or #574 "With the Lord as my guide"

### **Commissioning**

*(If garlands or crosses have been made, present them as each person is named.)*

Go now *(naming one another)*,  
to those places where people feel separated from God,  
go and tell everyone you meet there  
about being a disciple,  
mark each person with baptism,  
teach each person about living God's way,  
and remember all the time  
that in all you say and do,  
you are never alone,  
God goes with you always. Amen.  
(Repeat for each person.)

# Appendix

## 1. Bhil mission field timeline

### a) Canadian Presbyterian Bhil field missionaries in 1935

Location	Name	Date of arrival	Position on field
Amkhut	Rev. John & Mrs. Buchanan	1897 (in India since 1889)	Evangelism, medical, education
	(Mrs. Mary Buchanan died in Amkhut on May 15th, 1935)		
	Miss Bertha Robson	1912	Education
	Miss C. Maxwell	1926	Evangelism
	Miss M. H. Williamson	1927	Education
	Miss I. Errey, R.N.	1932	Abey Home
	(replaced Miss M. Soutar, R.N. who died suddenly in Amkhut in 1933)		
	Miss M. Sherrick	1933	Education
Mendha	Rev. C.P. & Mrs. Young	1927	Evangelism
(arrived in Jhansi 1921)			
Alirajpur	Rev. C.L. & Mrs. Wood	1930	Evangelism
Jobat	Rev. D.E. & Mrs. McDonald	1911	Evangelism
	(1st appointment was in Sardi)		
	Miss I. McConnell, R.N.	1927	Medical
	Dr. & Mrs. John Howie	1929	Medical
	(Dr. & Mrs. Maitland were in Jobat for a short period 1927-1928)		
	Miss E. Douglas	1930	Evangelism
	Miss B. MacMurchy, R.N.	1932	Medical
Barwani	Mr. & Mrs. A.E. Toombs	1927	Evangelism
	Dr. & Mrs. T. Draper	1929	Medical
(Bhil mission field timeline cont'd)			

### b) Canadian Presbyterian Bhil field missionaries at the half century mark of the mission

Rev. Clarence & Mrs. Amber Wood	Evangelism
Mr. & Mrs. A.E. Toombs	Evangelism
Rev. Fred & Mrs. Maggie Knox	Evangelism
Dr. & Mrs. W.R. Quinn	Medical
Mr. & Mrs. G.K. Agar	Evangelism
Miss Mary Sherrick	Education
Miss Ellen Douglas	Evangelism-Education
Miss Marian Williamson	Education
Miss Margaret Kennedy	Evangelism
Miss Isobel McConnell, R.N.	Medical
Miss Beatrice Scott	Education (Amkhut)
Miss Bessie MacMurchy, R.N.	Medical
Miss Gertrude Rollo	Medical
Miss Mary Nichol, R.N.	Medical (Jobat)
Dr. Effie Winchester	Medical (left after brief service due to ill health)

**c) Canadian Presbyterian Bhil field missionaries at various periods of service from 1950 to 1970 (in alphabetical order)**

Miss Helen Acton, R.N.	Hospital (Jobat)
Miss Ruth Bentley	Married and left before appointment
Miss Pauline Brown, R.N.	Public Health Unit
Dr. & Mrs. Carter	Hospital
Dr. & Mrs. Ian Cunningham	Hospital
Miss Mildred Gehman, R.N.	Medical-Vellore
Miss Agnes Hislop	Evangelism (Lay leadership)
Mr. Roger & Mrs. Marjorie Horrell	Economic development
Rev. Desmond & Mrs. Nancy Howard	Evangelism
Miss Mary Lankin, R.N.	Hospital
Rev. Alvin & Mrs. McIntosh	Evangelism
Rev. Bill & Mrs. Lucie Milne	Evangelism/Famine relief
Miss Doreen Morrison, R.N.	Public Health Unit
Mr. & Mrs. John Murray	Business manager
Miss Catherine Polson (McMullan), R.N.	Married and left before appointment
Miss Audrey Prendergast	Hospital (came from Jhansi)
Miss Susan Sargent (Stevens) R.N.	Married
Miss Lily Simpson, R.N.	Hospital
Miss Irene Stringer	Education
Miss Ida White, R.N.	Public Health Unit
Dr. Jack & Mrs. Joyce Williams	Hospital

**d) Chronological growth of the Bhil church**

- 1877 Founding of the Canadian Presbyterian mission in Central India
- 1886 The Presbytery of Indore of The Presbyterian Church in Canada was formed
- 1898 Dr. John & Dr. Mary Buchanan began work among Bhil tribals
- 1905 The Presbytery of Indore became Nalwa Presbytery
- 1909 Congregations were organized in Amkhut, Sardi and Mendha. There was a total of 521 Christians. Mendha had 89 Christians (2 supported by church funds). Amkhut had 289 Christians (101 communicant). Sardi had 143 Christians. 10 of the 521 Christians were supported by the church as teachers and preachers. (Missionaries tithed 10 per cent of their salaries to the church.)

"A Minute in Presbytery states – that in view of the distinct nature of the work among the Bhils and with a view to self-support as soon as possible, the Bhil Christians should not be employed as Bible readers and catechists by the presbytery or by the mission. Local churches were to support the workers. This pattern of support was kept for many years until the growth of the educational and medical ministries was such that those trained for the work had to be regularly employed by the mission. However, the emphasis on self-support for ministers and congregational expenses had a lasting effect." (Margaret Kennedy in *Flame of the Forest*, page 69)

"The first leaders were Chimliya, Guman (the first elder in Amkhut) and Gangji (the first ordained pastor and later the first moderator of the Vindhya-Satpura Presbytery). Gangji traveled throughout the countryside with a blind fiddler who played folk tunes to which Gangji set new words telling the gospel story." (Ibid, p. 64.)

- 1913 There were 902 Christians. 19 teachers and pastors were still paid from church funds. Jigiyo (Padre) and Veriyo (Teacher) had translated the Gospel of Mark from Hindi into Bhili. Naku, Tezlo and Daniel were other early ordained pastors. All had sons who became pastors as well. Naku's grandson, Othniel, is today also a pastor.
- 1914 The Amkhut church was opened and was used for the Amkhut school. Miss Bertha Robson started the school and lived in one room of the church building. (The "ladies bungalow" was not built until 1921.)
- 1915 Amkhut had 750 communicant members including 8 elders, 24 teachers and preachers.
- 1921 There were 20 Christians in Chichaniya.

- 1925 The Bhil church became a presbytery of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Prior to 1925 there had been a total of 90 missionaries in Central India. Three missionary couples and a single woman were left in the Bhil field area (ongoing Canadian Presbyterian mission work).
- 1928 The Vindya Satpura Mountain Bhil Presbytery was formed. In Bhabara, Chetsingh, an outcast Hindu, became a Christian. In Verger some Patliyas became Christians. Both met with opposition from Christian Bhils. The Bhil church had to learn that the church is not only for Bhil Christians.
- 1929 The first Christian converts were baptized by Mr. McDonald.
- 1931 There were 120 Christians in Jobat. (Some of these Christians came from Amkhut to work in the Jobat Hospital.)
- 1933 Zahoun Esaghar (Zion Christian Church) was built by the Christian people in Jobat. Jigiyo was the first pastor and there was an all Indian session and board of managers. Four sub-stations were under the care of the Jobat session – Chichaniya, with 10 families (ante-dated Jobat), Borjhar (opened 1931). Nanji Bhai, and Jobat elder, worked there and lived in a house built by the Jobat church. Piperiyapani and Kukshi were opened in 1932. The Barwani church was dedicated.
- 1935 6 adults were baptized in Barwani (these were the first baptisms in the State because of prior opposition). Tezlo, an evangelist in Toran Mal (later an ordained pastor) became home missionary of presbytery. Ordained, he lived in Jhabua State having 145,000 villages in his parish.
- 1937 Malwa Presbytery (U.C.C.) leaders agreed that work among Balais around Khalghat and east of Barwani was to be the responsibility of the Vindhya-Satpura Presbytery and the Presbyterian mission. Work began in Balkhar among Balais.
- 1960's There was a moving of the spirit in Anchpulla. Among the Bhilalas 14-15 received baptism. At Jalkhan Jalal Padre (first Bhil to receive a B.D. from Serampore College) came with Dan Evangelist and found 31 people waiting for baptism.
- 1967 Christian Training Centre is opened in Jobat. J.W. (Bill) Milne first director followed by Rev. Jalal M. Daniel. Balwant (evangelist) was the manager.
- 1968 The joint evangelistic committee of mission and presbytery turned over responsibilities to Presbytery which was to be called the Vindhya-Satpura Church Council of the United Church of North India.\*
- \*In 1958 it had been decided that financial take-over by the Indian church would take place at the rate of 10 per cent a year for 10 years. In 1968 the church was giving support of 331/376, therefore evangelists were let go into other jobs – teaching, farming, Every Home Crusade work, chaplaincy and C.T.C. manager. A last gathering and send off was held in 1970.
- Mission council turned over its responsibilities in medical, educational and economic development work, buildings maintenance and financial matters to the Vindhya-Satpura Administrative Council of Christian Institutions – Inauguration of the A.C.C.I. was October 30, 1968.
- 1970 In November the Vindhya-Satpura church council entered the Church of North India as a self-supporting body. Pastors were paid by their congregations.
- November 29,  
1970 Church of North India is born.
- April 1971 First synod of the Church of North India is held, Ayub Elder was a representative.
- October 28-31,  
1971 First synodical of Women's Fellowship for Christian Service is held.
- March  
1973 Diamond jubilee of Bhil field mission.
- November  
1997 Jubilee celebrations to mark the 100th anniversary of Christianity among the Bhils.

From *Contributions of Christian Mission to Malwa – 1877 to 1977* by Lucie Milne and A.B. Shiwaji, edited by Dr. David, Hindi Theological Literature Committee, Indore. (This book is printed in Hindi.)

## 2. Story highlights from some Bhil congregations\*

### **The Amkhut congregation**

grew out of the Buchanan's early efforts. Mary Buchanan led Bible study classes each day and John Buchanan led evening prayer meetings. Two men, Sri Chimliya and Sri Guman, trained with the support of the Mendha congregation, became the first elders to the Amkhut church. When the church building was constructed in 1914, it included classrooms for both a school and seminary.

### **The Mendha congregation**

was founded in an area notorious for crime. People in Mendha came to Dr. Buchanan's attention while the mission was building a nearby road in 1902. Many Mendha men came for construction work and, therefore, heard the preaching of the gospel. Many became Christians. With the appointment of missionaries to Mendha, the congregation grew quickly. Soon it had raised enough money to support two evangelists and to train leaders for other congregations. Once the church building had been constructed, the church built a school and organized a community health program.

### **The Sardi congregation**

is located in the centre of a number of small villages that the Amkhut congregation had served, initially by the Buchanans, but as soon as possible, by Bhil leaders. During the Great Famine, the mission assisted the area with the start of an agricultural project. The community responded with the building of a lake and taking care of livestock. Worship services were originally held on the verandah of the mission bungalow. Since the congregation was established in 1909 many pastors and church leaders have emerged from this congregation to serve the larger Bhil church, yet a church building was not constructed until 1951.

### **Chichaniya congregation**

got its start when some of the early Bhil converts moved into this village during the Great Famine. There they married villagers and settled. They received fields for cultivation and were taught to become self-sufficient. Chichaniya church was the first Bhil church building constructed in the Vindha Satpura region. Yet, for years there was not a permanent pastor so the church elders were responsible for Sunday services.

### **Jobat congregation**

was begun when, in 1920, the rana or ruler of Jobat gave land to the mission. There were actually few Christians in the village of Jobat and its surrounding area. However, people from Mendha and Amkhut came and helped with the building of a hospital and mission bungalow. In 1933 the church building was constructed. Over the years a number of villages came under the care of the Jobat congregation as sub-stations of the mission. In 1997, 65-year-old Padre Arthur Samuel was the minister of Jobat and nine other congregations that were situated anywhere from 19 to 55 km from Jobat. The "charge" had a total of 1,639 confessing members.

### **Barjhar congregation**

was formed when the first missionaries came and a small cluster of families in the village of Barjhar became Christians. However, there was so much opposition in the community that Christianity almost vanished. As a result of the dedication of two Christian school teachers, pastoral care from the Jobat, Mendah and Amkhut congregations, and a pastor in the 1980s, the church was revitalized. In 1996 the church building was dedicated.

\* Twelve congregations in total formed in the Bhil mission field. One, Toran Mal, was taken over by a Swedish mission and is no longer a church. The other congregations, including the six described above, continue today.

## 3. Recipes

### Chapatis

3 cups whole wheat flour, a cup water, a pinch of salt, 2 tablespoons of oil

Mix flour, water, salt and oil, adjusting the amount of water so that it becomes a stiff dough. The dough can be kept covered a few hours or overnight before kneading. Knead the dough until the texture is smooth and elastic. Pinch off the dough to make 15 balls. Flatten each ball between the palms of your hand and roll out on a well-floured board to a circle with a diameter of about 15 cm. (7 in.). Roll out three at a time but no more or they will dry out. Heat a heavy skillet or griddle until hot. Then one by one place the chapatis on the heat. Chapatis sometimes, but not always, blow up like little balloons after a minute, particularly with some light pressure from the touch of the back of a spoon. When the bottom starts to brown, flip over. As they are removed place them in a basket covered with cloth.

Makes 15 chapatis.

### Dal

1 ½ cups orange split peas

1 teaspoon salt

3 cups vegetable stock or water

2 tablespoons oil

1 tablespoon black mustard seed

½ green pepper

1 onion

1 teaspoon tumeric powder

1 teaspoon cumin powder

juice of one lemon

Boil split peas in salted vegetable stock for about 30 minutes until they are tender but not so long that they lose their shape. The peas should be rather dry, like mashed potatoes. Chop onions and green pepper. Heat oil in a large heavy pan with a lid. Add mustard seed to hot oil and cover. Allow to brown, but not fully. This takes a short time. Carefully peek as the seeds jump like popcorn. Stir in tumeric, curry powder, onion, and green pepper. Sauté until vegetables are soft. Then add to peas along with the lemon juice.

Serves 6 to 8.

### Chicken Curry

1 whole chicken cut up

1 tablespoon oil

2 potatoes, washed and cubed

1 medium onion, sliced

1-2 tablespoons curry powder or curry paste

1-2 cloves garlic, minced

2-3 cups water or chicken broth

1 teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon pepper

Cook onions and seasonings in oil. Cut up chicken pieces and add, mixing well. Brown chicken and onions. Then place in a large pot with the potatoes. Pour the chicken broth over the chicken and potatoes just to cover. Cook on low to medium heat for 30-45 minutes, adding more broth as necessary. Serve over rice.

### Indian Tea

4 teaspoons black tea, 2 cups boiling water, 2 cups hot milk, one cinnamon stick, cardamom, sugar

Bring water to rolling boil and pour over tea leaves and spices. Brew the tea for 5 minutes and strain into a large teapot.

Add very hot milk and sugar.

## 4. Craft ideas

### Banners

Have group members share their experience with making banners and their ideas about how they'd like the banner to look. Many resources (in the library and on the Internet) are available to groups that want to research the possibilities and get a range of ideas before beginning. Together plan the details of the banner you will make. Banners can be any size or colour, any style or image, simple or ornate, depending on ability and ambition. They can be made of almost anything. Banners can be made of any firm cloth, or backed with a sturdy cloth to help them hang straight. Felt, burlap and canvas are obvious choices, but moire fabric, an old bedsheet or light weight broadcloth (for an outside banner) are other good choices. Decorations can be drawn on with waterproof markers, fabric paint or acrylic paint, glued or sewn on depending on the style of the banner and your abilities. Decorations and lettering can be made of buttons, ribbon, braid, strings of wool arranged to form words and held on with stitches across it, or anything else you might have. Keep the design simple, make sure you agree who is doing what and by when. You might want to draw the design to a scale you are comfortable with and then use a photocopier to get it to the right size.

### Garlands

There is no right or wrong way to make a garland. The Bhil Christians made garlands using materials that were available and affordable in their particular village. In some cases the garlands were strings of flowers, in other cases they were strings of peanuts in the shell. Use a fine cotton twine or floss and a needle, and make garlands that use items available to you in your community such as: dandelions, pine cones, flower petals (e.g. tulip, rose, peony), peanuts in the shell, recycled bows or ribbons or strips of wrapping paper, tinsel, or fabric strips.

### Cross pendants

#### 1. Wood cross pendants

The teak crosses made by the Bhil man were made from wood about  $\frac{1}{4}$  in or  $\frac{3}{4}$  cm. The vertical piece was 4 in. or 8.5 cm. and the horizontal piece was 3 in. or 5.5 cm. Similar crosses could be made using  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. oak and equipment like a table saw with a dado blade or with a router, and/or chisel to fit the horizontal piece over the vertical piece in a dado joint and using a little carpenter's glue. Lastly, drill a hole through the side of the vertical piece and thread some leather lacing or cord (76 cm. or 30 in.) to wear the cross as a pendant.

#### 2. Beaded Cross Pendants

Beaded crosses can be made using pony beads (wood or plastic). To make one cross pendant you will need: seven wooden beads of the same colour, 1 wooden bead of a different colour, 1 black round sport shoelace 36 in. or 91 cm. long, glue (optional). Pony beads (100 assorted in one package) can be purchased in craft shops or craft sections of large retail stores.

1. Fold the lacing in half and hold the two string ends together.
2. Thread two same-coloured beads onto both strings. You may have to ease one through the hole and then the other. Push them down over both strings to within about  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. or 1 cm. of the fold, keeping the lace folded in half.
3. Take two more same-coloured beads. Thread one onto each string and then push them along a little toward the folded end.
4. Holding the two ends together again, thread the three remaining same-coloured beads onto both strings. Again you may have to ease one through the hole and then the other. Push them along a little toward the folded end.
5. At the other open end, tie the two strings of the lacing together in a knot as near to their ends as possible.
6. Push two of the beads up towards the knot.
7. Push the other bead that is on both strings towards the beads that are individually strung.
8. Lay the pendant on a flat surface and adjust the position of the beads so that the two on the separate strings are side by side with the other beads close by, above and below.
9. Take the different coloured bead and turn it sideways, placing it between the strings so that the holes face the single-strung beads.
10. Push the double strung bead above them down, adjusting the beads' positions until they make a cross-shape with the different coloured bead wedged in and held in place. You may add glue if you wish to hold the bead in.



## 5. Resources

The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 50 Wynford Dr., Toronto, ON M3C 1J7  
Telephone 416-441-1111, 1-800-619-7301, Fax 416-441-2825 Email: bookroom@presbyterian.ca

### Books

The following books are preserved in the Church's Archives in Toronto but may still be available in your church library.

*Flame of the Forest* by Dr. Margaret F. Kennedy. The Board of World Mission, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1980.

*Jungle Tales* by Dr. John Buchanan. Thorn Press, Toronto, 1938.

The following books are available from The Book Room at the above location.

*Called to Witness: Profiles of Canadian Presbyterians*, Volume 1, edited by W. Stanford Reid. Presbyterian Publications, 1975.

*Gifts and Graces: Profiles of Canadian Presbyterian Women*, edited by John S. Moir. The Presbyterian Church in Canada, Eagle Press, 1999.

*Living Faith: A Statement of Christian Belief*, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, Wood Lake Books, 1984.

*Partners – Meeting Bhil Friends in Central India* (A Mission Learning/Sharing Experience for Children and Youth), The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2003.

*Something Extra*, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2003.

*Standing with the Persecuted: A Worship Resource*, Justice Ministries, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2003.

*The Book of Common Worship*, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1991.

### Videos

*Bhil Kids* (2001) (Kids Around the World Series, Caleb Project)  
10 minutes, available for rental from The Book Room (see address above)  
The culture, beliefs and day-to-day life of Bhil people.

*India Earthquake* (2001)  
14 minutes, available for rental from Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D) (see address above)  
The Church of North India response to the earthquake with scenes from the Bhil Mission Field.

*Who is My Neighbour?* (1993)  
29 minutes, available for rental with study guide from The Book Room (see address above)  
The Church of North India with a segment about tribal people.

A photocopied collection of the following resources is available from the Book Room for \$5.00.

*Bhil Field Stories*, Thorn Press, Toronto, 1944.

*100 Years of Mission to the Bhil Field* compiled by Catherine Inglis, 1997.

"The India Experience" by Esther Powell (published in *Glad Tidings*, March/April 1998).

"Will the Bell Ring Again?" by Margaret Vanderzweerde (published in the *Presbyterian Record*, February 1997).