

30,000 'Pilgrims of Hope' Gather for 26th Annual Catholic Mega Bible Convention in Srikakulam Diocese

30,000 Pilgrims of Hope: A Catholic Journey of Faith, Sacrifice, and Unshakable Belief in Srikakulam.

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[/EINPresswire.com/](https://EINPresswire.com/) -- They walked for miles, some with nothing but the clothes on their backs and a prayer on their lips. Others crammed into buses that rattled over roads carved by time itself. They came because something was calling them—something bigger than hunger, bigger than struggle, bigger than the lives they left behind, if only for a few days.

More than 30,000 tribal Catholics from Odisha and beyond converged on Srikakulam for what would become a living testament to faith, resilience, and the quiet power of belief. The 26th Annual Catholic Mega Bible Convention, held from March 6-9, wasn't just a gathering—it was a force. A spiritual current pulling thousands toward a single purpose, a single truth: faith isn't passive. It moves. It breathes. It transforms.

At the helm of this extraordinary event was Bishop Rayarala Vijay Kumar, a man who doesn't just speak of faith—he builds it. For the first time, this convention took place in a non-tribal parish, shifting the lens so that others—priests, laypeople, onlookers—could witness the depth of tribal devotion. And what they saw changed them.



The air, thick with the scent of incense and earth, stirred as prayers rose like smoke. Hymns swelled, voices lifted, hands pressed together in unison. And as night draped itself over Srikakulam, the energy didn't wane—it intensified. A tide of faith, moving without force, only purpose.

Faith in Motion

Among those leading the charge were Cardinal Anthony Poola, Metropolitan Archbishop of Hyderabad; Archbishop Udumala Bala Showreddy of Visakhapatnam; and Bishop Aplanar Senapati of Rayagada, Odisha. Their presence was a reminder that the Church isn't built on walls, but on people—people who refuse to let their faith be anything less than a living, breathing entity.



Also present were Father Vijay Reddy, Pastoral Center Director; Father Jose, President of the Tribal Convention; Father Jonnes, Secretary of the TCBC Tribal Affairs; and Father Vijay Nayak from Delhi.

Bishop Rayarala looked at the sea of faces before him and uttered the words that would thread through every moment of the convention:

“Your faith has saved you.”

The tribal communities don't just believe in God—they live in a way that makes you believe.

Some came assuming they would be among the poor. That belief shattered within hours.

“Many assume that tribal communities are economically disadvantaged or less developed,” the bishop shared. “But when we see how they live, we learn something profound. They are among the most organized, resourceful, and talented people in India.”

It was true.

Carpenters, musicians, artists, and construction workers—people whose hands shaped the world around them—stood shoulder to shoulder, not just as attendees, but as builders of faith itself. They gave in ways that rewrote what generosity means.

The Widow's Offering, Made Real

If the Bible had a heartbeat, it was here. The kind of sacrifice that goes unnoticed in modern life but that shook those who witnessed it.

Cardinal Anthony Poola spoke of what he saw:

“The faith of the tribal communities is truly inspiring. Despite their challenges, they live out their faith through their actions, staying deeply rooted in our Lord and Savior, Jesus. They are real pilgrims of hope.”

But it was Mary “Sister Mary” Kornowski, an American missionary from Wausau, Wisconsin, who put it bluntly:

“It’s unbelievable what I witnessed here. You would never see this in America—the willingness to donate the very food that would feed their own families and share it lovingly with others.”

The people who had the least gave the most, selflessly and without hesitation.

A Community That Gave Everything

Dozens of priests stood outside, day and night, offering confession to anyone who sought it. They listened, they blessed, they absolved. A quiet row of fathers, some old, some young, some weary-eyed from hours without sleep, their hands raised in blessing over those who kneeled before them.

There were no time limits. No cut-off points. If you came seeking grace, you received it.

Nearby, a different kind of service unfolded. Hundreds of tribal families opened small shops selling food, crafts, and daily necessities. Instead of allowing large corporations to profit from the event, the diocese made a decision—the people would provide for each other.

If someone wanted a warm meal, they bought it from a local mother who had prepared it with her own hands. If they needed something to take home, they bought from a family whose work would put shoes on their children’s feet.

Every coin exchanged was a blessing—staying within the community, lifting one another up.

Honoring Those Who Give Back

Faith is not just about belief—it’s about action.

For their relentless commitment to uplifting communities worldwide, the Mary Help of Christians Award, the highest recognition offered by the Diocese of Srikakulam, was presented to Sir Dustin

Plantholt, Maxcene Crowe, Paul Flynn, Jessica Word, Dr. Christina Rahm, Sir Gabriele Andreoli, and Dr. Steven Plantholt.

Standing among those who had given so much, Sir Dustin Plantholt reflected:

“When His Excellency Bishop Rayarala invited me to the convention, I didn’t know exactly what to expect. What I witnessed were some of the most kind, generous, and truly beautiful people I’ve ever encountered.”

A Future Missionary Church

This wasn’t a conference. It wasn’t an event. It was something so much bigger.

A citadel of missionary work—one that embodied faith in action. A movement that doesn’t just talk about belief but breathes it into existence.

Under Bishop Rayarala’s leadership, the Diocese of Srikakulam has also established a shrine dedicated to Mary Help of Christians, the patroness of the Diocese.

For those searching for proof that faith is alive, that it is strong, that it still means something—look no further.

Thirty thousand people, united in faith and action.

What began in Srikakulam this week will impact future generations, guided by God’s grace and the Church’s enduring light.

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