



**“It is better
to light a
candle than
to curse the
darkness.”**



This saying has been attributed to many people. It was said by the Chinese sage Confucius and quoted by many others. Peter Benenson used it in 1961 as a founding principle of Amnesty International.

Jesus said, “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”

The tragic suicide bombing at All Saints Church in Peshawar in September cast a long shadow over Pakistan’s Christian community. The Bishop of Peshawar said: “This has shaken the whole community.” Few will easily forget the fear generated by the ransacking of Joseph Colony in March and the continued imprisonment of Aasia Bibi charged with blasphemy.

Few Christians see much hope for their future in Pakistan. Many are trying to leave. Others look for someone to blame for not protecting them. It is easy to curse the darkness.

“We are marginalized and the poorest of the poor,” said the Bishop. “We are refugees in our own country.”

But the world will never be changed by those who curse the darkness.

Jesus came into the world as a light to dispel darkness. To curse the darkness is easy. To light a candle that brings light to the world is Jesus’ command.

We celebrate those among Pakistan’s Christians who are lighting candles for their people. Some go many extra miles and pay a very high price to give light to the young people who will be the light of tomorrow’s Pakistan.

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Why are so many Pakistani Christians flying to Bangkok?

Thousands of Christians are leaving Pakistan to fly to Bangkok in Thailand. Whole families have sold their possessions to buy tickets to leave. There is an air of desperation among many to get away. Why?

The word is out that the United Nations in Thailand is accepting asylum applications. You just need to turn up and apply. Sooner or later you will be sent to the USA, Australia or some other safe place. That is one half of the story.

The other half is that many Pakistani families in Bangkok are living in run-down slum conditions while they wait for a decision on their case. Some have been waiting for a year or more. It is a high price to pay, but many Pakistanis are willing to pay any price to get away from their homeland.

But what about the millions who can never leave?

It is clear however that most Christians cannot afford to leave. We understand the frustration and discouragement of those who see no way to fulfil their dreams in the land of their birth. But it leaves a huge vacuum at the heart of the Christian community, as so many capable young people have left.

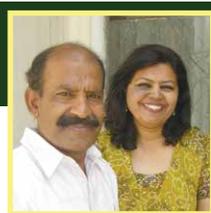
Is the situation for Christians really so hopeless?

It depends on one's attitude. Churches in Pakistan are open, protected by the Police. Every Christian still has the guaranteed right to "profess, practise and propagate his religion". And yet Christians live under the cloud of prejudice and the fear of violent extremism. Many Muslims face that fear also.

All this increases our admiration and appreciation of those who stay to serve their Christian community. In many cases they have paid a high price to help their own people. We are honoured to be able to support them.



Light a candle — start a fire



Tina Mateen
and Mother Nest



Tina worked for several years in a school for disabled children. Gaining much from this experience and supported by family and friends, she opened her own School in a Christian community to meet the needs of children with learning difficulties. So Mother Nest was born.

Tina has a small staff and is ably assisted by her husband and student daughter. They provide security and hope to about 25 day students, as well as providing support to their families. Most of the children are mentally retarded or have cerebral palsy or Downs Syndrome.

One of the Mother Nest students, Neha (18), with serious learning difficulties, was recently selected to run for Pakistan at the Special Olympic Asia Pacific Games in Newcastle, Australia in December.



Tina wrote (3 Dec.):
"I'm so glad and excited to inform you that Neha has won the silver medal in the 400 metre race. She won the first silver medal for Pakistan. It is a great achievement that a Christian girl has participated and won the silver medal."



Khalida and the Ananias Home for Blind Girls



The Ananias Home for Blind Girls was one of Starfish Asia's first projects in 2003. Khalida was looking after 15 girls and the Home was about to close. Thanks to her loyalty over these many years she still cares for the Home and the 26 visually impaired girls who now live there.

This year Khalida took us to Lahore's beautiful Gulshan Iqbal Park for a picnic. It is a large area of beautiful grass, trees and flowers — and it was more than a picnic. We sat in a circle and the girls told jokes and stories, made fun of each other and ate chocolate (provided by us). Some of them have a great sense of humour. Some are small, new and very shy, but this was an ice-breaking event enjoyed by all.



Irum is a brilliant comedienne, mimic and joker with a unique sense of humour. She was on top form in the park.



Ashraf and the Friends Public Middle School, Su-e-Asal



At the end of November the school in Su-e-Asal, a village to the east of Lahore city, moved into its new building.

Ashraf Rehmat, an experienced educationalist, assumed responsibility for the Su-e-Asal school in 2012 after it went through a period of uncertainty and almost closed. Su-e-Asal is a mixed community of brick kiln workers with little other access to schooling for the children. The building that served as school for several years was unsuitable, inadequate and run-down. Ashraf set out to find something better.

He signed a two-year agreement with the owner of a plot and renovated some old buildings to provide six classrooms within a minimal cost. On 18 November the new building was opened

and the students entered their new school with pride.

Ashraf plans to build two more classrooms when funds are available. He recently broke his collar bone and is recovering.



2014: priorities in the year ahead

Raising Standards

Is it enough to get thousands of children into school? We believe the answer is "No!" That is an important beginning — but only a beginning. Our goal is to enable Christian children from the most humble homes to achieve the best results because they receive the best possible education.



We are aware that this may require some painful and costly changes of direction for some schools. Failing schools will need to face reality and make changes to aim higher.

Aiming higher for higher education

We have entered into a partnership with a national initiative known as the "School Assessment for School Improvement Program." This is a department of a larger local organization, known as Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi (ITA) that works to improve standards in Pakistani schools.

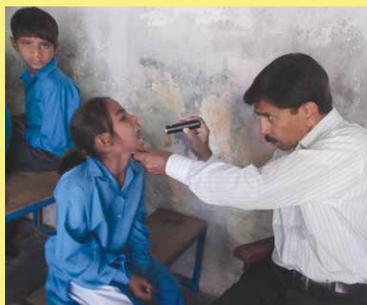


Already teams from ITA have done a thorough assessment of five schools that are supported by Starfish Pakistan. We are working through the recommendations of the comprehensive reports produced by this survey. We expect this ultimately to lead to greatly improved standards and expectations in all the schools we support.

Healthy body – healthy mind

Dr. Robin is a child specialist at Lahore's United Christian Hospital. But he also has a passion to care for the poor, especially in his own Christian community.

Starfish Asia hopes to enter into a partnership with Dr. Robin to give medical checks to students and basic health and hygiene instruction to staff, children and parents in schools supported by us.



He has already done a one-day trial assessment of the 56 children in the Gospel School in Hadayatabad.

- 20 children (35.71%) were found to be anaemic.
- 22 children (39.28%) had thick wax in the ears.
- 13 children (23.21%) had poor oro-dental hygiene.
- 16 children (28.57%) were underweight for their age.

Eyesight was tested, blood samples taken to test for hepatitis and heads examined for lice. All students were given deworming medicines along with iron and multivitamins.

"The results of this health survey show that these children need regular health monitoring, provision of deworming medicines, iron and multivitamin supplements, regular awareness and literature about healthy lifestyle."

This could open a new chapter for us in the care for Pakistan's poor.

Higher Education

We recently visited an organisation in Pakistan that receives major international funding to promote education. We were astonished at the goals of this Fund. "Our focus is primary level education. We are targeting to enroll 200,000 out-of-school children in schools by 2015."

"What happens," we asked, "when the children complete their Primary schooling?"

The answer: "They go on to a Government or some other school" — or more likely they join the tragic statistic of school dropouts and return to the child labour market.

We are increasingly convinced that Primary education without quality higher education only produces the next generation of literate sweepers, cleaners and brick kiln workers. We must do all we can to keep the children in school and to help them fulfil their dreams.

Scholarships

We are proud to be providing a scholarship for higher studies for more than 40 students like Komal. Her father is a Pastor. She is a teacher at the Lahore Christian High School as well as studying in the second year for a degree in Law.



Our present Scholarship funds are depleted and we need about £1,500 a month for scholarships.

Emergency Relief

Two issues are at stake here — two matters that we cannot ignore:

- On the one hand, we know that, with the current rate of inflation in Pakistan, it is vital to increase the teachers' salaries. It is not fair, in fact it is demotivating, to pay low salaries.
- On the other hand, we have a list of ten schools, not supported by us but struggling to serve their communities, that are paying almost nothing to demoralised teachers.

What is the solution?

In 2014 we aim to provide emergency relief to those ten schools so that they can at least pay reasonable salaries to their teachers. While working to inspire and motivate Christian teachers in their heroic task, by God's grace we will continue to expand our support further and wider.



Ashraf's family

During Kerstin's recent visit to Karachi in November she visited an unusual family. She shares her experience:



“ Beverly, the indomitable vice-chairwoman of the Holy Shepherd Grammar School, brought me to see Ashraf's family on my last day in Pakistan. They live not far from the school, off a narrow steep lane. We had to climb up precarious steps with no railing to prevent us from falling to the hard cement floor below. The family with three children live in one simple room on the roof.

Ashraf's wife (to the right in the picture) has numerous ailments, including diabetes and heart problems. Recently she had a stroke and cannot talk or move her right side. Ashraf is a remarkable man. He looks after his wife with extreme love and gentleness — very unusual in this culture. He feeds her, washes her, massages her and cares for her every need after he comes home from a day's work as a labourer. He has even carried her to healing meetings, but she is only slightly better. And that is perhaps more due to his patient efforts to help her walk.

He has taken a loan for her medical expenses, which he will never be able to repay on his meagre salary.

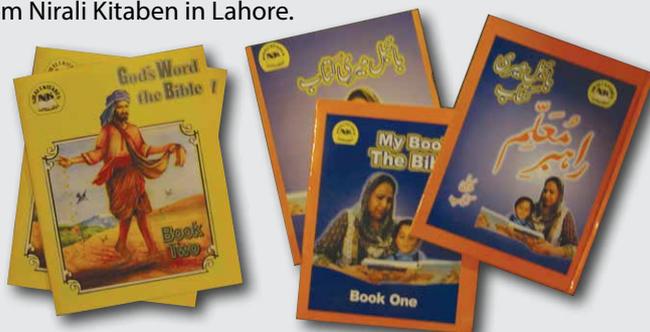
We sat on the roof and were urged to stay for tea. Their three children all go to the Holy Shepherd School. The school only found out about their situation when they could not pay school fees or afford uniforms. It was a humbling experience to meet this family living in utter poverty and yet so dignified – asking for nothing.”

Food for the soul

In our focus on the urgency of education, we reaffirm our commitment to the teaching and values of the Bible. Our concern is that Pakistan's Christian children should be a generation of faith — a generation that knows the Bible and follows Jesus. That is at the heart of our dream for the future.

Progress on the Bible curriculum

Preparation of the new Bible Curriculum for Pakistani Christian children has been slow but steady. The books are now being printed and schools have begun to order them from Nirali Kitaben in Lahore.



- Book 1 Textbook is ready in English and Urdu
- Book 1 Teachers' Manual is ready in Urdu
- Book 2 Textbook is ready in English.

Still in preparation but close to production are all the books up to Class 3. We hope they will all be ready in the New Year. Books for classes 4 and 5 will come in 2014.

Priority Appeal for the New Year

Can you imagine ...

- schools without students?
- schools without teachers?
- schools without books?



In March we will need to provide school books for up to 7,000 children. It will cost about £25,000 / US \$35,000 / S \$50,000

All help towards this goal will be welcomed

Tell us you care!

Yes, tell me more about schools and communities that need my help. Send me more information.

I enclose a gift of £ / \$ _____ for Starfish Asia

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giving hope to the children of Pakistan

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