



**STARFISH
ASIA**

giving hope to the children of Pakistan

42 • December 2014

News

The people walking
in darkness have
seen a great light;
on those living in
the land of deep
darkness a light
has dawned.

The Prophet Isaiah 9:2

*our
New Year
appeal*

As the New Year begins, we appeal for prayer for Pakistan's Christians. The old year closed on a dark note with the horrific murder by a violent mob of a Christian couple working on the brick kiln at Kot Radha Kishan near Lahore. In November the Christian mother Asia Bibi began her fifth year under sentence of death for blasphemy as her appeal was rejected by the High Court. Pakistan's Christians need our prayers. May their light shine in these times of darkness.

We wish that all our friends and supporters – together with our brothers and sisters in Pakistan – may have a Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year



1 Prayer for Pakistan's Christians

"The Kot Radha Kishan tragedy is a black blemish on the face of Pakistan, our religion and humanity." So wrote the Chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council, an organization that represents many Muslim clerics.

"The state has to act proactively to protect its minorities from violence and injustice. We must promote religious and ethnic diversity in our society as a virtue," said the Prime Minister.

Pray for Pakistan's leaders as well as the Christian minorities in these difficult times.

2 Support for our teachers

We are convinced that school teachers are the true leaders of society. Their example and teaching are the model for the next generation of Pakistanis. We want to invest more in them, giving them proper salaries, due respect and motivation for the task.

Starfish Asia is investing in teacher training and inspiration. Can you help us to ensure that in 2015 all of the 300 teachers in schools supported by Starfish Asia are properly rewarded (between £35 and £60 monthly (US\$55-95; S\$70-120).



Forty teachers attended the seminar given by Ian, Steve and Anser at Dar-ul-Hikmat, Lahore in November.

3 Books for 7,000 students

In February we will transmit funds to Pakistan to cover the partial or total cost of school books for 7,000 students. We have made this commitment but it can only happen with your help. We need about £21,000 (US\$33,000; S\$42,000). It is a small price to ensure that every student has the materials for the coming year of study.



Exercise books are given free to all schools supported by Starfish Asia. These have already been paid for.

On the front line:

Giving hope, fighting for peace



Khalid Shahzad is one of Starfish Pakistan's more unusual partners. He runs a school for disabled children in a largely Muslim area of Lahore. Khalid is also a passionate and fearless advocate of the rights of Pakistan's Christian minorities.

When the news came on 3rd November of the brutal murder of Shahzad and Shama at the brick kiln in Kot Radha Kishan, Khalid immediately went to the village. His outspoken demand for justice and reassurance for the minorities wins him many friends and some enemies too. He has won our admiration and respect. The photo shows him with a group of children from the Kot Radha Kishan brick kiln, where the couple worked.



"To rescue Pakistan's Christians from slavery, set out to educate each and every Christian child."

Khalid Shehzad

St. John Vianney School

Khalid believes passionately that education is a key solution to the vulnerability of Christians, many of whom work under conditions of forced labour or for minimal reward. Starfish Asia is now providing some support for a school for Christians he has founded in his suburb of Lahore. Fifty children study to Class 7 in very basic conditions.



Why would students want to come here, we wondered? "We attended the Government School, but it was very hard for us because we are Christians," said one student. "We came to this school because it is Christian." **The school urgently needs help to provide better facilities and proper salaries for the teachers.**

The Talents School, Lahore

Teachers that inspire

One school that has impressed us all is the Talents School in Lahore. Founded by Sajid, a pastor, and his wife Fawzia, a nurse, it has developed into a school with ambition, serving students from poor families and all communities.



Fawzia's approach to teaching was transformed by a few months of local Montessori training. She has developed a team of highly creative and motivated staff that aim at excellence in their teaching and classroom experience.

Ian, Anser and Steve spent time sharing with the teachers. We count ourselves privileged to be partners with them.

Staying small small enough to care

Hanifa's family

Hanifa's family is part of our history since we first met them in 2004 and began to support three of the girls in Ghauri Wisdom School. I visited them again in November. They almost dropped out of school earlier this year due to non-payment of exam fees, but we rescued the situation and just paid their fee again. Their ambition is still to be nurses.



Mike with a student from Dean Public School in Lahore in November. They gave us an impressive display from some very talented and confident students. Awards were then presented to outstanding achievers.

Mike, founder of Starfish Asia, Executive Trustee and editor of this Newsletter since 2003, writes here about some of our ambitions and dreams for Starfish Asia.

Dreaming big and staying small

It has always been one of our strengths that we remain a relatively small charity while maintaining lofty ambitions. We are not as small as we used to be nor as large as we would like to be, but still small enough to be intimate. This means several things:

- ★ We remain very focused in what we do. We only work in Pakistan.
- ★ Our staff is very small, though it has doubled in size with the arrival of Ian and Fiona this year.
- ★ Our overhead costs are still kept low. We do whatever we can in house — fund-raising, designing and producing all publicity and newsletters.
- ★ Above all, we are still intimately involved in the lives of the people we are helping. We can tell the stories of many of them, who have become friends. We can see the changes God has brought through the help we have provided. We can still share in people's sorrows and joys.

Ian Anderson and I returned in mid-November from a month with Anser and Kashi in Pakistan. Fiona, Ian's wife, was with us for 10 days, followed by Steve Curran from AE Tuition, a regular and much valued visitor to Pakistan. Together we visited 34 of the 40 schools and homes supported by Starfish Asia — and several that we don't. We thank God for the perseverance, passion and commitment of our Pakistani partners. They inspire us to do more.

We want to tell you much more

After Mike, Ian and Fiona visited Pakistan in November, they wrote a lively report that goes into much more detail about the achievements and dreams of Starfish Asia in Pakistan.

Please write for a copy. We can send it by email or in print. We would also like to send you a copy of the new brochure, *Restoring Hope to Pakistan's Children*.

Please email: mike@starfishasia.com
or write to Starfish Asia, 32 Beck Lane, Beckenham BR3 4RE, UK



Shania Asher



Shania's mother, just like the importunate widow, refused to take no for an answer. Because of her we helped Shania to gain her MPhil degree. She is now working with the victims of the Peshawar Church bombing. She recently wrote: "I am enjoying my work with children. Keep praying for me as life is tough in Peshawar for a single lady. I have got my MPhil transcript (grade B). This could not be possible without your support." Can we somehow help her to get her Doctorate?

Can we somehow help her to get her Doctorate?

Big dreams still aiming higher

School Assessments for Improvement

Sixteen of the 32 schools supported by Starfish Asia have been assessed by ITA in their School Assessment service. Anser is working hard to help schools improve their systems and provide better facilities for their teaching staff. **We need to do much more! We are not content to provide a simple education. We must aim for the best.**

For this reason Steve Curran, Ian and Fiona spent many hours of our recent visit to Pakistan in teacher training sessions — sharing, inspiring, opening minds to new possibilities and showing that we care for teachers!



Ian meets a very unusual family

The CGA Home for Special Children, Lahore



In a quiet corner of Lahore I walked through a gateway and up the length of a narrow courtyard lined with plant pots. Ahead was an entrance over which hung a grubby red cloth. Rhythmic music emanated from inside. As someone emerged, the cloth swept aside and revealed a room full of boys and girls dancing.

It was soon apparent that these weren't just ordinary youngsters; three had Downs' syndrome, others were mentally limited, deaf and dumb or physically incapacitated. They were celebrating a spontaneous, innocent, joyful time together.

Pastor Iqbal and his family look after the disabled youngsters as a joint family enterprise. They stay upstairs, giving over the ground floor of their home to the disabled residents. Facilities are by any standards basic.

I pressed Iqbal to explain why the children's families could not provide funding. "Families are unwilling to support disabled young people who contribute nothing to the family income," he said. He remembered a previous resident, who is now sent by his family daily to sit outside the local hospital to beg. Others might simply be thrown onto the street or left in a dark corner of their homes all day out of embarrassment, poverty or cold-heartedness.

In spite of my doubts, I was convinced of this project's need for support. This is a care home that, in very trying conditions, is really living up to its name: caring for some very vulnerable young people. It sees worth in children whom the world does not value. It offers them some hope on a financial shoestring. Starfish Asia's support ensures that money is not being wasted, even if this is a home that will never win prizes for glossiness.



One very special family: the curse of polio

Saima and her three children are the newest members of the CGA family. Saima's husband walked out on her. She had no income and three small children to care for, the two boys victims of childhood polio, unable to walk.



Pakistan is sadly one of the last countries in the world that has not yet eradicated polio. What is the future for Saima's little family? Pastor Iqbal has opened his home and his heart to them. Your support to Starfish Asia will provide for them.



Bible values in Christian schools

We are determined that Pakistan's Christians should not only be equipped for secular life — but also to be disciples of Christ.

With this in mind, Mike has been preparing a five year Bible curriculum for Christian students. After many years work, at last student text books and teachers manuals for Classes 1 to 3 are now ready in both English and Urdu. Some schools are already using them, though they will only be officially launched, with the offer of special discounts, next Easter. By then Class 4 books will also be ready. Class 5 books are still being written. Our own schools will be given free books.



Tell us you care!

Starfish Asia is a member of the Fundraising Standards Board



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

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