



**STARFISH
ASIA**

giving hope to the children of Pakistan

46 • December 2015

News

God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.



The Bible, 2 Corinthians 4:6

*We wish all our friends and supporters a
Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year*

A shining light in a dark world



Sunita is 14 years old. She comes from a village near Okara city in central Punjab. Her father is unable to work and her mother labours in the fields to support the family.

Sunita's two brothers were able to travel and so attended school in the city, but there was no hope for Sunita. Her parents could never risk letting a girl go so far by public transport.

Then in 2012 she was invited to join the girls at the HERF Home in Lahore and a light came on in her life. HERF (Human Education Resource Foundation) runs a Christian hostel for girls like Sunita from poor and disadvantaged homes.



The 14 girls are cared for by Javed and Lubna Akhtar. It is a family of love where everything is provided. Starfish Asia has been supporting the HERF Home since 2013.

The girls attend a nearby Christian school. Sunita joined the Nursery Class at the age of 11 but she was thrilled to be able to study at last. She is now in Class 2 and her ambition is to become a teacher.

Nasira

When Nasira was born 16 years ago, she was mistreated at home and left with an ugly scar on her face. Her father died when she was one, leaving his wife with six children to feed.



At the age of 12 she got the chance to join the HERF hostel in Lahore. At last she felt loved and could go to school. A donor sent funds and she had two successful operations on her face. Then she was hit by two misfortunes. She caught hepatitis and her mother died of TB. Her third operation to remove the skin flap had to be postponed. *Please pray that this can be done soon.*

When we visited HERF last month, it was a great joy to see that Nasira was back in the home. She looked heartbreakingly weak and thin, but happy. She is clearly not well and needs good food and care. Sangeeta, her best friend, was overjoyed to have her back in the Family.

Light in their hearts

Fr. Joe Louis is Diocesan Executive Secretary for Caritas Lahore, a major Catholic charity that serves thousands in the name of Christ. He oversees the wonderful work of the Ananias Rehabilitation Centre (ARC) for Visually Impaired Girls that has been supported by Starfish Asia for 10 years.



On 17th October the girls and staff of the Ananias Centre celebrated their 17th Birthday. We have celebrated 10 of them. The staff members, led by Mrs Khalida Nelson, are outstanding in their care for the 26 blind girls in the Home. The stage presentation as usual was full of colour, drama and humour. Though lacking sight in their eyes, the girls light up the world around them.

Caritas plans to expand the Home with a new hostel building to provide better facilities for the girls and to divide their living space from their work area. The girls deserve to have the best.



<https://www.facebook.com/www.caritaslahore.org>

Dim and flickering lights

In October we visited two schools in a suburb of Lahore. It is an area inhabited by a community of low-income labourers and cleaners, mostly nominally Christian.



Signs above the humble street entrances announce the existence of schools: *The Heavenly Kingdom* and *St. Merry High School*. We visited them both, as they are close to each other. Both are led by faithful, dedicated Christians who want to provide a glimmer of hope for their own community.



Each school provides the most basic elementary education to about 50 Christian children. They charge the minimum monthly fee — the price of a cup of tea. The teachers' salaries are about £12 / US\$20 a month.

Both schools are pleading with us to help them. They have many needs: furniture, books, Bibles, building rent, better salaries and training for their teachers.



We know of many such schools serving Christians. They urgently need resources to raise their standards. Your gifts will enable many to provide a better education to those who are eager to learn.

“God has plans for Max ...”

Fiona was in Pakistan in October, visiting schools, meeting school teachers, students and young people with ambition and hope for their future.



“ I don't know why Max caught my attention. He was quiet, unexceptional, earnest. Tariq and Huma had noticed him too, on the streets near their school. He might well have been one of the 10 million or so children in Pakistan who never cross the threshold of a school. But they encouraged him to come to classes. When he appeared one day, they gave him a book bag and helped him with a uniform.

Max's mother is dead, his father busy working, and so he is cared for by his grandmother. I catch a glimpse of him standing in class and reading aloud. At the end of the morning session he does not leave with the tide of other children. He stays to do his homework and to help around the school during the afternoon shift. As we leave he escorts us to the car with quiet courtesy, serious but with the flicker of a smile.

God has plans for Max — and indeed for each one of the children in our schools. At one level the odds seem stacked against so many of them. Families struggle to make ends meet and so children are often forced to work. Discrimination frequently confines Christians to menial jobs. Money and opportunities are tight. What will the future hold for Max?

Step by step

Step by step there is progress. The first step is getting the children into school. The next is not just providing an education but nurturing their aspirations and self-belief. We ask a class what they want to be when they grow up. They are eager to tell us their ambitions.

'A teacher,' says one.

'I want to join the police,' says another.

'I'd like to be a fashion designer,' adds a girl, clearly with an eye for style.

Schools and scholarships are two key tools enabling these eager children to breach the barriers of poverty and prejudice and pursue their dreams.

Komal

In the heat of Pakistan you don't really want to wear a black jacket if you don't have to. It's not the usual garb for a woman. But Komal has just qualified as an advocate and is in her uniform. After studying at Lahore Christian High School, followed by four years as a teacher there, she found herself drawn to law.

She saw the plight of people in her community — a maid falsely accused of theft; another young girl raped by her employer and powerless to seek redress. Now, with the help of a scholarship from Starfish Asia, she is an advocate and keen to represent those who might otherwise struggle to access justice. Eventually, she says, she would like to become a judge.

Ashir

Ashir achieved top marks in Matric exams at school. He excelled again in his FSc, and gained admission on merit to Medical College on his journey to becoming a doctor. “If Starfish had not been there,” he said, “I would not have been able to continue my studies.”

Our hope and prayer is that these stories of success will inspire students, such as Max, to grasp the future and the hope that God has planned for them.



Proud father, proud daughter



Tariq and Huma run Calvary Model School in Karachi, a Secondary School with more than 300 students. It serves a Christian community living in a very run down and poor industrial area in the eastern extremity of the city.



Revolving Scholarships



Christians with ambition and ability can go far, but are often hindered by the rising costs of higher education. We want to help so that they can share the responsibility.

We have recently provided a loan to three students, which they agree to return when they begin to work and receive good salaries. This investment will thus provide scholarship funds for further ambitious Christian students.

Samaiah

Samaiah is just 19. At St Peter's High School her diligence and drive were recognised when she became Head Girl. She went on to spend two years at Kinnaird College and has now completed her first year at the Rashid Latif Medical College. She has completed her first year of a 5-year course to train as a Doctor of Physiotherapy. She is the only Christian among 400 students.



The costs for her course are very high. “My prayers have been answered,” she said when we offered her a revolving scholarship. She willingly agreed to pay back the loan when she has completed her studies.

She dreams of setting up her own private practice, where she can make physiotherapy accessible to those who cannot pay the high cost of treatment.

INTERNATIONAL THE NEWS

March 16, 2013

Street sweeper's son Labha Masih becomes judge in Punjab

Zeeshan Labha attained national prominence when he was appointed a Judge in 2013. His fame came from his background, as the Press reported that “his parents kept sweeping the streets and bazaars of Okara to earn a livelihood for years.”

Zeeshan now holds a senior Government post in Lahore. His passion is to take the message of his life to the next generation: “You can succeed if you trust in Christ, work hard and aim high.”



He is working to prepare materials on career planning for distribution to Class 9 and 10 students in Christian schools. He has formed a team and Starfish Pakistan will work with him to open doors into schools, aimed at inspiring young Christians with faith and hope for their future.

Creative teaching

In our recent visit to Pakistan we focused on the use of the textbooks provided by Starfish Asia in April. We wanted to know if teachers were using the books with creativity and imagination.

We talked with many of the teachers; we gathered them together to listen to their struggles and answer their questions; we visited their classrooms; we showed interest in the amazing work they are doing. One school stood out:

Friends Public School

Friends School in Kasur serves a mixed (Muslim-Christian) community of families, many of whom work at the local brick kilns. The children are poor and have no other access to education — or indeed to much hope of escape from servile labour. Two hundred children study at the school.

Thanks to the emphasis on school textbooks without political or religious bias, which we have emphasized this year, the teachers in Friends School have shown a fresh creativity in their classes. When Anser saw what one class had created, he immediately rewarded the teacher with a gift. Then he discovered the same creativity in the next class!



Teachers' Day at Dean Public School

Guests were welcomed to a special school performance in celebration of **Teachers' Day** at Dean Public School. The whole student body of 200 was gathered on the roof of the crowded school building to celebrate their teachers with song, dance, colour and variety. We were moved and impressed. The atmosphere was delightful — and how they celebrated their teachers! Every class had made a special card to thank them. *They deserve it!*



Teachers are important!

We are preparing several training conferences for teachers in the New Year. They will receive training in basic teaching skills and lesson preparation. We will also address the challenge of promoting Christian values in the classroom.

The Christian Schools Survey

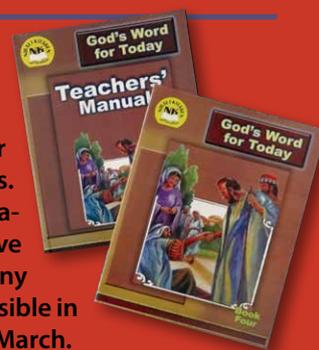


PROGRESS UPDATE

The launch of the pilot project for the Survey teams has been delayed by local body elections. This is now being conducted in five districts of Punjab. In early December a day of training will be held in Lahore for 20 Survey teams, conducted by ITA, who are assisting and analyzing the Survey data. Then throughout the next two or three months Survey teams will be visiting Christian schools to discover the real picture of education accessible to Christians.

The Bible Curriculum

Book 4 is now ready for use in Christian schools. Book 5 is under preparation. We aim to give all books *free* to as many Christian schools as possible in the new school year in March.



This is how we know what love is ...



We were deeply moved recently when we received the news that a large gift was being sent to us to bless the Christians in Pakistan. It comes from groups of Iranian believers living in Turkey. They are not wealthy people. It comes from their tithes — a gift of love.

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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www.starfishasia.com

Starfish Asia (UK)
32 Beck Lane, Beckenham, Kent BR3 4RE (UK)
Email: mike@starfishasia.com
Registered UK Charity No. 1099672

Starfish Asia (USA)
3230 Seagraves Mill Road, Hull, GA. 30646, USA
tax exempt under section 501(c)(3)

Starfish Asia (Singapore) Ltd.
887C Woodlands Dr. 50, #12-611, Singapore 733887
Email: geraldine@starfishasia.com

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