

Out of the darkness came a great light ...

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

Isaiah 9:2

We wish you a very Happy Christmas and a Blessed New Year

2021 has been a mixed year, with Pakistan's schools closed for many months and education in turmoil. We are grateful for the many who have supported and helped through some dark and difficult times.

It is time to look back, take stock and outline our ambitions for 2022. Here is how we see our priorities for the New Year:

Material: Improved facilities

★ We aim that all the schools we support should have access to clean toilets, good lighting, pure drinking water, classroom furniture, science equipment and computers — and a positive classroom environment.

Academic: Staff development

★ As capable management and inspired teachers are the key to the students' future, we will place a major emphasis on teacher and staff training — and better salaries.

Spiritual: Faith and Discipleship

★ Our prayer is that all the staff and students will come to know and love Jesus Christ, and increase in their knowledge of the Bible.



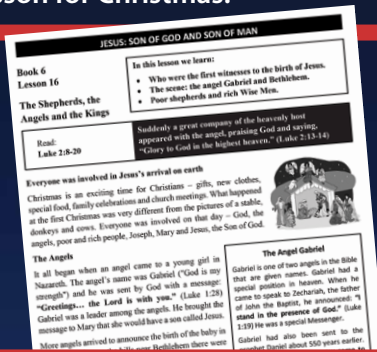
2022

a year of hope for
Pakistan's Christians

Teaching our children about the star, the Angels and the Wise Men

The Starfish Bible Curriculum, which is provided to about 10,000 students in 100 schools, is now in use for all Primary School classes 1-5 and for Class 7.

We are happy to announce that the book for Class 6 is now also complete and will be available for the new school year. Here is the lesson for Christmas:



Did you know...?

There is a very ancient tradition that 'Caspar, King of India', one of the Magi, passed through Taxila (now in Pakistan) on the way to Bethlehem.

(Curriculum Book 6: lesson 16)

Acts 2:9 tells us that there were Parthians in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. The Parthian Empire stretched to the Indus River — modern Pakistan. Were some of the ancestors of today's Christians present in Jerusalem on that day?

(Curriculum Book 6: lesson 21)

A million a day: Pakistan's vaccine campaign hits its stride



The Pakistan Government website stated in November that 78,215,285 people had received their first dose of the (mostly Chinese) vaccine and 49 million are fully vaccinated – an impressive achievement. The virus appears to be largely under control.

Rob and Dan in Pakistan



Rob Bavington, our CEO, left for Pakistan on 3rd November, together with his nephew Dan. It is the first visit any of us from the UK have been able to make since the start of the pandemic and it has been a busy three weeks involving a lot of travelling to see 15 of the schools and projects supported by Starfish Asia.

These two pages contain some of Rob's reports and reflections. I started by asking him what he thought were the three main benefits of his visit.

“First and above all, it has given me a new connection and a heart for the schools and students we are supporting. It has given me fresh energy to understand their needs.

Secondly, I have a better understanding of what the Lahore office team are facing, and how we can best support them.

And thirdly, it's all about relationship — meeting the staff, the project leaders, Danishmand and Jasmine. All very useful!”



Left to right: Asher, Naveed, Jasmine, Dan & Rob, Danishmand, Rafaqat, Majid and Aftab

Visiting schools in southern Punjab

Gordon School, Khanpur

It is a seven-hour drive to the town of Khanpur in southern Punjab. Rob and Dan, accompanied by Danishmand, Jasmine and Rafaqat, visited several schools on the way down, and stayed two nights in Multan.



“I am picking up a feeling for the difference from school to school. Not all schools are equally equipped. Why do some work better and others work less well?

We came to St. Paul's School in a village called Stuntzabad. Most of the students' parents work in the fields. The school is absolutely fantastic.

I asked the principal if he was married. “No,” he said, “I'm not married. I am married to the school.” He teaches in the school and goes out of his way to make sure his teachers are supported and the students are doing well.”

“We arrived late, but were greeted by children and teachers. Shama, the principal, showed us round the new building, which is very nearly complete. This will give the school three more classrooms, two washrooms and living accommodation upstairs.

Six teachers are adequately qualified and all are graduates of Gordon School. They cover nursery to year 8, giving 86 pupils a good start in education.”



Impressions

Reflections

Over the past two weeks we have visited about 15 schools and homes. How different they are from each other!



A few schools have asked for computers. They are all teaching computing, but no one has a computer!

The difference is in leadership. One may be thriving, but another is just not making progress. If we can invest appropriately with these leaders, then there is great hope for all the schools to give much better results.

I asked in one school how many computers they wanted. "Just one," came her answer. "Maybe two would be better," I replied.

The Star Shine School, Lahore

I was really impressed with this school. The principal, Elishba, is not personally highly qualified, but she understands basic education and she has a lot of drive. The kids knew their stuff. We asked them questions — and they could give good answers. It is a very cramped space (they clearly need some extra classrooms) but obviously learning was taking place. The teachers are all fairly well qualified.

Reflections on Leadership

"We want to work really hard to get alongside those leaders who may have started their school because they had a vision for their community, but they do not have the know-how to do it well. If we find that some are not gifted, we will work to get people alongside them, so their students can get the best possible chance in life.

The main thrust of the coming year must be teacher and management development. Jasmine and Rafaqat will prioritise certain schools."

Progress of Life School, Faisalabad

"Some schools we visited are in really poor areas. To get to this village school we passed by an open drain, which smelled horribly. There was rubbish everywhere. The building was tiny and cramped.

And yet the leader of the school has got a fantastic vision. He has a genuine heart for the education of the children in the area. You just get a sense that they want to make a difference.

The challenge for us is to support and work with them so that the conditions of the school and the standards of teaching are sufficient to make a real difference.





The School of Hope, Faisalabad

"We visited three schools in Faisalabad, about three hours south of Lahore. One of them was the Marjorie School of Hope. If you can see beyond the crowded conditions, it actually proved to be quite a good place for learning. The teachers were quite well qualified and had begun to put into practice some of the principles that Jasmine had shared in the Leaders' training a few weeks ago. There is of course room for improvement ...

Academic: Staff development

Rob met the leaders of two professional agencies that have made a significant contribution to the development of teachers and teaching in Starfish Asia schools.

 Humayun Shafiq, programme leader from Edkasa, told me that he was pleased with progress. He said that all the schools still engaging with Edkasa are doing well. The Matric results were better than expected. Many students gained results that people said would be 'impossible' in Starfish schools. This is very good, even taking grade inflation into account. Motivation of school leaders seems to be the main factor for whether EDKASA is used effectively or not."

 Abdur Rehman, the Director of CASTT, a team of professional teacher trainers, with whom we have worked before, met Rob to discuss a further year of formal training for Starfish Pakistan schools.

"We discussed the best use of resources, different possible forms for the training, and targeted training aimed at different categories of teacher, etc. We plan to start a year-long series of training courses with 175 teachers, starting in April. They will work closely with Jasmine."

Rewarded and honoured for hard work and success



Outstanding Achievement Awards 2021

On 13th November 163 students — all from low-income Christian families and attending schools supported by Starfish Asia — received a Certificate, a Book and great applause from honoured guests and parents. The Ceremony took place in Lahore and awards and speeches were given by Danishmand, Jasmine, Rob and others, including Annum Sadiq, the Founder of EDKASA, and Anser Javed, former Director of Starfish Pakistan.

All 163 students are now applying for scholarships for further studies.



Success for Sana

This amazing young lady has struggled against the odds, discouraged by her parents and forced to work in a factory.

With the encouragement of a head teacher she managed to pass her Matric exam with 808/1100. Moments like this make all we do seem so worthwhile.

2021 Graduation results

With delay and some confusion over this year's matriculation exams, the Government finally published the results "on the basis of average marks obtained in elective subjects".

For many the result was SUCCESS. In schools supported by Starfish Asia:

Total passes: 183

A+
9 students

A
22 students

Congratulations to all!



A long journey nears its close

On a dusty, barren hillside of Northern Karachi, our little Suzuki car shakes and rattles its way up one of the worst roads I've ever been on till at last we reach our journey's end: The Holy Shepherd Grammar School.

The journey for the new school building has not been straight forward. As the old building was deemed unsafe, a total new build was decided in early 2019. Finally, it is nearing completion. The opening ceremony was a joyous occasion, though the building isn't quite ready yet. The upstairs washrooms and electrics still need finishing. The students should be able to move in after the Christmas break.



Great appreciation was shown during the ceremony for the many who have made this building possible. So a BIG THANK YOU to each of you who have given and prayed for this work. Please continue to pray for the school leadership as they plan for the future and how to best use the new facilities to provide an even better future for the local Christian community.



The Power of Context

A new school building, bright classrooms, colourfully decorated walls, cold water to drink, fans that work and toilets that are clean — these are the "little things" that make a difference to ambition, respect, hope and the desire to succeed. Thank you to all who make this possible for Pakistan's Christians.



Transition in Singapore

Ten years ago, September 2011, Starfish Asia was registered in Singapore. It was led for many years by Geraldine Lee. The work has now moved on and the future is in the hands of a local Executive Committee, whose Chairman, Ng Tah Wee, has written for us this month.

Starfish Asia Singapore began when two ladies saw the needs of the Christians in Pakistan and felt compelled to do something about it. They sourced funds as best as they could to support schools, and made personal trips to teach and encourage the teachers there.

By God's providence, one of the ladies made the True Way Presbyterian Church English Congregation her home church. Seeing the meaningful work of Starfish, the Church began to provide monthly support, and also addressed the need for a local working structure. The Executive Committee was formed.



Left to right: Ng Tah Wee, Joanne Peh, Teo Kee Khoon, Geraldine Lee, Teo Kee Meng

More exciting development came when the church decided to bring the ministry to the Synod of the Presbyterian Church in Singapore (PCS), the alliance of 40 Presbyterian churches. This will potentially provide a platform to inform many churches about our ministry in Pakistan.

Do pray for our ongoing discussions, that our ministry would fit into PCS' mission objectives, and they would endorse the Starfish ministry.

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