

These children deserve better

In April schools in Pakistan opened their doors for new admissions and almost every school increased its numbers. We are grateful that more than 6,000 children now attend schools that are supported by Starfish Asia.

That throws a huge responsibility onto the leaders of our school projects. Many of these children know their **roots** (see my article on page 3) — from minority communities facing an uphill struggle to survive. Now the teachers have the possibility of giving them **wings** — a future full of the hope and dignity that a good education can bring.

Our responsibility is to provide the best possible facilities for these children. With such an influx of new students into school, we have received pleas from many of our Pakistani partners to provide desks and chairs — and some new classrooms too — to accommodate the increase.

In this issue we are making an appeal for help to provide furniture for our schools.

We know that children can sit on the floor (many do in Pakistan's schools) and they do not need the latest equipment. But we believe it is a question of dignity and respect—two values that we covet for the children from poor homes whom we serve—to provide the best possible environment to equip them for the future.

These children surely deserve the best!

"There are two lasting bequests we can give our children: One is roots, the other is wings."

Hodding Carter
(Journalist and author 1907 – 1972)



Four classes study on the roof at the Dean Public School under the shelter of this rough straw roof that has been destroyed by the weather. Now the hot sun of summer pours through the cracks and the school urgently needs a new roof.

The 80 children at the new school in Sharaqpur (below) have a nice rented building but no desks or chairs at all. They too need help to provide furniture for the school.



Under the burning summer sun

As the summer temperatures have soared above 40 degrees (110°F) in Punjab, and electricity has sometimes been off for 8 or 10 hours a day, life has been tough for the staff and children in school.

This comes from Angela at the Miracle Schools in Lahore:

"In the last two days two of our teachers fainted in the Miracle school and three fainted in the Brick Kiln School with the great heat here. Also many children have been vomiting and have suffered from dehydration with the heat and water infection. This month was terrible with so many sicknesses."

They have had some fun too. The staff at the Miracle Brick Kiln School brought in an inflatable paddling pool.



Sajida sent this report from the Life Transforming Centre in Akhtarabad:

"My email system is a bit slow because of the unscheduled power cuts. We are facing many problems with the lack of power. The electricity goes off for hours and hours and we are not even able to get water to drink. To get cold water for 150 people is a nightmare. Last Thursday we had to close the school at 12 to send the children home. It is really difficult to manage the school without power."

Summer provides no respite for those who have to work at the brick kilns. When the rains come in July, their work has to stop and their income is cut off. That is their time of crisis.



No one would guess that behind this unimpressive facade lies a success story

The Morning Star Primary School lies at the heart of Zia Colony, a dusty slum colony in eastern Karachi. Pastor George Thomas looked after a small congregation of Pentecostal Christians meeting in a home, when he married Fehmida in 2006. She had been a Primary School teacher and this opened a new door of opportunity for their ministry in Zia Colony.

The Morning Star Primary School has become a local success story with an influx of Christian children desperate for an education they can afford. They have just admitted 95 new students and are now overflowing. They have joined the queue requesting more furniture for their children.

Safia's story

Mike met Safia in George Thomas's church. He tells her story.

Augustine, Safia's husband, is right hand man to George Thomas in his church. Two years ago Safia collapsed during a service at which I preached. We urged George to arrange a full medical check-up. The doctor's report — she urgently needed a heart Mitral Valve replacement at a cost far beyond Safia's means. But God knew her need. The operation, paid partly by us and partly by a grant



from the Government, took place on 31st May and Safia is now recovering from her successful open heart surgery.



Living with dignity in Mianwali Colony

The Holy Shepherd Grammar School in Karachi now caters for 645 students. They have ambitious plans for further growth and to open a Vocational Training School.

Anser recently sent this insight into other pressures he faces as he tries to meet the needs of his community.

"The mother of Rahul Shahbaz and his sister Rahil came to see me (*see photo below*). She told me that her husband had undergone two stomach operations and was not fit for work. Due to his illness his salary has been cut and she could not afford to buy uniforms for her children."



Many of the families with children at the school have difficulty to afford school uniforms. As a matter of principle, Anser believes that a smart uniform is a mark of self-respect, dignity and pride for the children.

"Yesterday," he wrote, "we distributed uniforms to the orphans, and today some mothers approached me to ask for help for their children to get uniforms. It was difficult to refuse. Some of my students started weeping: 'I want a uniform'. It was really very difficult to see.

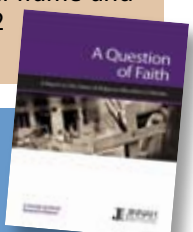
We had no option. I took 10 of them to the uniform shop to get them a uniform and asked that the bill be made out to me.

Needed: desks and chairs for 1,000 children

We have received requests from several schools that are regularly supported by Starfish Asia for desks and benches for more than 1,000 students.

The cost of a sturdy steel-frame-and-wood desk with a seat for 2 (sometimes 3) is £20 / \$30

The Jinnah Institute in Pakistan (www.jinnah-institute.org) has published a report on the status of religious minorities in Pakistan, titled *A Question of Faith*. The report can be downloaded from: www.sacw.net/article2126.html





Islamabad Model College for Boys, F-7/3

Mike was in Islamabad when the news broke that Osama bin Laden had been killed. He asked a taxi driver what he thought about it. "If only I can earn enough to look after my family and be allowed to live in peace, that is what matters to me," he replied. Pakistanis are weary of the endless crises.

"I stayed for two days in Islamabad with a friend in one of the capital's run-down Christian colonies, a mass of packed houses built on a slope around a sewage drain—by every definition a slum. And yet, strange to say, it is a privileged slum. Many of the Christians living here have jobs in the large homes of wealthy Muslims living nearby, and many of their children are able to attend good Government schools.

My friend took me that day to visit the Government Model College for Boys where he had studied. We spent an interesting hour with the Principal and discussed relations between Muslims and Christians in the school, before having a tour of the school facilities. *If only all Government schools were like this!*

Sadly, Islamabad is a world away from the rest of Pakistan. In the 18th amendment to the Pakistan Constitution, passed in 2010, a clear commitment was made to full and free education up to the age of 16:

"The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years..."

The record of the breakdown in education in Pakistan is well documented. The Pakistan Government admits that 7.5 million children still do not attend Primary School. The Dawn newspaper reported in March:

One in ten of the world's out-of-school children is a Pakistani. That is the equivalent of the entire population of Lahore... Only 35 per cent of school children, aged 6-16, can read a story, while 50 per cent cannot read a sentence.

Please look up [Pakistan's Education Emergency](http://www.youtube.com) in www.youtube.com to see a selection of videos on the current disaster in the Pakistan Government education system

The future for the Minorities

For Christians the situation is far worse, as there are special barriers that prevent Christian children (and children from other minority communities) taking advantage of the Government schools.

- ✧ There simply are not enough Government schools. The World Bank website reports that "only 22 percent of girls and 47 percent of boys complete primary schooling." A major reason: there are not enough available schools.
- ✧ The Government school curriculum is strongly slanted towards teaching Islam and there is huge peer pressure on Christians to conform to Muslim practices and belief. I witnessed two young Christian boys coming home from Government school in Sargodha, proudly reciting the Muslim creed to their mother.
- ✧ Many Christian children face discrimination in school, simply because they are Christian and are treated by many as low-caste and unclean. This highlights a huge problem.



Untouchability and Prejudice

For centuries the issue of caste prejudice has cast its dark shadow across all of South Asia. The struggle for the dignity of the Dalits in India has become a major social battle-ground.

In Muslim Pakistan there is no Hindu caste prejudice, but old customs die hard. The shadow of prejudice and discrimination against those who were once called low-caste now falls on the Christians, and they still carry that stigma today.

Aasia Noreen has become notorious in Pakistan as the first woman to be sentenced to death for alleged Blasphemy. But her real crime was not Blasphemy—it was the crime of being an untouchable Christian. This extract comes from a book being written on this delicate subject:

"Aasia was working in the fields, picking fruit alongside several other Muslim women. After lunch, she put her glass in the bucket of water which was there for all to use. The Muslim ladies objected. She had polluted the water. Her touch had made it 'dirty'. It was not that she hadn't washed her hands but it was something inherently 'dirty' in her that could not be washed away. The only way she could get rid of this "dirty" touch was to convert to Islam. She responded angrily and so got snared into what everyone fears in Pakistan—the blasphemy laws."

What is the future for Pakistan's Christians and their children?

"Only education, education and education can save and secure the future of our society."

(Professor Kaleem Dean)

The crisis of dignity

The Christian community in Pakistan is facing a huge crisis, a crisis of identity and a crisis of dignity.

Starfish Asia is fully committed to supporting Pakistani Christians who are working overtime to provide an education and a future of the children of their community. We believe education is vital and we want to do more, as our income allows. We believe much more needs to be done.

◆ Educational opportunity to the highest level

Hundreds of Christians pass their Matriculation exams—and then take menial and low-paid jobs to earn a small wage. Some of them could become tomorrow's doctors, lawyers and leaders. But it takes money to aim higher. **We are in urgent need of more funds to provide scholarships to deserving and capable students.**

◆ Dignity and respect as equal citizens of Pakistan

Pakistan's minorities are sometimes treated badly due to their humble origins and status in society, but dignity begins at home. Education provides self-respect—what joy to see pride in the appearance of children in smart new uniforms! But what shame when the schools are poorly equipped, the furniture broken and facilities inadequate. **We urgently need money to raise the standards.**

◆ Confidence of identity

Pakistan's minority communities need to re-discover pride in their identity — the pride of being Christian and a follower of Christ. We believe the Bible curriculum that is in process of preparation will restore much of this lost confidence to a generation of young Christians.



How we spent your gifts to Starfish Asia in 2010

Our annual accounts for 2009-2010 may be viewed at www.charity-commission.gov.uk
The 2010-11 accounts will be uploaded after a few weeks.

4% of our income in 2010-11 was spent on overheads: administration, fundraising and governance



Funds sent to Pakistan are dispersed to Starfish Asia projects through Starfish Pakistan, a locally registered Trust, whose accounts are audited annually.

Thank you to all our volunteers

We are very grateful for everyone who has joined us in some amazing extra-mile efforts to raise funds for the children in Pakistan. Some of your initiatives have been brilliant! Take a look at this and see what you could do.



Starfish Pot Plant Sticks

A volunteer in Northern Ireland who is a great fan of Starfish Asia made 80 Pot Plant Sticks to raise funds and promote the needs of Pakistan's children. Buy a Starfish Cookie Cutter from www.ebay.co.uk, then make salt dough, bake, paint and varnish. If you want the recipe, email kerstin@starfishasia.com

"Happy crafting! I have my starfish in a pot of parsley on the kitchen window sill – a great prompter for prayer!"

You can also use the cutter to make biscuits (cookies) in the shape of a starfish and arrange a Cake Sale or coffee morning. A Church in the Isle of Man raised £500 through a Cake Sale! Another volunteer sold tomato plants outside her house and raised £28.

Please let us know if you would like to have more copies of the Newsletter to distribute to friends or in your church.

Running for Starfish Asia

➤ On 17th April Andrew Raynes completed the London Marathon in 3 hours 49 minutes and raised £1,000 for Starfish Asia. "Four minutes off my personal best, so I was reasonably happy."

➤ Jenny Brown joined the Great Midlands Fun Run on 5th June to raise funds for Starfish Asia. "There was a great atmosphere. The crowds of spectators were brilliant cheering us on and this helped us to keep going. I hope the total will be more than £900."



Running the West Highland Challenge

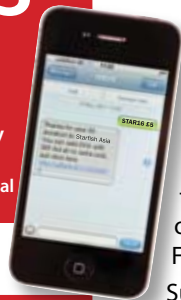
On 18th June Allan Grant from Glasgow is running the West Highland Challenge to raise funds for Starfish Asia. This is no mere Marathon. It is a "95 mile (153 km) rough terrain run from Milngavie on the outskirts of Glasgow to Fort William. It starts in the early hours at 1am on Saturday June 18th and I have 35 hours to finish by noon on Sunday 19th in Fort William. Along the way there is over 14,760 feet of ascents." Follow the race and pray for Allan!

Support Allan at: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/team/aegrant>

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Starfish Asia is a member of the Fundraising Standards Board



STARFISH ASIA

giving hope to the children of Pakistan

I was walking on the beach one morning and I saw a young man picking up starfish from the sand and flinging them back into the sea. I asked why he did it.

"If I don't, they will die in the midday sun," he said.

"But there are thousands of starfish," I replied.

"What difference does it make to save a few?"

He looked down at the starfish in his hand and flung it to safety in the waves.

"It makes a big difference to this one!" he said.

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