

Pakistan – The Cross is their Strength



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Persecuted: Christians in Pakistan standing up for their rights

Pakistan labourer Shahzad Masih and his pregnant wife, Shama, were killed in a manner that shocked the world.

The young Christian couple (pictured overleaf) were thrown into a brick kiln where they burned to death.

In Pakistan, barely a week goes by without acts of hatred being inflicted on helpless people – schoolchildren, factory workers, the disabled and the disadvantaged – especially women.

People of all faiths are at risk but as a marginalised community – comparatively small in number and predominantly poor – Christians are particularly prone to victimisation.

Compiled as a tribute to Shahzad

and Shama, this report is written in the hope that they did not die in vain. We join you in praying that the two young children the couple left behind become part of a society that overcomes hatred with love and rejects fanaticism in favour of faith.

And – thanks to you – that prayer works hand-in-hand with specific projects enabling Christians to survive persecution and reach out in faith. ACN is providing:

- Vocational training for Christian victims of persecution – notably women;
- Support for Sisters working with the young, the sick and the disadvantaged;

- Mass stipends for priests bringing Christ to persecuted people;
- Catechesis and Christian education for impoverished children;
- Raised boundary walls and surveillance cameras for persecuted churches.

Shortly after Shahzad and Shama's death, Archbishop Joseph Coutts of Karachi, who has worked closely with ACN for many years, told us: "Your charity is our hope; to know that there are people thinking of us, praying for us and acting in support of us gives us great strength in our troubles. Thank you so much." ●

Handing on the beauty of Faith

Passing on the Faith to the next generation is one of the most important tasks that we can undertake.

Pope Francis said: "The Faith is perhaps the most beautiful heritage that we can give because it makes you grow."

But children in Nagar Parkar – about 10 miles from Pakistan's border with India – are learning about Our Lord and his Church in a makeshift shelter of branches and twigs.

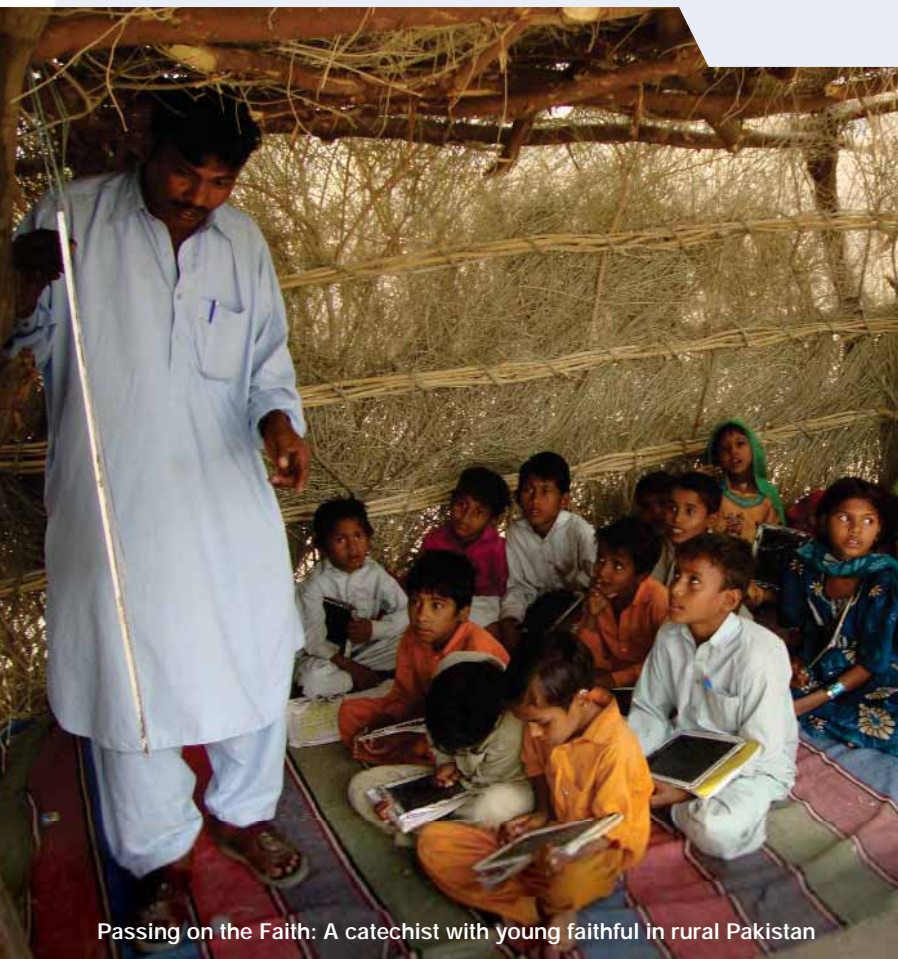
ACN is responding by supporting purpose-built structures in the parish.

The charity is also helping build catechists' houses in Lahore and

Multan dioceses as well as training catechists and Sunday school teachers across Pakistan to pass on the Faith to the next generation.

As Pope Francis said: "Even if at times it can be difficult, if it is so much work, if it presses upon us and we do not see the results we wish, still to educate in the Faith is beautiful.

"To help children, boys and girls, young men, women, and adults to know and to love the Lord ever more is one of the most beautiful educational adventures, for it comprises the Church." ●



Passing on the Faith: A catechist with young faithful in rural Pakistan

Pakistan's struggle against persecution



When Shahzad Masih and his wife, Shama, were thrown into a brick kiln and burnt to a death, their lives were overshadowed by persecution.

The couple, in their 20s, were dragged from their rural home in Punjab province, south of Lahore, beaten and killed.

Their children, four-year-old Sonia and her 18-month-old sister Ponam, were reportedly forced to watch. Shahzad and Shama stood accused of desecrating a copy of the Qur'an, a crime punishable by life imprisonment according to Article 295B of Pakistan's notorious Blasphemy Laws.

The 1,500-strong mob who chanted as the couple were sent to their deaths were not prepared to let justice take its course, nor did it matter to them that Shama was reportedly four months pregnant.

Large numbers of people – including many Muslims – suffer because of false blasphemy accusations.

But Christians are particularly at risk, especially as they are a minority of three million in a population of 170



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Shahzad and Shama, a young Christian couple from Pakistan, were murdered. Their deaths put the media spotlight on a community



Archbishop Joseph Couetts of Karachi

million and most of the faithful have little or no literacy and hold very menial jobs – sweepers, labourers and factory workers.

Shahzad and Shama's death in autumn 2014 came a month after mother-of-five Asia Bibi, another Christian accused of blasphemy, took her five-year-long case to Pakistan's Supreme Court in a last-ditch attempt to save her life.

The climate of hatred is deepening amid growing "Talibanisation" – extremism – sweeping in from Afghanistan all across Pakistan. The Taliban were blamed for the 2013 attack on All Saints Church, Peshawar, in which 87 people died and 170 were injured.

As a charity for persecuted and other suffering Christians, Aid to the Church in Need is working with bishops and other religious leaders to protect people at risk of persecution.

Speaking after the Taliban's December 2014 massacre at the Army Public School, Peshawar, Archbishop Joseph Couetts of Karachi told ACN: "It is the duty of every Christian to be a promoter of peace, reconciliation, harmony and unity... work[ing] together with fellow citizens [so] that Pakistan may be free from the scourge of violence and terrorism." ●



A Memorial service for Christians Shahzad Masih and his wife, Shama, killed in an act of mob rage

Other similar projects around the world



Faith in the future: A tribal family in southern Pakistan introduce the Child's Bible to the next generation

Child's Bible – teaching the Word of the Lord

For many of Pakistan's poor children, ACN's Child's Bible may be the only book they will ever own.

Not only does it introduce children to the riches of the Scriptures, but it is an invaluable tool in the fight for literacy in a country where 95 million people still cannot read.

That is why we have provided 80,000 copies of the Child's Bible in Urdu at a cost of £36,500 – as well as supporting a translation of ACN's I believe – A Little Catholic Catechism.

For those youngsters not so familiar with Urdu, ACN produced the Child's Bible in Sindi language, spoken in south-east Pakistan.

Sindi is just one of the 176 languages that Aid to the Church in Need's Child's Bible has been translated into since its launch in 1979 – and more than 51 million copies of the book have been distributed all over the world.

Fr Emmanuel Asi, who is responsible for promoting biblical literature across Pakistan, said: "In providing us with the Child's Bible, the benefactors of ACN have given the children of Pakistan a genuine missionary gift. The Child's Bible will give blessings to children in Pakistan for many generations." ●

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Your help is their hope



Keeping the Faith: Women at prayer

Pakistan is a priority country for ACN aid – with ongoing projects supporting catechesis, Christian education and help for seminarians. Examples of ACN aid include:

- Aid for food victims in north-west Pakistan (£11,500)
- Basic help for novice Dominican Sisters across the country (£3,830)
- Conference using Pakistan literature to promote inter-faith understanding (£2,500)
- Emergency support and training for victimised women in Punjab (£18,340)
- Eucharistic bread-baking equipment for the Archdiocese of Lahore (£3,120)
- Formation of 73 seminarians from Multan, Faisalabad and Islamabad (£12,340)
- Help towards a new church for Toba Tek Singh, Punjab (£7,670)
- Pastoral ministry for prisoners in the Punjab province (£2,700)
- Raising the boundary wall and other improved security at SS Peter and Paul, Faisalabad (£7,000)
- Schooling for poor children in St Joseph's parish, Faisalabad (£11,650)

Giving girls a future



Sr Rosey Yacoob with children from St Mary's High School, Sukkur, Sindh Province.

WHILE around half of Pakistan's 170 million people are unable to read or write, illiteracy is particularly high among girls.

In Faisalabad Diocese the Church is tackling the education crisis head on – running 82 schools.

The Taliban has destroyed more than 400 schools in northern Pakistan – and around 70 percent of these were girls' schools.

The struggle for girls' education has been championed by Peshawar teenager Malala Yousafzai, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, who survived a Taliban shooting to become an international icon of female empowerment.

Many religious Sisters are at the forefront of the drive to provide girls' education.

In the village of Chak 6/4-L – like many villages in Pakistan known only by

its number – the Sisters of the Holy Family run a boarding school for 45 girls whose families live in the remote regions.

The Sisters are building a new hostel for those schoolgirls who wish to pursue their studies beyond 14.

Many of these girls are extremely gifted and the Sisters would like them to have the chance to take their higher secondary level exams. ACN has promised to support this latest project.

Some of the students are also hoping to become Sisters, so ACN's investment in education is also an investment in the future of the Church in Pakistan. ●

