

Keep faith with Pakistan



Prayer and persecution: Women at Mass at Lahore's Sacred Heart Cathedral



Jailed: Asia Bibi (Image: British Pakistani Christian Association)

For Christians in Pakistan, oppression is a daily reality.

Downtrodden, denied access to proper healthcare, jobs and schooling, and often under pressure to abandon their faith, Christians and other minorities urgently need our support and prayers.

When Pakistani farm labourer Asia Bibi defended her Catholic faith,

she was accused of blasphemy and sentenced to death.

Nine years later, she is still languishing in jail.

Aid to the Church in Need exists for people like Asia Bibi (left).

This report is an appeal to keep faith with Asia Bibi and an invitation to support Aid to the Church in Need projects in Pakistan.

These include urgent legal assistance for people falsely accused and help for others – particularly women – needing basic food and shelter after being forced into hiding following sexual exploitation and violence.

Key ACN projects include

rebuilding burnt churches, providing 80,000 Child's Bibles in Urdu language, Christian schooling and a football tournament designed to kindle inter-faith understanding.

Against a backdrop of suffering, when the Pope made Archbishop Joseph Coutts of Karachi a Cardinal in June 2018, it was a moment of joy and hope for the faithful.

Cardinal Coutts recently told us: **"I am very grateful for the wonderful work of ACN – your kindness, your compassion and your prayers light many candles in the midst of the darkness of suffering."** ✝

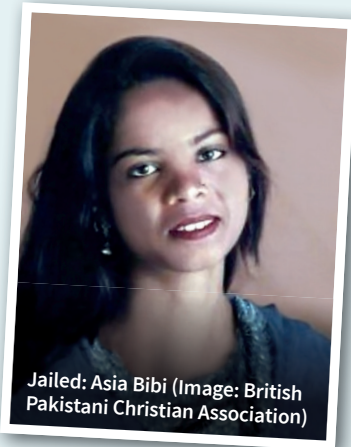
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Aid to the
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The Asia Bibi story



Jailed: Asia Bibi (Image: British Pakistani Christian Association)

When Asia Bibi defended herself for drinking out of a cup on a hot summer's day back in June 2009, little did she know the price she and her family would pay for her courage in defending her Catholic faith – a suffering that continues to this day.

The fateful drink of water that Asia took came in a break during a heavy working day picking berries, close to her home in Sheikhpura in the Punjab province.

Asia's fellow-workers were furious with her for using a cup that they too used. They made accusations against her and stated that, as a Christian, she had defiled the vessel by drinking out of it.

When Asia spoke up for her Christian faith, the response of her co-workers was to accuse her of blasphemy.

She was arrested and in November 2010 sentenced to death.

In July 2015 the Supreme Court of Pakistan suspended her death sentence pending an appeal.

The court adjourned the appeal in October 2016 when one of the justices withdrew, citing legal involvement with a related case.

At the time of writing, Asia is still waiting for the court to reschedule a final appeal hearing.

Appealing for clemency to be shown, Pope Benedict XVI declared his "spiritual closeness" with Asia and, to this day, people the world over continue to call for her release from jail. ✚

Outreach to those unjustly accused



Christians, marginalised for their faith, are vulnerable to attack

Thanks to you, Aid to the Church in Need is helping Christians on death row in Pakistan and others accused of crimes they did not commit.

Amid growing extremism, Christians are often victimised, with trumped-up charges brought against them.

ACN helps the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), which is campaigning for a moratorium on the death penalty – the sentence Christian mother-of-five Asia Bibi received for the crime of blasphemy.

The CCJP provides legal aid for Christians charged with other offences and who have nobody to help them.

Highlighting increased radicalism, CCJP national director Father Emmanuel Yousaf told ACN: "The level of hatred and bias towards the Christian community has been exposed."

With ACN's help, the CCJP is supporting 17 people jailed following a 2015 riot sparked by an extremist attack on two churches near Lahore.

Desperate to win justice, the falsely accused turned to the CCJP for legal aid, medicine, counselling, and prison visits.

Fr Emmanuel reports: "So far, the CCJP – with the financial support of ACN – has... acquired bails for six [of those charged] but there is still a long way to go."

Appealing for more ACN support, he added: "Please go on contributing to the welfare and noble cause of the Christian community." ✚

Tackling inter-faith tension with football



Faith and freedom: Father Emmanuel Parvez (second left) with footballer Salim Bad and supporters of the All-Pakistan Don Bosco Football Tournament supported by ACN

ACN needs your help to continue funding a Church-organised football tournament which tackles religious intolerance by bringing together people from all over Pakistan to play "the beautiful game".

The All-Pakistan Don Bosco Football Tournament involves more than 30 teams in a week-long series of "friendly" matches, held in the mainly Christian village of Khushpur, in the Punjab Province.

Organiser Father Emmanuel Parvez told ACN that the initiative came in response to the 9/11 US Twin Tower attacks, when faith leaders in Pakistan

were alarmed by growing extremist intolerance towards minority groups.

Father Emmanuel said: "In a country torn apart by violence, terrorism and the shadow of uncertainty, the tournament aims to enhance mutual respect and dialogue among our youth."

"To our surprise and joy, the response has been wonderful and every year, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian young people stay with us – walking, talking and playing together."

ACN funding is needed for the players' transport costs, accommodation and food as well as preparation of the football pitches and promotional activity. ✚

80,000 Child's Bibles for Pakistan



ACN Child's Bible

For young Christians in Pakistan, ACN's Child's Bible is a treasured gift that introduces them to the wonder of the Scriptures and the sacred role God plays in all our lives.

So popular is the little 128-page book that another 80,000 are needed in Pakistan's main language, Urdu.

Appealing for more Child's Bibles, Father Emmanuel Asi, Executive Secretary of the Catholic Bible Commission Pakistan (CBCP), told us: "We need your help to inspire our children and future

generations with devotion and give them missionary zeal to spread the Word of God."

In a country with low literacy levels, especially among Christians and other minorities, the Child's Bible is also a crucial learning tool for families who cannot afford a decent education for their children.

Father Emmanuel said: "The Child's Bible is a gift presented to children at their Baptism or Confirmation and it is used in Sunday School Ministry and by religion teachers. It is thus highly welcomed in Pakistan." ✚



Youngsters at a Bible Marathon in Karachi – a non-stop Scripture reading from start to finish.



Help us rebuild our churches

Christ the cornerstone: Rebuilding targeted churches is a vital part of ACN's work

When churches are attacked in Pakistan by extremists or are damaged in suspicious circumstances, distressed faith communities know they can turn to ACN for help.

For isolated and poverty-stricken Christian groups, rebuilding a church quickly sends out a much-needed

signal that they are not going to be forced out by acts of intimidation and violence.

In Muzaffarabad, in Pakistan's northerly Kashmir district, St Thomas's Church was burnt to ashes in an "unfortunate incident".

The parish's poor families cannot possibly afford to rebuild the church

and so ACN has offered to help.

Archbishop Joseph Arshad said: "A rapid response will help us rebuild the church and uphold the life of the community.

"A new church will allow more people to attend Mass and other celebrations as well as community-based activities taking place there." ✚

ACN priority projects Pakistan 2018-19

- Rebuilding of St Thomas's Church, Muzaffarabad
- National inter-faith football tournament, Khushpur
- Emergency and legal aid for victims supported by Justice and Peace Commission
- Training for 48 trainee catechists near Faisalabad
- Radio car for Catholic 'Wave' radio, Lahore
- Nurses' pastoral care centre, near Islamabad
- Expansion of Catholic TV, Pakistan
- 80,000 Child's Bibles in Urdu language



After Mass at Our Lady's Church, Derekabad, in the Thal Desert. ACN has supported this church's upkeep.



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN www.acnuk.org

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