



## Wiping the tears of persecution

Marked with the sign of Faith: Ash Wednesday Mass in a village outside Faisalabad

**PAKISTAN'S Christians need our help more than ever amid increasing reports of girls suffering abduction, forced conversion and marriage – as well as gang rape and enslavement.**

The victims are as young as 12, according to independent research, which states that **up to 1,000 Christian and Hindu young women and girls are abducted and abused every year.**

With your help, we can support both them and their families.

This report – *Wiping the tears of persecution* – not only assesses ACN's projects outreach all across the Christian community but **also spotlights the charity's work for vulnerable and**

**targeted young faithful, especially:**

- Legal aid for girls and young women forcibly converted and forced to marry their abductors
- Food, medicine and other daily needs for the families of people falsely imprisoned
- Christian catechesis and spiritual support for families living in fear
- Programmes promoting women's rights and vocational training for young Christians

In addition, this report has updates on key pastoral ACN programmes for Christian families, whose response to renewed persecution is an ever-deepening commitment to Christ.

**In Lahore, ACN is helping with a**

**new church for an expanding faith community who have outgrown their old chapel built of mud.**

In Rawalpindi, the charity is providing faith formation for 1,200 young people – not to mention sports and much-needed drugs awareness.

**And across the country the charity has provided emergency aid for COVID-19 victims.**

When ACN agreed to support the work of Dominican Sisters in a poor village outside Lahore, mission coordinator Sister Frances wrote back: **"We are so grateful to God that we can be of some solace to the people. Every day, people are knocking at the door asking for assistance."** ✝

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Aid to the  
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ACN UNITED KINGDOM



## Reaching out to the poorest of the poor

**A GROUP of intrepid nuns, determined to reach out to the poorest of the poor in a remote Christian village in the Punjab province, have turned to ACN for help.**

The Dominican Sisters run the only medical surgery and dispensary in Chak 424 village, Montgomerywala, home to Christians who are bonded labourers, working for landlords who hold vast estates in the surrounding area.

The nuns run a home for up to 60 boys aged three to 12, many of them orphans, others escaping violence at home and still more youngsters whose parents are too ill to look after them.

And if that was not enough, the Sisters also manage a co-ed primary school, a girls' high school and hostel.

For all this work, a car is vital to reach a community at the bottom of the social ladder.

And, because it is such a remote area, the car needs to be strong and capable of managing bad roads.

Writing to ACN, Sister Frances Farrugia, mission coordinator, said: **"The car is the only source of transport which is used by the Sisters to take the sick for hospital care."**

"The car is also used to go to the market to buy foodstuffs and other necessities for the works of our Congregation in this village."

She added: "The vehicle will be blessed by the feet of all those who sit in it for God's work. We do not stop doing what is right."

ACN has pledged to help Sister Frances and the other Dominicans. 🙏



Christian youngsters from a parish near Hyderabad, Sindh Province

## Calling time on the mud chapel



Cornerstone of Faith: Building gets underway on the new church

**FOR the last 70 years, parishioners who work as labourers in a village outside Sialkot have attended daily Mass in a tiny chapel built of mud.**

Inevitably, Pakistan's heavy rains have rendered the chapel unsafe and with parishioner numbers now swelling to nearly 10,000, **the need for a replacement place of worship is overdue.**

In a letter to Aid to the Church in Need appealing for help to build a brand new church for St James' parish, Archbishop Sebastian Shaw of Lahore said: "The chapel was built with masonry mud and it is eroding."

"The number of Catholics has increased and is still increasing and now the chapel is too small."

"Construction of a new church is beyond the capacity of the faithful as most of them are on daily wages in the factories or in the fields."

**"Although they are poor, they are very staunch and strong in their Catholic faith and want to have the spiritual nourishment that comes with attending daily Mass."**

ACN has committed to helping them complete work on a new church. Help us keep our promises of love. 🙏

## Thank you for supporting Maira

**MORE than 12,000 friends of ACN signed our petition calling on Prime Minister Boris Johnson to rescue a young Christian girl receiving death threats in Pakistan.**

Fiona Bruce MP, the PM's Special Envoy for Religious Freedom or Belief, received the ACN petition on behalf of Maira Shahbaz.

Maira is in fear of her life after running away from the man who kidnapped her, forced her to convert and marry him before subjecting her to gang rape.

Mrs Bruce announced she was immediately drawing Maira's

UK asylum appeal to the Home Secretary, stating: **"Maira's situation, and that of her family, is a tragic one and hearts go out to her – as demonstrated by the thousands upon thousands of people who have signed Maira's petition."**

That same day, **Neville Kyrke-Smith, National Director, ACN (UK), submitted to 10 Downing Street an open letter backing Maira's asylum appeal.**

It was signed by MPs, peers, bishops across Great Britain and leaders of human rights organisations and charities

supporting persecuted Christians.

This action followed an appeal direct from 14-year-old Maira herself, broadcast on #RedWednesday, last November, in which she said: "I request to all communities – please pray for me. I pray for all the girls in our Christian community."

She called on people to pray: **"God, keep [the Christian girls] in your hands and protect them under your wings."**

At the time of writing, an update is awaited from the Government in response to Maira's asylum appeal. 🙏



Fiona Bruce MP, the Prime Minister's special envoy for religious freedom (in red jacket) has officially received ACN's petition calling for Christian girl Maira Shahbaz (right) to be given asylum





# A youthful faith

**ACN is reaching out to hundreds of young people across the Diocese of Islamabad-Rawalpindi, helping them deepen their faith, get careers advice and avoid drug addiction.**

Surveys show that nearly 45 percent of people in Pakistan are under 20, putting huge pressure on teenagers struggling for jobs.

Money is tight and other resources are also scarce – issues worsened by the impact of COVID-19.

Research also shows a surge in youth addiction, with up to 40,000 new cases of alcohol and drug dependency every year.

Add to that the culture of oppression against Christians, including incidents of persecution, and Church leaders are increasingly fearful of a lost generation.

And so, **Archbishop Joseph Arshad of Islamabad-Rawalpindi has called**

**on ACN to help with a programme of retreats, catechesis, seminars and spiritual direction** – all tailored in line with COVID-19 restrictions – as are the sporting events which are also planned.

Drug awareness is another key part of the initiatives as well as advice for families of young people with addiction issues.

Archbishop Arshad told ACN that a faith-focused approach was critical, as putting God at the centre enables people to avoid addiction, giving them purpose and a sense that they are loved by their Creator.

He said: **“The youth have a very dynamic role – they have a vital contribution to make to the life of the Church.**

**“It is very important that the Church takes care of our young people and helps them to grow in their faith.”** ✝



Young girls at a Christian festival in Christ the King Seminary, Karachi

## Our little Angel is home again

**AGED just 12, Christian girl Farah Shaheen was kidnapped, shackled hand and foot, attached to a chain and was forced to do slave labour in a cattle yard.**

Against her will, Farah's abductor made her convert and marry him.

ACN fought a media campaign with headlines around the world highlighting her plight.

Five months into her ordeal, police recovered Farah and on 16th February 2021 Faisalabad District and Sessions Court ruled in her favour.

Her marriage was declared invalid and she was allowed to return home to her family.

Bishop Iftikhar Indryas, who lobbied for her release and organised her care, told ACN: **“Praise be Jesus Christ, mighty to save. Our little angel Farah is back home.”**

Farah is still recovering from her trauma. Please pray for her and her family as they start a new life back together again. ✝



Farah with bandages over her injuries

▶ Watch Farah's homecoming video: [www.acnuk.org/farahhomeagain](http://www.acnuk.org/farahhomeagain)

Farah Shaheen (centre with head scarf) is welcomed home by her father, Asif, left, and siblings





# Urgent help for Christian women

Young Catholics at a parish outside Hyderabad, Sindh Province

**ACN is supporting a nationwide programme to help Christian girls and young women all over Pakistan threatened by abduction, forced marriage and conversion as well as sexual enslavement.**

The initiative to *Help and Protect Christian Girls* and others from minority faith backgrounds comes at a time when **week in, week out, ACN is receiving reports of Christian girls being kidnapped, raped, subjected to bonded labour and trafficked – all because of contempt for their Faith.**

Thanks to your charity, we are able to team up with the Catholic-run National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) to roll out an expanded programme that

acts both to save abducted Christian girls and prevent others suffering the same fate.

Key to *Help and Protect* are:

- **LEGAL AID** – support for lawyers fighting to free girls as young as 12 forced into marriages
- **EMERGENCY AID** – food, medicine, living costs (heating, lighting and running water) for families of women – mothers, sisters and daughters – snatched from their homes
- **LOBBYING FOR LEGAL CHANGE** – campaigning for changes in the law to stop forced marriages and conversions and bring the perpetrators to justice
- **RIGHTS' AWARENESS CAMPAIGN** – A national conference, provincial

seminars, workshops, leaflets and social media, all designed to enable girls and their families to know their rights

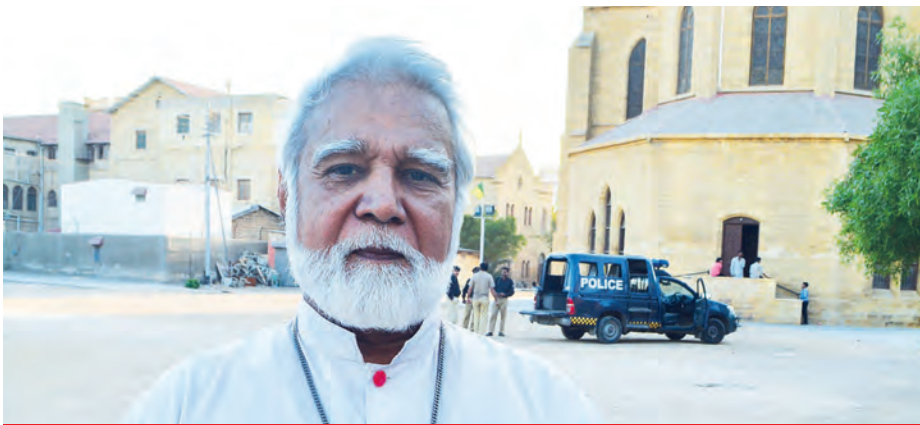
Thousands of girls stand to benefit in a country beset by abduction cases including that of Maira Shahbaz, (see 'Thank you for Supporting Maira').

**For nearly six months, 12-year-old Christian girl Farah Shaheen was attached to a chain and shackled by her husband who forced her to work from dawn to dusk in a cattle yard.**

Cecil Shane Chaudhry, the NCJP's executive director, told ACN: "We count on you to help us raise a voice against this terrible injustice and help our vulnerable young people." ☕

Hardship: Life is tough for many young Christian women in Pakistan





Thank you ACN: Cardinal Coutts outside St Patrick's Cathedral, Karachi

## Message to ACN from Cardinal Joseph Coutts of Pakistan

*"I have had a long association with ACN and I really appreciate what ACN is doing. The relationship with ACN is a relationship of sharing, a relationship of support and of help. We have been receiving help from ACN in so many different ways. Many of our people are very poor and we need help to live our faith and to live as Christians in a largely non-Christian environment. We need help for formation of priests, religious sisters and brothers, for building churches and in so many other ways."* ✠



# ACN aid 2020-21

Compassion for COVID victims: ACN emergency help distributed in Faisalabad © Caritas Pakistan Faisalabad



## EMERGENCY AID

COVID-related emergency food and other aid for families in the dioceses of Lahore and Faisalabad



## CONSTRUCTION

Construction of a church to replace a mud chapel, near Sialkot



## TRAINING

Vocational skills training for Christian girls and young women in rural and urban communities outside Lahore



## HELP AND PROTECT

Help and Protect programme for girls and women threatened with abduction and sexual enslavement – legal aid, emergency aid, rights and awareness campaign



## TRANSPORT

Car for Dominican Sisters reaching out to poor families in rural Punjab



## CATECHISTS

Ongoing formation for 98 lay catechists in Faisalabad diocese