

# ‘Please bring back my daughter’

**Twelve-year-old Saba was kidnapped and forced to convert and marry her abductor in Pakistan.**

On 5<sup>th</sup> January 2025, Saba was seized near her home in the Walton Model Colony No. 2 neighbourhood of Lahore Cantonment, Punjab Province. This is a historically mixed Muslim-Christian area. CCTV footage showed her being kidnapped by Muhammad Ali, a local man known to the family.

Saba’s father Shafique Masih sought help from the police, but he states that at the time of writing they have done nothing. Mr Masih said: **“I’m visiting the police station on a daily basis to plead with them to act, but it seems now that they are not serious in finding my underage daughter.”**

Mr Ali, who has fled the area, claimed that Saba was 18, and had converted to Islam and married him of her own free will. **Police know where she is, living under the roof of her abductor in Shaheed Benazirabad city, Sindh Province, but still do not act.**

Meanwhile Saba’s kidnapper has filed a petition in the Hyderabad Sessions Court to get legal protection for his “marriage”.

The kidnapping and forced marriage of Christian girls and women is a major problem. While there is no agreement about how many cases occur each year, research suggests that every year hundreds of young women and girls from Christian, Hindu and other religious minorities are abducted and forced to convert to Islam by the men who take them from their families. As part of their



Girls are at risk of abduction in Pakistan.



12-year-old Saba

sham marriages, they are subjected to sexual violence and other abuse.

But Saba’s family is not alone. Since 2021 ACN has been working with the Church’s National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) to support vulnerable Christian girls and young women. Their work includes helping families go to court to get their daughters back and raising awareness about the problem. Saba’s is just one of the cases the NCJP is working to resolve.

But they need your help to continue their vital work. Please support our Church partners in Pakistan who are helping families like Saba’s. And please keep all abducted girls in your prayers. 🙏

**PAKISTAN**  
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## Why should they suffer?

**An elderly man was beaten to death after being accused of blasphemy; a 12-year-old girl was kidnapped from her family home and forced to convert and marry her abductor; a church had to be built with a security wall after 26 churches were torched in a day.**

These are some of the harsh realities facing our brothers and sisters in Pakistan.

In many parts of Pakistan, Christians have not only faced targeted attacks on churches but also suffered repeated harassment, false blasphemy accusations, and discrimination in courts, schools and the workplace. At the UN, experts have expressed concern over a rise in the number of underage girls from Christian and other religious minority

backgrounds kidnapped, forced to convert and marry.

But Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) is standing in solidarity with persecuted and suffering Christians in the country. Inside, you will read how we are:

- Supporting the family of Christian man Nazir Gill Masih, who was beaten to death following a blasphemy accusation.
- Helping to get 12-year-old Saba and other kidnapped girls back home.
- Providing security walls for churches and seminaries.

Archbishop Joseph Arshad of Islamabad-Rawalpindi expressed his thanks to all of ACN’s benefactors who have enabled the Church to respond in these times of crisis. He said: **“We have**



Archbishop Joseph Arshad

**significant tasks ahead of us, and your love enables us to accomplish these vital spiritual and material needs of the people.** Despite the challenging and difficult situation, your support has been very appreciated which has helped our people in strengthening their faith.” 🙏

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## Hiding in fear

A normal street in Pakistan – but Sargodha's streets quickly deteriorated into violence.

**Christian grandfather Nazir Gill Masih died just days after being beaten by a 100+ strong mob which falsely claimed he and his family had set fire to the Qur'an.**

The mob looted and set fire to Mr Masih's home and shoe factory, after damaged pages of the Islamic holy book were found in the street outside the family's house in Sargodha on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2024. The rest of his family managed to escape, except his son who was also beaten but survived. Even while Mr Masih lay in hospital hovering between life and death, Pakistan police launched

a blasphemy enquiry with him at the centre.

Residents in Sargodha claim members of extremist political party TLP (Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan) – which became 3rd largest in the province in the 2024 elections – whipped up the violence against Mr Masih, as they resented a Christian having a thriving and successful business. **Members of Mr Masih's family have received further threats.**

With 48 of the members of the mob who killed Mr Masih having been bailed, his family were whisked out of Sargodha by the Church and taken to a safe house.

But ACN's Church partners need to support them for the next six months with:

- Groceries, utilities and other essentials.
- Trauma counselling.
- Furniture and other household items – after these were destroyed during the mob attack.
- A security camera to protect the family's safe house.

Please pray that the Lord will keep the Masih family safe and sound following their harrowing ordeal. 🙏



Nazir Gill Masih's family express their thanks to ACN and local Catholic project partner NCJP (National Commission for Justice and Peace).



New seminarians studying in class.

## Seeking to serve Christ – despite the dangers

**The young men joining St Francis Xavier Seminary in Lahore know that they could be called to make the ultimate sacrifice for Christ.**

ACN is determined to do all it can to help their studies. **The seminary is located in the Youhanabad quarter, where two churches were attacked by suicide bombers** – but ACN has helped to provide security for the compound, including new high external walls topped with barbed wire. It has

also provided Mass Stipends to support priests lecturing there.

ACN is currently providing a grant to support the studies of these future priests and has also promised to provide a new vehicle that can be used by both the seminary and the neighbouring Church of St Luke.

Without your generous love we couldn't continue standing by these courageous young men on their path to the priesthood. Thank you. 🙏



Security search a Mass-goer before he enters the church.

## Let us pray in safety

**Christians in Pakistan live in constant fear of attacks – and with good reason.**

In August 2023, a thousand-strong mob torched 26 churches in the Punjab district of Jaranwala and attacked more than a hundred Christian homes, causing terrified families to flee for their lives. **Archbishop Joseph Arshad said: "Our places of worship and people are not safe in any way due to this."**

So, with a new church being built in New Mariam Town, Chakri, Archbishop Joseph has asked ACN to support the Catholic community there with a security fence to help the faithful to pray in safety.

Archbishop Joseph told ACN: "This new fence will make it secure for the faithful to

attend the eucharistic celebrations and prevent mobs, attacks or forced entry that could harm the church premises or the people." It will cost £26,700.

This level of security is essential in a country where churches have been targeted by suicide bombers – and 21-year-old Akash Bashir is now on the way to sainthood, having given his life when he wrestled a suicide bomber to the ground who was trying to blow up the Catholic Church in Youhanabad in 2015.

Archbishop Joseph concluded by saying: "Thank you for your kind support and help – and above all, your love and concern for the Church in Pakistan." 🙏



Installing the new security wall and gate.

