

The children of Sargodha

deserve to have a future too!



The Light in Noori Gate

In the early morning of Tuesday February 28th unidentified people attacked a Presbyterian Church in Sargodha, Pakistan. They doused the back door with petrol and broke the windows, set fire to the church and then escaped. It was part of the response to the insulting cartoons that had appeared in European newspapers—a response that identifies Christians as allies of the west and enemies of Islam.

Fortunately the church pastor heard the noise and, with help from some Muslim neighbours, managed to extinguish the fire before much damage had been done—but too late to prevent further damage to the fragile relationship between Pakistan's Muslim majority and the tiny Christian community. "Minorities are not safe in Pakistan," said one resident of the Noori Gate colony.

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Hope in the city

I visited Sargodha in early April—a sprawling city of half a million people in the heart of the huge Punjab plain. Surrounded by vast fields of wheat, rice and sugar cane, its economy is based on the land. We drove past the fire-scarred church, though that was not our destination. We had come to visit the Noori Gate Christian colony that lies within walking distance of the church.

The Noori Gate slum is an area of close-packed dwellings, cracked apart by winding alleys and dusty streets. It is home to about 500 Christian families, many of them jobless or working as sweepers or labourers. It has been described as a colony of “ill-planned houses, cramped space, appalling drainage, high illiteracy and abject poverty.”

The Pakistani friend who was with me is a young man in his twenties, who loves Sargodha because he was brought up there.

Coming from a Catholic family, Tariq served as an altar boy and catechist. Then he gave his life to Christ—and the desire grew in him to do something for the poor in his city. He started to visit the local Jail, building up a close relationship with the prison authorities.

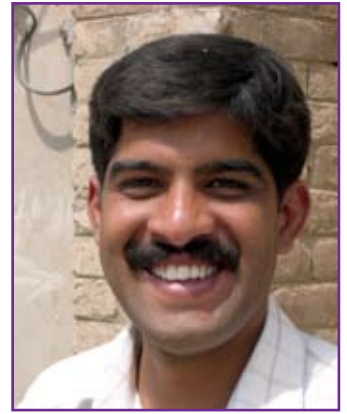


He wanted to open a library in the Prison. “They will never give permission to put Bibles in the jail,” said an older and wiser local Christian leader. But Tariq went ahead anyway, installed a cupboard for the books, and then, with help from the *Starfish Asia Fund*, stocked it with four Bibles, Christian books and a variety of other titles.

Hope for Noori Gate

We park the car and walk into Noori Gate. There are children everywhere, standing around, playing in the dirt, playing cricket—and staring with curiosity at us intruders.

I like it. I like children. They like having their photos taken and, with the magic of a digital camera, I can instantly show them their picture. I get mobbed, squatting amidst the crowd jostling to see the tiny screen of my camera. They love it and crowd around to have their picture taken again. It is not hard to take great photos.



Tariq Iqbal

Our tour of Noori Gate does not take long. The houses are small, cramped and bursting with life. And children... children everywhere. Few of them go to school. Their parents cannot afford that luxury, and it is hard for Christians to get a place in the Government schools.

What future?

What future will there be for these children without some education? For the present, an escape into the world of drugs, cricket in the alleys and a beating at home. For the future, the pressing need to get a job—sweeping floors for the rich or waiting for someone to give a poorly-paid job as a labourer. **These are nominally Christian kids and there has to be a better way.**

Tariq's better way

With help from the *Starfish Asia Fund* in May Tariq rented a 4-room house in Noori Gate. He installed fans (the temperature is soaring), desks, chairs and blackboards, and offered jobs to two teachers and

a watchman. And the children arrived! He has limited himself to 40, but more are lining up at the door, eager for the chance of a lifetime to learn to read and write and gain a foothold on the future.

Tariq still goes to the Jail every morning to teach a class of prisoners for two hours. Then he gets on his bicycle to see what is happening at the school. In the afternoon he has started literacy classes in the school building. In the evening he organizes a sewing class for ladies. And he is planning to get married in July.



The children of Tariq's School in Noori Gate—their first week in class in May. Great things start small.

It costs so little

It costs so little to rent a building, pay the deposit and buy the essential furniture for a Primary School. To run two or three classes also requires salaries for teachers, a watchman and a cleaner. Private schools recoup these costs from the fees, but in a school for the poor to charge fees would defeat the object. No one would be able to pay; even 50 pence or £1 a month is too much for many. Our monthly budget for Tariq's school is **£300 (US \$540)**, which will cover the costs for the present. But now he wants to rent a larger building...



The Sharakpur School for Special People

Sharakpur is an agricultural town of about 30,000 people an hour west of Lahore, celebrated for its sweet guava fruit. The town has basic amenities—hospital and High Schools—but lacks any specialist facilities for the handicapped.

Arshad Chiragh and his wife Nighat are a Christian couple with a special compassion for the disabled and the poor. They opened their small home to start a school for these special children.

The Sharakpur School is a project of the Fellowship of Christ and is run in close harmony with Ashley Arshad and his team of ladies, who travel over from Lahore each week to help.

With a grant from the *Starfish Asia Fund*, Arshad has rented another building with more space, and hired Christian staff to teach and supervise the children.

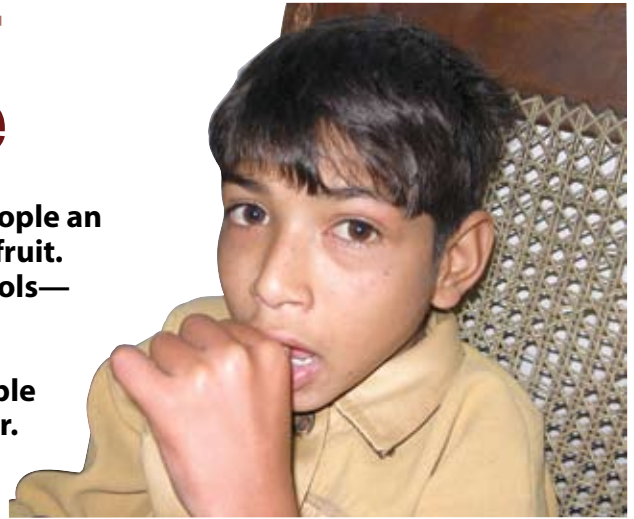


Arshad and Nighat

They all come from poor homes—both Christian and Muslim. Some are mentally disturbed or retarded; two are deaf and dumb; four are crippled from polio; Nabeel has a physical defect from an accident; Saleem has only one arm; Benish is disabled and also has a hole in the heart.

When I visited the home, I sat with 12 year-old Mobin and taught him how to use my camera. He cannot walk, due to polio, but his mind is sharp and eager and he was thrilled to handle the camera and take my picture. He can have a great future, given the right love and care.

Every one of these children is special in the eyes of God and is receiving in this School the love that is so often denied to the disabled.



The Fellowship of Christ is arranging further training for Arshad and his staff to equip them to provide better care. The Starfish Asia Fund gives a monthly grant of £300 / \$540 to cover the running costs of the school—enough for the basic needs of the school and its 23 very special children.



Our principles and practices

- 1. The Starfish Asia Fund is a small charity—we have no full-time admin staff and therefore pay minimal overheads and no salaries or rents.*
- 2. We are a funding channel for the poor and the disadvantaged, and focus our resources on helping the Christian community in Pakistan. We are not exclusive and some of the institutions we help also serve other communities in the name of Christ.*
- 3. We aim to give hope (often through education) to the poorest of the poor and so to restore dignity to whole families and communities. We also help the blind and the disabled, for whom there are few facilities in Pakistan, and sometimes provide urgent direct help to the needy and suffering.*
- 4. We do not initiate or control any projects ourselves, but provide resources to trustworthy national partners who are committed Christians, have a compassion for the poor and are trying to make a difference in their communities. We maintain a relationship of trust with our partners in Pakistan through personal contact and regular visits. In return we require full accountability from them.*
- 5. Our gifts are given in the name of Christ and we believe that the greatest gift we can give is the message of Jesus. All our institutions and partners are active in promoting the Christian Gospel.*

Mike and Kerstin Wakely founded the *Starfish Asia Fund* in 2003 as a response to the needs of the poor, especially in the Christian community in Pakistan. Building on 35 years of mission experience in South Asia, they work through a network of trusted partners to bring material and spiritual relief and hope to the disadvantaged.

News from our partners in Pakistan

Donkey carts for the poor

"I am just thinking that Jesus always helps the poor dejected people." So wrote Pastor Aziz in a recent email in which he said that he has now provided three carts for poor village Christians—not as a gift but on very generous and easy terms.

A donkey and a cart provide dignity and an income for a poor family. Once we see the results of this initial grant, we will be willing to try to provide more funds to help other poor families.

Pastor & Mrs Aziz



New Clinic opens for Easter



Ashley and Seema made a further contribution to the community in which they serve when they opened

the doors of a new clinic, providing free consultation and medicine for the poor. The clinic is located in the Lahore Christian High School and was funded by a generous donor through another agency.

Easter was also celebrated by the Fellowship of Christ with their usual distribution of provisions

to people in need—always welcomed by the community. Thank God that we are able to help one another in this way!



RDC School adds Class 9

The school in village Rak Dera Chahal was threatened with closure until the *Starfish Asia Fund* promised a subsidy. There was much rejoicing in the village in March when, thanks to the extra funding, the school added Class 9—one step away from full High School status. The 70 Christian children in this school come from a desperately poor slum. Even the small church building is a filthy ruin. We are trying to work with the families to restore hope.



Saving Starfish is a 15-minute introduction to the world of the *Starfish Asia Fund*.

Please send for a free copy

*We know we cannot help everyone—
but we have got to help some!
A little goes a long way to turn despair into hope.
Will you help us to make that difference?*

PLEASE CONTACT US!

- Please send me the quarterly newsletter
- Please send me the free 15-minute DVD - *Saving Starfish*
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or email: mike@starfishasia.com

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As I walked on the beach one morning, I saw a young man picking up starfish from the sand and flinging them back into the sea. "If I don't save them, they will die in the noonday sun," he said.

"But there are thousands of starfish on this beach. What difference does it make to save just 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."

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