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SEPTEMBER 2023

# PERSECUTION

PAKISTAN SPECIAL REPORT

## 10 Years Later

GROWING UP AN ORPHAN IN THE  
AFTERMATH OF PAKISTAN'S WORST ATTACK  
AGAINST CHRISTIANS

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

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SEPTEMBER 2023

## ON THE COVER

We combed through the 3,000+ photos ICC has taken pertaining to All Saints throughout the last 10 years. The cover portrays a collage of photos from right after the attack and memorial services to children receiving an education.

*Photo: International Christian Concern*

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**OUR MISSION:** Since 1996, ICC has served the global persecuted church through a three-pronged approach of advocacy, awareness, and assistance. ICC exists to bandage the wounds of persecuted Christians and to build the church in the toughest parts of the world.

**DONATIONS:** International Christian Concern (ICC) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) (all donations tax-deductible). ICC makes every effort to honor donor wishes in regards to their gifts. Occasionally, a situation will arise where a project is no longer viable. ICC will redirect those donated funds to one of our other funds that is most similar to the donor's original wishes.



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### STAFF

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# Surrogate Parents in Pakistan

Ten years ago, a nightmare descended on parishioners of the All Saints Church in Pakistan. Suicide bombers attacked and created a scene out of a horror movie. Hundreds of Christians were killed and injured, leaving a wake of pain that radiated out and will be felt for generations. It is the worst attack against Christians by Islamic extremists in Pakistan's history

In the aftermath of that devastation, we supplied emergency aid to numerous victims, but it was the orphans that moved our heart. We decided to "adopt" a number of them. We set up a small orphanage and provided the kids in our care with the best education possible.

For the past ten years we've covered school costs for 30 of the kids affected by the Pakistan bombing and continue to ensure that they have marketable job skills and training.

We can never replace their earthly parents, or remove their emotional scars, but we can fulfill the Lord's call to care for widows and orphans. It is this work that the Word tells us is "real religion" in the eyes of God.

We spearheaded the care for the orphans of All Saints Church, but it's you that changed their lives. You came to their rescue. You gave them hope in Christ. You gave them a hope and a future. Thinking of this, I was reminded of a quote from Charles Spurgeon, "The child being rescued from the fire clings to the fireman and trusts him completely. She doesn't question his strength or intent. She clings! The heat is terrible, the smoke is blinding, but her deliverer quickly brings her to safety" (paraphrased).

Whatever is going on in your life, whether you are basking in the sunlight, or challenged by life, please know that a few deeply wounded souls were touched by the hand of God because you chose to care for the persecuted. They were rushed from the fire by your arms.

And for that, I thank you with a sincere heart!

**JEFF**



**Jeff King, President**

International Christian Concern

Author: *The Last Words of the Martyrs and Islam Uncensored*



**"It's truer to say that martyrs create faith more than faith creates martyrs. Life has taught me that we are disliked and even hated, but we must break our silence and speak truth bravely."**

**- DR. SAPNA SB, QUOTE AT THE ALL SAINTS CHURCH BLAST MEMORIAL**

# ICC Newsroom

YOUR SOURCE FOR PERSECUTION NEWS

## Modi Breaks Silence on Manipur Violence After Shocking Viral Video

International attention was drawn to the ethnoreligious violence in the state of Manipur, India, when a viral video, released in May, showed two Kuki women being paraded naked in front of hundreds of male Meiti fomenters. An eyewitness stated that the women, including an unknown third, were later violently assaulted, gang raped, and left by the mob.

The viral video was released two months after the initial crime due to the strict internet censorship employed by the Indian government in troubled regions.

The day after this incident became known to the world, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the gang rape a “shameful incident” that reflected poorly on the whole country.

“I want to assure the nation, no guilty [people] will be spared,” he told gathered reporters, according to the Guardian. “What happened to the daughters of Manipur can never be forgiven.”

The current unrest stems from a recommendation made by the Manipur High Court that the majority Hindu Meitei people be made eligible for Scheduled Tribe benefits, including access to land reserved for the majority Christian Kuki tribe.

Religious differences have inflamed the tensions between Manipur’s various ethnic people groups, leaving hundreds of churches and temples destroyed, thousands of homes leveled, and tens of thousands of people displaced. While religion is not the sole source of the violence, its role in the conflict cannot be disregarded.



## Children Continue to be Kidnapped and Killed in the Sahel



The rise of Islamic extremism in Niger’s Sahel region has led to violent Christian persecution, with its worst impacts being felt by children as they face the dual horrors of being targeted and killed or being recruited and displaced from their homes.

“In Niger’s Tillabéri region, an entire generation is growing up surrounded by death and destruction. Armed groups have repeatedly attacked schools and food reserves and are targeting children for recruitment,” said Matt Wells, Amnesty International’s Crisis Response Deputy Director, Thematic Issues.

Since 2012, jihadists have controlled much of the neighboring region of northern Mali, where they recruit, train, and equip fighters in an effort to establish a caliphate.

A report by Amnesty International highlights the impact jihadism has on children in this area, stating, “Children have been killed, recruited to participate in hostilities, deprived of the opportunity to go to school, and forcibly displaced.”



## Chinese Communist Party Government Rewrites Portions of the Bible

Reports indicate that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has rewritten portions of the Bible to “provide active guidance for religion and socialism to coexist.” According to Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-WI), a Chinese university textbook rewrote the ending of the Gospel of John’s account of the woman caught in adultery with “Jesus himself stoning the adulterous

woman to death.” The CCP also replaced the Ten Commandments with quotes by Xi Jinping, such as, “Resolutely guard against the infiltration of Western ideology.” Rep. Gallagher noted that the CCP is on a “quest to make the faithful serve the party rather than God.”

## Coptic Pope Ignites Debate on Christian Population Numbers in Egypt

Despite Egypt containing the largest Christian population in the Middle East North Africa region, the exact number of Egyptian Christians remains unknown. Government censuses ignore the country’s Christian community, while some Christian clergy inflate their estimations of the Christian presence in Egypt. The lack of

clear information has heightened distrust of Egyptian state figures and bureaucracy, ultimately harming Egypt’s persecuted and marginalized Christians, particularly Copts, by creating division between Christians still living in Egypt and those who have sought refuge abroad.



## Nigerian Christian Leaders Speak Out After Muslim Man Stoned for Supposed Blasphemy

In June, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) condemned the murder of Usman Buda, a Muslim man from northeast Nigeria’s Sokoto State. For reasons still unknown, Buda was accused of blasphemy and beaten to death by a mob shouting “Allahu Akbar.” In the aftermath, CAN partnered with other Muslim leaders to condemn Buda’s killing, and a statement signed by the association president Daniel Okoh stated, “[Buda’s killing] is unlawful. We... denounce any form of violence or jungle justice in the name of religion. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family of Usman Buda during this difficult time.”



# West Watch

ISSUES INVOLVING CHRISTIANITY IN THE WEST



## US Supreme Court Rules 6-3 in Favor of Christian Free Speech Expression

**T**he U.S. Supreme Court (SCOTUS) on June 30 ruled 6-3 in favor of religious liberty in a landmark case citing the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment. The case involved a lawsuit brought by Lorie Smith, a Christian web designer in Colorado, against a Colorado anti-discrimination law that would have required Smith to design a website for a homosexual couple.

Chief Justice Roberts, Justices Alito, Barrett, Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, and Thomas ruled in favor, with Gorsuch writing the majority opinion. Justices Kagan, Jackson, and Sotomayor ruled against, with Sotomayor writing the dissenting opinion.

Thus, SCOTUS reversed the previous decision by the Tenth Circuit and struck down the Colorado law, ruling that, “The First Amendment envisions the United States as a rich and complex place, where all persons are free to think and speak as they wish, not as the government demands. Colorado cannot deny that promise consistent with the First Amendment.”

The dissenting opinion asserted that, “Today, the Court, for the first time in its history, grants a business open to the public a

constitutional right to refuse to serve members of a protected class,” claiming that the ruling followed a nationwide “backlash to the movement for liberty and equality for gender and sexual minorities.” Sotomayor then compared the ongoing LGBTQ+ movement with the civil rights movement of the late 20th century.

The majority opinion stated in response that, “It is difficult to read the dissent and conclude we are looking at the same case... The dissent claims that Colorado wishes to regulate Ms. Smith’s ‘conduct,’ not her speech.” Gorsuch then wrote that “it is the dissent that would have this Court do something truly novel by allowing a government to coerce an individual to speak contrary to her beliefs on a significant issue of personal conviction, all in order to eliminate ideas that differ from its own.”

Amid LGBTQ+ celebrations nationwide, an already-divided Christian community in the United States faces intense conflict. The threat of direct persecution—despite constitutional protections—is increasing, as activists seek to normalize LGBTQ+ ideology and practice at all levels of Western society.



## UN Body Calls for Action Against Religious Hatred after Quran Burning in Sweden

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) passed a resolution calling on the international community to “prevent and prosecute acts and advocacy of religious hatred that constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence” after a Quran burning in Sweden caused widespread outrage.

On June 28, 2023, an Iraqi man burned a Quran outside the Stockholm Central Mosque. Local law enforcement had attempted to obstruct other Quran burnings in 2023, but a Swedish court ruled that Swedish law protected such acts of reprobation. Thus, Stockholm police permitted the recent Quran burning to occur, but subsequently charged the man for acting “against an ethnic or national group,” according to Reuters.

The Swedish government itself condemned the Quran burning as an “Islamophobic act.” A U.S. State Department spokesman stated that Washington believes “the demonstration created an environment of fear” that imperils religious liberty while affirming that allowing the act to occur “supports freedom of expression.” ICC reported that Stockholm law enforcement subsequently authorized a request to burn the Torah and the Bible outside the Israeli Embassy in Stockholm. Multiple sources later reported that the planned burning did not occur.

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## Christian Doctor in UK Appeals Case After Being Fired Over Transgender Pronouns Use

A Christian doctor in the U.K. recently appealed his case after being fired for refusing to use transgender pronouns. Dr. David Mackereth held that he would not refer to a patient based on his subjective gender identity rather than based on his objective biological nature because of his Christian beliefs. Mackereth is currently appealing his case before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

The Christian Legal Centre commented on the case stating that “these rulings are believed to be the first time in the history of English law that a judge had ruled that free citizens must engage in compelled speech.”

In response, Mackereth sued the DWP for religious discrimination. The Employment Tribunal dismissed his case three months after the DWP fired Mackereth, citing his Christian beliefs as “incompatible with human dignity.” In May 2022, the Employment Appeal Tribunal partially overturned the previous verdict, yet still ruled that the firing had been justified.

In 2019, Mackereth lost his job at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the public service bureaucracy responsible for welfare and healthcare benefits in the U.K. The Christian Legal Centre—a Christian advocacy group in the UK—reported that the DWP considered refusal to use female pronouns to refer to a man that identified as a woman as “harassment” under U.K. law.





# Your Hands and Feet

ICC PROJECTS MADE POSSIBLE BY OUR SUPPORTERS



## Supporting Hope's Education



**RESTORE:** LIVES & COMMUNITIES

**P**astor J is a dedicated shepherd of his congregation and a loving grandfather to young Hope. In 2012, Hope's mother was attacked and raped by a radical Muslim man. When she found out she was pregnant, her and her father sought out justice in the court system, but the man would only take responsibility if they converted to Islam.

"We gave up," said Pastor J.

The burden of caring for both his daughter and granddaughter now fell heavily on Pastor J's shoulders.

ICC has been supporting Hope and her family for nearly a decade. Hope is now 10 years old and in school, but her grandfather is struggling to provide the financial support for her education.

ICC paid her school fees and provided other academic materials to relieve the financial burden for her family.

"I am very grateful for the support of my granddaughter, Hope,

from ICC. Hope is studying very well now, and she is also happy to be picked up and dropped off by the school bus every day. She has enough uniforms for the whole year," said Pastor J. "I will be praying for your organization and the work you are doing for persecuted believers. You have made my work of ministry even easier, since I am now focusing on it without thinking about how Hope will get an education."

Hope is now comfortable in school and has everything she needs. We expect and pray for her continued success academically and also socially.

"Thank you very much to you for paying for my school fees, school transport, food, clothing, uniform, shoes, and all the other things I have received. May God bless you very much," said Hope.



## AFRICA

# Peter's Story



**RESTORE:** LIVES & COMMUNITIES

The story of Peter and his family shows the unyielding strength of the human spirit. The fateful evening of April 12, 2022 forever changed their lives when the Allied Democratic Forces unleashed terror upon their village. Huddled together in fear, they witnessed their home being destroyed, robbed of its belongings, and their dreams shattered. With no choice but to flee, they sought refuge in the nearby church.

Their journey brought them to Bunia, a place where safety was uncertain, and survival meant grappling with unimaginable challenges. The absence of a steady income haunted Peter, and without financial stability, securing a proper home seemed like an unattainable dream.

To make ends meet, Peter resorted to backbreaking labor, digging farms for the local community, earning a meager \$1.30 for every completed job. The toil was excruciating, causing relentless body pain, but he persevered for the sake of his family. The odds were stacked against them, as finding a job in Bunia proved

exceedingly difficult, especially for internally displaced persons (IDPs) like them.

ICC provided immediate aid for the family to improve their living conditions, like food and clothing. We also supplied the family with a motorbike to provide Peter with a means to make a reliable income.

"We had nothing, and you have given us everything. May God bless you so much," said Peter. "I am so happy that my grandchildren will live in a normal condition now. We had nothing; no food, no clothes, no bedding. And today, we have all these things."

Their journey continues, but with the support they received, they now face the future with greater hope and determination.

An ICC staff member who implemented the project said, "In short, this project has greatly changed the life of this family and brought dignity, a lot of joy, and unity in the family."



## From Radical Islam to Redeemed Faith

What would cause a young radical Islamist to turn to Jesus? We connected with Mooney, a man who grew up training to become a Muslim imam and learning to treat Christians as second-class citizens. That all changed when he met Jesus.

Through a friend, he learned about the grace-filled love of Jesus. Comparing this to the harsh rules and regulations of Islam, he knew he had found something special. However, because of his decision to follow Christ, he was soon kicked out of his home.

Through your support, we came alongside this new believer to set him up with a metalworking business so that he can support himself financially. By God's grace, we trust that he will share this transformative love of Jesus with others as well.



# THE HIDDEN PLIGHT OF PAKISTAN'S CHRISTIANS

**W**hen we think of humanitarian concerns, typically, we think of Africa, the Middle East, and areas of Southeast Asia. Pakistan is a nation that garners less attention than neighboring India and Afghanistan. There is no Islamic extremist group that has seized control of the country like the situation in Afghanistan, nor is it governed by radical Hindu nationalists who use anti-conversion laws to target Christians like in India.

In a way, the situation in Pakistan is more egregious, as it combines the oppressive-like nature of radical Islam with the pseudo-legitimate cover of the nation's laws to inflict persecution on its most vulnerable group.

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan has proven intransigent to other beliefs by enacting and abusing blasphemy laws. These laws create a divide that marginalizes the Christian community and encourages violence against Christians.

Forced conversions and marriages among women and girls, false blasphemy accusations, and discrimination are all forms of persecution faced by Christians and other religious minorities in Pakistan. Extremists often target Christian places of worship for deadly terrorist attacks. Many Pakistani Christians fear the possibility of further attacks, particularly when celebrating major Christian holidays.

Islamic extremist groups are active in Pakistan. The All Saints Church bombing in 2013 is evidence that the Pakistani government did not have a handle on terrorist activities. Jundullah, a terrorist group linked to the Taliban, took credit for the attack on the children of the All Saints school. They stated that Christians are the enemies of Islam and that attacks would continue so long as there are Christians in Pakistan. Terrorists hope to instill fear into believers, that they would condemn their faiths and return to Islam. Targeting children at school is a very potent message that these people have no issue killing the innocent to accomplish their goals. Yet, the church in Pakistan remains strong. ICC has seen the church rebuilt and the students tuition and needs met in the wake of the disaster. Ten years later, the church is still strong in Peshawar.

In visiting the persecuted church in Pakistan, ICC staff has walked away with a renewed drive to change things for our suffering brothers and sisters. Their resilience in the face of unjust blasphemy accusations, social boycotts, attacks from radicals, and deplorable living conditions is humbling. They cling to their faith not because it is easy (for it is certainly not), but because they recognize that the suffering is temporary—that the only happiness they feel is from God, and that they would rather live a meaningful life in Christ than an easy life in Islam.



**PESHAWAR:** Peshawar is the city All Saints Church resides. It is a large city in Pakistan on the border of Afghanistan. While the majority ethnic group in Pakistan is Punjabi, the population of Peshawar is made up primarily of Pashtuns, reflected in the heavy Afghan population. Since the fall of Afghanistan in August 2021, hundreds of thousands of Afghans have come to Pakistan and are residing primarily in the border cities, like Peshawar.

There is a population of Christ believers in the city, but they are a significant minority in the majority Muslim country. Between the refugees, the proximity to Islamic extremists in Afghanistan, the minority ethnic group, and being a religious minority, it is very difficult to live out a life for Christ in Peshawar.



10 YEARS SINCE THE ALL SAINTS CHURCH ATTACK

# We Still Remember

THE COURAGEOUS JOURNEY OF 30 ORPHANS

ICC ADOPTED

By ICC's South Asia Regional Team

On the serene Sunday morning of September 22, 2013, the All Saints Church in Peshawar welcomed its congregation with familiar rituals and the essence of solace. Among those who gathered that day were the hopeful youth, attending special theology classes, preparing to become part of the church's congregation. Little did they know that an unimaginable act of violence would soon shatter the peaceful ambiance.

As the Sunday service concluded with laughter, camaraderie, and families enjoying a special thanksgiving meal, the youth began making their way back to their theology classes. The church compound was filled with joyous chatter and fellowship, as children played innocently, oblivious to the impending doom.

In a horrifying instant, a deafening blast pierced the air, quickly followed by another. Two suicide bombers had detonated improvised explosive devices attached to themselves. The church's windows shattered, and bloody chaos engulfed the once tranquil grounds.

The church compound, once a place of congregational celebrations, was now transformed into a scene of horror. Fragments of human bodies lay scattered, burnt faces covered in tar, disintegrated limbs, and pools of blood painted the once white courtyard with loss and destruction. Whimpering survivors, searching for their loved ones, faced a harrowing reality as they navigated through the wreckage.

The attack on All Saints Church was not just a suicide bombing; it was an assault on the future generations of Peshawar's Christian community.

The heinous act was meticulously planned to instill fear and leave a lasting impression on the community's history and future.

The church, built in 1883, had stood as a symbol of interfaith harmony, promoting unity among people of different religious backgrounds. Its unique architecture, resembling a mosque from the outside, was a testament to the coexistence of diverse faiths in the region.

On that ill-fated day, the church witnessed around 600 worshippers attending the Sunday service. Tragically, 127 innocent lives were lost (though the final number can't be confirmed), and more than 250 were left wounded, marking one of the deadliest blows to Peshawar's Christian community in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The Pakistani Taliban Jandullah claimed responsibility for the attack, stating it was in retaliation to the U.S. Drone Program. The terrorist group vowed to continue targeting non-Muslims until the drone strikes ceased, propagating fear and chaos among the religiously diverse community.

The aftermath of the attack saw the church, once a symbol of harmony, desecrated with shrapnel and blood, bearing the scars of lingering terror. The building that had witnessed countless thanksgivings now stood as a haunting reminder of the tragedy that unfolded within its walls.

In the wake of the attack, then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif condemned the act of terrorism, emphasizing that targeting innocent people went against Islamic teachings. He also contemplated reconsidering peace talks with the Taliban in the wake of this heinous incident.





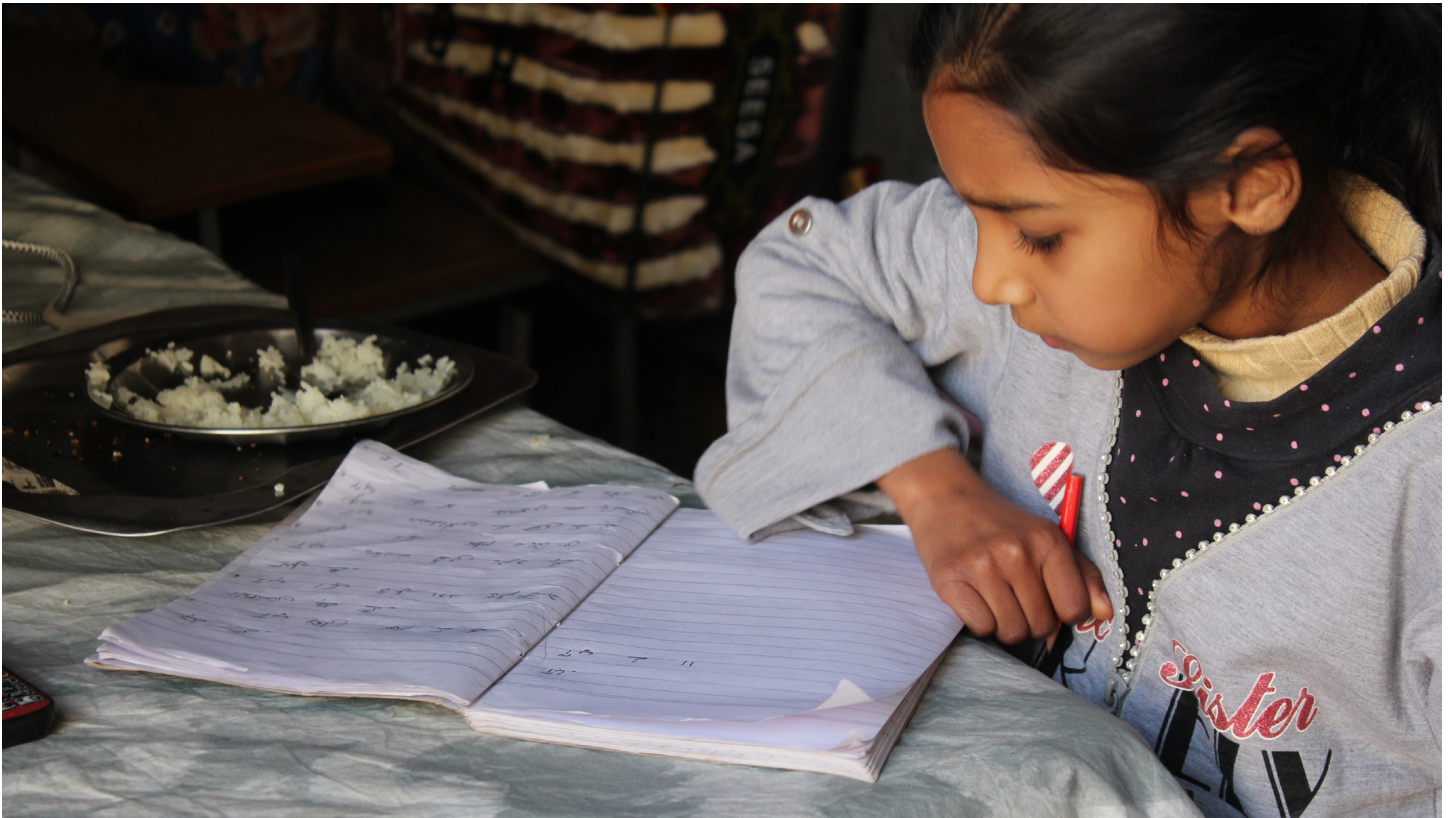
Photos: Inside All Saints Church.  
Families visit the graves of their  
loved ones killed from the blasts.







*A 2015 memorial service  
remembering the lives lost  
two years prior.*



The devastating impact of the All Saints Church Attack left a profound void in the hearts of the Christian community in Peshawar. Families lost loved ones, children became orphans, and the future of the community seemed uncertain. However, in the face of darkness, a glimmer of hope emerged through the support and compassion of organizations like International Christian Concern (ICC).

#### **SURROGATE PARENTS FOR SUNYA**

Sunya, a brave survivor, shares her harrowing experience of a tragic event that changed her life forever. It was a day filled with horror and despair when she and her elder sister rushed to the compound

in search of their parents. The scene was unimaginable – bodies, blood, and cries surrounded them, but they clung to a dim glimmer of hope that their parents might still be alive.

As Sunya prayed fervently for her parents' safety, she spotted a familiar face on the ground. It was her mother, but tragically, the lower part of her body was missing. Before Sunya and her sister could fully comprehend the horror, compassionate churchgoers shielded them from the gruesome sight, sparing them the pain of witnessing their mother's mutilated remains.

The siblings pleaded and fought to see

their mother, but the well-intentioned people insisted on protecting them from the traumatic sight. Sadly, their father's fate was equally grim, and they received his body a day later, unrecognizable due to the extent of the burns.

Left as orphans, Sunya and her four siblings, all school-going children, faced an uncertain future. The weight of their loss seemed unbearable, and they could not fathom how to continue without their parents' love and guidance.

Their youngest sister, only seven years old, miraculously survived due to a twist of fate. Sunya's mother had sent her to the church building just before the blast, sparing her

from the tragic events that unfolded.

In the months following the bombing, ICC launched an education program supporting the children severely affected. The goal of this program was, and is to this day, to support the education of children who would have been forced to drop out of school due to the effects of the bombing.

Sunya expressed, “When all other relatives seemed unable to help, ICC came to our rescue, offering support and care when we needed it most. ICC took on the role of surrogate parents, ensuring that we could continue our education and rebuild our lives”

With ICC’s unwavering support, Sunya and her three siblings completed their schooling, and even after a decade, ICC continues to stand by them. Sunya and her brother Shahan are now enrolled in bachelor’s programs at the university, with ICC’s Generation Transformation program covering all their educational expenses. Sunya’s younger sister is also receiving support for her education, all thanks to ICC’s dedication to their well-being.

Sunya and her family pray fervently for ICC’s prosperity and success in helping others, just as they have helped them through their darkest times.

### **A VESSEL OF GOD’S COMPASSION**

Robin’s family endured a living hell that scarred them for several years. Robin, a mere 15-year-old at the time, along with his 7-year-old brother Azfar, witnessed the horrifying event unfold in their own church compound. As explosions tore through the air, the young brothers clung to each other, surrounded by severed bodies and chaos.

The impact of the bombings was devastating. Robin sustained multiple fractures, confining him to a wheelchair for months, preventing him from appearing in his board exams that year. Azfar, though physically injured, suffered from deep emotional trauma, haunted by the horrifying image of the church turned into a graveyard before his eyes. Their father bore the brunt of the tragedy, his body riddled with ball bearings and tar, leading to a brain stroke that left him partially paralyzed and suffering from amnesia and aphasia.

**“When all other relatives seemed unable to help, ICC came to our rescue, offering support and care when we needed it most. ICC took on the role of surrogate parents, ensuring that we could continue our education and rebuild our lives.”**

**- SUNYA**





Mishal DO Fozia Nadeem



Shiza DO Riaz



Nasreen WO Riaz



Saiza DO Rashid



Hoorah DO Yousaf Nawal



Mairee



Jamila WO Nazir



Zarish DO William Sabir



Saba DO Pervaiz



Shazia WO Emmanuel



Meerab DO Naeem



Mona V



hweli DO Emmanuel



Kainat DO Nisar



Rehana Kausar WO Nazir



Yamima DO Naveed



Simraan DO Anwer



Sa



DO Riaz



Mavra DO Dilawer San



Raj Bibi WO Mehboob



Elizebth WO Samuel



Rafia W



Sania WO Har



Nasreen Bibi WO Naseem



Victor Jhon





Robin's father's condition deteriorated further with gangrene developing on his right leg, requiring amputation. However, the cancerous cells continued to grow, causing immense pain and suffering despite numerous operations. Amid their father's battle for survival, their mother made a difficult sacrifice, giving up her career to care for him and their children.

Financially burdened and with no other source of income, the family's hope rested solely on their father's recovery. In these dark times, ICC emerged as a beacon of hope. The organization stepped in to support the educational expenses of Robin and Azfar, enabling them to continue their studies despite the family's challenging circumstances.

Thanks to ICC's Generation Transformation Program, Robin graduated as a software engineer, while Azfar is now on the path to pursue his career in computer engineering after being admitted to a university. For Robin's mother, ICC was a blessing in disguise, providing her sons the opportunity to study in well-reputed educational institutions despite the prevailing inflation and financial struggles.

Robin's mother expresses, "Even in times of crisis, God provides a way for his people, and ICC served as a vessel of God's compassion and support for our family during those trying years."

*Victim's photos and names appear on the tribute for the All Saints blast victims in Peshawar.*



*Photos: Inside All Saints Church. Families visit the graves of their loved ones killed from the blasts.*

## A DIVINE BEACON OF HOPE

Noreen a resilient young survivor, emerged from the ashes of devastation with a story of hope and transformation. On that fateful day, she, her two sisters, and mother found themselves at the church. Fate took a cruel turn when Noreen left for her class, leaving her family behind in the church compound.

As she settled into her classroom, a deafening explosion ripped through the air, shattering the peaceful surroundings. Before Noreen could process the gravity of the situation, a second lethal weapon detonated, sending shock waves of chaos and terror through the vicinity.

Filled with dread and a desperate need to ensure her family's safety, Noreen rushed back toward the church compound. The scene that greeted her was nothing short of a nightmare. Bodies lay strewn on the ground, their lives snuffed out in an instant. Blood, fire, and unimaginable devastation painted a grim tableau.

Summoning every ounce of courage, Noreen ventured forth, braving the haunting sight of the deceased and dismembered. Fear gnawed at her heart, for she knew not what fate had befallen her loved ones. But even in the darkness, a glimmer of hope ignited within her when she spotted her elder sister, alive but grievously injured.

Noreen continued her search, and her prayers were answered when she found her younger sister and mother, both battered and wounded, but alive. The timely assistance of medical professionals had saved them from the brink of death. Her younger sister's skin had been torn from her right shoulder, and her mother had endured a life-saving laparotomy while her elder sister lost her right leg.

While her family's injuries were severe, their survival became a beacon of hope for Noreen. The will to live burned stronger in her heart, and she knew she had to embrace the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, Noreen became a beneficiary of ICC's Generation Transformation Program. Noreen's dream of becoming a fashion designer took

shape. The program offered her access to quality education and training, propelling her toward her graduation in September 2023—10 years after uncertainty plagued her future.

Noreen, a grateful beneficiary of ICC's Generation Transformation Program, expressed her heartfelt appreciation, stating, "Thanks to ICC, I was able to fulfill my dream of pursuing a bachelor's in Fashion Designing. [ICC] entered our lives like a divine beacon of hope, guiding us

**"Often, I keep thinking of God's strange plans. He took my parents to heaven, but He gave me ICC to take care of me, stand with me, to strengthen me, and to build my future. I have learned a lot from ICC on how to love others and engage in charity work. I would love to follow ICC's footsteps in the future if I could."**

**- SMITH**

through our darkest times with the care and support of a compassionate hand. We are forever grateful to God for sending ICC into our lives."

### STANDING BY SMITH

Among the dead were the parents of Smith, who at the time was in third grade. ICC has been paying for his education and acting as his guardian ever since.

He starts college this year, as he aspires to

be a medical nurse.

"I miss my parents a lot, but at the same time, I want to be strong for my younger brother, Musa. I want him to get a good education and live a dignified life as I dream of it," said Smith.

Smith is now part of ICC's Generation Transformation, where we will pay for his college tuition.

"Often, I keep thinking of God's strange plans. He took my parents to heaven, but He gave me ICC to take care of me, stand with me, to strengthen me, and to build my future," said Smith. "I have learned a lot from ICC on how to love others and engage in charity work. I would love to follow ICC's footsteps in the future if I could."

### THIRTY CHILDREN UNDER ITS WING

In the aftermath of the tragic All Saint Church attack, International Christian Concern recognized the dire situation faced by Peshawar's Christian community. With children losing parents and families losing their sole breadwinners, the future of these youngsters hung in the balance. ICC stepped forward to ensure that these young lives would not be lost to illiteracy.

Taking 30 children under its wing, ICC covered their complete educational expenses through its Peshawar schooling program. Over a decade later, ICC remains true to its promise. The impact of ICC's unwavering support is evident in the success stories it has fostered, with Robin, a victim of the All Saint Church attack, proudly graduating as a Software Engineer in August 2022. Four more students are set to graduate this year, each venturing into different fields.

The dedication and commitment of ICC have been a shining light in the lives of these children and families, pulling them out of the depths of despair and giving them hope for a better future.

The All Saint Church bombers devastated Peshawar's Christian Community by leaving many orphans behind. However, ICC stepped in as a surrogate parent, providing education and support through its Peshawar Schooling and Generation Transformation program, rebuilding the community's future. ✝



*The terrorists may have tried to destroy the lives and futures of these children, but we've not let the worst day of their lives define who they were meant to become. If you'd like to help these children and more persecuted Christians receive a higher education, please scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit [www.persecution.org/generation-transformation](http://www.persecution.org/generation-transformation).*

# Building Up Peshawar's Next Generation

ICC's former Regional Manager shares his journey following the living victims of the All-Saints Church bombing.

By William Stark

**O**n September 22, 2013, the congregation of All Saints Church, located in Peshawar, Pakistan, was filing out of the church building following a typical Sunday service. As a crowd gathered in the church's tight courtyard, two strangers passed through the gates and stood amongst the friends and families.

At 11:44 a.m., the two strangers detonated the explosives hidden under their clothing, unleashing a hail of shrapnel, body parts, and blood. More than 600 Christians were exposed to the deadly blasts and when the dust settled, more than 100 were killed and scores more injured.

To this day, the courtyard of All Saints Church bears the scars of this deadly attack. Inside the church, a clock's hand remains frozen at 11:44 a.m. as a memorial.

The bombing of All Saints Church remains Pakistan's most deadly incident of Christian persecution. However, many do not think beyond the attack's initial carnage or immediate victims. Those who survived the days and weeks that followed the bombings are often forgotten.

However, this does not mean they do not exist or are underserving of our help.

As a Regional Manager, I have had the privilege of serving the community affected by this attack. Among the most vulnerable survivors were the orphaned children and the children whose parents were injured so severely that they could no longer support their families.

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2015

I WILL MAKE THEM JOYFUL IN MY HOUSE OF PRAYER



In the months following the bombing, ICC launched an education program supporting the children severely affected. The goal of this program was, and is to this day, to support the education of children who would have been forced to drop out of school due to the effects of the bombing.

Since the program's launch in April 2014, ICC has supported the education of 62 Christian students, with more than half of them graduating from high school due in large part to ICC's support.

It has been amazing for me to watch the children in this program grow up over the last seven years. I caught up with two students who are now continuing their studies at university.

Joyce William's father, William Ghulam, was killed in the bombing of All Saints Church. In addition to her father, Joyce also lost her brother and sister in the bombing. Joyce's mother, her only surviving family member, was also severely injured. After the bombing, Joyce had to support her mother for two years as she recovered.

Joyce was in eighth grade when she was enrolled in ICC's All Saints Church schooling program. Now 21, she looks back at the importance of the support she received.

"The importance of ICC's schooling project of course lies in the fact that it helped remove the financial burden of my education from my mother's shoulders," Joyce explained. "In the midst of such a troubling time, the support paved the way for my studies. I am highly grateful to ICC."

Now studying English at the University of Peshawar, Joyce hopes to follow in the footsteps of her father, a renowned teacher in Peshawar.

"I got into the habit of reading books because of my father," Joyce said. "He used to read books and encourage his studies to have a deep friendship with books. Keeping his successful life in view, I decided to follow in his footsteps. I want to develop my professional career as a professor at a university."

For Nida Arif, another graduate of the

All-Saints Church schooling program, her entire family was severely injured by the bombing.

"Four members of my family got injuries," Nida said. "We went through a very hard time after the attack."

"I started receiving support from ICC in April 2014," Nida continued. "For three years, I was the beneficiary of this project and am proud to announce that I am now enjoying my medical studies. This is all because of ICC's love and concern."

At 22, Nida is studying to become a nurse at Rugaidah College of Nursing, a program within the Kuwait Teaching Hospital in Peshawar.

She is currently in her third year of studies and plans to join the Pakistan Army as a nurse after she graduates.

"I could not have reached this stage in my life if ICC was not there," Nida explained. "In the future, I want to initiate a small-scale project of my own to encourage Christian youths to flourish in the medical field."

For me, it has been a humbling experience to serve the families affected by the bombing of All Saints Church, especially the students benefiting from the schooling program. I always enjoy hearing about what the graduates of the program have gone on to do following ICC's support.

Looking to the future, however, I am excited by the prospect of going beyond the programs ICC is currently supporting in Peshawar.

As part of the new Generation Transformation program, ICC will continue to support Christian students like Joyce and Nida as they further their studies at university. This program will allow ICC to not only help the Christian community of Peshawar recover from the 2013 bombing, but also build up the next generation of Christians to be even stronger.

It is amazing, and humbling, to see how God can resurrect an opportunity to wonderful out of an event as tragic as the bombing of All Saints Church.✝

**"For me, it has been a humbling experience to serve the families affected by the bombing of All Saints Church, especially the students benefiting from the schooling program. I always enjoy hearing about what the graduates of the program have gone on to do following ICC's support."**

**- WILLIAM STARK, FORMER ICC REGIONAL MANAGER FOR SOUTH ASIA**



# Crowns of Courage

HIGHLIGHTING THOSE WHO HAVE SACRIFICED EVERYTHING FOR CHRIST

## I Forgive, I Forgive, I Forgive

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF SISTER LEONELLA SGORBATI

**I**n the 1970s, Sister Leonella Sgorbati of Italy first stepped foot in Africa, where she would spend the next several decades until her untimely death in 2006. She lived in Kenya for many years, working as a midwife and serving as the head of the Consolata Nursing School. Sgorbati also helped create the Chemichemi Institute, an academic institution for women to access an education and spiritual support.

Eventually, Sgorbati crossed the northern border into Somalia. Despite the terrorism that ran rampant in the nation, Sgorbati held hope for the next generation. She helped create a nursing school in the capital city of Mogadishu, to expand the region's healthcare offerings, but also provide opportunities to young adults who may otherwise be seduced by al-Shabaab recruiters.

Sister Joan Agnes Matimu, the current regional superior of the Consolata Missionary Sisters, recalled, "We deeply believed that if we gave a chance to the young people, something different, they would lay down their weapons. Sister Leonella believed deeply in that. She said, 'I know I am taking risks. I know I could be risking my own life, but I will do it for love.' "

While she worked with people from a variety of backgrounds in Somalia, Sgorbati chose to bridge the differences they faced. Matimu recalled, "She said there was no problem of working with people of other culture and religion as long as there is respect for each other, for where there is fear, there is no love."

As the years went by, the threats to Sgorbati grew increasingly palpable. In 2006, Pope Benedict XVI delivered a speech in Germany, referencing a Christian emperor's criticism of Islam. His remarks sparked a new wave of anti-Christian sentiment throughout the Muslim world, including in Somalia.

Even though Sgorbati kept her faith largely private in the workplace, according to Matimu, the local extremists likely thought Sgorbati was attempting to convert students at the nursing school.

Yet, Sgorbati persisted in her work despite the threats. Acknowledging the risks of her ministry, Sgorbati said in a March 2006 interview, "I know there is a bullet with my name on it. I don't know when it will arrive, but as long as it does not arrive, I will stay [in Somalia]."

Only a few months later, Sgorbati's words became reality. On September 17, 2006, gunmen shot at Sgorbati and her bodyguard as they exited the nursing school, striking them both several times. Both succumbed to their injuries.

To the very end, Sgorbati clung to her faith, choosing love over fear. According to a group of sisters who witnessed her death, Sgorbati's echoing last words were: "I forgive, I forgive, I forgive."





We'd love to hear from you!

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OR ONLINE AT  
**WWW.PERSECUTION.ORG**

OR BY PHONE  
**800-ICC-5441**

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