Pakistan

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is located in southern Asia, bordering the Arabian Sea. The country's name literally means "Land of the Pure" translated from the Urdu and Persian languages. It was first used in 1933 as an acronym for five northern territories under British control that longed to be a Muslim nation—

The Indus River cuts a path through the mountains

PAKSTAN. The "I" was added later for easier pronunciation. It covers an area that is just a bit larger than the state of Texas while its population is over seven times the size of that state's. The capital city of Pakistan is Islamabad.

Most people who live in Pakistan are Muslim (about 97%) while the remaining 3% are Hindu and Christian. The Roman Catholic community numbers about one million, which is about 1% of the population. The Catholic Church was established between World Wars I and II when the area was under British colonial rule.

Although education is free and compulsory in Pakistan up to grade 8, literacy rates show that the laws are not enforced. About 60% of the population above age ten can read and write, but when broken down by gender, a gap is revealed—for boys, the literacy rate is 69.5%, while for girls it is 45.8%. In very rural areas, the literacy rate for girls can drop to as low as 3%.

Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani teenager, has become world renowned for her efforts to shine a light on the issue of education for all children, especially girls in Pakistan. Taliban terrorists targeted and shot her, hoping to stop her advocacy. Her survival and recovery brought further attention to the issue. Malala was a co-recipient of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize and now lives in England where she continues her work for children's educational rights.

Photo Credit: World Bank

MCA in Pakistan

Where it exists, much of the first class education in Pakistan is provided by the Catholic Church. The Church runs 534 schools, 8 colleges, 7 technical/vocational institutes, and 8 catechetical centers. And yet, it is a persecuted Church.

According to the country's constitution, non-Muslims are not allowed to be president, prime minister, or hold any of the other 11 main governing offices. In many areas of the country, especially the poorer, rural areas, a tax is imposed on non-Muslims. If people are unable to pay the tax, they are forced to leave their homes. Worse still, churches are burned and people are threatened with physical violence because of their faith. Even children are not safe. False accusations of blasphemy—speaking ill of the Prophet Mohammed, whom Muslims revere—can be leveled at a Christian with no cause. Some pay for their faith in Jesus Christ with their lives.

In the Diocese of Hyderabad, the people of Matli parish make up a tiny minority of the local population - just 0.2%. With the help of missionaries, people are growing in faith and passing the love of God onto the next generation. Children are learning that to love God means to love each other, and to give a helping hand when necessary!

With MCA scholarship help at $100 a piece, many parishioners send their children to Holy Family Primary School. Students gather for morning prayer and prostrate themselves before a crucifix as they pray for God's daily help.

The students learn the tenets of the Catholic faith as well as language skills, math, and science. One recent lesson had little ones learning how bees draw nectar from flowers. They even dressed the part!

Children at the school are aware that their with their faith comes a responsibility to pass it on to others, and so they join The Missionary Childhood Association. Even as they are receiving aid, they realize that all God's children deserve a chance to become the people He intends them to be, so they pray and sacrifice from what little they have and give to the missions.

To help Pakistani children continue to grow in their faith, their fellow MCA members worldwide sent over $45,000 for scholarships to Catholic schools for needy boys and girls, the upkeep orphanages, and parish faith formation programs.