

AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN: July / August 2005

AFGHANISTAN

Over the summer it has been a great privilege to spend time with brothers and sisters in Pakistan and we were also able to make a visit to Afghanistan. We hoped it would be possible to meet all our Afghani brothers but the security situation prevented us visiting Qandahar and Jalalabad, we were advised not to go there, and in the end it was not possible for the brothers from these cities to come to Kabul for the same reason, though we were in contact with them. However a young man whom the Pakistani brothers had met in April and been teaching by internet, came to Kabul to be baptized and his friend who was unable to travel was visited by one of our Pakistani brothers in a village in a nearby province and baptized. Being Christian convert in Afghanistan is a dangerous thing and we are sure you will understand why we don't mention specific names. We are hopeful that it will be possible for this young brother who came to Kabul to make future visits to those we could not. He has a sad story of his life: the Taleban killed his father and his mother died from lack of medical care. He and most of his village escaped to Quetta for the remainder of the time the Taleban were in power. Even now medical care for most of rural Afghanistan is from mobile clinics which barely scratch the surface of need and the childbirth mortality rate is huge, both for mothers and babies. In one province the childbirth mortality rate is 1 in 10.

Kabul was relatively safe during the time we were there, one becomes accustomed to the regular bomb alerts and disposal, the army helicopters, and the general insecurity among the residents. During the time we were there, there was much talk about the elections and whether or not a less liberal government would be elected and the effect it would have too many sympathetic to the Taleban were elected. Many of the candidates are warlords or have connections to them and exert power over the people, especially in the rural areas. For those Afghanis who have begun to embrace western ways, it is a worry. Now the elections are over, it is too early to say how the government will manage their country but it looks as if it will be a long time before much changes. <http://www.kabuldaily.com/> There are many foreign NGO's working in Afghanistan but their workers are very conscious of the security issues and generally do not walk in the streets, even of Kabul. One has always to be aware of possible danger. For most women the burqa is still the preferred dress, though some are now wearing shalwar kameez or long skirts and coats. Head covering for women is necessary in public, even for western women, and usual in the presence of men. It is sad to see that the rebuilding of Afghanistan is taking so long, and that in most of Kabul the houses are still broken down from bombing and pockmarked with bullets and most of it doesn't look much different from our visit 2 years ago. However, despite all the difficulties and potential dangers, it was a blessed time and we give great thanks to our Heavenly Father for keeping us safe.

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PAKISTAN

Being able to make an extended stay in Pakistan meant there was the opportunity to visit the regions and spend time with the brothers and sisters in each area. Since All Pakistan Christadelphian Church [APCC] became a registered church in February, it has been establishing itself and we have ecclesias in three of the four provinces. We were able to spend time in Islamabad visiting our Iranian brother and sisters, a refugee family of father, mother and two teenaged daughters and were also able to visit UNHCR to bring their case before the officers, in the hope their file would be reopened. At the present time, their file is closed and migration to another country is difficult without the refugee status. They have already had two refusals from one country. They are strong in faith and hopeful that our work and all our prayers will help. They live in great poverty and we are very grateful to kind brothers and sisters who are helping us to provide money for their rent and food and schooling. We also had the joyful privilege of baptizing another refugee family whom they have been teaching, mother and father and two teenage sons who gave a very moving confession of their faith. Our ecclesia in Islamabad is growing and now has 8 members but because they are coming from the refugee community, it is certain that their needs will be with us for some time to come. We thank God for them and their preaching work and ask your prayers for them in all their difficulties.

From there we took the bus to visit our other ecclesias in Punjab and were able to take part in the ongoing work there. They are enthusiastic and eager to spread the Gospel. Unfortunately many of the FSD ecclesia were away with a school camp so we didn't spend so much time there. In Sahiwal they have various projects to help the local people who also come for Bible Study. One such project is a sewing centre where girls come and learn sewing skills and also have Bible Study. While we are there, we assisted in the baptisms of three sisters from this work and were able to join in with their outreach to areas in the city and some villages nearby. It is a pleasure to listen to their enthusiasm and join in with their planning and their overflow of ideas for future outreach and we made future plans for some of the Karachi brethren to come and help them in their work.



Sunday School

We also visited Quetta in Balochistan, an 11 hour bumpy bus ride through the mountains from Karachi, where we were able to meet the brothers and sisters and join in with their activities of Bible studies and prayer meetings, and also visit some Afghani refugees where the local ecclesia would like to start a sewing and embroidery project to enable them to earn a living, and also teach Bible classes and literacy. The Afghani women we spoke with were enthusiastic about the idea and we hope we will be able to support them in this work.

Nawabshah and Hyderabad in Sindh were also visited. The ecclesia in Nawabshah were very pleased to see us. Both cities are being visited on a regular basis by the Karachi brethren for support and Bible teaching and those who were ready for baptism were invited to Karachi so they could meet other brothers and sisters and be baptized with others in the relatively clean sea. [pollution of open water is a problem in Pakistan]. Not all of them could come but we invited three young men from Nawabshah to be baptized with a small group from Karachi. There are as yet no brothers and sisters in Hyderabad but on the next visit from Karachi we expect there to be the baptisms of those who couldn't come to Karachi.



Baptisms in the sea

Karachi is a busy and thriving ecclesia and almost every day and evening there are Bible study classes and prayer meetings in different areas of the city. There is an impressive amount of work going on and it is proposed to start 'cell groups' which will act as local bases as the city is very large [it has a population in excess of 11 million]. We spent one day holding an outdoor preaching effort at the sea, where we had friends and brothers and sisters and those who were to be baptized from Karachi [a brother and two sisters], as well as the three young men from Nawabshah. It was a joyful and happy day to gather together and listen to Bible teaching and witness the baptisms. At present Karachi ecclesia rent a house which has an office from where they send out Bible lessons, hold Bible study classes and acts as an ecclesial meeting place for the ecclesia. It also has accommodation for visiting brothers and sisters. There are plans which we prayerfully hope will work out, to buy some land and build a centre with accommodation which will house all these activities. We also hope to start a small school which will fund the future activities of APCC.

We thank God for His great blessing that enabled us to travel safely and kept us safe from harm and the danger around us. Life is fragile and one is particularly conscious of its fragility when passing train and road wrecks and being in rickshaws that weave their way in dense traffic and squeeze into impossibly small spaces between huge trucks and buses One reads of bus hijacks and every day of accident fatalities. We also thank Him for the great privilege of doing His work and for giving us the enthusiasm to do it unstintingly and untiringly. To Him be the glory.

We ask that you will remember the brothers and sisters here in Afghanistan and Pakistan in your prayers. We also ask for your prayers for all we do and that God will bless the work we do in His Name. For anyone interested in further information please write to: apcchurch@gmail.com

on behalf of the brothers and sisters of APCC