

PROGRESS IN PAKISTAN

'Knowing Jesus and making Him known'

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan have granted registration to Christadelphians as a legal religious denomination, in what is possibly a world first! While some Christian organisations have been waiting for more than 25 years for their applications to be approved, the All Pakistan Christadelphian Church (APCC) has been given legal recognition less than 6 months after we commenced the registration process. This wonderful answer to prayer means that our brethren in Pakistan can legally perform marriages, conduct religious services and social activities for members, own property, operate schools and colleges, and have legal status.

For marriages to be legal in Pakistan they must be performed by a Muslim priest or authorised Christian minister. If a marriage is not performed by an authorised person a couple may be regarded as living in adultery, and under Islamic law should be stoned. Registration as a Christian church means that our brethren in Pakistan can now appoint marriage celebrants and issue marriage certificates. This is an enormous breakthrough for us.

When asked what the reasons might be that we were granted registration so quickly the brethren involved in the process answered immediately 'Prayer!' They explained how that at a meeting with the Muslim lawyer who was preparing our application, they had to hand over a significant amount of money for the Government fees and legal costs. One of our brethren said to the lawyer 'Can we pray for you?' When the lawyer agreed our brother put one hand on the money and his other hand on the lawyer and prayed that the Lord's money would be used for the purpose for which it was given and that God would bless this lawyer in the important task He had given him to do. The lawyer was visibly shaken and said thereafter that he then realised how important it was that he represent us to the best of his ability!

The application process meant that two of our brethren had to appear in Court before a Judge, inspectors from the Department of Religious Affairs had to twice inspect our facilities in Karachi, and several brethren were interviewed.

This story is just one example of how committed and prayer-focused our Pakistan brothers and sisters are, and why God is blessing what they do in His service. Their most favoured phrase is 'To know Jesus and to make Him known'

The APCC has rented a facility in Karachi which houses an office, class rooms, a meeting room for the Karachi ecclesia, and accommodation for students or visitors. Each room in the facility is named after a province of Pakistan (the Punjab room, the Balochistan room, etc). The room has a wall map of the province and the plan is to progressively add photos, reports, charts, etc, showing the progress and development of the work in each province. They also have an Afghanistan room, as they look beyond their own borders and pray for brethren whose situation is even more difficult and challenging.

In February it was a privilege to attend the inaugural meetings of the now registered APCC, hosted by the Karachi ecclesia. Under the Government-approved Trust Deed a National Council was also established with representatives from the major population centres where we have brothers and sisters and ecclesias. At the inaugural meetings of the National Council, the brethren discussed their visions and plans for the future of the brotherhood in Pakistan, Afghanistan and beyond. There was a great deal of excitement as each Regional Coordinator

reported on their progress and shared their plans for the future. It was also good to hear the ecclesia singing out of their own APCC 'Praise the Lord' book in Urdu, and to see Urdu literature such as Bible Basics proudly bearing the name 'APCC (reg)'. As part of the inauguration meeting, the Karachi ecclesia had a Dedication service, in which we were led to consider Paul's analogy of one body, many parts and how we must work as one body. We ended our service with a very moving breaking of bread.

Some of the regional and national plans for the future include:

A sewing centre to train unskilled women so they can make clothes for their families and open up employment opportunities. The sewing lessons will be combined each day with Bible studies.

A Bible Basics Open School for conducting correspondence and in-house courses in various locations to prepare their many contacts for baptism.

Youth activities and leadership training for young men and women, and a campus outreach for college and university students.

Expanding the school programmes already under way which provide education for poor and underprivileged families. The standard of education at the Christadelphian school which is already operating is higher than that offered in many State-funded schools, with the children learning maths, science, geography, English, Urdu and Pakistan history and culture as well as Bible studies. (Some of the State-funded schools teach only Islamic studies, with little or no education in maths, science, etc).

A Bible training centre to help brethren develop their Bible knowledge and skills in evangelism, leadership, and ministry. It is also proposed to teach practical trade skills alongside Bible courses so that some brethren can become self-employed. This is also important in a country where there is widespread discrimination against Christians and they are denied many employment opportunities.

The translation of various books, articles and courses into Urdu and other local languages.

The APCC is a success story for other reasons too. Pakistan is possibly one of the first areas to become independent of western oversight within a short time. We believe that we have followed the New Testament model by appointing local brethren to oversee the local ecclesias and encouraging them to build a church within its own cultural context and with its own traditions, rather than imposing western culture and traditions on them.

An International Advisory Council (IAC) made up of experienced Christadelphians has been set up to work with the brothers and sisters in Pakistan to provide support, encouragement, ideas and advice. The IAC is an important link to the brotherhood in the rest of the world and see part of their responsibility as helping the brethren in Pakistan to take their place in a worldwide fellowship of believers, while avoiding western problems and disputes which should be confined as much as possible to their places of origin.

There are many challenges facing our community in Pakistan, where Christians are less than 2% of the population and where discrimination and persecution are widespread. Some of our brethren have been beaten and tortured, some are in hiding from their families because of their beliefs, others have lost their jobs or been denied education. However, they are all unanimous in

their belief that they would give up all this and more for the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ our Lord!

We ask for your prayers to join with ours that God will bless this work we do for Him, and all we do will be for His glory.

On behalf of APCC