

PAKISTAN REPORT



GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT... A DIFFICULT BULLET TO DODGE

Mothers with children left behind.

Dear full name,

How glad I am, after 10 grueling days in Pakistan, to be home in the land of freedom and liberty! You have no idea how good we have it, until you visit a country where freedom and liberty is sparse!

Discrimination against Christians in Pakistan is increasing at an alarming rate. Brazen attacks on churches, increased blasphemy accusations, intolerance by Sunni Muslims is giving rise to a growing caste society of "untouchables." Christians, the "unclean, untouchables," are increasingly vulnerable to beatings and murder while their perpetrators run free.

For drinking from the same glass as a Muslim, honor student Sharoon Masih, a 17-yr-old Christian, was beaten to death in his classroom by fellow students. His Muslim teacher turned a blind eye as this poor child was mercilessly punched and kicked. It was Sharoon's fourth day at a new school. His murderer, Ahmed Raza, is free on bail.

Yet, despite any evidence found against them, 42 Christians falsely accused on terrorist charges remain in prison for three years, while 100 Muslims were acquitted. A prosecutor told them that he "can guarantee their acquittal" if they renounce their faith and embrace Islam. Proof that it is their faith not "guilt" that keeps them chained. They have refused to deny Christ.

Many of them are being tortured to confess to the beating deaths of two Muslims during protests of the church bombings in Youhanabad, Lahore, which killed 17 and injured over 78 Christians. Little effort is being made to find the masterminds behind these bombings.

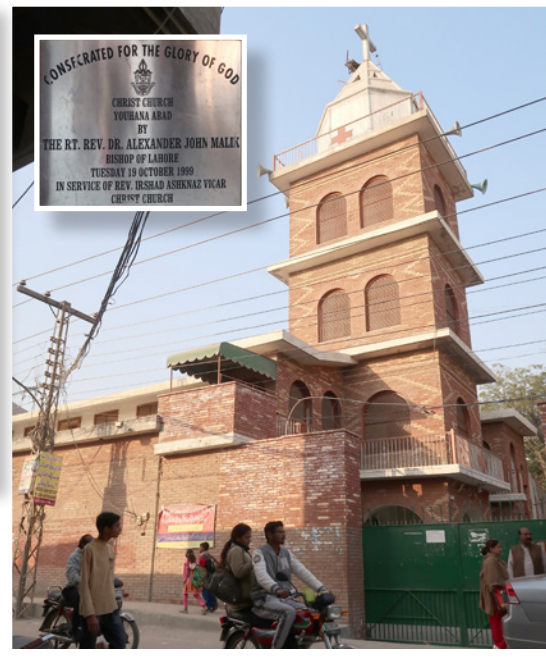
In Pakistan you are **guilty until proven innocent**. In a country where the word-of-mouth accusation of a Muslim against a Christian dominates all evidence, **it is a hard bullet to dodge**. There is no law, or justice, against false accusations.

I felt so helpless as I watched the young prisoners leave the Lahore courthouse. It was Saturday morning and I came to witness their trial and get as close as I was permitted. Miraculously, one of our team members, a US citizen, was not asked to present her identification document and was able to enter the court. She was able to briefly speak with them and watched them as they were chained and escorted into large prison trucks.

I felt even more helpless when I met with their parents, their wives and their children. I had little words to say. What could I offer to relieve their immense grief? I said what I could... I promised to not forget them and to be their *Voice and a Helping Hand*.



Zahid Yousaf Goga (hanging picture) sacrificed his life by throwing himself on the suicide bomber at Christ Church. His selfless act saved hundreds of more victims. His brother (below) still mourns his death.



Parents of arrested son still in prison for three years. Their grief is immeasurable.

Christ Church where I spoke on the power of forgiveness

Many are young husbands with children, their wives left in desperate situations without a breadwinner. They struggle daily to put food on the table to feed their children.

Like my mother, after my father was imprisoned, struggled for three years without work and had a very difficult time providing food for her two small children, I know first-hand the pain and difficulties these mothers face.

I wanted to visit Asia Bibi in prison but it is too dangerous. She is the most watched person in Pakistan today. As her final Supreme Court trial draws closer protests by Muslims for her execution are mounting around the country. I was, however, able to visit her husband Ashiq. Asia is in desperate need of our prayers.

Asia's acquittal is tricky. If released, keeping her and her family alive will be very difficult. Sadly, prison is her safest place at this moment. Should this happen, Spain has offered to take her. The logistics however are complicated. No one in the court system is brave enough to go against the Muslim mobs shouting for her death. I suspect the courts know she is not guilty, but dare not set her free, fearing great backlash.

I was invited to speak at one of the bombed churches, Christ Church, Youhanabad. I spoke on the power of forgiveness not only with words, but also from our hearts. It is easy for bitterness to enter our hearts but God is faithful through our forgiveness. I encouraged them to keep their faith, despite their hardships. I spoke about my father, his daily reliance on God and how he forgave those who tortured him.

After the service a lady handed me a small note "for Door of Hope work to all the nations," wrapped around Rs 5,000 (\$45 US). I said, "I cannot accept this money. I came to Pakistan to help Christians here." But she insisted and squeezed it into my hand. I was truly moved.

She was like the widow in Mark 12:44 who gave all that she had; "For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."

Often, those who live the pain reach deep into their pockets... they see pain and hardship firsthand and empathize with those who are in worse situations.

So many inroads were made in my brief trip. There is so much more I would like to share and will at a later time.

I pray that we, who live in freedom, remain compassionate to those whose liberty is lost.

Please join me in being a helping hand to our brothers and sisters in Pakistan!

May you and I be like the woman at Christ Church, Youhanabad, who reached deep into her pocket for those who have less.



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