



Columban Mission in Pakistan



The Catholic Youth Development Centre
Hyderabad, Pakistan



CATHOLIC YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTRE [CYDC]

Pakistan is an unequal society. It is a country of extreme wealth and desperate poverty. People are classified and separated according to religion, sect, caste, ethnic background. Your occupation and work decides whether you are clean or unclean, acceptable or unacceptable, in or out. Since 1978 when I arrived in Pakistan, I have seen and been part of the socially upward movement of many Christians through education and employment and their growth in personal confidence and manifest pride in their Catholic faith. Our Catholic young people give great hope for the future of the Church in Pakistan.

But so many are left behind!

Many Catholic youth in Hyderabad in south-east Pakistan are street-sweepers which, in the Pakistani mentality, is the most degrading and excluding occupation possible. I think this reflects the influence of the Hindu caste system which still exists in the popular mentality of most Muslims in Pakistan.

Education is the only way out for these young Catholics yet many of them have dropped out of school due to family poverty, being the sole wage-earner in the family, broken families, or family disinterest in education. Boys often have to leave school while still in the primary level to take on work so that they can help to earn the money needed to

provide the dowry for their sisters to marry. It is a popular misunderstanding to think that females are denied education in Pakistan. Amongst Christians in Pakistan, more girls are in school and receive a higher level of education than boys, the reason being that school is seen as a "safer" environment for the girls until they can be married through the "arranged marriage" system. The boys, meanwhile, are part of the breadwinning group for the family. Due to family poverty, this begins very early, too early, for many Catholic boys. They end up in menial tasks where their dignity is denied, where they are vulnerable to abuse, where their childhood is lost. They are caught into a life-long environment of discrimination which is based upon both religion and occupation.

In October 2008, eighteen year old Faisal came to me after Mass in my parish in Hyderabad with tears in his eyes. He had the Bible in his hands and said: "Father-ji, main is ko parh nehin sakta" [Father, I can't read this]. I asked if he had ever been to school. He said yes but only up to 3rd class when the teacher beat him so severely that he stopped going. He pulled up his shirt and showed me the scars of the beating on his back. This was what made me put years of thinking into action. This is when the Catholic Youth Development Centre began.



We already had the building and facilities of the Catholic Centre of Academic Excellence [CCAEC] in Hyderabad where 60 academically gifted but economically and socially deprived Catholic boys and young men came in the afternoon to receive assistance over a period of 4 years to enable them to get into university on merit. When I put the proposal to the bishop of Hyderabad, Bishop Max Rodrigues, he pushed me out of his door saying "Stop talking. Get started!" The Board of Governors of the CCAEC was as equally enthusiastic. And so we began in February 2009.

What we do at CYDC is take young men who have dropped out of school or who have never been to school and get them from illiteracy to 10th Class/Matriculation through an accelerated programme of learning spread over 3 years, from primary to secondary. They are enrolled for examination purposes in a school in Hyderabad. After getting their matriculation certificate, they will be encouraged and guided to move into technical education which will enable them to obtain secure and good employment and so break out of the repressive discrimination they have experienced all their lives.

Education, moral guidance, personal confidence building, and religious instruction and sacramental preparation are all seen to in the programme at CYDC. The staff consists of the director and 3 teachers [2 male, 2 female]. All students have a full medical check-up on enrolment and receive full vaccination against Hepatitis B.

In 2010, 36 young men are enrolled in CYDC of whom 8 have recently given their Class 9 examination. We await the results, due in mid-July, with great anticipation. The students

are aged between 16 and 24. Classes are from 9am-1pm, Monday to Friday. Some work before attending CYDC, others go to work in the afternoon, evening or night. All receive a substantial and filling meal each day at the Centre, for most the only decent meal they get. For me, the extraordinary aspect of CYDC is how our two young female teachers, Sonia Bashir and Nusrat Ilyas, both aged 25, have "tamed" these wild young men, giving them a thirst for knowledge and a new way of social interaction and behavior [I think we used to call this "good manners"]. This overturns the usual talk about male domination of women in Pakistan.

It takes about 3 months for each new student to settle into the rhythm of class and study at CYDC. Each student is individual, each coming from a very different background and some having had very traumatic experiences.

Annual running costs are \$12,000 which includes salaries, food, medical care, books and equipment purchases, and a share of the utilities [water, electricity, gas]. This works out to \$28 each month for every student.

The professionalism, patience, and commitment of the Director and teaching staff to the young men at CDYC are evident. What they are achieving is a direct result of the generosity of people like yourself. Together we do make a difference! [And Faisal has begun to be able to read the Bible. He led one of the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday this year. A happy young man.]

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