



Embrace

Newsletter of Release Women
Summer 2019

Sabina Wurmband

The cost of following Jesus

Many of you will have read about the Easter Sunday bomb attacks in Sri Lanka which left 257 dead and around 500 injured. Chrishanthini's story is one of many of the Christians caught up in the attacks. A day that began in anticipation of worship and celebration of the resurrection of Christ ended in mourning.

Ramesh and his wife, Chrishanthini, were standing with their two children, 14-year-old Rukshika and 12-year-old Niruban, near the entrance to Zion Evangelical Church, in Batticaloa, on Easter Sunday morning as they waited for the service to begin. A casually dressed man arrived at the church, carrying a large backpack. Ramesh challenged him and was informed that the backpack contained a video camera to film the service. The explanation did not satisfy Ramesh and he told the man that he would need to obtain permission first, before filming. As the two men spoke together, Chrishanthini took their two children into the church for the service, expecting that her husband would soon follow them. Just moments

later the man, not a filmmaker but an Islamist extremist, detonated the bomb which was in his backpack.

Ramesh had stopped the man from entering the church, but when the suicide bomber blew himself up, Ramesh was killed too, along with 12 children who were enjoying a snack after their Sunday school class and before the main service. Altogether, 28 worshippers were killed, but hundreds of others were saved by Ramesh's action in stopping the bomber from entering the church building. Chrishanthini found her husband's body just where she had left him earlier.

Chrishanthini is no stranger to tragedy. Both of her parents were killed during the civil war which raged in Sri Lanka for so many years. She also lost an aunt in the tsunami that struck the region on Boxing Day in 2004. This latest tragedy has left Chrishanthini a widow, and her children without their father. She will know that the loss of her husband meant that the lives of many people were saved on Easter Sunday, but the cost of following Jesus will be a difficult reality to face. Please use the prayer points on the back page to pray for Chrishanthini, her family and other victims of the Easter Sunday attacks.

Release International partners are seeking to provide emergency medical aid and support for the 28 families from Zion Church, Batticaloa, who lost their loved ones in the attack.



Ramesh,
Chrishanthini
and their
children.

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

Release Women: Connecting Christian women in the UK and Ireland with their suffering sisters around the world.

Creative skills give the 'strength to stand'



Learning new skills



We have written many times on these pages about the Strength to Stand (S2S) groups in Pakistan and Egypt which exist to help women who live under oppression as Christians in predominantly Muslim societies. While the women do not generally face daily persecution as experienced in some countries around the world, as Christian women they face marginalisation and injustice, such as the lack of access to a good education. This often results in poor employment opportunities and economic well-being, with Christian communities frequently living in poverty. So, it is especially exciting to report on some creative vocational training by a Christian arts ministry in the UK, working with our partner in Pakistan, to women in the S2S groups there. A small team spent nearly three weeks with 18 women from the groups, developing their creative skills with the aim to open doors of opportunity to the women to find employment or to start small businesses or micro enterprises.

The small team from the UK, just two ladies, worked with our partner in Pakistan. As the lead trainer, Jane, said, 'It was a rare heaven-sent gift to work as a team together... [with] one purpose in mind, to develop and build God's kingdom for the women of Pakistan. This enabled us to build an atmosphere of love and encouragement so all the women attending the creative training literally blossomed before our eyes. They accomplished amazing work, even though for the majority it was their very

first time of doing various aspects of the creative work.'

Part of the training focused on drawing, painting and design skills which were used together to make cards and journals. These were inspired by henna designs, a popular form of body art in Pakistan. The journals featured beads and mirrors, which are popular in Pakistani culture, within the finished items.

Another key aspect of the training was teaching the women how to make and use delicate paper beads to produce brightly coloured 'chandelier' style earrings to appeal to the Asian market.

The women were encouraged to assess their work together, to highlight what was good and to point out mistakes, not to be critical of one another but to learn from and to aim for high standards so that their products will stand out in the marketplace. 'The women's work developed to attain some of the highest level of achievement I've seen in any group in such a short time.' High praise indeed from Jane!

As the training continued, the women's enthusiasm for it grew and the hours of training lengthened. Some women showed tremendous commitment and dedication by getting up at 4.00am to complete their household chores before leaving home at 6.00am and travelling by three-wheeler rickshaw along very rough roads for two hours to arrive at the training venue.

At the end of the training, in true *The Apprentice* style, the group undertook some market research in Lahore. One Muslim shop owner was so impressed with the work that he gave them a small amount of money towards the project, saying he would give space in his shop to sell the work. Jane seized the opportunity and asked if she could pray for him and he willingly agreed! He then said that he would pray that his government would allow more people like Jane to help the women in this way. He felt that this would raise their self-esteem and so help families out of poverty. How right he is!

For the women in Pakistan, this is just the beginning. There are plans to return later in the year to continue the training, with a greater focus on business skills. Future leaders of the project are being identified so that it can be more sustainable in the longer term. Please pray for these special women, that as their creative skills grow, so will their relationship with God.



As well as creative training to encourage the women's economic development, there was also the opportunity to encourage the women's spiritual development and each morning started with a time of worship and prayer. Women from other S2S groups were invited to join them for sessions on intimacy, prayer and listening to God. But as the women's testimonies on the next page show, they also grew in confidence and self-esteem, in themselves and in their skills and abilities. To be encouraged and nurtured in this way has given many of the women the desire to start their own businesses, something they would not have contemplated before, something that gives them the strength to stand in their difficult situations. In a practical way, it really does give them the 'tools' they need. It helps to build their resilience to the oppression they live under and reduces their vulnerability.



'We can use our hands to praise the Lord!'

Nasreen*

Nineteen-year-old Nasreen is married and her family work in bonded labour at one of the many brick kiln communities in rural Punjab. Unlike some of the women, she did have the benefit of attending school until she was 14. Being able to earn an income is important to her to help to pay off the debt owed to the brick kiln owner. Nasreen already has ideas of how she can extend her skills in the future and so increase her income.

'I discovered my skills in this training, and it was very beneficial for me because it will help to make the future better... I would like to start first with selling journals and then sell other crafts too. I want to do the next training to learn more new things like decoration and designing bangles, watches and other items.'



Ruksana

Ruksana, Nasreen's older sister, also attended the training. She is extremely gifted, and her work was exceptional. She worked hard and showed maturity beyond her years. She led worship most days during the training and she also helped to organise the larger group sessions on intimacy, prayer and listening to God.

'In this training I knew God had given me skills I never realised. I learnt many things here and I am very happy about this... As I discovered that I can do this I got more confidence. I loved the jewellery making and I learnt about designing and colour sense as well.'



Soraya

When Soraya first joined the training, she was shy, withdrawn and she rarely smiled. She was hard-working and by the end of the training she flourished in every way, revealing her many creative talents, not only in drawing and painting but in singing and dancing too. Every morning began with worship and prayer; Soraya was quiet during these times. On the last morning she produced a piece of paper with a song written on it and she started to lead the group in worship. Everyone was stunned by the beauty and strength of her voice, coming from such a tiny, frail girl, who had been so quiet and reserved.

'I always wanted to learn art and when I knew that I could join this training I became very happy deep in my heart that I got this chance. It was very beneficial and important for me as I learnt new things and I also want to continue learning so I can start a business with art and craft. I explored the skill of my hand... I even had no idea how to hold a brush.'

You can support the Strength to Stand groups in Pakistan and Egypt by holding an Esther Experience event or Sabina Supper; see our website www.releaseinternational.org for more details! You can also learn more about this creative training at our Release Women National Conference in October, see the Noticeboard on the back page, where we will hear more feedback from the training and see some of the crafts the ladies produced.

Fatima

Fatima is married with three children and her husband works as a tiler. They are keen for their children to be educated and two of their children are already at school, which has to be paid for. Being able to earn an income, therefore, to supplement her husband's wages, is important. Although Fatima struggled at times with childcare arrangements for her youngest child she was determined to keep attending the classes, which she did with a lovely gentle spirit.

'The training was a very good chance for me to learn and I learnt many new things here. There was a loving atmosphere throughout the training. I like the way Mama Jane prayed and told us God's heart for us. Starting each day with the name of God was very good.'

Hania

Hania didn't have the advantage of any education but she already works as a beautician, from a small parlour in her home. Jane believes that she has all the potential to succeed given opportunity, training, love and encouragement.

'The training was very helpful for us. We learnt many new things and surely it will be beneficial to us for our whole lives. We can use our hands to praise the Lord by the art He has given us and to help our families financially. I loved doing all the work in this training. I liked everything: prayer, art-work and the laughter together... You really encouraged Pakistani women through this art training.'

Editorial

Dear sisters in Christ,

Summer, along with the holiday season, is here again. The gardens are blooming, lawns need mowing, barbecues need lighting, children need entertaining. We are continually striving to do our very best for our families, whatever that entails.

Our sisters in this edition are not concerned with the type of activities we often become involved with, instead they are learning new skills to help support and do their very best for their families.

It has been a privilege to read the stories regarding the Strength to Stand groups in Pakistan. Although we are aware of the work that these groups do, it is truly amazing and a great encouragement to read first-hand stories of exactly how these women are receiving benefit, not only for themselves, but also for their families. Their new skills bring them joy, fellowship, new friends, a new way of life, increased income, as well as bringing them closer to God. We must praise the Lord for Jane and her co-worker for all the training and encouragement they are giving to our sisters. They are doing a wonderful work enabling our sisters to reach their full potential and ultimately to help with their families' financial needs.

However, as we read about Sri Lanka our hearts become heavy when we think about how much our sister Chrishanthini and many others have suffered. They most certainly need our help, our prayers and God's hand upon each one of them to enable them to overcome this tragedy.

Let us be encouraged by the hymn writer:

*'I do not know what lies ahead, the way I cannot see;
Yet one stands near to be my guide, He'll show the way to me.'*

Every blessing,

Wendy

Prayer Points



***"Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being,
praise His holy name."***

Psalm 103v1 (NIV)

Please pray for Chrishanthini:

- That she and the children will know and feel God's presence and His comfort.
- For her children to be well-supported and to overcome the scenes they saw on that day.
- For the family to have all their needs met and to grow closer together to strengthen each other.
- For everyone who was in Zion Church on that day, as they struggle to come to terms with their losses and memories.

Please pray for the Strength to Stand groups in Pakistan:

- For Jane and her co-worker as they prepare the future training sessions.
- For the women to grow even closer to God and to rely on Him.
- For the women to have the 'strength to stand' spiritually, as well as economically.
- For more women to be confident enough to open businesses.

Please pray for Nasreen and Ruksana:

- For Nasreen to earn enough money to support her family.
- That Nasreen will be able to continue to the next training course.
- For Ruksana that she will continue to lead worship and encourage others.
- That both sisters will learn more about God and seek His plan for their lives.

Please pray for Hania, Soraya and Fatima:

- For Hania to have doors opened to enable her to succeed.
- For Soraya to have the confidence to push herself forward and overcome all her shyness.
- For Fatima to earn enough to have her children educated.
- For these women to have their needs met as they strive to follow Christ.

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REJOICE IN HOPE

*Testimonies
of serving
persecuted
Christians in
South East Asia*



You are invited to our

National Conference on Saturday, October 12

at St. Michael's Church, Chester Square,
LONDON, SW1W 9EF (10am – 4pm),
with guest speakers Hadassah and
Peter Hawk, Release International
partners from South East Asia.

Admission £10. Order your ticket
today! Call 01689 823491, book online
via Eventbrite or pay on the door. Doors
open at 9.30am for coffee. Bring a
packed lunch or purchase one locally.

ALL WELCOME!

Hadassah and Peter will also be
speaking at other venues in October.
Please see the website for full details.

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