

The Story of Friends of Pasrur

***The History of First Presbyterian Church of Iowa City's Friendship
with the Pasrur Christian Girls Higher Secondary School in Pakistan***

By
Jane Cranston and Mary Linn

May 2021



Here I Am, Lord
by
John Michael Talbot

*Here I am, Lord
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night
I will go, Lord
If You lead me
I will hold Your people in my heart.*



Introduction

I was asked to record the history of the First Presbyterian Church in Iowa City's (FPC) relationship with the Pasrur Christian Girls School in Pakistan. This relationship has spanned 20 years and has involved a number of groups, people, and donors, all of whom are important. It is a proud and somewhat miraculous history of events that deserves to be recorded accurately and all in one place. I hope I have done it justice.

The events described flow from our friendship with Veda Gill who is the hard-working, ever-inspiring engine of the PEB (the Presbyterian Education Board). With unflappable persistence and relentless hard work, she has developed a school system of beautiful buildings, well-educated students, and positive staff members. Veda puts her considerable faith into practice in the way she deals with people and challenges. Many people (including me) call her

“sister”. Veda is an inspiring evangelist who leads by example. Her fundraising and her management convey integrity, trust, and her unique spirituality. Veda’s faith is contagious.



Being a part of this process has given me the opportunity to witness miracles. In 20 years, we have helped to erect five substantial educational buildings and sent hundreds of girls to boarding school where they are safe from harm and getting a first-class education. In addition, it is not possible to read the events that follow and not be inspired by the generosity and vision of the members of the Friends of Pasrur committee and our church. Hundreds of destitute Christian girls have been rescued from their situation. In Pakistan, they are persecuted because they are female, because they are Christian, and because they are poor. The vision of the Presbyterian missionaries was to serve the poorest of the poor and that continues today.



Veda with Herb and Janice Wilson

Any summary of events regarding the Pasrur Christian Girls School would not be complete without acknowledging the work of Herb and Janice Wilson. They have been major contributors to building projects, major donors to the scholarship program, participants in the Friends of Pasrur committee work and a constant source of inspiration.

Jane Cranston
Friends of Pasrur

Timeline of Events

1854

The United Presbyterian Church begins its missionary program in education and medicine in Pakistan.

1898

The Pasrur School and orphanage is founded by Miss Allison (a Presbyterian missionary from Philadelphia) after six orphaned girls are dropped off at her door during an epidemic.



An early photo of the Pasrur Christian Girls School.

1947

Pakistan gains independence as a nation and separates from India.

1972

President Bhutto nationalizes 3,334 institutions, including all missionary and church-run schools. The Presbyterian schools are taken over by the Pakistan government. The schools are not well-managed and soon became decrepit.

1998

The Pakistani President devises a new Educational Policy, which includes the denationalization of missionary and church-run schools. Schools are given back to the Presbyterians in deplorable condition.

1999

In February, Veda Javaid Gill, Executive Director of the Presbyterian Education Board (PEB) in Pakistan, visits First Presbyterian Church, Iowa City as part of the “Mission to the USA”, sponsored by PCUSA. The PEB oversees 12 newly denationalized schools in the Punjab region of Pakistan. Veda’s visit is arranged by Rev. Tom Brown, minister of FPC. Veda is able to stay with our congregation for a month and develop many lasting friendships



Jane Cranston and Veda Gill on her first visit to the US

Veeda shares the story of the Presbyterian Church in Pakistan and its history with regard to the Presbyterian missionary schools. She explains how the PEB came to have many decrepit schools returned to them.

1999

Pervez Musharraf, the tenth president of Pakistan, follows a more pro-Christian policy. He continues the process of returning missionary and church-run schools to Christians.

2000

In October, Elaine Markuson, FPC mission council member, visits the school at Pasrur, Pakistan and reports on the appalling conditions there. “Project Pasrur” is launched. She asks the church to help. In November, FPC Session votes unanimously to give funds toward construction of a new multipurpose building for the Pasrur school.

2005 Pakistan Mission Trip I

Pastor Ed Morgan and Elder Nancy Ross visit Pasrur to help dedicate the multipurpose building.



Rev. Ed Morgan is with a group of students from the Pasrur School.



NEWLY CONSTRUCTED MULTIPURPOSE HALL
PRESBYTERIAN EDUCATION BOARD IN PAKISTAN
Library, Science and Computer Laboratory

A new multipurpose building is constructed which contains a library, a science laboratory, a computer lab and an auditorium.

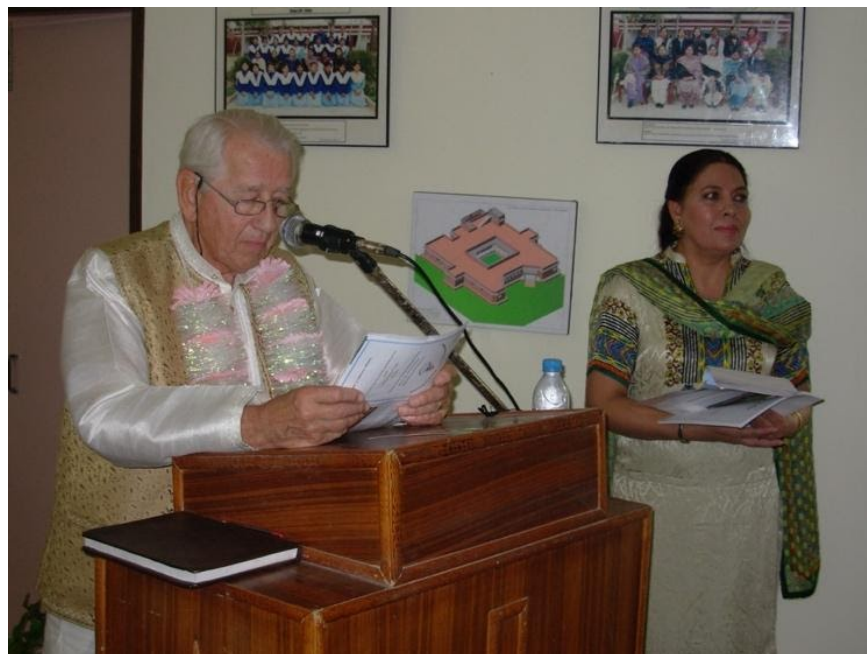
Janice and Herb Wilson pledge \$150,000 towards the construction of the boarding house/dormitory and challenged the FPC congregation to raise another \$150,000 to construct the building immediately. FPC raises the funds.



Pasrur boarding house for impoverished Christian girls is completed.

2007 Pakistan Mission Trip II

The boarding house/dormitory for 100 impoverished Christian girls is completed. In November, Rev. Ed Morgan, David Ketterer, Paul Schaefer, Herbert Wilson and Elaine Markuson represented the FPC congregation at the dedication of the boarding house.



Herb Wilson preparing to speak to a group in Pakistan about the building of the Pasrur Boarding house.

Rev Ed Morgan donates the sum of money he received as a farewell gift from the congregation, toward funding scholarships for girls to attend school at Pasrur and stay in the boarding house. He becomes Executive Director of the Friends of PEB after leaving our congregation.

Jane Cranston proposes to the FPC mission committee that she form a group to raise money for scholarships for Christian girls to attend the (PCGHS) Pasrur Christian Girls Higher Secondary School and live in the newly built dormitory. The scholarships are made available to impoverished Christian girls from nearby villages who do not have access to adequate schools. They will be eligible when identified by their village teacher and/or minister as both at-risk and academically able.

Jane has a luncheon for volunteers to create a subcommittee of FPC's mission committee. They name themselves, Friends of Pasrur. Their goal for the first year is to fund 50 scholarships.

Friends of Pasrur (FOP)

Subcommittee of the FPC Mission Council.

Adopted July, 2007

Objective: To create a group that will encourage the sponsorship of girls for scholarships at the Christian Girls School, Pasrur.

Goals:

To help the girls to attend the Pasrur Christians Girls School

To communicate the information about Pasrur and the PEB

To enable people to have the rewarding experience of sponsorship

To expand this opportunity to include other people and resources

To create positive relationships that will be sustaining



Janice Baumbach, Janice Wilson, Nancy Ross, Nancy Gardner, Elaine Markuson, Jane Cranston, and Becky Ross

2009 Pakistan Mission Trip III

Jane and Ed Cranston travel to Pasrur to take pictures and get background information, in order to better tell the story of the girls who are the recipients of the FPC scholarships.



“Christian Girls Boarding House Pasrur, Dedicated With to the Love and Generosity of Jane Cranston & the Friends of Pasrur (USA) January 5, 2009”

Over 100 congregation members contribute to scholarships for impoverished Christian girls to attend the PCGHS. Their contributions cover room and board, tuition, and books. 10 scholarships are paid for by endowment contributions. The cost of a scholarship is \$350 the first year. All 100 girls are sponsored. Alleluia.

Herb Wilson suggests that the boarding house girls work to educate illiterate adults in their villages on their vacations. The academic department trains girls each year to teach uneducated adults during the summer holidays.

2011

The Pasrur Endowment Fund is established to help support future financial needs of the school. A much-needed classroom block is completed in two stages. With the second-floor addition, which includes a well-equipped science laboratory, the school is able to extend to the 11th and 12th grade level. This is referred to as post-secondary or higher secondary. The Pasrur school is now registered as the Pasrur Christian Girls' Higher Secondary. Scholarships for post-secondary Christian girls are made available through FPC at a cost of \$750 each. These are available to girls who have gone through the Pasrur boarding school.



The classroom block is built in two stages and includes a well-equipped science room for post-secondary.

2012

A memorial fund in memory of Katie Lind's daughter, Kelly Lind, is established to provide money for a kitchen garden on several acres of land behind the school. A new well is dug to provide water for the land. Fruit and vegetables provide better nutrition and a more varied diet for the girls. Extra income from surplus produce is used for special food commodities for the girls. Katie also established the Lind Family Trust for Medical Check-Ups for the sponsored girls. Solar panels and a generator are also purchased.

2013 Pakistan Mission Trip IV

Pastor Sam Massey, George Minot (co-director of Christian Education), and FPC members, and Nancy and Steve Weber, visit PEB schools and help dedicate the new classrooms at Pasrur.



George Minot, Steve Weber, Sam Massey, and Nancy Weber near the newly created kitchen garden.

2014

In December, seven gunmen conduct a terrorist attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar, Pakistan killing 141 people, mostly children. All PEB schools are immediately closed. The Presbyterian Education Board raises the level of school security by extending the school boundary walls from 8 feet to 10 feet, putting razor wire on top of these walls, plac armed guards at the gates and installing CCTV cameras around the campus.

Extreme temperatures and rainfall cause the ceiling to collapse in the PEB administration building. An FPC Endowment (the Burianek Trust) makes a significant donation towards the construction of a new PEB office building.

2017

Funds are provided by Amy and Dave Nicholson, through the Wilson Family Trust, to First Presbyterian of Church of Iowa City, for the purpose of building a boys school at the Pasrur Christian School. The schools will be in memory of Tonya Nicholson and in honor of Veda Gill. It will be called the Gill-Nicholson Boys High School.

Jane Cranston goes to the Presbytery of East Iowa (PEI) with a proposal that they create a commission to raise the remaining \$100,000 needed for the Gill-Nicholson Boys High School. The commission appoints Jane as chair-person. Lay people, elders and pastors from a variety of diverse churches join the commission. Within a year, all funds for the Boys School are raised.

The PEI Commission:

Jane Cranston (Moderator): First Presbyterian Church, Iowa City
Rev. Sarah Hegar (ex officio): First Presbyterian Church, Mt. Pleasant
Rev. Trey Hegar: First Presbyterian Church, Mt. Pleasant
Paul Heidger: St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, Iowa City
Amy Nicholson: St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, Iowa City
Rev. Lisa Ross-Thedens: First Presbyterian Church, Rowley
Rev. Kitch Shatzer: Chaplain, United Pres. Home, Washington
Ellen Fisher: First Presbyterian Church, Cedar Rapids



The dream of a Gill-Nicholson Boys High School in Pasrur is realized.



Another view of the Gill-Nicholson passed Pasrur Boys School.



Emily and Amy Nicholson in front of the Memorial Prayer Room for Tonya Nicholson.

“In loving memory of the granddaughter of Herbert and Janice Wilson USA on January 9, 2008”

2018 Pakistan Mission Trip V

Many members from the PEI, along with others, attend the dedication of the Gill-Nicholson Boys High School. Because it was also the 20th anniversary of denationalization as well as the dedication of the Martinpur Boys School. It was a week of wonderful celebrations.



Paul Heidger, Amy Nicholson, Anna Sheetz, Kitch Shatzer, Margy Trimble, Pat Schnack, Lisa Ross Thedens, Jane and Ed Cranston



Veda Javaid Gill and Jane Cranston stand outside the new PEB administration building.

2020

Schools close due to the pandemic. FPC equips them with needed personal protection equipment and tarps so that the schools can reopen. The school passes all government inspections.

As of this writing, the Friends of Pasrur (FOP) has been able to fund all 100 scholarships for girls in grades nursery to 10th grade every year. Current cost is \$500 per scholarship, K-10 grades. All post-secondary scholarships that were requested have been fulfilled. In addition, we have been able to fund many building projects at the school. Scholarships are primarily funded through personal donations from people in the congregation and others outside the church. FPC's Burianek Trust has faithfully funded 10 scholarships each year. Buildings have been funded primarily through personal donations and Church endowments. The FPC mission Council has funded other projects including curriculum, school furniture, and equipment.



Janice Wilson, Sharon Oglesby, Mary Linn, Nancy Gardner, and Veda Javaid Gill are at one of our FOP potlucks.

Our method of fundraising is person-to-person. We have annual potlucks, church luncheons with presentations, coffees, and visits by Veda each year. We write our own thank you notes. Each year the sponsored girls send a photo, a hand-drawn picture and a hand-written thank you note to their sponsors. Veda also visits FOP meetings through Zoom. In addition, we send a monthly email newsletter and maintain a Facebook page and webpage.

The Friends of Pasrur are hard-working and dedicated. One member describes us as a sisterhood. We endeavor only to tell the story of the Pasrur School.



Nancy Stensvaag has been our treasurer and spreadsheet magician since we started. Her help is invaluable to our mission.



Each year we get together to sort, fold, and send our information about scholarships for the upcoming year which includes communications from the girls.

Special thanks to:

Our ministers who have supported us and made our work possible:

Rev. Tom Brown, Rev. Ed Morgan, Rev. Sam Massey, and Rev. Terry Purvis-Smith

Friends of Pasrur

Many church members have been a part of our Friends of Pasrur group. We have taken turns being chair and secretary, writing letters, preparing food, hosting dinners, speaking in church, and creating presentations. We welcome new members and have a number of members from outside of our church.

Current Members

Katie Lind, Liz Bolin, Anita Burnett, Ed and Jane Cranston, Nancy Gardner, Leann Graves, Mary Linn, Bill and Sharon Oglesby, Nancy Ross, Pat Schnack, Nancy Stensvaag, Candace Weibner, Jane Skinner, Jeanie Wade-Nagle, Nancy Weber, and Faryle Nothwehr

Leadership of Friends of Pasrur

Jane Cranston, Katie Lind, Sue Dallam, Nancy Stensvaag, Nancy Weber, Mary Linn, Leann Graves, and Nancy Gardner. Current chairs: Jane Cranston and Katie Lind

Donors and Friends:

We are sincerely grateful to all the wonderful, generous donors who truly are angels on earth.

For More Information about Friends of Pasrur Group go to:

Our website:

<https://firstpresioacity.org/ministries/mission-and-justice/pasrur-project/>

Our Facebook page:

[Facebook page for Pasrur](#)

“Here I am Lord”: sung by the boarding house girls in Pasrur:

<https://www.facebook.com/jane.cranston/videos/10214107400264519/>

IPR interview with Jane Cranston

Listen to an [episode of The Exchange on Iowa Public Radio](#). In the first half hour, Jane Cranston is interviewed regarding the Pasrur Project.

[Donate online now](#) to help sponsor a girl’s education. You can also set up automatic bank withdrawals to make it even easier. Download the [ACH Pasrur Form](#) to get it started.

Update – Our trip in 2018

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaEOiHoNjuZ5SOBerIYBX-Q?view_as=subscriber