



David and Dawn Curran
With Faye, Sian and Boaz
CMS mission partners
Pakistan

Link Letter No.6 June 2010

Dear friends,

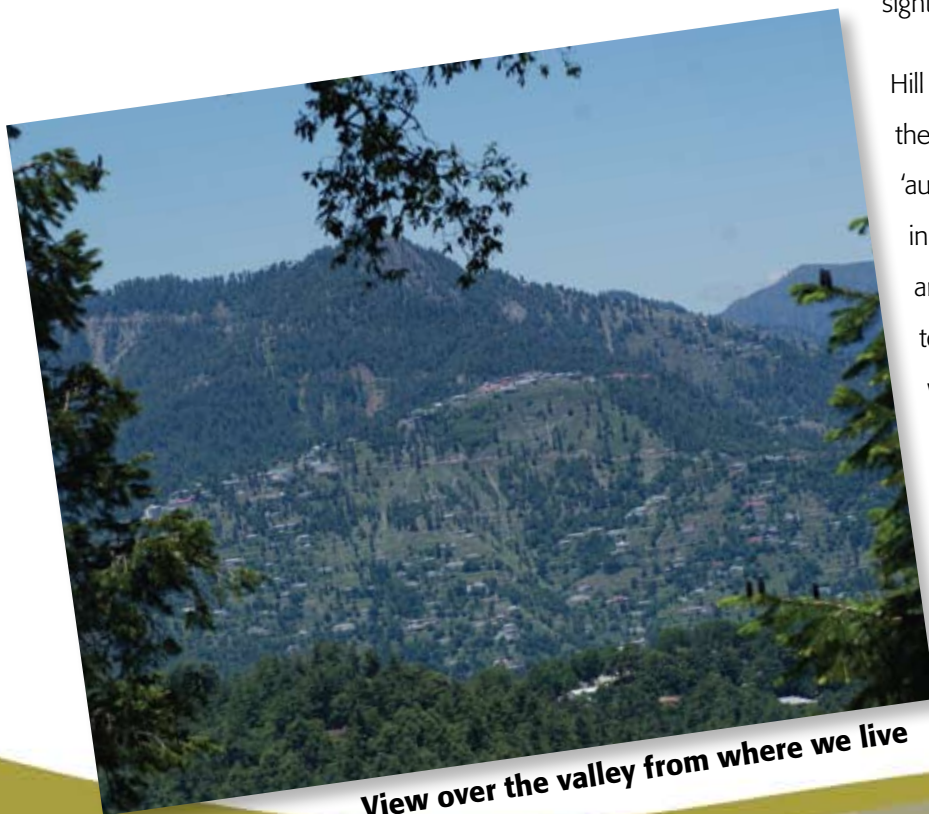
Having settled well into Murree life, we are making the most of the pleasant climate, language study and networking with the Christian community but are looking forward to the move to Sindh at the end of the summer. People say of Murree that *"it is great to arrive"*, for the weather is so refreshing, *"but great to leave"* as the living conditions are fairly basic and we are warned that it will get very damp when the monsoon starts around mid July.

Our language is improving well and we are finding it easier to converse with people and are braver in attempting longer sentences. Using wordless picture books to tell stories has enabled us to discover a lot of new vocabulary and the opportunity to struggle to make ourselves understood as in class we try to converse only in Urdu.

Wildlife galore!

The children are really enjoying living here. The garden and grounds of Hill Lodge provide the opportunity for a lot of time spent outdoors and nature is a fantastic teaching ground and Hill Lodge a dream location for nature projects. We have two kittens that live here, a pair of puppies who come through the grounds and a wild monkey who pays an occasional visit. When it comes to mini beasts, it seems that there is no end with ladybirds in abundance, a plethora of spiders and beetles, and a luminous green glow worm that we spotted last night. Bird spotting is another new activity and our favourite sighting has been an iridescent 'purple sunbird'.

Hill Lodge is a hostel for language students and so the children enjoy the attention they get from all the 'aunties' and 'uncles'. Boaz has made a special friend in Dr Claus who himself is missing his grandchildren and is teaching Boaz how to play the piano and how to walk. He promises to be quite accomplished when we leave!



View over the valley from where we live

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The Himalayas from our window

A diverse landscape

Living in Murree, and seeing more of Pakistan, I am struck by the diversity in this country. Astonishingly, only 90 minutes drive down the mountains are the flat Punjab plains in which the heat is so intense and it is a daily struggle to live. The flat plains are dusty and without rain. It is only by a complex canal irrigation system that the land is fertile. Climbing up from Islamabad to an altitude of 2300 metres, in Murree we are higher than any place in the UK – where Ben Nevis stands at a mere 1344 metres – and surrounded by mountains that dwarf those in Europe.

Here in the sub Himalaya's, rain is frequent and the grass is green. Today – a clear day – the vista allows us to see across to the taller mountains further north, revealing snow-capped Himalayas far in the distance but nevertheless awesome and mighty. The Himalayan system includes more than 100 mountains topping 7500 metres and Pakistan's tallest mountain is K2 where the peak stands at 8611 metres, the second highest place on earth. The two environmental extremes of the flat plains stretching hundreds of miles further south, and the remarkable mountains stretching further north, does much to sum up the extremes of diversity we see today in Pakistan.

Extremes...

In Pakistan, the first extremes that strike me are those of wealth and poverty. In the UK we don't see this as much, mostly due to everyone being entitled to free healthcare and education and our safety net of social security. I remember 10 or so years ago when



The regular monkey visitor to our garden

Tony Blair said that we live in a classless society in the UK and the uproar that this caused as 'huge' discrepancies were pointed out in classes. There was certainly some truth to the arguments presented but the differences between rich and poor are much less polarised than here in Pakistan. Here a Mercedes Benz regularly shares the road with a donkey cart. Pakistan has a very strong class society that is upheld. Most of this stems from the historical links with the Indian/Hindu caste system. People operate within their class, socialise within it and marry within it. To cross class boundaries is almost impossible.

In Pakistani church history, it was the lowest classes that first responded to Christ and consequently most of Pakistan's Christians are despised and shunned by society. This is why life is hard for most Pakistani Christians; they are near the bottom of the heap. However, it seems that even in the church the class society is reflected (maybe

With our helper at her home in Murree





Cheering on England at the World Cup



Boaz learning to play the tabla drums

this is also true to some extent in the UK). It is my prayer that Christians across the classes and, across lines of wealth, would unite to help each other.

Technological extremes are highly visible. A land with an excellent mobile phone network, and wireless broadband availability, ensures that living here in Murree we have better mobile phone reception and internet access than when we lived in Gloucester. However, when it comes to the basic needs of clean (or dirty) water, electricity and gas supply this country is sadly lacking. In Lahore we were living with alternate hours of load shedding, meaning that we lost electricity for 12 hours a day. Our child minder, Auntie Mariam, has not had running water to her home for a week and gas is another precious and scarce commodity.

The people of Pakistan

Pakistan is a huge country that includes four very different provinces and people groups. The Punjab, which itself is very diverse and including Lahore and Murree, is known as the bread basket of Pakistan, producing many foodstuffs and home to much of Pakistan's manufacturing and therefore wealth and power. Sindh, where we will be based from September, is Pakistan's most southern province, whose fertile strip follows the Indus south and is bordered either side by desert. Sindh is allegedly home to the hottest place on earth, Jacobabad. The modern, bustling city of Karachi is

in direct contrast to the rural villages where people live in adobe homes with poor provision of basic commodities. In conjunction with the provinces are four main languages, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtu and Balochi. Urdu, the country's official language, is the one we are learning. In addition, the cultures within these provinces vary significantly.

The people vary in many ways including the languages they speak, and different groups follow different strands of Islam. They vary in colour from being quite fair skinned and blue-eyed to being very dark. They vary in terms of education from those who are illiterate to those who are very well educated with PhDs. They vary in dress, with women going from brave city dwellers dressed in jeans and sleeveless tops to the most commonly worn *Shalwar Kameez* to tribal dress in rural areas, and everywhere some in *Purdah*. People and their lives vary in a hundred different other ways also.

A rural village in Gori



Pakistan is a country that cannot be adequately described in a short link letter and it would be difficult even in a whole book. It is not easy to put it in a box.

Having only been here for eight months, I am aware that we have only been exposed to a tiny part of things. Unfortunately, Western media report one small side of Pakistan that portrays a nation of terrorists living in a war zone. This is one small piece of a much bigger narrative. It is home to a very friendly people group where as foreigners we are seen as guests here and treated as such. While obtaining our driving licences, having attended the office on the wrong day, the chief of traffic police told us: *"you are guests in our country and so today we will accommodate you."* This certainly makes me think about how we British treat foreigners in our own country, and is another way I hope to become more 'eastern'.

Diversity and uniformity

Returning to the sight of the snow-capped Himalayas I reflected upon the vast diversity of this country. As a one time geographer the environment reveals two things to me. One is how Pakistan's diverse environment reflects the diversity we see in the country. The second thing that struck me was that this is how God made the world with so many examples of variety; in doing so, God reveals something of Himself to us – that He is a diverse God and a God who is surely much bigger than our understanding, however much we think we know Him. I recommend a country walk, and ask God to reveal something of Himself to you by what you see; you may be surprised!

It seems that the world is full of diversity and uniformity. I felt that diversity is something that should be celebrated but I noticed that much of the diversity I reflected upon was a negative thing. Surely God didn't intend for there to be so many of those that have and those who do not in the world. And yet there are areas where diversity should be encouraged and celebrated. Where cultures differ that is okay, as we don't all have to become one global culture

where everyone wears jeans and eats the same food. How boring the British menu would be if we took away all the global influences upon it and how empty our take-away streets would be!

Church is another place where I sense God enjoys diversity, a unity in belief but a diversity in expressing these beliefs. Some churches are good at caring for the elderly, some at sharing the struggles of young people, some caring for the sick and some playing good music. Some make a lot of noise as they go about practising church; some quietly persevere in hard places. Unity should not be mistaken as uniformity. As one Christian community, we can celebrate the strengths that different churches bring to our neighbourhoods and think about what *we* can do better rather than what *they* can do better. The bible says that the church is like one body with many different parts. If the parts recognise each other, and work together as one body, that will change the world.

Praise God:

- That the girls have started sleeping all night, most nights, in their own beds without disturbing us at all!
- That we have made good progression with language.
- That He has kept us safe thus far.
- That the children have settled well in Murree.

Pray for:

- Our next visa application, which we will make soon. Pray that it would be successful and without too much trouble.
- Our continued safety.
- Our language classes and that we make good progression.
- Our move to Sindh at the end of the summer.
- Pray for unity in the worldwide church and a celebration of diversity.

Thank you again for all your support

*David, Dawn, Faye, Sian
and Boaz*

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