

- PEB History -

The History of Presbyterian Education in Pakistan

Presbyterians started work in the Indian sub-continent during the 1850s. After the first missionaries of the Board of Foreign Mission of the United Presbyterian Church of North America reached Lahore, they traveled on **palaki** (a square wooden covered platform hanging from a bamboo pole, carried by at least two men) to ultimately reach Sialkot.

Over the next several years, the missionaries established girls' schools and boarding houses as well as primary schools in poor villages. They also established Gordon College in Rawalpindi. In most of these places, the missionaries acquired large parcels of land to provide for future expansion.

When Pakistan became a nation in 1947, all Presbyterian religious and other institutions continued to be managed by the missionaries in the field in Pakistan. In 1961, the Presbyterian Church body in Pakistan had been granted autonomy from the US church and re-registered as the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church of Pakistan.

In late 1971, the President of Pakistan announced a new law -- nationalization -- under which the provincial governments were authorized to take over all educational institutions, including church schools. Over time, most of the nationalized schools suffered from severe neglect. Staff and teachers were not held accountable, and little actual education was provided.

In 1995, the Presbyterian Church (USA) named Mr. S. David Stoner as Partnership Consultant to Pakistan for the purpose of reclaiming the schools which had been built on properties owned by PC(USA). A legal case was prepared, and papers were signed with the government, returning the schools to the Church under the management of the Executive Director of the Presbyterian Education Board of Pakistan, Veda Javaid Gill in 1998.

In 1998 most of these schools were in ruin. PEB authorized the Executive Director to work with the Presbyterian Church (USA) office in Louisville, Kentucky to develop financial support to restore the schools. She traveled extensively in the USA telling the PEB story. She was present at all the PC(USA) General Assemblies and visited many churches. She raised enough funds to hire capable staff and teachers and to begin construction of new buildings. In only a few years, she attracted a large group of PEB supporters, some of whom, in 2008, established a US non-profit fundraising organization called Friends of PEB.

In spite of much opposition and the challenges of property-related issues, the Presbyterian Education Board has moved forward. Now 20 years since denationalization, PEB has grown to 24 schools with nearly 6000 students. A women's empowerment program provides emergency shelter and training and seminars in health issues, legal rights, and social issues for communities. The professional office staff has a new administrative building funded in part by American friends, with dedicated academic, finance, administration, HR and IT departments. Committed principals and teachers at each of the PEB schools have seen excellent results from their efforts, with many boys and girls graduating and continuing to higher education in universities.

- Mr. Salim Bhatti
former Property Resources Coordinator and
General Attorney for PCUSA in Pakistan

