

# Challenges Lead to Success...

## - Jenny Stoner-

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As you read about the current PEB facilities and the activities now taking place in the schools, it is hard to realize how far they have come. In 1998, as I visited the dilapidated schools with Veda Gill, I couldn't imagine the transformation that would eventually result in the beautiful buildings and outstanding teaching of today.

### **Background**

Pakistan's school nationalization plan, implemented in 1972, was laudable in its aim to make education accessible to all children. However, in reality, it was an exercise in poor government management: almost no funding was provided for the schools; government-selected teachers were poorly paid and inadequately trained; the buildings and furnishings were totally neglected for 27 years. The schools were not doing their job.



In 1994 a lawsuit by the Christian church leadership in Pakistan won a decision that, although the government had the right to take over the management of schools, they did not have the right to appropriate the school property that was owned by the Presbyterian Church (USA). Partnership Consultant David Stoner was sent by PC(USA) to negotiate with the government to have the schools returned to the church. After negotiating with a succession of governments and receiving assistance from the US State Department, his efforts were rewarded. On July 30, 1998, the Presbyterian Education Board received notice that its 10 schools in the Punjab region were officially returned to the church.... with various conditions. This was a time of great excitement and enormous challenge. Before classes could resume in early September, each of the schools had to be registered in its town, new principals and teachers had to be hired, and the buildings and furnishings had to be prepared for students.

### **The reality of the denationalized schools**

Among the special challenges were the barriers raised by government teachers in many of the schools. They did not want to move, and many Muslim families were afraid that having the church assume management would mean that the children would be discouraged from Muslim beliefs. In 5 of the 10 communities where schools were officially "returned," those obstructing the return of the schools to the church succeeded, so those schools remained with the government. It was several years before additional schools were returned and there are still three of the original 10 that are not yet part of the PEB family. Additional special challenges were leaking roofs, lack of electricity, and unusable or insufficient furniture.

In November 1998, I had the privilege of visiting the 5 schools that had been returned. Parents and staff had cleaned up the schoolyards, planted flowers, and painted the walls of the building. Eager, smiling children were treated with respect by their teachers. In contrast, at the boys' high school still under government control, students were seated in broken desks in front of cracked windows, sanitary facilities were lacking, teachers threatened the boys with a large stick, and the library had 30-year old books that looked as though they had not even been dusted in all that time. Under the leadership of Veda Javaid Gill, change began to occur. Christian teachers were hired and PEB developed many training sessions to improve their skills and knowledge. **(continued on next pg.)**