



The Archbishop of Canterbury visited Pakistan this weekend to show support for its Christian community. During the three-day visit he prayed with Christians, listened to their experiences and offered comfort to those grieving in the wake of attacks. He also met with national leaders to raise the concerns of Christians and discuss protecting freedom of religion or belief for all people in Pakistan.

In a meeting in Islamabad on Monday with the Prime Minister, Imran Khan, the Archbishop informed Mr Khan of his visit yesterday to the city of Peshawar, where a priest from the Church of Pakistan was murdered in a terror attack in January. The Archbishop raised the issue of creating social cohesion and the importance of respecting people’s freedom of religion or belief, particularly in education systems.

During the meeting, the Archbishop also said that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was both a tragedy and “an act of great moral evil”, and spoke of the need for urgent efforts to build peace.

The Archbishop was visiting the country at the invitation of the Moderator of the Church of Pakistan, the Right Revd Dr Azad Marshall. During the visit he spent time with the Bishops of the Church of Pakistan, as well as Pakistani faith leaders and religious scholars.

On Sunday the Archbishop travelled to Peshawar in the northwest of Pakistan to spend time with the congregation at All Saints Church, including survivors and bereaved families from the bombing attack on the church in 2013. He also comforted the community following the murder of the Revd William Siraj, who was shot on his way home from a church service in January this year.



The Archbishop prayed with the congregation and assured them “you are not forgotten” by Christians around the world, including Anglicans across the global Anglican Communion. Archbishop Justin was accompanied by Bishop Azad Marshall and Bishop Humphrey Peters, the Bishop of Peshawar. While at All Saints Church, the Archbishop unveiled the foundation stone for a new Centre for Interfaith Harmony and Reconciliation to be based at the church.

Reflecting on his visit to Peshawar, the Archbishop said: “It was profoundly moving to visit the Christian community of Peshawar. It’s a community I have longed to visit for many years. I have prayed for them, wept for them and thanked God for them. Many of the community there continue to live with the trauma of the terrible attacks on All Saints Church in 2013. And yet the All Saints community have refused to allow the darkness to overcome the light of Christ among them. They are an inspiration and a blessing to us all.”

The Archbishop’s visit to Pakistan began on Saturday with a time of conversation, worship and prayer with the Bishops of the Church of Pakistan. The Archbishop listened to the challenges faced by the bishops in their dioceses, and praised their “extraordinary” work particularly in healthcare, education, prisons and supporting young people.

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On Sunday evening the Archbishop urged a gathering of faith leaders in Islamabad to “be courageous” in their approach to interfaith dialogue and working for peace. The reception, co-hosted by Bishop Azad Marshall and the Prime Minister of Pakistan’s Special Representative for Interfaith Harmony, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, was attended by the British High Commissioner Dr Christian Turner, religious leaders and scholars and diplomats.

In his address the Archbishop encouraged faith communities to pursue robust and genuine interfaith dialogue, particularly because of the rise in religious extremism in all the major faiths over recent decades. “We need to be honest with each other and be courageous in speaking about difficult issues. We need to learn to argue and disagree well,” he said.



On Monday the Archbishop had meetings in Islamabad with Pakistan's Prime Minister, President and Chief of Army Staff, in which he encouraged freedom of religion or belief and the pursuit of peace, interfaith dialogue and human rights.

In his meeting with the Chief of Army Staff, the Archbishop spoke of "the evil of war" and said conflict was always a catastrophe. They also spoke

about the need for a serious and holistic approach to tackling radicalisation in all faiths.

Speaking at the end of the visit, the Archbishop said: “At this time of profound trouble, suffering, conflict and uncertainty in our world, it has been a great privilege to visit our brothers and sisters in the Church of Pakistan. Our world needs hope, resilience, courage and a deep commitment to peace: and for that reason the Church of Pakistan is a gift not just to Pakistan but to the world. I give thanks for the way they bear witness to the love of Jesus Christ in the most difficult circumstances.



“Christians in Pakistan, along with other communities, face many challenges and struggles – and we must stand alongside them in their call for justice, human rights and freedom of religion or belief for all. Pakistan was founded on a hopeful vision in which every person is free to practice their faith, and we must pray and support everyone who continues to work towards the realisation of this vision.”

Bishop Azad Marshall said: “The visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury and his delegation to Pakistan has been a great encouragement to Pakistan’s Christians. Our meetings both internally as a uniting church and externally with governments and government representatives, has shown us that our voices have significance. It is my hope that the meetings we have had will bear fruit and strengthen the church while building our capacity to speak out against injustice and face the future with transformational hope in not ourselves or our plans but in the plan that God has for all of Pakistan. We look forward to building on these meetings and seeing the practical fruitful outcomes of all that was spoken, shared and sown between brother and sisters and friends.”



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