In November three representatives of Glasgow Presbytery, Graham Thain, Karen Wallace and Jim Hamilton, travelled to Pakistan as part of the Presbytery’s twinning relationship with the Church of Pakistan Diocese of Hyderabad.

We had been told to expect an armed guard at church services but I was surprised to see a *jeep* *full* of armed soldiers, parked within the walled and gated compound at St. Philip’s, Hyderabad. All urban churches are protected in a similar way. All our destinations had been approved by a government department and they helpfully ensured that we had a police escort in places where they thought that necessary. We were unsure whether we were celebrities or something else!

With two Sundays included in our ten day schedule, we were able, between us, to visit six different congregations at worship, as well as meeting members of others, during the week between.

We met young people young people participating in a demanding training course and women’s groups which tackle relevant issues and empower marginalised women. “You were allowed to work a scissors?! That’s impossible!” a woman was told on returning home from her first day at a craft project. Her family were used to such simple tools being kept in the hands of those with power over their inferiors!

Six schools run by the diocese, in diverse contexts, were included in our schedule, All diocesan schools offer education to children from across the faith communities, with priority being given to poorer children in village communities. Some schools have well established boys’ hostels, where students testified to the influence of hostel life on their faith and aspirations to serve the Lord Jesus. In many communities there remains a traditional reluctance to educate daughters but rather to see them married young. This tradition is only changing slowly.

As well as two historic contrasting mission hospitals - a small but effective hospital in the dusty city centre at Sukkur and the much larger, well-equipped hospital at Kunri set in beautiful therapeutic gardened grounds - rural health programmes are also making a significant difference to the health of rural communities. They are educating and mobilising local villagers to deal with hygiene, infection control, sanitation and drinking water issues and many women have been trained as birth attendants, significantly lowering infant mortality and assisting women with pre and postnatal care.

The Diocese’ Audio Visual Centre at Mirpurkhas is a base for innovative outreach to tribal Hindu villages. Small teams of linguists working in nine tribal languages are translating scriptures which are then available on a mobile phone App. Stories are a most effective way of communicating faith in the Sindhi oral culture so every month sixty story tellers rehearse and present a new Bible story around the villages. Tribal people don’t have long attention spans for preaching or speeches, but they will listen to music all night so outreach teams present the Christian faith in culturally relevant ways through songs. Some songs and themes are accompanied by ‘Bollywood’ style videos.

Alas, we were only able to bring home a small proportion of the topi hats and scarves with which we had been welcomed and had to leave behind over 100 floral garlands! Our packed itinerary left us feeling exhausted but privileged and humbled to meet so many inspiring brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus who, in spite of difficult circumstances, are building one another up in Christ and continuing to hold out the word of life.

Graham Thain