

THE MAGAZINE OF BARNABAS FUND HOPE AND AID FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

# barnabasaid

## Dying to be saved: Suffering Church Sunday 2009

- Why should they be secret? The plight of Christian converts
- Information, stories, sermon outline and much more inside

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2009



To guard the safety of Christians in hostile environments, names may have been changed or omitted. Thank you for your understanding.

**Front cover:** A Christian convert is baptised, pledging her allegiance to Christ

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

## Dying to be saved

The call of Scripture is to believe and be baptised (Mark 16:16). In the New Testament we have water baptism, which demonstrates our new life in Christ. Jesus spoke of being baptised with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5), of being incorporated into the family of believers and receiving His power. Jesus also spoke of a baptism of suffering or a baptism of death (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50).

For Christian converts from Islam, baptism is that pivotal moment in their faith when they express publicly their new allegiance to Jesus, their total loyalty to Him, and their willingness to follow Him even unto death. Baptism is

regarded as the point of no return, the decisive break, and is therefore often the moment at which real persecution of the convert begins.

Across the world today, there are many converts who are choosing to take this step of baptism. Indeed, there are more Muslims coming to Christ than at any other time in history. For some this step will end in almost certain death. I was in East Africa recently, and a church leader told me of two young ladies who had left Islam for Christ and then returned to their communities only to be slaughtered by their fathers.

President Barack Obama has made a remarkable call for freedom of religion (see page 6). Mr Obama's father and grandfather were Muslims, so, according to sharia, he too was born a Muslim. In taking a decision to follow Jesus Christ he became an apostate. When he called for freedom of choice in matters of faith, he sent a message across the Muslim

world that every individual should have the freedom to choose their own faith.

This message is desperately needed in the Islamic context. But it is also needed in other religious contexts where conversion to Christ and baptism are viewed as traitorous acts, a betrayal of one's community that warrants punishment, even death. Mr Obama's conversion has been accepted by Muslims. Will they now accept all other conversions?

Barnabas continues to appeal for an end to the Islamic apostasy law. Starting with Islam, where legislation for the death penalty for apostasy is more detailed and enforceable than in any other faith, we hope and pray that in time all religions will allow their followers the freedom to choose.

**Dr Patrick Sookhdeo**  
International Director

# What has Barnabas achieved under God?\*

## Currently:

- We are supporting over **5,000** Christian children in **23** Christian schools/educational programmes in eight countries – Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Pakistan, Sudan, Kenya and the Holy Land.
- We are supporting **203** evangelists and **286** pastors in **24** countries – Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Bangladesh, Chad, Cuba, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Kazakhstan, Macedonia, Pakistan, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Ukraine and six other countries.

I am immensely thankful to the Lord and to all our supporters for what Barnabas has been able to accomplish in bringing practical aid and spiritual nourishment to our persecuted brothers and sisters in many parts of the world. Sad to say, discrimination and persecution are growing in most contexts (even in some Western contexts), and the Barnabas team are kept immensely busy responding to the increasing needs. But it is an immense privilege to serve the suffering Church in this way, and we could not do it without your gifts and prayers.

In the past year we have sent 506 grants to 54 different countries ranging in size from £90 to £90,000. On this page we give a selection of some of our current and recent achievements. (Certain countries cannot be named for security reasons. Thank you for your understanding.)

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO, INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR

## In the last 12 months:

- We provided food to over **85,000** Christians.
- We provided **59,603** Bibles and Christian books in **19** languages to **15** different countries – Bangladesh, China, Egypt, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Niger, Pakistan, Burma (Myanmar), Russia, Sudan and four other countries.
- We provided resources to construct or repair **55** church buildings in **14** different countries – Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Burundi, China, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Mali, Burma (Myanmar), Russia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and one other country.

## In the last 3 years:

- We sent aid to Christians in **10** countries affected by natural disasters (earthquake, tsunami, drought, cyclone) and provided support for over **40,000** Christian families in these areas.
- We helped to build and/or provide running costs for **10** clinics and hospitals in **6** countries – Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iraq, Papua New Guinea and Pakistan – as well as providing support for persecuted Christians needing urgent medical attention.

\*figures calculated at time of going to press in July 2009

# Obama in Cairo



In his speech in Cairo on 4 June 2009, President Obama courageously addressed the issue of the right of every individual to be free to choose their own faith, thereby addressing the issue of conversion from Islam (apostasy): "People in every country should be free to choose and live their faith based upon the persuasion of the mind, heart, and soul."

He also called for respect and right treatment of minorities in Muslim countries, giving examples of two Christian communities: "The richness of religious diversity must be upheld – whether it is for Maronites in Lebanon or the Copts in Egypt." It was bold of him to mention the problem of discrimination against the Copts, which the Egyptian government consistently denies.

He could of course have mentioned other persecuted Christian minorities in the Middle East and in the Muslim world. President Obama claimed that freedom in America "is indivisible from the freedom to practice one's religion". He did not however demand that Saudi Arabia and other Muslim states that severely restrict the freedom of non-Muslims to practise their religion reciprocate and follow that model. So while his speech was an acknowledgement of the problems of converts from Islam and of other

## Petition Update

At the time of writing, we have **23,047** signatures for the petition "Why should they be secret?"

Please keep gathering signatures and help to abolish the Islamic apostasy law with its death sentence for those who leave Islam.

<http://www.barnabasfund.org/whysouldtheybesecret>

The petition closes on 31 December 2009.

Christians in Muslim contexts a lot was left unsaid. It remains to be seen whether it will translate into any actual policy changes.

According to sharia (Islamic law), Mr Obama is himself an apostate from Islam. Whatever he may say about his upbringing, Islam teaches that the child of a Muslim father is by definition a Muslim. As Mr Obama declares himself to be a practising Christian, whereas his father was undoubtedly a Muslim, sharia considers Barack Obama to have left his first faith, Islam. He should therefore be liable to the death penalty and other punishments. This is the aspect of Islamic law that our campaign and petition is seeking to change. We need to be very much in prayer that he will be kept safe from any attacks by radical Muslims.

Please write to President Obama, thanking him for highlighting the plight of those who are persecuted for following Jesus. Tell him how

pleased you are that he has not been persecuted as an apostate and ask him what steps he is taking to see that others who leave Islam may be able to live without fear of harassment, persecution or death. Please ask him to sign our petition at <http://www.barnabasfund.org/US/Action/Campaigns/Why-should-they-be-secret/Online-petition/>

Your letter does not need to be long, but please be polite. Start your letter "Dear Mr President". The address is:

**President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500,  
USA**

As and when you receive a response, please send a copy of it and your letter to your nearest Barnabas Fund office so we can collate them.

# DYING

# TO BE SAVED



## Suffering Church Sunday 2009

Would you give your life for Christ?

DATE

TIME

VENUE

Throughout 2009 Barnabas Fund has been running a campaign for the abolition of the Islamic law of apostasy. Our petition calls on national governments to support all efforts by Muslims to this end, so that those who choose to leave their Islamic faith are no longer subject to any penalty but are free to follow their new convictions without fear.

# Why should they be secret?

For this year's Suffering Church Sunday we are focusing on the challenges faced by converts to Christianity, not only from Islam but from all other religions and none. In the following pages you will find many ideas for your Suffering Church Sunday service. We invite you to

choose a Sunday in November (or another month if this suits your church calendar better) and to use this material to reflect on the plight of converts who suffer persecution for their Christian faith – our brothers and sisters who are, sometimes literally, dying to be saved.

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Original new song, and how your church can care for persecuted Christians

## Other resources

Turn to page 23 for a list of other Suffering Church Sunday resources, **including a DVD** available free of charge from your national Barnabas Fund office or from our website [www.barnabasfund.org/scs](http://www.barnabasfund.org/scs).

## Timeline

# A Timeline of Christian Persecution 2008/2009:

### Andulo, Angola

On 20 July Muslim extremists attacked the Christian community in the town of Andulo, Angola. The Muslim mob burned three church buildings and assaulted 4 Christians. Leti Raimundo, the school-age daughter of a deacon at one of the churches, was **beheaded**. Another Christian required 20 stitches in her head.



This Angolan Christian needed 20 stitches after a Muslim mob attacked her village

### Mosul, Iraq

Thousands of Christians fled the city of Mosul in terror in October as Sunni Muslim extremists launched a fresh wave of threats and violence to purge the city of Christians. "We left everything behind us. We took only our souls," said Ni'ma Noail (50), a civil servant who had to abandon his home. At least 14 Christians, including a 15-year-old boy, were murdered; many of them killed execution-style by gunmen.

**Approximately 12,000 Christians were forced out**, after leaflets were distributed threatening Christians with death unless they converted to Islam.

### Jos, Nigeria

Hundreds of Christians were killed and an estimated 7,000–10,000 fled their homes after rioting, started by Muslims on 28 November, engulfed the city of Jos, Nigeria. In well co-ordinated attacks, **Christian homes were burnt** and churches vandalised, and clergy were attacked and killed. The violence started after the results of a local election seemed to favour the Christian Berom people over the Muslim Hausa people. Jos lies in Nigeria's troubled "Middle Belt", where Christians and Muslims are in roughly equal numbers and there is a history of large-scale sectarian rioting. These riots often appear to be pre-planned attacks, with young people being paid to participate in the violence and promised heavenly rewards for killing Christians.

Aug 08

Sept 08

Oct 08

### Orissa, India

At least 50 Christians were murdered, some burnt alive and others cut to pieces in a rampage of anti-Christian violence in Orissa, India, beginning in August. 300 villages were cleansed of Christians, with homes, churches, relief camps and **even orphanages razed to the ground by Hindu extremists**. With over 50,000 displaced, Christians wanting to return to their homes have been told, "Come back as Hindu or don't come back at all." Some who dared to return to their villages were forcibly converted to Hinduism. Sometimes the Hindu extremists poured petrol over the Christians and then told them to convert; if they refused they were set alight. Thankfully, 2009 saw a new government, but the threat of Hindu extremism remains.



Barnabas Fund aid being distributed in, Kandhamal, Orissa, India

### Saudi Arabia

Fatima al-Mutairi, a young Saudi woman, learned about Jesus on the internet and decided to follow Him. When in August her family noticed the cross on her computer screensaver and discovered that she had converted from Islam to Christianity, they **cut out her tongue and burned her to death**. In the last blog that Fatima wrote before her death, she found comfort and strength in the opening verse of Psalm 27, "The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?" Another Saudi blogger, Hamoud Bin Saleh, has been repeatedly harassed and detained by the Saudi police for writing about his conversion from Islam to Christianity on his website.

a selection of examples from July 2008 to January 2009



Home destroyed by rioting Muslims, Jos, Nigeria

Sangla Hill, Pakistan

Despite eyewitness accounts and medical evidence indicating guilt, police have declared three Pakistani men innocent of raping a 13-year-old Christian girl in the Sangla Hill area of Pakistan. In February, **Ambreen was abducted and gang-raped** at gun-point and was found by her family in a critical condition several hours later. When she was kidnapped, she was told by her captors, "We will kill your parents if you tell them this." Christians in Pakistan are often extremely poor and are employed by the local Muslims. The teenage girl comes from a poor background, while the Muslim men accused of her rape are part of a wealthy family of local landowners. In such circumstances it is exceptionally hard for Christians to get a fair investigation or trial.

Nov 08

Dec 08

Jan 09

Somalia

A 22-year-old Somali Christian convert from Islam, Ahmadey Osman Nur, was **murdered while attending a Muslim wedding** on 14 September. Since the wedding service was held in Arabic, Nur asked for it to be translated into the Somali vernacular. The sheik who performed the ceremony took offence at Nur's request. Knowing of Nur's conversion to Christianity, he declared him to be guilty of apostasy and as Nur left, he was shot dead by an armed guard.

Egypt

Martha Samuel, an Egyptian convert from Islam to Christianity, was detained, stripped and beaten at Cairo airport on 17 December as she tried to emigrate with her family. Her two children witnessed her assault and were deprived of food to pressure their mother to return to Islam. The judge, who tried her case, imprisoning her for a month, told her that if he had a knife **he would kill her for leaving Islam.**



Martha Samuel

## Timeline

# A Timeline of Christian Persecution 2008/2009:

### London, UK

The Rev. Noble Samuel, a Christian minister at a United Reformed Church in London, UK, was attacked by three men in March on his way to the TV studio where he films a Gospel programme. Mr Samuel was born in Pakistan and moved to Britain 15 years ago. He does not set out to be confrontational, but shortly before the attack his views had been aggressively challenged by Muslim callers in a broadcast phone-in. The incident, which has been described as a **“faith-hate” crime** by police, happened when a car pulled in front of Mr Samuel

and a man came over to ask for directions. The attacker opened the car door and started punching Mr Samuel and trying to hit his head on the steering wheel; he then grabbed Mr Samuel’s cross and pulled it off, throwing it to the floor. Two other men stole his laptop and Bible. The assailants warned Mr Samuel, “If you go back to the studio, we’ll break your legs.” Following the attack, Mr Samuel went ahead with his show at studios that are owned by local Muslim businessman Tahir Ali, who went on air later that day to condemn the attacks.



The Rev. Noble Samuel, who was brutally beaten for his Christian faith

Feb 09

Mar 09

Apr 09

### North Western Province, Sri Lanka

In March a pastor and a church worker sustained serious injuries when they were **attacked by a man armed with a machete** in North Western Province, Sri Lanka. Many church members have been too frightened to meet together for worship as a result. On Wednesday 8 April, a group of Buddhist militants gathered outside the home of Pastor Kumara in Weeraketiya, Hambanthota district, threatening to kill him if he did not leave the village by the morning. These incidents are the latest in a series of attacks against churches and Christians, who have been subjected to violence, murder of clergy, harassment and intimidation, often initiated by locals who condemn the growth of Christianity in the country.

### Machharkay, Punjab, Pakistan

On 9 May, Ishtiaq Masih had disembarked from a bus that had stopped in Machharkay village to give the passengers an opportunity for rest and refreshment. A sign hung on the roadside tea stall, which read, “All non-Muslims should introduce their faith prior to ordering tea. This stall serves Muslims only.” When Ishtiaq went to pay for his tea the owner noticed his necklace with a cross on it. The owner called on his employees to punish the Christian for not abiding by the sign. **A group of men then beat Ishtiaq to death** with whatever they could lay their hands on, including stones from the ground on which he lay.



Braving persecution, Christians in Pakistan distribute Gospels and other Christian literature.

### Xinjiang, China

Authorities in the Muslim-majority Xinjiang region of China have been detaining a local Christian church leader for over a year. His family have not been allowed to see him since his arrest and only limited, restricted access has been given to his lawyer. Alimujiang Yimiti is an ex-Muslim who has been a believer in Jesus Christ for 14 years. According to his wife, “Faith in Jesus has made great changes in Alimujiang’s life and has made him really a good citizen who loves his country and his people.” **His family have received no news about him** and no communication from him since soon after his arrest.

# a selection of examples from February to July 2009

## Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan

**Owning a Bible became illegal** and a reason to be raided by the state police in Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan this May. The already tight restrictions have come close to suffocating the local church when the senior religious official for the region announced they were banning the Bible, the film "The Passion of the Christ" and other religious literature, including a hymn book, a Bible encyclopaedia, a Bible dictionary and a children's Bible, for "import, distribution or use in teaching". For example, a Bible

was confiscated when police ransacked the home of Polat Smetullaev without a warrant. Government officials insisted the raid had been justified as Smetullaev's mother is known to host a Bible study for Christian women twice a week. Officials warned that if she carried on her Christian teaching without the approval of a registered, centralised religious organisation, she could face administrative punishment or even criminal prosecution.



A view of Uzbekistan from space, Karakalpakstan is in the top left corner

May 09

Jun 09

Jul 09

## Burma (Myanmar)

Since 2 June some 4,000 of the mainly Christian Karen tribe again had to flee to the mountains owing to renewed attacks by the Burmese military. If captured they can be forced to endure heavy labour and even undertake mine clearing duties. The army often sets fire to the villages or plants landmines to kill anyone who returns. As a result many stay in the jungle out of fear, and **succumb to starvation**, disease or snake bite. As a result of this conflict there are 140,000 refugees in camps over the nearby Thai border.



A displaced Burmese family

## Yemen

On 12 June a group of nine expatriate Christians living in Yemen, comprising a German doctor, his wife and their three young children, a British man, two German nurses and a South Korean teacher was kidnapped by armed men. Three days later the bodies of the two nurses and the teacher were found in a riverbed, with gunshot and stab wounds. Following the discovery, Yemeni troops began searching for the other six hostages, but their fate remains unclear at the time of writing.

They all worked for a Christian organisation, and there is concern that they were targeted as **an act of revenge for their alleged attempts to convert local Muslims** to Christianity.



The uplands of Yemen

## Laos

Dozens of Christian in Katin village, Saravan province were threatened on 16 July with losing their livestock and their homes unless they **abandoned their faith** in favour of the 'local spirits' of Lao tradition. This incident follows the killing of nine pigs by the authorities on 5 July, each belonging to a Christian family and worth six weeks' salary for the average labourer in the area. The village leader said, "If any villager is found following the Christian faith without renouncing that religion, he or she will no longer be under the official provision and protection of the village."

## Testimonies

Across the world, people are experiencing the grace and love of the Lord Jesus and committing their lives to Him. They encounter Him in many and varied ways, through national evangelists, the love and witness of church members, radio, television, the internet, Bible and literature distribution and through the miraculous.

But faith can also bring persecution for many converts because of the choice they have made. Although some converts from a Western background may experience a degree of pressure and ridicule, it is a particular problem for converts from Islam, who may suffer misunderstanding, harassment, abuse, violence and even murder.

Here we share the testimonies of "Joshua" and "Ruth", who converted to Christianity from Muslim backgrounds.

# Thrown on the streets for following Jesus

"Joshua" studied Islam in Saudi Arabia and Nigeria and, following in the footsteps of his father, who was the highest-ranking Islamic Imam in the country, he became one of the leading Islamic clerics in his country. One day, Joshua visited a friend who showed him an unusual text called "The Book for Men with White Hair" – so-called, according to the friend, because only old and mature men should read it. His curiosity sparked, Joshua took the book and read all about Issa (Jesus). In his confusion, he turned to the Quran and, as he read more about Issa, he became convinced that Jesus was God.

Joshua had been actively involved in persecuting churches, so when he crept in to the back of a church to hear Christ's message, he was chased away for being a spy. He eventually found a church which let him in, and there he gave his life to the Lord. Later that day, he returned to his mosque and in front of

everyone, including his father, he declared that Jesus was God and that he was a Christian. This sparked outrage and he was dragged away by members of the mosque. Stripping him of his clothes, his father declared "Because you are my son, I will give you 20 minutes to flee. After 20 minutes you are no longer my son and I will send men to kill you. Leave everything Islam has ever given you!" Leaving behind his family, property and clothes, Joshua fled naked into the night.

Joshua was found by his sister, who gave him food and clothes. He lived on the streets in constant fear and was often beaten by Muslims if he tried to tell them about Jesus. Local churches would not shelter him for fear of attack. After 18 months of living like this, a church finally took Joshua in and gave him food and somewhere to sleep, but many Christians still suspected that he was a spy.



Joshua and his wife at their wedding

One Christmas Eve, Joshua was sleeping in the church when the pastor approached him and asked him where he would be spending Christmas. Joshua replied, "I have nowhere to go." The pastor said that he would pray for Joshua, but he did not invite Joshua to spend Christmas with him. Feeling alone and desperate, Joshua made a vow to the Lord that if God ever got him out of his state of homelessness, he would commit his life to helping take care of converts. Soon after this, he moved to a different church, where he met an American woman who gave him some money and put him in touch with Barnabas Fund.

Through Joshua, Barnabas Fund supports more than 300 converts by providing assistance with medical costs, rent, food, transport and the setting up of a pig breeding project to provide a source of income generation for the converts. In addition, financial backing is provided for outreach training, discipleship and vocational training.

■ **Project reference** 56-641



Joshua baptises a new Christian



Pigs from the breeding programme that is funded by Barnabas

# A blackboard with “Jesus” on it

“Ruth” was raised in a staunch Muslim family in East Africa. As a young girl, she liked to follow her brothers, even getting involved in a violent assault on the local Anglican minister. While her father and brothers beat the minister severely, Ruth struck him over the head with a piece of wood.

As she grew up, Ruth married and moved from her family home to live with her husband. One night as she slept, Ruth had a dream about a blackboard with the word “Jesus” written on it three times. The next day, she asked her mother who Jesus was. Her mother instructed her to pray a certain formula of words in order to get rid of the evil *jinn* (spirit) whom the mother believed had caused the dream.

A few days later, Ruth had another dream in which she saw a picture of her local church and heard a voice saying, “This is Jesus.” When she woke, she ran straight to the church, where she was led to give her life to the Lord Jesus. She was dramatically changed, bursting with joy and love.

But this decision has not been well-received by Ruth’s family. Her father and brothers, who live next door to the church building, shout and threaten to kill her every time she goes to church, throwing sticks and stones at her.

Now a widow, Ruth has had three of her four children taken away from her. On the very evening that she told her story in the open air by the church in June 2009, her house, which is next to a mosque, was



Ruth, a Christian convert from Islam, is baptised

burned down. Despite losing everything she owned in the fire, Ruth continues to trust in the Lord; her story is a testament to the power of Christ to changes people’s hearts and minds.

Not only converts themselves, but also anyone who is thought to be seeking to win converts from Islam, is liable for persecution. Many such are martyred. Our story below is from Mauritania, North Africa, a region often called the Maghreb.



A typical scene from an old town in Mauritania, where American Christian Chris Leggett was murdered for “Christianizing”

## Christian aid worker murdered in Mauritania

On 23 June 2009, Chris Leggett, an American Christian living in Mauritania, was killed. Two attackers appeared to try and kidnap him, and when he resisted they shot him several times in the head. Al-Jazeera television later played a recording reportedly from Al-Qaeda, which stated, “Two knights of the Islamic Maghreb succeeded Tuesday morning at 8 a.m. to kill the infidel American Christopher Leggett for his Christianizing activities.”

Despite this taunt his family issued the following statement:

*In a spirit of love, we express our forgiveness for those who took away the life of our remarkable son. Chris had a deep love for Mauritania and its people, a love that we share. Despite this terrible event, we harbour no ill will for the Mauritanian people. On a spiritual level, we forgive those responsible, asking only that justice be applied against those who killed our son.*

Mauritania’s Interior Ministry responded, saying that it was investigating the death

and security forces were doing all they could to catch the criminals.

Leggett, his wife and four children lived for seven years in the impoverished El-Kasr neighbourhood of Nouakchott, where he directed an aid agency that provided training in computer skills, sewing and literacy, and he also ran a micro-finance program. His good works as a Christian undertaking humanitarian work could not protect him from this brutal attack, which was, interestingly, justified by his attackers on the basis of the Islamic apostasy law.

# Persevering under Pressure

## 1 Peter 4:1-19

### 1. Introduction

When someone becomes a Christian from a Western background today, she may encounter a fair bit of hostility from other people. As she draws back from some of her former activities and tries to live in a way that pleases God, her family and friends may criticise and mock her; a few may even want nothing more to do with her. By reacting in this way they may hope to pressure her into abandoning her new faith.

This pressure can be very unpleasant and upsetting, but someone who converts from Islam usually suffers much more serious persecution. Having left behind his Islamic beliefs and practices he not only has to put up with criticism and mockery; he is also seen as a harmful influence within his family and community. He may well have to face threats, vandalism and violence, and in some places he will live in fear of his life. One purpose of this ill-treatment is to push him into giving up Christianity and returning to Islam.

Nissar Hussein is a hospital nurse in Bradford. Born a Muslim, he and his wife converted to Christianity. They and their children have been jostled, abused, attacked, told loudly to move out of the area and given death threats in the street. His wife was held hostage inside their home by a mob. Their property has been daubed in graffiti and their car rammed and torched. Bricks have been thrown through their windows and the steps to their home strewn with rubbish. Nissar was told that his house would be burnt down if he did not repent and return to

Islam. This all happened in the UK, so imagine how much worse life can be for a convert in a Muslim-majority country, who may also face legal penalties or even execution.

In the face of such suffering new Christians can start to question the value of their faith. Is it really worth accepting persecution for Christianity, or would they do better to discard it, or at least to compromise with other people's expectations of them?

### 2. A letter for persecuted Christians

The first letter of Peter is written mainly to Christian converts from paganism. They have given up their previous beliefs and practices, including their former involvement in pagan religious festivals, and they are trying to do what is right and good before God. But as a result they are under extreme pressure from their pagan neighbours.

The Christians are no longer respected by their fellow citizens. They are now seen as outsiders who are threatening the unity of their local communities. They suffer ridicule and slander and are accused of crimes against society. The purpose of this persecution is to bully them into rejecting their faith and accepting their old ways once again, and the temptation for them to do so is very strong.

1 Peter is addressed to these problems. It is written to show the readers how valuable their faith really is, and on that basis to encourage them to maintain their new and distinctive Christian lifestyle. The fourth chapter is part of an extended

exhortation on these themes. By reflecting on this we can learn how to encourage converts as they face pressure to abandon their faith – both those in our midst and those in the persecuted churches all over the world.

### 3. Breaking with the past (4:1-6)

#### a. Following Christ's example

In the first part of the chapter the readers are urged to take the same attitude to their suffering as Christ did to His. Because He chose to suffer rather than fall into sin, they must do so too. From now on they must obey God's will and accept the hostility that results, not yield again to their sinful human desires and relapse into their former way of life. They have spent enough time in the past following the pagan agenda; they must now live out day by day the decisive break with their past life that they made when they became Christians.

All converts to Christianity have to reject parts of their previous lifestyle that their community takes for granted. Converts from Islam, for instance, must stop reciting the Islamic creed and ritual prayers. They know that their decision may well arouse aggressive opposition from some Muslims. But to sustain them in their resolve they have the example of Christ, who was ready to suffer rather than disobey God's will.

#### b. Taking the long view

The letter acknowledges that the Christians' acquaintances are surprised that they do not join in pagan celebrations, and slander them for keeping away. But these people will give an account to the one who is ready at any time to judge the living and the dead. Even if the Christians suffer to the point of death, they will still be vindicated when the Spirit raises them to new life.



The Christians to whom 1 Peter was written lived in various parts of what is now northern Turkey, including Cappadocia.  
Source: Wikimedia Commons

This kind of long view helps to give converts the right perspective on their sufferings for Christ. For example, think of Abdul Rahman, a native of Afghanistan who converted to Christianity while living abroad. After he went back home he was divorced by his wife, and in the custody battle over their two daughters she and her family denounced him to the police. He was arrested, charged with apostasy and threatened with execution. Although he was later freed due to pressure from the West, he had to leave the country and live in exile.

Converts like Abdul Rahman, who are cruelly ill-treated by their family and former friends and deprived of so much that is dear to them, need to be assured that their persecutors will not have the last word. Instead they will be called to account by God for what they have done to His people, while those they have persecuted will be justified and blessed. So even for believers who are severely afflicted, the value of their faith is far

greater than its cost – a truth to which many persecuted Christians bear passionate witness.

#### 4. Helping one another (4:7-11)

The letter warns that the last days have begun. So the Christians are to be alert and sober for prayer. Above all, they are to show constant love towards one another, because love forgives many sins and limits their destructive effects. They are to be hospitable to one another without grumbling, and to use the gifts that each has received from God to serve one another, so that

God may be glorified through Christ. In the midst of persecution their dedication to God and their commitment to one another will keep them united and faithful, and ready for the end when it comes.

Converts who suffer for their faith in Christ are helped to endure through both the prayers and the mutual support of their Christian family. This includes their local churches, some of which may contain other converts from their former religion. For instance, among other Muslim-background believers who have left the mosque behind, Christian converts from Islam can find a sympathetic and supportive community and renew their courage in the face of persecution.

But the wider Christian community also has a responsibility to suffering converts. For any who live among us we can bring

## Sermon outline

their specific concerns before the Lord and offer them love, hospitality, care and ministry directly. For those living further afield we can pray more generally and help to meet their practical needs by using our gifts and resources in their service.

### 5. Facing hostility (4:12-19)

#### a. Rejoicing in the flames

According to 1 Peter it is not surprising that the new Christians are having their faith tested by the fires of persecution, and they should not react as though it is. They are sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and therefore they should rejoice, so that when His glory is revealed they may be glad. The joy that they have in suffering with Christ will be perfected in the future, when Christians will rejoice with Him in glory.

We must be sensitive in applying these verses. It is obviously not right for comfortable Western Christians, under little pressure for their faith, to lecture persecuted converts in Muslim countries on the need to rejoice! But we can at least hold the promise of eternal joy before our suffering brothers and sisters as an encouragement to them to be glad in the present.

Often, though, the lesson is taught the other way round. Christians suffering hideous mistreatment can be models of joy in the midst of affliction, and so prompt those who suffer much less severely to rejoice too. Believers in South Sudan, who were living in unbelievable deprivation and distress inflicted by the Islamic government in the North, were once asked why they sang so joyfully. They replied, "Because God has given us another day, and because we are going to heaven."

The letter also tells its readers that being abused because they bear the Name of Christ is a sign of God's blessing; it shows that His Spirit rests upon them. Of course they should not attract punishment by sinning; that sort of suffering is no use at all! But they should not be ashamed to suffer as Christians, and if they do, they should praise God because they are called by that Name. Converts facing persecution for their new faith can hardly praise God for their suffering, but like the Sudanese believers,

they can praise Him in it, because it is a sign of His Spirit's presence. They share something of God's glory, even now!

#### b. Trusting God and doing good

But in the trials of the churches God's final judgment has already been set in motion. Christians are saved through it only by sticking to righteousness and not trying to make things easier for themselves by yielding to their persecutors' demands. This may be hard for them, but the fate of the ungodly and sinners who disobey the gospel will be far worse. So those who suffer for Christ are to entrust themselves to their faithful Creator and do good.

1 Peter does not minimise the suffering that Christian converts have to endure. Persecution is a deeply painful ordeal. Martha Samuel, an Egyptian convert from Islam, was arrested at Cairo airport last year as she tried to leave the country with her family to start a new life. She was stripped and kicked in front of her two young sons, and then beaten and raped while in custody. Her four-year-old, asked if he would like to pray for her, said, "Daddy Jesus, may you forgive the bad guys who are striking Mum and Dad ... make them your children so that they will not strike Mum and Dad again." This is only one of countless heart-wrenching stories that are told every year by the persecuted churches.

And yet – as persecuted Christians will often be the first to say – even at such a great cost it is still good for them to persist in their Christian living. Why? Because the alternative – the judgment that will fall on those who disobey God – is much more serious. And Christians have a faithful God! He made them, and they can commit themselves to Him in the confidence that He will bring them through all their trials to share in His glory.

### 6. Conclusion

1 Peter 4 makes big demands on converts to Christianity. They are to leave behind their former life and accept the persecution that follows. They are to help one another through prayer and mutual

support. They are to rejoice and praise God in the midst of their suffering, to trust Him, and to keep on doing good. These demands are hard enough for those of us who have to face only a little trouble for the sake of Christ. We should never underestimate how hard they are for converts who suffer grievously at others' hands.

But the passage also offers several reasons for maintaining a Christian lifestyle. The example of Christ, who chose to obey God and suffer the consequences, encourages Christians to do the same. Their persecutors will be called to account by God, while they themselves will be vindicated. Converts are promised eternal joy when Christ's glory is revealed, and they share in that glory even now through the Spirit of God who lives in them. If they persist in doing good they will escape God's judgment on ungodly sinners.

The prayers and support that Christians offer to persecuted converts, through organisations such as Barnabas Fund, can help to remind them of these truths and sustain them in their Christian living. These verses encourage us to be good stewards of the grace of God that we have received, to empower converts who suffer for Christ to stand firm in their fiery ordeal.

**A PowerPoint presentation to accompany this sermon is available to download from [www.barnabasfund.org/scs](http://www.barnabasfund.org/scs), and also on a free DVD, which you can order from your nearest Barnabas office.**

### Further reading

For further exposition of this chapter and its principal themes, please see the following:

Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, New York, Doubleday, 1997, pp705-724

J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (Word Biblical Commentary), Waco, Word Books, 1988, pp223-275

# Suffering for Christ

## 1 Peter 4:1-19

This study looks at the same passage as the sermon outline (pp. 16-18). It can be used before or after hearing the sermon, or separately. If it is used without the sermon, it may be helpful for the group leader to read through the sermon outline beforehand. The main study is in questions 1 to 13. The section at the end entitled “Digging deeper” is intended for those who would like to explore some of the more challenging aspects of the passage, and also its context.

### Introduction

1. What (if any) kinds of hostility did you suffer from other people when you became a Christian? How do you react to stories of converts to Christianity being persecuted? [You could read one of the stories from the sermon to the group.]
2. Have you ever been tempted to abandon or compromise your Christian faith or lifestyle under pressure from others? What helped you to keep going?

#### Read 1 Peter 4:1-6

3. What are the Christians who read this letter told to do in verses 1-3? And what reason are they given for doing so?
4. What kinds of behaviour that our society takes for granted do we need to give up when we become Christians? How do non-Christians react to our rejection of these (see v.4)?

5. How does the long view of verses 5 and 6 make a difference to our understanding of suffering for Christ? How far does it shape our response to the hostility of others?

#### Read 1 Peter 4:7-11

6. What does verse 7 mean by “The end of all things is near?” How does it tell us to respond, and why?
7. Why is it so important for Christians to love one another (v.8)? How might you follow the instruction in verse 9 in your own context?
8. What gifts has God given you and the other people in your group (speaking, service, others)? How can you use these to serve other Christians and glorify God (vv.10-11)?

#### Read 1 Peter 4:12-19

9. According to verses 12 and 13, how should we react in the face of

persecution? What incentive is offered to encourage us to do this?

10. In what way is being insulted for Christ a sign of God’s blessing (v.14)? How is it possible for us to praise God in the midst of suffering (vv.15-16)?
11. How does the teaching in verses 17 and 18 encourage us to remain faithful to Christ even when we suffer for it? How can we put verse 19 into practice?

### Conclusion

12. Re-read the passage quickly and list the demands that it lays upon us as Christians and the reasons it provides for maintaining a Christian lifestyle. Identify at least one action that you will now take in response.
13. Consider how this passage might prompt you to offer prayers or practical support to Christians who are suffering for their faith.

### Digging deeper

14. What do you think verse 6 might mean? (You may need to consult some books!) How might it change our outlook on suffering for Christ?

15. What else do you expect to happen at “the end of all things” (v.7)? **For some ideas, look at 1 Peter 1:3-5, 13; 5:1, 4, 10.**

16. Read some of the other verses in 1 Peter that relate to the persecution and suffering of Christians (e.g. 1:6-7; 2:12, 18-23; 3:13-17; 5:6-11). How do these add to the insights you have learned from chapter 4?

# A guide for youth group leaders: the suffering Church

## Illustration 1

**Step one:** *Scruples* is a fun and easy game that presents various moral situations, like, 'you have been asked to look after your neighbours pet whilst they are on holiday, but it is dead when you arrive. What do you do?' If you want to save time in preparation you can buy the board game "Scruples for kids" or the original version, online. If you would like to personalise the evening, why not write situations relevant to your youth group. When the situation is read out, one person is asked to say how they would respond. Everyone else then decides together whether they are telling the truth or not. The point of the game is to convince everyone else that your response to various moral scenarios is genuinely held and not just the first thing you thought of. It is a wonderful way to explore the breadth of attitudes and beliefs in your group.

**Step two:** When you have been playing for a little while throw in this question: "You are given a Bible. You read the Gospel of Mark and decide to follow Jesus. However, your family are Muslim and forbid you from changing your faith, threatening to disown you if you go to church. What do you do?" Throw the question out to the whole group and take a mental note of the reaction.

**Step three:** Award an edible prize to the person with the most honest answer.

## Illustration 2

**Step four:** Hand out a few paperback copies of Mark's Gospel and then ask your group how many of them have ever taken the time to sit down and read it. Ask about the reasons why and highlight the various online audio opportunities to enjoy the Gospel.

**Step five:** Get them to guess in a TV game show style (if you want to make this a feature, a useful tool is the interactive DVD of 'the price is right' game show, available online) how much it costs to get one of these paperback Gospels? Take the first guess from your youngest member; write it in the middle of a roll of wallpaper or large paper and then ask whether people think it is higher or lower. If dressing up as a game show presenter will aid the enjoyment, feel free.

**Step six:** Show them the receipt and whoever is closest gets a copy of the Gospel to take home as their prize.

**Step seven:** Once they have settled a little after the excitement of the game, point out to them that in the Karakalpakstan region in north-western Uzbekistan having a Bible can lead to your being raided by the secret police. In other countries it would be illegal to meet with the Bible as you are doing now. For instance, Christians meeting together to read the Bible in rented property in the Maldives can be evicted or deported and in Belarus, unless your church Bible study is registered, you cannot meet; if you break the terms of your registration, you will be fined or closed down. Ask your group whether they think following Jesus is important enough to go to prison for.

## Explanation

**Read John 13: 34**

<sup>34</sup> **A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**

The love that Jesus has for us is clearly displayed, not only in Mark's Gospel but also throughout the Bible. One way that Jesus' love for us is shown to the world today is through our love for each other, both at home and overseas, both in good times and in trials. Jesus says here that we **must** love one another. Loving people close to us is sometimes really hard. What would loving a persecuted Christian in another country look like? How easy would it be? How can we love those who are responsible for the persecution? How does this look like Jesus' love for us? Take a moment to try and catalogue Jesus' acts of love. Pick one to start with and challenge your group to put it into practice in the next 7 days.

## Investigation

In any crime there is a victim and a criminal. TV shows teach us that the criminal has a) motive, a reason to act outside the law, b) opportunity, a chance to act without being caught, and finally c) means, the skills and tools to complete the perfect crime. Using all your detective skills take the following passage and try to unpick Saul's motive, opportunity and means. Start with the passage below and then have a more detailed read of the passages surrounding it. Try to sketch out exactly what happened and why. Once you have done this why not turn to the information pages in this magazine for some examples of the cost of following Jesus from the last few months and repeat the exercise above.

### Acts 8: 1-3

**<sup>1</sup> On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. <sup>2</sup> Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. <sup>3</sup> But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.**

Jesus catches Saul on the road to Damascus later in the same chapter and challenges him about his behaviour. Saul then goes to the house of Judas on Straight Street, and God commands a Christian called Ananias to go to him. How do you think that Ananias would have felt about being asked by God to visit Saul, the persecutor of the church? How did Ananias react? How would we? If that seems a difficult question to answer then consider your reaction to this: how would you feel about praying for those who persecute the Church and asking that they may encounter Jesus in a similar way? Jesus does after all give us a specific command to do this, and He gives us a concrete example in the life of Saul, who becomes Paul, the writer of 13 books of the New Testament.

### Matthew 5: 44-45a

**<sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven.**

## Competition

**Do you want the opportunity to get more involved in supporting the suffering Church?**

Well, if you are 18 or under then take part in this competition. You could have your work published in our magazine and on our website, as well as interview one of our staff writers by phone about the work of Barnabas Fund. All you need to do is to find out whether your church has links with a country where Christians are persecuted and write 500 words about what it is like to be a Christian there and how that compares to being a Christian in your own country. If your church has no links with any country where Christians are persecuted ask them why not and pick one of your own. Your article will need to include references of any quotes or facts you use; any relevant large photograph is a bonus.

**Closing date is 1 January 2010.**

**Entries to be emailed to [competition@barnabasfund.org](mailto:competition@barnabasfund.org) or posted to the Pewsey, UK address on the back of the magazine.**

## Discussion

- Whom do we love?
- When do we love despite difficulties?
- What example did Jesus set us in this?
- How can we love our fellow followers of Jesus better?
- Where could you make a start?
- Why wait?

## Contemplation

What verdict would you give on Saul before he met Jesus? How does the forgiveness he receives in repentance and baptism encourage us in prayer today? End your investigation by having a time of prayer for those who persecute the Church today, that they may encounter Jesus, repent and follow Him. Read the poetic verse of Psalm 30:5, "weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (NKJV). Play the music track *C.S. Lewis Song* by Brooke Fraser as an aid to reflect upon our response to the suffering experienced by our brothers and sisters who begin to follow Jesus, only to face immediate opposition and oppression, hostility instead of help. How can we make our faith more urgent?

## You may need:

- The board game, *Scruples for Kids*
- Some paperback copies of Mark's Gospel (making sure you keep the receipt)
- The interactive DVD *The price is right*
- A roll of wallpaper
- Some marker pens
- A couple of edible prizes
- Bibles
- Pens and paper
- A copy of Brooke Fraser, *C.S. Lewis Song* (MP3 or CD), and the means to play it

## A prayer for persecuted Christians

Our Father in heaven,

We praise Your Name for the grace and courage You grant to our brothers and sisters who suffer for their faith, to those who endure poverty, hunger, discrimination and mockery, to those who are beaten, imprisoned or tortured, to those who have lost family and friends, home and job, because of their decision to follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Please fill them day by day with peace, joy and hope. Give them a special awareness of Your loving presence at all times. Strengthen them to endure hardship. Give them Your words to say to those who despise and reject them. Fill them with Your love for those who ill-treat them and give them the grace to forgive and pray for their persecutors.

We pray also for ourselves. Help us to remember that we and they are members of one Body. Help us also to value the freedom You have blessed us with and guide us to use that freedom more wisely as we serve those who have none, for their peace and to Your glory.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen

## Original new song "Lord, teach us to rejoice in you"

We are grateful to Mr Christopher Idle, a Barnabas Fund supporter from Kent, UK, for permission to publish his song "Lord, teach us to rejoice in you". Based on Philippians 2: 4-5, this song speaks about remembering that Christ died for us and seeking to help those who are suffering for their faith. Mr Idle has set the words to the tune of *Bristol* (Thomas Ravenscroft, 1621), so that people can sing the song easily and thus concentrate on the meaning of the words without struggling to learn a new tune. *Bristol* is often used for the hymn "Hark the glad sound", and can be found in *Songs of Fellowship*, 154.

### *Lord, teach us to rejoice in you*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>1. <i>Lord, teach us to rejoice in you<br/>in chains or liberty,<br/>but not to rest one hour too long<br/>while others are not free.</i></p>             | <p>2. <i>Grant us your patience, gentle Christ,<br/>if hunger stalks our path;<br/>but when our sisters have no bread<br/>lend us your righteous wrath.</i></p> |
| <p>3. <i>Help us, strong Christ, to know<br/>your grace<br/>wherever we may live;<br/>but for our brothers' homelessness<br/>divine impatience give.</i></p> | <p>4. <i>Give us a peaceful, quiet mind<br/>for all we lack or need;<br/>but zeal to help when<br/>neighbours cry,<br/>to hear where nations bleed.</i></p>     |
5. *Lord Christ, you came not for yourself;  
for us you faced the worst;  
for your sake let us serve your world;  
for their sake, put you first.*

*Christopher Idle*

## Suffering Church Sunday offering

The decision to follow Christ is a life-changing one, especially for those who have left Islam, as their decision can often turn family and friends into violent persecutors. Converts can lose their job, their house, their freedom and their health. Barnabas Fund's **Convert Fund** offers support to provide safe accommodation, meet practical needs (such as food, shelter and medical assistance), and help with pastoral care, discipleship and training.

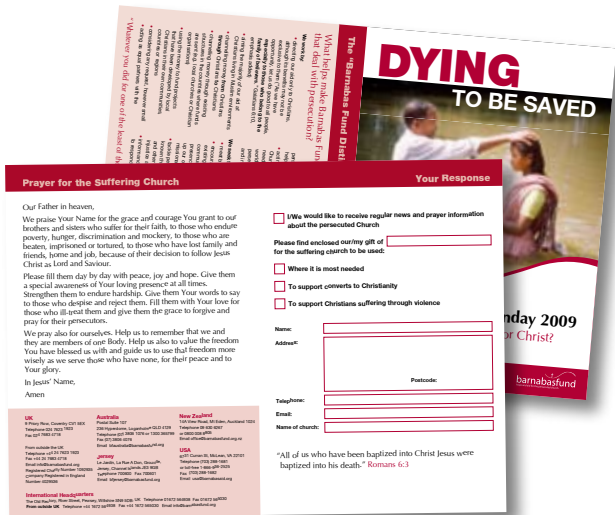
Through our **Victims of Violence Fund** you can help Christians for whom following the Lord Jesus Christ has meant harassment, violence or imprisonment. This Fund also cares for the families of those who have been martyred. With your help, we will be able to support even more Christians who are suffering for their faith.

Please consider taking up a Suffering Church Sunday offering for one of the following:

- Convert Care Fund (00-113)
- Victims of Violence (00-345)

## Suggested songs for your service

- Justice and mercy (Matt Redman, *The Father's Song*)
- It is well with my soul (Horatio Spafford, *Sacred Songs and Solos* 210)
- The Lord's my Shepherd (traditional, *Songs of Fellowship* 537)
- The Lord's my Shepherd (Stuart Townend, *Songs of Fellowship* 1030)
- Be still, my soul (Katharina von Schlegel, *Hymns Ancient and Modern* 719)
- Blest be the tie that binds (John Fawcett, *Songs of Fellowship* 49)
- Brother, let me be your servant (Richard Gillard, *Songs of Fellowship* 54)
- Pray for the church afflicted and oppressed (F Pratt Green, *Common Praise* 559)
- I pledge allegiance to the Lamb (Ray Boltz, *Concert of a Lifetime*)



## Prayer-and-response card

This card, which includes the prayer opposite and a response form, is available to order free of charge from your national Barnabas Fund office. The cards are a great resource for distribution to your congregation on Suffering Church Sunday – please order as many free copies as you need!

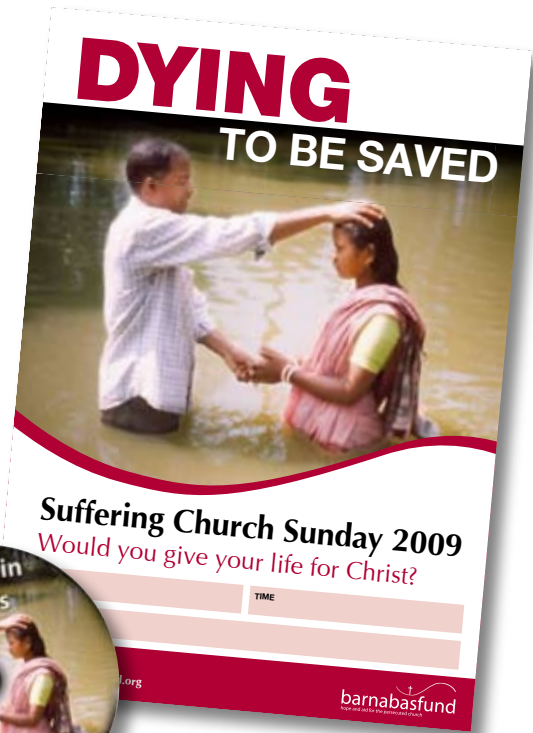
## Order your free Suffering Church Sunday resources

The following resources are available free of charge from your national Barnabas Fund office (addresses on back page) or from our website [www.barnabasfund.org/scs](http://www.barnabasfund.org/scs). Please use the form below to order.

- A3 version (approx 300x420 mm) of the Poster (see page 8), to advertise your Suffering Church Sunday service.
- Prayer-and-response cards (see illustration above), including the “Prayer for the suffering church” and a response form.
- SCS 2009 DVD “Church in Chains”. Barnabas Fund staff member, Bernice McCafferty, has written and recorded a

song for the suffering Church called “Church in Chains” (approx. 4.00 mins). The DVD will contain the video with and without singing for your church to sing along. It will also have the music for you to play, and the words with accompanying chords.

- Powerpoint presentation to accompany the sermon on 1 Peter 4 (see pages 16-18). Available on the DVD and to download from our website.



I would like to order the following free resources: (please indicate quantities in boxes)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A3 poster “Dying to be Saved” | <input type="checkbox"/> DVD “Church in Chains” and powerpoint presentation                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prayer-and-response cards     | <input type="checkbox"/> Copies of the Suffering Church Sunday issue of <i>Barnabas Aid</i> (Sept/Oct 2009) |

Name:  (Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms, Rev, Dr)

Address:

Postcode:

Email:

Name of church:

Send this form to your nearest Barnabas Fund office. Addresses on back cover. Resources can also be ordered or downloaded from [www.barnabasfund.org/scs](http://www.barnabasfund.org/scs).



Christian residents of Bahmani Walla, where a 600-strong mob attacked villagers with acid and destroyed over 100 homes

## Israel: Intimidation of Church Leaders by Anti-Christian Protests

Yoyakim Figueras is 39 and an Israeli-born leader of a church in Beersheba, Israel. Almost every Tuesday night some 15 ultra-orthodox Jews from the anti-missionary organisation Yad L'Achim demonstrate outside his house chanting, "Stop baptising Jews into Christianity." They have obtained a permit to protest, and so the police do nothing to intervene, despite Yoyakim's requests.

Yoyakim is the current focus of the organisation's anti-Christian activities now that the object of their previous campaign, a Christian man in nearby Arad named Eddie Beckford, is under house arrest. Eddie, a black American, endured almost seven years of racial taunts, having his tyres slashed and seeing his property destroyed by fire before losing his temper one night when a visiting couple and their babe in arms were attacked outside his house by the protestors. Eddie punched one of the attackers and broke up the group. No-one else has been prosecuted for the incident. A local shopkeeper in the market says, "No normal person could listen to [the names Eddie is called] all the time and do nothing. Eddie's a good man, peaceful ... he doesn't bother anybody."

One man who took part in the protests said he wasn't against Christians, but insisted that it was against the law for missionaries to proselytise. Although this is incorrect (Israeli law forbids proselytising minors and bribing potential converts with money or material favours), the protestors believe that "all missionaries have to be removed from Israel".

Source: *Jerusalem Post*, 2 July 2009

## Pakistan: Christian Homes and Businesses Firebombed

**On Tuesday 30 June, painful memories were rekindled for Pakistani Christians as an angry Muslim mob attacked Christians and their property, ostensibly on grounds of blasphemy. This time the target was the village of Bahmani Walla, in the Kasur district of Punjab.**

The violence started following an incident in which a Christian man driving a tractor requested that a Muslim man riding a motorcycle allow him to pass. This request was refused and a disagreement ensued. News of this was spread, along with allegations of blasphemy against Islam. Around 600 Muslims assembled and firebombed Christian homes, damaging 117 houses; water pumps

were vandalised and water pipes broken, making it extremely difficult to extinguish the fires. Christians who returned home the following day found they had no electricity, and Islamic slogans were smeared across walls within the looted homes. Vehicles owned by Christians did not escape the rampage, with tractors and motorbikes being burnt or stolen too. The most disturbing incident was the throwing of acid at the Christians as they fled the violence; at least nine women and four children were injured.

Barnabas Fund is helping the victims of this horrific attack.

■ **Project reference** 41-829

## Nepal: Two Dead in Explosion at Local Church

Christians in Nepal are reeling from the first bombing of a church in Nepalese history. The bomb exploded in a building in Lalitpur, south of Kathmandu, on 23 May, killing 15-year-old Celestina Joseph, and Pabitra Paitri, who was 30. More than a dozen people were injured. According to reports, the National Defence Army (NDA) recently

declared that they want to restore the traditional Hindu monarchy. They claim to be responsible for the bombing of a mosque in 2008, the murder of a Christian minister in Nepal earlier this year and this latest attack on a church.

The incident has added to the instability that

is brewing in Nepalese politics, with strikes and protests in Kathmandu following the resignation of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Insurgent groups have been trying to take advantage of the shaky political structure, and there are rumours that the NDA have been threatening to bomb the homes and churches of local Christians, seeking to extort money from them by threatening their safety.

## Iran: Death Penalty for Apostasy May Be Dropped from Bill

It has been reported that Iran, well known for its strict attitude towards Christian converts from Islam, may throw out the death penalty for apostasy from the Islamic Penal Code Bill, which had been provisionally approved by the Iranian Parliament in September 2008. Prior to this approval, Iranian judges could impose the death penalty for apostasy only on the basis of Islamic law and fatwas, not through Iranian law.

The Parliamentary Committee came under intense international scrutiny following the recent elections, and some feel that this may have prompted the Committee to drop the apostasy provisions from the Bill. However, there are still obstacles to clear, as all changes to the Bill must be approved by legislators.

Many Iranian Christians have experienced intense oppression under the regime, as Christians, whether from a Muslim background or from a Christian background, are expected to be loyal to the West rather than to Iran. Those who leave Islam to follow Christ are deemed traitors to their community. It is feared that Christians in Iran can expect even harsher treatment following the June 2009 elections, as the government has accused the West of "interfering and stirring up trouble".

Of particular concern is the fate of Marzieh Amirzadeh and Maryam Rustampoor, two young Christian women who are being held in Tehran's notorious Evin prison. The women were arrested in March 2009 for converting to Christianity from Islam, and it has been reported that a judge told them they will be "executed as 'apostates'". Maryam and Marzieh responded with courage to this, telling the judge to 'expedite his sentence'. While the proposed changes to the Bill could mean that the women will not face death for converting, there is considerable concern that they will be forgotten as the world focuses its attention on the political turmoil in Iran.



**Marzieh and Maryam, held in Evin prison since March 2009 for converting from Islam to Christianity**

## Iraq: Bombs Detonated outside Churches across Iraq

On Sunday 12 July, a car bomb exploded outside a prominent church in Baghdad resulting in the deaths of four Christians and leaving dozens more injured. It was timed to coincide with worshippers leaving the Sunday evening service.

This direct assault on Christians came at the end of a weekend of coordinated bomb attacks, when a number of bombs hidden in cardboard boxes were detonated outside Christian sites across Baghdad and Mosul. At least six churches were badly damaged in the attacks, with one building being set ablaze.

Authorities in the northern city of Mosul responded to the explosions by introducing temporary curfews in Christian neighbourhoods. Allegedly, this is to provide a degree of protection to the community, but it is unlikely to prevent similar attacks from being staged.



**A view from outside a bombed Baghdad church**

## Egypt: Upsurge of Violence against Christians Gains Momentum

On 21 June the village of Ezbet Boshra-East, El-Fashn, was the scene of a Muslim mob attack on Egyptian Christians and their homes and crops. There is no church building in the village, but Christians used to be able to meet in the local minister's three-storey house. In July 2008 Muslims had attacked the building in protest at its use for Christian prayer, and the authorities ruled that no more than two visitors at a time could enter the house. On 21 June 2009 a group of 25 Christians arrived from Cairo to visit the minister, unaware of the local decree, and the Muslims supposed that they were using the house for worship. The Muslims then began to ransack private homes and attack the Christians with clubs

and other weapons. Police officers joined in the assaults and looting, severely beating many people. Nineteen Christians were arrested after the attack, and according to one report they were released only when they agreed not to pray in the minister's house.

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has been alarmed by the attacks, calling them "another example of the upsurge of violence against Christians ... in the past few years". The Commission has long expressed concern that the Egyptian government does not do enough to protect Christians and their property in Egypt, nor

does the government bring enough perpetrators of such violence to justice.

In a separate incident in the village of Guirgis Bey, Akfahssi, El-Fashn, violence started when local Muslims circulated a rumour that the Christians were intending to convert the local social services building into a church. The building is next door to a mosque. A gang of Muslims burned down two houses belonging to Christians and set fire to cars belonging to the local church and minister.

There is concern that such action against Christians will escalate out of control across Egypt if the Egyptian authorities continue to refrain from intervening.

# Prepare to Pray with Advent Booklet

Advent is a time of preparation for many who busy themselves with buying and wrapping gifts, visiting family, trimming the Christmas tree and other traditional pre-Christmas activities. For Christians, it is also a time when we prepare to remember and give thanks for the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. The season of Advent is a dual reminder of the original waiting done by the Jews for the birth of the Messiah as well as the waiting that Christians do today in anticipation of the second coming of Christ.

But there are millions of Christians around the world who are persecuted for their faith in the Lord, and for whom Christmas is often a time of increased harassment and discrimination.

This year, we have produced an Advent prayer booklet to encourage you to pray with us for persecuted Christians in the run-up to Christmas. Following on from our popular Lent prayer booklet 2009, the Advent prayer booklet will focus on countries where Christians are

persecuted and highlight good news stories from these countries where Barnabas Fund has been able to bring hope and aid to local Christians. It will also provide a snapshot of Christmas celebrations in other countries and bring to your attention some of the places where life for persecuted Christians is particularly difficult.

You will receive your prayer booklet with our Christmas Appeal letter, in late November. Extra or advance copies can be ordered from your national Barnabas Fund office or the UK office using the form opposite or online from [www.barnabasfund.org/resources](http://www.barnabasfund.org/resources).

Please try to find ten minutes a day in the pre-Christmas rush to join with us in prayer this Advent, to remember those countries where religious persecution is prevalent, and where our Christian brothers and sisters suffer for the Name of the Lord.

## Warm Reception for UK Supporters' Day 2009

This year's Barnabas Fund UK Supporters' Day was held on 6 June 2009 at Freshbrook Evangelical Church, Swindon. Despite the gloomy weather, nearly 200 supporters turned out to show their support for the work of Barnabas Fund and to hear the International Director, Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, give a stirring talk about the growing influence of Islam in Britain.

The event began with a short talk from the Church Representatives Coordinator, on the role of church reps, challenging supporters to increase the number to 500 by Christmas 2009 and asking people to be the voice of the persecuted, those who cannot speak for themselves. This was followed by an overview of Barnabas Fund projects and more detailed reports on Barnabas' work in Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

This year we welcomed Pastor Wessie van der Westhuizen from South Africa to give an

uplifting talk on the work he has been doing in Zimbabwe, where Barnabas Fund is not only providing food aid, but also supporting a project that is working towards a long-term solution to hunger. In the previous edition of *Barnabas Aid* (July-August 2009; <http://www.barnabasfund.org/UK/Resources/Barnabas-Aid-magazine/>), you can read more about Barnabas Fund's involvement in Zimbabwe and find out about ways that you can help.

The event concluded with a talk by Dr Sookhdeo, who gave his thoughts on President Obama's recent speech in Egypt, and discussed the rise and impact of Islam in Britain. He considered how society will respond to the increasing challenge of Islam and more importantly, what approach Christians and the church are taking towards Islam in Britain and around the world.

## Thought-provoking New Book on Apostasy

The Islamic law of apostasy can have life-threatening implications for converts to Christianity and others who choose to leave Islam. Dr Patrick Sookhdeo is currently finalising a book which examines the issue of apostasy from Islam. The first chapter looks at the law as defined by the source texts (the Qur'an, *hadith* and sharia), and the second considers the way in which it is interpreted and defined by contemporary Muslim scholars, with reference to such issues as blasphemy. The third chapter examines its application in the world today, using a number of case studies. Copies of this new book should be available from November 2009. Please contact your national Barnabas Fund office for further information and to order.

## Running in Belfast for Barnabas Bakery

On 4 May 2009, David Bird ran the Belfast City Marathon to raise money for Barnabas Fund. He completed the marathon in a time of 4 hours 30 minutes 14 seconds, raising £416.50. The money will go towards a Christian-run North Korean bakery, which is supported by Barnabas Fund. The bread that is produced is distributed free to poor and hungry children, while the bakery provides jobs for a number of Christians.



David completed the Belfast marathon in four and a half hours



Workers from the Christian-run bakery unload bread