



# Praying for the Suffering Church

2024-2025

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**Front cover:** A Christian family in Bangladesh praying together.

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# Praying for the Suffering Church 2024-2025

*“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” (Ephesians 6:18)*

The Apostle Paul instructs the Ephesian believers – and in turn, Christian believers in all times and places – to “always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people”. This instruction is set in the context of suffering and spiritual opposition – “the devil’s schemes”, “the powers of this dark world, “the day of evil” (Ephesians 6:11-13).

Just as the instruction to pray continually is for all believers throughout history, so the experience of suffering is common to the Lord’s people wherever and whenever they find themselves. Certainly the suffering of some is far more acute than that of others, but none are fully free from the troubles and tribulations of this fallen world.

The global Church suffers in several ways: war, disaster, famine, disease and persecution. These sources of

trial were prophesied by the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 21:9-11) and in the Revelation given to the Apostle John (Revelation 6:1-11). In the face of this suffering it becomes clear that prayer is an urgent duty, as well as a God-given privilege.

Paul also instructs us to “be alert” as we keep on praying. The intention of this booklet is to keep us alert to the needs of our Christian family around the world, thereby guiding us in our prayers. Most pages are dedicated to a particular country, others focus on a particular group of persecuted believers, and the final page encourages us to rejoice in the glorious hope that we have in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Some Christians like to observe the traditional season of Lent to prepare themselves for Good Friday and Easter Day. The booklet has been structured for use during this time, with a page for every day from Ash Wednesday, 14 February, to Easter Day, 31 March. A reading plan for this period can be found on the inside back cover.*



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# Afghanistan

Upon their return to power in 2021, the Taliban gave Christians in Afghanistan three choices: leave, revert to Islam, or face death. There were at that time an estimated 5,000 to 8,000 Christians in Afghanistan (but most of them were secret believers, so only the Lord knows the true number). Many Christians fled the country but now face being forced to return, possibly to their deaths.

Afghanistan is one of only a handful of countries which have an official death penalty for leaving Islam, in line with sharia (Islamic Law). Afghanistan's Christians, who are first-generation converts from Islam and their children, could therefore be executed. The Hanafi school of sharia, which historically dominated in Afghanistan, holds that the death penalty for apostasy applies only to sane adult males – but in the Taliban's strict interpretation it appears that all apostates might face death. As well as formal execution, converts also face the possibility of being murdered by zealous Muslims amongst their family, friends or community.

Towards the end of 2023, Pakistan began to crack down on allegedly illegal immigrants from Afghanistan. Some were deported, while others made their own way back in response to pressure by the Pakistani authorities. Any Christians returning to Afghanistan will be in grave danger.

Afghanistan is in the throes of terrible hunger and poverty. The Taliban's style of government, drought and Western confiscation of assets have all contributed to creating unliveable conditions. In 2023 more than 90% of the population were impacted by poverty, with women tending to be the worst affected. Christians in hiding for their safety are unable even to seek work.



A Christian family in Afghanistan

Pray for everyone in Afghanistan suffering so terribly from poverty and hunger. Pray especially for Afghan Christians, whether in their homeland or elsewhere, asking the Lord to protect them from harm and provide for their physical and spiritual needs. Pray that those believers who have left the country will find safe places to settle. Pray that the Christian presence in Afghanistan will not be extinguished again, as happened to the country's ancient Christian community in the fourteenth century.

# Algeria



**A**ccording to some estimates there are now 160,000 Christians in Algeria, who live alongside the 98% Muslim majority. The Christians are mainly converts from Islam, their children and grandchildren, and most are from the indigenous Berber ethnic minority, not from the Arab majority.

Converting from Islam is not illegal, but anyone evangelising Muslims risks a five-year prison sentence. Since 2018 there has been much pressure on Christians from the authorities and some believers have spent periods in prison. At the latest count, at least 49 church buildings had been forced to close, leaving only about seven still open. Pastors have continued ministering to their congregations, now meeting as small groups in homes, but, without Sunday service offerings, many have suffered a severe decline in their personal support.

Islam is the official state religion, but the constitution guarantees freedom “to exercise worship”, if exercised in accordance with the law. However, this guarantee is counterbalanced by other laws which restrict the freedom of non-Muslims. The National Commission for Non-Muslim Worship can grant permits for churches, but so far none have been issued, despite numerous requests by churches since 2006. Building safety committees have inspected many church buildings since November 2017 as part of the process of permit-granting.

Persecution is bringing the believers closer to the Lord. One group of congregations has committed to continual prayer and fasting, with the congregations taking turns to pray and fast for a day, and all of them doing so on Saturdays.



Algerian Christians worshipping outdoors, next door to their church building, which has been closed and sealed by the authorities

Praise God for the Church in Algeria and that the wave of persecution which Christians are currently suffering is causing them to grow in faith and in their experience of the Lord. Ask the Lord that when the time is right, according to His perfect will, He will cause the Algerian authorities to relax their pressure on church buildings so that they can reopen and grant permits so that Christians can worship legally.

# Armenia

## and Nagorno-Karabakh

**A**rmenia received nearly 120,000 Armenian Christian refugees who fled the neighbouring region of Nagorno-Karabakh in a period of about a week at the end of September 2023. The hasty departure of almost the entire population was a response to Azerbaijani forces invading their homeland, which is an enclave within Muslim-majority Azerbaijan. The invasion followed an Azerbaijani blockade that lasted over nine months leading to dire shortages of food, fuel and medical supplies in Nagorno-Karabakh.

It was the third time that Nagorno-Karabakh has been fought over in recent decades. The first was in the early 1990s. The second was a six-week conflict in 2020 when Azerbaijan recaptured territory that had been controlled by the Armenian population of Karabakh since 1994.

Nagorno-Karabakh had been populated by Armenians for at least 2,500 years. When part of the Soviet Union (USSR) it was governed as an independent oblast within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. It was incorporated into the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1991 after the collapse of the USSR.

At the time of writing, peace talks are underway, which may result in the whole of Nagorno-Karabakh remaining under Azerbaijan's rule. If so, the refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh are very unlikely to return, as it would mean living under the rule of a Muslim majority.

Armenia adopted Christianity as its official religion in the year 301, and Nagorno-Karabakh contains many ancient churches and other Christian sites of great significance.

Between 1893 and 1923, some 1.5 million Armenians were killed in the Ottoman Empire in a genocidal policy to exterminate Christian minorities.



30,000 children were among almost 120,000 displaced Armenian Christians from Nagorno-Karabakh when Azerbaijan invaded the enclave in September 2023

Ask God to comfort and provide for the 120,000 Karabakh refugees who lost their homes and heritage in such a sudden, violent and tragic way. Ask that the host community in Armenia, itself a poor country, will be able to meet their needs and that all will find spiritual strength in Jesus, their Lord and Saviour. Pray that Armenia itself, where they have taken refuge, will not be attacked.

# Bangladesh

**T**he People's Republic of Bangladesh was formed in 1971, when East Pakistan seceded from West Pakistan after a bloody civil war. It has operated under a parliamentary democracy since military rule ended in 1990.

Islam is the state religion, although the constitution enshrines equal rights for all religions. The Christian minority of less than 1% enjoys greater freedom than in many Muslim-majority countries, but – along with the 9% Hindu population – experiences discrimination from the 90% Muslim majority.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, returned in January 2024 for her fourth consecutive term, has done much to protect the rights of Christians and other non-Muslim minorities. Since 2012, her government has funded the construction of 84 churches and part-funded another 643 church building projects, particularly in tribal areas.

Christians and other religious minorities, however, are calling on the authorities to do more to prevent communal violence against minority communities and to protect them from forced evictions and land seizures.

Land-grab victims include around 5,500 tribal Santal Christians made homeless when Muslims and armed police evicted them from their land in 2016, killing three Christians. Barnabas has constructed new homes for some of the evicted families.

Anti-Christian violence began to increase from 2014, especially in rural areas, although it remains at a low level. The main targets are converts from Islam and people active in evangelising Muslims.

Bangladesh has restrained the rise of political Islam for many years, but Islamism is growing. Extremist group Hefazat-e-Islam has called for the creation of an Islamic state and the death sentence for those who insult Islam.

A number of Rohingya Christians live in the sprawling Cox's Bazar refugee camp in south Bangladesh, among 900,000 Rohingya Muslims who fled genocide in Myanmar. These Christians are attacked on occasion because of their faith by Rohingya Islamist extremists.



Barnabas provides free education to impoverished Christian children at six Christian pre-schools in Bangladesh

Lift up the small Christian community in Bangladesh, and ask the Lord to shield and provide for them. Ask that the government will continue to promote equality and religious freedom.



# Victims of Violence and Injustice



*"He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight." (Psalm 72:14)*

**T**he constant threat of violence hangs over many Christians, from state or local authorities, from extremists or from communities and family. Many are vulnerable to false accusations, which can lead to arrest followed by imprisonment, beatings or even torture.

Anti-Christian mob violence in Pakistan usually relates to false accusations of "blasphemy". Those accused must remain in hiding even after being acquitted, because of the danger of violence from zealous Muslims. When torn pages of the Quran were found in the street, a Muslim mob rampaged through the Christian area of Jaranwala, Punjab, in August 2023. More than 100 Christian homes were attacked, around half of them burned down, and 27 churches were ransacked.

Since 2009 over 50,000 Christians (45,000 of them in Nigeria) have been slaughtered by Islamist militants in sub-Saharan Africa. In the same attacks, countless other Christians are injured, maimed or lose their homes/livelihoods.

More than 50 people from the Christian-majority Kuki tribal group were killed in anti-Christian violence in Manipur, India, in May 2023. An estimated 114 church buildings were

burned down as targeted attacks on around 67 Kuki villages left several thousand Christians displaced by the violence.

In Eritrea and Iran Christians suffer police raids, arrest, detention and torture. In Iran they are often tried in court on charges such as "acting against national security". In Eritrea they are rarely charged with anything specific, just imprisoned. Nepal and Laos have vaguely worded laws about "hurting religious sentiment" and "disturbing the social order", respectively, which, according to the whim of officials, can be used against Christians.



Pakistani Christians who lost their homes and possessions in the Jaranwala riots collect food and practical aid donated by Barnabas supporters

Pray for protection of Christians whose stand for the Lord brings the daily possibility and often the reality of violence and injustice. Ask that they will know God-inspired strength and courage. Remember those imprisoned for their faith and pray that the Lord will sustain them and protect their families.

# Burkina Faso

**T**he security situation in Burkina Faso deteriorated still further in 2023 as Islamist terrorists tightened their grip on the ravaged country. Jihadists are in control of more than 40% of the nation and violence perpetrated by the extremists, much of it targeted against Christians, has driven more than 2 million from their homes, creating one of the fastest-growing displacement crises in the world.

In 2023, an estimated 4.7 million people – more than 20% of the population – were in need of humanitarian assistance. The situation was particularly severe in 23 towns and cities besieged by the terrorists. More than 800,000 people in these areas are reachable only by helicopter.

At the time of writing the population of Djibo is swollen by 600% to more than 300,000 following the arrival of tens of thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs), many of them Christians. They are surviving largely on wild leaves as the city has been under siege since early 2022. At least 40 civilians were killed, and over 42 injured, when hundreds of armed Islamists on motorcycles attacked homes and three IDP camps in Djibo in November 2023.

Burkina Faso was once known as a bastion of religious tolerance, where its majority Muslim population (60%) lived in peace with Christians (30%) and

followers of African Traditional Religions (10%). That harmony was shattered in 2015 when Muslim extremists in neighbouring Mali and Niger began moving into the north of the country.

Many thousands have died during the insurgency. The terrorists have carried out relentless attacks on civilians, frequently targeting Christians, church leaders and churches. In 2022 an 83-year-old female American missionary, who cared for malnourished children, was kidnapped and held for five months. Christians have fled the worst-affected areas, where church buildings are closed or destroyed. They now worship quietly so as not to draw attention to themselves.



Barnabas provided rice, sorghum and cooking oil for Christians affected by violence in Burkina Faso

Pray for peace and security to return to this troubled land. Ask that the Lord will protect those at risk of jihadi violence, especially His people.

# Cameroon

An estimated 4.7 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance in Cameroon in 2023, a 20% increase on the previous year, as a result of ongoing conflict in two regions and the influx of tens of thousands of refugees fleeing unrest in the neighbouring Central African Republic.

Natural disasters, including flooding and drought, have compounded pressure on Cameroon's water and food resources as well as healthcare services and education.

The Islamist armed groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province have continued attacks in Cameroon's Far North, killing civilians and contributing to the internal displacement of more than 385,000 people.

Rural Christian communities in the Far North are routinely attacked by the jihadists operating from bases on the Nigerian border and around Lake Chad. Thousands of people were left homeless following a spike in assaults in April and May 2023. In one week alone it was estimated that Islamists killed at least six villagers, destroyed 400 homes and shops, and escaped into Nigeria with up to 450 cows, sheep and goats along with 100 motorcycles.

Six years of conflict between the main Francophone region (over 80% of the population) and the Anglophone regions of the north-west and south-west are estimated to have left more

than 6,000 people dead, and displaced hundreds of thousands.

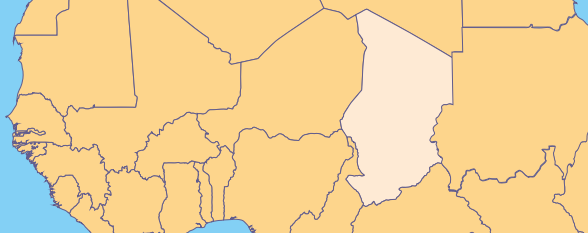
Cameroon is around 70% Christian, 20% Muslim and has a small percentage of followers of African Traditional Religions. Most of the Muslims live in the Far North, making Christians in that part of the country particularly vulnerable.



A young Christian refugee who fled Boko Haram violence in Cameroon draws clean water from a Barnabas-funded borewell at a refugee camp in Chad

Ask the Lord to strengthen the faith of Christians who are suffering due to extreme weather events or to attacks by Islamist militants. Pray for comfort for the bereaved, especially widows and orphans. Ask that the needs of the thousands displaced by violence will be met. Pray that the God who makes wars cease (Psalm 46:9) will bring an end to conflict in Cameroon.

# Chad



**C**had is host to more than a million refugees, one of the largest and fastest-growing refugee populations in Africa. Since April 2023, the crisis in neighbouring Sudan has driven hundreds of thousands more across the border, adding to an already desperate situation. Chad is one of the poorest countries in the world with one of the highest levels of hunger.

A pastor and 12 worshippers were among at least 17 killed by Fulani Muslim extremists in Logone Oriental region of southern Chad in May 2023. Around 20 villages were burned down and several thousand people displaced. It followed Islamist militant attacks on four other southern villages a month earlier in which two pastors were killed.

This is the same area where many Christians – from both Chad and Cameroon – have been struggling to recover from severe floods towards the end of 2022, which affected an estimated 340,000 people. Large swathes of crops were destroyed, along with livestock, destroying thousands of livelihoods.

Christians, living mainly in the south, make up around 35% of the population. They face discrimination from the Muslim community (around 53%), as well as violence, particularly in rural areas where Muslim herders attempt to seize land from Christian farmers.

Chadian Christians are further endangered by the ongoing jihadist

insurgency raging across the Sahel. Islamist militant members of Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province attack from their bases in the Lake Chad area, which includes portions of Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria.

Christians also face persecution from followers of African Traditional Religions, most of whom live in the south.

All this is putting additional strain on the country's resources. In 2023, a total of 2.1 million people were acutely food insecure. The previous year Chad had experienced its worst lean season in more than a decade.



Barnabas provided more than 4,000 Christian families with a 50kg bag of maize each to help them after severe flooding in Chad

Pray for protection for Christians in Chad. Ask the Lord to send His Holy Spirit to strengthen them to withstand the many difficulties they endure.

# China

China's surveillance-state reputation is epitomised by the way it deals with Christians across the nation. While churches continue to grow rapidly, praise God, Christianity is viewed as a Western colonial religion and is therefore marginalised and kept under close watch.

The intensity of persecution varies across the country, often initiated at provincial or city level, but with the permission of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Many "house churches" (i.e. unregistered churches) remain undisturbed, but some of those with connections to the West may be forcibly closed and their members arrested. The Three Self (i.e. officially registered) churches are less harassed but more closely scrutinised.

The state has imposed on "foreign" religions a policy of Sinicisation, that is, making them more Chinese, but this means their preaching and message must be in line with the CCP. Some churches have been forced to replace Christian symbols with Communist texts or photos.

Not only this, but also some Christians contend with their church attendance being tracked through face recognition, and their spending being recorded when buying Christian resources or donating to their local church. Church services and the chat afterwards may be monitored live to ensure nothing is said against the ruling powers. This mainly happens at churches with Western links.

Geopolitical tensions between the US and China are leading both nations to block their online meeting platforms and social media too, making it difficult for Christians in China to pursue their studies via Western online platforms. Christian content on social media is often censored, and, since March 2022, running religious activity online has required official authorisation.



"God loves the world" say the gold characters on the front of this church building in Shanghai

Pray that Christian perspectives and values will break through the veil of Sinicisation and censorship, enforced by the CCP. Ask the Lord to bless and protect those who are endeavouring to live faithfully, despite constant pressure and surveillance. Ask that the Holy Spirit will be a Teacher (John 14:26) to any Christians struggling to learn online, as well as church leaders in shepherding Christ's flock.

# D.R. Congo

**T**he Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continues to suffer repeated violence caused by the ongoing conflict between the rebel Congolese Revolutionary Army (also known as M23) and the DRC government. In this Christian-majority (around 90%) country, Christians are also victims of Islamist brutality.

An estimated 5,500 have lost their lives in anti-Christian violence in DRC since October 2014. Islamist violence is most severe in the north-eastern provinces of North Kivu and Ituri. Christian communities are targeted by jihadi group the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), linked to Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh). Both provinces have been in an official state of emergency since May 2021. However, President Felix Tshisekedi declared “a gradual and progressive easing” of the emergency measures in the two provinces, including a transition back to civilian governance, in a televised address to the nation in October 2023.

Amongst numerous attacks, Islamist militants killed at least 26 residents, including 12 children, in the town of Oicha in Beni territory, North Kivu, on 24 October 2023. The attackers carried out the assault with machetes rather than guns, to avoid alerting nearby troops with the sound of gunfire. In January 2023 the ADF carried out a bombing of a church in Kasindi, North Kivu, in which 17 Christians were killed.

In April 2023 aid agencies warned that ten million people in DRC were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, a crisis exacerbated by a renewed rise in violence. More than 600,000 have been internally displaced since violence escalated in June 2022. This includes hundreds of thousands of farmers driven from their lands and homes across North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri, leaving them unable to plant for the next harvest.



Congolese Christian refugees in Uganda with Barnabas-funded aid

Pray that the faith of the Christians will grow in response to the dangers they face. Ask that, if it is the Lord’s will, jihadi violence in DRC will come to an end. Ask that the easing of restrictions in North Kivu and Ituri will be timely and proportionate and for aid to reach the hungry.

# Egypt



**C**hristianity in Egypt dates from the first century and there has been a continuous Christian presence despite centuries of anti-Christian persecution since the arrival of Islam in 640 AD. Christians and Jews were then relegated to a second-class status by the new Arab rulers who forced them to submit to a raft of humiliating regulations. Although the Christian faith was eliminated in the rest of North Africa, it survived in Egypt.

Christians today make up around 10% of the population. They remain subject to discrimination, hostility and occasional violence by the majority Muslim society. This is especially the case in rural areas.

Violence has reduced in the 2020s, compared to the previous decade when atrocities included suicide bombings at two churches on Palm Sunday 2017 that claimed 46 lives.

Egyptian Christians say their situation is now better than it has been in living memory. The country's President, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, returned for a third term in office following elections in December 2023, is swift to give verbal and practical backing to the Christian community whenever anti-Christian incidents occur.

Al-Azhar University now controls most of the mosques so that the extremist Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928, has become less influential.

President al-Sisi's government introduced the 2016 Law for Building and Restoring Churches, which mitigated laws dating from 1856 and 1934 that had made it almost impossible for new churches to be built and very difficult for existing ones to be repaired.

At the time of writing, more than three-quarters of the 3,730 churches or church-affiliated buildings that applied for registration under the 2016 law have received licences.

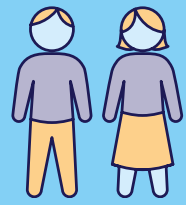
Furthermore, the foundation stones were laid for two new church buildings in Minya governorate, Upper Egypt in July 2023, an achievement that would have been virtually unthinkable before the government repealed the Ottoman-era restrictions on churches.



Barnabas has enabled hundreds of impoverished Christians in rural Egypt to set up small businesses

Give thanks for the support of President al-Sisi and pray that society in general will also become more positive towards Christians. Praise God for the construction of two new church buildings.

# Children



**C**hristian children are not immune from the persecution their parents endure. Daily challenges can include hostility from teachers and classmates, and pressure to convert to the majority religion. Christian pupils can be marked down or failed in exams. Many Christian parents, caught in a poverty trap through anti-Christian discrimination, cannot afford to send their children to school.

Other children have no school to go to, being refugees fleeing persecution, famine or conflict. When Azerbaijan invaded the Christian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, around 30,000 children were among those forced to seek refuge in Armenia. In Myanmar, Christian children have suffered as their families have fled from one IDP (internally displaced people) camp to another. When the Buddhist extremist Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) bombed a camp in Christian-majority Kacin State in October 2023, 11 children were among 29 people killed.

Islamist violence has caused many schools in the Sahel region of West Africa to close, notably in Cameroon and Burkina Faso. Many Christian children in Burkina Faso, displaced by the unrest, are refused school places in their new location simply because they are Christians. Barnabas Aid has helped fund an emergency Christian school

in Burkina Faso for several hundred children displaced by the violence.

Children are among the many victims of Islamist attacks in Nigeria's Middle Belt. The last of 121 pupils of Bethel Baptist High School, Kaduna State, kidnapped by terrorists in a raid in July 2021, regained his freedom in November 2023. Treasure Ayuba was reunited with his family after being the abductors' sole captive for nearly two years.



Children in Burkina Faso attending an emergency Christian school part-funded by Barnabas

Pray for protection of all children of persecuted Christian families. Ask that they will keep their eyes on the Good Shepherd, not discouraged by setbacks or injustice. Pray that they will receive opportunities to learn and develop as they grow strong in their faith.



# Eritrea

**E**ritrea continues to be one of the world's worst countries for persecution of Christians, especially of certain denominations. The authoritarian Marxist government keeps tight control of the population which is roughly half Muslim and half Christian. It legally permits only three Christian denominations – Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran – as well as Sunni Islam. Even the legally permitted denominations may be intimidated and harassed, and 2023 saw an increase in pressure on them. But the situation is much worse for the other Christians.

Christians from prohibited denominations are subjected to arbitrary arrest and lengthy terms of imprisonment often without charge or trial. In prison they are forbidden to pray aloud, sing, preach or read religious books. They are frequently beaten, starved of food and water, held in degrading and overcrowded conditions, tortured and forced to do hard labour. Sometimes prisoners are tied up and suspended from trees; one form of this is called “the Jesus Christ” because it looks like a crucifixion. Pastors and theological students in detention are singled out for extra punishment or extended sentences.

In March 2023, around 30 Christians were arrested in a home where they had gathered to worship. The following month, 103 Christian youth were

arrested, reportedly for trying to record Christian music on YouTube.

It is estimated that there are about 400 Christians imprisoned for their faith in Eritrea, mainly Evangelicals and Pentecostals. But only God know the true number. At least 18 were released from prison in 2023, most of them after nine or ten years in detention. Two pastors have been held since 2004.

Tens of thousands of Eritreans have fled persecution in their homeland, with many seeking refuge in Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda and Israel.



Therapy sessions, funded by Barnabas, to help Eritrean Christian mothers and their children, who have sought refuge in Israel

Pray for grace, strength, hope and endurance for all Christians in Eritrea, particularly those in prison. Ask that they will show Jesus' love, even in the face of cruel and brutal oppression. Pray that they may be a source of comfort and strength to those around them.

# Ethiopia

**E**thiopia is wracked by conflict and hunger and experiencing one of the worst humanitarian disasters in the world. A brutal two-year war in its northern Tigray region, involving Eritrean troops, is thought to have caused about 500,000 to 600,000 deaths, many of them from war-related hunger or lack of access to medical care. Although that war came to an end in November 2022, other internal ethnic armed conflicts are in progress across the country. At the time of writing, Somalia is threatening to go to war against Ethiopia to stop it from recognising the independence of Somaliland after landlocked Ethiopia signed a deal with Somaliland to use its main seaport.

Extreme weather is bringing extreme suffering. The north is afflicted by a prolonged drought, while in the south and east there has been destructive flooding which has also caused deadly landslides. Cholera has also been ravaging the country. Large numbers of children are not attending school. By November 2023 people were again dying of hunger in Tigray, and so were cattle. Millions of people in many parts of Ethiopia are in urgent need of food assistance.

Ethiopian Christians look back to the Ethiopian eunuch, who was led to the Lord by the apostle Philip (Acts 8:26-39). Their country officially became a Christian nation in the fourth century when the Kingdom

of Axum adopted Christianity as its state religion. Freedom of religion is established in the nation's constitution and around two-thirds of the population are Christians, with the remaining one-third mainly Muslims.



Ethiopian Christians worshipping

Pray that Christians will be peacemakers within Ethiopia, setting an example of love and forgiveness. Thank the Lord for the peace deal which ended the conflict in Tigray and pray that there will not be war with Somalia. Pray for rain to fall in the north, at the right time and in the right amount, and that humanitarian aid will reach the many who so desperately need it.

# Indonesia

**T**he situation of Christians varies greatly across the vast country of Indonesia, which has the largest Muslim population in the world. Anti-Christian hostility is greatest in the far west, where the semi-autonomous province of Aceh is the only part of the nation governed by sharia (Islamic law).

Papua, the easternmost province, has for a long time been Christian-majority, but the government is encouraging Muslims to settle there so as to create a Muslim majority. Papua is very poor and underdeveloped, despite being mineral-rich, and the Christian population are frequently attacked by the Indonesian military.

In much of the rest of the country, there was, until a few decades ago, a marked religious tolerance, due to the state philosophy of “Pancasila”. President Joko Widodo has worked to combat Islamist extremism and re-establish peaceful and equal co-existence between religions.

Christians can sometimes be denied permission to construct church buildings by regional officials. A 2006 decree forbids religious services in private residences and requires places of worship to have at least 90 members and approval from 60 households of other religions before they are allowed to construct their own building. Local authorities have the responsibility for implementation, and the decree is not consistently enforced.

In January 2023 President Widodo reminded provincial and local authorities that they should be upholding religious freedom. He said that Christians and other non-Muslims “have the same right to worship. They have the same rights in terms of freedom of religion and worship.”

At the time of writing, Indonesia is preparing to go to the polls on 14 February 2024 to elect a new president. President Widodo cannot stand for re-election because he has completed the maximum allowed two terms in office. The position of Christians in Indonesia after this date will depend greatly on the new president.



Christians celebrate the construction of a bore-well for a village church in Central Java, funded by Barnabas

Give thanks for the central government’s recent consistent stance against extremism and support for religious freedom and equality. Pray that this policy will be continued by whoever has succeeded President Joko Widodo.

# Iran

**T**he Islamic Republic of Iran, established by the 1979 revolution, is the world's leading Shia Muslim country, ruled by an Islamic cleric. Since 1989 this has been Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Christian worship is permitted for the historic Assyrian and Armenian Christian minorities, whose languages are not understood by the Muslim majority. Worship in the national language Farsi (Persian) is forbidden, as is evangelising Muslims. Nevertheless, many Iranian Muslims have become Christians and there are now hundreds of thousands of Farsi-speaking believers.

Iran is one of very few countries where a Christian has, in recent years, been executed for apostasy (Pastor Hossein Soodmand in 1990). More often, however, those who are active and prominent in the convert churches or in ministry to Farsi-speaking Christians are arrested on pretexts such as “acting against national security” and punished more lightly. It seems that the authorities seek to exhaust the Christians psychologically by continually releasing and re-arresting them in order to push them to flee abroad or return to Islam.

Judicial outcomes vary. Hodayoun Zhavah and his wife Sara Ahmadi were acquitted and released in May 2023 while serving terms for involvement with a “house church” (as the convert churches are called). The appeal court

judge ruled that there was no evidence that the couple had acted against national security. Iranian-Armenian Pastor Joseph Shahbazian, whose sentence for holding church meetings at his home was reduced from 10 to 2 years in May 2023, was “pardoned” and released in September 2023. However, in the same month, Anooshavan Avedian, another Iranian-Armenian pastor, began a 10-year sentence for “propaganda contrary to and disturbing to the holy religion of Islam”.

A crackdown on house churches in five north-western cities led to at least 69 arrests in July 2023. Those released were forced to sign commitments not to undertake any Christian activities, or ordered to undergo Islamic re-education classes.



Pastor Joseph Shahbazian outside Evin Prison, Tehran after being released on 13 September 2023

Praise God for the growth of the Iranian Church. Ask the Lord to keep Iranian believers joyful, bold and wise.

# Iraq

**A**bout a decade has passed since Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIL, ISIS, Daesh) took over much of Iraq. In August 2014 they seized the Plains of Nineveh, the historic heartland of Iraqi Christianity, two months after they occupied the city of Mosul where many Christians also lived.

IS was officially declared defeated in Iraq in 2017, but Christians have been slow to return to the area. Some no longer have homes to return to, as these were destroyed or fraudulently sold by IS. Various churches have been rebuilt – in some cases with the help of Muslim volunteers – and the Iraqi authorities restored some stolen homes to their rightful owners, both Christians and other non-Muslim minorities.

But the memory of what they endured – including sexual assault and being sold into slavery – remains. So too does the anti-Christian hostility stirred up by IS during their time in Mosul. Furthermore, there are IS “sleeper cells” still in Iraq, comprising fighters who are lying low for the moment. Although only a few hundred in number, they still launch sporadic guerrilla-style attacks.

Large numbers of Iraqi Christians are still displaced in semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan, to which they fled in 2014. This region is facing growing threats and instability from Iran and Turkey as they target Kurdish PKK fighters and “dissident groups”.

In the last 30 years an estimated 75% of Iraq’s Christians have left the country completely. Many struggle to survive as refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. Most Iraqi Christians are descended from the original indigenous people of the region, the Assyrians, whereas the Muslim majority are Arabs.



Young Iraqi Christians, many of whom were displaced by IS in 2014, were encouraged in their faith at a 2023 conference in Erbil, part-funded by Barnabas

Pray for the Lord’s guidance for Iraqi Christians, so many of them displaced or refugees, that each family may know whether to settle where they are or to return to Iraq. Ask that their faith will not fail despite the years of suffering. Pray for stability and security in Iraq and for good relationships between Muslims and Christians.

# Kazakhstan

**K**azakhstan is the largest of the Central Asian republics and has the largest proportion of Christians (about a quarter).

The Christians are mainly from a Russian or Ukrainian background, but there are also converts from Islam who are Kazakhs or from other Central Asian ethnic groups.

Kazakh nationalism is increasingly viewed as linked to Islamic identity. The long-standing dislike and distrust of Muslim-background Christians is therefore starting to be directed against all believers.

Kazakhstan's constitution guarantees freedom of conscience and outlaws religious discrimination. However, for a church to register legally, according to the 2011 Religion Law, it must have at least 50 members locally, 500 regionally and 5,000 nationally – an impossibility for smaller churches. Police raid unregistered churches, seize property and fine or arrest and imprison Christians for worshipping unlawfully. The law also prohibits evangelism.

Amendments to the law added in 2018 imposed even harsher restrictions, including a ban on religious teaching unless within a registered organisation – effectively making religious discussions in private homes illegal. Further restrictions on holding one-off religious events away from a regular place of worship were added in 2022. These include the requirement to apply for permission to hold the event at

least ten working days in advance, and provide details about the number of attendees and how they will travel there.

A registered church in Almaty Region was still without access to banking services at the end of 2023. Its bank accounts have been frozen almost continuously since April 2017 because a donation from abroad towards the purchase of a new church building was flagged as “suspicious”.



Barnabas-funded work making a church building in Kazakhstan resistant to flooding

Pray for increased freedom for Christians to practise their faith in Kazakhstan, including sharing their faith with non-Christians. Ask the Lord to give Christians wisdom to navigate burdensome government regulations and favour with powerful government officials. Pray for encouragement for all believers who experience hostility because of their faith, especially converts from Islam. Lift up particularly those converts who are the only Christian in their household, and therefore very vulnerable.

# Refugees and Internally Displaced People



**P**ersecution often forces Christians to leave their homes, even their countries, in large numbers.

When Muslim-majority Azerbaijan seized Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, almost the entire population of the Christian enclave, 120,000 people, fled their homeland to seek refuge in Armenia. The invasion followed a nine-months blockade of the region where Armenians maintained a strong Christian witness for 1,700 years.

Many thousands of Iraqi Christians fled their home in Mosul and the Plains of Nineveh when Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) captured the territory in 2014. A Christian in Iraqi Kurdistan reflected, “While I am many other things – a son, a husband, a father, an accountant – all other people seem to see me as is an IDP [internally displaced person]. So long as I am an IDP, I feel like I cannot embrace the beauty of being anything else.” Christians have even been driven from their homes in Iraqi Kurdistan by Turkish bombardment supposedly aimed at terrorist groups, but also seeming to target Christian communities.

Esousing Buddhist nationalist ideology, the violent attacks of the Myanmar military have driven many thousands of Christians from their homes.

Christian families in rural Laos are often evicted by fellow-villagers.

Boko Haram and Fulani extremist militants in Nigeria have caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Christians, to seek shelter in other villages or IDP camps. Christians in Laos and Vietnam have been evicted from their villages for their faith on numerous occasions.

Many believers from north-eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have sought refuge in western Uganda to escape persistent Islamist violence.



Barnabas provided financial assistance to 1,650 Christian families newly arrived in Armenia who were most in need

Pray for all Christians driven from their homes, whether displaced within their own country or forced to flee abroad. Ask that they will know the presence of God as their refuge through His guidance, comfort and strength, as well as practical aid to enable them to rebuild their lives.

# Kyrgyzstan

**T**he population of Kyrgyzstan is around 86% Muslim. Since the end of Soviet rule in 1991, there has been a revival of Islamic practices and, especially since 2009, increasing pressure on Christians with the introduction of various restrictive laws.

Persecution often comes from the Muslim community, particularly in rural areas such as beautiful Issyk-Kul. Muslim-background believers are the main target, but anti-Christian hostility is increasingly being directed towards those from Christian backgrounds too.

Converts typically face rejection, verbal abuse, threats and sometimes violence. They may lose their jobs or find that their businesses are boycotted. Some have been banned from grazing their cattle or accessing water. They therefore have severe economic difficulties.

Christians also face difficulties in arranging burials in public cemeteries, despite a requirement for these to have zones for all religious groups. There is great concern about what happens to the body after death and converts want to avoid having an Islamic burial.

At the time of writing, a proposed new law is under discussion that would make it harder for religious organisations to get the registration they need in order to function legally. Under the new law, organisations such as churches would need to have at least 100 adult founder members living in

the same district, 500 adult members in the same oblast (region) and 3,000 adult members living “proportionately” in at least five of the country’s nine regions. After five years they would have to re-register. Currently they only need to have 200 adult founder members living anywhere in Kyrgyzstan.

Christians can already be punished for sharing their beliefs in public, and religious literature may be censored. The Religion Law (2009) prohibits “illegal missionary activity” i.e. any missionary or evangelistic activity by a group not registered with the government.



Barnabas-supported winter coal for Christians facing hostility in Kyrgyzstan

Praise God for the growing Church in Kyrgyzstan and ask Him to provide for the needs of new believers – spiritual, emotional and practical. Pray that the strict new law will not be passed in the proposed form.



# Laos

**C**hristians in Laos are a minority of some 150,000 believers who face frequent harassment from local authorities in rural areas. In urban areas their situation is much better, but the perception of Christianity as a Western faith persists. A “Law on the Evangelical Church”, in force since December 2019, gives Christians the right to conduct services, preach throughout Laos and maintain contacts with believers in other countries, but this law is not well enforced outside the cities.

A 2017 decree prohibits “associations” from disturbing the “social order” or “national harmony”, but as its imprecise wording allows local authorities considerable freedom of interpretation, Christians can be targeted under this law.

Fifteen Christian families were expelled from their home village Mai in Luang Namtha province in February 2023 after their conversion to Christianity. The authorities’ attempts to negotiate with the village leaders in order to allow the families to return met with no success. Elsewhere, in September 2023 a widow and her five children who refused to renounce their Christian faith had their house and rice barn dismantled by villagers and were put in police detention. In October 2023, eight Christian families (about 60 people) were evicted from their village in Savannakhet province because they left the traditional spirit cults of their

fellow-villagers and decided to follow Jesus Christ. In the same month in another village, authorities ordered a church to cease meeting and threatened the believers with arrest and heavy fines if they did not comply, or if anyone in the village were to fall sick or die.

Laos is almost bankrupt and the staple food, rice, is in short supply because the government has ordered land to be used to grow water-melons for export.



A widow-headed Christian family’s house being dismantled by order of the village authorities

Pray that the freedom of worship enshrined in law will become reality across the whole country. Ask the Lord to provide for Christians who have been deprived of homes and fields because of their love for Him.

# Lebanon

**L**ebanon's economic, social and political institutions are in collapse. The cost of food and basic goods (mostly imported) continues to skyrocket and severe shortages are resulting. Many people have been laid off, as businesses have been unable to continue trading. Others still with jobs have had their salaries reduced.

The situation of most people is now dangerously insecure. The World Bank has ranked the crisis amongst the worst globally since the mid-nineteenth century in its effect on living standards. Formerly middle-class families are struggling to make ends meet, while the refugees and poor were described in late 2023 as "on the brink of starvation or already starving". People have died because they could no longer afford the medications they needed.

The shadow of the regional war which began in October 2023 is making people in Lebanon very anxious and afraid, especially in the south of the country.

Lebanon is a haven to 1.5 million refugees (more than 20% of the overall population), mainly from Syria, and including many Christians. Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees per capita and per square kilometre in the world. At the time of writing, many Lebanese are fleeing the southern areas of Lebanon, adding to the masses of displaced and refugees already in the country.

Lebanon's traditional identity as a Christian-majority country declined

over the twentieth century; now it is thought that only about a third of the population are Christians. The long sectarian civil war of 1975-89 still casts a shadow, but an informal 1943 agreement continues that the President be a Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of Parliament a Shia Muslim.



Barnabas-funded medicine given to Lebanese Christians in desperate need

Pray for wisdom for the leaders of Lebanon and for an end to the ongoing economic crisis engulfing the country which is causing such immense suffering to almost everyone. Ask the Lord especially to sustain our Christian brothers and sisters, not only with essential supplies but also strength, hope and faith to endure. Pray that Christians, whether Lebanese or refugees, will be salt and light in Lebanon.

# Libya

**T**he precise number of Christians in Muslim-majority Libya is both fluid and unknown.

Most Christians are migrant workers, and church congregations have representatives from many nations. The tumult and insecurity in Libya is now so great that many workers from the West and from India have left the country. Those who remain are largely from sub-Saharan Africa. There are also Christian refugees from various African countries, many on their way to Europe. There is a small number of indigenous Libyan converts from Islam.

Libya has suffered chaos and civil war since the overthrow of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. At the time of writing, there are two rival governments: the Government of National Stability in Tobruk, and the Government of National Unity in Tripoli. Numerous jihadi and tribal groupings across the country support one or the other. Several thousand Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) fighters moved to Libya when ejected from Syria.

In September 2023, two dams collapsed, creating widespread flooding in a strongly Islamist part of north-east Libya.

Libya's interim constitution (2011) declares Islam the state religion and sharia (Islamic law) the principal source of legislation. It also guarantees non-Muslims freedom to practise their religion and prohibits religious

discrimination but does not allow Muslims to choose another faith.

Six Libyan Christians, who were arrested separately in early 2023, are facing the death penalty as apostates for having converted from Islam and allegedly proselytising others. One of the six is a 22-year-old woman who released a video describing her conversion to Christianity at the age of 15.

A seventh Muslim-background believer is thought to still be on death row after being sentenced to death for apostasy in September 2022.

Islamists target Christians for killing, kidnap, forceful conversion and sale in “modern-day slave markets”. Violence is commonplace in detention centres against Christian refugees, mostly West Africans or Eritreans.



The Church of Christ the King, Tripoli

Pray for the protection of all Christians in Libya, particularly converts from Islam. Ask that those imprisoned for apostasy will be released and death sentences will not be carried out.

# Mali



**M**ali is a Muslim-majority country where Christians, most of them living in the south, number around 2% of the population. A new constitution, adopted in June 2023, continues to uphold religious freedom and prohibit religious discrimination. Additionally, Muslim leaders have condemned what they believe to be extremist interpretations of sharia (Islamic law).

Mali, however, suffers greatly from Islamist terrorism, particularly in the northern Saharan regions. Since 2012 jihadists have been waging a war with the aim of establishing sharia throughout the country. In August 2023 it was reported that Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) had doubled the amount of territory it controls in Mali in less than a year. Al Qaeda also controls areas of the country.

Islamic governance is fairly popular. Many Muslims like sharia courts because they deal out justice that is quick and understandable, and the severe sharia punishments result in low levels of crime. Islamists also provide Quranic schools in areas where little formal education is available.

International experts have raised concerns that Mali – which has undergone four coups since 1991 – could become a failed state owing to armed separatist groups and jihadists that oppose the government. French forces withdrew in October 2022, and a UN peacekeeping force withdrew,

after a decade's presence, at the end of 2023.

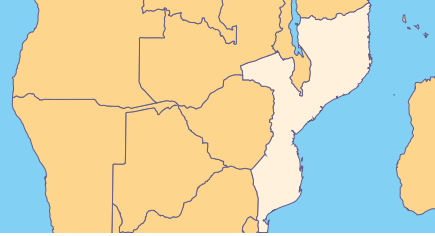
On several occasions church leaders have suffered abduction by suspected Islamists. In June 2021 five Christians, including a church minister, Leon Dougnon, were abducted in Bandiagara. Dougnon was held for more than three weeks; the others were released after two days. In September 2021 Pastor Emmanuel Goita was abducted in Koutiala and released three weeks later. In November 2022 a German church minister, Hans-Joachim Lohre, who had lived in Mali for over 30 years, was abducted in the capital, Bamako, and released in November 2023.



A pastor in Mali using Barnabas-funded study materials

Pray that the Lord will protect believers – and all people in Mali – from Islamist and other violence. Ask that there will be increasing peace and stability. Pray especially that God will provide for and sustain the faith of His people.

# Mozambique



**T**he violent Islamist insurgency in Mozambique, which began in October 2017, continues to devastate the lives of people in northern Mozambique. The Islamist militant group, originally called Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama (known locally as Al Shabaab), has killed an estimated 1,800 Christians. Their attacks are particularly brutal with victims often beheaded, dismembered or skinned. The militant group now call themselves Islamic State Mozambique Province (ISMP).

The province of Cabo Delgado (sometimes called “the land of fear”) is the part of Mozambique worst affected by this violence. Christians are one of ISMP’s main targets. Following one raid on 4 February 2023 in the village of Chapa their statement said that “the soldiers of the Caliphate ... captured five Christians and slaughtered them, praise be to God”. On 9 July 2023 ISMP militant captured two fishermen near the village of Litamanda. They beheaded the one who was a Christian and let the Muslim fisherman go free. Sometimes, however, ISMP also attacks Muslims, such as moderate peace-loving Muslims who refuse to join the Islamists’ ranks.

After the ISMP’s leader was killed on 22 August 2023, there was a decrease in ISMP’s activities for a while and an apparent attempt to “win hearts and minds” but within a few weeks they were killing civilians again.

In November 2022, Islamist militants in Mozambique demanded Christians in the area they controlled should pay them the jizya tax which classical Islam demands from subjugated non-Muslims.

Approximately one million people live as Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Mozambique, displaced by the conflict in the north as well as by floods and cyclones. Some have also fled from forced recruitment by ISMP.



Barnabas provided food aid for Christians fleeing violence in Cabo Delgado province

Pray for an end to the violence in northern Mozambique. Praise God for the many peaceable Muslims who refuse to join the militants, and pray that the men of violence will learn the same attitude. Ask that Christians will be a beacon of hope, peace, joy and love in the midst of this appalling brutality. Pray for God’s comfort and healing for all the bereaved and traumatised.

# Pastors and Evangelists



*"Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding." (Jeremiah 3:15)*

**T**hose entrusted with sharing the Gospel and building up the Body of Christ around the world often suffer for their ministry. The life of a full-time Christian worker can be very lonely and dangerous, especially when encountering hostility and opposition. Many also endure hardship due to poverty. Church leaders are often a particular target of anti-Christian threats and violence. Not only is it powerfully symbolic to arrest, kidnap or kill the leaders, but also church members may flounder without their pastors and teachers.

The toll is especially high in Nigeria where, in Kaduna State alone, 23 pastors have been killed by militant extremists in a recent four-year period. Pastors' families are also affected. Militant Islamists killed Pastor Musa Hyok and his two sons in an attack on their home in March 2023 in Plateau State. Pastor Amako Maraya was killed and his wife, Grace, kidnapped when a gang stormed their home in Kaduna State in November 2023.

Christian leaders in several countries face severe government restrictions. In Iran, those leading house churches or active in evangelism to Muslims may receive

prison sentences. Particularly harsh treatment is meted out to pastors imprisoned in Eritrea, where Christians are often detained for years, usually without trial.

It is often difficult for full-time Christian workers in situations of great poverty or persecution to get appropriate training. Some have few resources to help them in their ministry. There are pastors in Myanmar who do not even have a Bible.



Pastor Alimujiang Yimiti was released in 2023 after 15 years' imprisonment in China

Pray for pastors, evangelists and church planters facing hardship and danger as they seek to strengthen the Body of Christ and build God's Kingdom. Pray that the Lord will fill them with His wisdom, insight and vision as they help His people to endure suffering. Pray for those who have not had opportunity for much or any training that the Holy Spirit will guide and equip them.

# Myanmar

**M**yanmar's military has been persecuting the country's small Christian community for most of the last six decades.

Attacks against the Christian-majority Chin, Kachin and Karen ethnic groups – and other groups with significant Christian minorities, including the Kayah (Karenni) people – have increased since the military (Tatmadaw) overthrew Aung San Suu Kyi's democratically elected government in 2021.

The military represents the dominant national identity of ethnic Burman (or Bamar) Buddhists – Myanmar is 68% Bamar and 88% Buddhist. Christians are currently estimated at about 6%.

Numerous assaults by land and air on Christian communities have killed hundreds of civilians, and tens of thousands of believers have been driven from their homes to seek refuge in the jungle or in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). Many people have been displaced several times.

The Tatmadaw has been accused of committing war crimes by deliberately attacking churches, hospitals and schools where displaced people were sheltering in Christian-majority areas. In September 2023 the Chin Human Rights Organisation reported that 95 religious buildings in Chin State alone, mostly churches, had been hit by shelling since the 2021 coup.

Twenty-nine people were killed and 56 wounded when the Tatmadaw bombed an IDP camp in Kachin State in October 2023. The dead included 11 children, the youngest of whom was 18 months old. The victims had already fled from another IDP camp after first being forced from their homes. In January 2024 at least 15 people, including a number of children, were killed by an air strike that targeted two church buildings in Sagaing Region at about 10.15 a.m. on a Sunday morning. These are just two examples of many.



Displaced Christians in Myanmar.  
Barnabas helps to provide aid

Pray that the military's campaign of violence towards Christians and other non-Burman, non-Buddhist minorities in Myanmar will cease. Ask that the Lord will protect the displaced and enable vital supplies to reach those in need. Pray that Christians, who have endured severe persecution for two generations, will be filled with hope, peace, joy, love and perseverance.

# Nepal

**C**hristianity has made significant advances in the former Hindu kingdom of Nepal, officially a secular nation since 2008. From virtually no believers in the early 1950s the Church has grown to perhaps as many as 1.5 million believers, or about 5% of the population (which overall is 85% Hindu).

A growing religious nationalist movement is demanding that Nepal return to a Hindu state. A law which came into force in 2018 made it illegal to attempt to convert a follower of a religion “being practised since ancient times”. This is interpreted as a religion passed down through at least three generations, thus protecting Hindus and Buddhists but excluding most Nepali Christians, who are either first- or second-generation believers.

The 2018 law also bans “hurting religious sentiment”, a wording so vague that almost any public Christian activity can be deemed illegal. In April 2023 one Nepali news website published an opinion piece arguing that Christian evangelism hurts “the religious sentiments of the majority” and calling for more rigorous application of Nepal’s 2018 anti-conversion law. The writer accused Christians of “aggressive proselytising” and using aid programmes as a subterfuge to gain converts.

Several pastors have faced court cases on fabricated charges of forced conversions. A man and a woman

in Janakpurham were attacked in September 2023 for preaching Christianity. A group of extremists smeared black soot on the man’s face and handed both Christians to the police. The incident came as church leaders in Nepal reported attacks on at least seven church buildings in the preceding weeks.

Christians were among the families living in the remote and mountainous Jarjarkot region rocked by a 5.6 magnitude earthquake on 3 November 2023. It is estimated that at least 20 churches were among the thousands of buildings reduced to rubble.

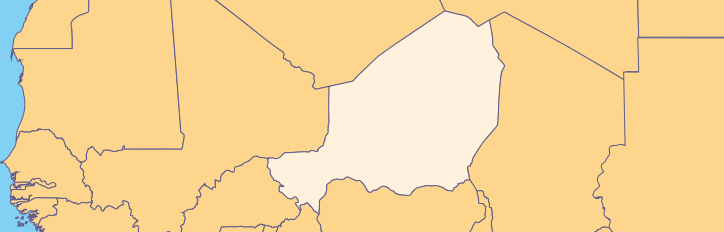


A group of Christians studying discipleship/Christian leadership in Nepal. Barnabas helped to fund the training of the tutor

Give thanks for the dramatic growth of the Church in Nepal. Pray that church leaders will know Divine wisdom in leading God’s people and that unfounded charges of forced conversion will be dismissed.



# Niger



Until recent years Niger was one of the more politically stable and safe states in the Sahel region, albeit extremely poor.

Freedom of religion was guaranteed by the constitution and upheld by the government, so that the tiny Christian minority (less than 0.4%) was in a good position. But Niger has now been engulfed by the Islamist terrorism that is spreading across the region.

There are frequent attacks by several groups of Islamist militants who control territory in various parts of the country. They often target Christians, and a significant number of their attacks take place in Tillabéri province where most of the churches are. Jeff Woodke, an American missionary, was kidnapped by Islamists in October 2016 and released in March 2023.

A military coup took place on 26 July 2023, when the presidential guard seized power. Ousted President Basoum is from the small Awlad Suleiman tribe, a minority within Niger's Arab minority, and had a good relationship with France, the former colonial power.

The coup was widely condemned internationally, including by Niger's southern neighbours, many of whom imposed sanctions, suspended financial transactions and froze Niger's assets. These responses caused increased hardship in Niger, with frequent electricity blackouts and curtailed supplies of food and medicines.

The new military government soon banned UN agencies and international charities from working in certain sections of the country. Niger formerly relied heavily on foreign aid for its most impoverished people. It is estimated that, in 2023, 4.3 million people (17% of the population) required humanitarian assistance. The government has withdrawn Niger from a military agreement with the European Union to help fight violence in the Sahel and has turned to Russia instead. The last French troops left the country in December 2023.



Christians taking part in a Bible class in Niger

Christians in Niger are often associated with the West. When anti-Western feelings rise they can face attacks. Ask the Lord to protect our Nigerien brothers and sisters. Pray that He will direct the nation's leaders and its neighbours to end the hardship of the people of Niger.

# Nigeria



**A** relentless campaign of anti-Christian violence is continuing in Nigeria, where the population is roughly 50% Christian and 50% Muslim. The majority of Muslims live in the North while most Christians are based in the South; the Middle Belt is predominantly Christian.

Around 45,000 believers have been killed by Islamists since 2009, mainly in the North and Middle Belt. Many hundreds of thousands have been displaced. Jihadi groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province, along with Islamist extremist Fulani militants, carry out attacks on rural christian communities, killing and kidnapping people, burning buildings and crops.

The attackers, who arrive in large numbers on motorbikes, often at night, also drive off livestock and loot food stores, leaving survivors struggling to find enough food for even one meal a day.

“Almost on a daily basis we hear people being killed,” said a senior Nigerian bishop in 2023.

The majority of deaths have occurred in the north-eastern state of Borno, where Boko Haram was founded in 2002, but currently Kaduna and Plateau states in the Middle Belt are among the worst afflicted. Churches and pastors are frequently targeted.

On Christmas Eve, 24 December 2023, a wave of coordinated attacks on 25 remote and isolated Christian villages in Plateau State resulted in the

deaths of at least 295 Christians, mainly women, children and those unable to run away. Many of the victims were burnt alive. At least 1,500 homes were burnt, eight church buildings destroyed, hundreds of people injured and 30,000 displaced.

With over 200 million citizens, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. The population is increasing fast and it is expected that by 2050 Nigeria will have a larger population than the USA. There are about 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 languages.



“God, you see and hear the cries of Your people,” said a Christian in Kaduna State when Barnabas provided food, blankets and sleeping mats to survivors of extremist attacks

Ask the Lord to bring an end to the violence. Pray for His comfort for traumatised, homeless, grieving and injured Christians and the grace to forgive.

# North Korea



**C**hristians in North Korea endure terrible persecution by the state. Believers must keep their faith secret, even from their own children who are encouraged at school to report on parents who pray or read Scriptures. The “crime” of owning a Bible can result in execution.

Christians who gather for worship risk being sent to a labour camp, along with their whole family. Inmates of the camps are starved, tortured and worked almost to death, but believers suffer even worse forms of treatment because of their faith.

North Korea is routinely ranked as the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. Yet until 1945, Pyongyang – now its capital – had been a stronghold of Christianity, with the city known as the “Jerusalem of the East”. The parents of Kim Il-sung, founder of the current communist regime, were devout Christians and he himself served as a Sunday School teacher.

Kim Il-sung consolidated his power in the late 1950s with the introduction of the *songbun* system, which classifies citizens according to their “loyalty” to the state. Religious practitioners are in the lowest “hostile” class, deemed worthy of punishment and execution. Christians are viewed with greater suspicion, as “agents of the West”.

Kim Il-sung also introduced the state ideology of *juche*, or “self reliance”, which maintains that North Korea must remain separate from the

world, dependent on its own strength and the guidance of its supreme leader. Both *songbun* and *juche* have been perpetuated by Kim Il-sung’s successors, his son Kim Jong-il, and grandson, Kim Jong-un, the present supreme leader.

The communist authorities in North Korea and neighbouring China collude closely over the arrest, punishment and forced repatriation of North Korean Christians who attempt to flee to China.



One of five state-controlled churches in Pyongyang. Their existence gives the illusion of religious freedom in North Korea, but sermons contain only political rhetoric

Pray that Christians in North Korea will hold firm to their faith. Ask that Christians enduring terrible abuse in labour camps will be assured that no hardship or persecution can separate them from the love of Christ.

# Pakistan

**C**hristians are a small and despised minority in Pakistan, making up 2 to 3% of the population.

Believers often experience severe poverty because of discrimination in employment. Many work in low-paid, dirty and dangerous jobs such as cleaning sewers. Many families cannot afford to send their children to school, and a cycle of illiteracy and poverty continues.

Christians and other non-Muslims are particularly vulnerable to accusations under Pakistan's "blasphemy" laws, which include a mandatory death sentence for defiling the name of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam (though this has not yet been carried out). The laws were tightened in January 2023 when the National Assembly increased the punishment for insulting the family of Muhammad from three to ten years in jail. False accusations of "blasphemy" are often made to settle grudges.

"Blasphemy" cases frequently stir up mob violence against the accused, their families and Christian communities. One of the worst outbreaks occurred in August 2023 when extremist Muslims rampaged through the Christian area of Jaranwala, attacking 27 churches and 100 homes, after torn pages of the Quran were found in the street. Similarly, believers had to flee their homes in Sarghoda in July 2023 when Muslim militants blamed Christians for "blasphemous" posters.

Noman Masih, a 22-year-old Christian, was sentenced to death in June 2023 by a local court in Bahawalpur over images allegedly found on his mobile phone.

Usually in "blasphemy" cases the higher courts overturn the decisions of lower courts. Musarrat Bibi, an illiterate Christian widow, was acquitted of "blasphemy" in December 2023 alongside an illiterate Muslim colleague for burning pages of the Quran with wastepaper at a school in Punjab. The Court of Additional Sessions ruled both were innocent.

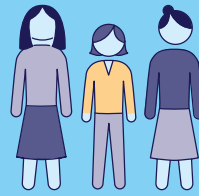
Christian girls and young women are vulnerable to being abducted by Muslim men and forced to marry their captors and convert to Islam. The authorities are often reluctant to intervene.



Barnabas funds apprenticeships for young Pakistani Christians in a variety of trades to enable them to escape poverty

Pray for the Lord's strength to sustain Pakistani Christians who face daily discrimination and hostility. Ask Him to shield believers from false accusations of "blasphemy".

# Women



*“A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” (Proverbs 31:30)*

**C**hristian women are especially vulnerable in areas where Christians suffer for their faith.

Christian widows in such contexts, as well as women whose husbands are in prison, have little or no income to support themselves and their children. They also have no man to protect them which is very significant in many contexts. Women and girls who leave another religion to follow Christ are also in greater danger of violence from zealous Muslim relatives than male converts would be. It is harder for them to leave the family home and find another place to live. Muslim families often exert pressure on widows bereft of their husbands’ protection to try to force them to reconvert to Islam. Some Muslims consider all Christian women “immoral” and therefore automatically deserving abuse.

In Pakistan and Egypt, young Christian women and girls are frequently kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam and forced to marry a Muslim.

Some Pakistani women have faced extreme violence for refusing to convert and marry a Muslim. Sunita Munawar had acid thrown in her face by the man she refused in 2023, and Sonia Bibi was shot dead in similar circumstances in 2021.

In anti-Christian violence in Manipur, India, in May 2023, a mob forced two Christian women to parade naked down the street. One of the victims reported being gang raped, and the second woman said she was molested and assaulted. The father and brother of one of the women were killed trying to protect them.

Over 100 of the 276 schoolgirls, mostly Christian, abducted by Boko Haram Islamists in Chibok, Nigeria, in 2014 remain in captivity. Hauwa and Esther, rescued in 2023, had each been forced to marry Boko Haram fighters three times.



Barnabas Aid has helped many Egyptian Christian women, especially widows, to start up small businesses

Pray for Christian women and girls who are marginalised, despised and persecuted because of their faith and gender. Ask that the Lord will be their Protector and strength.

# Saudi Arabia

**M**ecca and Medina, the two holiest cities of Islam, are located within the modern kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and it is here that the religion of Islam was born. The country's constitution is based on the Quran and the example and words of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Saudi Arabia promotes its strict Wahhabi interpretation of Islam worldwide and provides huge financial support for Islamist groups and Islamic mission abroad.

Sharia (Islamic law) is the foundation of the judicial system. Leaving Islam, therefore, incurs the death penalty, although there have been no known executions for apostasy in recent times. Blasphemy is potentially also a capital offence, and this concept is used to suppress free speech, including on social media.

Recently, however, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has introduced reforms to relax the application of sharia. They include reducing the powers of the religious police, expanding women's rights, and removing some material in school textbooks which taught intolerance of non-Muslims. Flogging is no longer an official punishment for drinking alcohol and adultery, even though it is a penalty specified by sharia.

There are about a million Christians amongst the country's large population of expatriate workers. The number of indigenous Saudi Christians (converts

from Islam) is unknown, as almost all are secret believers.

Non-Islamic religious buildings are forbidden and Christians cannot normally make any public display of their faith and must gather privately for worship. However, Christmas decorations were openly on sale in 2022 and 2023 and Christmas gatherings in expatriate compounds were celebrated in the Saudi press. In early 2023, Saudi authorities permitted a series of worship services for Egyptian and Eritrean Christians across the kingdom.



Christmas trees may have no relevance to the birth of Jesus but Christmas decorations openly on sale are a hugely significant change in Saudi Arabia

Give thanks for the small reforms introduced; pray that they will lead to greater freedom of worship for non-Muslims. Pray that secret Saudi believers will be kept safe and will grow in their faith. Pray for expatriate Christians, many living and working in very harsh conditions, that their relationship with Jesus will encourage and strengthen them.

# Somalia

**S**omalia is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian. The tiny Christian community, in a land that is virtually 100% Muslim, consists almost entirely of converts from Islam. Many have been murdered by family, community members or Al Shabaab jihadists.

The constitution declares Islam to be the state religion, and no law can be enacted that opposes the principles of sharia (Islamic law). Promoting any religion except Islam is illegal.

Somalia has been ravaged by conflict since 1991, when rival warlords vied for power.

In 2006 Islamist militant group Al Shabaab began waging an insurgency against the Somali government. They gained control of much of southern and central Somalia, taxing the people in the area they controlled and launching attacks into Kenya. But in late 2022 the Somali military managed to push them out of parts of central Somalia.

Islamic State in Somalia Province (ISSP) operates in Puntland, north Somalia. It acts as a financial hub, transmitting funds to IS affiliates in other countries.

In 1991 the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland asserted its independence from the rest of Somalia, but this was opposed by Somalia. Somaliland is generally considered to be more stable than Somalia but it is equally difficult and dangerous for Christians, as its

constitution prohibits Muslims from converting to another religion. In 2022 Hanna Abdirahman Abdimalik (21) was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for converting to Christianity. Another convert, Hoodo Abdi Abdillahi (27), was given a seven-year sentence.

In late December 2023 Somalia and Somaliland agreed to resume talks to resolve their dispute, but in early January 2024 they were at loggerheads again after Somaliland agreed to let land-locked Ethiopia use its main seaport.

As of December 2023, Somalia had endured a record-breaking five failed rainy seasons resulting in the worst drought for 40 years and a severe food crisis.



The ruins of a cathedral in Mogadishu. There are no longer any church buildings in Somalia

Pray for Somali believers that the Lord Jesus will protect, uphold and wonderfully fill them with hope, peace, joy and love despite the dangers of their daily lives.

# Sri Lanka

**In** predominantly Buddhist Sri Lanka, Christians constitute 8% of the population and are represented in both the Sinhala majority and Tamil minority ethnic groups. They include new converts from other religions as well as families who have been Christian for generations. Many are very poor. They face hostility from extremists amongst Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims.

According to the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, early 2023 saw a reduction in the targeting of Christians. Nevertheless Christians did continue to face violent attacks that year. In one incident, a trainee pastor was left with scratches on his neck by two men who also threatened to attack the church building. Soon afterwards, two Christians from the same church, returning home from a Bible study, were badly beaten by men armed with iron bars. In another incident, around 50 villagers surrounded the home of a pastor to try to dissuade him from conducting worship services. A Sunday morning worship service in Puttalam District was broken up by police. A Christian worker received death threats.

For years there has been an erroneous but widespread belief that all churches had to be registered, and sometimes churches have been wrongly threatened or harassed on this basis. But this belief may soon become true, as the Ministry of Religion has announced plans to make registration

of all places of worship compulsory. It also plans to introduce laws against speech considered hurtful or offensive to other religions; these could potentially be used against Christians engaged in evangelism.

Church leaders have expressed dissatisfaction with the slow investigation into suicide bomb attacks at Easter 2019 in which at least 254 people died, mainly Christians. As of December 2023 no one had been convicted for the crime.

The Sri Lankan economy is beginning to stabilise after the worst economic crisis since the country became independent in 1948.



One of the Sri Lankan Christians Barnabas has helped to set up a small business

Ask the Lord to strengthen Sri Lankan Christians continuing to face intimidation and violence, reminding them that the world hates them because it first hated Christ (John 15:18).



# Sudan

**In** April 2023 a violent war broke out between the Sudanese armed forces and a paramilitary group called the Rapid Support Forces (which grew out of the greatly feared Janjaweed militia). Fighting focused on the capital Khartoum and on the Darfur region. By October 2023 about 9,000 civilians had been killed and more than five million people had fled their homes. At the time of writing the war is still in progress.

The Sudanese Council of Churches has reported multiple attacks on church leaders and church buildings as the conflict in Sudan continues. Churches have been looted or used as military bases, and several have been burned down. Many Christians are among the 1.3 million Sudanese who have fled to neighbouring countries.

The Christian minority in the Republic of Sudan (formerly North Sudan), estimated at 3%, faced severe persecution for decades until the ousting of Omar al-Bashir's Islamist government in April 2019. This included extreme violence, imprisonment for failing to adhere to sharia (Islamic law), and the execution of some Christian converts from Islam.

After 2019 many legal reforms were made, including the separation of religion and state and the ending of Islam's status as Sudan's official religion. Christian cultural centres and libraries that had been forcibly closed for many years were able to reopen.

These steps towards religious liberty and other freedoms have infuriated Sudanese Islamists, and a military coup in 2021 appeared to signal a possible reverse in the liberalisation process. The question of whether or not apostasy from Islam is still a punishable crime in Sudanese law and/or in actual practice seems to be undecided.

Christians continue to face strong opposition from sections of Sudanese society. Spies have infiltrated some congregations.



Barnabas helped to support these students at a Bible training institute in Sudan

Thank the Lord for the steadfast faith and bold witness of longsuffering Sudanese Christians, and pray for greater unity. Ask the Lord of peace to bring an end to the violence and chaos engulfing Sudan. Pray that stable governance will return to the country and that hardline Islamist laws will not be reimposed.

# Syria

**T**he Syrian civil war, now in its fourteenth year, has created the largest displacement crisis in the world. Some 12 million Syrians have been forcibly displaced within the region, including many Christians who comprised 10% of the Syrian population before the civil war started in 2011. At the time of writing, the last rebel stronghold is in Idlib.

The nation is wracked by spiralling inflation, limited electricity, shortages of food and medicines, with US sanctions restricting what help can be given from outside. On top of this, a double earthquake in February 2023 devastated parts of northern Syria. One of the worst affected cities was Aleppo, which has a substantial Christian community. Syrians of all backgrounds are suffering terribly.

In the last months of 2023, Syria was bombed by Turkey, Israel, Russia and the USA. Christian communities in the north-east are sometimes hit by Turkish air attacks, allegedly aimed at the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Many church buildings and Christian homes have been damaged and destroyed by these airstrikes.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy for Syrian Christians is the destruction of the good relationship they had enjoyed with the Muslim majority before the civil war began. At that time, Syrian Christians were respected and treated as equals. Many are the descendants of the survivors of the Armenian, Assyrian,

Syriac and Greek Genocide, which peaked in 1915; they had found refuge in Syria and been made welcome. The rise of Islamist groups in recent years has led to Syrian Christians beginning to suffer the hostility that is normal in most Muslim-majority contexts.



Distributing food sent by Barnabas Aid's food.gives programme to Christians in Aleppo after the 2023 earthquake

Please pray that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, will bring an end to the conflict and suffering in Syria, which afflicts the whole population. Ask that He will strengthen Syrian Christians in body, mind and spirit and give them hope to endure the trials they face. Ask that they will be a source of encouragement and hope to others around them, and that the good relationship they had, half a generation ago, with the Muslim majority will be restored.

# Tajikistan

**C**hildren in Tajikistan are banned from attending religious activities, except for funerals. This has been the law since 2011 and means that the mere presence of Christian children on church premises could be punished severely.

This is one example of the severe restrictions on all religions in Tajikistan, despite a constitution which affirms the right of citizens to profess any religion. Christians, who number less than 2% of the population, are under even more pressure than the Muslim majority.

All religious associations must have a minimum of ten members over the age of 18 and be registered by the government's Committee on Religion, Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations and Ceremonies (CRA). However, no new churches have been registered in more than a decade. The head of the CRA announced in 2022 that the government will not register any more churches, although he refused to say why. Congregations without registration have to meet as discreetly as they can as their gatherings are illegal.

Even registered churches face harassment and restrictions on their activities. The authorities ruled in 2022 that employees of all registered non-Muslim religious organisations must provide personal and financial information about themselves and their families.

The "extremism law" (Criminal Code article 189) is used to crack

down on religious activities. Churches are frequently inspected by officials who use intimidation and seizure of church property to put pressure on some congregations.

The import and distribution of religious publications must be approved by the authorities.

In prisons Christians and other non-Muslims are often treated harshly by guards and fellow-prisoners.

Although still the poorest country in Central Asia, Tajikistan's economic situation is gradually improving. But many Christians have left the country to escape persecution and poverty.



Barnabas has provided food for impoverished Christian converts in Tajikistan

Ask that Christians in Tajikistan will find strength in the joy of the Lord, in spite of the difficulties they face. Pray for the Lord's guidance for Christian parents, teaching their children the faith at home. Ask His special blessing on converts from Islam facing hostility and sometimes violence from the Muslim community.

# Converts



*“Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice ... because great is your reward in heaven.” (Luke 6:22-23)*

**C**onverts to Christianity from Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions often face rejection from their family, community and their employers, as well as hostility and violence. Many converts, including those from African Traditional Religions and traditional beliefs in south-east Asia, are driven from their villages.

Relatives of converts from Islam may seek to kill them to restore “honour” to the family, especially if the convert is female, or zealous Muslims may try to enforce sharia (Islamic law) that prescribes the death sentence for apostates.

In the few countries whose laws have the official death penalty for apostasy, it is rarely enforced and converts are most likely to be imprisoned or harassed in other ways. One such country is Mauritania, almost 100% Muslim. A video of a baptism posted on social media led to the arrests of 15 Christians in November 2023 for apostasy and proselytism. Christians’ prayers were answered the following month when all were released.

A convert in Kyrgyzstan recalled when his best friend, a Muslim,

threatened to kill him because of his decision to leave Islam. “In these moments we pray for overcoming such adversities,” said the convert.

Even in Christian-majority Uganda converts to Christ face violence in predominantly Muslim areas. Sixteen-year-old Dorothy needed hospital treatment after she was badly beaten by her parents when they learned of her conversion. Kabugho’s husband burned everything she owned before he forcibly divorced her and left her to care for their three children as a single mother. Faridah’s restaurant was set on fire by her Muslim brothers who accused her of abandoning their ancestral faith (Islam).



Barnabas is helping Ugandan Christian converts to become self-sufficient by training them to make soap to sell

Give thanks to the Lord for new converts who take up the cross to follow Jesus. Pray that they will be given the strength and grace in days of trial.

# Turkey

**On** 6 February 2023 the city of Kahramanmaraş, Turkey, was the epicentre of a 7.8 magnitude earthquake, the second largest the country has ever experienced. Over 50,000 people died, 107,000 were injured and bodies were still being pulled from the rubble of destroyed buildings nine months later. The small Christian minority (about 0.1%) were among those affected by the disaster. In Antakya, a church and the homes of the pastor and all the congregation were destroyed.

The historic Christian community continues to carry the scars of the Armenian, Assyrian, Syriac and Greek Genocide that occurred in the early twentieth century, organised by the Ottoman Turks, which resulted in the deaths of 3.75 million Christians. Prior to the genocide, Christians constituted approximately 20% of Turkey's population. Afterwards, those who remained faced harassment of many kinds by the Republic of Turkey which replaced the Ottoman Empire in 1923. Many church properties were expropriated by the state. This makes all the more remarkable the opening of a new church building in Istanbul in October 2023 with the full backing of the Turkish government.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan does not hide his hope of extending Turkish Islamic influence, as if aiming to revive the Ottoman Empire. Turkey apparently seeks to position itself

as the focal point of a future pan-Turkic empire, reaching from the Mediterranean to the Great Wall of China, while also vying with Saudi Arabia for leadership of the Sunni Muslim community worldwide.

Straddling Asia and Europe, Turkey has a history of being a transit country for refugees. As of November 2023, it was hosting 3.6 million refugees, mainly from Syria; amongst the refugees are many Christians. Some Iranian Christian refugees are detained in prisons and camps, and face the possibility of being deported back to Iran.



A congregation holding an Easter gathering by the ruins of their church following the earthquake

Pray for the Christians of Turkey, that they will be strong in the Lord, especially the small number of Turkish converts from Islam. Pray for Iranian Christian refugees asking that God will give them a safe place to settle.

# Turkmenistan

**L**ife in Turkmenistan is dominated by a pervasive presidential personality cult. It is the most authoritarian of all the Central Asian states, very poor and largely closed off from the rest of the world. The 2016 religion law maintains that the country is a secular state with religious freedom, but also banned religious meetings in private homes.

The authorities appear suspicious of any form of religious activity, whether from the Muslim majority (about 90%) or the Christian minority (about 7%). Christians experience pressure both from the authorities and from the Muslim community.

Most Christians are from an Armenian or Russian background, although there is a small but growing community of converts from Islam. Converts are often rejected by their families and communities and lose their jobs.

In order to worship legally, churches must be registered. For this a church must have at least 50 resident members older than 18. However, applications can be rejected arbitrarily because officials claim a church's goals or activities "contradict Turkmenistan's constitution".

There are just 20 registered churches in Turkmenistan, so most Christians have to worship illegally. Police carry out surveillance for unauthorised religious activities, raiding Christian homes and arresting believers, particularly church leaders. This can

result in fines for those present, larger ones for the leaders.

The authorities must approve all church leaders, each of whom is required to have "appropriate religious education". It is hard to get permission to import Bibles.

People accused of religious offences are often tried in closed courts and their sentences kept secret. Many religious prisoners are held at the notorious Ovadan-Depe Prison, where some cells are too small to stand up in, and prisoners are beaten, tortured and semi-starved. Prisoners have no contact with the outside world and many have never been heard of again.



Barnabas has provided food to support poor Christians in Turkmenistan

Ask the Lord to sustain and strengthen Christians in Turkmenistan, cut off from the rest of the world but not from the Holy Spirit. Pray that the authorities will become less hostile towards Christians and will enable more churches to register, so that Christians can worship legally.

# Uganda

Uganda is 80% Christian and its constitution guarantees religious freedom. Christian converts from Islam, however, endure hostility from the Muslim minority. Christian communities on Uganda's western border are vulnerable to attacks by Islamists from neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

One of the worst attacks was the massacre of Christian pupils at a school in Kasese District, in June 2023. Members of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) – also known as Islamic State Central Africa Province – stormed the school, hacking, hammering and shooting pupils to death. Others were burned alive when the terrorists threw petrol bombs into dormitories. Forty-two believers died, most of them pupils.

The ADF, formed in 1995 to overthrow the Ugandan government, now operates mainly in north-eastern DRC, but also makes some attacks in Uganda.

ADF militants are suspected of murdering a white tourist couple and their local guide in a national park in western Uganda in October 2023. Next day they issued a statement that “soldiers of the Caliphate” had killed “three Christians”.

ADF members also plotted to bomb churches in the capital Kampala and in Butambala district in September and October 2023, but their plans were foiled by the police.

Despite being a minority, Muslims occupy many powerful positions including in politics and business. In 2023 Islamic banking facilities were introduced into Uganda, after a long campaign by Muslims. Christians are concerned that the introduction of this element of sharia (Islamic law) will lead to more aspects of sharia being implemented in Uganda. Muslims have also been pressing for sharia inheritance laws (which discriminate against women) and Islamic law courts.



Barnabas paid medical bills for student Algyanyira and others who survived the Kasese District school massacre. We also funded counselling for survivors, their families and the bereaved. “Your support and prayers make us feel healed,” he said

Ask the Lord to protect Christian communities in Uganda from jihadi attack and pray that He will be a strong tower of refuge for converts. Pray for wisdom for church leaders and that the lawmakers of Uganda will ensure that all citizens are treated equally.

# Uzbekistan

In the early decades since its creation in 1991, Uzbekistan was a very repressive place for Christians. However, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, elected in 2016, has a more tolerant attitude to religion in general, and is allowing more freedom to both Islam (followed by a large majority of citizens) and Christianity.

State hostility towards Muslim-background believers has reduced, with their house meetings no longer targeted by police. The number of churches granted official registration, which allows them to meet legally, is slowly increasing.

The number of adult members required for a church to apply for official registration was reduced in 2019 from 100 to 50, although an additional restriction requires all founders (church members at the time of registration) to be resident in the same city or district.

Another obstacle to registration is that church ministers are required to have university-level qualifications, and congregations must have their own buildings.

A ban on religious teaching without state permission remains. A registered religious community must still submit reasons for any event, the address, date, time, number of attendees, sources of finance, and copies of any literature or audio-visual material to be used. Christian evangelism or missionary work is effectively banned.

There is a growing number of converts from Islam, who typically face hostility from the Muslim community.

Younger, able-bodied Christians often leave their local areas in search of work. As a result small rural churches struggle to find leaders and to pay their utility bills.

Islam is undergoing a revival in Uzbekistan, which has a strong Islamic heritage. The ancient city of Samarkand was the capital of a Muslim empire created in the 14th century by Timur, who crushed the last vestiges of Christianity at that time in Central Asia.

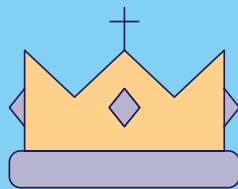


A small church in rural Uzbekistan has hot water and heating after Barnabas paid for a new boiler

Praise God that the authorities in Uzbekistan have become more tolerant towards Christians and pray that more restrictions will be lifted or eased. Pray that converts facing hostility for their decision to follow Christ will stand firm in the Lord.



# Martyrs



*"They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."  
(Revelation 12:11b)*

**C**hristians throughout the world are called to give up their lives to follow their Lord, and some pay the ultimate price.

Converts to Christianity, particularly from Islam, can be murdered by family or former friends, or by zealous Muslims. The tiny Christian community of Somalia has experienced many martyrdoms of this kind. In some countries converts from Islam risk being officially executed for apostasy.

Communist governments such as North Korea identify Christians as a threat and execute believers or torture them to death. Believers in prison or labour camps in North Korea are often singled out for especially harsh treatment and may die from it.

Hundreds of Christians in Northern and Middle Belt Nigeria are killed by Islamist extremists each year, totalling around 45,000 since 2009.

In western Uganda, 42 Christians, mainly school pupils, made the ultimate sacrifice for their faith in June 2023 as they were slaughtered by jihadists crossing from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Pupils were heard singing hymns as part of their evening worship just before the massacre.

Wuwih William Gemuh, a senior Bible translator in north-west Cameroon, was kidnapped and later

killed by gunmen after leading a workshop in March 2023.

The persecution of Christian-majority ethnic groups in Myanmar by the armed forces has been likened to genocide. While many Christians are killed randomly in airstrikes, three church deacons from Myanmar's Chin State arrested by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) in July 2023 are believed to have been tortured to death.

When jihadists abducted two fishermen in Cabo Delgado Province, northern Mozambique, in July 2023, they allowed one man to go free because he was a Muslim, but beheaded the other because he was a Christian.



Bible translator Wuwih William Gemuh was kidnapped and killed in Cameroon

Give thanks for the courage of those who have remained faithful to Christ, though it cost them their lives. Pray that their example will be an encouragement to other Christians enduring persecution and a witness to their persecutors.

# Vietnam

Vietnam is prone to natural disasters, with severe flooding and landslides affecting much of the country in October 2023, including Christians in central and northern regions.

The communist government views all religions with suspicion, but particularly Christianity, which it perceives as “Western”. Most Vietnamese people are “culturally Buddhist”. Some follow Cao Dai, a strongly nationalistic religion that combines elements of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism.

Vietnam’s constitution states that citizens “can follow any religion or follow none” and “all religions are equal before the law”. The 2018 Law on Belief and Religion prohibits religious activity that could “harm social order and/or national unity”, while requiring authorities to protect religious freedom. Religious groups must seek registration to be officially recognised and to carry out activities including worship, preaching, teaching and publishing.

Christians, who make up around 7% of the population, experience persecution in varying degrees across the country. Local or provincial authorities decide whether to crack down on Christians, and central government often fails to intervene.

More than half of Vietnamese Christians are from ethnic minorities. The Montagnard people, from the Central Highlands, followed animistic beliefs before starting to convert to Christianity in increasing numbers in the 1950s and

60s. The Hmong people, living mainly in the north-western Highlands, came to faith in Christ in the 1990s through a Manila-based evangelistic radio station broadcasting in the Hmong language.

Both Montagnard and Hmong Christians have suffered persecution. Thousands have been denied household registration documents or identity cards, leaving them unable to access healthcare or schooling. Converts are kept under surveillance, intimidated, beaten and held in arbitrary detention.

Churches are frequently refused permits and leaders of house churches and new converts are summoned to “criticism sessions” in an attempt to make them publicly deny their faith. Unregistered house churches are sometimes closed and the property of Christians confiscated.



Christian families receiving aid after heavy rain and landslides in north-west Vietnam

Ask the Lord to enable His people in Vietnam to remain firm in their faith, whatever restrictions they face. Pray that the right to follow Christ will be recognised and implemented by local authorities.

# A Living Hope



*“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?’”  
(John 11:25,26)*

**T**hat is the glorious promise of the resurrection for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Martha and her sister Mary experienced unspeakable joy when their brother Lazarus was raised to life, yet even that miracle was but a wonderful foretaste of the eternal glory in God’s presence that awaits all who trust in Christ.

Jesus’ promise brings hope and comfort to all believers, especially those for whom this earthly life is a time of suffering. It is especially important for those living with acute poverty and persecution; those living in daily danger in conflict zones; those who have been displaced from their homes through unrest or natural disasters; those who have lost loved ones to anti-Christian violence.

The Body of Christ around the world draws strength from His glorious resurrection power. The empty tomb and the witness of Christians over centuries testify to the living hope we have that is Christ in us, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).

In Revelation we are promised, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or

mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:4)

God raised Jesus from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, “because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:24).

Whatever the sufferings God’s people endure, we can rejoice in His victory over death. He is the resurrection and the life! He is risen!



Persecuted Christians in Nigeria worshipping. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus brings hope whatever our circumstances

Give thanks that we serve a risen Saviour who lives in us. Pray that the living hope of Christ in us will sustain and encourage suffering and persecuted Christians around the world.

# Practical help for the suffering Church



Thank you for your prayers for the suffering Church.

Praying is the most important thing we can do to help our suffering brothers and sisters. But if you would also like to send them practical help, you will find details on the tear-out form opposite of how you could send a gift to Barnabas Aid. We will forward your gift to places where Christians live with pressure, harassment and violence so that it can be used to fund Christian-run projects that help needy and suffering Christians.

We greatly welcome donations to our General Fund, which we can use wherever the need is greatest or most urgent, and for projects we cannot publicise because they are too sensitive or for other reasons.

However, if you would like to direct your gift more specifically, here are some suggestions:

**Feeding Fund** (reference 00-636)

**Victims of Violence Fund** (reference 00-345)

**Small Business Start-Up Fund** (reference 00-356)

**Vocational Training Fund** (reference PR1535)

**Christian Schooling for Christian Children** (reference 00-794)

**Convert Fund** (reference 00-113)

**Leadership Training Fund** (reference 00-430)

**Bibles and Scriptures Fund** (reference 00-362)

**Resources Fund** (reference 00-479)

**Disaster Relief Fund** (reference 00-634)

or **General Fund** – to be used where most needed – (reference 00-000)

For more information, please visit [barnabasaid.org](http://barnabasaid.org) or call your nearest Barnabas Aid office (contact details on back cover).

LIVING  
STREAMS

## Living Streams Sponsorship

We have sponsorship programmes available for regular donations to certain kinds of project. Please contact your nearest Barnabas Aid office for details.



# Yes, I would like to help suffering Christians

Please return form to Barnabas Aid NZ, PO Box 276018, Manukau City, Auckland 2241  
Telephone (09) 280 4385 Email newzealand@barnabasaid.org Website www.barnabasaid.org/nz

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**Here is my gift of:**  \$25  \$50  \$100

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For NZ purposes (Barnabas Aid is authorised to issue tax receipts only for donations specified for use within NZ)

PR1555 food.gives

PR1570 .gives shipping costs

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For wherever the need is greatest (General Fund)

PR1566 medical.gives

Description

**It really helps with speed of processing your gift if your details on online internet banking transactions are set up as follows for the Payee's Statement.**

**Particulars**  
your constituent # e.g. 23-1234 or 23 1234

**Code**  
the project/fund you are giving to e.g. General or NZ or 00-514 for child sponsorship

**Reference**  
the frequency e.g. weekly, fortnightly, 4-weekly if you have set up a regular gift

**Acknowledgement:**  No acknowledgement needed  Please send acknowledgement  
(Note: To save costs, receipts will be sent by email wherever possible)

**Internet banking** I will donate through internet banking  
(Barnabas Fund Account 02 0562 0046270 97)

**Regular gift** I would like to give regularly. Please send me details..

**Legacy gift** If you would like more information about how to leave a gift to Barnabas Aid through your will, please contact our New Zealand office (left).

## Become a Barnabas Aid Volunteer

Partner with us to help our suffering and persecuted family - find out more about volunteering with us at [barnabasaid.org/get-involved/volunteer](http://barnabasaid.org/get-involved/volunteer)



### Alternative gift card

If you would like to make a donation as an alternative gift for a friend or relative, we can supply you with an attractive gift card, which you can send to the person for whom you have made the donation. Please fill in the details as you would like them to appear on the card.

"Dear

A gift of \$  has been received on your behalf

from

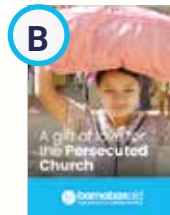
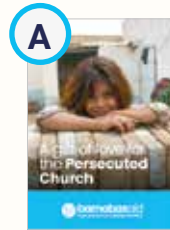
*This gift will assist Christians who are persecuted for their faith. With many thanks on behalf of the persecuted Church"*

- Tick here if you do not want the amount to be stated on the card
- Tick here if you do wish details about the project to be included on the card

Please state your preferred card choice (see right):

If you would like to have the card sent directly to the recipient, or if you would prefer to receive blank cards and fill them out yourself, please contact your national office (address details below).

If you would like more cards, please photocopy the form or attach a separate piece of paper with the details for extra cards and send it with your donation. You can also call your nearest Barnabas Aid office with the details and pay by credit/debit card over the phone.



If you would like to donate online please go to [www.barnabasaid.org/nz/donate](http://www.barnabasaid.org/nz/donate) or scan the QR code to the left

**\*We reserve the right to use designated gifts for another project if the one identified is sufficiently funded.**

Barnabas Fund (NZ) trading as Barnabas Aid (NZ) Charities Services number CC37773 Company registration number 9429 0429 68016 IRD/GST number 072-544-331

# Lent prayer diary

For those who are using this prayer booklet in Lent 2024, the following schedule of readings and prayers is suggested. It begins on Ash Wednesday, 14 February, and finishes on Easter Day, 31 March.

|  |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
|  |                    | <b>14 February</b> | <b>15 February</b> | <b>16 February</b> | <b>17 February</b> |
|  |                    | Afghanistan        | Algeria            | Armenia            | Bangladesh         |
| <b>18 February</b>                       | <b>19 February</b> | <b>20 February</b> | <b>21 February</b> | <b>22 February</b> | <b>23 February</b> |
| Victims of Violence and Injustice        | Burkina Faso       | Cameroon           | Chad               | China              | D.R. Congo         |
| <b>25 February</b>                       | <b>26 February</b> | <b>27 February</b> | <b>28 February</b> | <b>29 February</b> | <b>2 March</b>     |
| Children                                 | Eritrea            | Ethiopia           | Indonesia          | Iran               | Kazakhstan         |
| <b>3 March</b>                           | <b>4 March</b>     | <b>5 March</b>     | <b>6 March</b>     | <b>7 March</b>     | <b>8 March</b>     |
| Refugees and Internally Displaced People | Kyrgyzstan         | Laos               | Lebanon            | Libya              | Mali               |
| <b>10 March</b>                          | <b>11 March</b>    | <b>12 March</b>    | <b>13 March</b>    | <b>14 March</b>    | <b>15 March</b>    |
| Pastors and Evangelists                  | Myanmar            | Nepal              | Niger              | Nigeria            | North Korea        |
| <b>17 March</b>                          | <b>18 March</b>    | <b>19 March</b>    | <b>20 March</b>    | <b>21 March</b>    | <b>22 March</b>    |
| Women                                    | Saudi Arabia       | Somalia            | Sri Lanka          | Sudan              | Syria              |
| <b>24 March</b>                          | <b>25 March</b>    | <b>26 March</b>    | <b>27 March</b>    | <b>28 March</b>    | <b>29 March</b>    |
| Converts                                 | Turkey             | Turkmenistan       | Uganda             | Uzbekistan         | Martyrs            |
| <b>31 March</b>                          |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |
| A Living Hope                            |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |

## **International Office**

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**[barnabasaid.org](http://barnabasaid.org)**

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