

BARNABAS FUND - AID AGENCY FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH - BRINGING HOPE TO SUFFERING CHRISTIANS

AFRICA

Many troubles face a land of increasing Christian faith

INDIA

Your gifts help Christians meet the Covid challenge

PAKISTAN

Apprenticeships give hope and security to young believers

Africa

A continent in desperate need

The Barnabas Fund Distinctive

What helps make Barnabas Fund distinctive from other Christian organisations that deal with persecution?



We work by:

- directing our aid only to Christians, although its benefits may not be exclusive to them (“As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, **especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**” Galatians 6:10, emphasis added)
- channelling money **from** Christians **through** Christians **to** Christians (we do not send people, we only send money)
- channelling money through existing structures in the countries where funds are sent (e.g. local churches or Christian organisations)
- using the money to fund projects which have been developed by local Christians in their own communities, countries or regions
- considering any request, however small
- acting as equal partners with the persecuted Church, whose leaders often help shape our overall direction
- acting on behalf of the persecuted Church, to be their voice – making their needs known to Christians around the world and the injustice of their persecution known to governments and international bodies

We seek to:

- meet both practical and spiritual needs
- encourage, strengthen and enable the existing local Church and Christian communities – so they can maintain

their presence and witness rather than setting up our own structures or sending out missionaries

- tackle persecution at its root by making known the aspects of other religions and ideologies that result in injustice and oppression of Christians and others
- inform and enable Christians in the West to respond to the growing challenge of other religions and ideologies to Church, society and mission in their own countries
- facilitate global intercession for the persecuted Church by providing comprehensive prayer material
- safeguard and protect our volunteers, staff, partners and beneficiaries
- keep our overheads low

We believe:

- we are called to address both religious and secular ideologies that deny full religious liberty to Christian minorities – while continuing to show God’s love to all people
- in the clear Biblical teaching that Christians should treat all people of all faiths with love and compassion, even those who seek to persecute them
- in the power of prayer to change people’s lives and situations, either through grace to endure or through deliverance from suffering

“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40)

barnabasaid the magazine of Barnabas Fund

Published by Barnabas Aid

1934 Old Gallows Road Suite 350

Vienna, VA 22182, USA

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Front Cover: A Zimbabwean Christian child who is being fed by Barnabas Fund’s ePap project. See page 4.



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Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever

At the start of 2022 we reflect back on two years characterised by human suffering on an enormous scale. This suffering, beyond anything seen in the lifetime of most of us, has produced much questioning, uncertainty, cynicism and distrust. We do not know what or whom to believe. Politicians, scientists, church leaders and commentators (expert or otherwise) bombard us with conflicting claims, especially on social media. Perhaps the growing intolerance of those whose views differ from our own has developed as a kind of self-defence. Hostility has become the normal tone for expressing disagreement. Gone is the idea that individuals have a right to hold and express their own opinions.

Saddest of all, Christians have taken up this behaviour. We assume the worst about our brothers and sisters in the Lord, instead of trying to think the best of them. We express our concerns rudely and belligerently, our device-tapping fingers as destructive as the tongue that James warned about (James 3:1-12). We even reject the cries of anguish of persecuted believers, disbelieving their facts and figures.

We should accept and even welcome criticism, especially from fellow Christians who may have more maturity and experience of the Lord. "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17). We must try to build each other up in our faith (Jude 20 NLT). But let us do so peacefully and lovingly. "... make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Romans 14:19). Let us remember the much-quoted words of the 17th century German Lutheran theologian Rupertus Meldenius, recommending an attitude of love (*agape* in Greek, *caritas* in Latin, often translated "charity"): "In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity."

In the US and elsewhere churches are fragmenting, attendance is dropping and many young Christians, including evangelicals, are giving up the faith. Believers seem unable to bear with one another (Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13) and contemptuously reject anyone who differs from them in their experience of the Lord or any other non-essential matter. Those who come from contexts where there are "not many visions" (1 Samuel 3:1) react aggressively to those in other contexts who are encouraged and filled with faith when the Lord reveals Himself in supernatural ways.

As Christians we must be centred on Christ, not on our culture, our church traditions or what we read on our electronic devices. We should be Christ-like as we respond to events around us. At the graveside of Lazarus, in the midst of death, mourning and tears, Jesus wept (John 11:35). He so empathised with His friends that He wept with them, even though He was about to raise their beloved brother from the dead, and thus remove the cause of their sorrow. Is this not the model for us as we face this age of suffering? Rather than focusing on the minutiae which divide us, or on identity politics and sectarian interests, can we not see behind these things to our Christian brothers and sisters, and indeed to the whole of humanity, who are suffering in the most appalling way? In a world of massive food shortages, devastating storms and diseases, let us have a compassionate empathy for the suffering even if they "think differently" from us (Philippians 3:15).

In the challenging issues that we face, surrounded by uncertainties and lacking the skills to evaluate the clamour of opinions, there is one thing we can be sure of: Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour is on His throne. He is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8) and ultimately the only answer to our world's needs. Remembering the centrality of Jesus, we can face the new year without fear or anxiety but with confidence. Let us not lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5). Let us trust in Him.

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director

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how barnabas is helping

Despair turns to joy as ePap restores people to health in Zimbabwe

“It is simply overwhelming to witness the levels of despair, poverty and illness. But this is counterbalanced with the joy that our programme has brought to these desperate communities.” The words of our project partners as they distributed Barnabas-funded supplies of the nutritious porridge ePap to more than 16,000 hungry and malnourished Christians in Zimbabwe.

Barnabas delivered 52 tonnes of ePap through our new food.gives initiative to Matabeleland and Bulawayo, the areas most badly affected by hunger, where many were surviving on one meal a day. Our distributors showed how ePap is easy to make, by simply adding water to the pre-cooked powder. Rich with vitamins and minerals, it rapidly brings improvements to health.

Deliveries of ePap coincided with the reopening of schools after nearly two years of lockdown. Teachers reported that, after receiving regular ePap, children were concentrating better and were no longer sleepy during class. Attendance also soared, up to 100% in some schools.



Schoolchildren are now full of energy, thanks to ePap supplied by Barnabas

£139,780 (\$192,125; €165,615)
for 52 tonnes of ePap

Project reference: 91-721
(feeding in Zimbabwe)

Senegalese Christian widows empowered to stand firm in faith

“Without Barnabas, my children and I would live on the streets and starve,” said Senegalese widow Mariétou, a Christian convert from Islam. She had no means to feed her children after her husband, also a convert, died of Covid-19; her parents refused to help unless the family became Muslim again.

Sometimes the children went for days without eating, sustained only by meals provided by Mariétou’s church. Then Barnabas gave Mariétou a sewing machine, enabling her to make a living. “The project has empowered me,” she said. “I feed my children and all my children are in school. I thank the Lord for this miracle.”

Mariétou was one of 12 Muslim convert widows, in similar situations, whom Barnabas enabled to become financially self-reliant and able to withstand pressure from their Muslim families to reconvert. Seven who had seamstress skills received a sewing machine. Three others opened stalls selling fish, vegetables and cosmetics. One started a food venture, another a poultry business.



“Barnabas brought me out of misery,” said mother-of-four Dior, one of 12 widows helped

£4,925 (\$6,810; €5,855) for small-business start-up equipment for 12 widows

PR1530 (Covid Emergency Fund)

Food and shelter for survivors of Haiti disasters

Haiti suffered two natural disasters in quick succession in August 2021. It was struck by a 7.2 magnitude earthquake that killed around 2,200 people and destroyed over 37,000 homes. Two days later the impoverished island was lashed by a tropical storm, which caused flooding in the already devastated south-west and destroyed thousands more homes. Many churches, vital centres of local communities, were reduced to ruins.

Survivors who lost everything when their homes were destroyed slept outside under flimsy tenting. “It is hard to understand, but God is still God and he is still in charge,” said a pastor. “What we know is that He will still take care of His people.”

Barnabas provided food, shelter and medicines to meet the immediate needs of the homeless. “Hitherto hath the LORD helped us,” said our church partner, referencing 1 Samuel 7:12, adding, “And we know that He will continue to be faithful to the people of Haiti.”



Haitian families receive much-needed food provided by Barnabas

£47,180 (\$65,000; €55,790)

Project reference 95-852

Compassion in action

Strengthened and encouraged. This is what we often hear from Christians who have received support from Barnabas Fund. Thank you for making this possible. Here are just a few examples of the many ways we have recently helped persecuted and pressurised Christians.

Your donations save lives of many Covid patients in Uzbekistan

Barnabas has provided four oxygen concentrators for a Christian team of doctors, nurses and volunteers caring for seriously ill Covid-19 patients (most of them Christian) in their homes in Muslim-majority Uzbekistan, where hospitals have been struggling to cope.

In one year the volunteers have helped more than 500 patients suffering severe breathing difficulties, providing them with oxygen concentrators for up to seven days, depending on the individual need. The new Barnabas concentrators are in constant use, helping the volunteers to reach even more of our suffering brothers and sisters. The team receives up to 30 calls a day for help.

A pastor wrote to thank Barnabas supporters. "Through your ministry many people's lives have been saved," he said. "I thank God there are people like you who are not indifferent to the problems associated with the pandemic. Despite the difficult time, you still sacrifice your finances to save people."



A patient linked to one of the Barnabas-funded oxygen concentrators

£2,025 (\$2,790; €2,400) for four oxygen concentrators

PR1530 (Covid Emergency Fund)

Emergency food aid arrives swiftly for hungry Christians in south-east Asia

Christians living in rural poverty suffered most when a south-east Asian country experienced a recent surge in Covid-19, leading the police and army to seal off villages. Christians, already harassed and marginalised by the majority population, were largely ignored by the authorities when it came to receiving help and families had little saved to see them through the crisis.

Barnabas provided 326 families with enough rice, cooking oil and salt to last them until the next rice harvest. Working swiftly through our established partnerships with churches in the worst-affected provinces, the food was delivered before the villages were sealed. "This aid has once again highlighted the extremely fast and effective response that our deep partnership with Barnabas is able to provide to those in need," said a church leader.

A Christian said that without Barnabas most families would have had to borrow money at high interest rates or sell what little they possessed.



A Christian man receives food from Barnabas to last until the next rice harvest

£3,790 (\$5,225; €4,505) for food for 326 families

PR1530 (Covid Emergency Fund)

Christians from Asian mountains send thanks for food, Bibles and training

Isolated and persecuted Christians living in the mountains of another south-east Asian country are a "wonderful tough people" who totally rely on their rice harvest to survive – but when disaster or sickness hits there is often no Plan B, said our project partner.

Barnabas provided 100 Christian families, identified as being in dire need by local churches, with 20kg of rice each to help them survive difficult times. We also distributed 60 Bibles in the local language, and for many who received one it was the first Bible they had ever owned.

Workshops providing training in income-generating skills proved so popular we were asked to repeat them. Forty-two Christians learned motorbike maintenance and received a set of tools to start them in business. Eight women were taught sewing and each given a sewing machine. It is the first time anyone had helped Christians in the locality and they sent repeated thanks to Barnabas supporters.



Christians learn the nuts and bolts of motorbike mechanics

£2,100 (\$2,890; €2,480) for food, Bibles and income generation workshops

Project reference: XX-799



Hunger and food insecurity place Africans, such as this young woman in Mozambique, in danger of not only starvation but increased social unrest, violence and instability

The second largest continent in the world, Africa is home to 54 nations.* Its population, currently 1.2 billion, is the youngest of all continents, with a median age of 19.7. According to some forecasts Africa's population will double by 2050, outstripping both China and India, with Nigeria having a larger population than the USA. By 2100 Africa may have tripled its current population.

Africa is not only the youngest but also the poorest continent (excluding Antarctica). Much of its 30 million square kilometres is desert, and the vast Sahara is edging further south year by year.

Africa has been greatly blessed spiritually, with two periods of massive Church growth. The first, which focused on North Africa, was in the early Christian centuries, reaching its highest point around the year 500 AD when an estimated 40% of Africans were Christians although only 45% of the continent's population had heard the Gospel.

The advent of Islam in the seventh century gradually destroyed the African Church except in Egypt, but before that destruction occurred Africa had produced several important theologians and Christian leaders. One such was Hadrian from Cyrenaica (in modern Libya) who travelled to remote Britain and became abbot of a monastery in Kent in 670. Hadrian was hugely influential on the young Church in what would become England, helping to turn it into "an intellectual powerhouse of the early medieval world".

The second period of rapid Church growth in Africa was in the twentieth century. This time the focus was on the southern part of the continent resulting in a

* 54 are fully recognised by the United Nations. There are also Western Sahara and Somaliland.

Africa: A continent in desperate need

vibrant and joyful Church. By 2060 it is thought that nearly half (42%) of the world's Christians – hundreds of millions of our brothers and sisters – will live in sub-Saharan Africa.

But Africa today faces many grave difficulties. The continent has in the past few years replaced the Middle East as the epicentre of jihad and Islamist violence.

This violence comes as Africa is bearing the brunt of food poverty, scarcity and famine. The global economic downturn caused by Covid-19 is also having a disproportionate effect on Africa, while foreign intervention is adding to Africa's mounting woes.

The rise of Islamism

In November 2020 the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) reported that the “centre of gravity” for Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh) activity had moved from the Middle East to Africa. Africa is experiencing “a surge in terrorism”.



Christians in Kajuru district were among those across Kaduna State, Nigeria, who suffered an onslaught of Islamist violence that killed 300 people and destroyed hundreds of homes in early 2019. Islamist violence throughout Africa continues unabated

In September 2021, to give just one example, Islamist militants killed 34 people – most of them women and children – in Kaura Local Government Area, a predominantly Christian area of Kaduna State, Nigeria. Even by conservative estimates around 10,000 people have been killed by Islamist violence in Nigeria since 2015.

The South Africa-based Institute for Security Studies (ISS) estimates that in the 20 years prior to the 9/11 attack in the USA 10,000 people were killed by Islamist violence across Africa. In the 20 years since that attack the figure stands at 55,000 – more than five times as many.

The Islamist ideology seeping across Africa has deep roots, especially in West Africa. In the 1970s the Muslim

World League – funded by Saudi Arabia – poured money into northern Nigeria, distributing Islamist literature, setting up Islamic schools and offering scholarships for religious universities in Saudi Arabia itself. This campaign bore fruit in 1978 with the founding of the Izala Society (known formally as the Society of Removal of Innovation and Re-establishment of the Sunnah).

The Izala movement was committed to Wahhabism – a Saudi Arabian ideology that seeks a return to a more “pure” and very strict form of Islam. The group remains dominant – it is virtually impossible to achieve rank or office in northern Nigeria without links to Izala.

A key figure in the rise of Izala was Abubakar Mahmud Gumi, who argued that Muslims should never accept the rule of a non-Muslim – this statement led to twelve northern Nigerian states adopting elements of sharia (Islamic law) after a Christian, Olusegun Obasanjo, became president in 1999. Another was Ahmed Idris Nasreddin, a highly successful Eritrean-born businessman based in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, who with the help of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood channelled funds from Nigeria to various Islamist causes, including to Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda before and after 9/11.

Nigeria and the Sahel

The Izala movement provided the ideological and financial basis for the rise of Boko Haram, the Islamist militant group that originated in Maiduguri, north-east Nigeria. It gained international attention after the abduction of more than 270 schoolgirls from Chibok, Borno State, in 2014.

The group pledged allegiance to IS in 2015, but split the following year with one section forming the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) and a separate Boko Haram movement remaining independent of IS. After the death of Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau in June 2021, however, reports indicated that some Boko Haram fighters were giving their loyalty (*bay'a*) to IS.

The western Sahel – Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger – has also become a hotbed of terrorism and unlawful Islamist governance. Three groups – Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Jama'a Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen (JNIM) and Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS) – are active. All three have roots in the Algerian Salafist Group for Call and Combat, and all three have benefited from the illegal traffic of weapons and explosives looted from Libya after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi.

Boko Haram operates across borders, carrying out – for example – attacks on Christian communities in south-east Niger. ISWAP is active in this region, with an estimated force of 3,500-5,000 fighters based around Lake Chad. Further south, Islamist violence has displaced at least 228,000 people from Cameroon's border areas with Nigeria.

Eastern and central Africa

The traffic of weapons and explosives from Libya has also flowed into east Africa. Somalia has suffered violence from the Al Qaeda-linked Al Shabaab, which controls much territory in southern and central Somalia, enforcing sharia law. The Islamist group also carries out attacks in Kenya, murdering Christians and other non-Muslims.

Islamists have wreaked havoc in Mozambique. Al-Sunna wa Jama'a (known locally as Al Shabaab due to comparisons with the Somalia-based group, but regarded by the US as an IS affiliate) took control of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique's far north in 2020, subjecting the population to shocking violence. It was only with the help of Rwandan and South African forces that in late 2021 Mozambique drove the terrorists back.

IS affiliates and other Islamists are also active in central Africa, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which has been afflicted with violent conflict for many years. For example, in October 2020 terrorists, thought to have links with IS, killed at least 120 and burned down a church building along with 45 houses in DRC's North Kivu province.

Hunger and food insecurity

Of ten "extreme hunger hotspots" cited in an Oxfam report on global food insecurity, five are in Africa – DRC, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan and the western Sahel – these areas alone accounting in 2020 for 61.5 million people experiencing "crisis-level hunger". By November 2021 it was estimated that 239 million people in sub-Saharan Africa were at risk of malnutrition.

These reports and others indicate the overlapping and interconnected causes of the global food crisis that is afflicting Africa so deeply. Conflict is perhaps chief among the drivers of food insecurity, as farmers are forced off the land and food supplies are looted or destroyed.

Natural disasters also have a devastating impact. Persistent drought and desertification over the last five years have led to repeated failed harvests and, in turn, widespread malnutrition, acute hunger and desperate famine in Madagascar. At least half a million children under the age of five are malnourished, more than a million people are in danger of starvation, and many have already starved to death.

Economic shocks also drive hunger and famine. In early 2021 the World Bank reported that the pandemic had already pushed as many as 40 million Africans into poverty. This foreshadows further unrest and instability: "Africa's Covid crisis is yet to come," says Nic Cheeseman, professor of African politics at the University of Birmingham.

Food insecurity leads not only to hunger and starvation but also to further conflict. The ISS reported in September that "supply chain disruptions, climatic

shocks, rapid spikes in commodity prices and lockdowns" have "created fertile ground for unrest". Conflict – a cause of food crisis – is also a result of food crisis.

Corruption, instability and mis-government

Africa's troubles are compounded by governments often unable or unwilling to do anything about violence and hunger. Government is characterised by instability, a fact that provides opportunities for Islamists. In Mali and Somalia, for example, Al Qaeda-affiliated groups have stepped into the role of government by providing services such as Islamic schools.

European colonialism has left a legacy of ethnic conflicts, due to European decisions about national borders that ignored the reality of African demographics.



Natural disasters have led to severe drought and famine in Madagascar. Hundreds of thousands are at risk of malnutrition, disease and death

The distrust of the West that exists across much of Africa is a major headache for Christian communities who are simplistically identified with Western colonialism. To nominal Muslims who see Christianity as a Western imposition, and who understandably balk at millionaire pastors and the so-called "prosperity gospel" that are often Christianity's most visible face, the purported purity of Wahhabi Islam becomes an attractive prospect.

A new scramble for Africa

Today China is leading what some have termed "a new scramble for Africa". The communist state is now Africa's largest trading partner, with Sino-African trade worth an estimated \$200 billion annually.

China is providing much infrastructure in countries such as the DRC, Kenya and South Africa, and the Chinese recognise that government stability is good for business. Yet there are downsides. A likely reduction in Chinese lending could lead to a new economic shock. African countries who ally themselves with China rather than Western powers will face fewer difficult questions about human rights, including anti-Christian persecution.

Wagner – a Russian private paramilitary company with alleged links to the Russian state – is active in several African nations, creating a further threat to peace and security.

In the Central African Republic, says Joseph Siegle, director of research at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies in Washington DC, “Wagner has been implicated in human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, rape and torture” as part of its profiteering mission to take control of mineral extraction, including the mining of gold, uranium and diamonds. Similar accounts emerge from Wagner involvement in Libya, Syria, Sudan, Mozambique and Madagascar.

Now the government of Mali plans to bring in 1,000 Wagner troops, ostensibly for security and training purposes as France scales back its operations in the Sahel nation. Yet Wagner has no interest in stability – indeed, the UK Foreign Office calls the organisation a “driver of conflict” that “capitalises on instability for its own interests”. The government of Niger – Mali’s neighbour – has already predicted trouble for the western Sahel if the Russian paramilitaries become involved.

“Africa’s Covid crisis is yet to come.”

An African Afghanistan?

The picture for Africa is bleak. Terrorism, violence and instability reign. Poverty and food insecurity will lead to more terrorism, violence and instability. African governments are unable to cope, Western and Chinese involvement is at best a mixed blessing, and Wagner threatens to destabilise regions of Africa still further.

The Taliban’s recent takeover of similarly dysfunctional Afghanistan was greeted joyfully by African Islamists, from al-Shabaab in Somalia to JNIM in the western Sahel. JNIM leader Iyad Ag Ghaly likened the US withdrawal from Afghanistan to the French withdrawal from Mali, baldly declaring: “We are winning.”

Many African nations risk becoming failed states; several are already there. It does not take a great leap in imagination to see the western Sahel together with northern Nigeria becoming a vast West African Afghanistan.

Yet Africa remains a continent of deep and unyielding Christian faith. There are hundreds of millions of believers across Africa, with more turning to Christ every day. Increasingly the Church in the West, where Christianity is in decline, will look to Africa for spiritual sustenance, support, leadership and evangelism. The Kingdom of Christ increases even in the most seemingly helpless and hopeless of circumstances, and “of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:7, ESV).



The new food.gives initiative from Barnabas Fund is your way of helping our brothers and sisters in Africa

You Can Help!

Barnabas Fund has been working for many years to alleviate the suffering of our African brothers and sisters, and you can help!

Our new initiative **food.gives** is a further way that Barnabas Fund is combating food insecurity, hunger and starvation. We have already delivered vital food supplies from South Africa to believers in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and in Madagascar we are providing 234 tonnes of ePap – a special nutritious porridge designed to provide vital nutrients – for a rolling programme over two years reaching over 79,000 Christians across Madagascar’s 22 regions.

Please see the enclosed leaflet or visit www.food.gives to see how you can help.



Anita hones her stitching skills as she pursues her goal to be a fashion designer



Adeel has impressed in his training despite the challenges of Covid lockdown when the workshop was closed



Training as a barber has given Yasroon the opportunity to provide for himself and for his family

Lives transformed through apprenticeships in Pakistan

“I prayed all the time and sought God’s help. My prayers got answered when one day I happened to meet the team of Barnabas Fund,” said Yasroon Hanif, apprentice barber.

Yasroon’s testimony typifies the experience of young Christians in Pakistan. Many have to leave school to go out and earn money to support the family, for example in a case of death, accident, sickness or redundancy affecting one of the parents and preventing them from continuing to work. When his father lost his job with the 2020 lockdown, Yasroon had to abandon schooling to seek a means to support his family. Because of the discrimination Christians face in Pakistan, finding work is always difficult. Yasroon faced the constant refrain that he lacked the necessary experience and skills. Once supported with a monthly stipend of 2,000 rupees (£9; \$12; €10) from Barnabas Fund, however, he enrolled as an apprentice barber. He has now started receiving a regular wage and has learned much in the process.

A range of opportunities

Barnabas is currently supporting over 500 young Christians in apprenticeship schemes organised by our Pakistani Christian project partners on the ground in Rawalpindi/Islamabad, Lahore, Hyderabad, Faisalabad and Multan. The partners identify those youngsters who can most benefit from the training provided. The monthly stipend covers training, travel and lunch expenses

and a proportion of the project supervisors’ costs.

Employers do not provide a wage, but they train the apprentices who work for free while they are learning. When the trainees are sufficiently experienced they can seek paid jobs for themselves or even set up their own small business. The apprenticeships offered that can open these doors include mechanics, beauticians, carpenters, electricians and many others.

Hurdles overcome through spiritual support and prayer

Sania, a dressmaking apprentice, describes the typical financial obstacles encountered before receiving support from Barnabas. “It is very difficult and expensive to learn any kind of skill,” she explains. “Technical institutions are very expensive.” Many Christians in Pakistan are, like Sania, too poor to pay for the vital vocational training, without which they are unable to acquire the skills to help them secure employment.

Shahmaz appreciated the practical guidance offered by the Barnabas Fund team. He recalls that he opted for a welding apprenticeship after being “counselled” and “encouraged”.

Regular field visits by Christian project supervisors check on the apprentices’ wellbeing and progress, and maintain good working relationships with trainers. Barnabas Fund has provided motorcycles to facilitate their work.

Monthly fellowship meetings between apprentices and project

partners, including Bible study, prayer and counselling, have provided wonderful opportunities to share experiences and encourage one another.

Successful training inspires vision for the future

On 24 August 2021 a ceremony held in Lahore celebrated the progress made by 25 apprentices. Twelve received recognition as graduates who had completed their training, some of whom have started earning a regular salary. Among them Kosar, now drawing a monthly wage as a beautician, says, “Every night in our family prayer, all my family members pray for the whole team of Barnabas Fund and we wish more prosperity for them.”



Graduation day for apprentices in Lahore

Sufyan, an apprentice mechanic, and Anita, learning dress designing, expressed their aim to set up their own businesses so that they can provide training and employ Christian youth.

Sana sums up the impact of the ministry of Barnabas Fund and its partners. “They are helping to save lives of those youngsters who are in distress and they are providing them with new hope to face the challenges of life. I think through this help they are changing the future path of many of the families.”

Project reference: PR1531
Apprenticeships in Pakistan



Job and the mystery of suffering

In

“God’s answer to suffering” (*Barnabas Aid*, November/December 2021 pp.12-14) we saw how suffering came into the world when Adam and Eve, tempted by Satan, sinfully rebelled against God.

Genesis 3:15 explains how Satan became our enemy but God provided an answer to both sin and suffering through Christ’s death and resurrection. Until Christ returns, however, Satan continues to hurt and destroy, causing as much suffering as he can.

How does this suffering manifest itself? God has given us a detailed case study in the book of Job. Here we are confronted with an unfolding panorama of human suffering – suffering later fulfilled in the suffering of Jesus Christ during His life on earth. Job is representative of all humanity and there are aspects of his suffering with which every human being can identify, for he experiences catastrophic economic loss, death of loved ones, physical illness, social alienation and spiritual turmoil.

The challenge of the book of Job

Job is a challenging book. The graphic descriptions of Job’s profound suffering, and his vehement agonised speeches, must distress any reader. Furthermore, it gives no answer to the question of why we suffer. It is an oriental book about a concrete example, written mainly in poetry, which creates difficulties for Western readers used to thinking in general and abstract terms and analysing texts phrase by phrase.

Scholars cannot agree who wrote Job or when. Nor can they agree on the geographical location of Uz, which was clearly not in Israel. But perhaps this vagueness helps to make his story more universal.

The suffering of the man Job

Job’s terrible afflictions are summed up in 1:13-19 and 2:7-8. First, four messengers bring reports of disastrous loss and bereavement. His oxen and donkeys have been seized and the men looking after them killed, his sheep and the shepherds have been killed by “fire from heaven”, his camels have been taken and the servants with them killed, and a wind has blown down the house of his eldest son, killing all ten of his children inside. Later Job’s skin breaks out in painful sores from head to toe.

This first set of afflictions led to more. We know that Job was a tender-hearted man, concerned for the weak and poor (Job 30:25). He must have been greatly distressed by the sufferings of others caught up in “his” disasters – his wife and the loved ones and dependants of the slaughtered servants. To watch others suffer is a dreadful experience. We remember Mary, watching her son’s crucifixion; surely this was the sword piercing her soul foretold by Simeon (Luke 2:35).

When Job falls sick he goes to live on a dung heap, created by years of excrement piled up and periodically burned. In this despised and filthy place, all he can do to ease his pain is scratch the sores with a piece of broken pottery.

Further suffering comes from the reactions of those around him. From a position of prominence and respect (chapter 29), Job’s misfortunes have brought him down to the lowest possible place. “He has stripped me of my honour” (19:9). People mock and ridicule him, even spitting in his face (30:1,9-10). His wife finds him repulsive (19:17). His close family, his extended family, most of his intimate friends, his acquaintances, his house guests all reject and abhor him. His servants

refuse to obey him. Even young children scorn him (19:13-19). He feels excluded and alienated.

It is interesting to note the similarities with the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, the “man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3 AV) for whom it was “the will of the Lord to crush him with pain” (Isaiah 53:10 NRSV). He too was despised and rejected (Isaiah 53:3).

The responses of suffering Job

Job’s initial responses are reasoned, wise, humble and faith-filled – the outcome of many years of walking with God. He is, at this point, able to govern his emotions. When he hears of the loss of all his children, and most of his servants and riches, he falls to the ground in worship saying,

Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised (Job 1:21).

When his hideous illness begins, he responds, “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” (Job 2:10)

But before long Job’s emotions overwhelm him and can no longer be reasoned into submission. Chapter 3 is the first of many cries of extreme anguish. A recurring theme is his effort to retain some shreds of hope. He loses hope (7:6), then clutches hold of it again: “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him” (Job 13:15).¹ But by chapter 19 Job is saying that God has completely taken away his hope. It has gone forever like an uprooted tree (19:10).

It seems to Job that God is furiously angry with him, an anger that has passed into enmity.

His anger burns against me; he counts me among his enemies (Job 19:11).

We readers know that God was not angry with Job at all. On the contrary, God was very pleased with him and had every confidence in him. But it was an essential part of Job’s testing that he should not know the reason for it.

Meanwhile poor Job thinks that God has coordinated all His forces to attack him simultaneously (Job 19:12 NRSV). He feels not only excluded by his community but also cast off by God, a spiritual pain worse than his physical suffering. We are reminded of our Saviour’s cry on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)

But Job rallies his faith and suddenly bursts out with the staggering declaration: “I know that my redeemer lives” (19:25).

The Hebrew word translated “redeemer” is *go’el*, the kinsman-redeemer whose duty was to avenge wrong done to their close relatives, or to buy them back if they were sold into slavery. From our side of Calvary, we think of Jesus redeeming us from our sins (Galatians 3:13; Titus 2:14; Revelation 5:9). But Job has in mind the restoration of his good name, which had been dragged into the mud by afflictions that everyone assumes are a punishment for sin. God is his *go’el*.

It is striking that Job claims kinship with God, for he is not even an Israelite. Despite this and despite his present experience, he believes that God, in His mercy and love, will not cast him off forever and will ultimately clear his name. As Henry Ellison, son of a Jewish convert to Christianity, says,

Job ... discovers in the furnace of affliction that he has been so bound up with his God that he can turn to Him and call on Him for vindication as a right, for God has made him His.²

Satan’s role

Satan’s first appearance in the book of Job is among a group of angels before the LORD (1:6) who questions Satan about where he has been. Satan (which means “the Accuser”) replies that he has been roaming around the world, the implication being that he has been seeking those he may accuse. Then Job’s name is introduced into the conversation – not by Satan but by the LORD, who says that Job is blameless and upright, fearing (i.e. revering) God and shunning evil (1:8). Satan claims that Job’s praiseworthy attitude is only because he has been so wonderfully blessed in material terms and that Job would curse the LORD if his possessions were taken from him. The LORD replies by giving Satan permission to do his worst with everything that Job owns – “everything he has is in your power” (1:12) – but not to hurt Job himself.

Off Satan goes and wreaks havoc on Job through four simultaneous tragedies. God allowed it and Satan did it. Many believers in Job’s situation might attribute their suffering to the hand of Satan, but Job is wiser. He recognises God’s sovereignty (1:21). God made use of Satan’s malicious character, but the origin of Job’s sufferings goes back to the LORD Himself, for which no explanation is ever given. (See also 42:11.)

In chapter 2 another heavenly meeting takes place and the LORD commends Job’s response to his suffering. Satan declares that Job’s integrity will fail if Job’s own body is afflicted. God allows Satan some more power: now he can touch Job’s body

but must not take his life (2:1-6). The terrible sores erupt on Job's skin but still he does not curse God as Satan had expected. Again Job sees the hand of God at work (2:9-10).

The faithful friends of Job

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar (2:11) were men of wealth and standing, respected for their wisdom. Yet they left their homes and journeyed to visit their disgraced friend Job, with whom nobody else would associate. They sat with him on the disgusting dung heap for a week. They wept. They tore their robes and threw dust on their heads to show that they shared his grief. With sensitivity and compassion the visitors refrained from speaking "for they saw that his suffering was very great" (2:13 NRSV). In the end it is Job who breaks the silence with the long howl of chapter 3 cursing the day he was born. Only after this first venting of his feelings does one of his friends speak, very tentatively and anxious not to offend (4:2). One could hardly ask for more devoted friends.

Yet, as the book unfolds, it becomes clear that their well-meant words are not helping Job, or at least not in the way they intended. The viewpoint of the three friends (and of Job) is that good people should prosper, as God blesses them, and not suffer.

Job's problem is that if the theology he has always believed is correct, then the disasters that have come on him mean that he must be a terrible sinner. But he knows he is not. The testimony of his heart is in conflict with the theology on which he has built his life. Job's friends, repeatedly urging him to repent of the sin which they believe must have brought the troubles on him, increase his anguish. But their words help him crystallise his thoughts and force him to turn from human "help" to God.

Finally, God overwhelms Job with a revelation of His majesty (chapters 38-41). Job bows before the sovereign LORD, accepts His will, drops his questions, quiets his raging and repents (42:1-6).

Drawing strength from Job

Some Christians give up the faith because of suffering. But few will have suffered as much as Job, who kept his faith, or the many martyrs who died rather than deny Christ. So what can we learn from Job?

We often feel that we could bear our suffering better if we understood *why* we were suffering. Perhaps

we even envy our persecuted brothers and sisters, because their suffering is a direct result of their stand for the Lord Jesus and clearly glorifies Him. But one of the main messages of Job is that often there is no answer to "why suffering?", only an answer to "what is suffering?"

Job never knew why he was afflicted, but he concluded that humankind cannot always understand God's ways and that God does not always reveal His will. Even though we readers are privy to the discussions between the LORD and Satan (of which Job was unaware) we do not know why the LORD acted in this way. We must, like Job, be satisfied with what the LORD does reveal. For Job, that was God's majesty as shown in His creation. We have also "the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The mystery of suffering can only be embraced, not analysed or assessed. "In acceptance lieth peace."³

The restoration of our fortunes may not happen in this life. It did for Job, when God doubled his wealth, gave him another ten children and caused his relatives to welcome him back (42:10-17). But this is rather rare. For many believers, it will happen when they are in heaven.

Wisdom cannot give an answer to "Why am I suffering?" Job's three friends were reckoned by their contemporaries amongst The Wise, as was Job himself, but none of them had an answer. The only answer we have is to continue to trust in the Divine sovereignty and providence of God no matter what, following the example of Job:

As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job... (James 5:10-11 NRSV)

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director Barnabas Fund

Note: translating the Hebrew of Job is highly complex, so no single Bible translation adequately represents the meaning.

1 There are a variety of translations of this verse, some with very different meanings.

2 H L Ellison, *From Tragedy to Triumph: The Message of the Book of Job*, Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1958; paperback edition, 1967, p.70.

3 Amy Carmichael, *Toward Jerusalem: Poems of Faith*, first published London: SPCK, 1936; Triangle edition 1987 © The Dohnavur Fellowship, Dohnavur, Tamil Nadu, India, pp.40-41.



Helping and healing our brothers and sisters in India's Covid crisis

The new Covid-19 care centre in Maharashtra will provide medical care for impoverished and neglected tribal people

Barnabas Fund has channelled more than £240,000 (\$325,000; €280,000) of your generous donations to support Christian medical ministries in India that are still responding to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. This has enabled our brothers and sisters, called to minister to the sick and the needy, to continue to provide care and treatment in such dire circumstances, particularly to our fellow Christians.

Your donations have supported many hospitals and medical ministries in various parts of India. This includes the installation of four power generators, provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) kits to 12 hospitals, the purchase of oxygen cylinders and oxygen concentrators, and other vital equipment including pulse oximeters, stethoscopes, thermometers and an ECG machine.

Throughout summer 2021 India was ravaged by Covid. At the peak in May more than 300,000 new cases were being reported every single day. This in turn led to healthcare services being overwhelmed. Many died while

waiting for space in overcrowded hospitals; severe shortages of oxygen meant that others on intensive-care wards suffocated to death.

India, as of November 2021, has officially recorded 460,000 Covid deaths, and a study by the US-based Centre for Global Development estimates that the full Covid death toll could be more than ten times that number. The pandemic is not yet over – your gifts have already saved lives and will doubtless save many more.

The Church response

The Church in India has been devastated. In June it was reported that more than 2,000 pastors and Church leaders had already succumbed to the virus. At least 40 ministries in India were in danger of closing down, simply because their leaders had died and there was no one able to replace them, leaving Christians without spiritual care and support at the time they needed it most.

“The second wave of Covid infection has created devastation and panic in India,” said an Indian Church leader. “We lost thousands of people to this deadly virus.”

Yet the Church has also made a significant contribution to the pandemic response. Barnabas Fund created an emergency taskforce of Church leaders from across denominations, chaired by our International Director Patrick Sookhdeo. We have worked closely with Christian medical ministries such as Emmanuel Hospital Association and the Christian Medical Association of India (CMAI).

All this ensures that your gifts are used as efficiently as possible to help and support our suffering Christian family.

“We praise God for His mercy”

“At our hospital we did not have an ICU [intensive-care unit] or even an HDU [high-dependency unit] set up,” said Dr George Varghese, the Senior Administrative Officer at Prem Sewa Hospital in Gandhinagar, near Balrampur, Uttar Pradesh. This small hospital is just one example of where your donations have made a life-saving difference to the lives of Christians.

The hospital has been able to set up a ten-bed Covid care centre as well as a five-bed ICU. Along with the new wards Prem Sewa Hospital has



Your gifts are helping Christian nurses, doctors and other carers to combat the onslaught of Covid-19 in India



The new generator at Nav Jivan Hospital in Jharkhand state provides power for medical equipment as well as the on-site living quarters of hospital staff

installed an oxygen-generating plant that will prove vital to the survival of the most severely afflicted Covid patients.

The hospital only receives an average of 15 hours' power supply each day – an amount that can vary considerably – while the oxygen plant requires continuous power. Your contributions have allowed the purchase and installation of a new 45 kVA (45 thousand volt-amps) generator to overcome this barrier.

These improvements will be of special help to the Christian community of Balrampur. Dr Varghese says that

members of local churches can now get “quality healthcare service from the hospital, and they don't have to be referred to far-off hospitals for the medical care”. He concludes, “We praise God for His mercy upon our small hospital.”

New generators minimise risks to treatment

Prem Sewa is one of many Christian hospitals and medical ministries across India that we have supported. The Nav Jivan Hospital in the village of Tumbagadad, Palamua, Jharkhand state, is typical of rural hospitals that suffer from an inconsistent supply of electricity and the risks to treatment that follow. “Power outages caused staff to grope in the dark,” says hospital administrator Helen Paul, as well as causing vital equipment to fail and leading to delays in surgery and other procedures.

Thanks to your donations, a new 62.5 kVA generator has been purchased and installed, delivering a continuous energy supply to power the hospital. If power from the mains comes to a halt the generator immediately whirs into action, ensuring that there are no potentially deadly gaps in power

supply. In the same way the generator immediately stops when mains power is restored.

“Now there is no cause for any apprehension,” explains Helen. “Work has become very smooth and power outages do not hamper work flow.”

It was a similar story at Broadwell Christian Hospital in Fatehpur, Uttar Pradesh. Dr Jesudoss explains that the frequent power cuts had made an alternative power source a necessity, but that the hospital's small generator was unable to cope. As well as placing patients at risk the power outages made life difficult for doctors, nurses and other hospital staff who live on-site.

The hospital has installed a new 125 kVA generator, capable of supplying power both to the hospital itself and to the domestic areas that are home to staff, including 25 family quarters and a women's hostel. Previously, says Dr Jesudoss, “we were not able to provide power to the domestic area during daytime.” Now there is enough power for these areas, as well as operating theatres, ventilators, monitors, and other medical equipment.



Home healthcare is provided by a Bangalore-based Christian ministry to those with Covid who cannot afford hospital care

Christian ministries providing help and hope

The 70-bed Burrows Memorial Christian Hospital in the Cachar district of Assam has also been fitted with a new 140 kVA generator. Johnson Singson, the hospital administrator, explains that as a rural hospital in an area vulnerable to summer monsoons continuous power could not be guaranteed. “As our hospital is situated in a far-flung area there are frequent load shedding and power fluctuation problems,” he says, and “during the monsoon months between May and October heavy rains destroy grid infrastructure resulting in interruption of power supply for a good number of days.”

“God has answered our prayers at the right time through Barnabas Fund.”

Now, says Johnson, the hospital “will be able to provide uninterrupted services” to those in need of critical care. “Thank you very much for your valuable support and kindness towards our hospital ministry,” he adds, “God has answered our prayers at the right time through Barnabas Fund.”

In the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, Barnabas is providing vital medical supplies for a Christian

ministry serving a tribal area of more than a million people by running a 20-bed Covid isolation facility. “There is an absence of health infrastructure in the villages,” explains Christian leader Vaibiv Moon, adding that the few hospitals in the region “are unable to cater to the huge need”.

The isolation facility has been equipped with PPE kits, IV drip stands, thermometers and bedding, along with food and kitchen utensils. Our project partners have purchased three oxygen cylinders, as well as four oxygen concentrators – machines that purify the air and actually produce oxygen for Covid patients.

Tribal people are often despised and neglected, and are among the most destitute and impoverished of Indian society. “We have been always considered as untouchables,” said Shakar Jaganath, a tribal leader in Gadchiroli. “Thank you for setting up this centre here in our community. We feel valued.”

Project Reference: PR1530
Covid Emergency Fund

Practical help in time of need



Working with the CMAI, Barnabas Fund has provided £23,000 (\$31,000;

€27,000) to set up a ten-bed Covid care centre at a Christian hospital in the city of Nadiat, Gujarat. The new centre allows the hospital to fulfil its Christian mission of caring for the sick. The centre will continue to be put to important use even if the virus recedes, as a respiratory clinic that will provide much-needed care long into the future.



A grant of £119,000 (\$161,000; €139,000) has also allowed

CMAI to provide new PPE kits – including masks, face shields, gloves, coveralls and other items – for ten Indian hospitals.



Often the disadvantaged of India – Christians among

them – cannot afford hospital care. A Christian ministry in Bangalore has taken it as its mission to serve those who must remain at home. A grant of £18,300 (\$25,000; €21,000) has provided health care staff with equipment such as pulse oximeters and digital thermometers in order to carry out home assessments.

These are just a few of many examples of how we are using your gifts to help our needy brothers and sisters. Medical care, say our project partners, will be based on Christian values of service – values sorely needed at such a time of crisis.

Atrocities against Christians mount as Tatmadaw attacks Chin town

MYANMAR



Fires caused by a Tatmadaw artillery attack soon spread across the small town of Thantlang [Image credit: Chinland Post]

The Myanmar military (also known as the Tatmadaw) shelled the town of Thantlang, Chin State, on 30 October, causing fires that destroyed or damaged more than 160 homes and three church buildings.

The town had already been largely evacuated owing to the threat from the military to civilians in Christian-majority Chin State, including earlier artillery strikes against Thantlang.

The attack is one of at least 20 cases documented by human rights groups and media outlets in which Myanmar's military government has deliberately targeted Christians, pastors and church leaders, church

buildings and other Christian sites.

Chin Human Rights Organisation deputy director Salai Za Uk Ling labelled the extensive destruction as "war crimes and grave breaches of international humanitarian law".

In September 31-year-old Pastor Cung Biak Hum was shot dead in Thantlang while trying to put out a fire caused by Tatmadaw artillery. Soldiers then hacked off Pastor Cung's finger in order to steal his wedding ring.

The ongoing violence in Chin State has displaced thousands of people, with an estimated 1,800 fleeing across the Indian border to seek refuge.

Egypt lifts four-year state of emergency imposed after church bombings

EGYPT

Egypt is to lift its nationwide state of emergency imposed four years ago following bomb attacks against churches, which left dozens dead and more than 100 wounded.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced his decision in a Facebook post on 25 October, stating that Egypt had become "an oasis of security and stability in the region".

The state of emergency was imposed by President al-Sisi after suicide bombers targeted two major churches in Alexandria

on Palm Sunday 2017, killing at least 65 people and injuring 126, for which Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) claimed responsibility.

Christians, who make up 10% of the population of Egypt, say that their situation in the Muslim-majority country is now better than it has been in living memory. The government is working steadily to legalise churches following the repeal of Ottoman-era restrictions in September 2016.

Forced marriages and conversions of Pakistani Christian girls continue

PAKISTAN



Arooj gives her account of being threatened with death and forced into marriage and conversion to Islam [Image credit: CLAAS]

Two sisters, both Christians, were abducted and forced to marry Muslim men and convert to Islam, according to Barnabas Fund contacts in Punjab, Pakistan.

Arooj, 18 years old, and Kinza, 14, were kidnapped on 29 June from Lahore, and taken to their captors' home town of Mian Channu.

Arooj was released on 12 July after the girls' father, Aslam Masih, asked local leaders in Mian Channu to put pressure on the family to hand them over; Kinza was held in captivity for a further month before she escaped. Their captors, who were cousins of each other, threatened to kill them if they did not go through with the marriages and forced conversions.

Both girls are now in a safe place, and the Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement has filed to have the marriages annulled. Police have registered a case against 21-year-old Abdul Rauf and 22-year-old Muhammad Shakir, who allegedly forced Arooj and Kinza to marry them.

Also in Lahore, the High Court has ruled that a 14-year-old Christian girl who was abducted in Faisalabad, forcefully converted to Islam and married to a Muslim man should not be returned to her Christian family.

Even though the legal age for marriage in Pakistan is 16 (except in Sindh where it is 18) the judge ruled that Chashman Kanwal – who was 13 when abducted in July 2021 – is mentally mature enough to consent to marriage and conversion.

In a judgment on 24 September, Justice Tariq Nadeem ruled according to the sharia (Islamic) principle that marriage to a girl who has reached puberty is legal, arguing that Islamic jurists place greater importance on mental age than physical age.

Chashman's father, Gulzar Masih, expressed his determination to appeal against the court's decision.

Karnataka plans anti-conversion legislation as extremists use laws to harass Indian Christians

INDIA



Christians protest against an attack on their community and the proposed anti-conversion law in Karnataka [Image credit: Kiran Bakale]

The chief minister of Karnataka confirmed the state government's intention to introduce a new anti-conversion law. If such a law is passed, Karnataka would join nine other Indian states, including Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, in criminalising conversions carried out through force, fraud or allurement.

disrupted church meetings in Karkala and Hubballi, on 10 September and 17 October, respectively, to protest against alleged forced conversions. As a result hundreds of Christians staged a demonstration on 25 October in Hubballi in opposition to the proposed anti-conversion law.

Across India, violence, intimidation

“What we do is share the Good News with people, tell them about Jesus, but without forcing anyone to convert.”

Basavaraj Bommai announced on 28 September the plan in response to incidents of allegedly forced conversions which he claimed “have become rampant” across the state. Earlier, on 24 September, a group of Karnataka church leaders had met with Bommai to express their opposition to any anti-conversion law, arguing that accusations of forced conversions in the state were “malicious” and “untrue”.

The state government on 13 October also ordered a detailed investigation into all churches, Christian leaders and missionaries in Karnataka, a move strongly opposed by the Christian community.

Christians are often falsely accused of attempting to gain converts unlawfully. Groups of radical Hindutva nationalists

and false accusations against church leaders are increasing as extremists continue to use anti-conversion laws as a means of harassing Christians.

On 28 September Pastor Charlie John and two other Christians were arrested after extremists ordered them to stop distributing Bibles and leaflets in Rampur, Himachal Pradesh. The pastor denied accusations, saying, “What we do is share the Good News with people, tell them about Jesus, but without forcing anyone to convert.”

The following day, in Madhya Pradesh, radical Hindutva nationalists disrupted a Christian wedding ceremony alleging that the bride had unlawfully converted from Hinduism. The reception was disturbed “based on a false allegation of religious conversion,” said Patras Savil, a local pastor.

Indian teenager dies from acid attack after refusing to stop prayer meetings

INDIA

A Christian teenager who had suffered burns of up to 70 per cent of his body following an acid attack in Gaya, Bihar state, India, died in hospital on Sunday 26 September.

The family of Nitish Kumar believe that the attack was carried out by radical Hindutva nationalists in reprisal for Nitish's refusal to stop holding daily prayer meetings in his home.

Nitish was attacked on 11 August when he went to buy vegetables. He had just left his house when three men on a motorcycle threw acid on him.

Police claims that Nitish burned himself to death in response to a family argument were vigorously disputed by his family, who have received increased threats since the attack.

Fifteen Christians re-arrested in Eritrea

ERITREA

Fifteen Christians have been re-arrested in Eritrea and taken to the Mai Serwa maximum security prison in the capital Asmara following raids on their homes.

Some had already endured as many as 16 years of incarceration until being freed in September 2020 as part of anti-Covid-19 measures. They were re-arrested after the discovery of a list of Christian contacts.

The arrests followed the detention in July of two elderly pastors, Girmay Araia and Samuel Gebreweldi, from the Full Gospel Church of Eritrea, who were taken to Asmara's Second Police Station. No reason has been given for their arrest.

It is estimated that there are now some 160 Christian prisoners in Eritrea, almost certainly enduring brutal conditions.

In Touch

Warehouse fills up with your generous food.gives donations

Donations to food.gives, our new international food bank for hungry and persecuted Christians, are rolling into our warehouse in Swindon, Wiltshire, thanks to your wonderful generosity. Our first container of 18 tonnes of food is on its way to South Asia. Please pray it arrives safely.

Among the many donations we have received are gifts collected by churches as part of their harvest festival celebrations.

Whyte's Causeway Baptist Church, in Fife, Scotland, UK, filled an incredible 14 food.gives boxes full of dry food. This was in addition to the congregation's annual harvest offering for people in need in the Kirkcaldy area.

In Northern Ireland, UK, the congregation of Markethill Presbyterian Church in County Armagh collected 100.8kg (almost 16 stone) of rice, chickpeas, lentils, flour and soap for food.gives. They also collected tinned food for their local food bank. For more information on how you, your prayer group or your church can contribute towards food.gives please go to www.food.gives.



Members of Whyte's Causeway Baptist Church, from the left, Lynda, Judy, Anne, Catherine, Christine, Liz, Dorothea, Jim, Mark and church minister Ron (crouching front) with some of their donations for food.gives

Urge your MP to support Armenian Genocide bill in UK Parliament

MPs in the UK's House of Commons will on 18 March 2022 debate a bill to recognise the Ottoman-era Armenian Genocide. If passed the bill will face several further stages before it would become law.

The bill would require the UK government to officially recognise as genocide the slaughter of a century ago, establish an annual commemoration of the genocide, and incorporate teaching about it into the National Curriculum.

Tim Loughton MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Armenia, who presented the bill at its first reading in November, said, "Refusing to recognise the Armenian Genocide risks conveying a dangerous message."

Between 1893 and 1923 some 1.5 million Armenians were killed in the Ottoman Empire in a policy of extermination of Christian minorities. In addition, some 2.25 million Assyrian, Greek and Syriac Christians were killed within Ottoman territories between 1914 and 1923, making a total of 3.75 Christians killed.

Please write to your local MP urging him or her to support the bill on 18 March.

Prayer Focus Update marks 25 years and 300 editions

Barnabas Fund is delighted to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our monthly resource for prayer groups, now called *Prayer Focus Update*. It first appeared in October 1996, and we are thankful to the Lord that it has been published every month ever since, for more than 300 editions.

Prayer is at the heart of everything we do at Barnabas Fund. We believe in the power of prayer to bring change. In 25 years PFU, used by many individuals as well as prayer groups, has guided supporters to intercede on specific needs and situations of our persecuted Church family, in times of triumph and tragedy. We thank you for your diligent prayers on behalf of our suffering brothers and sisters, asking almighty God either to remove their persecution or to give them strength to stand.

PFU is available to download in A4, A5 and large print format at www.barnabasfund.org/pray.

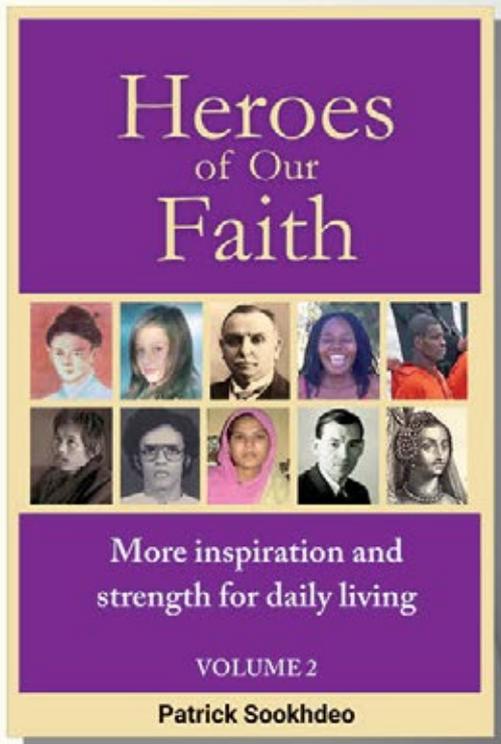
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Start the year with Heroes of Our Faith – volume 2

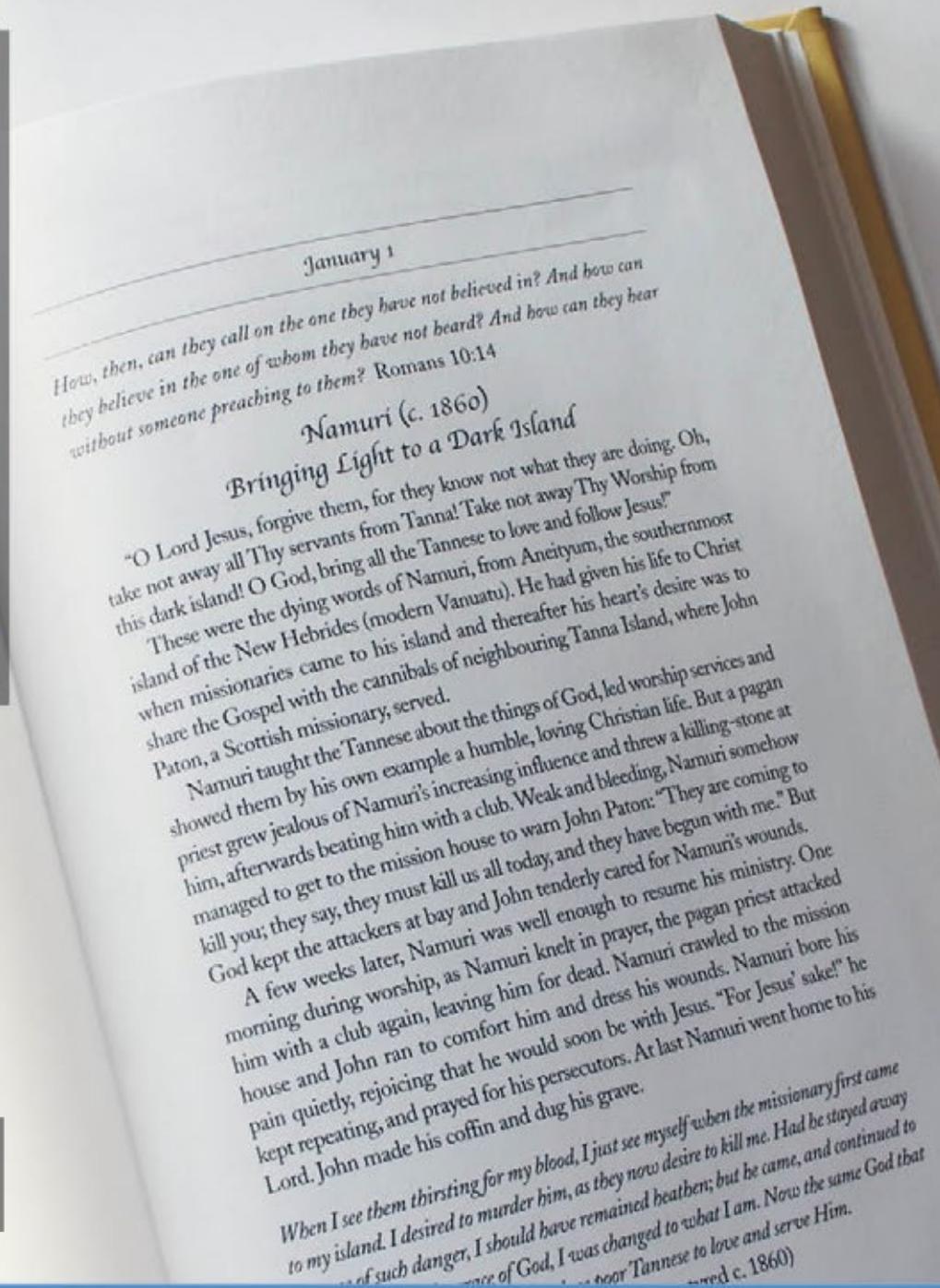
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