

SUNDAY 30 OCTOBER – SUNDAY 6 NOVEMBER

15 PAGES OF INFORMATION AND RESOURCES INSIDE FOR YOU AND YOUR CHURCH

barnabasaid



Suffering Church Action
and Awareness Week

“By your
endurance
you will gain
your souls”

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 or goods e.g. food)
- 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.

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Front Cover: A Christian woman from West Asia worships in a building funded by Barnabas

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Religion or the fear of the Lord?

The word “religion” entered the English language in the thirteenth century, and was used at that time to refer to a life regulated by monastic vows. It was derived from a Latin word, *religio*, but what did *religio* mean? Scholars have been debating for centuries the etymology of *religio*. Some say that it was to do with binding oneself to God. Others say it originally meant anxiety, inhibition or a sense of duty in everyday life. Interestingly, *religio* does not exactly correspond to any Greek or Hebrew word, so when our English Bibles use the word “religion” or “religious” we must realise that it is rather a loose translation.

The Old Testament does not mention “religion” but often speaks of a faith-filled believer’s response to God as “the fear of the LORD” or “the fear of God”. This means standing in awe of God. To fear Him is to recognise His greatness, His power and authority, His supremacy over us, but also His holiness and His matchless purity. It is the reaction of Isaiah, who cried, “Woe is me” when he saw the LORD high and lifted up with the seraphim singing around Him, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:1-5 AV).

From the Old Testament we learn that anyone could be right with God on this basis. Job was not Jewish, yet he feared God and was praised by the Lord for this (Job 1:1,8). However, in the New Testament this changes dramatically – the substitutionary death, atoning work and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ become pivotal for our faith.

Interestingly the “fear of the Lord” also occurs in the New Testament.

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

(Acts 9:31. See also 2 Corinthians 5:11; Revelation 14:7)

In faith, we should bow humbly before our all-holy, all-powerful and all-glorious God. We should recognise that He is not only a God of infinite goodness but also a God of justice and judgment. When His people do not fear and reverence Him, when they choose to live without Him or to live lives that contradict His laws, He will eventually act in righteous anger and bring punishment.

The fear of the LORD seems to be absent from much of the modern world. Many of us live in contexts where His Name is rarely heard except in jest or blasphemies and where His authority is denied. God is widely rejected and even those who own His Name often seem merely to pay Him lip service, rather than to follow Him wholeheartedly.

Understanding the times

As we seek to understand the times in which we live, let us remember that the Lord will come to fulfil His purposes for all humanity and for His people. God’s judgment upon the nations is certain, but let us remember that it will begin with the household of God, the Church (1 Peter 4:17).

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10). True wisdom is to know the will and mind of God and to discern the spiritual realities of life that lie behind the physical. Jesus warned that before the end times and His return, many false teachers would arise. “Watch out that you are not deceived,” He said to His disciples (Luke 21:8). How much we need true wisdom from above in order to understand the times in which we live and to distinguish truth from falsehood. Let us ask God for the gift He gave to the men of the tribe of Issachar who “understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chronicles 12:32)

“Understanding the times” is the theme of this year’s Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week, 30 October – 6 November. Resources are in this magazine and available from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director

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how barnabas is helping

Gift of seeds saves lives in drought-affected southern Madagascar

“God really responds [to] His people’s prayers in difficult time,” said Finentsoa, a Christian farmer in drought-affected southern Madagascar. Finentsoa, her husband and three children are among 6,831 poor Christian families given seeds provided by Barnabas to grow food to help them avoid famine. They are in a region where rains have fallen recently.

Families are reporting 80% yields after planting the maize, beans and pumpkin seeds, which they could not afford to buy. They now have food to eat and enough to sell for an income. Our church partners say the project has saved lives and strengthened Christians in their faith.

“This confirms that our hope in Christ is still alive and will be alive forevermore,” said a Christian mother. “It changes better our life in term of spiritual because we felt that God doesn’t let His people to be orphans so He saves them in different ways ... Because of His mercifulness we are blessed.”



Finentsoa’s crop of beans will enable her to feed her family

\$25,832

Project reference: PR1552

Nigerian survivors of jihadi attacks give thanks for prayers and aid

“We have experienced pure evil,” a Nigerian pastor told us. “The killing of women and children, the destruction of our villages with the aim of wiping us out because we are Christians. But we have also experienced love from Barnabas. Brothers and sisters who are far away continue to put us in their prayers and send food and materials to us ... what more can we ask for?”

Barnabas provided maize, beans, blankets, sleeping mats, educational materials and roofing sheets to help 22,000 Christians displaced by attacks by Islamist Fulani militants. A village leader said, “I thought these people must be angels to know what we need ... at our most dire moments. Thank you Barnabas. You have wiped the tears from our eyes.”

A church leader added, “We are so grateful for these lifesaving materials. ... we know that indeed we do have brothers and sisters who care and do not just pray, but also act by sending their support.”



Christian attack survivors carry away one of the sacks of food provided by Barnabas

\$79,184

Project reference: 39-772
(Victims of violence in Nigeria)

Disabled converts in Senegal given skills to earn living

In Muslim-majority Senegal, having a disabled child is seen as shameful, a “curse” caused by “evil spirits”. Disabled children have no opportunity to go to school or find work. They are usually sent out on the streets to beg by their families. Like others, they will be disowned by their families if they convert to Christianity.

Barnabas enabled six disabled converts to escape from begging by helping them to become self-sufficient. They received training in shoemaking and we provided them with sewing machines and equipment to start up in business.

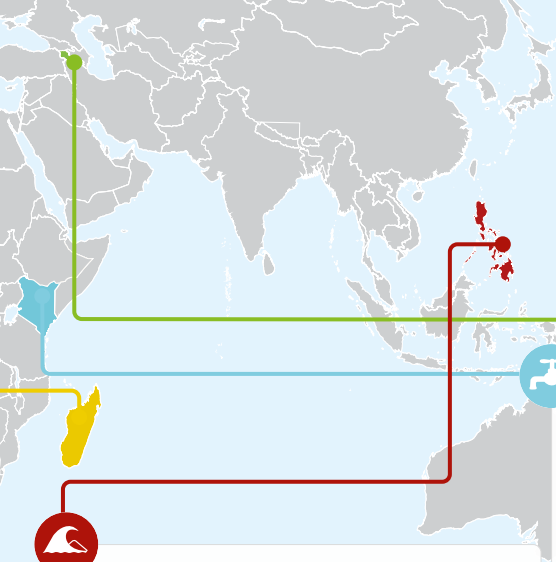
“I thank the Lord who brought me out of darkness and Barnabas who brought me out of ignorance and rehabilitated me,” said Abdoulaye, who became disabled after contracting polio as a child. “Because of Barnabas, I have become a dignified and respectable man.” Another disabled convert said, “Now I see myself as a man and not as a sub-human. I know I can be of service to society.”



Barnabas enabled Abdoulaye to start a shoemaking venture

\$6,743

Project reference: PR1562



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

Light of Christ shines after typhoon wreaks havoc in Philippines

“Even though we almost lost everything, we can still eat with your help,” said a grateful Christian family whose home was destroyed when Typhoon Rai hit the Philippines in December 2021. Barnabas provided 1,500 Christian families with ten kilos of rice and a five-gallon container of water each to meet their immediate needs in the weeks after the disaster when food and water were scarce and there was an outbreak of diarrhoea.

We also provided 50 shelter repair kits, containing timber, metal sheeting and nails, to help Christians make essential repairs. They happily shared the materials with their neighbours, so even more families benefited from the supplies.

“Through the disaster relief aid many witnessed the love and light of Christ through the good works of His followers,” said our church partners. “As a result they gave glory and praise to the Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)



Five-gallon containers of water provided by Barnabas are distributed to Christian families

\$51,375

Project reference: 42-845

Christian home for abused Kenyan girls thanks the Lord for clean water

“A miracle has happened which I sincerely attribute to God’s love through Barnabas,” said the head of Cana Girls’ Rescue Home in Kenya, which provides a safe, Christian refuge for girls fleeing sexual abuse and other dangers. He was referring to a new borehole, drilled on the home’s land with funding from Barnabas, which is producing plentiful water, solving a shortage caused by the chronic lack of rain.

The home now has piped water for showers and toilets, and water for its new kitchen garden, providing fresh fruit and vegetables for the 47 girls in its care. “With this reliable source of clean water, we expect improved hygiene in Cana, minimal water-borne diseases and elimination of water bills,” he explained.

The borehole is also providing the home with an income from the sale of surplus water to the local community at a reasonable price. Money generated will help to maintain the borehole and home.



The rescue home now has a bountiful supply of water, thanks to Barnabas

\$33,516 for borehole, two 10,000-litre water tanks, solar panels

Project reference: 25-663

Suffering Armenian Christians given help to start small businesses

Armenian Christian families who have suffered as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have been given the means to become self-sufficient through small farming ventures.

More than 60 families were each given five beehives to enable them to generate an income from the sale of honey. Another 164 families have each received two pigs (one male, one female), while 128 families have been given three sheep each.

All the recipient families have struggled to meet their daily needs since Azerbaijan’s invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian Christian enclave within the Muslim-majority Republic of Azerbaijan, in September 2020. The conflict ended in November 2020 with Azerbaijan having taken significant territories that had formerly belonged to Armenian communities.

“I am very grateful to those who help us,” said Irina, an Armenian Christian. “I would never have been able to buy beehives.” Now Irina can sell honey as a way of supporting her family.



355 Christian families have been supplied with pigs, sheep or beehives

\$189,113 for beehives, pigs, sheep and transport costs

Project reference: PR1576 (Livelihoods in Nagorno-Karabakh)



Understanding the times

SUFFERING CHURCH ACTION
AND AWARENESS WEEK

SUNDAY 30 OCTOBER – SUNDAY 6 NOVEMBER

“Do not be afraid,” Moses told the Israelites as he led them out of slavery in Egypt. “Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today” (Exodus 14:13). Around 1,500 years later and the words of Moses were echoed by our Saviour Jesus Christ in His powerful promise, “Stand firm, and you will win life” (Luke 21:19).

These words bring huge comfort and hope to our poor and persecuted brothers and sisters whose suffering has increased immeasurably because of the conflict, famine and disease that are escalating around the world. Because of their faith, many Christians are marginalised, discriminated against, attacked or even killed. Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week (SCAAW) is an opportunity for us to stand alongside our suffering Church family, to make known their situation and demonstrate Christ’s love to them in prayer and practical action.

With this special SCAAW magazine there is a range of inspirational material for you, your prayer group and your church to raise awareness during SCAAW of the plight of Christians suffering for the Name of Jesus. We have suggested making SCAAW run from 30 October to 6 November, but these resources can be used at any time that suits your church’s calendar.

Here is a guide to what resources are available within this magazine, online at barnabasaid.org/scaaw or to be ordered from your local Barnabas office (details on inside front cover). All are available free of charge in the quantities you need. You can also request extra copies of this magazine.

Persecution explained

Suffering Church – An overview of the increasing suffering endured by Christians because of war, disaster, famine, disease and persecution. Turn to p8 or download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

SCAAW overview video – To encourage your church or group to get involved. Available at barnabasaid.org/scaaw

Praying for the Persecuted Church – Booklet covering 39 countries where Christians experience discrimination, harassment or violence. Download at barnabasaid.org/scaaw or printed copies available from your local Barnabas office.

For your Bible study group, prayer group or personal devotions

Small group Bible study – A thought-provoking Bible study on Luke 21:5-32. Turn to p18 or download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

Eight-day Devotional Booklet – To help you each day of SCAAW to focus on understanding the times and the suffering of our Church family. Included with this magazine or from barnabasaid.org/scaaw or from your local Barnabas office.

Prayer diary – *Barnabas Prayer* will inform and inspire your prayers each day. Included with this magazine or download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

SCAAW 2022 prayer – A special new prayer for our persecuted Church family. Turn to p20 or download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

SCAAW prayer bookmark – To encourage you when reading or to carry with you to inspire you. Included in this magazine and available free of charge from your local Barnabas office.

For your church service or other meeting

Sermon Outline – Notes for a sermon on the theme: Understanding the Times (Luke 21:5-32). Turn to p16 or download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

PowerPoint Sermon Outline – Main points of the sermon outline, to show at your SCAAW theme service or group meeting. Download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

New hymn for SCAAW 2022 – *“I will never let go of my Jesus”*. Turn to p15 or download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

Special recording of our SCAAW hymn, *“I will never let go of my Jesus”* – with images and words, which can be played before, during or after your SCAAW church service. Available at barnabasaid.org/scaaw

Six suggested songs and hymns for SCAAW – Lift your voice in praise of our almighty Lord in uncertain times. Turn to p20.

Activities for young people – Social media and Three of a Kind challenge for children and young people. Turn to p19.

Getting involved with SCAAW – More ideas for your SCAAW service, event or meeting. Turn to p20.

SCAAW event poster – Turn to p7 for an A4 size poster to publicise your SCAAW event or meeting. An A3 size poster is available on request from your local Barnabas office and to download at barnabasaid.org/scaaw



Suffering Church Action
and Awareness Week

Understanding the Times

“By your endurance you
will gain your souls”

What we're doing for Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week

What



When



Where



barnabasaid.org/scaaw



barnabasaid
hope and aid for suffering Christians



War, Disaster, Famine, Disease, Persecution:

The suffering Church around the world



Impoverished believers in Bangladesh, given food and water aid funded by Barnabas, offer prayers and worship to the Lord God



Barnabas Aid has distributed food and other essentials to displaced believers in several regions of Myanmar

In chapter 21 of Luke's Gospel we read of the Lord Jesus Christ warning His disciples of the events that will take place before the end comes: wars, famines, diseases and disasters (Luke 21:9-11). Each of these is taking place before our very eyes, causing great suffering to the Church and the world as a whole.

The Lord also warns of persecution, in which Christians will face imprisonment, betrayal and death (Luke 21:12,16-17). This prophecy is being fulfilled today, as it has been in every age since it was given.

Here we use these five categories – war, disaster, famine, disease and persecution – to give an overview of how the Church across the Earth is suffering. Sometimes the Church suffers with the world; sometimes the Church suffers from the world. Whatever the case, our brothers and sisters desperately need your continued, prayerful support.

WAR

At the time of writing, the Global Conflict Tracker managed by the Council on Foreign Relations lists 26 wars, armed conflicts or areas of instability across the world. By some definitions the total could be more than twice as high as this.

War is an area in which Christians share in the general suffering of all humanity. In **Ukraine** many believers are among the civilian dead and wounded, the more than five million who have sought refuge overseas, and the approximately seven million displaced from their homes in Ukraine itself. The conflict is also having a disastrous effect on food supplies around the world (see *Famine*, below).

The tiny Christian population of **Yemen** is caught in one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters as armed struggle between Houthis rebel forces and Saudi-backed pro-government forces continues to destabilise the country. Similarly, armed conflict between pro- and anti-government forces in **Ethiopia** has, according to figures from Ghent University, killed 50-100,000 people, many of them Christians.

In the ongoing **Myanmar** conflict, which has worsened since the military coup of February 2021, ethnic-minority Christians are deliberately targeted. The Buddhist-nationalist military (Tatmadaw) – infamous for their brutal and murderous treatment of Rohingya Muslims – has attacked Christian communities in Chin, Kachin, Karen and Kayah states for many years, killing and injuring untold thousands.

In late 2021 and early 2022, for example, repeated attacks on the town of Thantlang, Chin State, displaced 10,000 people and destroyed or damaged at least six church buildings. Pastor Cung Biak Hum was shot and killed as he tried to put out a fire. Soldiers then hacked off his finger and stole his wedding ring.

Thousands of believers are in IDP (internally displaced persons) camps, but even these are not safe. In January 2022 a seven-year-old girl was killed in a strike on an IDP camp. Adults are now teaching

young children to dig makeshift bomb shelters. Some seek refuge in the jungle, others have fled into India or Thailand. Return home is often impossible as the Tatmadaw lay mines around abandoned villages.

The aggression of **Azerbaijan** – supported politically and militarily by **Turkey** – towards the Armenian Christian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in late 2020 brought back memories of the Armenian Genocide a century ago.

In the beleaguered **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**, a rebel force known as M23 has renewed fighting with the DRC army in the north-eastern province of North Kivu. The DRC alleges that **Rwanda** is supporting the rebel movement. Christians in north-eastern DRC are already suffering an Islamist insurgency. Armed Islamist groups are the driving force behind armed conflict in much of sub-Saharan Africa (see *Persecution*, below).

Christians have suffered immensely in **Afghanistan**, the result of Western foreign policy choices and Islamist terror (see *Persecution*, below). Today they share in the desperate poverty of Afghanistan that has led to people making the awful decision to sell organs or even their own children.

In the South China Sea, **China** is increasing the number of military flights into Taiwan's air defence zone. **China** claims the island of Taiwan as part of its own territory. In several statements **United States** President Joe Biden has said that the US will act to defend Taiwan. The consequences of a US-China war are unthinkable: not only fighting across the face of the Earth, including the possibility of nuclear or chemical warfare, but famine, disease and poverty – and throughout the global Church, division, suspicion and hostility among the brothers and sisters of Christ.

This prophecy is being fulfilled today, as it has been in every age since it was given

DISASTER

Natural disasters are deadly in and of themselves, but can also create further health problems and economic shocks that continue for years after the event.

In August 2021 a 7.2 magnitude earthquake killed more than 2,000 and destroyed 37,000 homes in **Haiti**. Two days later a tropical storm wreaked further havoc. Many church buildings lay in ruins, a disaster in itself for a nation where the churches are vital centres of local communities.

In December 2021 Typhoon Rai swept across the **Philippines**, damaging 1.4 million homes including 400,000 destroyed, the country described "as if bombed worse than World War Two". A 6.2 magnitude earthquake along with a tsunami devastated **Tonga** in January 2022. Crops were destroyed, and water polluted, affecting more than 80% of the population.

The following month Cyclone Batsirai battered south-eastern **Madagascar**, the second cyclone to hit the country in two weeks. At least 111 people died, mainly drowned or crushed when their houses collapsed. Already underdeveloped, much of the

country's infrastructure was wrecked, with schools, hospitals and at least 6,000 homes destroyed. "Cyclone Batsirai has gone," said a church leader, "leaving Madagascar with disasters."

The situation in **Lebanon** is similar, though the catastrophe here was a man-made accident rather than a natural disaster. In August 2020 a massive explosion at the Port of Beirut killed at least 218 people and injured around 7,000 others, as well as causing US\$15 billion in damage. The exact cause of the explosion is unknown, but somehow around 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate stored in a warehouse was ignited, causing a devastating blast which demolished thousands of homes, completely destroyed three hospitals, and damaged homes as far as six miles (ten kilometres) away. Several Christian neighbourhoods near to the port were severely affected.

Covid-19 had already devastated the Lebanese economy, with Christians among those suffering from low wages, inflation and unemployment. Many were struggling to pay for rent, medicine or food – those struggles have increased. More than two years on, Lebanon has yet to recover.

FAMINE

The present global food crisis is shaping up to be one of the worst disasters ever to face humanity. Around a billion people are without sufficient food to maintain their health and physical wellbeing. Of that billion, the World Food Programme (WFP) says that 49 million are already facing famine – already nearing the point of death.

The conflict in Eastern Europe has exacerbated a situation that was already on its way to becoming a worldwide catastrophe. Russia exports more wheat than any other country in the world, while Ukraine is also one of the world's largest exporters. Together the two countries export on average 59 million tonnes of wheat, estimated at between 23% and 33% of the global total. The two countries are also leading exporters of other grains, seeds and vegetable oils, as well as much-needed fertilisers. Planting and harvesting has been severely disrupted. A deal has been struck to allow wheat to be exported from Ukraine by sea, but distribution of wheat and grain will likely continue to face disruption.

Extreme weather events – drought or floods, cyclones, plagues of locusts – have also crippled agriculture in many parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The shock to the global economy caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has driven up the price of food, fertiliser and transport. Falling wages and soaring interest is leading to food poverty, even for some in the Western world.

The WFP has said that 20 million people are at risk of malnutrition in the Horn of Africa and neighbouring East African countries, where persistent drought has led to crop failure and the death of livestock. Northern **Kenya** has experienced the failure of four rainy seasons

in a row – its worst drought in 40 years. Other badly affected countries in this region include **Djibouti**, **Ethiopia** and **Sudan**, while **Somalia** is the land most affected by hunger and malnutrition according to the Global Hunger Index (GHI).

Just across the Red Sea, environmental disasters have combined with the ongoing civil war to leave thousands at risk of malnutrition in **Yemen** – second in the GHI's list of the worst affected. Drought and other environmental disasters have also hit countries in southern Africa, including **Madagascar**, **Mozambique** and **Zimbabwe**.

Hunger is not discriminatory – it affects people of all religions, creeds and beliefs. Yet in many parts of the world, Christians suffer extra deprivation because of their faith in Jesus. Already

among the most impoverished and vulnerable to disaster, they are often pushed to the bottom of the list when it comes to receiving aid, or excluded altogether.

A family of starving Christian converts in **Sri Lanka** were deliberately given food contaminated with rat droppings. A desperately hungry pastor in **India** was denied food aid, the authorities telling him to pray to Jesus if he wanted something to eat. Displaced Chin Christians in **Myanmar** have been left out of plans made by that country's military government to distribute internationally funded aid.

Not only is food insecurity caused by economic downturns, diseases and conflict, it can also lead to further economic downturns, diseases and conflict – a ratchet effect that we are already seeing across the Global South. Humanly speaking, this crisis will get worse before it gets better.

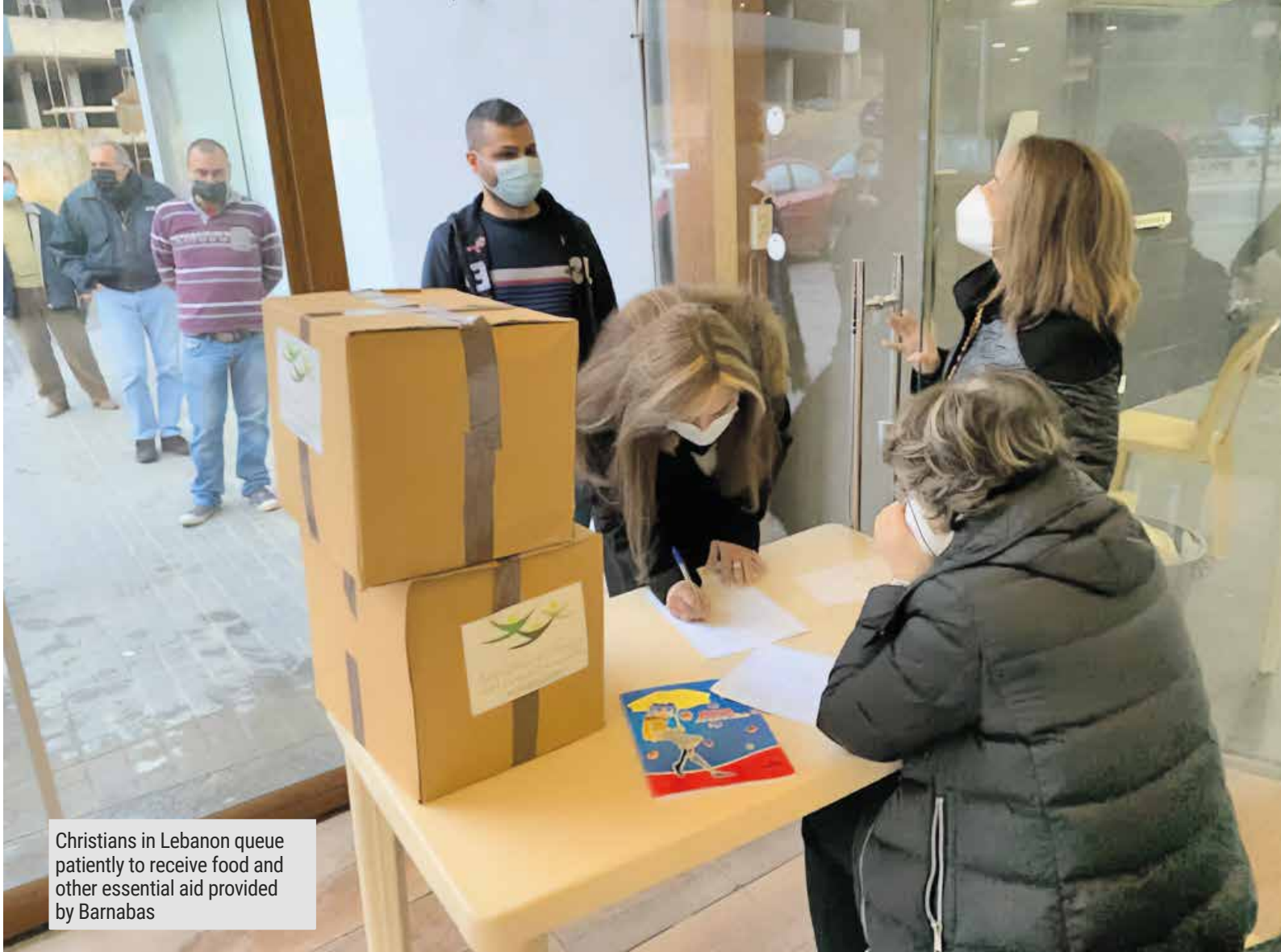
DISEASE

Disease is another ever-present danger that faces humanity, including the Church. The Covid-19 pandemic – to take only the most obvious example – has led to millions of deaths, and millions more being hospitalised. The psychological and financial impact of lockdowns and other restrictions remains incalculable. The virus is still present – at the time of writing the number of cases globally is rising, not falling.

The Church in **India** has suffered the loss of more than 2,000 pastors and Christian leaders to Covid-19. To compound the grief of their family and friends, many churches and ministries were left leaderless. Some have been forced to close. Christians in **Nepal** suffered a similar desperate situation.

Like famine, disease does not discriminate on the basis of religion. Yet statistically Christians are likely to be among the poorest in society, and therefore the least able to pay for medical care, medicines or treatments. This is the case in India, **Indonesia**, **Myanmar** and **Sri Lanka**, to give just four examples of where Barnabas Aid has funded Covid-related medical projects. Medicines were provided to believers in **Kyrgyzstan** and **Turkmenistan**, and oxygen

The present global food crisis is shaping up to be one of the worst disasters ever to face humanity



Christians in Lebanon queue patiently to receive food and other essential aid provided by Barnabas



Selling cactus leaves in Androy, Madagascar. In their desperate hunger, people buy and eat the slightly poisonous leaves because there is nothing else



Barnabas Aid has funded Covid-related medical projects in India



Practical supplies funded by Barnabas Aid are distributed to victims of jihadi violence in Plateau State, Nigeria



One of the Afghan Christian families who fled into a neighbouring country, now helped by Barnabas Aid to re-settle in a safe location

concentrators in **Uzbekistan**. Through our medical gives initiative we have also transported 50 million pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE) to Christian hospitals in **Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia** and **Zimbabwe**.

Impoverished Christians earning their living by casual labour were also among those to suffer most from lockdowns and other restrictions on activity. Barnabas funded programmes to help Christians affected by the pandemic in more than 40 countries, including **Albania, Angola, Armenia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, D.R. Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Georgia, Guyana**, India, Indonesia, Kenya, **Lebanon, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique**, Myanmar, **Namibia**, Nepal, **Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa**, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, as well as countries in Central Asia.

China's introduction of restrictions on online religious content has created severe difficulties for churches unable to hold in-person services owing to the virus, as many are no longer able to use livestreaming as an alternative.

In secretive **North Korea**, the unwillingness of the government to admit the scale of the problem and the lack of medicines and other treatments are transforming a difficult situation into a catastrophe. In June 2022 the communist authorities also admitted the existence of another widespread illness, an intestinal problem thought by international health experts to be typhoid or cholera. Here there are no churches able to provide or to seek help.

Statistically, Africa has fared better than other regions of the world in terms of known Covid infections and fatalities. Nevertheless, there have been a quarter of a million Covid deaths reported across Africa – and this figure may not give the full total. In early 2022 Barnabas Aid contacts at a Christian hospital in **Uganda** told us that at one point every doctor on staff was infected with the virus simultaneously.

Furthermore, there are many other infectious diseases – malaria and tuberculosis to name just two – that have killed many and in turn held back the development of sub-Saharan Africa. Diseases associated with malnutrition are also likely to increase across the Global South. The increasing urbanisation and connectedness of our globalised world increases the risk of further epidemics or pandemics in the years ahead.

PERSECUTION

Christians remain the most persecuted people in the world, owing to their commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Persecution comes from many sources: governments and authorities, terrorists and religious extremists, communities and neighbours, even family and friends. It is meted out by different ideologies and belief systems: Islamism, communism, religious nationalism, and increasingly secular humanism.

Islamism is a cause of anti-Christian persecution in many countries. Since the Western withdrawal and Taliban takeover of **Afghanistan** in August 2021, the country – never safe – has reverted to being one of the most dangerous in the world for our brothers and sisters.

The estimated 5,000 to 8,000 Christians in Afghanistan were all converts from Islam or the young children of converts – as such they faced the death penalty for apostasy. Many fled into neighbouring countries, but these Muslim-majority lands are themselves dangerous for Muslim-background believers. The Taliban are reported to have gone door to door searching for Christians. Converts are also at risk of violence and death at the hands of their own families; this risk has increased since the Taliban takeover.

Iran is another repressive Muslim-majority land. The constitution recognises Christianity as the religion of historic Assyrian and Armenian minorities, and these are permitted to worship in their own languages. However, worship in Farsi (Persian), the national language, is forbidden and Farsi-language churches are closed down. Farsi-speaking Christians, being converts from Islam, are the main target of persecution. In separate incidents in 2022 two Tehran-based Armenian-Iranian pastors received ten-year prison sentences for running illegal Farsi-language “house churches”.

Saudi Arabia has taken some steps towards liberalisation in the past couple of years, but all religions other than Sunni

Islam remain illegal, conversion from Islam can still be punished with death, and Saudi Christians are compelled to be secret believers. Conversion from Islam is also a crime in Iran, the **Maldives, Mauritania**, and **Somaliland** – though no known executions have taken place in Saudi Arabia or any of these countries in recent years except Iran. Promotion of any religion other than Islam is illegal in **Somalia** and **Comoros**, and evangelising a Muslim can result in a five-year prison sentence in **Algeria**.

In **Azerbaijan** June 2021 amendments to both the Religion Law and the Administrative Code of Azerbaijan barred churches from appointing leaders without state approval. Restrictions on churches are a feature of life in the Central Asian states of **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan** and **Uzbekistan**.

Believers in **Pakistan** face direct persecution more from Muslim extremists within society than from government. This most notably includes false accusations of “blasphemy”, often made as a means of settling personal grudges. Angry mobs can easily be persuaded to attack Christians and other non-Muslims, even on the basis of highly spurious allegations. Christian and Hindu girls and young women are often kidnapped, forcibly converted and forcibly married to Muslim men. Police and courts are usually reluctant to act. Christians are generally treated as second-class citizens, with many consigned to dirty, low-status jobs.

Christians remain the most persecuted people in the world

Similarly, in **Egypt**, where the government is now much more supportive of the rights of Christians, opposition to the Church from extremists within society continues. In April 2022 a church minister in Alexandria was stabbed to death by a Muslim, a former member of an Islamist terrorist group. In June a Christian in Sohag was hacked to death by a Muslim man known to have Islamist views.

In June 2022 the world's attention was drawn to an attack on a church service in Owo, Ondo State, southern **Nigeria**, in which 40 worshippers were shot and killed. Yet while anti-Christian violence is rare in the south, in northern and Middle Belt Nigeria such violence at the hands of Fulani Islamist extremists, Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province remains a sad fact of life. As many as 10,000 Christians have lost their lives to jihadists since 2015. Christians are also often targeted by Islamist groups for abduction.

While community violence against Christians in Nigeria is comparatively rare, in May 2022 Deborah Samuel, a Christian student, was beaten and stoned to death by a mob of Muslims after being accused of blasphemy against Muhammad, the prophet of Islam.

Terrorist groups affiliated to IS and al-Qaeda also operate in the Western Sahel states of **Burkina Faso**, **Mali** and **Niger**, as well as northern **Cameroon**. The situation is likely to worsen owing to the ongoing French withdrawal from Mali and general instability of the region.

In **Kenya** Christians are targeted by the **Somalia**-based al-Shabaab. Islamist group the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) are active in the **DRC**. In April and May 2022 at least 36 people were killed in attacks on mainly Christian north-east DRC. A church leader in neighbouring Uganda, where many Congolese were forced to flee, described ADF as "mercilessly killing Christians".

Northern **Mozambique** has earned the title "land of fear" after brutal Islamist violence. At least 2,658 people were killed between 2017 and 2021, and in the first quarter of 2022 at least 24,000 people were displaced by ongoing conflict.

Islamist terrorism remains a threat to Christians in the Middle East and North Africa, including in **Libya**, **Iraq** and **Syria**. Christians in Syria and Iraqi Kurdistan face the additional threat of military strikes by **Turkey**, purportedly part of an anti-terrorist campaign but seemingly targeting Christians along with Kurdish and Yazidi minorities.

In the twentieth century communism was responsible for most anti-Christian persecution, especially in the form of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Opposition to the Church persists in today's **China**.

China's Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel, which came into effect in May 2021, require that pastors and church ministers in the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (China's official Protestant church) to be those who "love the motherland, support the leadership of the Communist Party of China, support

the socialist system, [and] practise the core values of socialism". Further regulations require churches and individuals to obtain permission before posting religious content online, while believers have spoken of greater difficulty in finding Bibles and Christian resources in shops or through online retailers.

North Korea is perhaps the most dangerous place on earth to be a Christian. Tens of thousands of believers have been starved, tortured and worked to death, often for "crimes" as simple as meeting for worship, praying, or owning a Bible. The harshest and most inhumane punishments in prison camps are often reserved for Christians.

Persecution also takes place in communist **Vietnam** and **Laos**. Church leaders in Vietnam say that they face difficulties in registering to conduct religious activities, while ethnic-minority Christians – more than half of Vietnamese believers – face systematic discrimination. Churches in Laos also find it difficult to register owing to the suspicion of local officials, despite tolerance from central government. Christians in these countries usually face oppression more from their neighbours and local authorities than from central government, but central government is often unwilling to help.

Eritrea is a highly authoritarian, one-party state, governed by the communist People's Front for Democracy and Justice. There are estimated

to be around 160 Christians imprisoned for their faith. Jailed believers report being beaten, denied food and water, and blocked from receiving medical attention. They may be in prison for many years without being

tried or even charged. In the first half of 2021 more than 100 Christians were released, but by the end of that year at least 15 had been re-arrested.

Buddhist nationalism is the cause of anti-Christian persecution in **Myanmar** (see *Conflict*, above), as well as in **Sri Lanka**. Religious nationalism in the form of Hindutva is also the main source of anti-Christian persecution in **India**. Extremists often attack and denounce Christians and Muslims for fear that they pose a threat to India's own religious identity.

Eleven Indian states have anti-conversion laws that prohibit seeking converts through force, fraud or allurements. Ten of these are permanent, while one – Karnataka – is a temporary ordinance that, at the time of writing, has yet to become a permanent measure. There are two major issues with such laws: firstly, that all evangelism or sharing of Christian testimony may be criminalised; secondly, that such laws encourage extremists within Indian society.

The Church in the West does not in general experience persecution, though opposition from the dominant ideology of secular humanism could yet turn into fully fledged persecution. Christians need to be spiritually ready for the suffering and opposition that may appear in years to come, looking to our suffering brothers and sisters around the world for encouragement. ■

Christians need to be spiritually ready for the suffering

I will never let go of my Jesus

“Sir, don’t you understand that when you kill me you send me to glory? You cannot threaten me with glory.”

These words were spoken in 1977 by Romanian pastor Josef Tson to a secret police officer who was threatening to shoot and kill him. (Quoted in Jeff Robinson, “Romanian Josef Tson recounts God’s grace amid suffering”, *Baptist Press*, 19 July 2004)

Words: Caroline Kerslake | Tune: Red River Valley | Arranged by: Noel Frost

Piano

Pn.

I will ne - ver let go of my Je - sus. Through His blood I am ho - ly and free.

If you kill me you send me to glo - ry Where my Je - sus is wait - ing for me.

1. I will never let go of my Jesus.
Through His blood I am holy and free.
If you kill me you send me to glory
Where my Jesus is waiting for me.
2. It began in the Garden of Eden
With a serpent, a fruit and a Fall,
Bringing hatred and heartache and fighting
Ever since, everywhere, for us all.
3. I will never let go of my Jesus.
He is love, He is joy, He is peace.
If you kill me you send me to glory
Where all sorrow and suffering cease.
4. So my love for the Lord shall not waver,
Nor my faith or discernment grow dim.
It is only a little while longer.
With His help, I will stand firm for Him.
5. I will never let go of my Jesus.
He is coming to set all things right.
If you kill me you send me to glory
Where I'll walk not by faith but by sight.

Understanding the Times

Luke 21:5-32

This sermon outline can be used at a Suffering Church service or meeting. It can be read out as it stands (you may want to omit the Bible references in brackets). You could add some illustrations of your own or take some from the information on pages 8-14. You might also find helpful material in the small group Bible study on page 18 or the eight-day devotional booklet. Alternatively, the outline can be used as a framework for your own ideas and applications. A PowerPoint to accompany the sermon can be downloaded from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

1. Introduction

We live in times of great turbulence and extremes. Violence and war, escalating inflation bringing suffering to those who were comfortable and misery to those who were already poor. We see destructive and dangerous weather extremes. A deadly pandemic has raged across the planet. Warmongering political leaders seem to have taken the stage, their tempers frayed, spoiling for a fight, stoking the fires of conflict. Resurgent hunger threatens billions of people.

How should we, as followers of Christ, understand what is happening in our time? Can we view current events from an eternal perspective?

In our Bible reading today, Jesus spoke of tumultuous times to come and warned His followers of two perils: (1) false teachers preaching false hope, and (2) giving way to fear at the thought of what was to come (verses 8-9). Jesus did not want His followers to succumb either to false hope or to faithless despair.

It may be that we are entering a time of great testing. If so, we must not cling to false hope that everything will be easy for us. God had strong words of condemnation for the Old Testament prophets who said "Peace, peace" when there was no peace, when in fact God was about to bring judgment (Jeremiah 6:14; Ezekiel 13:10).

Jesus offers us comfort – we can gain our souls – but first we must endure and stand firm. We must beware of teaching that everything will be easy for Christians while the rest of the world suffers. This is not what Jesus said.

Although the future will be difficult we must not be afraid. Jesus told His disciples not to be terrified by the terrifying things that were to come. Paralysing fear and faithless despair are as unchristian as the mindless determination not to believe that anything really bad could possibly happen to us.

If the Church is to be winnowed and refined by suffering, we must be those who stand firm to the end, not those who give up the faith. Serious mature discipleship is needed. It is no time for complacency. We must pray humbly for discernment and wisdom to

recognise the truth amidst all the attractive lies that are being peddled, including those who present themselves as Christian teachers.

2. Calamities in a broken world

The Fall – Adam and Eve's first sin in the Garden of Eden – changed everything. God's perfect creation was broken. Pain and burdensome toil entered into the world, as the LORD God responded. The effects of this ripple out into every area of our lives today, and Satan rejoices in creating havoc and misery. But it will not be like this for ever. Even before He cursed the ground, God put in place a solution, a salvation plan – the Lord Jesus Christ, who would crush Satan (Genesis 3:15). It could be said that Christianity began in the Garden of Eden.

The promised crushing of Satan occurred on the cross, and Satan is now in his death throes. But he is still able to wreck and destroy. The ultimate reason that some societies are very poor or corrupt; their people wretched, sick and hungry; nations warring; the planet racked by earthquakes, floods and storms, is the Fall. As our Bible passage has shown, these things will get worse. But the unfolding of history is leading to Christ's return. Salvation is taking us back to Eden, taking us back to what we were meant to be.

"Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom," Jesus warned His disciples (verse 10). Nationalism is one of major causes of disharmony and violence in the world. But, as the Apostle Paul wrote, we Christians are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20). Our primary loyalty is not to any earthly realm but to Jesus our King and to His Kingdom. Our first love must be Christ and His Body, i.e. His people.

3. Living as citizens of heaven

If Christianity transcends nation, race, ethnicity, class and caste what are our responsibilities to the earthly nation of which we are citizens? Of course, we must be good citizens of our own countries, for example by praying for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2) and paying our taxes (Matthew 17:27, 22:17-21). We should obey all laws that do not conflict with God's commands (1 Peter 2:12; 4:15) although there may be times when we must disobey human orders

in order to obey God. Shortly before the birth of Moses in Egypt, Pharaoh commanded two midwives to kill any baby boys that they delivered for Hebrew mothers, but the godfearing midwives disobeyed Pharaoh (Exodus 1:15-21).

We can be a channel of God's blessing in our communities through our prayers and our loving care for others. We can be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16) by making known the Gospel and by living godly lives, even if this is counter-cultural. For example, we could embrace a simple lifestyle, return the change if we are given too much in a shop, and refuse to fiddle our expenses at work. A Barnabas supporter in Northern Ireland, who worked as a cleaner for a non-Christian employer, would hand back part of her wages if she finished her work early.

Some of us may feel a call from God to work to right some of the wrongs, injustices and evils in our world today, as, for example, our Christian forebears campaigned for the abolition of slavery. Given that we are in the world but not of it, how far do we go in cooperating with non-Christians to accomplish such goals? How far do we go in engagement with the essential but somewhat murky world of politics? Wise words came from the British politician Sir Stafford Cripps (1889-1952) who said that the Church should not be in politics but urged that there should be more Christians in politics and more Christianity in politicians. Each of us must prayerfully seek our own answer from the Lord about our own involvement.

Some of these choices and activities may open us to ridicule or worse. But let us take comfort from Jesus' words:

*Blessed are those who are persecuted
because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
(Matthew 5:10)

We must make sure, however, that we are not persecuted for anything except for our Christ-like behaviour and for bearing the Name of Christ (verse 12). His Name means His power, authority and uniqueness as Son of God and Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14). We are identified with Him and we speak for Him in the world. As an old hymn says,

*Now I belong to Jesus,
Jesus belongs to me,
Not for the years of time alone,
But for eternity.¹*

A time is coming when we, who belong to Jesus, shall be hated by everyone (verse 17).

4. God will keep us

In the midst of such dangers, Jesus gives us a precious promise: "Not a hair of your head will perish" (verse 18). It must have reminded His listening disciples of an

earlier time when He had reassured them that the very hairs of their head were all numbered by God, so they should not be afraid in times of persecution (Luke 12:6-7). In the care of providence, absolutely nothing happens to us without God's will.

But moments earlier (verse 16) Jesus had said that some of the disciples would be put to death. Is He contradicting Himself? Of course not. His promise of preservation is about our souls, not our earthly bodies, which will be replaced by resurrection bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35-56).

In understanding times of persecution, we must realise that it is our eternal souls which are important, not our temporary bodies. "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul," Jesus tells us (Matthew 10:28).

Viewed from this eternal perspective, the need to seek justice, freedom and equality for ourselves as Christians on earth takes a back seat. These things are good in themselves, but they are not priorities. If wrongs are not righted on earth, they will be righted in heaven.

Many people strive to prolong their physical lives to the utmost. Some wealthy individuals have had their bodies frozen after death in the hope that future scientists will find a way to revive them. But with a proper spiritual understanding of the times, we can resist the desire to preserve our bodies and we can embrace the purposes of God who will keep us for all eternity.

5. Let us stand firm to the end

Verse 19 is very short but tells us a vital truth: if we stand firm we shall gain our souls. "Standing firm" is the Greek word *hupomone* (pronounced hoo-POM-uh-nay). It means to endure difficulties. It is the perseverance produced when we suffer (Romans 5:3), when our faith is tested (James 1:3) or as we strive to keep on living a godly life in a corrupt and immoral world (2 Peter 1:6). With *hupomone* we can be like the Apostle Paul who did not lose heart despite his many afflictions and troubles (2 Corinthians 4:16).

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus describes a future time of persecution when Christians are falling away from the faith and betraying one another; false prophets are leading people astray, wickedness is increasing and many who used to love the Lord no longer do so.

The times in which we live have many similarities to what Jesus described. But, Jesus said, "the one who stands firm [*hupomone*] to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:13-14).

Let us ask Him to give us discernment to understand our times, that we may not be deceived by false teaching, and perseverance to enable us to stand firm to the end.

Standing firm in challenging times

This study follows the same Bible passage as the sermon outline (pages 16-17). It can be used before or after hearing the sermon. If it is used without the sermon, it may be useful for the group leader to read through the sermon outline beforehand. You may also like to read the SCAAW 2022 eight-day devotional booklet, which is enclosed with this magazine and can be ordered from barnabasaid.org/scaaw or contact your nearest Barnabas Aid office (details inside front cover).

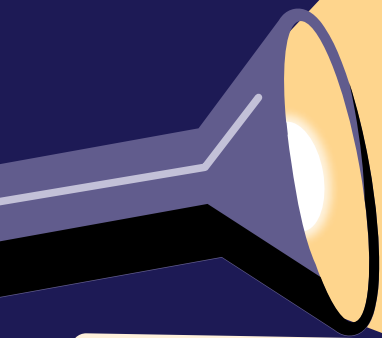
The section headed “Digging Deeper” is for those who would like to explore the theme in more depth.



1. What “signs of the times” mentioned in the passage do you notice in the world today?
2. Consider the opposite tendencies of faithless despair and mindless determination not to believe anything bad could happen to us. When have you leant too far in either direction? How have you sought to counter this tendency?
3. We are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20). What does that mean to you? As someone whose real home is in heaven, while nation rises up against nation (v.10), what should be our response?
4. Have there been times when trying to be a good citizen of your own nation has brought you into conflict with your primary citizenship, belonging to God’s kingdom? How have you resolved/can we resolve such dilemmas?
5. What counter-cultural actions have you or other Christians taken to be salt and light in a crooked generation (Philippians 2:14)?
6. The British politician Sir Stafford Cripps (1889-1952) said that the Church should not be in politics but urged that there should be more Christians in politics and more Christianity in politicians. What do you understand by this view? How far should Christians be engaged in politics?
7. Are there times when Christians have to disobey the law, obeying God rather than human laws? Share occasions when you have done so, or felt challenged to do so.
8. How do you imagine the disciples felt being told that some of them would be put to death (verse 16)?
9. “Everyone will hate you because of me” (verse 17). How can we ensure that any opposition or persecution we encounter is because of our faith in Jesus and not the result of any fault in us?
10. “Not a hair of your head will perish” (verse 18). How do you think the disciples felt on hearing this? How does realising that your soul is secure change your perspective of life?
11. What important issues or causes must nevertheless be secondary to our focus on eternity? At what point should we accept injustice for ourselves for the sake of God’s Kingdom? At what point should we accept injustice for others for the sake of God’s Kingdom?
12. How can we learn to endure and stand firm (*hupomone*) (v.19) in all of life’s trials and not to give up?
13. How can we show steadfastness by striving to live a godly life in a corrupt and immoral world (2 Peter 1:6)?

Digging deeper

14. What other verses or passages from Scripture have helped you to a more balanced and accurate picture of suffering, where the opposite extremes of despair and overconfidence are confronted and defused?
15. What are the characteristics of false teachers? What do we need to guard against most? (Matthew 7:15-16; Ephesians 4:14; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 6:3-5; 2 Peter 2:1-3; Jude v.4)
16. “But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves” (verse 14). What causes us anxiety and worry about what will happen if or when we are persecuted, and how can we learn to trust God in these difficult situations, so that we do not worry?
17. “At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (verse 27). What images of God’s glory from Scripture do you find the most inspiring? What do we learn from each instance of His glory being manifest? (For example, Exodus 24:15-16; Isaiah 6:3; Ezekiel 1:26-28; Matthew 17:5; John 1:14; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Revelation 21:11)



Uncertain times ... but we can all play a part

We live in uncertain times. Many are suffering, including Christians, from the harsh effects of war and hunger. Covid has still not gone away. Young people have had their world turned upside down by having to leave their homes. Perhaps you know people your age, at school or college or in your neighbourhood, who are having to face living in a strange country. But God has a plan in these uncertain times and He can use us, whatever age, to bring about His purposes for good. Take time to look into Barnabas' social media and enjoy pitting your wits against the "Three of a Kind" puzzle. Be inspired to learn how God has plans for us even in difficult times, and we can be a part of them.

Three of a kind

Can you find the **third** of each set of three? Use the clue provided to find the missing number three. The number of letters needed is in brackets.

First two	Clue	Number three
Example: Paul, Silas,	<i>apostles</i>	Barnabas (8)
1. Mary, Lazarus,	<i>siblings</i>	(6)
2. Faith, Love,	<i>good things that go together</i>	(4)
3. Peter, John,	<i>disciples</i>	(5)
4. Matthew, Mark,	<i>Gospel writers</i>	(4)
5. Wise Men, Angels,	<i>present at Bethlehem</i>	(9)
6. Meshach, Abednego,	<i>tested by fire</i>	(8)
7. Babylon, Rome,	<i>places of imprisonment</i>	(5)
8. Smyrna, Philadelphia,	<i>churches in Revelation</i>	(8)
9. Afghanistan, Nepal,	<i>countries in South Asia</i>	(8)
10. Joseph, Reuben,	<i>sons of Jacob</i>	(8)
11. Frankincense, Myrrh,	<i>gifts</i>	(4)
12. Galatians, Colossians,	<i>letters</i>	(9)



Raise awareness through social media ... and food.gives
Sharing with your family and friends on social media is a brilliant way to help suffering Christians and raise awareness. Barnabas Aid has three different pages to look out for. You can check out Barnabas Aid, food.gives and Barnabas+ on Facebook and Instagram.

You can share SCAAW posts from any of our social media pages. On each of the pages, you will find the SCAAW post pinned to the top. Please like our pages and share the SCAAW post with your friends and family – ask them to do the same.

A great practical step you can take is to be involved with food.gives. See page 21. You, your family or youth group can make a huge difference in sending food to poor Christians in different parts of the world.

Now fill in your answers in the boxes to the right. If your answers are right, the highlighted line going down will spell a key word which helps us understand why Christians are prepared to suffer for their faith. Two of the key word's letters have already been filled in for you.

The key word is _____

Getting Involved With Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week

Order your SCAAW resources

Go to p6 for a complete list of the resources that you can request from us free of charge.

Pray for your suffering brothers and sisters

We encourage you to uphold in prayer our suffering Church family. You may like to commit to praying regularly for a project (some examples can be found on p4-5) or for members of our Church family suffering because of war, disaster, famine, disease and persecution (explored on p8-14).

We encourage you to use our 8-day Devotional Booklet based on Luke 21 to inspire your daily prayers during SCAAW.

Perhaps your prayer or church home group could organise a special daily prayer event following the booklet's eight daily themes. Our new prayer for SCAAW is featured on this page and also on the enclosed SCAAW bookmark. Keep the bookmark close at hand to inspire you in prayer at all times of the day. Every *Barnabas Aid* magazine includes our prayer dairy, *Barnabas Prayer*, to inform and spur your prayers each day.

A Prayer for the Suffering Church

Gracious Lord,

When war and violence surround

Your people,
When death is on every side
And man has ceased to be his
brother's keeper,

Our times are in Your hands.

When disease stalks the land,
A pestilence that strikes without warning,
When sickness and sorrow fill the air,

Our times are in Your hands.

When disaster has descended upon us,
Storm, tempest and earthquake,
Floods, drought and locusts,

Our times are in Your hands.

When famine ravages the barren earth,
When food is gone and children cry
for bread,
When hunger and starvation are all they
know,

Our times are in Your hands.

When persecution is on every side,
When family and friends reject
and betray,
When authorities punish even to death,

**Gracious Lord,
keep Your people faithful.**

When Your hand of judgment is heavy
upon us
For our many sins, which we
acknowledge and repent,
Then, in Your wrath, remember mercy.

Gracious Lord, forgive us.

Amen

Raise awareness at Sunday services or group meetings

Dedicate a special service on 30 October or 6 November (or another Sunday that suits your church calendar) to stand with our persecuted brothers and sisters and praise our everlasting Father who has vowed never to forsake us.

When you are planning your themed Sunday service or other group meeting you may find the following resources useful: Sermon Outline (p16) with a PowerPoint presentation available to download from our website; small group Bible Study (p18); Our suffering Church, an overview of the five major causes of global turbulence that are inflicting additional suffering on our brothers and sisters (p8-14); new hymn on the theme of perseverance, entitled "*I will never let go of my Jesus*" (p15) and a recording of "*I will never let go of my Jesus*", with words and images, available from our website; other suggested hymns and songs (this page); our special SCAAW prayer (this page) and, for children, our special puzzle challenge (p19).

Make sure everyone goes home with something to remind them of their suffering Church family. So order plenty of copies of our new prayer bookmark or the 8-day Devotional Booklet or more copies of this magazine to give out to the congregation. All are available free of charge in whatever quantity you need.

We have an A4 poster (p7) and an A3 poster (available to download from our website or from your local Barnabas office) for you to advertise your event.

There are many ways to show your love for persecuted Christians around the world during Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week

Suggested hymns and songs for your SCAAW church service

Days of Elijah

Robin Mark

Complete Mission Praise 1012

Be Still, My Soul

Kathrina von Schlegel

Christian Worship: Hymnal 847

God is Our Strength and Refuge

Richard Bewes

Ancient and Modern 645

It is well with my soul

Horatio Gates Spafford

Voices Together 617

He will Hold me Fast

Ada Habershon

Small Church Music 630

Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah

William Williams

Common Praise 455

Show your love with a gift

Ask your church leadership about taking a collection for persecuted Christians at your SCAAW church service or meeting. Perhaps you would like to give to a particular project (examples are on p4-5) or you could order one of our food.gives boxes to fill with dry foodstuffs, such as chickpeas, lentils, salt and wheatflour, for our hungry brothers and sisters in need around the world (p21).

Alternatively, you could give to our General Fund and we will use your gift wherever the need is greatest. Donations to the General Fund enable us to react quickly to emergency situations, and meet needs that are too sensitive to publicise.

Our supporters frequently inspire us with their commitment to raise money on our behalf (p27). Could you organise a fundraising event for SCAAW? Perhaps you could hold a coffee morning or cake sale at your church, organise a car wash or arrange a sponsored event such as a walk or bike ride.

1,000 tonnes of direct aid helping a million households



food.gives boxes containing dry food items donated from Barnabas supporters in UK are reaching grateful recipients in Ukraine

In the first year of food.gives Barnabas Aid has sent more than 1,000 tonnes of food and other essential aid around the world, reaching a million households.

The creation of Barnabas Aid's food.gives programme – launched in June 2021 – represented a new addition to our long-term mission.

Barnabas Aid has for many years sent funds to support local feeding projects for Christians around the world – and we continue to undertake this vital ministry. But now we are also sending direct aid – food and other supplies – to our global Christian family.

As well as food.gives we have also started a medical.gives programme, providing urgently needed medical aid and support to Christians around the world.

50 million pieces of PPE

As part of medical.gives, around 50 million pieces of life-saving Covid PPE, donated by the Irish government, have been shipped to Christian hospitals in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The consignment is worth around \$44 million. Barnabas supporters have covered the cost of \$22,000 to ship each container to its destination. This worked out at just one cent for each piece of PPE.

“This PPE initiative by Barnabas Aid is of immense importance for survival of both health workers and their patients,” said one African church leader.

Barnabas Aid has also received a substantial donation of medical equipment and work clothing from another Western government, which medical.gives is shortly to transport by



Your generous donations are ensuring that PPE reaches the Christian healthcare workers who urgently need it

lorry to Ukraine for Christians fleeing the conflict. The donation includes around 200 generators and a number of defibrillators.

Facing the challenges of the war zone

In February the conflict in Ukraine triggered an urgent call to help Christians fleeing the country or internally displaced.

As part of our global food.gives response four containers of dry foodstuff have been shipped from the United States and Canada, with – as of July 2022 - two more scheduled. A container of aid from New Zealand is due to reach Ukraine in September.

More than 300 tonnes of food and other supplies, including blankets and clothes, were delivered by road from our warehouse in Swindon, UK. Through food.gives, Barnabas created a supply line direct from our supporters in the UK to the epicentre of the crisis.

Feeding the global body of Christ

Overall Barnabas has transported food and other practical supplies from seven countries to believers in many parts of the world, including Eastern Europe,

the Middle East, southern and eastern Africa and South Asia.

Nearly 500 tonnes of ePap – a porridge made from maize and soya beans with added vitamins and minerals that combats the effects of malnutrition – is being delivered from South Africa to our brothers and sisters in Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), Madagascar, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Following a series of devastating natural disasters in Tonga, thousands of Christians received food.gives aid from supporters in Australia and New Zealand – bottled water, rice and other non-perishable foodstuff, cleaning equipment, hygiene supplies and building materials.

A 40ft container loaded rice, white flour, lentils, dried chickpeas and salt from the UK reached hungry Pakistani Christians in April 2022.

“This container will feed so many persecuted and suffering Christian families,” said our partner in Pakistan. “Thank you Barnabas Aid and food.gives.”

Visit www.food.gives to find out more

Seeking support for the suffering Church

Our supporters often contact us suggesting that we send our reports and regular updates to politicians, in order to make them aware of the plight of the suffering Church.

While we circulate our material to as wide an audience as possible – and some members of the House of Representatives, senators and government ministers do take notice – our supporters are in a much better position to than Barnabas Aid itself to seek the support of politicians.

Members and senators are generally more interested in the views of their own constituents than organisations such as Barnabas. After all, it is their constituents who will decide whether or not to vote for them at the next election. Furthermore, politicians will often feel obligated to respond to letters from their own constituents, but not necessarily to correspondence from charities, aid agencies or pressure groups. Such groups are expected to be campaigning for a particular issue or adopting a particular stance – and as such we may have less impact than you in raising matters with politicians.

If you would like to share something brought to your attention by Barnabas Aid with your member or senator, here are some guidelines to help.

Write to your member or senator

We recommend that in most instances you should write to your own member or senator. It is possible to write to a relevant government minister (for example, the Minister for Foreign Affairs) but a letter to your own local representative is more likely to gain a response. Remember that your member or senator will feel more of an obligation to write back to you,

while a government minister may feel able to ignore your letter. You can ask your member or senator to raise the matter with the relevant minister.


Your member or senator is your representative whether or not you voted for them and whether or not you support them or their party. Do not write to a member from another constituency just because you support their party. You can write to any of the senators who represent your state or territory, but not to those of another state or territory. The issues affected the suffering Church around the world are likely to fall under matters that are the responsibility of the federal government rather than the government of your state.

If you are unsure who are your senators or who is your member, you can find out here: https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/

Write a letter rather than an email

Politicians are more likely to take notice of a letter delivered by post than an email. Whether or not it is a fair reflection of your efforts, there remains the perception that sending an email is easy and can be undertaken without much thought or care, while writing a letter demonstrates more serious intent. Whether you write a letter or an email, remember to include your address and postcode so your member knows that you are one of their constituents or senator knows that you live in their state.

Write to:
[your member's name], MP or
Senator [your senator's name]
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600
Australia



Politicians are generally more interested in the views of their constituents than those of organisations such as Barnabas Aid

Use your own words

It is usually better to write using your own words. Your member or senator is more likely to see that you are passionate, serious and committed by your own writing. One letter like this can have more impact than ten identical letters signed by different people.

Keep your letter brief and to the point

Politicians received a lot of correspondence, so it helps if your letter is brief and to the point. A letter of 5-6 pages will be skim-read at best, with large chunks of it overlooked or ignored. We recommend aiming to write one side of A4 paper, and certainly no more than two. Please do use facts and statistics to support your point, but using too many numbers and figures can deaden their impact.

Explain what you want your representative to do

In your letter, be clear about what you would like your member or senator to do. There is little point writing a letter that simply describes or complains about the situation facing Christians in a particular country – you must set out how you would like your representative to respond. In the case of Afghanistan, for example, you may want your member to write to the Minister for Home Affairs asking Australia to allow Afghan Christian refugees to settle here. Remember also that the ability of your representative to act may be limited, especially if they are not a member of the government. Your member or senator – or even the Australian Government – is unlikely to be able to do anything for Christians imprisoned in North Korea, for example.

Feel free to respond – but know when to stop

If you disagree with a reply you receive, there is nothing stopping you from responding with a second letter to express your disagreement and try again to make your point. The chances of changing your representative's mind though are slim, so carefully consider whether such a response is a good use of your time. It is probably advisable not to send a third letter after this. Similarly, if you have not received a reply after three weeks, then it is acceptable to send a follow-up letter. Do not send multiple follow-up letters, however – this may be viewed as harassment, and certainly as a nuisance.

Be polite

It is easy to become angry when we read of the persecution and suffering endured by our brothers and sisters around the world – but none of this is the fault of your member or senator. In practical terms, a polite letter is more likely to gain a positive response. A rude or bad-tempered communication can be safely ignored. Conversely, well-mannered writing may make your request stand out – sadly, politicians receive abuse all the time. Regardless of the practical advantages, remember that your representative – whether or not you agree with their views – is a person made in God's image and worthy of respect.

Pray

Our Lord is sovereign over the hearts and minds of politicians, regardless of whether or not they are believers. When Nehemiah presented his request before the pagan king of Babylon, he “prayed to the God of heaven” (Nehemiah 2:4) and received a favourable reply. As you write and send your letter, pray that God will use it for the good of His suffering people around the world.

Iranian pastors sentenced for running “house churches”

IRAN

Iranian-Armenian pastor Anooshavan Avedian, 60, was sentenced on 11 April to ten years in prison for running a “house church” in Tehran. House churches in Iran are congregations of Farsi (Persian)-speaking converts from Islam.

On release he will serve a further ten years’ “deprivation of social rights”, including restrictions on employment.

Anooshavan lost an appeal against the sentence in a decision announced on 29 May. His lawyer, Iman Soleimani, criticised the haste at which the verdict was reached, which “demonstrates insufficient study of the case by the appeal judges, dismissal of the defence, and unjust process”.

Two members of Anooshavan’s church, Abbas Soori and Maryam Mohammadi, won their appeals

On release he will serve a further ten years’ “deprivation of social rights”

against a ten-year deprivation of social rights and had their individual fines reduced from 50 million tomans (approximately \$2,790) to 6 million tomans each.

Joseph Shahbazian, 58, another Iranian-Armenian pastor, has also been sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment for his role in leading a “house church” in Yaftabad, Tehran.

In a verdict delivered on 7 June, Joseph was found guilty of “propagating Evangelical Christianity”.

Four Christian converts from Islam who were members of the Yaftabad church were sentenced to between one and four years in prison, but permitted instead to pay fines of \$1,115-\$1,744

During the trial the judge pressured the four to blame Pastor Shahbazian for their conversions to Christianity with the promise of a lighter sentence, threatening heavier sentences when they refused to do so.

Over 100 Nigerian Christians massacred in three separate attacks

NIGERIA



Ondo State Governor Rotimi Akeredolu wept as he visited the church in Owo in the hours following the attack [Image credit: The Guardian Nigeria]

Gunmen opened fire at a church in Owo, Ondo State on Sunday 5 June, killing at least 40 worshippers.

The attack began toward the end of the service. The attackers made no attempt to cover their faces and gave no indication that they were gunmen. “Suddenly we heard gunshots,” an eyewitness said. “They directed the gun at everyone, particularly women and children.”

Ondo had previously been relatively safe and untouched by extremist violence.

“Our hearts are heavy,” said Ondo State Governor Rotimi Akeredolu. “Our peace and tranquillity have been attacked by the enemies of the people.”

On the same day, suspected Fulani militants left 32 dead after a raid on a Christian community in Kaduna State. The militants burned down a church building and several homes across four villages in Kajuru Local Government Area (LGA). In a statement the Adara Development Association said that the militants arrived on 150 motorcycles, armed with AK-47s. About 80% of the Adara people are Christians.

The following Sunday, 12 June, suspected Fulani extremists killed 37 people in an attack on a Christian-majority area of Benue State. The attackers destroyed dozens of homes, forcing more than 500 people to flee from the villages of Igama and Efeche in Okpokwu LGA.

Christians beheaded by Islamic State in northern Mozambique

MOZAMBIQUE

Islamist militants raided a Christian village in Memba, Nampula province, northern Mozambique on 17 June, beheading one resident.

The raid by Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama, known locally as Al Shabaab (not the Somali-based group of the same name), is the first in recent years in Nampula. The terrorist group is linked to Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh).

IS has also claimed responsibility in a statement for the “beheading of several Christians” in raids across Nangade, Cabo Delgado province, to the north of Nampula.

Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama effectively gained control of an area of Cabo Delgado in 2017.

The province has been termed “the Land of Fear” owing to brutal violence meted out against both Christians and moderate Muslims.

In late 2021 Mozambican, Rwandan and South African forces had started to drive the Islamists back. However, the Islamist insurgency now appears to be spreading.



A Mozambican Christian displaced by Islamist violence receives food aid

Pakistani Christian granted bail, but three others face death penalty for “blasphemy”

PAKISTAN



Ashfaq Masih has been imprisoned since 2017 on charges of “blasphemy” [Image credit: Naila Inayat]

“We will continue to fight in court to get him acquitted because he is innocent”

Stephen Masih, a mentally disabled Pakistani Christian, was granted bail after being imprisoned for more than three years on charges of “blasphemy”. The Lahore High Court announced the decision on 31 May.

Stephen was jailed in March 2019 after an argument with a neighbour. Then 38, Stephen was alleged to have made derogatory remarks about Muhammad, the prophet of Islam.

“We will continue to fight in court to get him acquitted because he is innocent,” defence lawyer Abdul Hameed Rana said.

On 8 June, however, death sentences for alleged “blasphemy” were upheld in the case of two brothers, both Christians, Qasir and Amoon Ayub.

The brothers were convicted by a lower court in 2018, having been imprisoned since 2014 for posting “disrespectful” material online; however, there is no evidence linking them to the material in question.

Defence lawyers announced their

intention to file a further appeal with the Supreme Court in Islamabad.

A motorcycle repair mechanic, Ashfaq Masih, 34, has also been sentenced to death for “blasphemy”.

The accusation followed a dispute with a customer who refused to pay for the repair of his motorbike in June 2017 on the grounds of his Muslim faith. When Ashfaq insisted on payment, he was alleged to have said that Jesus Christ is the only true prophet and was therefore accused of “blasphemy”.

Ashfaq’s legal team will submit an appeal following the judgment of the Court of Session in Lahore issued on 4 July.

Pakistan’s “blasphemy” laws – sections 295-A, B and C of the Pakistan Penal Code – are often used to make false accusations in order to settle personal grudges. Section 295-C relates to “defiling the name” of Muhammad, which carries a mandatory death penalty.

Christian families in Vietnam forced from their homes

VIETNAM

Four Christian families (32 people) were forced out of their home village for refusing to re-convert to a local animist religion.

The families have now been allowed to return, but only after missing the rice-planting season, a situation which has left them short of food.

Since returning to their village the families have been under surveillance. They have also been told that they cannot leave

Expulsion from the village followed a campaign of harassment, including confiscation of livestock and the cutting off electricity for a week. One of the children was denied a birth certificate, without which no child can access healthcare or attend school.

Since returning to their village the families have been under close surveillance and are not allowed to leave.

Some of the believers have been Christians since 2017 when they found Christ through hearing evangelistic radio broadcasts.



The National Assembly Building of Vietnam in the capital, Hanoi. While persecution in Vietnam comes most often from local authorities and communities, central government is usually unwilling to intervene



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“Blessings and grace”: Equipping “Mei” in her ministry of service

A couple pose for a wedding photo outside a church in Beijing. OCRPL is supporting “Mei” in her ministry to married couples who find themselves struggling [Image credit: Matthew Stinson]

“Mei” has served the Church in China for more than 20 years, supporting and leading the activities of her congregation and reaching non-Christians with the Gospel. She is just one of the Chinese church leaders studying with the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life (OCRPL), the academic branch of Barnabas Aid. Mei is undertaking her Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree.

A large part of Mei’s ministry of service is counselling married couples. Her approach to these couples is to seek to restore their relationship with God and then with each other. Christian couples are strengthened and encouraged, while many non-Christian husbands become believers.

Mei’s heart for married couples stems from her own experience of marital tension. Both she and her husband were young and didn’t know how to adapt to their married life.

One day a Christian shared the Gospel with Mei, telling her of the promise of God, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Mei cried out to the Lord for help, began to pray regularly, and experienced the compassion and grace of God. Her life transformation first led her husband to become a Christian, and then her seven brothers and sisters, her parents, and her in-laws.

Now serving her local church, Mei attended Bible college for two years. She took several part-time jobs in order to be able to fund her studies. During the planting and harvest seasons, she had to travel between school and home to help her husband with farm work and in caring for their two young children.

Yet while Mei was able to study marriage counselling at a secular university, she has not previously had the opportunity to undertake in a Christian setting the further training needed to support her vital work. Now, thanks to OCRPL, that opportunity has been provided.

One of the aims of OCRPL is to equip leaders who can then pass on their skills and knowledge to others. Mei is already living out that vision, training 70 young Christians who plan on passing the national examination to get a counselling licence so that they can support those who are struggling with marital relationships and share the Gospel with them.

“Mei’s life and ministry are full of God’s blessings and grace,” says another Chinese church leader. “While she always feels that she is just a woman with no good education, God has never despised her and He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid instead” (Luke 1:48).

In China, as in many other lands, there are few opportunities to undertake pastoral and theological study. Those opportunities that do exist can be prohibitively expensive, sometimes amounting to thousands of dollars per year. Even theological books and Bible commentaries are hard to find.

OCRPL provides formal training at low cost, thanks to the generous donations of our supporters and the use of online teaching. There are currently ten church leaders from China amongst OCRPL’s student body – three undertaking a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree and seven a Master of Ministry (MMin) degree. God willing, 30 undergraduate students are being added in October 2022.



OCRPL
Oxford Centre for
Religion and Public Life

In Touch

Praise God for the opening of our new food.gives warehouse

Eyes opened to suffering of hungry Christians

Ashley Saunders, Barnabas Aid Australia's Head of Partnerships, said he was encouraged by the high level of support expressed for food.gives at the Mission Expo at Norwest Anglican Church, Sydney in July.

On Mission Sunday, at the conclusion of the Expo's Mission Week, Ashley spoke at four services at the church, about the work of Barnabas Aid and was encouraged by the interest in food.gives.

"Eyes were opened to the reality that there are many people hungry in the world simply because, as Christians, they are poor and marginalised," explained Ashley.

Many people at the four services signed up to receive our Barnabas Aid magazine and daily prayer guide.



Supporters were keen to hear more about the work of food.gives at the Barnabas Aid stand at the Norwest Mission Expo, Sydney

We are delighted to announce that Barnabas Aid Australia's new food.gives warehouse in Victoria is up and running.

At the time of writing, a formal ceremony marking the opening of the warehouse at East Bendigo is still to be held. However, staff and volunteers are already busy receiving food.gives boxes filled with dry foodstuff such as chickpeas, lentils, rice and flour from churches across the country.

The opening of the warehouse allows food.gives to further expand operations nationwide.

The Barnabas Aid team feel very blessed with the provision of the Bendigo warehouse. It provides the food.gives volunteers and staff with increased flexibility to process the donated food boxes, and a place to build community, with a focus on others who are in need.

"God is using us for His Glory"

Many volunteers from local churches have joined with us to help prepare donations from our supporters for shipping to suffering Christians in other parts of the world.

"food.gives is a great and motivational project," said Sue, one of the first volunteers at Bendigo. "It gives great purpose to serve those who are hungry on the other side of the world.

"We can see where God is using us for His Glory."

Support is growing each week in Australia for the food.gives programme. Among the latest donations are scores of filled food.gives boxes from churches in Redbank Plains and Kingston in Queensland, and from churches in Naracoorte, South Australia.

Another donor from Western Australia, who wishes to remain anonymous,

gave a whole pallet of dry food via the virtual shopping list on our food.gives website - that's enough to feed 180 Christian families for a week!



Sue was one of the first to volunteer at our new East Bendigo warehouse

We are very grateful to our partners at the Victory Life Church in Western Australia for providing us with warehouse space free of charge at their Margaret Court Community Outreach (MCCO) centre in Osborne Park.

MCCO warehouse manager Bryam Robayo said he has been inspired by the food.gives project because it aligns with their own outreach work providing "love and care for those families and communities that are in need".

Our thanks also go to our supporters for their generous response to the devastation in Tonga caused by the volcanic eruption, earthquake and tsunami in December 2021.

As a result of your donations, food.gives Australia sent two shipping containers of food, blankets, clothing and educational materials to help Christians affected by the disaster. The first container arrived in May 2022 and, at the time of writing, the second is scheduled for arrival at Nuku'alofa in August.



Volunteers hard at work at our WA food.gives warehouse in Osborne Park.

Life can bring us many challenges, uncertainties and sorrows. Sometimes, like the psalmist, we are downcast and disturbed, dejected and in turmoil, anxious and fearful, overwhelmed, even despairing. Perhaps God seems far away and we feel bereft and alone.



Lifting up the Downcast

by Patrick Sookhdeo

"I am so grateful for this wonderful little book, which can fit into a handbag/pocket and come with me wherever I go!! ...The more I read this book, the more I appreciate it. It is a gem and a gift above most gifts, for it will walk with me all my life – and I must buy more to give to others. EVERYONE should have a copy of this book." – Cornwall, UK

"I really needed this book and it is such an encouragement to me. What an answer to my prayers to have gotten this book at the exact time that I have been downcast... it is such a blessing to me."

Texas, USA

"I suffer a lot with depression and anxiety and all kinds of fears. But this book is really uplifting."

Powys, Wales, UK

"I had been going through a very long period of great anxiety over a family situation. I found chapter 4 "Trusting God in Uncertain Times", especially page 59, a turning point in my prayer life and trust in our Almighty God, for whom NOTHING is impossible. I was greatly encouraged in my faith."

Warwickshire, UK

"A useful resource to offer anyone who is experiencing life's challenges or is overwhelmed with despair and turmoil."

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