

EGYPT

Small businesses help
to transform lives

MARTYRS AND CHAINS

Remembering the
persecuted Church

THE SHEPHERD'S ACADEMY

Ministry training programme
expands into Central Asia

barnabasaid



**Food aid
reaches hungry
Christians across
the world**

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.

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
- 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 suffering Church by providing a range of prayer materials
- safeguard and protect our volunteers, staff, partners and beneficiaries
- keep our overheads low.

WE BELIEVE:

- 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: An elderly Christian in Ukraine
receives food aid from food.gives



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Every human life is precious

I recently saw a picture of a baby with a large plaster over a gunshot wound to her back. She had a similar wound on her chest, as the bullet passed right through the baby and into her mother, who was killed. Her father, four of her siblings and about 25 other Christians in the village also died in the same attack on 16 May 2023 in Plateau State, Nigeria. The eight-month-old survived, although she will probably never be able to walk. Her name is Precious.

This example illustrates our world today – a world wracked by war, gratuitous violence and conflict; a world where problems are solved with a machete or a gun; a world where revenge and retaliation are normal; a world where the death of an enemy is never mourned. It is a world increasingly without humanity, forgiveness or mercy.

As we enter a new year in such a world, there is a sense of hopelessness. We see the innocent suffer and die, including our brothers and sisters in Christ. The family of baby Precious perished because they were Christians.

We see powerful forces unleashed against the weak and the vulnerable. We hear talk of “collateral damage” as if losing human lives to gain political/military ends is the obvious course of action. A generation of young adults, whose minds were shaped by computer games of bombing and shooting, is moving into leadership positions. Ideologies that are admired bring mayhem and destruction.

The Bible often tells us that our God is a God of justice and of mercy. Mercy is an action, rooted in compassion and forgiveness. One of the Hebrew words for “mercy” has to do with a mother who protects and sustains the unborn infant in her womb. What greater picture of mercy can there be? Mercy is not weakness, though the world may interpret it that way.

Jesus told a parable about an unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-35), who was forgiven a huge debt by his master but would not forgive a small debt he was owed by a fellow servant. He physically attacked the man and then had him thrown into prison.

We know that the world often behaves like this, but what of us Christians? Are we any different? Our sins have been forgiven by a tremendous act of mercy when God sent His Son to die for us. Do we have mercy on our fellow sinners? Or do we use our positions of power to get revenge on those who injure us, causing endless pain and suffering, just as the world tends to do?

Mercy is an action, rooted in compassion and forgiveness

Jesus also said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7). Showing mercy is a Divine mandate.

Can we, who have received God’s mercy, be hard of heart, cold and indifferent? If the God of mercy had not looked mercifully on us, where would we be? So how can we join the chorus of those baying for blood without any thought of those who suffer? Should we not call for mercy, however unpopular that may make us? Should we not urge our churches, our statesmen, our militaries to be merciful? If not we will lose our own souls.

Every child, every woman and every man is created in the Divine image and is loved by God. Their lives are sacred and precious. But we are gradually being de-conscientised because of the violence we see on our screens, whether, real, fictional or virtual. If we lose our consciences, we lose our humanity.

Who can restore our lost souls and lost humanity but Jesus Christ Himself? It is only in Jesus Christ that perfect forgiveness, transcending hatred and enmity, is found. May He be our guide as we enter this new year.

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO
International Director, Barnabas Aid

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Compassion in action

How your donations are helping

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 suffering Christians.

£14,583
(\$17,500; €16,041)



Medical help for desperate Christians suffering in Lebanon

Barnabas has met the medical needs for six months of 200 chronically ill Christians impacted by the economic crisis in Lebanon. The price of medicines and treatment has risen so high that many of the impoverished beneficiaries had resorted to taking their medication only every other day to eke out their supplies.

“The practical help is tangible proof for those people that they are not forgotten, that their needs are met and that someone is looking after them,” said our project partners.



An elderly Christian receives Barnabas-funded medicines in Lebanon

Project reference: PR1533 (Needy Christians in Lebanon)

£90,000
(\$108,000; €99,000)



Funding support for Algerian pastors after churches shut

“Thank you for your care and compassion,” wrote an Algerian church leader after Barnabas sent funding to support pastors whose churches were closed by the authorities. At least 49 have been shut, leaving their pastors largely without income.

Barnabas’s funding frees pastors from the worry of how to feed their families and enables them to focus on ministering to believers gathering in small house-groups. “God brought Barnabas at this unique and difficult time to help support the pastors,” added the church leader.



The door of an Algerian church sealed shut by the authorities

Project reference: 02-570

£6,915
(\$8,298; €7,606)



Leaking roof fixed at well-used Uzbek church building

Thanks to the donations of supporters, Barnabas has funded urgent repairs to a building owned and used regularly by a registered church in Uzbekistan. The leaking roof was replaced and its walls and floor repaired.

Three church congregations share the building, enabling them to meet legally. It is also used by the host church for prayer meetings and Bible studies, for its youth and children’s ministries and for training courses. The number of churches granted registration in Uzbekistan is increasing, although restrictions on registration, religious teaching and Christian events remain.



Uzbek Christians meet in the building repaired by Barnabas

Project reference: PR1424 (Church buildings in Uzbekistan)



£104,775
(\$125,730; €115,252)



ePap delivered to 11,800 Christians in Zimbabwe

More than 11,800 Christians living in Zimbabwe’s hunger-afflicted Matabeleland region received one daily serving for 60 days in Barnabas’s latest rollout of the nutritious porridge ePap. Our food gives project delivered 33,000 kg of ePap through 131 churches, providing 708,840 servings in total.

Disabled children are showing a marked improvement in their health, weight and response to physical therapy after receiving ePap. “It has been a great positive with some children gaining [developmental] milestones after years of therapy without any success,” our partners reported. *Latest from food.gives – p.8*



A disabled Christian girl receives bags of nourishing ePap

Project reference: PRI543 (ePap and other feeding in southern Africa)

£9,472
(\$11,366; €10,419)



Christian graduates in Pakistan learn to live and preach Gospel

“I learned not only to preach the Gospel, but to live the Gospel,” explained Iram, a recent graduate from a theological seminary in Lahore, Pakistan, part-funded by Barnabas. Another student commented, “In addition to gaining theological knowledge, I understood the importance of relying on the Holy Spirit for effective ministry.”

The seminary is one of two theological colleges in Pakistan supported by Barnabas. Founded more than 50 years ago, the seminary’s 700 graduates have planted more than 350 churches across the nation.



Christian students at the theological college in Lahore, part-funded by Barnabas

Project reference: 4I-1268

£1,202
(\$1,442; €1,322)



Specialist repairs secure Kazakh church from floods

The foundations of a registered church building in Kazakhstan have been made secure, thanks to Barnabas. We paid for a specialised company to seal the basement that has been flooded by melting snow every spring for ten years. “This will allow the church to stand for years to come,” said a spokesman.

The church, which has faced intimidation by the authorities in recent years, started more than 30 years ago when Christians, including converts from Islam, began meeting in libraries and halls. Construction of the church building was completed in 2018.



Barnabas-funded work underway on the church basement

Project reference: 24-1338 (Church buildings in Kazakhstan)



Simple livelihoods that change lives

Barnabas Aid helps impoverished Egyptian Christians to become self-sufficient

Barnabas invests in hope by funding small business ventures that enable poor and marginalised Christians to become financially independent. Although some initiatives are simple and small, the impact they have on individual families is enormous.

“Ruth”, a Christian mother living in a poor desert area of Egypt, gives thanks to God and Barnabas Aid for giving her family “hope and a new beginning”.

She had no means with which to support her family after her builder husband was paralysed in a fall at work. Only a monthly allowance from their church spared the family from destitution.

Now Ruth can support her family with her own income, thanks to a small business that was set up with funding from Barnabas.

Ruth and 15 other impoverished Christian women – the majority of them widows – were each given a stock of new slippers and shoes to sell.

The women used the profits from sales to buy more stock and their businesses “have grown step by step”, our project partner says.

Each of the women earns enough to provide for herself and her family, and they no longer need to receive financial support from the church.

This is just one example of how Barnabas is helping impoverished Christian women and young men, who frequently struggle to find work in Egypt, to become self-reliant.

Since January 2023, Barnabas has helped more than 310 Egyptian Christians to escape grinding poverty by enabling them to start up 289 small businesses.

Market stalls provide income for 23 Christians

Twelve Christian widows and seven young men are now making a living from Barnabas-funded market stalls that can easily be moved from location to location. We provided each seller with a start-up stock of sweets, mixed nuts, chocolates and seeds, all bought in bulk to reduce costs, which was then packed into smaller bags.

Sellers set up their stalls outside transport stations, schools, clubs and churches while some have made deals with established grocery stores and kiosks to sell their products.

In addition, we trained four Christian women to bake cookies and cakes from home for sale on the stalls, which enabled the four women to earn an income as well.

One of the stallholders, “David”, had been devastated when he was made redundant from his sales job, which left him without an income to support his wife, his three children and his sick mother. He now makes a good living from his stall and no longer has to ask his church for money to buy his mother’s medicine.

Believers share benefits of transport enterprises

Barnabas funded the purchase of 12 second-hand three-wheel trucks. Each vehicle is shared by two young Christian men, one working the morning shift, the other the evening shift, to transport goods and products.

The men have established a good reputation in their villages for their services. Some have even secured contracts with small factories, transporting their products to shops or wholesalers.

Additionally, they give free transport services to local churches.

Egypt

“Michael”, a young Christian man, is due to marry his fiancée in 2024, but didn’t have enough money to provide a home for them both. Thanks to the income he receives from working the evening shift on the three-wheel truck, he is able to save money to afford a home for when the couple are wed.



Each Barnabas-funded three-wheel truck supports two young Christian men

In another new transport venture, four young believers are sharing in pairs two tuktuks (small vehicles used as taxis, sometimes called auto rickshaws) funded by Barnabas. Tuktuks are the main form of passenger transportation in villages, and each vehicle is in use around 17 hours a day.

“Francis” struggled to support his sick father and younger brothers, especially after his mother passed away. Now, with the money he earns from his tuktuk shifts, he is able to pay for his father’s medical treatment and look after his family.

Carpenters given tools to think big

Barnabas also funded the purchase of additional tools and machinery for five carpentry workshops. This enabled the young men we supported in the workshops to produce heavier furniture such as cupboards, chairs and beds, and increase their earning potential.

Carpenter “Matthew” couldn’t afford the transport costs needed for his daughter to travel to school.

“Today with this expansion at work,” he says, “I’m receiving more orders and

making more profit and my daughter goes to school every day.”

Businesses targeted to meet demand

All the small enterprises are targeted to meet local demand.

Nine widows and seven young people were each provided with a second-hand photocopier as well as a stock of stationery supplies to sell, such as notebooks, pens and pencil cases.

Each business is located close to a large customer base, such as a university, school, educational centre or government office.

In another venture, seven young car mechanics were supplied with the tools to repair batteries and helped to set up businesses close to main roads where they were on hand to help drivers in the event of a breakdown.

One of the mechanics, “Paul”, and his widowed mother were having to live at his uncle’s home after their house was destroyed in an accidental fire. Thanks to the income he earns from battery repairs, Paul can now afford to rent a room where he and his mother live happily.

Another enterprise saw four young men provided with a stock of water filters and spare parts to sell in villages where the water supply is unclean, and the demand for water filters is high.

This has come as a relief to villagers who now have access to clean water, as well as to the impoverished young Christians supported by Barnabas.

One of the sellers explained that he had been desperate to find work to end his poverty and learning that he was to receive a grant to start up a business was the answer to his prayers.

He said, “A week before taking the project grant I was crying in the church asking God for His favour to help me in my time of need to find a job, and He replied to me with the project grant.”

“I remembered the Bible verse when Jesus said, ‘Ask and it will be given to you,’” he added, referring to Matthew 7:7.

2,000 years of Christian persecution in Egypt

Christians in Egypt have faced persecution for much of the past 2,000 years. Believers endured persecution under Roman rule in the first century, and this intensified with the arrival of Islam in 640AD. The new Arab rulers relegated Christians and Jews to a second-hand status, forcing them to submit to a raft of restrictions and humiliating regulations.

Christians today make up around 10% of the population of Egypt. They remain subject to hostility and discrimination by the majority Muslim society. This is especially the case in rural areas where violence occasionally erupts against Christian communities and churches, and believers struggle to find work.

The threat from Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) has diminished in the 2020s, compared to the previous decade when IS atrocities included suicide bombings at two churches in Tanta and Alexandria on Palm Sunday 2017 that claimed at least 46 lives.

President supportive of Christian community

Christians say their situation in Egypt is now better than it has been in living memory.

The country’s president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, has been swift to give verbal and practical backing to the Christian community whenever anti-Christian incidents occur.

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

The government of al-Sisi introduced the 2016 Law for Building and Restoring Churches, which mitigated laws dating from 1856 and 1934 that made it almost impossible for churches to obtain a licence, forcing many congregations to worship illegally.

At the time of writing, 3,189 of the 3,730 churches or church-affiliated buildings that applied for registration have received licences granted under the 2016 law, leaving 541 applications remaining.

food.gives

Shipping essential aid you have donated across the globe ■



food.gives aid encourages Ukrainian Christians



Distribution of food.gives boxes to South Sudanese Christians

Help from distant lands encourages Christians in Ukraine

Lorries reached Ukraine with food and other essential aid for Christians struggling with the ravages of the ongoing conflict.

Two 40-foot containers were sent from Germany. Essential foodstuffs distributed included rice, chickpeas, lentils, beans, noodles, salt, sugar, flour, powdered milk and dried yeast. We also sent clothing, blankets, tents and heaters; toothbrushes, toothpaste and dental floss; sanitary pads, nappies and baby bottles.

"The fact that people from so far away keep sending food and aid has strengthened them the most."

We also sent nine pallets of food.gives parcels from the UK.

"We went to help the people left behind, elderly and families that did not have the resources to move towards the west," explained our project partner.

This practical aid also came as a spiritual encouragement. "In these circumstances," continued our partner, "people understand the true love of the Christians. The fact that people from so far away keep sending food and aid has strengthened them the most."

Support for Christians in drought and flood-stricken South Sudan

South Sudan is experiencing multiple crises with drought affecting some regions, flooding in others, and a spiralling refugee crisis due to the ongoing civil war in the Republic of the Sudan to the north.

In the Global Hunger Index for 2023, South Sudan was one of nine countries identified as having "alarming" levels of hunger.

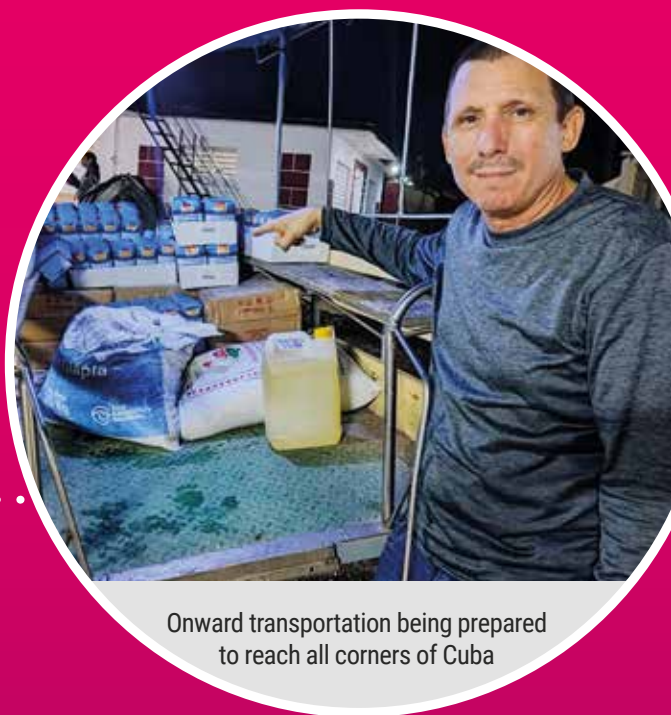
In 2023 we sent two shipments of aid, generously donated by UK supporters. The first contained 1,089 food.gives boxes, which were delivered to Juba. The second contained rice, flour and chickpeas, as well as clothes, shoes and bedding.

For many of the Christian beneficiaries, this support is their only means of maintaining a healthy diet.

The impact of Barnabas supporters' donations is profound. "The generous support," our partner said, "makes it possible for our church in Juba to make the community a great place to live."



Ukraine, South Sudan, Haiti, Namibia and Cuba – just five of the 23 countries where Christian communities have been blessed through food.gives. More than **71 million** servings of food have been sent since Barnabas Aid’s food.gives project began in June 2021. Your donations continue to make a huge difference to the lives of God’s people facing conflict, social unrest, displacement and extreme weather conditions. On these pages we report on some of the latest deliveries.



Onward transportation being prepared to reach all corners of Cuba



Christians afflicted by drought in Namibia receive food.gives aid



Soup mix reaches isolated communities in Namibia

Fortified nutritious soup mix has been sent from the US to Namibia and provided essential relief for Christians struggling in the drought-prone nation.

The consignment of 16 tonnes was distributed with separate journeys into remote areas of the Kunene Region of north-western Namibia required.

Our local project partners contended with three flat tyres and five wheel studs needed replacing. All seven locations were reached and the soup mix was successfully distributed. “By God’s grace the wheel stayed put!” exclaimed our partner, adding a prayer request that God will send rain in abundance to this needy region.

“It is still long before the rainy season, so it is getting tougher,” our partner informed us, “Thanks so much for the food donation.” The food was distributed in the villages of Khorixas, Fonjteine and DeReit, where small communities are among the worst-affected by drought.

A further shipment of soup mix from Canada arrived in Namibia in October 2023.

Island-wide aid distributed to 35,000 Christians in Cuba

“We thank God in the name of Jesus for the blessings we have received from you.” These were the words of an impoverished Cuban Christian who received food aid that was delivered with funds from Barnabas Aid.

Barnabas covered the transport costs of the vital food delivery, in which seven 40-foot containers were sent to Cuba.

“We are very grateful for this help that you are offering to the people of Cuba, especially to the people of Christ,” continued the grateful recipient – one of around 35,000 Cuban Christians who received food.

More than 139 tonnes of food were delivered. The consignment contained rice, pasta, tomatoes, oat flakes, milk, flour and cooking oil – many of which are otherwise unobtainable in Cuba.

The containers were distributed to sites all over the country, with one container of food used to help those affected by the 2023 hurricane season. Hurricane Idalia caused flooding in the country’s western provinces with around 8,000 people forced to evacuate their homes.



Barnabas partners Blessings of Hope prepare soup mix for transportation to Haiti

Nutritious soup mix bound for Haiti

Our dehydration partnership with Blessings of Hope, a Christian non-profit organisation based in Pennsylvania, United States, has enabled us to send a tonne of dried soup mix to Haiti – enough to provide at least 40,000 bowls of nourishing soup for hungry Christians.

The soup mix includes sweet potato, carrot, pepper and tomato, and is fortified with a carefully formulated powder additive to add extra vitamins and nutrients. The formula for this powder was created by a specialist nutrition company in New Jersey based on the ingredients we used.

The soup mix, sealed in bags and then in airtight plastic containers that can be reused, was shipped to Florida in October.

At time of writing, it is about to be flown to remote airstrips in Haiti for swift onward distribution across the country through eight Christian ministries. Flying the aid into the country avoids using Haitian ports, which are currently controlled by criminal gangs.

In this desperately poor Caribbean nation, almost half the population face acute hunger, with even safe drinking water extremely scarce. The government has collapsed and neither police nor army have been able to intervene. The gangs murder, rape and kidnap on a vast scale. In the first half of 2023 alone there were nearly 300 cases of abductions in Haiti, including church leaders and Christians kidnapped from Sunday worship.

Why does Barnabas pay to ship out food rather than buying produce in the receiving countries?

Barnabas Aid runs many food aid projects where financial support is sent to project partners so that they can buy food locally and distribute it.

But food.gives works by transporting food aid from Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States and other “sending” countries to needy Christians in lands of poverty and food scarcity.

Why the difference?

In some countries food shortages – often the result of crop failures caused by droughts or other natural disasters – are so severe that even if Barnabas sent money, there is no food to buy.

In others, food can simply be so expensive and inflation so rampant that food.gives is by far the most effective way of helping our Christian family.

Furthermore, international sanctions can prevent the sending of money to some parts of the world – but it is still possible to send food.

Transporting food through food.gives makes sound financial sense, and often results in huge savings. For example, a 40-foot container of dehydrated soup mix carries one million servings. This works out at just half a penny per serving!

A combination of direct aid through food.gives and funding sent through other Barnabas Aid feeding programmes ensures that we can continue to provide food for hungry Christians in many lands of poverty and persecution.

How you can help

Simply order a box from us and fill it with non-perishable food from the items below

What you can send



To get involved scan the QR code or visit www.food.gives/get-involved



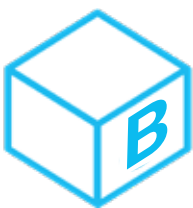
In the previous article (Barnabas Aid, November–December 2023, pp. i–iv) we looked at the first three beatitudes, in which Jesus tells of the blissful happiness that accompanies three mindsets the world would view as negative. Divine bliss is given, here on earth, to those who realise they are spiritually destitute and must depend completely on God; to those who grieve because of their sins as well as the sins and suffering of others, and who ache to be at Home in heaven; and to those who lay aside their own rights and self-interest in order to focus, under God’s direction, on serving others. In the article below, we move on to the beatitudes which are more obviously “positive”.

A Manual for Christian Living

④

A passionate yearning for Christ-likeness

Matthew 5:6–7



lessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (Matthew 5:6)

The fourth beatitude describes a deep longing to grow in personal righteousness, a longing which springs from the consciousness of spiritual need that is described in the previous beatitudes. It is not a vague aspiration tucked away at the back of the mind. It is not the good intentions that proverbially “pave the way to hell”. It is as strong as our instincts to satisfy the most basic of physical needs. It is the craving of a starving person who can think of nothing but food, or a person dying of thirst whose thoughts revolve all the time around water.

The promise of blissful happiness is for those who yearn for righteousness with this unwavering fervour. It is for those who know that their sins have separated them from God and long to establish or restore a relationship with Him. It is for those who want to live out the Beatitudes in their daily lives,

who want to show the fruit of the Spirit in every action, who long to grow more Christ-like as they walk with Him. For this righteousness is more than mere conformity to law; it is about being like Jesus, who is Himself our righteousness.

It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. (1 Corinthians 1:30)

Some have said the fourth beatitude could equally well begin, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for Me.” This reminds us of the psalmist who was panting and weeping for God (Psalm 42:1-3).

Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains how “righteousness” in this verse includes both justification and sanctification.¹ It encompasses the desire to be set right with God, through the atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the desire to be free from sin in all its forms, that is, the desire to stop being a “slave to sin” and become “a

slave to righteousness” (Romans 6:17-18). The first desire is fulfilled as soon as we make a decision to trust and follow Christ, and after this we no longer have the same relationship to sin (1 John 3:6). The second, however, is a process that will continue for the rest of our earthly lives.

The unusual Greek grammar of Matthew 5:6 shows that we are to desire total righteousness, like a whole loaf of bread not just a slice, a whole jug of water not just a glass. Blissful happiness does not come to those who are willing to settle for partial goodness, to deal with some sinful habits and not bother with others, or to cultivate only a selection of Christ-like character traits. The beautiful fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) is, as the Greek grammar shows, a single fruit with nine aspects of it described, not nine separate fruits.

We know from the first beatitude and from many other Scriptures that we cannot do any of this in our own strength. The righteousness that we yearn for is the righteousness that comes from God (Romans 10:3), a free gift from Him to us. This applies both to our justification by faith and to our gradual growth in holiness.

The promise that goes with this beatitude is that those who have such a desire will be given the very thing they are longing for. After we have put our trust in Christ, the Holy Spirit will work in us, enabling us to learn to resist Satan. We shall be transformed with ever-increasing glory into the likeness of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18). This transformation process will be completed in heaven. When we see Him we shall be like Him, and meanwhile we look forward to that day with confident Christian hope and continue to strive for His purity (1 John 3:2-3)

Here on earth we must not be dismayed to find that we are still a flawed “work in progress”, winning some battles with Satan and losing others. We must remember that Scripture promises us forgiveness and purification from our unrighteousness, whenever we confess our sins (1 John 1:8-9).

Many Christians have written of their daily struggle with sin. The apostle Paul described his desire to do good and his consternation at so often finding that he had done evil instead (Romans 7:15-20). It has often been said, “The perseverance of the saints is falling down and getting up, falling down and getting up, falling down and getting up, all the way to heaven.” The fourteenth-century English mystic, Julian of Norwich, wrote also of this falling down and getting up, a process that helps us to appreciate God’s astonishing, unbreakable love for us.



If there be any such lover of God on earth who is continually kept from falling, I do not know of it, for it was not revealed to me. But this was revealed: that in falling and in rising we are always

inestimably protected in one love; for in the sight of God we do not fall, and in our own view we do not remain standing, and both of these are true, as I see it, but the sight of our Lord God is the highest truth.²

If our heart’s desire is to be like Jesus, that desire will eventually be granted. Meanwhile, we have this beatitude’s promise of blissful happiness as a “by-product” of our desire. If we pursue happiness we will not find it, but if we pursue holiness we will be given happiness along the way and, at the end of the road, perfect holiness too. Our lives may be full of sin and failure, but if we keep our passionate yearning for righteousness, this promise of bliss is for us. It is the longing that brings the happiness.

Our longing is known by God and affirmed by Him, just as He affirmed King David with a “well done” for David’s desire to build a temple (1 Kings 8:17-18) even though David’s warfare prevented him from carrying out his desire (1 Chronicles 22:7-10).

As Dr Lloyd-Jones, writing in 1959, pointed out:



If you are anxious about the state of the world and the threat of possible wars, then I assure you that the most direct way of avoiding such calamities is to observe words such as [the fourth beatitude]. If every man and woman in this world knew what it was to ‘hunger and thirst after righteousness’ there would be no danger of war. Here is the only way to real peace.³

O the bliss of those whose heart’s desire is to be like Jesus



lessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. (Matthew 5:7)

“What a searching statement that is!” wrote Dr Lloyd-Jones about the first half of this next beatitude, “What a test of each one of us, of our whole standing and of our profession of the Christian faith!”⁴ Are we merciful? If not, has our faith in Jesus made any difference to our character?

“Mercy” seems a short, simple, everyday word, occurring hundreds of times in most English translations of the Bible. Yet its meaning stretches wide and deep. Just as in English there are other words similar to “mercy”, such as “compassion”, “forgiveness” and “grace”, so it is in the Hebrew of the Old Testament, where several different words are translated in English as “mercy”. The standard Hebrew word for mercy is *rachamim*, which also means “wombs”, indicating protection, provision

and the unwavering love of a mother for her baby. (Jesus probably used a similar word in Aramaic, when He spoke the fifth beatitude.) This thought brings us to *hesed* (or *chesed*), the active, steadfast love of our covenant-keeping God. Indeed, *hesed* is sometimes translated “mercy”, for example, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). Mercy is an intrinsic part of *hesed* love.



New Testament Greek also has several words translated in English as “mercy” but the standard one is *eleos*, used here in Matthew 5:7. The same word occurs when Jesus quotes God’s words in Hosea 6:6 about desiring mercy, not sacrifice (Matthew 9:13; 12:7). It also occurs in the story of the two blind men seeking to be healed, who cry out to Jesus “Have mercy on us” (Matthew 20:30-31) and when Jesus rebukes those who tithed their spices and herbs but had not done “justice, mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23).

The basic meaning of the English word “mercy” is kindness towards someone over whom you have power. Mercy involves compassion or pity, yet it is more because mercy includes action as well as a sympathetic feeling. The blind men were asking Jesus to do something for them. Mercy was something which the spice-tithers should have been doing, not merely feeling merciful.

Mercy includes forgiveness, that great distinctive of Christianity which sets our faith apart from all other world religions in which revenge and retaliation are typically permitted, sometimes even commanded as a duty. But this is not so in the faith founded by the Lord Jesus who “when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten” (1 Peter 2:23, NKJV).

Instead we have “the blessed retaliations of the kingdom of God”.⁵ For example,

If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. (Proverbs 25:21; Romans 12:20)

If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. (Matthew 5:39-40)

There is a beautiful illustration in Jesus’s parable of the prodigal son, whose wronged father “retaliated” by running out to hug and kiss him and then ordering the best clothes, jewellery and a feast for him (Luke 15:11-24).

Mercy is a key aspect of the character of God. When the LORD showed His glory to Moses the two characteristics that He mentioned were His graciousness and His mercy (Exodus 33:19, AV). When He proclaimed His Name to Moses, as they stood together on Mount Sinai, He said, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious...”

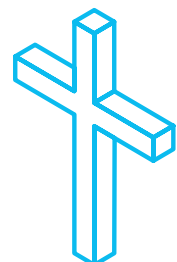
(Exodus 34:6, AV). It is interesting to note that the place established by the LORD for meeting with Moses has traditionally been called in English the “mercy seat”. This was a cover of pure gold made to go over the ark of the covenant, that is, the wooden chest containing the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 25:17-22). The literal name of the cover was the “propitiatory shelter” or the “propitiation place”, translated in some Bible versions as “atonement cover”. The mercy seat was not only where God appeared but also where the high priest sprinkled blood once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:1-16) so that his sins and the sins of the whole community could be forgiven.

The greatest example of God’s mercy to us is the giving of His Son. He loved the world with an active *hesed* love, a love that performs merciful actions. Giving His Son was His act of mercy to save us (John 3:16).

Although God is full of mercy, it is the opposite for human beings. Mercy and forgiveness do not seem to come naturally to us. Without the Holy Spirit’s help, we tend to want to “get our own back” and to seek revenge or at least to seek what we might describe to ourselves as justice, or reparations/compensation, or asserting our rights. That is why it is so important to measure ourselves against this beatitude as a test of the reality of our Christian faith. Mercy is part of the righteousness that the fourth beatitude tells us should be our fervent desire. A naturally forgiving spirit is rare, so, if we find that we do now have a forgiving spirit, we can rejoice at this work of God in our lives. When we are merciful, not vindictive, in our day-to-day activities, when we are kind to our enemies in their distress, it is a sign that “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

Since God combines grace and mercy when He describes Himself, let us consider where those two qualities overlap and where they are different. The New Testament Greek word for grace, *charis*, means a favour given freely, without receiving anything in return. As Christians we think immediately of God’s forgiveness of our sins (Romans 3:24), but humans can also show grace to each other (Acts 2:47; 25:3). God’s grace is a response to human sin, but His mercy is a response to human misery or indeed to the misery of any other part of his creation (Job 38:41). Richard Chenevix Trench has pointed out that in God’s purposes for salvation,

the grace must go before the mercy, the χάρις [*charis*] must go before and make way for the ἔλεος [*eleos*]. It is true that the same persons are the subjects of both, being at once the guilty and the miserable; yet the righteousness of God, which it is just as necessary



should be maintained as his love, demands that the guilt should be done away, before the misery can be assuaged; only the forgiven may be blessed. He must pardon, before He can heal; men must be justified before they can be sanctified.⁶

As humans can be gracious to each other, so we can be merciful to each other (Luke 6:36) and forgiving to each other (Colossians 3:13).

Although all humans, made in God's image, are capable of being gracious, merciful and forgiving, our relationship with God should mean that we Christians display these qualities to a greater extent. The more we realise the depth of God's grace, mercy and forgiveness to us, the easier it is to show grace, mercy and forgiveness to those who have injured or offended us. This goes way beyond recognising that someone may have had a headache on the day they shouted at us unfairly, or been influenced by a distressing experience in the past, or suffer from a mental illness. We recognise that ultimately they have been duped by the world, the flesh and the devil, as we ourselves have surely been duped in the past. Through their hurtful words or deeds, they have been the victims of Satan and his unwitting tools. But they do not understand the situation in spiritual terms and, in that sense, are not responsible for their actions. We therefore feel compassion for them, especially if we see them eaten up with bitterness and anger.



We forgive them in our hearts, and, as we have opportunity, we do practical acts of mercy for them, including praying that God will forgive them (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60). It may be that our mercy is not recognised as such by the recipients of it. They may see our merciful action to them as a sign of weakness or an admission

of guilt. If so, take comfort in the knowledge that the Lord knows and understands.

Despite the work of the Holy Spirit, we will not become perfect in mercy here on earth. If we were to be judged on how merciful we are, none of us would reach heaven. But it is by grace we are saved; we do not win our salvation by our good actions (Ephesians 2:8-9). God will show mercy to us on the Day of Judgement because of our repentant and trusting attitude, our humble realisation that we are spiritually destitute and helpless (as we saw in the first beatitude).

So the promise at the end of the fifth beatitude, that mercy will be given to the merciful, must be understood in the same way as praying to be forgiven "as we have forgiven" others (Matthew 6:12). If we are merciful and forgiving to others, it is primarily the result of our realisation that God is merciful and forgiving to us. We already know that we shall receive His mercy on the Day of Judgement, for Jesus has died to take away our sins, and therefore we are merciful to others.



God calls us to be merciful, and this is the ultimate test of whether we are growing in Christ-likeness



DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director, Barnabas Aid

1 Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, Vol.1*. (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1959) p.77.

2 Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chapter 82 of her long text, translated by Barry Windeatt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) published as Oxford's World Classics paperback, p.161.

3 Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, p.73

4 Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, p.95.

5 Richard Chenevix Trench, *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, drawn from the Writings of St. Augustine with Observations* (London: John W, Parker, 1844), p.11.

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Why you can trust Barnabas Aid

30 years of experience serving the suffering Church

The faith of Nigerian victims of anti-Christian violence was strengthened through Barnabas Aid's continued support

We are humbled when we read reports and testimonies from Christians we have helped. To know that we are serving the suffering Church and that Barnabas Aid is changing the lives of poor and persecuted brothers and sisters around the world is a joy.

None of this would be possible without our faithful supporters, who give so generously, often giving from very limited means. We are thankful that they trust us to be good stewards of their gifts for suffering Christians worldwide.

Expert partnerships and earnest thanks

In the last 30 years Barnabas has funded an estimated 5,000 projects in 109 countries. Only the Lord knows how many lives have been saved. In that time, we have built up a wide network of trusted Christian project partners who live and work in the contexts where believers need support.

Normally the projects we support are developed and designed by our local project partners on the ground – churches, ministries or other Christian organisations. Each project is therefore well suited to the particular needs of believers in those countries. Project proposals are scrutinised by our own regional experts, ensuring that the projects we fund are viable and that your gifts and donations are used to best effect in the service of the Church.

We work directly with our project partners, as we do with our supporters, not through any third parties. This means that we channel aid directly from Christians, through Christians, to Christians. It also means we get news and reports on the projects direct from those who are running them.

We actively monitor the progress of projects and, where security allows, we share this news with you:

- Our *Barnabas Aid* magazine always highlights a selection of recent projects in our 'How your donations are helping' section and elsewhere in its pages
- We ask for testimonies, passing on gratitude and prayers to show the real difference our supporters have made in the lives of Christians in need
- Our regular *Barnabas Aid Update* email often shares the good news of how a project is progressing
- Our Barnabas Church Volunteers and Speakers will often have updates to give to their churches, prayer groups or Bible study groups
- We hold Supporters' Days and other events throughout the year, where we share news on what Barnabas is doing

With God's help, we do our best to remain transparent and open in reporting our work where it is safe to do so.

We work directly with our project partners, as we do with our supporters, not through any third parties. This means that we channel aid directly from Christians, through Christians, to Christians.

All donations that are given for a specific project are used 100% for the costs of that project. We do not take any deductions for our overheads. All deductions for overheads come from our General Fund, and amount to less than 12% of our total income.

Thanks to your generosity and the large network of project partners we have developed in the last three decades, we are able to react swiftly to crises, disasters and reports of persecution (see page 13). Yet we are also proactive, not just reactive, anticipating the needs of the Church

in the months, years and even decades ahead, as the Lord leads us.

A future focus for years to come

Barnabas does not just respond to meet immediate needs, vitally important as this is. We take care to plan for the future through our support of Christian schools, apprenticeship programmes and small business ventures. These provide opportunities for believers that will sustain them for years to come.

Our methods of working also serve to empower local churches and Christian organisations. The strength and confidence of our project partners are increased, and they are witnesses of God's goodness in their own contexts. This also speaks to our commitment to meeting the spiritual needs of the Church. Many of our projects aim to provide Bibles and other Christian resources, support for pastors and evangelists, and work to repair and renew church buildings. Through our expansive network, your gifts help to strengthen individuals, local churches and wider Christian communities as a whole.

We know that believers will suffer persecution in many forms until the Lord returns (Matthew 24:9; Revelation 6:10-11). Violence, imprisonment, torture, abuse and discrimination will continue to be the experience of our brothers and sisters in Christ. As such, we will still be needed to pray for and provide aid wherever we can. Our fervent prayer and declared aim for 2024 and, God willing, the years beyond is to continue taking every opportunity to do good to the family of believers (Galatians 6:10).

In the last year...*

500 tonnes



More than 500 tonnes of aid shipped in 47 containers

47 containers



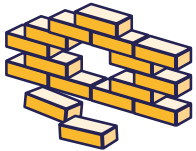
2,460,000

Provided 2,460,000 servings of ePap in Malawi and Zimbabwe



14,000,000

Includes 14,000,000 servings of food



229

Pakistani Christian brick-kiln families freed from bonded labour (bringing total freed so far to **1,804** families, in 20 phases of the project).

1,308

small businesses established



148

148 Christian schools supported

for

15,180

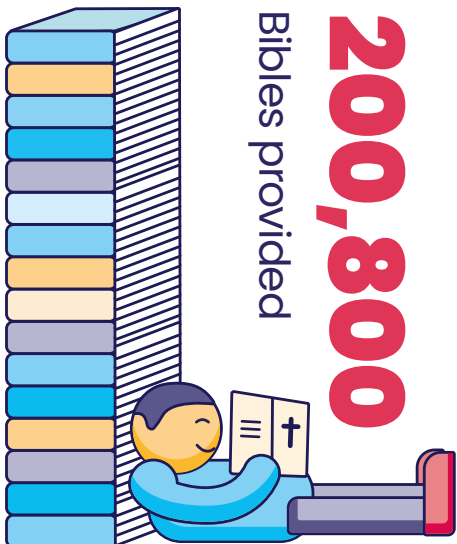
Christian children in 10 countries



providing livelihoods for

1,322

Christian families



200,800

Bibles provided

16,800

Christian victims of violence helped



*1 November 2022 to 31 October 2023

“Remember my chains”

Meeting the Christians behind the statistics – stories from those you have helped

(Colossians 4:18)

“**T**hey comforted us and provided us an emergency relief package on time,” said a church leader in Jaranwala, Pakistan who received aid from Barnabas after the vicious anti-Christian riots on 16 August 2023.

Messages like these pour into Barnabas Aid, helping us remember that every figure on the page opposite is a Christian you have enabled us to help.

We count it a joy and a privilege to have been used by God throughout 2023 to provide urgently needed practical and emotional support to give relief to persecuted Christians around the world. But it is only possible through His help, the gifts and prayers of our supporters, and our faithful project partners working in these contexts.

Paul’s closing remarks in his letter to Colossian Christians – quoted in our headline above – could be repeated by suffering Christians in many countries today. Persecution is on the rise at an alarming rate, and the consistent plea we receive from our project partners has been to remember our family of believers in their time of need.

Support for victims of violence

“I am very thankful to Barnabas Aid for this food package, hygiene kit and crockery set... We are still under threat – please remember us in your prayers,” said Shafqat from Jaranwala, one of the hundreds of Christian families whose homes were destroyed by the rioters.

Barnabas Aid project partners were on the scene within 24 hours, evaluating how we could provide aid to the local Christians and churches who had endured terrifying hostility against them. We were able to distribute aid packages for 172 of the worst-affected Christian families, comprising food essentials for one month, hygiene kits, and kitchen basics so that they could rebuild their lives after their homes had been burned and looted.

Sub-Saharan Africa is a hotbed of violent persecution against Christians.

“The armed men had burst into the middle of worship within the school to threaten death to the teachers and students... these threats were accompanied by whippings,” wrote our project partner in Burkina Faso. Violence, kidnapping, murder, burning of houses or crops, and looting of property are regular occurrences for Christians in this country.

“I didn’t [get any help] except from Barnabas Aid, my 35 oxen, my 50 bags of cereals and more than 60 small ruminants were taken away by the armed men,” said Daniel, after Barnabas Aid sent relief to him and many displaced Christians who were driven from their community.

Through your gifts, Barnabas was able to send food to help nearly 200 Christians in Burkina Faso survive after they were forced to leave everything behind.

Converts from Islam are also persecuted in Burkina Faso. “[My husband] told me to choose between my home and my faith... Not being able to deny my faith, I decided to be faithful to my Lord... We are humbled that Christians from far away are helping us with so much food,” said “Aicha”.

Aicha, along with her two children (pictured) were thrown out of their family home when she left Islam to follow Christ. Barnabas met their practical needs with food essentials.

Aid for those at the mercy of aggression

Barnabas has been a constant supporter of Christians from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2022 and repeatedly during a heart-breaking 2023. From December 2022 to September 2023, Barnabas Aid increased support for our suffering brothers and sisters during the blockade of the Lachin Corridor by Azerbaijani forces. With the Lord’s help, Barnabas acted quickly to get desperately needed food and hygiene items into the region within weeks.

After Azerbaijan invaded Nagorno-Karabakh on 19 September 2023, almost the entire population – that is, 120,000 hungry and traumatised Armenians – have become refugees leaving behind practically everything they owned. They have had to flee their beloved homeland, which was a land filled with ancient churches and vibrant Christian faith.

Barnabas Aid continued to help these brave Christians who endured so much hardship and persecution. We sent funds to provide food, shelter and resources to help them survive and heal from their trauma and, with God’s help and yours, we will assist with their longer-term needs in 2024.

Our Lord reminds us in John 15 that we will be persecuted because the world persecuted Him, but Paul also tells us that we can “...do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers”. (Galatians 6:10)

It is a God-given honour to serve the suffering Church, remembering that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was persecuted and died for us. It has been our mission for 30 years to serve suffering Christians, remembering that there are believers who are persecuted in His name every day.

Let us remember their chains, as Paul asked the church at Colossae to remember his. We pray that the Lord will continue to use the work of Barnabas Aid to provide timely and appropriate relief wherever Christians are in chains – whether they be physical, emotional, or spiritual.



“Aicha” and her children with the food provided by Barnabas Aid after she was thrown out of the family home by her husband because she decided to follow Christ

Martyr Island

“In the work of my Lord and Saviour, I desire to live or die,” wrote John Williams, a missionary of Welsh descent, in 1823. He and his English wife Mary had been serving God in the islands of the South Pacific since 1817, evangelising and teaching the new believers. They continued together in their fruitful missionary work until 20 November 1839. On that date, John Williams, by this time highly acclaimed in missionary circles, visited an unevangelised island called Erromango,* part of the group of islands now called Vanuatu.* He was accompanied by the British Vice-Consul in Samoa and by a young man called James Harris, who felt a call to be a missionary to the Marquesas Islands, elsewhere in the Pacific.

The Erromangans gave their British visitors a friendly welcome, and gifts were exchanged. After a while, James Harris left his two companions on the beach and went inland. Suddenly he came racing back, followed by yelling islanders with clubs and spears. Without hesitation, the Vice-Consul ran and waded out to the rowing boat they had come in. But John Williams waited, apparently trying to identify whether the yells were hostile or not. Then he too began to run towards the sea. But he stumbled and fell in the shallows, which enabled the islanders to catch him and kill him. James Harris was killed in a nearby river. Afterwards the Erromangans ate the two bodies in a sacred religious ceremony.

Erromangan tradition recalls that the white visitors had moved too close to a *nevsem* (a tower-like structure symbolising peace and stability) that the islanders had built for Chief Natgo. This seemed like a calculated insult to the chief and came soon after white traders had killed a number of islanders. Chief Natgo had therefore summoned his warriors to attack.

Christians from Rarotonga in the Cook Islands and from Samoa were grief-stricken at the loss of their beloved “Williamu” who had led them to Christ. They volunteered in their hundreds to take his place and bring the Gospel to Erromango.

An aged Rarotongan, who had been a great warrior, addressed his fellow Rarotongan believers:

Brethren, wipe away your tears. This is my question to you. What about the work? Who will stand where Williamu fell? Who will go and complete the battle which he began?

Brethren, I have been remembering the prayer of Jesus when he hung upon the cross, ‘Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.’ Now, in conclusion, I look to the missionary and I look to you, and I tell you that the desire of my heart is to be put on board the next ship that comes to our land, to be taken down to that dark land of Eromanga, and to be put on shore in the midst of the heathen who murdered Williamu.

I will tell them what we once were, and what the Word of God has now made us; and, it may be, they will understand what I say: but should I fall by their hands, [at this point he looked towards another church member] if I fall you, my brother, follow me; and if you fall let another come, and in this way the land of Eromanga, and all its people, shall be gained for Jesus, and become as we are this day through the preaching of His Word.”

The ordeals endured by these local missionaries were terrible. Before their conversion they had been warriors and some had been chiefs, but on the hostile mission field of Erromango they patiently suffered hunger, insults and abuse. Some were killed, while others perished of disease or starved to death because the Erromangans would not help them in acquiring food. Nevertheless, as soon as a missionary was withdrawn or died, others instantly volunteered to take their place. It is recorded that around 40 Christians from Samoa and Rarotonga – men, women and children – died in their efforts to bring the Gospel to Erromango. Canadian missionaries George and Ellen Gordon arrived in Erromango in 1857. They were very concerned by the brutality of the white traders, who were not averse to using guns

and cannon in the process of taking Erromango’s valuable sandalwood trees. The traders, part of the colonial expansion of the time, also stole precious food such as yams and pigs.

Rejecting conventional missionary practices of the time, the Gordons did not recruit Christians from other islands to teach and preach on Erromango. Rather than trying to maximise the number of Erromangans who heard the Good News, they focused on nurturing and training a few Erromangans who showed an interest in the Christian message. George translated portions of the Bible into one of the six Erromangan languages.

After four years there was a group of about 40 Christians, three of whom had been baptised. Then the sandalwood traders, changing their weapons from firearms to viruses, deliberately introduced measles to the island. Huge numbers of islanders died as they had no resistance to the new disease. George cared tirelessly for as many of the sick as he could, and only two of his patients did not survive. Unfortunately both were the children of a chief. Believing that George had deliberately killed his children by magic, the chief and a group of warriors killed George and Ellen on 20 May 1861.

The Erromangan Christians buried the Gordons and then fled en masse to another Vanuatu island called Aneityum, which already had a thriving Christian community. Later the same year they returned to Erromango and were still there when George’s younger brother James arrived.



George and Ellen Gordon [Image credit: Pacific Manuscripts Bureau]

James had volunteered promptly to take his martyred brother’s place on Erromango, but completed his theological training and some medical studies before setting sail, so did not reach Erromango until the mid-1860s. By this time the island was so

depleted of sandalwood trees that a new trade was replacing it – a trade in men. Erromangans were being taken as indentured labourers, mainly to plantations in Australia, where they were often worked to death. “Blackbirding”, as it was called, was almost a slave trade and was strongly condemned by all the missionaries in Vanuatu, who wrote in protest to the authorities in both Britain and Australia.

The Erromangan Christians welcomed James warmly. As a brilliant linguist who had studied his brother’s Bible translations during the long sea voyage, he was able to preach in one of the Erromangan languages almost as soon as he arrived. He followed his brother’s unorthodox missiology method, pouring his time and energy into a small group of Erromangan Christian young men, hoping that they would become future leaders of the church. These men accompanied James in his extensive travels around the island. By 1870 he had baptised 16 people.

On 7 March 1872 James was on his veranda, translating the book of Acts. He had almost reached the words “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60) when he was attacked and killed.

Most of those James had baptised went on to share the Gospel with their fellow-Erromangans. The young church grew quickly and was able to raise up leaders from its midst.

In 1880 a church building was constructed, named the Martyrs’ Church. Sadly, this name referred only to six Western missionaries who were killed or died of disease in Erromango, not to the 40 Samoan and Rarotongan missionaries who perished similarly but whose names and stories have been lost. Twenty years later around 95% of the people of Erromango identified as Christians.



The Martyrs’ Church, c. 1890 [Image credit: National Library of Scotland]

Erromango was developing a distinctive reputation. Amongst Western Christians it soon became known as “the martyr island”. But some of the Christians from other islands of Vanuatu looked at this differently: they blamed the Erromangans for having killed so many missionaries, suggesting that because of this their island would never thrive.

A culture of reconciliation

The Erromangans were burdened by the knowledge that their ancestors had killed John Williams, the first Christian missionary to their island, as well as later ones. They felt that the blood of the missionaries was crying from the soil of Erromango, like the blood of Abel (Genesis 4:10). But a tradition of reconciliation had been strongly embedded in Erromango’s culture for many generations (as in the culture of other Vanuatu islands). The building of *neusems* was one of the ways in which peace was made and kept between rival tribes and villages. Another custom was that, if an innocent life had been taken in a tribal conflict, a female should be given in recompense. The idea was that, through marriage and childbirth, she would restore life to those who had lost a family member.

Adding to this tradition the Christian teaching on forgiveness, it perhaps should not be surprising that eventually a reconciliation ceremony took place in Erromango. It involved 18 descendants of John Williams, from all around the world, and hundreds of Erromangans from across the island, who came, singing and praying, to meet them. The date was 20 November 2009, the 170th anniversary of John Williams’ martyrdom.

The day included a re-enactment of the killings. At another point, dozens of descendants of the killers queued up to apologise individually to the descendants of John Williams. One Erromangan couple symbolically “gave” their seven-year-old daughter, a descendant of Chief Natgo, to the Williams family, in exchange for the loss of John Williams. (She remained in Erromango, and the Williams family undertook to be responsible for her education.)

In 2018 a New Zealand researcher asked various chiefs, pastors and elders in Erromango about the effect of the reconciliation ceremony. They all agreed that people felt released from a heaviness

that had weighed on them, and that the people of the other islands could no longer continue to blame them for killing missionaries. Some also noted that the population was growing, churches were working more closely together, a second high school had been built, and other positive developments in the island’s infrastructure and economy, including the restoration of sandalwood forestry.



Reconciliation Ceremony, 20 November 2009 [Image credit: Erromango Cultural Association]

An example to all

What a wonderful example the Erromangans have set for the rest of the world! The missionaries they had killed (thinking them to be a danger) are so few in number compared with the deaths caused by many other nations. The sandalwood traders and blackbirders alone caused far more deaths of Erromangans, while the white colonial powers from which they came harmed and killed so many innocents that the number cannot be computed. Yet today’s generation in those countries, affluent and with a predominantly Christian heritage, does not seem to dare to apologise for what their ancestors did during colonial times.

The Christians of Erromango have shown us a higher and better way. Of course, the current generation of Westerners are not personally responsible for the atrocities of the past, yet what healing and wholeness they could bring if they were to apologise for the actions of their ancestors!

You can read more about these martyrs in Patrick Sookhdeo’s books of daily devotional readings on Christian martyrs, *Heroes of Our Faith*, Vol. 1, pp. 150, 330-331 and Vol. 2, pp. 215, 347. (Isaac Publishing, Vol. 1, 2012, second edition 2021, ISBN 978-1-9524501-2-9, Vol. 2, 2021, ISBN 978-1-952450-15-0) To purchase these books please go to barnabasaid.org/resources/books or contact your nearest Barnabas Aid office (addresses on inside front cover) or write to sales@barnabasbooks.org

* Erromango is also called Eromanga. During colonial times Vanuatu was called the New Hebrides.

Police break up Sunday worship service after complaints

SRI LANKA

Police broke up a worship service at a pastor's house in the Puttalam District of eastern Sri Lanka, on the morning of Sunday 17 September 2023.

Two police officers came to the pastor's house in response to a complaint made by a resident via an emergency hotline. This followed complaints made against the congregation by neighbours earlier in the month.

The officers ordered the members of the congregation to leave, questioned the pastor, and warned him that he might be arrested if they are called again.

Sri Lankan law does not currently require any permit, licence or registration to hold religious worship. However, extremists have been known to disrupt church services, particularly

in homes, with accusations that Christians are meeting unlawfully for worship.

In May 2023 Sri Lanka's Minister of Religion, Vidura Wickramanayaka, announced that he would draw up plans for a new law that would require official registration of places of worship, but no such law has yet come into effect.

Military kills 29 in bombing IDP camp in Christian-majority state

MYANMAR

Twenty-nine people were killed and 57 wounded when the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) bombed a camp for internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Mon Lai Hket village of Christian-majority Kachin State.

The strike was carried out close to midnight on 9 October 2023. Among the dead were 11 children, the youngest of whom was only 18 months old.

The victims had already fled from another IDP camp after first being forced from their homes.

A witness who lives near the camp confirmed that the rest of the IDPs dispersed as the whole camp was wiped out by the attack. "The bomb left a lake-sized hole in the earth," he said, adding that the strike had

also damaged a church, a preschool building and the village school.

A pastor from the Kachin Baptist Church led a funeral service for the victims, while prayer meetings were held in other parts of the state.

Christians are a minority in Myanmar as a whole, but a majority in Kachin, Karen and Chin states. Anti-Christian violence has persisted for many decades, and increased in intensity after the military coup of February 2021.

In August 2023 two civilians were arrested and killed by Tatmadaw soldiers in Momauk township, Kachin State. In the same month at least seven were injured in aerial strikes on church buildings, pastors' homes, and other houses in Chin State.

Militants kill 15 in attacks on Kaduna and Benue states

NIGERIA

Militants killed six residents from two families in the Takanai Gora community in Zangon Kataf Local Government Area (LGA), Kaduna State, on 26 September 2023.

The community is part of the Christian-majority Atyap Chiefdom. Those killed were named as Sarah Adamu, Rejoice Adamu, Enoch Adamu, Juan Aminu, Salomi Aminu and Meshak Aminu. Six others were injured. The gunmen dispersed when the military eventually arrived on the scene.

Further south, in Christian-majority Benue State, gunmen killed nine people on the night of 17 October as they stormed three communities in Logo and Gwer West LGAs.

Five people were killed at Mahanga and Ayilamo in Logo LGA, while four others were killed at Nagi camp, Mbachohon council ward of Gwer West LGA. Many others sustained injuries in the attacks.

Benue State Governor and church leader Hyacinth Alia condemned "the nefarious activities of the herders who maim and kill innocent Benue citizens in cold blood".

In expressing sympathy for families bereaved, he also called on security forces to act against the armed militants.



An IDP camp in Christian-majority Kachin State just hours after a military strike that killed 29 people [Image credit: Myanmar Now]

History made as Erdogan opens new church building in modern Istanbul

TURKEY

The opening has taken place of what is believed to be the first church building built with government backing in Turkey's 100-year history as a post-Ottoman state.

The country's President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, joined church leaders to take part in the inauguration ceremony of the building in Istanbul on Sunday 8 October 2023.

The government backing contrasts with the Turkish state's record of expropriating churches and other church properties since the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923.

Erdogan – who is open about his ambitions to spread Turkish Islamic influence, as if to re-establish the Ottoman empire – has been criticised during his two-decades

as the country's leader for converting ancient churches into mosques.

He faced an international outcry for converting Istanbul's Hagia Sophia, once the world's largest cathedral, from a museum into a mosque in 2020.

Construction of the church began in 2019, and Erdogan laid the first stone for its construction.

The inauguration was postponed following the February earthquake that struck both Turkey and Syria.

The church, which has capacity for 750 worshippers, was filled for the inauguration ceremony.

One attendee commented, "Look at this crowd! These are my brothers and sisters, and at last we have a place where we can all come together!"



The new church in Istanbul is the first to be built with government backing since the Turkish Republic was established in 1923 [Picture credit: Al-Monitor/Yasin Argul]

Police foil attempt to bomb two churches

UGANDA

Ugandan police foiled a terrorist plot to bomb two churches in central Butambala district on Sunday 15 October 2023.

Members of the public became suspicious of what proved to be explosive devices and notified the police.

President Yoweri Museveni said the militants had planned to detonate two bombs in churches in Kibibi, about 30 miles from the capital, Kampala, but the devices "were reported to police and defused".

President Museveni praised the vigilance of the public and advised residents of the Rwenzori region on the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to report any suspicious individuals appearing in their area.

He warned of a continuing terrorist threat to Uganda from DRC-based extremists.

In June 2023 terrorists from north-eastern DRC were responsible for an attack on Christians at a boarding school in Kasese District, western Uganda.

More than 40 people, mainly school pupils, were killed (see "In Brief", *Barnabas Aid*, September/October 2023).

In September 2023 Ugandan police arrested six people from the same terrorist group in connection with an attempt to bomb one of the largest churches in Kampala.

Twelve children among 26 killed in North Kivu province

DR CONGO

At least 26 people were killed on 24 October 2023 in a Christian area of north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Extremists attacked residents in the town of Oicha in North Kivu province at around 11pm with

machetes. The death toll included 12 children.

A local army spokesman said that the attackers carried out the slaughter using machetes rather than guns in order to avoid alerting nearby government troops. Four people

injured in the assault were taken to hospital.

Around 5,500 people have lost their lives to anti-Christian violence in DRC since October 2014. Terrorist groups target Christian communities, particularly in North Kivu and other north-eastern states.

The Shepherd's Academy expands into Central Asia

Huge need for theological training to support region's pastors and church leaders



Delegates gathered for a Barnabas-funded conference in Armenia were enthusiastic about the opportunities offered by TSA's online learning programme

Praise God for the wonderful church growth in the Central Asian republics as many Muslims turn to Christ.

There are new believers meeting together in convert churches all across this vast region, in addition to the historic Christians.

The pace of growth is creating a big demand for leaders to guide congregations. Many are being led by Christians who are both young in age, and young in terms of their Christian knowledge and beliefs.

Huge need for pastoral training

Barnabas Aid's theological and pastoral training programme The Shepherd's Academy (TSA) – the undergraduate section of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life (OCRPL) – is expanding into Central Asia to meet this demand and support leaders in their God-given calling.

“There is a huge, and growing, need in Central Asia to train pastors so that they are better equipped for ministry,” said Dr Prasad Phillips, Deputy Executive Director of OCRPL.

“Many pastors serve a number of congregations but have never had an opportunity to be trained. There are a few well trained but the majority of them are not.”

Church leaders in the region need to be equipped also for the particular challenges that face their church members.

Converts to Christianity are often rejected by their families and friends, and are subjected to hostility by their

communities. They are frequently denied work by Muslim employers and, as a result, many Christian men are forced to look for employment further afield, leaving their small churches weakened by their absence.

The governments of the Central Asia republics, which emerged out of 70 years of communist rule, tend to be deeply suspicious of Christians and closely monitor church activities.

Pastors and congregations are often subjected to intimidation or fined for unauthorised worship. Churches are required to register, but the rules of registration are sometimes impossible for small congregations to meet, thus rendering them unlawful.

Expansion of TSA warmly welcomed

The expansion of TSA was warmly welcomed by more than 60 evangelical church leaders and heads of theological institutions from Central Asia who gathered for a Barnabas-funded conference on the future of theological education in the region, held in Armenia's capital Yerevan in October 2023.

Delegates were enthusiastic at the opportunities online learning offers to pastors, the majority of whom share the overall poverty of their communities and cannot afford normal tuition fees.

Many pastors are bi-vocational, supporting their families through secular employment, and are unable to leave their jobs for residential college studies.

Initially TSA is offering Central Asian students a choice of five undergraduate

degree courses in Russian. There will also be three TSA short training courses in Russian that will enable students to sharpen their skills as under-shepherds of the Lord's flock.

More TSA courses are in the process of being translated into Russian and will be available shortly. Courses in Georgian and Uzbek are also planned.

Hundreds studying with TSA in Global South

The Shepherd's Academy was established by Barnabas Aid in 2021 to meet the need for leadership training among grass-roots church leaders in the Global South.

Its currently has more than 800 students registered from over 30 countries in the Global South, and has 20 study centres in 12 countries.

Students undertake short training courses or full undergraduate degrees. The courses, which are accredited by the European Council for Theological Education, combine guided self-study and online classes, providing flexibility and affordability for church leaders who would otherwise struggle to access formal learning.

Additionally, each degree student is linked to a local study centre for in-person tutorials, which help students to apply the self-study materials to their own cultural contexts.



Barnabas Aid volunteers chatting to visitors about our work and our food.gives project at last year's Big Church Festival

Come and join us at the Big Church Festival – 25 and 26 May 2024

Come and join Barnabas Aid at the Big Church Festival (BCF) taking place at the beautiful Wiston Estate in West Sussex, UK, on 25 and 26 May 2024.

Barnabas is now the festival's headline sponsor and we are looking forward to welcoming Christians from across the UK and around the world for a wonderful weekend of worship and fellowship.

Some of the world's best Christian musicians will be featured as well as new up-and-coming artists across the festival's eight stages.

Apart from the main stage, there are several smaller stages with music artists and youth events. BCF is a fantastic family experience around like-minded people who have come together to worship the Lord over a weekend.

There are a host of attractions for children at The Field of Fun including climbing walls, circus performers, go-karting and storytelling, while adults will be drawn to the bustle of The Avenue with its food vans, bookshops, merchandise, Expo tents, and the terrific Tea Garden.

Alternatively, you could follow The Wiggly Path to the Prayer

Tree, the Spoken Word Tent, or relax and take in the beautiful view of Wiston House from the comfort of hammocks and deckchairs. The camping facilities at the festival are top notch, too.

We need your help!

But we do need your help! We're looking for volunteers to lend us a hand at the festival, welcoming visitors, serving at our water stations, café and Expo stand, as well as behind the scenes preparing meals to sustain our hungry helpers.

We're also looking for volunteers to help us set up on 24 May, and pack away on 27 May.

Could you or your church get together a group of willing friends to help us? Every volunteer will receive free entry, food, camping (tents and camp beds), access to the Barnabas staff and volunteer hospitality tent, and a Barnabas Aid T-shirt. All we ask is that each day you give us four or five hours (to be finalised closer to the time) of your time to help at the festival.

For more information about the festival and ticket prices go to bigchurchfestival.com

To find out more visit our website barnabasaid.org/volunteer-at-bcf or call our events team at the Barnabas UK offices on **01793 744557**.

Barnabas Aid thanked at Windsor Castle ceremony

Barnabas Aid was thanked at a ceremony held at Windsor Castle, UK, for its work delivering around 50 million items of personal protective equipment (PPE) to Christian hospitals in five African countries.

The Duke of Gloucester was the guest of honour at the event hosted by historic charity Crown Agents International Development on 10 October 2023 to celebrate its achievements over the previous year.

Barnabas worked in partnership with Crown Agents to transport £25 million of PPE donated by the Irish government to hospitals in Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe between September 2022 and early 2023.

The cost of delivering the much-needed PPE in 40 shipping containers – £12,000 (\$16,000, €14,000) per container – was funded with the donations of Barnabas supporters.

Barnabas Aid's International CEO Noel Frost was among the invited audience of around 80 representatives from the charity, banking and regulatory sectors.

He said Barnabas Aid's work was showcased at the event. "Our ethos and ability to rapidly deliver aid was highlighted," he explained.

"We were specifically singled out and thanked for our work and passion for our charitable objectives."



Barnabas Aid International CEO Noel Frost, left, is introduced to the Duke of Gloucester

Petition:

End the genocide of African Christians

More than **50,000** Christians have been slaughtered in a genocidal campaign of anti-Christian violence that has swept across parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

The worst-affected area is northern and Middle Belt Nigeria, where around 45,000 believers have been killed by terrorists since 2009.

Added to this figure are an estimated 5,500 Christians since October 2014 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 1,800 in northern Mozambique since October 2017 who have lost their lives to sustained anti-Christian violence. More of our brothers and sisters have suffered violent deaths in countries such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Kenya and Niger.

Our African brothers and sisters show great resilience, courage and faith in the face of the unrelenting onslaught. But can we, with God's help, give them the hope of better protection?

We recognise that other groups are targeted as well as Christians. We acknowledge the difficulties faced by African governments and the wider

international community in combatting this form of violence.

Yet we also believe that more can be done by African governments, supported and empowered by the international community, to protect Christian communities that are especially vulnerable to extremist violence.

Our petition urges the UK, Australian and New Zealand governments to request institutions such as the African Union and its legislature the Pan-African Parliament to consider this urgent situation. The petition also requests that the matter be discussed at the October 2024 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

You will find a petition sheet enclosed with this magazine. If you would like to join our campaign, please add your name. If possible, please circulate the petition to others who may be interested in signing.

