



barnabasprayer

BARNABAS FUND – AID AGENCY FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

To help you
pray for the
persecuted
Church

MARCH/APRIL
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Thank you for your prayers for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ, which make such a difference to them. We sometimes have to change or omit their names for security reasons, and we have only limited space to share their stories. But the Lord knows the people and places we are praying about. Please do not feel limited by the specific prayer requests, but pray as you feel led. On each Sunday we have provided a set prayer; please feel free to use these in their current form, to adapt them as you prefer, or to use the information they contain to frame your own prayers.

March

THURSDAY 1 The employment situation in Kyrgyzstan is very difficult and many people are leaving the country to seek work to support their families; this includes church leaders. Ask the Lord that leaders will return to their homeland and to raise up new leaders in the country. Pray for Christian children who face persecution at school that the presence and comfort of the Holy Spirit will be very real to them. Lift up the many Christians who cannot get work to support their families unless they deny Christ; ask that they will continue to be faithful and that our heavenly Father will provide for them.

FRIDAY 2 Four Christians from one village in Laos and a pastor from a nearby village were arrested in Laos in mid-December. The four had infringed the law by inviting the pastor to come from outside and help them prepare for Christmas; they should have limited their Christmas celebrations to their own village. This regulation is only

one of many affecting the Christians of Phin district; they are also banned from teaching the Bible and spreading their faith. The reason for these rules, according to a Phin district official, is that “Christianity is the religion of the Europeans and Americans.” Pray that these restrictions and others requiring churches to register will be lifted. Pray that Laotian Christians will boldly proclaim the truth of their Saviour without fear, knowing that the Lord is with them (Psalm 118:6).

SATURDAY 3 There are many migrants in Libya, mainly from West Africa and Eritrea, hoping to get from Libya to Europe. But they are in permanent danger of being picked up by Libyan militias and sold into slavery in modern-day slave markets. Amongst these vulnerable Africans are many Christians, for example, Eritreans escaping religious persecution. Pray for an end to what the secretary-general of the United Nations described as “among the most egregious abuses of human rights.” Pray especially for our Christian brothers and sisters that they will not lose heart, as they fix their eyes on the unseen and the eternal (2 Cor 4:16-18).

SUNDAY 4 **O Lord, we lift up to You all Christians who are refugees in other countries or displaced within their own country. Be their refuge and a strong tower. Let them hear Your words of comfort and fill them with a peace that the world cannot give. Remind them of their heavenly homeland, where You have prepared a city for them. Let them know Your comfort and peace and Your assurance of their heavenly homeland,**

where You have prepared a city for them. (Psalm 61:3; Hebrews 11:16)

MONDAY 5 More than 16 centuries ago, a Christian from the Maldives called “Theophilus the Indian” brought the Gospel to Yemen. He led the king of Yemen to Christ in AD 354. Now both Yemen and the Maldives are strongly Islamic, and Christians in either country can be arrested for sharing their faith. In the Maldives you can be imprisoned for having a Bible in your home, and it is a crime to criticise Islam. As converts from Islam, Maldivian Christians have broken the law just by deciding to follow Christ. Intercede today for Maldivian Christians, asking that God will strengthen any in prison and that the Holy Spirit will comfort and encourage isolated believers.

TUESDAY 6 Give thanks for the dramatic ruling by Morocco’s High Religious Committee last year that converts from Islam should not face the death penalty, and pray that other countries will follow this lead. Pray that the National Human Rights Committee will grant Moroccan Christians their requests and that their right to exist, worship and share their faith will be recognised. Ask God to guide, nurture and add to the number of Christians in Morocco, and that He will give give them the strength to “live a life worthy of the calling [they] have received” (Ephesians 4:1).

WEDNESDAY 7 Lift up in prayer the many displaced Kachin Christians in Myanmar (Burma), and also Christians from other ethnic minorities, who have experienced horrific treatment at the hands of the country’s military. Pray that they will remain strong in the Lord

as they face great hardship. Pray that the progress of democracy in Myanmar, so fêted in the world’s press, will lead to true religious freedom for all.

THURSDAY 8 Many Nepalese Christians feel like second-class citizens in their own country; pray that they will be assured of their citizenship in heaven. Openly sharing their faith can bring prosecution; pray that changes to the constitution and the restrictive religious laws introduced last year will be reversed. Lift up Indra, Shukra and Mekh, three Christian Nepalese citizens who were jailed in India in January for sharing their faith with local Indian people. They were found guilty under the Indian Penal Code Section 295A which prohibits deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs. They had arrived in the town of Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh state, only three days earlier, intending to stay for some time.

FRIDAY 9 Join hands with our brothers and sisters suffering from Islamist violence in Nigeria, and cry out with one voice to the Lord for justice. Ask God for the complete defeat of the Boko Haram Islamist militants group and that its members may come to know and love the Prince of Peace. Pray for the protection of Christians in refugee camps due to Boko Haram violence and that, in the midst of adversity, the light of their love for Him will continue to shine.

SATURDAY 10 Call on the Lord to help North Korean Christians, who are subject to brutal repression at the hands of a dictatorial leader. Pray

especially for those facing death, torture and abuse in labour camps; pray that they will be comforted with the assurance that neither death, nor life, nor any powers can separate them from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8: 37-39) Ask that Christians, gathering together in secret, will encourage one another to hold firm to the faith.

SUNDAY 11 Thank you, dear Lord, for pastors, church-planters and evangelists who serve You in the face of opposition and violence in places where Christians are a despised minority. May Your Holy Spirit equip and empower them spiritually, just as You meet their material needs. Protect them from attacks from the majority community, harassment from the authorities and unjust penalties for their service to You. Please make their ministries fruitful, in lives transformed by the truth of the Gospel of Christ and churches strengthened to face persecution with courage and perseverance.

MONDAY 12 Nine Pakistani Christians died and over 50 injured when Islamic State terrorists attacked a church in Quetta on Sunday 17 December. The death toll could have been much higher had it not been for the courageous efforts of two Christian men who managed to lock the church gates and thus delay the entry of the attackers. Both, George (63) and Sultan (36), were killed. Praise God for the self-sacrifice and courage of our brothers and ask Him to heal the injured, comfort those who mourn and provide for those who have lost their breadwinner. Barnabas is giving practical aid.

TUESDAY 13 Pray for Christians in the southern Philippines where they have been targets of Islamist violence for many years. Remember especially those from the city of Marawi, who were held hostage for months last year by the Maute Islamist militants and reportedly used by them as forced labour, human shields, sex slaves, bomb-makers, fighters and looters. Pray that they will know the Father's healing, restoration and comfort after this terrible experience. Many Christians were killed for their faith. Ask that the Lord will comfort their bereaved families and friends. Pray that the government will have wisdom to know how best to resist the rise of Islamism.

WEDNESDAY 14 A radio station in the North Caucasus area of the Russian Federation, supported by Barnabas Fund, brings teaching and encouragement to many isolated Christians in the region as well as enabling Muslims to hear the Gospel. Pray for all the radio station staff as they make and air the programmes and respond to the many individual enquiries and requests for prayer. "Through this radio, God speaks not only to me but also to my clients," says a taxi-driver in Krasnodar, who always has the station playing in his car.

THURSDAY 15 Pray for isolated, secret Saudi believers, known only to their Father in heaven; may they be encouraged and comforted by the Holy Spirit, and grow in their faith through revelation and the study of the Word. As Saudi Arabia begins to give a little more freedom to women, such as allowing them to drive, pray that it may also give freedom to non-Muslims to

live and worship according to the faith of their choice.

FRIDAY 16 Beseech the Lord to hear the cries of Somali Christians, and keep them safe and their faith unwavering in the tempests of political and social persecution, and the Islamist violence which is so likely, humanly speaking, to lead to their martyrdom. Ask God to touch President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed to allow freedom of religion in Somalia. Intercede for the return of peace to Somalia and the end of the terror caused by the Al-Shabaab Islamist militant group.

SATURDAY 17 Pray for the Christian minority in Sri Lanka, vulnerable to many kinds of harassment, pressure and persecution. Pray that they may have wisdom to understand the complex times and context in which they live and to know what to do (1 Chron 12:32). Ask that Christians will be able to meet and worship freely. Many Sri Lankan Christians are impoverished and exploited by their employers; they suffer greatly at times of natural disaster. Pray that they know the protection of their Heavenly Father and rejoice in the knowledge that even though they are poor, they are rich (Rev 2:9).

SUNDAY 18 **Lord Jesus Christ, we bring to you in prayer all the Christian women and girls living in contexts of marginalisation, poverty and persecution. Many are doubly despised – for being Christians and for being female – and are at risk of abuse and violence. Be their shield and their glory, and lift up their heads. We pray especially for widows, whose husbands died for Your Name’s sake. Comfort**

their broken hearts and enable them to provide for themselves and their children. (Psalm 3:3)

MONDAY 19 According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, in the last seven years the authorities in Sudan have demolished, damaged or threatened with demolition almost 50 church buildings and have arrested almost 200 Christians, many of them for protesting about the demolition or expropriation of church property. This is all “part of a broader campaign to shrink the space available for Christians to practise their faith” on the pretext that, since mainly-Christian South Sudan became independent in 2011, there should be no more Christians left in Sudan itself. This goes way beyond the restrictions of sharia law, according to which Christians can live in an Islamic state (such as Sudan) albeit treated as second-class in comparison with Muslims. Pray for a complete change of attitude of the Sudanese government to the Christian minority (estimated at 3%), who cling to their faith despite such pressure.

TUESDAY 20 Many Syrian Christians left their homes during the war years, seeking safety in another part of their homeland or in another country altogether. Amongst those who remained in the most difficult places are many elderly, disabled and sick who could not travel. Pray for them now, as they struggle through each day. Ask that the Lord will provide for all their needs. Pray for the many Syrian Christians in other countries that they will be comforted by the presence of the Holy Spirit and will be welcomed into the family of believers around the world.

WEDNESDAY 21 Pray for Christians in Tajikistan, who must endure many restrictive laws for practising and sharing their faith. Lift up Christians who have been arrested and jailed under the “extremism law;” pray for their safe release. Remember the children of Christian parents, banned for the last seven years from taking part in public religious activities. Pray that parents will find other methods to teach them the way of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 11:19)

THURSDAY 22 Although Tanzania is Christian majority over all, parts of it are strongly Islamic, including Zanzibar, and Muslims have disproportionate influence in government, judiciary, education and business. Violent Islamist attacks are increasing. Pray that Christians will be given wisdom from above to respond to the developing situation in their country. Ask also that they will draw strength from the words of Christ: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 5:10)

FRIDAY 23 Lift up in prayer Pakistani Christian asylum-seekers in Thailand, whom the government will not recognise as refugees. Pray for a dramatic change of policy by the Thai government and for the release of believers held in conditions sometimes worse than jail, simply because they have tried to escape discrimination or persecution in their homeland. Pray also that Thai converts from Buddhism will draw strength and encouragement from the Holy Spirit in the face of family opposition.

SATURDAY 24 Pray for Turkish Christians who live in a climate of

growing instability, particularly for those who are converts from Islam, and for Iraqi and Syrian Christian refugees who are especially singled out for harassment. Pray that all Christians will have the boldness to witness for Christ, despite negative portrayal in the media and the risk of being arrested or attacked.

SUNDAY 25 **Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we thank you for the example of those from other religions who decide to follow You, willingly taking up their cross, enduring loss and suffering for Your sake. Please strengthen, encourage and protect them in their walk with You. In times of loneliness or rejection, let them feel Your presence and love in a very special way and remind them that their place in Your family can never be taken away from them. Equip them with all they need to grow in the knowledge and love of You. (Luke 14:27)**

MONDAY 26 Pray that churches in Turkmenistan will be permitted to re-register with the authorities, in accordance with a law issued two years ago, so that they can function legally. Ask that the Lord will strengthen the faith of believers in Turkmenistan, especially converts from Islam, and make a way for Bibles and Christian literature to be more freely distributed. Ask God to give wisdom from above to church leaders as they shepherd His people through difficult times, and especially in their dealings with the authorities.

TUESDAY 27 Praise the Lord that the Church in Uzbekistan is growing, despite severe persecution. Lift up in

prayer Christians, especially church leaders, who suffer physically and emotionally from intimidation, beatings and imprisonment, and pray that God will heal them. Ask that the government will change its attitude to believers and lift restrictions on religious freedom.

WEDNESDAY 28 Pray that the Vietnamese government's new religion law, which came into effect in January, will lead to reduced harassment and persecution of Christians, and that it will be the first of many steps toward greater religious freedom in Vietnam. Pray that those imprisoned who face brutal abuse under trumped-up charges of "subversion" – often for supporting the freedoms of others – will be acquitted and released.

THURSDAY 29 In pre-Islamic times, there was a diocese (Christian bishopric) of Sanaa, capital of modern Yemen, and another diocese on the island of Socotra, which was then, and still is, ruled by Yemen. According to tradition, the apostle Thomas brought the Gospel to Socotra in the first century. The pagan king of Yemen became a Christian in AD 354 and built three churches in the main cities of his country. But Christianity in the region came under severe pressure when Islam arrived in the 7th century. By 632 Yemen had submitted to the new Islamic state in Medina. The last mention in the records of a Christian presence in Yemen is around 840-850. Christianity continued longer in Socotra, disappearing only in the 16th or 17th century. Praise God there are now Christians again in Yemen - a small number of Yemeni converts from Islam and a larger number of

expatriate workers and refugees. Pray for them all that they will stand strong in the mighty power of the Lord (Eph 6:10). They face harassment, even after death. The Christian cemetery in Aden, the only one in the country, was vandalised in November 2017, with crosses and grave stones knocked down. Christians are not allowed to be buried in Sanaa. Pray also for the whole population of Yemen, in the anguish of their suffering from hunger, disease and war, that our merciful heavenly Father will intervene and help them.

GOOD FRIDAY Thank God for the assurance of eternal life for all who believe in Jesus. Praise Him for the perseverance of believers who did not cling to life in the face of death (Rev 12:11). Ask that their sacrifice will embolden others to endure and demonstrate the truth and power of the Gospel to their killers. Pray, too, that the Lord will comfort those left behind in their grief and give them His peace that passes all understanding (Phil 4:7).

SATURDAY 31 Entreat the Lord that Zimbabwe's new political leadership, under President Emmerson Mnangagwa, will fear God (Exo 18:21), and respect religious freedom. Join hands with our Zimbabwean brothers and sisters, and cry to the Lord with "a faith that can move mountains" (1 Cor 13:2) for the recent drought to remain a thing of the past. Praise the Lord for the courage of His servants, who have challenged the authorities over issues of justice and righteousness and been persecuted for it. Pray that they will not be discouraged, but continue to live in and speak the truth.

April

EASTER SUNDAY Praise God for the hope we have, that all who are in Christ have already been made alive with Him (Ephesians 2:5) and will one day be with Him in glory. Pray for our brothers and sisters who today face harassment, discrimination, violence and persecution, that they will hold firm in the assurance of that living hope and be sustained through the comfort and power of the Holy Spirit.

MONDAY 2 Last Saturday (31 March) was the deadline set by the Israeli government for the forcible deportation of asylum-seekers, a policy that seems chiefly aimed at about 30,000 Eritreans in the country, who are mainly Christians. Pray for their safety and protection wherever they are today. They had fled terrible persecution in their homeland but are regarded by the Israeli government as “infiltrators.” For some years, the Israeli government has apparently been trying to get them to leave the country voluntarily by making their lives as wretched as possible, with enforced poverty for all and spells in the infamous Holot detention centre for the men. But those who took up the offer to go to Rwanda or Uganda found their situation even worse and some ended up in the hands of people-traffickers or were even killed. Pray that the Israeli government will remember their own history and the words of Yahweh, “The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself.” (Lev 19:34 NRSV) Thank Him for the compassion and practical generosity

of ordinary Israeli people towards the Eritrean refugees.

TUESDAY 3 Thank you for praying for Fauzia and Jazila, two young mothers in Uganda who were disowned and thrown out of their family homes when they left Islam to follow Christ. With finance forwarded by Barnabas Fund, they have each started a small business: Fauzia runs a retail shop and Jazila is trading in potatoes, beans, tomatoes and charcoal. Praise God that the women can now support themselves and pray that their businesses will thrive and their faith will grow.



Fauzia and her son in the shop

WEDNESDAY 4 Mauritania has strengthened its law on blasphemy. There was already a death sentence for “every Muslim, man or woman, who mocks or insults Muhammad ... , his angels, books...” but this will now be applied even if the person repents of what they have done. The announcement came a few days after a Muslim blogger, convicted of blasphemy, was released from prison, his death sentence having been

downgraded to two years in jail. His release caused outrage and rioting. Mauritania is almost 100% Muslim and it is not clear how this law would apply to non-Muslims. Events in other countries have shown that this type of legislation makes it very risky for Christians to discuss religious matters with Muslim friends or colleagues; it is so easy for them to be accused of “blasphemy.” Ask that the Lord will protect and watch over Mauritanian Christians, who are very few in number. As converts from Islam, they are already liable to an official death penalty in Mauritania, for apostasy.

THURSDAY 5 Nine Egyptian Christians were shot dead in an Islamic State (IS) attack on a church in Helwan, Cairo, on 29 December. Policemen (one of whom was also killed) prevented the attackers from getting inside the building, where a service was taking place, otherwise the death toll would have been far higher. The attack took place about two weeks after IS, using fake news, called for Egyptian Christians to be attacked over the Christmas period. Martyrdom is considered by Egyptian Christians to be the greatest gift that God can bestow; pray that this thought may bring comfort to the bereaved from the Helwan attack and many other attacks on Christians in recent months. Pray also for the grieving relatives of the policeman.

FRIDAY 6 “Destruction, ruin and killing will never be able to defeat goodness, construction, love and peace ... you are our family. You are part of us. We are one and no one will ever drive a wedge between us.” These stirring words were uttered by President al-Sisi of Egypt at a Christmas church service he attended.

They speak of solidarity between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority, in the face of centuries of anti-Christian discrimination to which anti-Christian violence has been added in recent years. Praise God for President al-Sisi’s repeated affirmation of Christians in Egypt and all the practical ways in which he has helped them.

SATURDAY 7 Bassem Shehata Haraz fled with the rest of the Christians of his home town El Arish, North Sinai, Egypt, in February last year, after a wave of Christian murders there. Unable to find work elsewhere, Bassem and his brother returned to El Arish in the summer, and re-opened the family shop. On 13 January this year the two brothers and a Muslim friend were stopped in the street by three armed, masked men. They spotted the cross that Bassem displayed and asked if he was a Christian. He replied, “Yes,” and they immediately shot him dead. Please pray that God will comfort all who mourn for this 27-year-old and will speak to the hearts of the zealous Islamists who killed him, convinced that they were doing a good thing.

SUNDAY 8 Heavenly Father, we praise You for the church in Egypt, believers who have endured faithfully the centuries of hostility, discrimination and persecution, passing on the faith to their children, generation by generation. Help us to learn from their example, as anti-Christian pressure grows in many parts of the world and following Your Son becomes more costly. We rejoice to know that there are far more Egyptian Christians wanting to gather to worship the Lord Jesus Christ than there are approved church buildings for them

to meet in. Thank you that the strict regulations about church buildings have now been relaxed and that the governor of Minya province has given permission for 21 to be renovated, expanded or rebuilt. Please protect those building programmes from attack by grass-roots extremists. We ask this in Jesus' Name.

MONDAY 9 God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Eph 3:20). Praise Him for a dramatic answer to prayers regarding the government committee set up in Egypt last year to review the status of unlicensed church buildings. By 30 September 2017, some 2,600 congregations had submitted requests for legal status for their buildings, after restrictions were eased in 2016. Then in January 2018 the Ministry of Housing formally announced that Christians would be allowed to continue to worship in unlicensed buildings while their applications were being processed. This may sound like simple common sense, but given Egypt's history of strong and often violent opposition to church buildings, it is astounding and wonderful news. There are about ten million Christians in Egypt and not nearly enough licensed church buildings for them.

TUESDAY 10 Jonota Roy and her family left Hinduism to follow Christ on 4 July 2015 when an evangelist visited their house, read to them John 3:16 and explained that Jesus had died for sinners. Three years later, heavy rain and floods damaged the crops and houses of their community in Bangladesh. The family had to go and stay in the school compound. "We prayed every day for God's provision,"

says Jonota, and then recounts how the water receded after a month, and the church provided food and medicine (funded by Barnabas). Praise God for the spiritual encouragement that practical aid has brought to this family and other believers who would be discriminated against because of their Hindu background.

WEDNESDAY 11 The Kazakhstan Evangelical Alliance has requested urgent prayer about forthcoming new legislation in their country. The proposed amendments would, if passed into law, add even more restrictions for Protestant Christians and even make some difficulties for Muslims who do not follow the state-backed Hanafi Sunni version of Islam. The draconian Religion Law of 2011, after which the majority of Protestant churches and organisations went underground or just disappeared, was passed into law in barely a month. Christians in Kazakhstan are concerned that the new law could be passed just as quickly, now that the long drafting stage has been completed. Please pray that the religious liberty situation in Kazakhstan will get better, not worse.

THURSDAY 12 Thank the Lord for answered prayers for the family of much-persecuted Pastor "Odil" in Central Asia. In January, a medical check-up of his disabled baby daughter (then aged about seven months) found that every part of her body was normal! The doctor was astonished and said she did not know how it could have happened. Odil and his wife, both crying with joy, explained that they were Christians and had prayed to God who had done this miracle. The previous

month Odil's parents' home had been raided by anti-terrorist police, who took a CD of worship songs and a few papers. After this Odil was summoned for an interview with the departmental chief. Odil reports that the man did not shout or threaten him, but they had a "very intelligent conversation" for two hours, during which time Odil gave his testimony and shared the Gospel. His interrogator commented that it was the first time he had met a Christian who could explain his faith so clearly. Pray for the anti-terrorist chief that he may meet the Lord Jesus, whom he is persecuting, and believe. (Acts 9:1-5)

FRIDAY 13 Rev. Dr Musa Asake, the general secretary of the Christian Association of Nigeria, has protested strongly over the lack of action from the Nigerian authorities about "Boko Haram, gunmen and Fulani herdsman who are prowling villages, shooting and killing innocent Christians." Alluding to the catalogue of attacks, especially in Benue state, he said, "The impression has now been firmly established that the Islamists of northern Nigeria have 'legalised jihad' in Nigeria." Pray that the Nigerian security forces will be effective in protecting vulnerable Christians in the North and Middle Belt. President Buhari is himself a Fulani Muslim. Pray that he will use the power of his position to do good to all in his country, irrespective of tribe or religion. Ask that Nigerian Christians will respond to violence with the forgiveness and love of Christ.

SATURDAY 14 Linda John Maina (aged 17), a Christian from Chibok, Borno state, Nigeria, was on her way to a wedding where she was to be a

bridesmaid, when she was abducted and forcibly married to a Muslim. A Nigerian pastor commented, "There is a deliberate, calculated plan by Muslims to destroy as many Christian girls as possible." Her distraught father said, "It looks like the Muslims think and see us Christians as slaves and can do whatever they want with us without any repercussions. Of course, they have the government and system behind them." At a sharia court hearing on 28 December, neither Linda's father nor his lawyer were allowed to state their case and Linda herself was not allowed to speak at all. Pray that Linda and all other Nigerian Christian girls who have suffered this treatment will be set free.

SUNDAY 15 Lord Jesus Christ, we pray today for the "Chibok girls" of Nigeria, kidnapped from their school in Chibok during the night of 14-15 April 2014. You know, O Father, the ordeal that these mainly Christian girls suffered, as they were forcibly converted to Islam and made to marry jihadists. We pray especially for the 100 or so who are still in captivity. Be close to them, speak to them in their hearts, reminding them of Your love and the truths of Your Word. Enable them to cling to You as their Saviour, Lord and God, despite the teachings of radical Islam forced on them for four long years. Thank you that around 160 girls have escaped, been rescued or released; we ask that you would help them too, as they recover from the trauma of what they have endured.

MONDAY 16 Thank you for your prayers for the three sons and three daughters of a church elder in the village of Moskota, Cameroon, kidnapped last August by

the Boko Haram fighters who attacked their village and killed their father. Boko Haram tried to force the children (aged about 8 to 16) to convert to Islam but they refused. They were about to be sent to the main camp to become slaves, when the women looking after them fell asleep and the children managed to escape. They spent four days in the bush, making their way back to safety in the regional capital, Maroua. Their mother Sarah is so traumatized that she cannot properly care for them, so the church is looking after both mother and children. Praise God for the children's escape and pray for full healing for them and their mother.

TUESDAY 17 On 15 December 2017 lawmakers in Bolivia approved a new penal code which potentially makes evangelism a crime, with a prison sentence of five to twelve years. The issue arises over Article 88 which bans any attempts to recruit people "to take part in armed conflicts or religious or worship organizations." On the other hand, Article 4 of the Bolivian constitution grants religious freedom to everyone. Pray that religious liberty, including the freedom to try to convince others of your beliefs, will be affirmed clearly in Bolivian law.

WEDNESDAY 18 *Our Religious Freedom* is Barnabas Fund's new campaign for religious liberty in the West where hard-won freedoms, established in earlier centuries, are now being eroded. Please pray that many Christians will get involved, through action or prayer or both. Pray that the UK will pass specific laws to protect all the seven key aspects of religious freedom, and that these will not be reduced simply to "freedom of

worship". Pray that Australia will put in place effective protections to achieve the same result. Pray that New Zealand will have a formal government review to see if these freedoms are being undermined, despite the 1999 Bill of Rights Act. (For more details, including the campaign petition, go to OurReligiousFreedom.org)

THURSDAY 19 The British government's then Minister of State for Universities, Jo Johnson, made clear in November 2017 that he wanted to protect free speech on university campuses. Free speech (and with it the freedom to evangelise) was coming under threat from the "safe spaces" movement to protect students from hearing anything that might offend them. There have also been two recent cases of students being disciplined for expressing their traditional Christian beliefs about sexual ethics and the sanctity of life; one of them was expelled from his MA course in Social Work at Sheffield University. Mr Johnson has now been moved from this post and has a different ministerial portfolio; pray that his successor, Sam Gyimah, will continue the same policy and will be sure to include full freedom of religion.

FRIDAY 20 Austrian church leaders rejoice in a move of God by which 859 asylum-seekers converted to Christianity in Austria in 2017. But the authorities, seeking to test the genuineness of these conversions, are asking "absurdly difficult" questions, say the church leaders. These can include complicated issues about the doctrine of the Trinity or the date on which the first woman was ordained in Austria. Pray for our new brothers and sisters that, faced with such unfair questioning,

they will be strong and courageous and will not be afraid, holding firm to the truth that wherever they go, the Lord God will never leave or forsake them (Deuteronomy 31:6). Ask too for wisdom for the church leaders seeking to help and support them.

SATURDAY 21 Christians in Belarus have been arrested and fined for singing and offering Christian books and magazines to passers-by at the entrance to the market in the north-eastern town of Lepel. The “street library ministry” had previously functioned for many years without the authorities disrupting their activities. Pray for an end to this harassment, and also that the police action against the Christians will serve to create in local people a greater desire to read the Christian materials they offer. (Forum 18)



Barnabas Fund has delivered 20,000 Bibles to displaced Christians in camps in a south-east Asian country

SUNDAY 22 O God, we thank You for the precious gift of Your written Word, which teaches us endurance and brings encouragement and hope. We pray today for thousands of persecuted Christians in south-east Asia who have fled their homes because of violent persecution, often with nothing but the clothes they were wearing, and have been living in

camps for years, without sight of a Bible. Thank you for enabling Bibles to be safely delivered to the camps by a long and roundabout route and for the joy this has brought to the Christians there. May their faith be strengthened daily as they read Your Word. We ask this in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 15:4)

MONDAY 23 Islamist leaders in Indonesia have called on Muslims to cast their votes in elections only for fellow-Muslims “who can defend Islam and make sure that Islamic teachings are applied.” The background to this was the election of a Christian known as “Ahok” to be governor of the capital, Jakarta. He is now in prison for blasphemy, having argued that the Quran does not actually teach that Muslims must only be led by Muslims. There are provincial, district and municipal elections in Indonesia scheduled for June this year, and a presidential election in 2019. Pray that Indonesian Muslims will return to the attitudes of 20 years ago, when Christians and Muslims lived together harmoniously as equals, and will vote for those who will promote such equality.

TUESDAY 24 Today is the day on which Armenians mark the anniversary of the terrible genocide, extended over many years, which peaked in 1915. Millions of Armenian, Assyrian, Greek and Syriac Christians were massacred or died from hunger or hardship as they were forced to trek across the Middle East. Many settled in Syria, where they were welcomed and protected. But today the Christian presence in the region is threatened again, firstly because of violence by Islamic State (IS) and

similar groups and secondly because of the anti-Christian hostility amongst local Muslims which IS has created and left as a legacy, even after IS has been defeated militarily.



Newly arrived in Armenia, these Armenians have fled anti-Christian violence in Syria, where their grandparents and great-grandparents had found safety from genocide at the hands of the Turks and Kurds. They are being checked off a list to receive food from Barnabas Fund

WEDNESDAY 25 A Christian leader in Basra, Iraq, affirmed that most of the Muslims in his city treat Christians as equals “with dignity and respect.” But, he added, “there are fanatics who say loudly in the mosques that we are blasphemers ... the sons of pigs and monkeys” and spoke of the threat to Iraqi Christians of “robberies, gang rapes, torture and murder.” Pray to the Lord, the God of all mankind, to change the hearts and attitudes of these minority extremist Muslims. Many displaced Iraqi Christians feel it is impossible that they can ever return to their homes, because of the attitude of such Muslims, but pray that they will find hope in the words of the Lord, long ago, when He was bringing dramatic change in the area that is now Iraq: “Is anything too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:26)

THURSDAY 26 The wife of an Iranian pastor serving a ten-year prison sentence has herself been given a five-year sentence. Shamiram Isavi Khabizeh was sentenced on 6 January for “acting against national security and against the regime by organising small groups, attending a seminary abroad and training church leaders and pastors to act as spies.” Her husband, Victor Bet Tamraz, was found guilty of similar charges and their son has also been accused. Allegations of this nature are often made against Iranian Christians who are simply engaging in ministry, especially if they have links with Christians outside the country. Pray for Shamiram and Victor as they endure incarceration in Iran’s notorious prison system, that they will be strong and take heart because of their hope in the Lord (Psalm 31:24) and that their bold witness to Christ will draw those they meet in prison to faith in Him.

FRIDAY 27 “Every day with a heavy heart and a feeling of hopelessness, four of us – me, my wife, my two sons – would wake up early in the morning by 4 a.m. and go out to work [making bricks]. We used to pray to God to get us out of our misery. We were so ashamed of what we were.” Sadeeq, Zubeda and their family were “bonded labourers,” tied to the brick kiln where they worked because of debts they had incurred at times of family crisis when they had had to borrow money from their employer. Like so many other Pakistani Christian brick-kiln workers, they were never able to repay the debt, and interest was continually subtracted from their meagre wages, so they could not afford to send their children to school. Sadeeq’s family is one of 120 Christian families

who used to be in this situation, but are now free from their bondage because their debts have been paid by Barnabas Fund. At first Sadeeq could not believe it would really happen, but “the supervisor took our money and gave the receipt. That day was the most miraculous and joyful moment of my and my family’s life. I returned home, sat together with my family and thanked God.” Praise God for His blessing and guidance over this project and pray that more families can be set free.



Sadeeq Masih: “My Lord has released us from our debt ... We used to feel like slaves but now we have become confident ... Thank you every one who has contributed to transforming our lives with hope and joy

SATURDAY 28 Please continue in prayer for Aasia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian mother who was sentenced to death for “blasphemy” in 2010. She has been in prison for almost nine years, much of the time in solitary confinement to protect her from possible violence from Muslim prisoners. She is waiting to have her appeal heard in the Supreme Court, but the hearing has been repeatedly postponed. Nevertheless she is bearing up, and her family visit every month. They live in hiding because, being close relatives of a “blasphemer,” they might be murdered. As you pray for Aasia, her husband and children,

lift up also the Christian lawyers representing her, asking that they will have wisdom and favour from God in their work, and that they too will be kept safe from harm by zealous Islamists, who would believe they are pleasing Allah by attacking everyone connected with a “blasphemer.”

SUNDAY 29 Lord Jesus, we rejoice at the wonderful work of Your Holy Spirit in China, as You add daily to those who are being saved in this atheist state. Thank You for the courage of Chinese Christians in boldly sharing their faith despite the persecution this is likely to bring down on them. Please strengthen all who are in prison today. You know what they are enduring; be close to each one. As the Communist authorities begin to clamp down on Christian children, trying to hinder them from participating in Christian activities that would strengthen their faith, give wisdom to their parents and let the children come to You, by whichever way You choose. (Acts 2:47; Mark 10:14)

MONDAY 30 Officials in Shaanxi province, China, destroyed two church buildings within a fortnight. The first one, in Zhifang village, was demolished on 27 December. Local Christians gathered to protest, some chanting, “Freedom of belief,” and posted on social media some documents proving they were allowed to build there. The authorities apologised, admitting the church was not on illegally occupied land after all, and a few days later dynamited a large church in Linfen city. Pray that the pressure on Chinese Christians will ease off; things have got steadily worse for them since Xi Jinping became president of China in 2013.

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