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persecuted
Church

MAY/JUNE 2018

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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.

May

TUESDAY 1 On 16 January the government of Pakistan issued a fatwa condemning Islamic extremism and vigilante attacks on supposed “blasphemers”. Signed by 1,829 Islamic religious leaders, the fatwa stated that imposing one’s religious ideology by force is contrary to the teachings of Islam. The fatwa was based on the classical Islamic tenet that only the proper Islamic ruler can declare jihad or enforce punishments, such as the death penalty for apostasy and blasphemy. Therefore individuals should not take the law into their own hands and mete out violent punishments on those they consider to be infidels or blasphemers. Pray that the Lord will use this fatwa to bring greater security in Pakistan, especially for Christians and other non-Muslim minorities.

WEDNESDAY 2 In further dramatic news from Pakistan, on 16 February the Interior Ministry submitted to

the Islamabad High Court a draft of proposed amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016, which would provide severe punishments for false accusations of “blasphemy”. In fact, the penalty for a false accusation would be the same as the penalty for the alleged blasphemy itself. At the moment blasphemy must be punished with anything from several years in prison to a death sentence, while false accusation leads to a maximum six months in prison or 1,000 rupees fine (£6.50; US\$9; €7.30). The proposed amendments had been requested by Judge Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui after he had tried a case of five bloggers accused of uploading blasphemous content on social media. Pray that the proposed changes will become law in Pakistan, thus preventing the numerous malicious false allegations, which are made every year; Christians and other non-Muslims are particularly vulnerable.

THURSDAY 3 At the time of writing, Patras Masih (aged 16) is under arrest in Pakistan and his family are in hiding. Patras, a Christian, has been charged with “blasphemy”, after a photoshopped image of him standing on the dome of a mosque appeared on a Facebook group page under his name on 16 January. There was no initial response from authorities until Muslims began violent street protests on 19 February in the Shahdara district of Lahore, reportedly with encouragement from local mosques. Police intervened to protect the Christians’ homes, but many Christian families fled. Pray that Patras may be released soon and for an end to false accusations of blasphemy and anti-Christian violence.

FRIDAY 4 Six house churches in the Pakistani town of Abbottabad were closed in January, but a fortnight later the church leaders were given a verbal assurance that they could reopen again. The surprise closures, a very unusual event in Pakistan, came shortly after the USA placed Pakistan on a special watch list for severe violation of religious freedom. Abbottabad is the city where Osama bin Laden, leader of Al Qaeda, was killed by American commandos in 2011. Pray that Christians will not be seen as the disposable pawns in a game of power politics between Pakistan and the USA.

SATURDAY 5 Thank you for your prayers for Ibrahim and Mariam, the Ugandan brother and sister who were thrown out of their family home when they left Islam to follow Jesus. Mariam (17) has struggled with her school work in the last year because of the stress caused by threats from her father and stepmothers, but she enjoys Girls Brigade at church. Both she and Ibrahim (14) are in the church choir. Thanks to generous gifts from Barnabas supporters their practical needs have been met, but pray for their spiritual and emotional needs, especially for Mariam, who recently started at a



Mariam was so distressed by threats from her Muslim father and his two new wives that she could not do well at school last year

new school; pray that she will know the peace of Christ in her heart.

SUNDAY 6 Lord Jesus, we praise and thank you for the example of the many desperately poor Christians, especially in African nations, who have clung faithfully to You despite offers of material wealth if they would convert to another religion. Though their poverty continues, may each one affirm with Job that they still have this consolation – their joy in unrelenting pain – that they have not denied the words of the Holy One. May we too be prepared to make sacrifices for You, whether great or small, remembering always that You died on the cross for our sins. (Job 6:10)

MONDAY 7 Police demolished a church building in a suburb of Khartoum, Sudan's capital, on Sunday 11 February, just hours after the worship service had finished (having first confiscated all the books, chairs and equipment inside). In recent years, Sudan's government has accelerated its apparent efforts to eradicate Christianity by deporting Christians, shutting down Christian schools and demolishing church buildings. Yet there are thought to be still 1-2 million Christians remaining within Sudan's population of about 40 million total. Pray that each one may persevere in their faith, despite poverty, marginalisation, oppression or outright persecution.

TUESDAY 8 In February the United Nations warned of "unprecedented levels of food insecurity" in South Sudan and said that more than six million people were at risk without aid. This is nearly two-thirds of the remaining population. Last year two counties of

South Sudan were officially at famine level from February to June, meaning that 100,000 people faced starvation. But the UN warning for 2018 said that eleven counties could slip into famine this year. Aid workers warned that more than 30 counties could face severe hunger by May. Whatever the situation at the time you are reading this, ask God to glorify His Name and to provide for the hungry of South Sudan, so many of whom follow Christ.

WEDNESDAY 9 The Church and church leaders are greatly respected in South Sudan. Praise God that the Church is the one body that provides visible unity across political and tribal divisions in the country. Church leaders are often at the forefront of peace and reconciliation initiatives. Pray that Christians will demonstrate by their lives how different ethnic groups can co-exist in harmony, and ask the Lord to bless with success the peace-making efforts of His people.

THURSDAY 10 A church building in Kaji-Sai, Kyrgyzstan, was burnt down on 2 January. When police came to investigate the arson they discovered the congregation included ethnic Kyrgyz people (converts from Islam) and demanded to know why they attended church instead of going to the mosque. They even suggested the believers might have set fire to their own building. Christians in the town have suffered threats, intimidation and harassment since 2010. Ask that our brothers and sisters will be kept strong in the Lord and be able to stand firm in the day of evil (Ephesians 6:10-17).

FRIDAY 11 “All local people know us as Christians who lead people to Christ...

We and other Christians face regular social discrimination and sometimes face physical threats. Once, Muslim children throttled my daughter, but other people protected her.” These are the words of “Karim”, a Kyrgyz convert from Islam who serves God as a missionary to other Kyrgyz Muslims, with financial support from Barnabas. He and his wife have also been visited by the secret police, wanting to know how many people meet to worship in their home each Sunday. Praise God for their courageous witness. Pray for the protection of the whole family, and also for all the new believers they are nurturing and pastoring, especially the isolated ones who cannot join them for weekly worship in their home.

SATURDAY 12 About a hundred Christians were gathered for worship in the city of Gyanja, Azerbaijan, on Sunday 28 January when police burst into the meeting. They filmed everybody and took their personal details, including those of the 40 children present. They then contacted the schools attended by the children. As an unregistered church, members of the congregation could be fined, typically about three months’ average wages. The country’s Religion Law, first introduced after independence in 1992, has been repeatedly amended. All churches are supposed to register, but registering can be a lengthy and confusing process and applications are often refused. The frequent changes in the law mean many churches have had to re-register multiple times. Pray for all who were present on 28 January that they will not be discouraged or fearful, especially the children.

SUNDAY 13 Our Father in heaven, we pray today for Christian women and girls who live in contexts of marginalisation, poverty and persecution. You know their vulnerability and their suffering, despised for being Christians and despised for being female. May they rejoice to know that You are protecting them day by day, that in You they have a safe refuge and that underneath are the everlasting arms. May they know themselves loved and treasured by their Saviour, who first revealed Himself after His resurrection to a group of women. We ask this in the Name of Jesus. (Deuteronomy 33:27)

MONDAY 14 An illiterate 12-year-old Pakistani Christian girl was abducted and forced to marry a Muslim man. But on 8 February the Islamabad High Court ordered that she should be returned to her parents. Judge Siddiqui wrote in his order that he was not convinced she had embraced Islam of her own free will and directed the police to investigate her abduction more thoroughly. Such abductions of Christian and Hindu girls, with forced conversion and forced marriage, happen all too often in Pakistan, but it is rare that the authorities see things from their parents' point of view. Pray that Judge Siddiqui's desire for everyone to be equal under the law may be embraced by police and judiciary at all levels in Pakistan.

TUESDAY 15 Tomorrow is the first day of Ramadan, the Islamic fasting month. This is a time when Muslims try to draw close to Allah by various disciplines of prayer and fasting. Sadly, it is also a time when radical Muslims sometimes try to show their devotion to Allah by attacking

non-Muslims. Pray for the protection of Christians and other non-Muslim minorities living in Muslim-majority contexts in a special way over the next 30 days. Pray that zealous Muslims truly seeking a relationship with God will find it in the Lord Jesus Christ.

WEDNESDAY 16 It was a poignant celebration when a communion service was held in the ruins of a church in the Syrian city of Deir al-Zor on 3 February, for it was the first to be held since the liberation of most of the city from control by Islamic State militants in September 2017. Furthermore, the Deir al-Zor region was the final stop for hundreds of thousands of Armenian and other Christians who had been forcibly marched there from Turkey during the Ottoman-led genocide of Christians a century ago. Huge numbers had perished or been slaughtered on the way, and many of those who managed to reach the "death march" destination, Deir al-Zor, also died. Nearly 300,000 are thought to have been massacred there in 1916 alone. Children were burned and



Armenian Christian orphans at the time of the genocide, each holding their day's ration of bread. These ones were in Aleppo (Photo by Leopold Kashchik. Source: "100 Photographic Stories about the Armenian Genocide", Armenian Genocide Museum Institute Collection, Yerevan, Armenia)

drowned en masse. Survivors report that the Deir al-Zor police chief had 2,000 Armenian orphans tied together and thrown into the Euphrates river on 24 October that year. Pray that the Christians of Deir al-Zor (estimated at 3,000 before the civil war began in 2011) will have peace in the Lord Jesus, and take heart that He has overcome the world (John 16:33).

THURSDAY 17 Kurdish militia in north-east Syria are kidnapping Christians to use them as forced conscripts in their armed struggle against Turkey. Seven Christians were abducted around the town of Qamishli on 19 January by Kurdish security forces. After negotiation six of the seven were released but, at the time of writing, the whereabouts of Saliba (aged 20) is still unknown. On 31 January two Christian university students, who were on their way to sit exams, were also abducted. The Christian negotiator who helped secure the release of the majority of the group abducted on 19 January has said that the forced conscription of young Christians is part of a wider pattern of intimidation by Kurdish forces who “want us to abandon our homeland so that they can seize more of our properties and land”. Pray for the release of Saliba (whose name means “cross”) and for all other Christians who have been abducted in north-east Syria.

FRIDAY 18 The YPG Kurdish militia in north-east Syria have been spraying graffiti on to Christian properties to mark them for confiscation. This is chillingly reminiscent of the way in which Islamic State sprayed slogans and signs on to Christian homes and businesses in northern Iraq in 2014 before seizing

them. In this part of Syria, the peaceable Christians have traditionally been seen as a buffer between the Arabs and Kurds who are hostile to each other. Ask our heavenly Father to bless His sons and daughters in north-east Syria that they may continue to be peace-makers in their local communities, despite this provocation. (Matthew 5:9)

SATURDAY 19 A court in Egypt imposed a fine of 360,000 Egyptian pounds (£14,600; US\$20,400; €16,600) on the Christian who owned a building, not licensed as a church, where believers had been meeting for worship for many years. The same court gave one-year suspended sentences to 15 Muslims who had taken part in a violent attack on the building, in the village of Kafr al-Waslin, near Giza, on 22 December. Members of the congregation had been assaulted and the interior of the church severely damaged. Egypt’s President Sisi has been working hard to remove the legal obstacles which for nearly two centuries have made it so hard for Egyptian Christians to have sufficient places for worship and ministry. But, as indicated by the difference between these two sentences, attitudes on the ground still tend to be biased against Christians having churches. Pray that, from top to bottom of Egyptian society, there will be complete change of opinion and an end to the traditional hostility to church buildings.

SUNDAY 20 **O Holy Spirit, our Counsellor and Comforter, be close to all who suffer for Jesus’ Name today. Console and strengthen them. Give them the right words to say to their persecutors. O Spirit of Truth, who teaches us all things and reminds us of everything**

that the Lord Jesus said, nourish the faith of believers whose Bibles have been confiscated, who are imprisoned, who follow Him as secret believers and have no fellowship with other Christians. Enable them to delight daily in their Saviour's love and to grow in Christlikeness. We ask this in Jesus' Name. (John 15:15-27)

MONDAY 21 New religion regulations came into force across China on 1 February. The updated regulations, which form part of a government crackdown on “extremism”, increase government scrutiny of religious literature and websites, and require registered religious organisations not to “use religion to harm national security, disrupt social order ... or [do] other harm [to] national interests”. The changes appear to leave Christians, particularly those in registered churches who are legally allowed to meet, in a more vulnerable position. Pray for wisdom and courage for our brothers and sisters in China, whether in registered churches or in unregistered churches; they can so easily be accused of disrupting social order or damaging national interests, simply by living as Christians.



This silver cross, rising from a lake, is a prominent landmark beside a registered church in Suzhou, near Shanghai. But new regulations are likely to make registered churches more vulnerable

TUESDAY 22 China's legislature, the National People's Congress, voted on 11 March to remove a clause in the Chinese constitution that limits the president of the country to two consecutive terms. This will allow President Xi Jinping to continue in that role after 2023. Xi is also General Secretary of the Communist Party of China and Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and under his leadership there has been a crackdown on Chinese Christians. Pray that the Lord will raise up a just, merciful and generous ruler for this vast country, where Christians number around 100 million.

WEDNESDAY 23 Chinese Christians know that following Jesus is likely to mean going to prison. Usually this is only for short periods, but in Yunnan province, long sentences of 4 to 13 years are being issued to Christians, accused of being members of a cult called Three Grades of Servants. It makes no difference that the Christians had never belonged to the cult and some had never even heard of it. Pray that the Lord will sustain and strengthen each one.

THURSDAY 24 Some of the accused Christians (above) were found in possession of what the Chinese authorities called “evil cult” materials; these turned out to include Christian classics such as *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Streams in the Desert*. The Yunnan authorities appear to want to eradicate Christianity; pray that the Christian presence and witness will remain. Pray also that the Holy Spirit will speak to the persecutors as they read the literature they have seized.

FRIDAY 25 A Bangladeshi Christian family of five were violently evicted from their home in Dhaka on 13 February by a mob of about 30 Muslims. The incident was reported to the police but no arrests have been made at the time of writing. There are frequent “land grabs” targeting the property of the Christians and Hindus in Bangladesh. Pray that the authorities will act to protect these vulnerable minorities.

SATURDAY 26 If the building work has gone according to schedule, Phase 1 of Barnabas Fund’s project to provide new homes for the Santal Christians of Gaibandah, Bangladesh, will have been completed by now and 48 families should be living in sturdy brick-built one-room homes, instead of makeshift tents. Before the tents they lived in wooden shacks, but these were burnt down on the night of 6 November 2016,



This young Christian mother in Bangladesh currently lives in a tent, but Barnabas is building simple brick houses for her community, who were made homeless by persecution

apparently by the police in conjunction with local Muslims. Pray for good progress with phase 2 and no further persecution of the community. At least 5,500 Christians were made homeless on that night.

SUNDAY 27 O Triune God, be with Your persecuted people today. In the midst of danger, discrimination, scorn and hardship, may they know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to encourage and support them. We pray especially for isolated believers who cannot meet with other brothers and sisters in Christ to pray, worship and learn. May each one be deeply conscious of Your presence in their life, may they rest in their heavenly Father’s protection, rejoice in their Saviour’s love, and know the guidance of His Spirit at all times. (2 Corinthians 13:10)

MONDAY 28 Al-Shabaab Islamist militants murdered three Christians in the village of Qarsa, north-east Kenya, on 16 February. Armed men forced their way into a house in the primary school compound before dawn and shot dead two Christian teachers, Kevin Shari and Seth Oluoch Odada. Seth’s wife Caroline was also murdered: local sources said it was as if she had been butchered. The couple had only recently married. A source wrote to Barnabas Fund of “pain, and agony from the cruel hands of Al-Shabaab ... people, especially Christians, are living in terror.” Christian teachers in this part of Kenya are frequent targets of Al-Shabaab; pray that they may know the Lord’s own peace, so that their hearts will not be troubled and they will not be afraid. (John 15:27)

TUESDAY 29 The UN predicted in February that another 200,000 South Sudanese would flee their country to Sudan during the course of 2018. The irony of this is that the South Sudanese, who are mainly Christians, fought a bitter civil war for decades to get

independence from the strongly Islamic Northern government which wanted to impose sharia law on them. Now the internal fighting within South Sudan, combined with drought and famine, is driving them to seek refuge in the very place they fought so hard to leave. In the meantime, the Muslim minority in South Sudan is moving rapidly towards dominance in politics and business. So the newly established homeland for Sudanese Christians may become as Islamic as the country it broke away from. Pray that South Sudanese church leaders will be able to exert strong and effective influence on church and society, so that South Sudanese may live together in peace. Pray also for rain and good harvests.

WEDNESDAY 30 “East Africa Hope” is the name of Barnabas Fund’s project to give hope and a future to South Sudanese Christians who have fled to Uganda and Kenya, and now live in vast refugee camps, dependent on food aid. With God’s help, the project aims to strengthen the refugees spiritually, provide a proper education for the children, and enable people to become economically self-sufficient through skills training and providing tools, seeds, sewing machines, baking ovens etc. Please ask for the Lord’s guidance and help with every part of this project. (Jeremiah 29:11)

THURSDAY 31 Six months ago, the Algerian authorities reportedly created a committee to inspect church buildings on their compliance with safety regulations. However, they are going beyond this remit, and questioning congregations about whether they have permits to conduct religious activities.

They have ordered several churches, two Bible schools and a Christian-owned bookshop to close. At the same time there has been an increase in the number of arrests of Christians. Pray for Algerian Christians, as pressure begins to intensify against them once again. Ask that they will respond with wisdom, courage and perseverance, remaining faithful to the Lord Jesus. Most of them are converts from Islam or the children of converts.

June

FRIDAY 1 There are many Christian ministries in Tunisia but only one officially recognised Christian body, a training ministry called the Augustine Association, which managed to get registration during the upheaval of the Arab Spring. Christians mostly gather for worship in homes, but some are too fearful of persecution to attend such meetings. After many postponements, municipal elections are to be held on 6 May. Tunisian Christians ask prayer for God’s hand to be over these elections, and that their country will once again become a blessing for the whole region as it was in the days of the early Church. Pray also that the Lord will take away their fears and give them His peace.

SATURDAY 2 Most Christians in Libya are foreigners, especially Africans who have come for work or migration. But, praise God, there is a growing Church of Libyan converts from Islam. They do not often meet together physically because it is so dangerous, but they “meet” for fellowship, Bible study etc. by Skype or other online methods. Libyan Muslims are becoming more open to the Gospel,

perhaps because of the terrible troubles in their country, now famous for conflict, division and people-trafficking. Libyan Christians are becoming more active in sharing their faith. Praise God for what He is doing in Libya, and ask Him to guide and protect His people.

SUNDAY 3 Heavenly Father, we lift to You our brothers and sisters in north-east Nigeria who are so vulnerable in the face of attacks by Boko Haram militants. We cry out to You to intervene and bring an end to the murderous activities of the men of violence. We pray for all those they have kidnapped and forced to join their ranks that You will enable them to escape to freedom. Comfort those who mourn, provide for those who have lost their livelihoods. Through your almighty power enable them all to respond with forgiveness and love. We ask this in the Name of Christ.

MONDAY 4 The far north of Cameroon is very different from the rest of this mainly Christian country. In the north, Muslims are 60% of the population and strongly dominate the Christians economically and politically. They also dominate the courts, which tend to make judgements that disadvantage



Village church in northern Cameroon, where Christians are greatly persecuted

Christians. Muslims own nearly all the shops, and actively try to convert Christians to Islam, by offering them clothes, money, wives or shops – or, in the case of young women, by marrying them. Pray that the Christians of northern Cameroon will be faithful to Christ, resisting all attempts to make them convert to Islam.

TUESDAY 5 Boko Haram militants are active in violently persecuting the Christian minority of northern Cameroon. Their crops are burnt and their livestock stolen. For example, when the village of Roum was attacked on 15 January, two churches and at least 93 homes were destroyed, as well as 20 food stores and the church-run health centre. Four people were killed. Those who flee such violence have no land and cannot make a living; the government aid that is meant for these internally displaced people tends to go to Muslims, not Christians. Food prices are rising and the cost of millet has almost doubled. Pray that our brothers and sisters will wait patiently for the Lord and will be joyful in Him, despite their calamitous situation. (Habakkuk 3:16-18)

WEDNESDAY 6 Christian children in the far north Cameroon are missing out on an education because so many school-teachers have left the area to escape the violence. There are many traumatised women in the churches, whose husbands have been kidnapped or killed. Christians in the village of Tolkoma ask Barnabas Fund supporters to pray for some men from their church who were kidnapped about three years ago and have not been heard of since. People sleep in the bush instead of

the villages, fearful of a night raid by Boko Haram. When normal life is so disrupted, pray that the Cameroonian Christians may find the Lord their eternal and unchanging Rock, who keeps their minds steadfast and gives them perfect peace. (Isaiah 26:3-4)

THURSDAY 7 Thank the Lord for the growing tide of protests against the official treatment of Eritrean refugees in Israel. Thank Him too for the kindness of ordinary Israeli people in helping the refugees. Pray that the Israeli government will soften their stance and reverse the cruel laws that bring increasing poverty and suffering on people who have fled their country because of persecution there. Most of the Eritrean refugees are Christians. Pray that they will find strength and hope as they cling to the Lord.

FRIDAY 8 Five women were killed by an Islamic State gunman who opened fire on Christians leaving an afternoon service in Kizlyar, Dagestan, on Sunday 18 February. Four of them died at the scene and the fifth died later in hospital. Five other people were wounded, including a police officer and a national guardsman. The attacker, Khalil Khalilov, who was armed with a hunting rifle and a knife, shouted “Allahu Akbar [God is great]” as he ran towards the church. Islamic State’s Caucasus Province claimed responsibility for the attack. Pray that the bereaved will be comforted and the injured restored to full health.

SATURDAY 9 The Russian republic of Dagestan is mountainous, ethnically very diverse, and riven by conflict, as different groups of Muslims war against

each other. The Dagestan Muftiate (representing Sunni Muslims) expressed sorrow about the church attack in February (see Friday 8) and condemned the Muslim gunman as a Wahhabi who, they said, therefore had “no connection to true Islam”. Praise God for these words of affirmation for the small Christian minority and pray that Christians may be salt and light in their chaotic and violent society. Barnabas Fund is supporting small, vulnerable Christian congregations.

SUNDAY 10 Dear Lord Jesus, we rejoice to know that we have many brothers and sisters in Iran, and that they are standing firm in the faith, despite persecution. We know that right now there will be some in prison, perhaps suffering heat, hunger, sickness, beatings or even torture. Bless them with a wonderful sense of Your presence. Enable them to sing songs of praise to You. Make them a witness to other prisoners and to the guards. Use them for Your purposes and Your glory.

MONDAY 11 Turkey’s Association of Protestant Churches reported continuing hate crimes against Christians last year, including threats and increased hate speech in the news and on social media. In the cities of Izmir, Balikesir, Samsun and Van, media attempted to incite the public against Christians by trying to connect churches with terror organisations, e.g. displaying New Testaments alongside terrorist publications. Some Christians who worked as public officials in Izmir, Istanbul and Diyarbakir were threatened with dismissal because of their faith. Protestant community representatives were not invited by the government to any of their meetings

with religious groups during the year. As we approach the half-way point of 2018, pray for an improvement in attitudes to Christians in Turkey this year, instead of further deterioration.

TUESDAY 12 The European Parliament has adopted a resolution expressing serious concern about the lack of freedom of religion in Turkey “including the increased discrimination against Christians and other religious minorities” and condemning “the confiscation of 50 Aramean churches, monasteries and cemeteries in Mardin”. These properties have been confiscated from Christians in the last decade, based on claims that the title deeds had lapsed. It does not appear that the Turkish government cares much what the European Parliament thinks, so the properties are unlikely to be returned. Pray that Christians in Turkey may joyfully accept the confiscation of their property, because they know that they have better and lasting possessions (Hebrews 10:34).

WEDNESDAY 13 Pastor Paul Song, originally from South Korea, has been a part-time volunteer chaplain for 20 years at Brixton prison in London. He and other Christian chaplains ran internationally known Christian courses such as Alpha and Just10, which were so popular with the prisoners that waiting lists had to be created. In 2015 the Christian senior chaplain was replaced with a Muslim imam who disapproved of the Christian courses and said he wanted to “change the Christian domination” within the prison. Last August he had Pastor Paul banned from entering the prison. Pray that Paul may be allowed to return to

his greatly appreciated ministry there and that the imam’s plans to remove Christian influences in the prison may not succeed.

THURSDAY 14 Pray for God’s blessing, leading and guidance for Barnabas Fund’s campaign, *Our Religious Freedom*, which seeks to ensure that laws in Western countries like UK, Australia and New Zealand serve their intended purpose of giving full freedom of conscience, speech and religion to all. Pray that this campaign will make a real and solid difference and stop the gradual erosion of religious liberty, which is affecting Christians primarily at the moment, but may soon affect everyone.

FRIDAY 15 Islam is strong in Mauritania, influential in politics and frequently discussed in the media. But change is in the air. The country has recently got a new flag, new national anthem and new currency, and people are generally seeking more freedom of expression and conscience. “Pray that the eyes of imams, sheikhs and other Muslim leaders be opened,” say the Mauritanian Christians. Pray with our brothers and sisters for change in the attitudes and beliefs of these influential individuals, leading to religious freedom and decisions to follow Christ.

SATURDAY 16 The Church in Mauritania is small, underground and severely persecuted. Article 306 of the Criminal Code Book specifies the death penalty for an apostate unless they return to Islam within three days. Although no Christians have been executed, some have been imprisoned. They also suffer many of the other normal

penalties for those who leave Islam: they are rejected by their families, thrown out of their homes, lose their jobs, lose their inheritance rights, and women are often divorced by their Muslim husbands. Ask that each will be comforted by an awareness that the Lord knows what testing times they are passing through and that they will come forth as gold, with a strong and mature faith (Job 23:10).

SUNDAY 17 O Jesus, our Saviour, who prayed on the cross for Your Father to forgive those who were crucifying You, and who commanded us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, please give us grace and strength to obey You in this. We ask that You reveal Yourself to those who mock You and who mock us Your followers, to those who believe they are doing right to be unjust or violent to us or to other Christians. May they joyfully yield their lives to You, and live for Your praise and glory.

MONDAY 18 The only registered church buildings in Morocco are international churches for foreigners. Moroccan believers (all converts from Islam and their children) normally meet in small groups in homes (which poses practical difficulties) and sometimes get together in larger numbers for camps and conferences. Their number one challenge is the lack of suitable places to meet. Praise God for church growth, which creates this problem of meeting places, and pray that He will provide. Pray for protection for church leaders who travel extensively, visiting the scattered groups of Christians, to provide teaching, discipleship and pastoral care.

TUESDAY 19 In 2010 a law was passed in Morocco to expel all foreign missionaries. There is no law against Moroccans being Christians, but officially all Moroccans are considered to be Muslims. The High Religious Committee has ruled that converts from Islam should not face the death penalty (a startling and bold decision, because it goes against sharia). A year ago the National Coalition of Moroccan Christians sent a letter to their country's Human Rights Council asking for official recognition of Moroccan churches, but they have received no answer. Ask that the Lord will give wisdom from above to Christians in Morocco, living in a context of paradox and contradiction.

WEDNESDAY 20 Mohammed bin Salman has been Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia for a year and is using his powerful position to overhaul his country's institutions, bringing a certain amount of modernisation and liberal reform, including a little freedom for women. In February he suddenly replaced a whole generation of military leadership. Pray that, amidst all these surprises, he will also introduce religious liberty, thus allowing hundreds of thousands of Christian migrant workers, as well as Saudi converts from Islam, to worship in freedom.

THURSDAY 21 Nepal is officially a secular country, but in practice the Hindu majority is favoured, while Christians and Muslims are discriminated against. Buddhists are treated quite well because Buddhism, like Hinduism, is considered a Sanatana religion (a religion of the forefathers). A new law passed in

August 2017 is due to come into force in September 2018 and will make it a crime for anyone to try to convert a follower of a Sanatana religion to another faith; this will be punishable with five years in prison and a fine of 50,000 rupees (£345; US\$480; €390). Pray that Christians in Nepal will have wisdom, sensitivity and courage to live in the changed legal situation in which they find themselves and pray for continued church growth despite such efforts to stop it.

FRIDAY 22 The first Church in Nepal was extinguished in the mid-eighteenth century when the king decreed that everyone had to be Hindu. Some two hundred years later the Church began again with a small group of believers, and since then an estimated 1.5 million people have put their faith in the Lord Jesus. But most Nepalis still see Christianity as a foreign, Western religion. Nepali Christians ask prayer for discernment, courage and faithfulness for those seeking to build a fully Nepali, fully Christian identity. Pray that Christians may be accepted and appreciated for their contribution to the country's well-being.

SATURDAY 23 Anti-Christian persecution peaked in Nepal in 1990, but, praise God, church growth did not stop. Although less acute than in the past, persecution continues, whether from relatives, local community or radical Hindus. Pray for grace and perseverance for each believer at their time of suffering. Pray also for the Nepal Christian Society, which is trying to secure legal and religious rights for Christians, so that they will not be vulnerable to arbitrary

arrests, seizure of their property, or discrimination.

SUNDAY 24 Lord Jesus, we pray today for Aasia Bibi, enduring the long years of solitary confinement in prison in Pakistan because of a false accusation of "blasphemy". You know all her hopes and fears. You know how often her legal appeal has been scheduled and then postponed at the last minute. Grant her justice. Help her to find solace and strength in Your Word, especially her favourite verse where You command that we must not let our hearts be troubled but put our trust in You. We ask your blessing also on her children, who have been without their mother for nine years, and on her husband as he brings them up alone. (John 14:1)

MONDAY 25 The European Union's Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion has told the Pakistani government that Pakistan's trade access to the EU will be directly linked to a positive outcome in Aasia Bibi's case (see above). It is understood this move has been prompted by the Italian government. Since 2013 Pakistan has had duty-free access to EU markets. Thank the Lord that European politicians are acting on behalf of our sister Aasia, but pray that they will exert themselves to help millions of other persecuted Christians.

TUESDAY 26 Tomorrow there will be elections in Indonesia for city governors and mayors. Last year, the capital Jakarta elected a new governor to serve a five-year term, with Muslim Anies Baswedan ousting Christian "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama. Ahok had been ahead in the polls, but was accused of

“blasphemy” by Islamists, who called for Indonesians to vote only for Muslim politicians. Ahok was later sentenced to two years in jail. The man who accused him has now been jailed for hate speech and, at the time of writing, Ahok is appealing his conviction in the High Court. Pray that Ahok’s appeal against his manufactured conviction will be successful and that the actions of Islamists – who engineered mass protests against him – will not deter other Indonesian Christians from becoming involved in politics or Muslims from voting for them.

WEDNESDAY 27 The Setara Institute, based in Indonesia, recorded 201 violations of religious freedom in that country in 2017 of which 75 involved government officials and the rest were by individuals or organisations like the Islamic Defenders Front or the Indonesian Ulema Council. Most of the violations were directed at religious minorities including Christians, Confucians, Buddhists, Hindus and Shia Muslims. They included intimidation, discrimination, assault, hate speech, bans on worship and the sealing of places of worship. Only a generation ago, Indonesia was a model of religious tolerance, harmony and equality. Pray that the tide will turn again and the intolerance and violence be replaced with respect and peace once more.

THURSDAY 28 A sword-wielding attacker seriously injured a pastor and three worshippers when he ran into a church service in Sleman, on the island of Java, on Sunday 11 February. The attacker was shot and wounded by police, then arrested. He was later identified as a Muslim university

student who had attempted to travel to Syria to fight with Islamic State. The Indonesian national police chief stated, “He ended up launching his attack here.” Pray that the injured Christians will fully recover and that the zealous young man who thought he was pleasing Allah by attacking them will have a personal encounter with the Prince of Peace.

FRIDAY 29 On 27 February Malaysia’s highest court ruled unanimously that Christians converting from Islam need permission from a sharia court to change their officially registered religion. The case concerned four Christians from Sarawak who want to remove the word “Islam” from their identity cards. The court decision is devastating, as sharia courts in Malaysia can impose a three-year jail sentence for apostasy from Islam. (In classical sharia law it would be a death sentence for adult male converts.) They would have to have a Muslim lawyer to represent them in a sharia court. Call on the Lord who said “Let justice roll on like a river” to act in power and bring full religious freedom to Malaysia (Amos 5:24).

SATURDAY 30 North Korea was very much in the news earlier this year during the Winter Olympics in South Korea. But little was said about the treatment of North Korean Christians, who are harshly persecuted. Whole extended families may be punished if one individual Christian is caught by the authorities, and many are believed to be serving out sentences in brutal labour camps, often treated more severely than other prisoners. Pray for these faithful believers that the Lord will wonderfully sustain them and grant them grace to endure.

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