

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

APR-JUN 2022

voice

of Persecuted Christians

A photograph of a woman and a young child in a rural setting. The woman, on the left, is standing and wearing a yellow short-sleeved shirt and a leopard-print skirt. She has a headscarf and is looking towards the camera. The child, on the right, is sitting on the ground, wearing a light-colored sleeveless top and looking off to the side. In the background, there is a large, simple tent made of light-colored fabric. A large red arrow graphic points from the top right towards the woman and child. In the foreground, there are some cooking items, including a large metal pot and a smaller metal cup, resting on a fire pit made of stones and logs.

**HELPING
BELIEVERS
IN FLIGHT**

*News, stories and prayer requests
from persecuted Christians around the world*



Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

We can all do something

As I write the world's eyes are understandably on the crisis in Ukraine. Every news story is focused on the war and its impact. It is impossible to ignore, and rightly so; we must respond as Christians with all the prayers we can muster and help practically where we can. In fact we have just approved a new project with our partners to provide support to Ukrainian Christians. Let's pray to God for an end to this terrible conflict as so many other believers are doing.

It is easy to be consumed by this horror but we must remember that God is sovereign here just as He is sovereign in the lives of persecuted Christians around the world. Believers are suffering in many ways in many countries yet they know their suffering for their faith is not wasted and will be rewarded when Christ returns.

In this edition of *Voice*, we focus on those who have been forced to flee because they are Christians – often with nothing but the clothes on their back. On page 6 **Nigerian** Christians tell us of their loss but are also overflowing with thanks to God for how He, through Release

International partners, has provided for them. On page 8, persecuted Christians in **Burkina Faso** tell us how this same support is helping them to keep going in their faith!

So when we read these stories of pain and loss let's not be overwhelmed but encouraged that our support is making a fundamental difference in their lives.

That's why I'm so grateful to **Rev Robert de Berry** for his efforts to raise funds to help (see centre pages and sponsorship form). We can't all cycle from Kent to Cornwall and back like Robert but each one of us can do something, from praying to giving – even a small amount pledged in sponsorship to Robert can make a difference – to maybe taking up a role as a **Volunteer Speaker** in your church (see page 19).

Or perhaps you can encourage your church leaders to take part in our annual **All Out for God** event this year by holding a Sunday service outdoors on May 29 (or another date if more practical) to stand with our persecuted family (see page 20) or join in our **Day of the Christian Martyr** event in June (see page 23). It's so important to keep raising awareness of the needs of persecuted Christians around the world today especially when there is so much else that cries out for our attention.



Please raise sponsorship for Robert de Berry by using the enclosed sponsorship form, and promote the event in your church by using the centre-page poster.

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RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

Release helps Christians in the UK and Ireland to actively engage with their persecuted brothers and sisters around the world: praying with them, standing with them, helping them, and learning lessons of true Christian discipleship with them.

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FUNDRAISING
REGULATOR

Faith under fire



Schoolgirl still in captivity

February 19 marked the fourth anniversary of the abduction of Leah Sharibu, the Nigerian schoolgirl who was kidnapped by Boko Haram terrorists when she was only 14 years old.

Originally, more than 100 students were abducted during a raid on a school in Dapchi, Yobe state, by the militant group. Five were reported to have died during the attack and, after negotiations, all remaining students were released except for Leah.

According to reports, the teenager continued to be held captive because she refused to renounce her Christian faith and convert to Islam.

• Please pray for Leah's health and safety, that she will remain strong in the Lord and that she will be released; and for God's comfort for her family.

**Sign up to
Release**



Ukrainian Christians fear Russian control

Christians in Ukraine fear that a Russian takeover of their country will end religious freedom.

In those parts of Ukraine that were already under Russian separatist control (in the Luhansk and Donetsk areas) many Protestant churches have faced restrictions, with church services being closed and books banned. In fact in almost eight years under Russian control, freedom of religion has come under severe attack.

Norway-based Forum 18 says that in those areas all Protestant communities have been made illegal, along with any church not part of the Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox community.

The breakaway Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) passed the Religion Law on February 17, 2018. This required every religious community to re-register with the authorities.

'In other words, apply for permission to exist', according to Forum 18. The justification given was 'to secure the defence of the country and the security of the state'.

Then in March 2019 all Baptist Union congregations were ordered to halt public worship or face punishment. Since the passing of the Religion Law, registration has been refused for every Protestant, Baptist and Pentecostal community.

To support the Christian communities, Release International's sister organisations have been providing Bibles for Ukraine, including the Russian-separatist areas. We have also just approved a new project with our partners to provide support to Ukrainian Christians.

Following the invasion by Russian troops in February a partner of ours who was still in Ukraine at the time of writing told us: *'There is no safe place and the goal has been to sow panic everywhere. Our hope is in the Lord.'*

• Please pray for the nation of Ukraine and an end to the conflict. Ask God to protect believers everywhere especially in the disputed areas. Pray also for the safety of our partner in the country.

(Source: Forum 18)

China's 'Mayflower Church' awaits asylum verdict

Release International partners are encouraging prayer for Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church, also known as the 'Mayflower Church', which continues to exhaust its legal options for asylum in South Korea. If the South Korean government continues to reject them, they may be forced to go back to China where they will face harsh punishment.

Pastor Pan Yonggang led 28 adults and 32 children to resettle in Jeju, South Korea, in 2020.

China Aid said: *'Please keep praying for all of the exiled Shenzhen church members so they can find immediate favour within*

the South Korean legal system so they can stay in Jeju and avoid being deported to China. We're doing everything we can to ensure Pastor Pan's congregation will not be sent back to China.'

If they get deported back to China, every member of this church will face extreme punishment such as torture, arrest, and forced disappearance.

Many freedom advocates across the world now refer to the congregation as the 'Mayflower Church' for their desire to escape persecution and worship the Lord in safety.

Listen to our latest podcasts



Bike pilgrimage Revd Robert de Berry takes time out from training for his marathon bike pilgrimage to tell us what inspired him to undertake such a gruelling ride (from Kent to Cornwall and back), exactly what is involved in the sponsored cycle ride and how Release supporters can get involved. Further information available at releaseinternational.org/bikepilgrims.

Living martyrs for Christ Release International partner Asif from Mordecai Ministries International looks for opportunities to intervene before the worst effects of persecution take place. He shares about his own background growing up as a Christian in Pakistan, the inspiration behind his ministry and how it is making a difference in the lives of individual believers and Christian communities around the world.

Persecution trends 2022 It is a sad reality that Christians across the world are continuing to face violent opposition because of their faith in 2022. Release International staff members Kenneth and Tom, who helped to write the ministry's Persecution Trends report for this year, share some extra insight into the pressures our partners are likely to face in 2022. The report is included in the previous edition of *Voice* (Jan-Mar 2022) available on our website releaseinternational.org.

Our topical *Voice* podcasts are available from releaseinternational.org/podcast or via your favourite podcast app.



Raymond Koh vigil marks five-year anniversary

A candlelit vigil marking the fifth anniversary of the forced disappearance of Malaysian Pastor Raymond Koh was held in Kuala Lumpur in February. The kidnapped pastor's wife, Susanna Liew, described her pain at not knowing the fate of her husband. *'We are frozen in grief,'* she said.

In-person attendance at the Council of Churches Hall was restricted to 70, due to the Covid pandemic. But a further 2,535 participated via a live online broadcast.

Pastor Koh's wife Susanna gave a moving address. *'Whether he is dead or alive, God is with him,'* she said.

But, she added, if her husband is no longer alive, then she would want to thank those who had kidnapped him for *'giving him the privilege and honour to die as a martyr'.*

Release International is pressing the Malaysian Government to investigate the disappearance of Pastor Koh and bring about his release. A petition to the Prime Minister and the Inspector General of Police can be signed online at releaseraymond.com.

• Please continue to pray for Susanna and the rest of Pastor Raymond's family. Pray that the Malaysian Government will respond to international calls to release information about Pastor Raymond's disappearance.

Pakistani pastor killed in ambush

A Church of Pakistan lay pastor was gunned down and a priest wounded by unknown assailants as they drove home from a worship service in the north-western Pakistan city of Peshawar, sources said.

Church of Pakistan Bishop of Peshawar Humphrey Peters said that William Siraj, aged 75, was shot and died instantly in the ambush in the Gulbahar neighbourhood, while Revd Patrick Naeem, 55, received a bullet wound but was in a stable condition. A third church leader in the car was unharmed, he said.

The men were returning from All Saints Church in the Ring Road area on Sunday, January 30, when two gunmen riding a motorcycle intercepted their car and opened fire, Peters said.

'Siraj received one bullet in the forehead and one on the arm and died instantly, while Revd Naeem received a bullet wound in the hand,' he said. *'It's a miracle that Revd Naeem and another priest escaped the volley of bullets.'*

The assailants fled the scene unchallenged, according to witnesses, Peters said.

(Source: Morning Star News)

Ethiopia blocks Tigray aid

A Release International partner reports that the conflict in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia has subsided to a degree with sporadic fighting along the borders but the area is still under siege with no medicines or food allowed in.

Hundreds of Christians who fled to northern Ethiopia to escape persecution in Eritrea have been caught up in the conflict.

Dr Berhane Asmelash recently received a disturbing message from a pastor in Tigray who said people were suffering due to lack of medicine and food and that he was burying four to five people a day. Most of the deceased were young diabetics who were dying because of lack of insulin.

The Ethiopian Government is not allowing any vital medicines in despite strong pressure from the UN and Western countries. Dr Berhane said: *'The US is putting strong pressure on Ethiopia to resolve the conflict through dialogue but I am not optimistic.'*

• Pray that food and medicines will get through to those in need and for an end to the conflict in Tigray



CARING FOR THOSE LEFT WITH NOTHING

After fleeing attacks from militants, many Christians in Nigeria continue to live in difficult conditions. But Release International partners are there to support and encourage them, as Kenneth Harrod reports.

Daniel will never be able to forget the night Fulani militants attacked his village last year. It was a night that devastated his family.

'Armed Fulani militants attacked my village while I and two other men were on night patrol. We heard gunshots from a distance.

'Unknown to me my house was the first one they targeted. They shot my wife and five of my children,' said Daniel. 'I thank God that two of my children

survived – but I lost my wife and three of my kids.'

Daniel (pictured above) decided to leave the area and is now living in a camp for internally displaced people (IDP) in Kaduna state. 'I decided to leave the community for fear of another attack, since they have threatened to come and attack again,' he said.

The camp where Daniel and his two surviving children are now living was visited by a Release International

partner, who provided food and other emergency resources. 'Thank you for this food relief,' Daniel said. 'We truly appreciate it and pray the Lord will bless those organisations that have made this possible.'

Zugwai is a wife and mother who now lives on the same IDP camp. She recalls the attack on her village that forced her to flee. 'After our last meal we went to bed, when we heard gunshots in our village. We decided to run into the bushes for safety. While we ran, our houses were set ablaze by the attackers. My house and the hair salon I ran were burned down. Since then we have been in this camp, struggling for survival.'

She added, reflecting on her present circumstances: 'God has used kind-hearted people to support us. It is my prayer that these evildoers who attack us will come to repentance.'



Aid provided by our partners is distributed in the camp.

Thousands of people are now living in IDP camps in Nigeria, Release's partner reported. The camp where Daniel and Zugwai are situated alone houses around 5,000 people, including infants and the elderly, and conditions are not easy.

The relief work of Release's partner has provided basic items such as rice, beans, sugar, vegetable oil, salt and laundry soap, all packaged in buckets. Our partner also plans to visit the camp to provide medical support and to run its well-established Bible-based trauma healing counselling for those struggling in the wake of attacks.

Rev Yunana is a minister in one of the areas affected by Fulani attacks and was at the IDP camp when our partner visited. *'On behalf of the entire congregation and all the villagers we appreciate this support. You have*



Murna's home and store were burned down.

shown to us Christian love,' he said. 'We are very grateful. We accept your hand of kindness with much gratitude.'

PLEASE HELP CHRISTIANS WHO HAVE BEEN FORCED TO FLEE PERSECUTION AND CONFLICT.

These precious believers need your prayers and gifts to survive – and rebuild their lives.

Your gift could provide:

- vital food parcels
- pastoral care and Christian discipleship
- vocational training to help believers start small businesses

To make a gift please use the enclosed form, call 01689 823491 or give online at releaseinternational.org

Murna is another mother living on the camp after fleeing violence. *'We were asleep at about 11pm when we heard sporadic gunshots in our village,' she said. 'I managed to run into the maize plantation to hide. Our houses were burned down. I lost an in-law and his son that night. I want to say a big "thank you" to those who have supported us. This food will go a long way to catering for our needs.'*

Another survivor, also called Murna highlighted some of the difficulties for those who end up in IDP camps. *'My house and provision store were burned down. After the attack we*

came to the IDP camp where they have fed and clothed us. Our major source of livelihood (farming) has been taken away from us as we cannot access our farms again for fear of attacks. We lack blankets to keep warm at night. I am grateful to those who are thinking of us. May God bless and replenish you.' Murna said God spared her family, but another family of five she knew were all killed in the attack.

Release International's partner visited another camp further south, in Benue state. This location, about the size of a football field, houses several thousand families, all survivors of brutal attacks on more than 100 communities in Benue, Nassarawa and Taraba states. Those living in the camp have lacked adequate food and shelter, and have even faced an outbreak of malaria.

Gideon, a former carpenter, has been living there for a year now. He recalled the day militants attacked his village. *'We were already asleep when we heard gunshots in our village. I came out and realised we had been surrounded by armed Fulani men. We managed to run to the bushes to hide. They shot at us while we ran.'*

'Since the attack we have tried going back to our village but they have attacked again, and since our lives are threatened no one wants to go back to the village again. Even our farms are now inaccessible to us since the attacks.'

Samuel has been living at this camp since 2020, following a Fulani attack on his village, which saw people killed, houses burned and farmlands destroyed. *'Since our major means of livelihood – farming – has been taken from us (we cannot go back to our farms for fear of being attacked again) we have been surviving from hand to mouth,'* he said.

• Please continue to pray for all Christian families in Nigeria who have been displaced by attacks on their communities. Pray for the necessary help to rebuild their lives. Pray also for our partners as they continue to minister to persecuted Christians in the midst of on-going violence.



Wake-up call in Burkina Faso

A displaced Christian in Burkina Faso shows the work she is doing to support her family

an Assemblies of God preacher, lived in the north-west with his wife and five children. He was working to help internally displaced people situated about 200 kilometres from the capital.

'Timothy was threatened,' says Susanna. 'He was told they were planning to kill him. But he was bold and said: "I will stay with my family; we will serve the Lord where we are.'"

But then the situation changed for the worst. *'One church member, a lady, had been walking down the street. There was a bomb hidden in the road. Suddenly, it exploded. There was nothing left of her.'*

'Timothy told me, "If we don't move now, the road may be completely closed and there will be no possibility for us to get out. We must move to the capital.'"

When the jihadists attack villages, they know where the Christians live and they target them deliberately, says Susanna. *'They are looking for the believers.'*

Singled out

Mamouna*, her husband and two small children, aged four and seven, were singled out. *'They targeted the family specifically because they knew they were Christian. As they ran away, Mamouna's husband was killed.'*

Susanna, who has worked in the region for more than a decade, began to notice the difference back in 2016. *'For the first time, I could see women who were covered completely in black, with only their eyes showing. It was*



Release International partner Susanna helps Christian refugees in Burkina Faso. She has looked on with alarm as believers have become the latest targets of the jihadis, as she explained to Andrew Boyd.*

Jihadists are infiltrating the Sahel region of Africa with the aim of imposing an Islamic state across the greater Sahara. Yet this emerging conflict is vastly under-reported, as is the religious dimension to that violence.

Until 2014, Burkina Faso, one of several countries that make up the Sahel, was a model of peaceful relations between Christians and Muslims. Both faith groups lived contentedly side by side. But then heavily armed jihadis started returning from conflicts in Libya and Syria.

The violence took off in 2019. That year, Susanna says the jihadis stated their intention to target Christians, who make up 20 per cent or more of

the population of Burkina Faso. *'Now the whole country has been touched by these terrorist attacks,'* she said.

Susanna has watched with alarm as the culture has grown increasingly radical and more intolerant.

Christians targeted

When the jihadis attack a village they destroy shops, schools and official buildings, but their main target is the church. And Christians are being increasingly singled out for killing by armed gangs that stop cars and buses on the roads.

'Christians are killed on the spot. If you're kidnapped and you're a believer, there is no possibility you will survive.'

The violence has led to a flood of people from their homes. Timothy*,

a sign for me that something was changing.

'Very soon there were more than 600 jihadist schools in Burkina Faso. They were training normal people to become jihadist fighters.'

How could this have happened? Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world. Literacy is low and unemployment high. *'The people were ready to listen to the jihadis,'* says Susanna. *'If you are poor and uneducated, whatever they tell you, you will believe. And if they offer you money you will do anything.'*

Today, she sees that same process of radicalisation taking place across the Sahel. *'Hotspots begin in different areas. And when you look at the big picture, you can see they are somehow connected.'*

'Religious conflict'

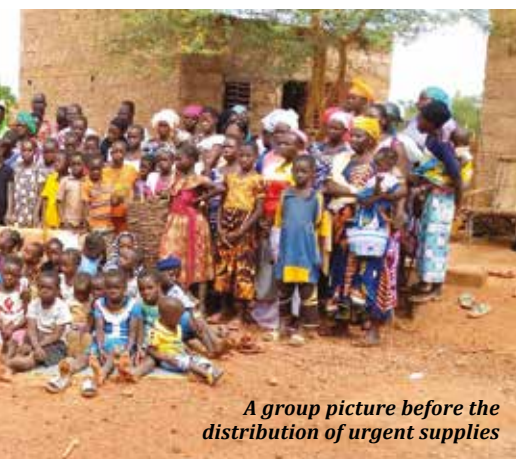
She continues: *'I am a little afraid now when I look at Africa. Many people try to say that these are simply tribal wars. But what we see is the radicalisation of Muslims. The jihadists are trying to make an Islamic State of Greater Sahara. It is really obvious that this is a religious conflict.'*

Susanna is working with Release International partners VOM Poland to

'You are helping us to keep our faith'

provide urgent help to the displaced and refugees, people with no access to government support.

'We try to get help to them in the first



A group picture before the distribution of urgent supplies



The Sahel: Desert, droughts and terrorism

- The Sahel region is directly underneath the Sahara and stretches from east to west Africa.
- It comprises a number of countries or parts of countries including Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad.
- The Sahel has a population of around 135 million, with one of the world's highest growth rates.
- The region is becoming increasingly dry and desert-like due to climate change, deforestation and overgrazing.
- Since the 1970s it has seen increasingly frequent droughts. As a result there have been more famines, incidences of cholera, socio-economic problems and security crises.
- With up to 80 per cent of its people living on less than \$2 a day, poverty is more widespread in the Sahel than in most other parts of Africa.
- Most governments in the Sahel are formally democratic, but corruption is common and the UN reports that the gap between the privileged class and the masses is widening.
- One of the biggest security threats facing the region is terrorism, specifically jihadism.

(Sources: BBC, iD4D, UN, PRB)

days, to provide food and hygienic materials. Then we set up an education project. In the main cities, the schools are still open, but the Christians cannot afford the fees or the books. So we send Christian children to schools, where they also get one hot meal per day. We pay for the meal, so the parents don't need to. It's a really big help. Today we are supporting 1,300 children.'

This practical support also provides spiritual nourishment. *'They tell us: "We had lost our hope and were very weak. What you have done is not only help our children get an education and change their country, you are helping us to keep our faith."*

'I'm really thankful to Release International supporters,' added Susanna. *'We can feel your prayers. And I know from the people I work with, that they can also feel them.'*

God is at work

In the middle of this trouble, God is at work. Susanna said the church is

growing under pressure. What had once been a queasy mix of animist, Muslim and Christian practices is being refined. The church has begun to change. *'People are growing in faith and have the courage to keep their faith.'*

That courage under fire has challenged Susanna deeply. *'In a peaceful country, life is easy. You can have a good job and still forget to open your Bible.'*

'It reminds me that freedom and peace must never be taken for granted. Maybe one day these could be lost even in my country. So what I see challenges me to stay strong in my faith. This has been a wake-up call for Christians in Burkina Faso. And it's a wake-up call for us all. The clock is ticking.'

'Please continue in your prayers. And remember to tell others about what is going on in Burkina Faso.'

*Names have been changed



HELPING
CHRISTIANS
IN FLIGHT

THE COST OF CONVERSION

Afghans take their lives in their hands when they convert to Christianity. Our partners met families who managed to escape after the Taliban takeover and others including a former imam, who survived a grenade attack after turning to Christ

They own only what they could carry out of Afghanistan: clothes, a few small personal items and their most treasured possession – their faith in Jesus. These recent converts to Christianity have already paid the price for their newfound faith – they had to flee their homes in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover last year. They are now living together in one house in a secret location with numerous other believers.

Five families who managed to escape with their lives share a single residence, while in another building

not far away ten families composed of 35 members fill the bare rooms. They all sleep on the floor in a giant hallway.

But their joy in the Lord is evident for our partner to see: *'They are lovely*

'They need our very serious prayer to survive in their new Christian faith'

Christians with a big faith and a big hope in Christ to have a good future.

'These believers escaped from Afghanistan because they were

associated with the Americans, either working with them or converted by them. So the Taliban know them and wanted to kill them but they managed to escape from there.'

Since arriving in a new country, they simply crave 'good spiritual food, proper Christian fellowship and the love of other believers' more than anything else.

'They need our very serious prayer to survive in their new Christian faith,' he adds. *'They are entirely dependent on God and His people.'*

One member of the group expressed his desire to our partner – it wasn't for a comfortable and prosperous life or even just a safe place to live but to learn more about Jesus and take the gospel back into Afghanistan!

One believer who left her homeland long before the Taliban took over is Aabroo*.

Aabroo came to faith in 2015 and

Children were among the refugees following the taliban takeover in 2021



Aabroo ministers to Afghan refugees

faced almost instant rejection from her husband and siblings.

'They asked me to reject Jesus and say no to Him. They said I was an apostate but I continued in my faith,' she said.

A while after her conversion Aabroo's husband died. It was a traumatic time even though he had been opposed to her faith. *'I thought my family is finished, my life is over, but the peace of*

Jesus was marvellous. There were many difficulties especially when I had to take my children and leave the home. No one gave me anywhere to live for two years and I couldn't get my children admitted to any school.

'It was a hard time but the Holy Spirit was my strength. I was rejoicing in my faith in Jesus; that was my strength.'

Referring to the account of Jesus calming the storm in the gospel of Mark, chapter 4, she added: *'My life was like a boat in a storm like with the disciples in the boat when Jesus rebukes the storm. Jesus was rebuking every storm in my life.*

'When I read scripture I feel strength in my soul and body.'

Aabroo is now involved in ministry to a number of families who have come out of Afghanistan. In fact she believes that's why God settled her in her new home – to be there to care for Afghan refugees when the time came.

'My prayer and message is that I want my relatives, neighbours and friends to know Jesus, the Light of the World. Pray for me that more and more will be open to Jesus and receive Him.

'My faith is big and I believe my God is big,' she declared.

Another Afghan believer who has suffered for his faith in Jesus and yet known the life-changing power of the gospel is 'Abas'*

A former imam, Abas committed his life to Christ after reading the Bible and talking to a Christian leader.

'While studying the Koran I found that there was something missing so I started reading the Bible. Not long after, I had a meeting with a pastor and came to faith.'

Abas's conversion had two dramatic effects: first it changed him from being

'I lost everything except Jesus Christ'

an angry militant, and secondly it put a target on his back.

'Before I was a Christian, I was very bitter. I disliked everyone and was full of hatred for humanity. I lived like a militant and thought I was the only righteous person on the earth. When I met Jesus, I suddenly changed – I



Abas survived grenade attack

experienced grace, and the love of Christ that was on the cross came into my heart. I started to love everybody.'

That love was not reciprocated, however. A year after his conversion somebody threw a grenade at his house, then an attempt was made to kidnap him. This was on top of being abandoned by family and friends and losing his business. *'I lost everything except Jesus Christ,' he said.*

He told our partner: *'Pray for me that I will be steadfast and live as a Christian even to death. My fear has gone and I have a living hope in Jesus so I am not afraid of persecution or being killed. My eternity is safe.'*

**Names have been changed*

PRAY FOR AFGHAN BELIEVERS

- **That those who have fled their homeland will be able to find a safe place to live and work**
- **That individuals and families who follow Christ inside Afghanistan will know God's strength, protection and courage as they seek to live out their faith under a hostile regime**
- **That God would provide for the needs of Afghan Christians whether inside the country or part of the diaspora**
- **Thank God for the testimony and ministry of believers such as Abas and Aabroo, who are willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of the gospel**



THE REVd ROBERT DE BERRY INVITES YOU TO JOIN HIM ON HIS 2022 BIKE PILGRIMAGE.

WE ARE CYCLING OVER 900 MILES from North Foreland Lighthouse, near Broadstairs, in Kent, to Lands' End in Cornwall and back again along the south coast. The Bike Pilgrimage Stages are shown here. On some days there is more than one option to cycle with us. You can cycle one stage or more. Some pilgrims are cycling the whole route.



TO REGISTER TO RIDE

with Robert and friends, please go to



BIKE PILGRIMS

Robert de Berry's

BIKE PILGRIMAGE 2022

Cycling stages

START...

MAY

Stage 1

Sat 14 May North Foreland Lighthouse near Broadstairs Kent, to St Mary's Church Bredin, Canterbury **20 miles**
12noon Welcome Picnic

Stage 2

Mon 16 St Mary's Bredin Canterbury to Maidstone Baptist Church **20 miles**

Stage 3

Tues 17 Maidstone Baptist Church to Christ Church Orpington **26 miles**

Stage 4A

Wed 18 Christ Church Orpington to St Nicholas Sevenoaks **9 miles**

Stage 4B

Christ Church Orpington to St Peter's Church Tonbridge Wells **23 miles**

Stage 5A

Thurs 19 St Nicholas Sevenoaks to Cheam Baptist Church **31 miles**

Stage 5B

St Nicholas Sevenoaks to Redhill Baptist Church **31 miles**

ALL DISTANCES ARE APPROXIMATE

Stage 11

Thurs 26 Reborne Community Church Milborne Port to Taunton Baptist Church **32 miles**

Stage 12

Fri 27 Taunton Baptist Church to Holy Trinity Barnstaple **50 miles**

Stage 13

Sat 28 Holy Trinity Barnstaple to Oceans Community Church Bude **34 miles**

Stage 14

Mon 30 Oceans Community Church Bude to New Wave Church Newquay **44 miles**

Stage 15

Tues 31 New Wave Church Newquay to Crowlas Methodist Church nr. Penzance **30 miles**

JUNE

Stage 16

Wed 1 Crowlas Methodist Church nr. Penzance to Lands' End **20 miles**

2nd-5th June

HM The Queen's Jubilee Celebrations

Stage 23A **Tues 14** Lansdown Baptist Church Bournemouth to Lighthouse International Church Southampton **29 miles**

Stage 24A **Wed 15** Lighthouse Intl Church Southampton to Christ Church Portsmouth **20 miles**

Stage 25 **Thurs 16** Christ Church Portsmouth to St John's Church Southbourne **8 miles**

Stage 26A **Fri 17** St John's Church Southbourne to Findon Valley Free Church Worthing **25 miles**

Stage 26B St John's Church Southbourne to St Mary's Church Thakeham **27 miles**

Stage 27A **Sat 18** Findon Valley Free Church Worthing to Downs Baptist Church Woodingdean nr Brighton **18 miles**

Stage 27B St Mary's Church Thakeham to Downs Baptist Church Worthing **18 miles**

NORTH FORELAND LIGHTHOUSE, KENT TO LANDS' END AND BACK!



our website and click on the Eventbrite registration link for the stage or stages that you wish to cycle. It costs £25 to register to ride per stage.

The minimum fundraising target that we are asking you to raise for us per stage is £100 but we hope each rider will be able to raise £500 or more!

Any questions, please contact info@releaseinternational.org or call us on 01689 823491.

www.releaseinternational.org/bikepilgrims

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SPONSOR ROBERT

please do so via his Just Giving page below. Or use the enclosed Sponsorship Form and send it back to us with your donations. Please do ask your church friends to sponsor this wonderful pilgrimage.

www.justgiving.com/fundraising/robert-de-berry

Information is correct at time of going to press.

CSW everyone free to believe

<p>Stage 5C St Peter's Tonbridge Wells to Cheam Baptist Church 40 miles</p>	<p>Stage 17 Truro Methodist Church to Holy Trinity St Austell 14 miles</p>	<p>Stage 27C Findon Valley Free Church Worthing to Church of the Ascension Peacehaven 28 miles</p>	<p>Stage 29 Tues 21 Holy Trinity Eastbourne to Christ Church Ore Hastings 17 miles</p>
<p>Stage 5D St Peter's Tonbridge Wells to Redhill Baptist Church 35 miles</p>	<p>Stage 18A Wed 8 Holy Trinity St Austell to St Matthias Plymouth 39 miles</p>	<p>Stage 27D St Mary's Church Thakeham to Church of the Ascension Peacehaven 30 miles</p>	<p>Stage 30 Wed 22 Christ Church Ore Hastings to St Mary's Church Ashford Kent 30 miles</p>
<p>Stage 6A Fri 20 Cheam Baptist Church to St Paul's Church Dorking 14 miles</p>	<p>Stage 18B Holy Trinity St Austell to St Werburg's Wembury 46 miles</p>	<p>Stage 28A Mon 20 Downs Baptist Church Woodingdean nr Brighton to Holy Trinity Eastbourne 9 miles</p>	<p>Stage 31 Thurs 23 St Mary's Church Ashford to Holy Trinity Folkestone 17 miles</p>
<p>Stage 6B Redhill Baptist Church to St Paul's Church Dorking 8 miles</p>	<p>Stage 19A Thurs 9 St Matthias Plymouth to St Mark's Church Exeter 43 miles</p>	<p>Stage 28B Church of Ascension Peacehaven to Holy Trinity Eastbourne 23 miles</p>	<p>Stage 32 Fri 24 Holy Trinity Folkestone to Philip's Church Margate 29 miles</p>
<p>Stage 7A Sat 21 St Paul's Church Dorking to St John the Baptist Wonerish 15 miles</p>	<p>Stage 19B St Werburg's Wembury to St Mark's Church Exeter 48 miles</p>	<p>Stage 29 Tues 21 Holy Trinity Eastbourne to Christ Church Ore Hastings 17 miles</p>	<p>Stage 33 Sat 25 St Philip's Church Margate to North Foreland Lighthouse near Broadstairs Kent 2 miles</p>
<p>Stage 7B St Paul's Church Dorking to Cranleigh Baptist Church 13 miles</p>	<p>Stage 20A Fri 10 St Mark's Church Exeter to Waycroft Hall Axminster 28 miles</p>	<p>Stage 30 Wed 22 Christ Church Ore Hastings to St Mary's Church Ashford Kent 30 miles</p>	<p>FINISH LINE!</p>
<p>Stage 8 Mon 23 St John the Baptist Wonerish to Christ Church Winchester 40 miles</p>	<p>Stage 20B St Mark's Church Exeter to Crossroad Church Seaton 22 miles</p>	<p>Stage 31 Thurs 23 St Mary's Church Ashford to Holy Trinity Folkestone 17 miles</p>	
<p>Stage 8B Cranleigh Baptist Church to Christ Church Winchester 48 miles</p>	<p>Stage 21A Sat 11 Waycroft Hall Axminster to Dorchester Community Church 28 miles</p>	<p>Stage 32 Fri 24 Holy Trinity Folkestone to Philip's Church Margate 29 miles</p>	
<p>Stage 9 Tues 24 Christ Church Winchester to St Paul's Church Salisbury 25 miles</p>	<p>Stage 21B Crossroad Church Seaton to Dorchester Community Church 34 miles</p>	<p>Stage 33 Sat 25 St Philip's Church Margate to North Foreland Lighthouse near Broadstairs Kent 2 miles</p>	
<p>Stage 10 Wed 25 St Paul's Church Salisbury to Reborne Community Church, Milborne Port 39 miles</p>	<p>Stage 22 Mon 13 Dorchester Community Church to Lansdown Baptist Church 29 miles</p>		

ALL PROCEEDS WILL BE SPLIT 50/50 BETWEEN CSW AND RELEASE INTERNATIONAL.



The valley of the shadow



Marilyn

Even just an accusation of blasphemy can bring devastation to a family in Pakistan. Victims suffer in prison while their loved ones are forced into hiding. We visited two Christian women whose husbands have been jailed to find out what impact it has had on their lives.

By Tom Hardie

I imagine travelling up to five hours to visit your spouse in prison for just 30 minutes. What would you talk about? What would you say? Would all the news you wanted to share be forgotten as you see the tears in your loved one's eyes? Half an hour is all that Marilyn is allowed so every second is precious.

'When I go there, I sometimes forget what I wanted to say and ask him and he also in excitement doesn't know what to say so he writes things down on his hand so he can remember,' she told us on our recent visit to support persecuted Christians in Pakistan.

Marilyn, who is able to make the journey to the prison only once a month, has been looking after their

four children on her own since her husband, Asif Pervaiz, was accused of blasphemy and arrested in 2013.

'When you or your husband are under a charge of blasphemy in Pakistan nobody will stand with you. Everybody abandoned me. I was helpless and hopeless,' she said.

What made matters worse was that her twins were only 17 days old when Asif was arrested. *'I was really upset,'* she said. *'My two elder children had to stop their education as well and even the owner of the house we rented asked me to leave. I thought my life was finished.'*

Following the sentencing Marilyn and her children were forced to go

into hiding to protect themselves from militant attacks.

Readers may remember that we featured Asif's case in *Voice* a year ago. He received a death sentence in 2020 for allegedly sending 'blasphemous' text messages.

Asif's lawyer, Saiful Malook, who represented Christian Asia Bibi (who was sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010 and released in 2018) said the prosecution's case was so weak he could not understand why the judge had ruled against his client.

'The worst thing in blasphemy cases is that the accused are left to rot in jail for years till their innocence is finally proved,' he said.

And sometimes, as in Asif's case, the jail is so far away from loved ones that visits for poor family members become exceedingly difficult.

However, although Asif was moved 100 miles away from his family to Faisalabad, thanks to your support our partners have been able to give Marilyn assistance so she can visit her husband – something that otherwise

would be a huge financial burden to her – as well as helping to provide for her basic needs.

At first only she was allowed to visit Asif but now the children can go too, although Covid-19 restrictions made it harder for several months.

She says that Asif is stronger in his faith than ever before and even though his eyesight is poor he loves to read and write.

'Asif is full of hope and he keeps saying "Don't worry, I'll be back soon".

'I also am not afraid of the situation because my living God is with me. My favourite verse is in Psalm 23, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for You are with me."

'That verse is always helping me because I am going through the valley of shadow. And I always have found my God and my Lord with me. He is standing alongside me, so He is my refuge and my help.'

Please pray for Marilyn and Asif and their family. Asif's case is still pending because no judge is willing to read the case because of the pressure from extremists.

Sadly, Marilyn's experience is not unique.

We met another Christian family whose lives have been torn apart by a false accusation of blasphemy.

Ashfaq Masih has been in prison for six years simply because of an

'Asif is full of hope and he keeps saying "Don't worry, I'll be back soon"'

allegation made against him by a man disputing payment for business services.

His wife Nabeela told us: *'There was a dispute over money and when my husband asked the man for payment for repairing his motorbike Ashfaq was accused of saying derogatory things against the Islamic prophet Mohammed.'*

As so often happens, the accused are arrested and then thrown into prison where they can languish for years



Nabeela

without even a guilty verdict being pronounced. And even if they are exonerated they can never go back to the lives they once had but instead are

'It is very difficult to cope in this society when you live as a single mother'

forced into hiding to evade extremists for whom even an accusation of blasphemy is enough to warrant a death sentence.

Meanwhile their families struggle on, never knowing what lies ahead.

'Without Ashfaq it is very difficult to manage so I work in someone else's house sweeping and cleaning and we live on that money,' Nabeela said. *'It is very difficult to cope in this society when you live as a single mother.'*

Thankfully she is able to visit Ashfaq once or twice a month.

'Please pray that my husband will be released. And pray especially for my little daughter; she is missing him a lot. It is very difficult to answer her questions when she asks about her father.'

PRAY

• That Asif will be moved closer to Lahore; that he would be released as a matter of urgency; that God would protect Asif in prison and

preserve his mental and physical health; that God would give Marilyn strength as she brings up the children on her own. And thank God that Release's partners are able to support them as they go through the valley of shadow.

• That Ashfaq will be released soon and reunited with his family; that God would provide practically and pastorally for Nabeela and her daughter.



Population: 238 million

Capital: Islamabad

Government: Federal parliamentary republic

Religion: Muslim: 95.8%, Christian: 2.5%, Other: 1.7%

Sources: World Factbook, Operation World.



The inspiring faith of a broken people

From ministering to imprisoned Christians to praying with the abused and rejected, Release International Volunteering Ambassador Imtiaz has been supporting persecuted believers in Pakistan for many years. Here in a special interview he reflects on their unquenchable faith in the midst of suffering and how their stories have shaped his own walk with Christ.

Q: *How long have you been visiting Pakistan and ministering to persecuted Christians? Describe some of the highlights and some of the challenges.*

A: I have been going to Pakistan since 2006 and have not only been changed by what I have seen, I have had the most amazing privilege of praying with and encouraging the Christian community. One of the

highlights for me was when I visited a prison and prayed for several Christians in a cell and then after that praying and sharing God's word with other Christians who were in the hospital wing. However, it didn't end there because I was invited by the superintendent of the prison who was a Muslim to go and pray for his mother at his house. It was wonderful to pray for this woman and then pray for him and his family. One of the most challenging times for me was

when a village was attacked; at least 50 houses were destroyed because of rumours that pages from the Koran had been desecrated. I visited a house in the village where eight Christians were burnt alive. There I prayed with some Christians who were weeping but also looking to God. Since then some still live in fear wondering when the next attack will come.

What are the biggest changes you've seen over the years in terms of the persecution of Christians and what are the greatest challenges they face today?

Since 2006, there have been a number of attacks on villages and churches and false allegations of blasphemy, although we praise God that more recently the attacks on villages do seem to have reduced. For those who have been accused of blasphemy it can take months for their case even to be heard and during this time they are held in prison where they face threats and violence as well as pressure to convert to Islam. Their spouses and children also pay a price; they've often lost the bread winner and so

have to find alternative financial support. Some live in poverty and unpleasant housing conditions. It's incredibly sad to meet these prisoners and their families. One of the other problems for Christians is that they are treated as second-class citizens. Many Christian families are in bonded labour at brick kilns and are cut off from the rest of society. Once a friend told me that he asked one of the children working in a brick kiln if he would like an ice-cream. The child replied: 'What is an ice-cream?'. One of the other difficulties families face is the kidnapping of Christian girls and attempts to force them to convert to Islam and even marry men who could be two or three times their age. Over the years I have met some of these girls and listened to their stories. I have come away with a broken heart and tears in my eyes but at the same time what has given me hope is seeing their faith in the Lord. They love Him but at the same time their hearts are broken; they long for healing from their deep trauma. Similarly I've met converts to Christianity who, although they have experienced violence and have had to live in hiding from their families and community, have an amazingly strong faith.

Which stories or people have particularly inspired and challenged you over the years? What impact has meeting them had on your own walk of faith?

There are many Christians in Pakistan who have really inspired and helped me. If there was one thing that has really spoken to me it is the presence of God in their lives. I have seen this in how they love others. I remember one woman who was accused of blasphemy and was in prison for about a year. After she was freed I visited her and her first act of love was to go into her little kitchen and make me some food. Even after the hardship of suffering she wanted to serve this to me. Seeing such love has inspired me to seek more of God in my own life and show the love of Christ to my brothers and sisters.

On one trip you met and prayed with a teenage Christian girl who had been abused as a younger child.

If we follow Christ and walk in His footsteps, we will also experience some kind of persecution and suffering and injustice.

Can you tell us about that and how you cope with hearing these heart-breaking stories?

I have met several Christians girls who have been abused; one I met recently didn't share much but we know she was abused at a young age. However, in my meeting with her she did say she loved reading the Bible. She was incredibly sad and broken but there was a glimmer of hope in her love for the Lord and his word. It was sad and sometimes you just don't know what to do or say except just to listen and love with tears in your eyes.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by stories of persecution and wonder why God doesn't always intervene; why He allows His people to suffer. What would be your response to that?

I always look back to our Saviour who experienced terrible abuse and suffering and finally death. If we follow Christ and walk in His footsteps, we will also experience some kind of persecution and suffering and injustice. For some it is beyond imagination and in this life we may never know why; but what we do know is that God is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. While we are on earth we may not know why God allows suffering but when we see Christ face to face all will become clear.

Readers may be familiar with people like Zafar Bhatti, jailed as a result of his Christian witness. You've met Zafar. Tell us about his struggle and the impact of his imprisonment on his wife.

Zafar has been in prison since 2012. It's not been easy for him; however, his faith is very strong, and he is

willing to die for Christ. I once held his hand and as I listened to him sharing, I could feel incredible love from him and the presence of the Lord. As I looked into his eyes, I could see his tears but also a reflection of the tears of Christ. He longs to be free and always asks for God's people to pray for his freedom. His wife too has struggled for many years since his imprisonment and as she gets older it's becoming harder for her emotionally and physically. Having to cope without her husband since 2012 has left her broken. Travelling to the prison and back is also increasingly difficult. However, even with these hardships her faith is strong. We thank God for our partners who visit Zafar and his wife and through the generosity of God's people in the UK are able to help financially and pastorally.

Are you optimistic that the situation for Christians in Pakistan will improve or are you fearful that it will deteriorate further?

For me I believe persecution will increase in all sorts of ways. Unless the blasphemy law changes Christians will always face the danger of false allegations. The more extremism rises in Pakistan the more the persecution and discrimination will increase. I am not fearful of what may happen because Jesus told us that in this world we will have troubles and St Peter reminds us that suffering must not come as a surprise for God's people. My concern is that it's vital the body of Christ fulfil the command of Jesus to love one another; one of the ways we can show this is to help and support prayerfully, practically and pastorally. It's so important that these brothers and sisters do not feel abandoned.

Finally, what is your prayer for persecuted believers in Pakistan?

Father God, we thank You for our brothers and sisters who trust and love You even in the hardship and pain. Thank you that even in difficult circumstances they witness to Your mercy and grace. May they experience the power, love and presence of the one and true living God in their lives: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



Helping children to keep going in their faith

We are grateful for your donations which allow us to partner with NCEASL (the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka), which offers persecuted Christians financial aid, legal advice and practical support. In particular, we partner with NCEASL to support the children of pastors who are persecuted for their faith.

Christian children such as Grace* and Joel* endure great adversity, witnessing not only the financial struggles of their churches in extremely poor areas of Sri Lanka but also the persecution of their parents up close. However, thanks to your generosity, they have had access to education and Bible teaching even during the Covid pandemic.

Grace's father serves in a desperately poor rural village, many of whose residents live hand to mouth and

where there are minimal resources such as internet access.

Being a Christian brings further challenges. Grace has witnessed acts of severe violence against her family and their ministry; leaders of other faith groups have threatened their lives and taken measures to stop them from buying and selling land, and these groups continually disrupt their services. As a young girl, Grace goes through great mental and spiritual strain. Covid exacerbated this as she

was isolated for several months when schools were closed. However, Grace and her family are relieved that she can now attend school again.

NCEASL's support has been of immense help to Grace. She can continue her education and does well at school. She and her siblings are also blessed by access to virtual Kingdom Kids sessions, which she enjoys.

Holding on to God

Joel's father pastors in an area which faces extreme economic hardship and so, like Grace, his family are constantly under great financial pressure. Many congregation members hardly make ends meet, and the economic impacts of the past year have made Joel's family's position even more difficult. They have not always been able to afford essentials; let alone the additional classes that Joel needs.

As a result, Joel's family have had seriously to consider leaving the ministry and finding work elsewhere. Additionally, the lockdowns in the past two years have not reduced, but rather increased, the persecution and threat of attack which the family faces. Joel has witnessed many instances of persecution, threats and attacks in the many years that his family has served the church, which has left him with difficult questions. However, the family have decided to hold on to God and trust Him, and keep serving the church.

NCEASL has supported Joel in many ways, especially academically. It helped to pay for Joel's additional classes and, as a result, he exceeded all expectations by coming first in his class! Because of this, he has been able to start attending a better school in this past year. Like Grace, he has also enjoyed the Kingdom Kids monthly programme, which has strengthened Joel spiritually during the difficult recent years. Joel's parents have commented that he has a better understanding of the purpose of the ministry and all the challenges they have faced, which is a great encouragement to them.

**Names have been changed*



Turning action into words!

Volunteer Speakers are a key and valued part of Release International's ministry. Without them, we could not share a biblical understanding of persecution, the stories of our brothers and sisters, and God's call for the church to get involved as widely as we do. We believe we have a great privilege and opportunity in being able to share the good news of Jesus's love for humanity and, as part of that, to speak on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are persecuted around the world because they love Him.

If you're passionate about raising the voice of persecuted believers we would love to hear from you. And don't worry - we will give you all the training you need to be a Speaker.

One of our Volunteers said this about their experience:

'I have been a Volunteer Speaker for over 20 years and have had the honour of speaking to hundreds of people, many of whom did not know about persecution until they came along to a meeting. It is very satisfying to know that a lot of the people I have spoken to go

on to become supporters, prayer warriors, church reps, and in some cases friends.'

Our Volunteer Speaker training course allows you to learn at your own pace and in your own time. With hands-on support from Release International staff, the course is designed to give you great confidence in what you do.

Here is what another Speaker said about the training course:

'I was impressed by the depth and scale of the course. I think this is a credit to Release International and shows the importance of a solid biblical understanding of the subject of persecution. Part of the course involves reading Kenneth Harrod's book Jars of Clay, which expands upon the biblical theme of persecution. It shows how we can apply this biblical understanding to our own lives and the lives of our churches, while learning more about the sufferings of our persecuted brothers and sisters and, most importantly, how we should help them.'

Kenneth Harrod, Release International's Head of Content and Theology, said: 'Serving as a Volunteer Speaker for Release

International is a wonderful way to raise awareness about the suffering and persecution our brothers and sisters go through. You will encourage God's people in their own faith and inspire them to pray and support our brothers and sisters around the world. We will support you by giving you the relevant training and resources which will give you confidence to represent Release International and to be the voice of persecuted Christians.'

Of course, although it is a privilege to be able to share the stories of our brothers and sisters, it can often be challenging, for the Speaker as well as for the

'Serving as a Volunteer Speaker is a wonderful way to raise awareness about the suffering and persecution our brothers and sisters go through.'

congregation. Our Volunteering Co-ordinator, Andrew Wilmshurst, commented: 'I have found it a great honour sharing with churches and individuals the joys and sorrows of our brothers and sisters. I confess that sometimes it's hard to share stories, but we must remember we are a voice for persecuted Christians. I would really encourage you to pray and ask the Lord to show you if He is calling you to be a Volunteer Speaker. If He is, please act on it and get in touch. We would love to have you in the team.'

You can find out more about becoming a Volunteer Speaker or register your interest by contacting Andrew on awilmshurst@releaseinternational.org or 01689 823491. We very much look forward to hearing from you.



churches to set aside a **five-minute time of silence** during their service to remember our persecuted family: those who have died for the faith and their bereaved families; those forced to flee their homes; believers behind bars simply because of their love for Christ; and others who undergo unrelenting oppression.

Are you all out for God?

Hold your church service outdoors to show solidarity with persecuted Christians

Every May we encourage churches up and down the country to hold a Sunday service in the open air to show their unity with persecuted believers and to pray for those who don't enjoy the same freedoms we have in the UK.

For this year's All Out for God (AO4G), which will be on May 29 (although you can choose another Sunday if that is more convenient) we are asking

Paul Robinson, Release International CEO, said: *'In the past you have faithfully held services outdoors and even under Covid restrictions stepped outside to pray for our persecuted family, and we are very grateful. We know that that act of solidarity and prayer means a huge amount to those suffering for the faith; to know that they are not forgotten.'*

'Please join us again this year in showing your love and support for persecuted believers. Our five minutes of silence represents our love for and unity with those who have no voice.'

If you are on social media please use the hashtag #AllOut4God to make others aware and to share your prayers on the day.



Come and say hello!

After a gap of two pandemic-affected years, we are delighted to say that we will be back at a number of events and conferences this year!

Christian family conferences are something many of us enjoy and have missed since the onset of Covid-19.

This year Release International will have stands at **Word Alive** (North Wales, April 9-14), **Bible By The Beach** (Eastbourne, April 29-May 2) and **Big Church Day Out** (Wiston, June 3-4t). If you are planning on attending any of these events, do come and say hello at our stand: we'd love to see you!

We plan to be at other major events in the summer, too, so watch out for more details in the next edition of *Voice*.

Persecution – where now?

Truro conference seeks way forward three years after bishop's review

Release International CEO Paul Robinson will be joining the Bishop of Truro, the Rt Revd Philip Mounstephen, as a speaker at a conference in June to identify what can be done to help persecuted Christians. The gathering comes three years after the bishop's ground-breaking review into Christian persecution.

Dr Russell Blacker of the Caucus for the Persecuted Church said: *'This is a topic that concerns all Christian believers as well as others who share a concern about the persecution of religious minorities which has already spawned several genocides. It is an urgent problem which is of deep significance for all societies, including the West.'*

Also speaking at the conference which takes place at Truro Methodist Church on June 6 will be Bike Pilgrim Revd Robert de Berry (see centre pages for Robert's epic cycling challenge).

Dr Blacker added: *'The purpose of this conference is to bring together distinguished experts in the field, to review current strategies, and to identify what more can be done – not just by those working within well-known advocacy and aid organisations but within the church as a whole.'*



*Dr Russell Blacker:
'This is a topic
that concerns all
Christians'*

INVITE A SPEAKER

Our team of experienced speakers are available to join your church or online meeting to help you support and pray for persecuted Christians. They would love to hear from you!

Ireland:

Stephen on 028 9334 0014
or 07933 313169

London & South:

Chioma on 07861 656269

Midlands & North:

James on 07434 894016

Scotland:

James on 07434 894016

Wales & West of England:

Paul on 07861 651139

Stage set for drama's new dates

If Prison Walls Could Speak
UK drama tour 2022

The Artless Theatre company is continuing to tour the country with its dramatic production of *If Prison Walls Could Speak*.

This is a powerful drama based on the true story of Petr Jasek, who in 2015 was imprisoned in Sudan as a result of his ministry to persecuted Christians. Petr works for one of Release International's sister missions. The one-man play is a hybrid multimedia performance, which features immersive video and sound.

New dates are being added all the time. For up-to-date information, visit the tour page on our website (releaseinternational.org/artless-theatre-tour). The website also includes details on how your church could

host a performance of this memorable production.

Artless is partnering with Release International to take this production around the country and as such we need volunteers to help us man a stand and book stall at each event. So, if there is a performance near you and you would be willing to help out, please contact our Volunteering Co-ordinator, Andrew Wilmshurst (awilmshurst@releaseinternational.org).

The theatre production itself has been inspired by Petr Jasek's account of his time in prison, which is told in the book, *Imprisoned with ISIS*. This is available to purchase from the e-store on our website or by calling 01689 823491.

Whale of a challenge!



Inspired by a talk from a Release International volunteer speaker Joe in Scotland felt he had to do something to help persecuted Christians around the world – but what?

'My dad and I came back from the church service and agreed we would do

a sponsored event but we weren't sure what as I don't cook and I don't bake,' he said.

Then came the idea of the bench press. But not just any bench press. *'We decided we would bench press the weight of a blue whale in one night!'* That's the equivalent of 150,000kg. Fortunately, Joe wasn't alone. The 15-man team of friends agreed to attempt around 10,000kg each.

Thanks Joe and team for a wonderful effort. So far Joe and his fellow bench pressers have raised more than £2,000 altogether.

If you feel inspired by Joe and would like to take on a fundraising challenge yourself to help persecuted believers please do get in touch on 01689 823491 or info@releaseinternational.org.



Release International to host seminar at Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast

We are delighted to be able to partner with our friends at Christians in Parliament this year to take part in the National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast live at Westminster Hall in the Houses of Parliament. The event will take place from 7.30am to 9.00am on Tuesday, July 5.

The breakfast, chaired by Andrew Selous MP, is a great opportunity to pray for our Parliament, Government and politics, to build relationships between church leaders and parliamentarians and to reflect upon the relevance of the Christian faith to our public life.

The theme this year is 'Serving the Common Good' and the main speaker will be Revd Les Isaac OBE, founder of Street Pastors and President of Ascension Trust.

After the main breakfast, there will be a programme of seminars as well as a dedicated hybrid event for church leaders later in the morning. Release International will be hosting a seminar from 9.15am to 10.15am titled *Persecuted Christians in Africa: God's Goodness in Times of Trial*. We have invited speakers who include Dr Susanna*, who works in Burkina Faso; Dr Berhane Asmelash of Release Eritrea; and Archbishop Ben Kwashi, who will share via Zoom about his ministry and witness in Nigeria.

Find out more about Susanna's work in Burkina Faso on page 8.

**Name changed*

THE WORD

Persecuted Christians are strengthened by their vision of the future. May that be the same for us too, says Release's James Fraser

Home is where the hope is

What does the word 'home' mean to you? For many of us who live with the material privileges and stability of the West 'home' has very positive connotations. It conjures up ideas of warmth, safety, comfort, security and belonging, and it is very important for our general sense of wellbeing.

That said, when we read the Bible, we find that the importance of 'home' in the here and now is relativised for the Christian. In the Old Testament, the story of God's people is bookended by exodus and exile. And in the New Testament the Apostle Peter describes Christians as strangers and exiles in the world. There is a sense in which movement and alienation are to be expected.

Many of our persecuted brothers and sisters know what that means. As you have read in this edition of *Voice*, many have been forced to flee and left homeless because of their faith. We can't ignore or understate their plight, and we are called to support them in whatever way we can – displacement is a serious deprivation. But we also need their help. We need to grasp something of the vision that inspires their faithful perseverance in the face of losing everything.

In Revelation chapter 7, John is given a vision of the end of history. A great multitude from every tribe, language, people, and nation take their place before the throne of God. John sees the totality of God's redeemed people across all space and time – the universal church. And he is told,

'they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the

throne will shelter them with his presence.

Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst.

The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd;

he will lead them to springs of living water.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

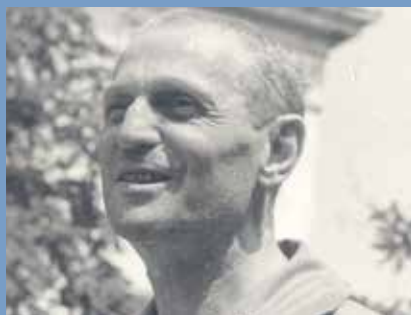
John's vision is not a psychological fantasy to help us cope with the harsh realities of life. Revelation does not present itself to us in that way. Rather, it is a glimpse of the sure and certain outcome of history. It is the inevitable conclusion of a series of events set in motion by the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus. Simply put, for the Christian, this is a vision of 'home.'

It is this 'from the future' perspective

on reality that enables persecuted Christians to persevere. Those who have lost 'home' in the here and now understand that as painful as it may be, it is a temporary deprivation. Very soon they will be sheltered by the personal presence of Almighty God. He will feed them and lead them to living water. This unchallengeable protection and unrelenting provision will last for all eternity.

John's vision is no less relevant for those of us with a more secure experience of 'home' in the here and now. However, the point of application may differ. Important as it is, we should not depend on our material home for our ultimate sense of security and belonging. Perhaps we can afford to grasp our temporary comforts a little less tightly. Perhaps we can invest a little more of ourselves in the permanence of the future.

INSPIRING FAITH



'People who met Jesus in Nazareth and Bethlehem didn't recite prayers to Him. They said what was in their hearts, and so should we.'

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand was imprisoned for 14 years in communist Romania in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1968 he inspired the founding of Release International, which today continues his ministry to serve persecuted Christians around the world in the name of Jesus.



THE DAY OF THE CHRISTIAN MARTYR

Wednesday, June 29, 2022

You and your church are invited to join us in remembering modern-day Christian martyrs on June 29, 2022.

Speaker tour in North and Midlands.
Email info@releaseinternational.org to host meeting.

FREE resources available at
releaseinternational.org/martyrs.



01689 823491



martyrsday@releaseinternational.org



releaseinternational.org/martyrs

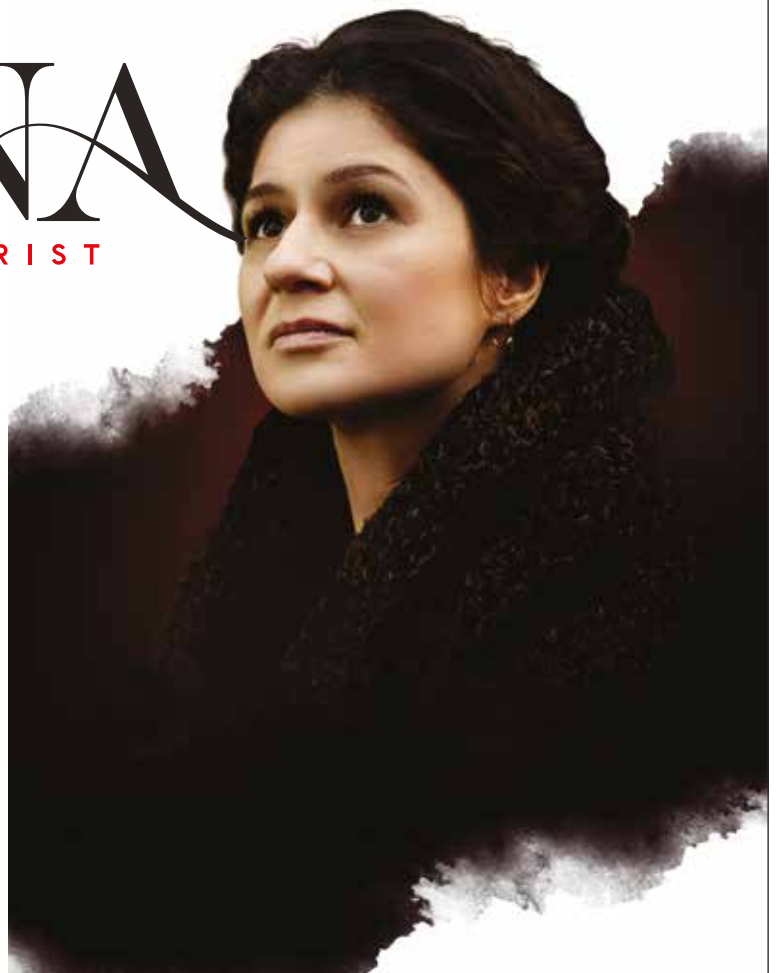
SABINA

TORTURED FOR CHRIST
THE NAZI YEARS

**Monday, April 11 to
Wednesday, April 13**

Livestreamed on
releaseinternational.org

A powerful film about Sabina Wurmbrand, wife of pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who inspired the founding of Release International.

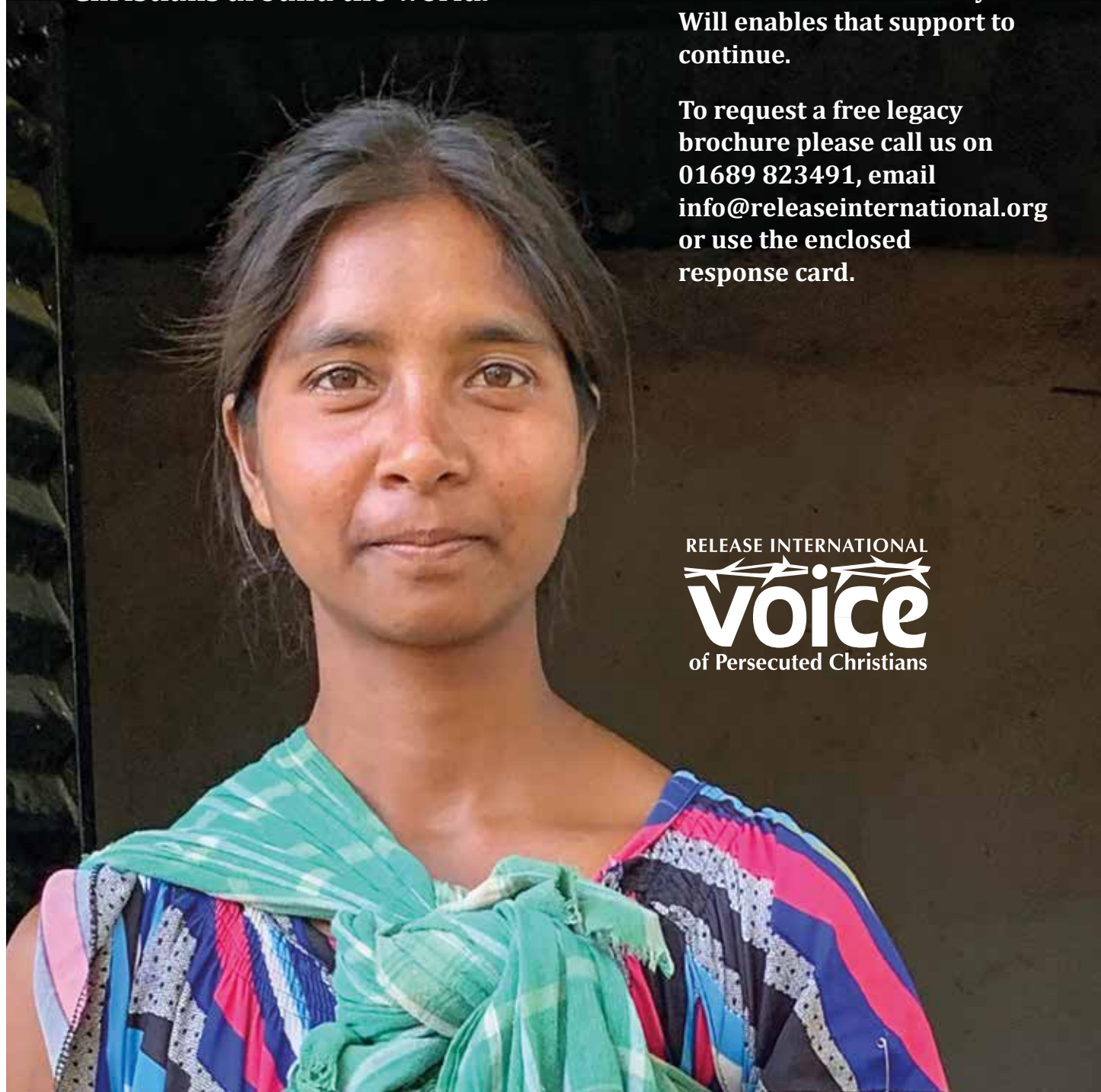


Will you leave a legacy of enduring faith and love?

A legacy gift to Release International can be a natural continuation of your commitment to sharing God's love and compassion with persecuted Christians around the world.

Your support enables our partners to provide prayerful, pastoral and practical help to persecuted Christians in over 25 countries. Including a gift to Release International in your Will enables that support to continue.

To request a free legacy brochure please call us on 01689 823491, email info@releaseinternational.org or use the enclosed response card.



RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
Voice
of Persecuted Christians

prayershield

April – June 2022



Despite persecution, Christians in Egypt continue to point to the One who makes rivers flow in the desert (Isaiah 43:19).

APRIL 2022

Heavenly Father,

*Thank You for seeking me out,
for running to find me when
I was lost to sin. Thank You
for Your amazing grace and
unending love.*

*Your love has won the victory
over the evil one who seeks to
devour me like a roaring lion
(1 Peter 5:8).*

*Abba Father, I pray that
my persecuted family will
experience Your victory over
temptation, over despair, over
hopelessness. May Your love
comfort and strengthen them
every day.*

In Jesus' name,

Amen

EGYPT

FRIDAY 1: Thank God that the church in Egypt continues to shine the light of Christ despite the oppression it faces. Ask God to strengthen believers' resolve to stand firm in their faith.

SATURDAY 2: One of our partners in Egypt reports that on average they are baptising one family of new believers each month. Praise God!

SUNDAY 3: The Nile Christian Bookshop in Cairo is run by a Release International partner. Pray that it will have a great impact on the thousands who walk past it each day.

MONDAY 4: Christians in Egypt, who were already among the nation's poorest, have been hit hard by the economic

impact of Covid, particularly those who live in rural areas of Upper Egypt. Ask God to provide for their needs.

TUESDAY 5: Thank God that, through the generosity of Release International supporters, our partners in Egypt have been able to distribute food packages to families who have lost their income through the pandemic.

WEDNESDAY 6: Pray for the *Strength to Stand* groups that Release International supports in Egypt. Despite

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

Several churches in Ethiopia have been destroyed as persecution mounts.



Covid restrictions, they have continued to visit the homes of women they support and have maintained regular contact through WhatsApp.

THURSDAY 7: Ask God to protect leaders of the *Strength to Stand* groups who go out to visit women in their homes. Two of them were recently threatened with kidnap.

FRIDAY 8: Thank God that He is building up the faith of the women supported by *Strength to Stand* groups. Many face ongoing sexual abuse as well as poverty and oppression.

SATURDAY 9: The husbands of the women supported by the *Strength to Stand* groups have seen the change in their wives and asked church leaders to set up similar support groups for them. Thank God that this is strengthening the church.

ETHIOPIA

SUNDAY 10: Pray for the church in Ethiopia, a Christian-majority nation where believers in some areas, especially the south and east of the country, are under pressure. Christian-owned property, including churches, have been destroyed;

believers have been beaten and some killed.

MONDAY 11: Most Christians in Ethiopia can worship freely – but those who have left the traditional church or Islam can face opposition. Ask God to give these believers the strength to endure.

TUESDAY 12: 'Jemal' enjoyed debating with Christians, undermining their arguments, until he turned to Christ. His family have since rejected him, beaten him, and destroyed his home. Ask God to bless and protect him.

WEDNESDAY 13: Pray for 'Faizah' whose husband Nagawo was killed by Islamists who were angry he had led Muslims to Christ. They destroyed Faizah's home too, but Release International associate ministries helped rebuild it. She continues to share the gospel with her community.

THURSDAY 14: 'Negasi', 'Ephrem' and 'Dinaw' all came to Christ in prison – and went on to lead many of their fellow inmates to Christ. Praise God that since their release, they have continued to share the gospel, despite persecution.

PRAYERS FOR EASTER

GOOD FRIDAY: As we remember Jesus' suffering on the Cross today, let's also remember the millions of our fellow believers worldwide who share in His suffering and lay down their lives to share Him with others.

EASTER SATURDAY: Believers outside the traditional church of Ethiopia, such as Evangelicals, can face persecution even from those who profess the Christian faith. Pray for unity in the body of Christ.

EASTER SUNDAY: Let's celebrate together Christ's victory over sin and death on this glorious resurrection day! And let's pray that our persecuted family in Ethiopia and worldwide will experience this resurrection power in their own lives (Romans 8:11).

CHINA

MONDAY 18: Chinese police arrested Early Rain Covenant Church elder Li Yingqiang on Christmas Eve for 'disturbing social order' – just before he was due to preach in an online seminar. Thank God that more than 300 Christians and faithseekers attended the event. Li was later released.

TUESDAY 19: Pray for Pastor Pan Yongguang and the 60 other members of Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church in China who

have been seeking asylum in South Korea. The South Korean High Court recently rejected their claim: some fear China may have exerted pressure over South Korea.

WEDNESDAY 20: Pray for endurance for the Xuncheng Reformed Church in Taiyuan which suffered a number of raids last year. Several church members have been detained in recent months.

THURSDAY 21: Zhao Weikai, an elder of the Xuncheng Reformed Church (above), was arrested last July and charged with possessing materials 'promoting terrorism and extremism' after officials found documentaries about the Tiananmen Square massacre at his home. Pray for his release.

FRIDAY 22: Pray for strength for five members of the Xuncheng Reformed Church who were jailed in January for 'crossing a border illegally' to attend a church conference in Kuala Lumpur, despite having visas to travel. Their sentences range from six to eight months' imprisonment.

SATURDAY 23: Church leaders An Yankui and Zhang Chenghao of the Xuncheng Reformed Church (above) were detained in December and charged with various offences linked to their church activity. Pray that they will sense God's presence – and be freed.

SUNDAY 24: Pray that churches will not fall foul of new restrictions which came into effect in March, limiting faith-related content on social

media. All religious content will be vetted to ensure it promotes 'socialist values'.

UGANDA

MONDAY 25: Please pray that the authorities in Muslim-majority areas of eastern Uganda will do more to protect Christians from violence.

TUESDAY 26: Pray for protection for evangelist Charles Kamywa. He was recently beaten unconscious by six extremists who intercepted him on his way to take part in a debate about Christianity and Islam.

WEDNESDAY 27: Pray for the wife and four children of Pastor Bashir Sengendo, a former mosque leader in eastern Uganda. He was killed by relatives angered by his conversion to Christianity.

THURSDAY 28: Extremists beat widow Jenifer and her daughter, Oliva, unconscious, leaving the teenager unable to walk. Pray for protection and healing for them both.

FRIDAY 29: Pray for a man in central Kayunga district who is suspected of hanging his wife and two children because they received Christ. Pray for those affected by these deaths.

SATURDAY 30: Ask God to protect Bishop Raymond Malinga Opio who was badly beaten by extremists after speaking at an evangelistic outreach in Buwenge, eastern Uganda. Several people came to Christ at the event.

MAY 2022

KENYA

SUNDAY 1: When 'Amina' (pictured) turned to Christ, her parents banned her from their home and her husband divorced her. Thank God for her faith and her determination to share the gospel.

MONDAY 2: Pray for Christians in the coastal region of Kenya, especially Lamu, which is predominantly Muslim. Extremists seem bent on making it an independent Islamic area.

TUESDAY 3: Pray for the families of six Christians in Widho, Lamu county, who were killed recently by extremists (including suspected *al-Shabaab* militants from Somalia).

WEDNESDAY 4: Pray for the family of Mwangi Maina, one of the six Christians killed in Lamu (above). Extremists forced his four children to view their father's dead body, before setting fire to their house.

THURSDAY 5: Ask God to encourage the church family of the six murdered Christians in Lamu (above) who belonged to the Redeemed Gospel Church and the Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa.

FRIDAY 6: Many people fled the Widho area in fear after the six Christians (above) were killed. Please pray that government and security officials will tighten security so Christians feel safe enough to return.



'Amina' in Kenya has faced intense persecution but has found strength in God's Word.

AFGHANISTAN

SATURDAY 7: Pray for believers in Afghanistan: the Taliban's return to power last year poses a real threat of more intense persecution. Recent reports suggest Taliban reprisals against those perceived to be allies of the West and the former Government.

SUNDAY 8: Release International partners are supporting several families who fled Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover (see *Voice* magazine, pages 10-11). Please pray that God will meet their every physical and spiritual need.

MONDAY 9: Thank God for the overcoming spirit of 'Aabroo' whose family rejected her after she turned to Christ and who was forced to leave Afghanistan. She is now caring for Afghan refugees.

TUESDAY 10: Pray for 'Abas', a former imam who has suffered (and survived) a grenade

attack and kidnapping attempt since becoming a Christian. Stand with him in praying for a steadfast spirit.

WEDNESDAY 11: A poor harvest and the near collapse of the Afghan economy have caused severe food shortages. Pray that God will meet the needs of Christians who are likely to face discrimination in social support such as food distributions.

THURSDAY 12: Pray in faith that Afghanistan, the nation that Bishop of Truro Philip Mounstephen recently described as 'the most dangerous country on earth to be a Christian', will see explosive church growth.

PAKISTAN

FRIDAY 13: Pray for strength for the church in Pakistan. Christians fear persecution may intensify as the Pakistani Taliban have been emboldened by the Afghan Taliban's seizing power last August.

SATURDAY 14: Please continue to pray for justice for Zafar Bhatti, who has been imprisoned for 'blasphemy' in Pakistan since 2012. His life sentence was recently increased to a death sentence. Ask God to be with his wife, Nawab, too.

SUNDAY 15: Pray for Marilyn and her four children: her husband, Asif Pervaiz, is on death row for blasphemy (see *Voice* magazine, pages 14-15). They are able to visit Asif for only 30 minutes once a month, a 200-mile round trip only possible due to Release International support.

MONDAY 16: Ashfaq Masih, husband of Nabeela (pictured), has been in prison for six years after someone accused him of blasphemy during a dispute over money (see *Voice* magazine, pages 14-15). He has yet to be tried. Pray for his release.

TUESDAY 17: Pastor William Siraj was shot dead as he drove home from a Sunday service in Peshawar city. Pastor Naeem Patrick, travelling with him, was wounded in the attack: another church leader was not harmed. Ask God to comfort William's family and heal Naeem fully.

WEDNESDAY 18: The memorial for Pastor William (above) was held at All Saints' Church which militants attacked in 2013, killing more than 70 people. Ask God to comfort this congregation.

THURSDAY 19: Pray for Pastor William's bereaved daughter who also lost her husband in the 2013 attack on All Saints'

Church. She is reported as saying: 'I praise God and am so proud that I am the daughter of a martyr and the wife of a martyr too.'

FRIDAY 20: Pakistan's most senior cleric, Bishop Azad Marshall, has called on the Government to provide 'justice and protection of Christians', following Pastor William's murder. Pray that his call will lead to action.

SATURDAY 21: Ask God to protect Sajjad Masih Gill who was released on appeal after almost ten years behind bars. His life sentence for blasphemy was converted to a death sentence last year – before his acquittal

SUNDAY 22: Pray for the acquittal of Christian nurses Mariam Lal and Navish Arooj who were charged with 'defiling the Koran' after they followed their supervisor's instructions to remove Islamic stickers from their hospital in Faisalabad.

MONDAY 23: Thank God for the strong witness of 'Yalina'. Her husband abandoned her when she became a Christian. Then her parents threw her and her three children out on the streets when she refused to give up her faith.

TUESDAY 24: Release International partners in Pakistan are able to provide safe housing for persecuted Christians such as Yalina (above) as well as practical support and pastoral care. Ask God to protect them, too.

WEDNESDAY 25: Pray for a 14-year-old Christian from Lahore whose family say she has been kidnapped and forcibly converted to Islam. They have received a copy of a certificate informing them she has married a 45-year-old man.

IRAN

THURSDAY 26: Pray that the Iranian authorities will begin to recognise the positive

contribution Christians and other persecuted religious communities make to society.

FRIDAY 27: Pray for Naser Navard Goltapeh whose appeal against a ten-year prison sentence is due to be reviewed by Iran's Supreme Court. Arrested in 2016, he was later convicted of 'acting against national security' through his involvement in house churches.

SATURDAY 28: Thank God that Sasan Khosravi and Habib Heydari were released early from jail, before they had completed one-year prison sentences for 'propaganda against the state'. Pray for Sasan who is still due to serve two years in internal exile.

SUNDAY 29: As we celebrate *All Out for God* today, let's remember those Christians in Iran and worldwide whose churches have been shut down or who are forced to worship in secret.

MONDAY 30: A prosecutor in Dezful ruled recently that conversion to Christianity is not against Iranian law. Pray that all Iranian authorities will agree that believers with a Muslim background should be accorded the same rights as other Iranian citizens.

TUESDAY 31: Pray for Ayoub Poor-Rezazade, Morteza Mashhoodkari and Ahmad Sarparast who have been charged with 'deviant propaganda'. If convicted, they face heavy sentences.



Nabeela's husband, Ashfaq, has been waiting to be tried for 'blasphemy' for six years.

JUNE 2022

ALGERIA

WEDNESDAY 1: Thank God for the resilience and strong faith of Algerian Christians. Ask God to sustain them and reward their patience with strong church growth.

THURSDAY 2: Pray for a church in Ait Atteli, in Tizi Ouzou province: officials recently started legal proceedings to close it down. The church has more than 90 members.

FRIDAY 3: Pray that all churches closed since 2017 in the government campaign against the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) will reopen soon.

SATURDAY 4: Pray that a 2006 ordinance governing non-Muslim worship will be amended and justly implemented. Currently, non-Muslim worship can only be held in buildings registered for that purpose – yet the licensing body has yet to issue a single licence.

SUNDAY 5: Pastor Salah Chalah, senior pastor of the largest Protestant church in Algeria, and president of the EPA, faces multiple charges, including 'practising non-Muslim rites without permission', along with three other Christians. Pray they will all be acquitted.

MONDAY 6: Pray that the Algerian authorities will cease their campaign against churches and approve the re-registration of the EPA.



Algerian Christians protesting about a 2006 religious ordinance which they say is being used to persecute the church. Photo: Morning Star News

TUESDAY 7: Pray that God will use the current restrictions to draw many more Algerians into a relationship with Him.

WEDNESDAY 8: Pray for Algeria's young people, who make up a large percentage of the population in general, as well as the majority of Christians. Pray that they will respond with faith, not frustration, to the current restrictions.

NIGERIA

THURSDAY 9: Pray for the families of four believers who were killed within a fortnight in January, during raids on villages in the Chibok area of Borno state. Homes and churches were destroyed in the attacks, believed to be the work of Islamic State West Africa

Province (Iswap), formerly known as Boko Haram.

FRIDAY 10: Twenty-two girls were kidnapped in the Chibok area in January. Pray that they will be set free – along with 100 girls kidnapped in 2014 who are believed to remain in captivity.

'We need your prayers for God's deliverance from these forces of evil.'

James Nkeki, survivor of extremist attack, Chibok, Nigeria

SATURDAY 11: Chibok Christians have reportedly been attacked more than 100 times since the 2014 abduction of more than 276 Christian high school girls. Pray for concerted government action to end this cycle of violence.

SUNDAY 12: Praise God for the overcoming faith of people such as Victoria Dunga who survived an attack on Kautikari, Borno state, in January, in which three Christians were killed. 'Burning down our churches will not stop us from worshipping God,' Victoria says.

MONDAY 13: Pray for villagers in Kurmin Masara, Kaduna state, where Fulani militants killed 11 Christians in late-January. One elderly woman, known as Mama Fide, was burned to death in her home.

TUESDAY 14: Ten women and children were kidnapped – and one Christian killed – in a militant attack on Gbagyi Villa outside Kaduna city. A further six Christians had been kidnapped in a nearby village within the previous week. Pray for their release.

WEDNESDAY 15: Pray that the Nigerian Government will take swift and robust action to end the killings and kidnappings in northern Nigeria.

THURSDAY 16: Pray for the many Christians in northern Nigeria who have been displaced by violence. Last year alone, nearly 5,000 Christians fled their homes, Release International partners say.

FRIDAY 17: Pray for Christians in Plateau state who continue to face severe pressures. At least 22 believers were killed in suspected Fulani raids in Jos North and Bassa counties in January.

SATURDAY 18: The raid in Dong village, Jos North (previous prayer), came after a previous assault in May 2021. The area is home to many Christians who have fled persecution elsewhere. Pray that this community will know God is their 'refuge and strength' (Psalm 46:1).

SUNDAY 19: Nigeria goes to the polls in 2023 when general elections are scheduled. Pray that political campaigning this year will not prove an excuse for greater religious persecution.

MONDAY 20: Pray that God will move in His mighty power to end the violence in northern Nigeria that has been targeted at Christians for many years.

INDIA

TUESDAY 21: An anti-conversion Bill is being considered in Karnataka state: Christians in the state fear it will further limit religious freedom. Pray that the Bill will not be passed.

WEDNESDAY 22: Pray for Pastor Nandu Nathaniel and his wife, Savita Singh, whom police in Uttar Pradesh state arrested and detained in October on forced conversion charges. Bail has been denied twice.

THURSDAY 23: Pastor Shayam Sundhar was detained under the anti-conversion laws of Uttar Pradesh state in September. He has been threatened many times by

local extremists. His bail applications have also been denied. Pray for his release.

FRIDAY 24: Please pray for five pastors – in addition to Shayam and Nandu (above) – who are believed to be in prison in Uttar Pradesh: Shakeel Abraham, Vijender Rajbar, Rajesh Rajbar, Abhisaiik Rajbar and a pastor called Ramchand.

SATURDAY 25: Pray for Pastor Pawan Kumar's house church in Jammu and Kashmir state's Kathua district. A mob invited journalists to record their raid on a worship meeting and, when police were called, they held the Christians responsible for the disturbance.

SUNDAY 26: Pray for Pastor Chunglenlal Singsit and family who have returned to his native Manipur state after Chunglenlal was threatened by extremists and police in Jammu and Kashmir state.

MONDAY 27: Pray for Punjab pastors Inderjit and Sanjay Kumar: they were attacked by an extremist mob who accused them of forced conversion in Anand Nagar, Haryana state. Sanjay's Bible was burned.

TUESDAY 28: Christian leaders from Gurdaspur district, Punjab state, have demanded legal action against those who burned Sanjay's Bible (above). Pray that Christians' religious rights will be accorded the same respect as those of other faiths.



Bindi's husband Kande died at the hands of extremists in India.

WEDNESDAY 29: On the *Day of the Christian Martyr*, let's pray for the families of those who have died for their faith – including Bindi (pictured) from Jharkhand state. Extremists killed her husband Kande – because the couple shared their faith

with neighbours. Ask God to provide for her and her young daughters.

THURSDAY 30: Continue to pray that the national Government, led by the Hindu nationalist BJP, will change its attitude and hostile tone towards non-Hindus.

*Lord Jesus,
Word made flesh, Love incarnate.
You are my defender.
Lord, I pray that every persecuted believer will know Your truth:
'The LORD is my strength and my song; he has given me victory'
(Exodus 15:2, NLT).
May they know You as the one who takes hold of their right hand and says, 'Do not fear; I will help you' (Isaiah 41:13).
Jesus, You have won the victory.
Hallelujah!
Amen*

China Aid; Middle East Concern; Morning Star News; Release International partners and contacts; *The Guardian*; VOM Canada; VOM USA.

Names in inverted commas have been changed to protect identities.

While we do not provide financial support to every Christian mentioned in *Prayer Shield*, we believe in the power of prayer to change lives.

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