

nov dec 2016

voice of persecuted christians

# release



RUNNING  
FROM  
ISLAMIC  
STATE



**Please support our Christmas appeal to provide urgent help to vulnerable Christian families in northern Iraq**



# Welcome

by Paul Robinson, CEO

Will YOU  
pray for  
persecuted  
Christians?

One of the privileges, and challenges, of working at Release is helping Christians in the UK and Ireland understand what believers around the world are going through for their faith.

I've just returned from Pakistan where I met victims of the Easter bombing in Lahore. **One young man I prayed with had shrapnel blasted into his face, head, arm and heart.** Thanks to your gifts Release has been supporting him through his complicated medical treatment, but it is hard to adequately describe the trauma and grief that young Christian carries in his heart.

Perhaps one way to comprehend his suffering though is to try to see it as God sees it.

In Acts chapter 7 verses 55 and 56 we see Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Do you notice something unusual about that? Jesus is not seated at the right hand of God as is generally depicted. He is standing. Why? Is it, perhaps, that he rises to acknowledge Stephen, the one about to be stoned to death in His name?

How many more martyrs and victims of persecution have there been since Stephen? Countless, and how would Jesus have felt over each one of them? I'm guessing pretty much the same as He did over Stephen.

So if you want to know what moves God's heart, read Acts 7. But be warned: if it has that effect on Jesus, then surely it needs to move us too!

Richard Wurmbrand, the persecuted Romanian pastor who inspired the founding of Release, wrote in *Tortured for Christ*: 'I tremble because of the sufferings of those persecuted in different lands. I tremble thinking about the eternal destiny of their torturers. I tremble for Western Christians who don't help their persecuted brethren...' Those words, published in 1967, continue to challenge all of us. **What will we do to help Jesus' followers?**

One thing we can, and must, do is to pray for them. We have to respond with practical love too — but we must pray. The other thing we can do is to tell others so that they can pray too.

## Ask your church to join the national day of prayer

A simple way of doing that is by alerting your church friends to the **International Day of Prayer for persecuted Christians** (IDOP) and encouraging them to get involved. This year our focus for IDOP is Sri Lanka because Christians there are suffering as a result of a discriminatory government circular. You can read more about it on page 6. Included with this edition of the magazine is a petition form calling for its repeal. Please use it in your church especially around IDOP to collect as many signatures as possible.

People frequently ask us whether petitions do any good. Our partners in Sri Lanka have told us: 'Signing the petition, and asking others in your church to sign, will pressurise the government to take effective steps.' **Let's pray that it does.**

# CONTENTS



4

## FAITH UNDER FIRE

Militants seize villages in Nigeria



9

## A PRAYER FOR SRI LANKA



14

## GOOD NEWS

Iran appeal raises £32,000



6

## 'GOD WILL BRING US THROUGH'

says Pastor Roshan



10

## RUNNING FROM ISLAMIC STATE

Please help vulnerable Christian families in Iraq



15

## RELEASE POTENTIAL

Change Maker Jessie visits Sri Lanka



8

## TAKE PART IN THE DAY OF PRAYER



12

## INSPIRED BY THEIR FAITH

Bishop Richard Jackson visits Pakistan

16

## A LIFE TRANSFORMED

Iranian pastor Harry needs our prayers



18

## 'COME TO ME'

Accept the call to follow Jesus, wrote Richard Wurmbrand

**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.

**Release International:** PO Box 54, Orpington BR5 4RT - T: 01689 823491- E: info@releaseinternational.org - © 2016 Release International - Registered Charity 280577. The ministry of Release International Ltd, a company limited by guarantee in England, No. 1506576. Registered office: Times House, Throwley Way, Sutton SM1 4JQ.

All personal data/sensitive personal data herein are processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Further details are available from Release International. Stock images may be used to protect those we serve.



releaseinternational.org



releaseinternational



@releaseinternational #ReleaseInt



releaseinternational

# FAITH UNDER FIRE



*Please pray for Naomi and Joseph who are grieving the loss of their father Perfecto.*

## Church elder murdered in the Philippines

Fifty-two-year-old Perfecto Padilla, a church elder from Sultan Kudarat, Mindanao, was gunned down by two assailants while he was resting outside his house in September. He died on his way to hospital.

His two children Naomi, 12, and Joseph, 10, are left without parents. Their mother went to work overseas many years ago and has lost contact with the family.

'This district was once a peaceful village,' said Release's partner. 'But now Muslims have built a mosque very close to the church. They have been trying to force the Christians to sell the church property.'

'This constant pressure appears to be part of a plan to try to claim more land,' he said.

*Please pray for Naomi and her brother Joseph, and please give generously if you can so our partner can help them.*

*A parent of one of the abducted Chibok school girls cries during a rally in the Nigerian capital Abuja. Photo: Reuters/Afolabi Sotunde.*

## Eight killed as terrorists seize villages in northern Nigeria

Boko Haram terrorists took over three villages near Chibok town in Borno state, leaving at least eight people dead.

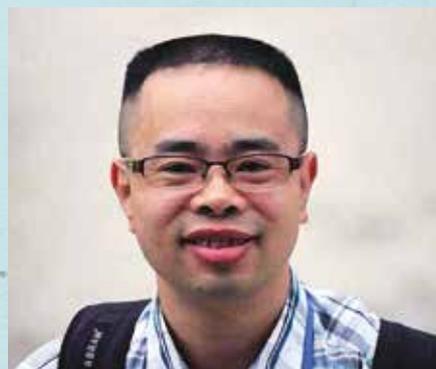
During the attack in September, the militants are reported to have hoisted their flag over the villages.

Many families in the area are still waiting in agony for news of more than 200 girls who were snatched from a Christian school in Chibok town in April 2014. Though one girl was rescued in May, almost all of those seized by Boko Haram remain missing.

Nigeria's President, Muhammadu Buhari, has called on the UN to mediate with the militants. Buhari has said he is prepared to arrange a swap, freeing extremists in jail in return for the girls' release.

*Please pray that God will comfort and heal all those injured and bereaved in the attack. Pray too for the immediate release of the girls abducted from Chibok and elsewhere in Nigeria.*

## Detained pastor Yang Hua in poor health



Lawyers representing imprisoned Chinese pastor Yang Hua report that he has been suffering from serious health conditions while in detention.

Yang has been in police custody on a variety of charges since December 2015: he is accused of 'divulging state secrets', but has yet to be tried.

According to a recent interview with his lawyers, prosecutors have visited Yang twice, put him under physical duress and repeatedly threatened to kill him and harm his family if he fails to confess to his supposed crimes.

*Pray that God will heal Yang Hua and that he will be released from detention.*



## Perpetrators of Malatya murders re-arrested

The Turkish authorities re-arrested the five Muslim nationalists convicted and sentenced to life in prison for the torture and murder of three Christians in Malatya, southeast Turkey, in 2007.

Fearing that the five might flee Turkey, the prosecutor requested their arrest on September 29, according to Release partner Middle East Concern.

The day before Salih Gurler, Cuma Ozdemir, Abuzer Yildirim, Hamit Ceker and Emre Gunaydin were each found guilty of the premeditated murder of Ugur Yüksel, Necati Aydin

and Tilmann Geske. Each was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Despite the conviction and sentencing, however, all five had walked out of court free men while their case awaited higher legal review, infuriating Turkish Christians.

Gokhan Talas, a close friend of the three slain Christians and witness at the murder scene, said he was relieved at the decision to detain the five men. 'I believe the families, my family, feel more secure now,' he said.

***Pray that the families of those murdered will know God's comfort and justice, and that the killers would come to repentance.***

## Militants kill 26 in Central African Republic

Muslim militants slaughtered 26 civilians in a predominantly Christian village in the Central African Republic, the worst violence in the embattled country in recent months.

Rebels from the former Seleka group attacked the village of Ndomete, about 220 miles north of the capital city of Bangui, in September. The militants then went door-to-door in order to identify and kill Christians, a source told Morning Star News.

Hostility between Muslims and Christians worsened in 2013, when Seleka deposed then-President Francois Bozize and installed Michel Djotodia, a Muslim. Djotodia announced the disbanding of Seleka in September 2013, but the rebels have since rampaged throughout the country, killing Christians and political enemies, leading to the formation of Christian militias to counter them.

***Please pray that the families of those killed will know that God 'heals the brokenhearted' (Psalm 147:3).***



Release CEO Paul Robinson drew attention to the plight of persecuted Christians during the Labour Party conference church service in Liverpool in September.

'Some estimates say that 200 million of our Christian brothers and sisters, today, suffer persecution, ranging from verbal harassment and discrimination, through to physical violence and murder, for no other reason than they believe in Jesus,' he said. 'We must never forget or abandon them.'

During his short presentation, Paul quoted from a report in *The Spectator* magazine: 'The world is witnessing the rise of an entire new generation of Christian martyrs. The carnage is occurring on such a vast scale that it represents not only the most dramatic Christian story of our time, but arguably the premier human rights challenge of this era as well.'

Sources: China Aid, Forum 18, Middle East Concern, Morning Star News, Release partners, Voice of the Martyrs USA.

# SRI LANKA

Pastor Roshan with a newspaper report describing the attack on his church.

**'As a Christian family and community we know that persecution is part of our lives'**

in front of the police station and demanding the closure of the church.

The police also told Roshan to stop all activities in his church and that his life and the lives of his family were under serious threat.

*'We got our church together and we prayed through the night,' he said. 'We got some good advice and a lot of support from the NCEASL lawyer. We decided not to stop, but to continue our activities.'*

That was two years ago. And Roshan and his family are still in the village ministering the gospel, despite the risks. Our partner NCEASL continues to give him legal advice.

*'As a Christian family and community we know that persecution is part of our lives. But, I also know that God has called me to serve here, that He has great plans for me and my church. So, even though we are having a hard time I believe God will bring us through because He is faithful.'*

# 'GOD WILL BRING US THROUGH'

**Pastor Roshan has been in ministry for over 20 years, starting up new churches and discipling believers in a rural area of Sri Lanka. Yet today Buddhist extremists are trying to close down his church.**

Pastor 'Roshan' (not his real name) grew up in a Buddhist family but encountered Jesus at a young age when his family was going through difficulties. At that time a local church pastor prayed for the family and encouraged them to look up to Jesus as the source of their hope during these hard times.

He was moved by this encounter and decided to invite Jesus into his life and become a believer.

Later on he went to Bible college and felt God's calling on his life to plant churches where there were none.

He started the church he currently serves five years ago. His congregation was growing and all was going well until two years ago when a group of Buddhist monks and local villagers turned up at a Sunday service asking him to stop his activities and shut down the church.

After this incident he went to the local police to lodge a complaint against the radical monks and was told to come back two days later for an inquiry.

On the day of the inquiry the Buddhist monks rallied a large group of people who were protesting



**Read how Christian women are standing strong in Sri Lanka in the latest edition of Release Women's Embrace newsletter. Call: 01689 823491 for your FREE copy.**

**Turn to page 15 to see what Release Potential's Jessie discovered on her recent visit to Sri Lanka.**



Godfrey  
Yogarajah,  
General  
Secretary  
of Release  
partner  
NCEASL.

# FACING PERSISTENT PERSECUTION

Representatives of Release recently interviewed Godfrey Yogarajah, General Secretary of our partner the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL).

## Q: What are some of the key challenges facing Christians in Sri Lanka today?

**Godfrey:** One of the main challenges, especially in the rural and remote areas, is the persistent persecution fuelled by extremist Buddhist monks. Often they rally local people to attack churches, to beat up pastors and to threaten families of those who have become followers of Jesus.

Another major challenge is the discrimination and intimidation of Christian children in local schools. Often they are forced to participate in Buddhist rituals against their will. If the children or the parents say 'No' they can be reprimanded and, in some instances, fined.

Between January 2015 and September 2016 NCEASL recorded over 160 incidents against Christians.

Sometimes local government authorities have issued orders to close down local churches or to make life difficult for them using a government directive called Circular 2008.

According to Circular 2008 all new churches should be registered at the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs. But, pastors soon discover that there is no process for churches to register. In fact the Circular has no legal basis or validity.

Furthermore, now that we have a new Christian affairs ministry in place, this cannot be imposed on Christians.

## Q: What are you doing to cancel Circular 2008?

**Godfrey:** We are committed to helping evangelical churches to become legitimate bodies by offering legal advice and fighting for their cause. This has been a long struggle and we are grateful for every victory God grants us.

## Q: How can Christians in the UK and Ireland support your efforts?

**Godfrey:** Please pray for us because a lot of prayer is needed. Pray for our work to bear fruit for God and pray that our government officials will cancel Circular 2008 and grant

# ATTACKS AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN SRI LANKA

## Selected incidents June-July 2016

- **JUNE 24** A group of around 80 led by a Buddhist monk assault Christians performing a street drama in Ampara and make death threats.
- **JULY 16** Sunday School classes of the House Church Foundation, Kandegama, Polonnaruwa district, are interrupted by 12 militant Buddhists who say that the children should not be taught Christianity. They also accuse the pastor and his workers of unethically and forcibly converting residents.
- **JULY 16** Two police officers tell the pastor of the Church of Truth, Pallekele, Kandy district, to stop all religious activities until he has registered the church with the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs.
- **JULY 22** The pastor of Jesus Christ Fire Church, Aththiyadi, Jaffna district, receives a letter claiming that his church is unauthorised and that he needs to obtain approval from the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs.

Christians here the freedom to worship and tell others about Jesus.

Remember pastors and believers in your prayers too because it is a huge challenge to practise their faith in a majority Buddhist setting. Ask God to give them grace, strength and love for their persecutors.

Finally, continue to be a voice for us by signing the petition (see page 8) so that Sri Lankan Christians can have the freedom you enjoy.



## TAKE PART IN THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS (IDOP)

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20

Hundreds of churches around the world will be praying for persecuted Christians on November 20<sup>1</sup>; why not join them and make your prayers count for believers in Sri Lanka. This is also an ideal opportunity to promote our new STOP THE CIRCULAR campaign (see left).

Please use these free resources, available from [releaseinternational.org/idop](http://releaseinternational.org/idop):

- Short video explaining how Circular 2008 is being used to discriminate against Christians and to close churches and prayer meetings. Ideal for use alongside our new STOP THE CIRCULAR petition (see left).
- Topical prayer points and written prayers that can be used as part of a church meeting or prayer group (PowerPoint)
- IDOP resources for young people and students are available from Release Potential at [releasepotential.org](http://releasepotential.org)

Don't miss out: your prayers are a vital way of showing your love for our persecuted family.

# PLEASE SIGN OUR NEW PETITION

***'We are at a crucial point in time now to encourage the Sri Lankan Government to cancel Circular 2008,' says Yamini Ravindran, Legal and Advocacy Coordinator of NCEASL.***

*'That's because Sri Lanka is coming up in the review cycle of the United Nations and now we have a new Government that is seeking to build unity in the nation and which is more open to maintaining religious freedom.'*

*'We want to seize this opportunity to highlight the plight of Christians who are suffering the consequences of Circular 2008 by launching a new campaign with the help of partners such as Release International.'*

Enclosed with this edition is a copy of the STOP THE CIRCULAR petition which calls on the Sri Lankan

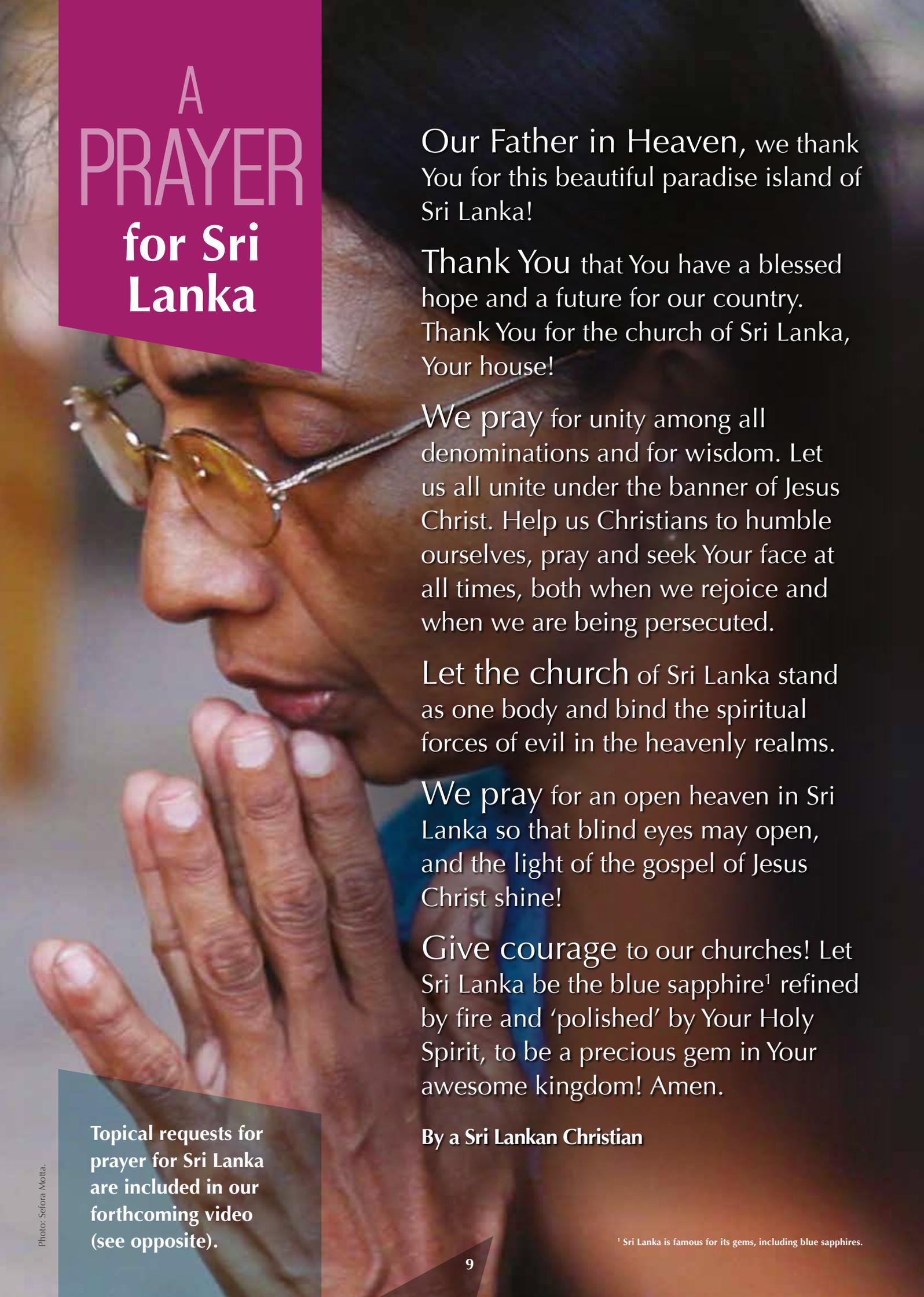
Government to cancel Circular 2008: please sign this and pass it on to your friends in your church to sign as well. The form may also be downloaded from [releaseinternational.org](http://releaseinternational.org).

We want to collect as many signatures as we can from Christians in the UK and Ireland, and to

***'We want to seize this opportunity to highlight the plight of Christians who are suffering the consequences of Circular 2008.'***

present these to the Sri Lankan High Commission in London.

***'Signing the petition, and asking others in your church to sign, will pressurise the Government to take effective steps,' says Yamini.***



# A PRAYER for Sri Lanka

Our Father in Heaven, we thank You for this beautiful paradise island of Sri Lanka!

Thank You that You have a blessed hope and a future for our country. Thank You for the church of Sri Lanka, Your house!

We pray for unity among all denominations and for wisdom. Let us all unite under the banner of Jesus Christ. Help us Christians to humble ourselves, pray and seek Your face at all times, both when we rejoice and when we are being persecuted.

Let the church of Sri Lanka stand as one body and bind the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

We pray for an open heaven in Sri Lanka so that blind eyes may open, and the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ shine!

Give courage to our churches! Let Sri Lanka be the blue sapphire<sup>1</sup> refined by fire and 'polished' by Your Holy Spirit, to be a precious gem in Your awesome kingdom! Amen.

**By a Sri Lankan Christian**

Topical requests for prayer for Sri Lanka are included in our forthcoming video (see opposite).

# WILL YOU HELP THOSE WHO ARE RUNNING FROM ISLAMIC STATE?



**Your generous gift to Release this Christmas can ensure that vulnerable Iraqi Christian families on the run get the help they desperately need.**

It was two o'clock in the morning when Samira heard the words she'd been dreading: 'Run! Islamic State is coming.'

She woke up her four children aged between four and thirteen and bundled her most precious possessions into a small suitcase. The family then fled into the night from their home in Qaraqosh.

She joined hundreds of others who were escaping north towards the autonomous region of Kurdistan — today home to more than three million displaced Iraqis.

## ***She lost two of her children in the crowd***

After hours of walking she couldn't carry her case anymore. When her feet started bleeding, she had to take off her shoes. Then, she lost two of her children in the frantic crowd.

Beside herself, she went back to look for them, asking everyone she met whether they had seen her children. But nobody had.

In utter desperation she cried out to God.

## **Answered prayer**

Within a short time her prayer was answered: other refugees had found the children wandering and had brought them with them.

Eventually Samira and her children made it to Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan, where they spent the first few nights sleeping in the street. Then a local church found them and took care of them, giving them food and other supplies provided by Release's partner Majed.

*'We give the displaced families food packages, blankets, gas for cooking,*

*heaters and clothes. It helps them to survive: many arrive in Kurdistan with nothing,'* said Majed.

*'Often they are in a state of shock and fear. We comfort and encourage them.*

*'My heart is to help persecuted Christians, because I was once persecuted myself. I'm joyful to do what God has called me to, and to see many of the refugees come to Christ, but I am sad to see their great need.'*

Majed knows first-hand the cost of following Jesus in a Muslim nation. After he converted his family rejected him and he lost his job. He was beaten and had to live on the street.

*'That's why I have a heart for refugees and Muslim-background believers,'* he said.

Tens of thousands of Iraqi families have been displaced as a result of the brutality of Islamic State – and are now surviving in refugee camps in northern Iraq.  
Photo: Reuters/Rodi Said.



## Will you give £10 or more today to help vulnerable Iraqi families?



By sending a gift today you will be helping vulnerable Christians like Samira, Thaer and their children who are living as refugees in Kurdistan.

Thanks to your generosity they will receive the basic food, clothes and other supplies they need to face the harsh winter.

But most of all they will know that someone cares for them and that God loves them. What your generosity can make possible:

- £10 can help provide a Bible and Christian literature for a displaced family
- £20 can provide clothes, blankets and heating supplies for the cold winter season
- £50 can provide food packages for two families of rice, lentils, sugar, milk and tinned food. Also nappies for infants where necessary.

Please make a donation today — and show your love for persecuted Christian families in the name of Jesus.

## THAER'S STORY OF SUFFERING AND NEW HOPE

Thaer and his family also had to run for their lives. Terrorists burst into their church in Baghdad and gunned down members of the congregation. When security forces attempted a rescue, the militants detonated suicide bombs filled with ball-bearings.

Sadly three-year-old Adam and his father, Uday, both members of Thaer's family, were among the more than 50 victims.

Thaer and Nadia hold photos of Uday and three-year-old Adam who were killed by militants. Photo: Andrew Boyd.

Thaer, his wife, Nadia, and three children have now also fled to northern Iraq in search of a safe haven and a new life together.

*'We just want to have security and be able to raise our kids with dignity,' he said.*

Please pray for Thaer and his family and for thousands of displaced Iraqi Christians like them.



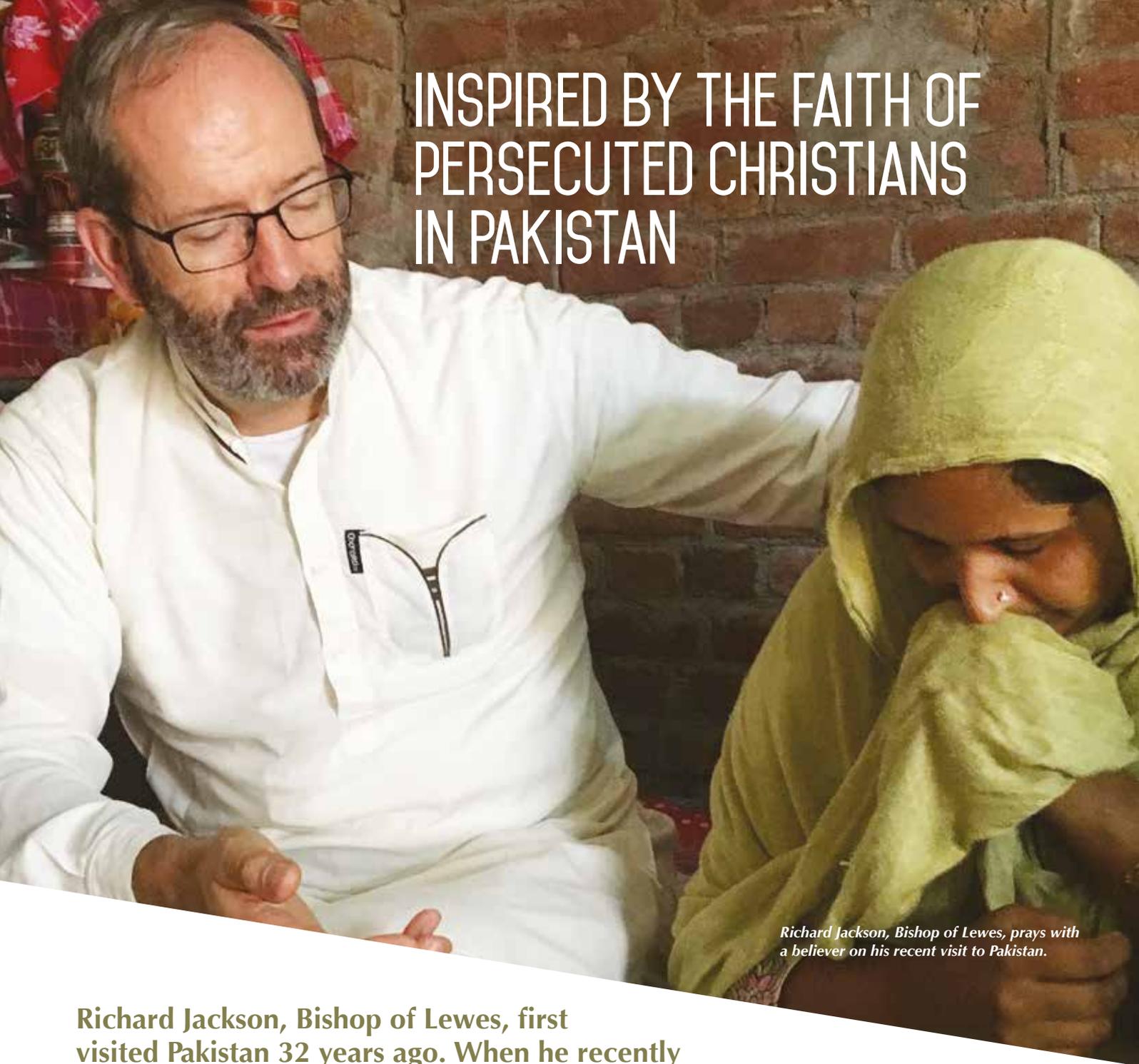
**GIVE** using the attached card or form

**GIVE:** over the phone by calling 01689 823491

**GIVE ONLINE:**  
[releaseinternational.org/donate](http://releaseinternational.org/donate)



# INSPIRED BY THE FAITH OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN PAKISTAN



*Richard Jackson, Bishop of Lewes, prays with a believer on his recent visit to Pakistan.*

**Richard Jackson, Bishop of Lewes, first visited Pakistan 32 years ago. When he recently returned as part of a Release ministry team he was overjoyed by the bravery and faith of many persecuted Christians you are helping to support.**

Arriving in Pakistan I could tell that some things have changed hugely: notably the economic development of the country. Thirty-two years ago cars and even motorbikes were comparatively rare. Nowadays the urban centres are often impassable with traffic.

Today, however, the security situation is much more grave, with genuine threats to life for our Christian brothers and sisters.

We visited one family who had lost loved ones in this year's Easter bomb blast in Lahore. We prayed for a young man recovering from injuries he had sustained, the scars still fresh where the ball bearings had been removed from his body.

His paralysed arm may prove to be a permanent disability — and the psychological scars will need great healing too.

In one home I was invited to baptise the family's two-year-old daughter, something they had been unable to do because of their constant running from people who meant them harm.

Often the stories I heard were accompanied by many tears.

You may have heard about 'Rose' (not her real name), a Muslim convert, who told me how she had to move from one safe house to another, with virtually nothing to live on.

She also had to live with the knowledge that her own mother had

***‘Without the work of Release partners many would be destitute, and quite likely forced back into their former faith’***

arranged for someone to pour petrol on her and set her alight — all for choosing to follow Jesus.

We rejoice when people choose Christ, but in Pakistan this often has huge implications for their family relationships. Without the work of Release partners many would be destitute, and quite likely forced back into their former faith.

**Oppressive drudgery**

As I saw first-hand, many Christians work in the brick kilns scattered across the countryside. This is nearly always a form of bonded labour. They are paid insufficient to live on and have to borrow from their employers, often at prohibitive rates of interest.

The children have few opportunities, their health is poor and there is little hope in a human sense beyond a life of unremitting drudgery.

However, despite these oppressive conditions, their worship was powerful, their trust in the Lord strong and their resolute hope inspiring.

I still haven’t recovered from seeing Kalashnikov-wielding armed guards at Christ Church, Youhanabad, the site of a suicide bombing last year that killed 12 people.

**Threat of Taliban**

Sadly, the Taliban’s growing cunning means that mere guns are unlikely to be a sufficient deterrent. However, this constant danger did not stop 800 worshippers joining us for a service!

It has not stopped growth either, both in numbers and in depth of discipleship.

I was privileged to have opportunities to teach on Christian leadership and was reminded of how Christians from the UK and Ireland who visit Pakistan can be a great blessing.

American church leader and author Bill Hybels once said: *“The local*

*church is the hope of the world — and its future lies chiefly in the hands of its leaders.”*

On the basis of my visit, the future in Pakistan looks more hopeful than I could imagine.

Throughout my visit I was impressed by the persistent courage of both Release’s partners and persecuted believers who in Jesus have found an anchor in every storm.

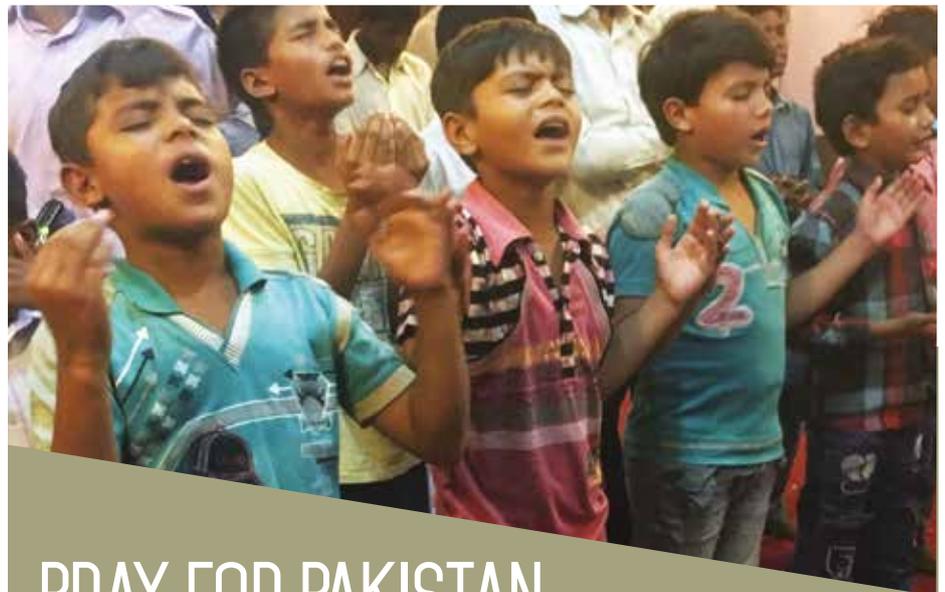


**‘Peter’ and ‘Rose’ feature in our powerful 13-minute DVD about persecuted Christians in Pakistan: *Paying the Price*. Call: 01689 823491 today to get your **FREE** copy.**

My lasting image is of ‘Peter’ (not his real name), who used to be an Imam. One day he announced his conversion through the mosque loudspeaker — and then had to run for his life!

**I’ve met few people who shone with the love of Christ like he did.**

I’m grateful that he, like many of the folk I met, have inspired me to both a deeper encounter with God and greater obedience. **✝**



# PRAY FOR PAKISTAN

- Pray for the many Christians who face discrimination and persecution in Pakistan today
- Ask God to meet their daily needs, especially those who suffer in the repressive brick kilns
- Despite the many hardships, thank God for the courage and overcoming testimony of these precious believers
- Pray for the partners of Release, who minister hope and healing in the name of Jesus

Thank you to everyone who has signed our recent online petition to help persecuted Christians in Pakistan (see page 14).

# GOOD NEWS



## A SMASHING TIME

WELL DONE to Bethel Evangelical Church in Tredegar, Blaenau, Gwent, which organised a PING-PONGATHON to raise £750 for persecuted Christians. The church's table tennis group staged a continuous one-hour competition for ten members, ranging in age from teenagers to octogenarians!



## PAKISTAN PETITION TO BE PRESENTED TO HIGH COMMISSION

Thank you for signing our online petition calling on Pakistan's Prime Minister to repeal the blasphemy laws. These continue to be open to widespread abuse, enabling false allegations to be brought against Christians and other minorities.

Farm labourer Asia Bibi, for example, was accused of blasphemy and has been held on death row since 2009. At the time of writing her appeal against the death sentence was due to go to the Supreme Court. If that fails her only hope is a presidential pardon.

We hope to present the petition to the Pakistan High Commission in London before Christmas: further details will be published on our website [releaseinternational.org](http://releaseinternational.org).

Please pray that the petition will be well-received by the authorities, and will strengthen the case for repeal of the discriminatory blasphemy laws.

Read how Pakistani Christians remain strong in their faith on page 12.



Asia Bibi

## IRAN APPEAL RAISES £32,000



A big thank you to all our supporters who raised more than £32,000 to help persecuted Iranian Christians (see page 16).

The funds will enable ongoing support for the underground church in Iran:

- Bible-training courses and resources for leaders
- Training for evangelists
- Support for Iranian Christians forced to leave the country

If you'd like to give, it's not too late. Call: 01689 823491 or visit [releaseinternational.org/donate](http://releaseinternational.org/donate) and choose 'Iran'.

# REACHING A GENERATION

**'I'm really looking forward to inspiring and challenging a generation to love persecuted Christians,' says Release Potential's new team leader Lola.**

## **What were you doing before?**

For over 11 years I was teaching primary school children from 5 to 11 years. I was also a church youth minister for three years during which I developed a youth project from scratch running Sunday services and a youth club for young people aged 11 and over. I enjoy music, drumming and singing, Zumba and jogging and am a wife and mother of two boys.

## **Why have you come to Release?**

I'm passionate about young people and equipping them to reach their full potential through the power of the gospel! I want to empower and equip students, young people and youth workers with practical and creative ways of raising awareness about persecuted believers around the world.

## **Why is it important for young people and students to connect with persecuted Christians?**

Because it empowers those they serve, broadens their own world view and increases empathy with those who suffer for their faith in other parts of their world.

## **What can I do?**

You can pray for persecuted believers, raise money to fund practical initiatives, even support Christian workers who are able to visit them in person.

## **How can we pray for you and Release Potential?**

Please pray for more Change Makers to make a difference and change their world (see below) – and that youth workers will continue to use our resources to communicate the message of the cost of following Jesus.



## **BE THE CHANGE!**

Are you aged between 17-23? Do you want to stand up for persecuted Christians and speak out for justice and peace? Do you want to be equipped to share your faith at home and around the world? Then become a Release Potential Change Maker and join our one-year mentoring programme. Check out [releasepotential.org/change-makers](https://releasepotential.org/change-makers) and apply now!

For details of our youth resources visit [releasepotential.org](https://releasepotential.org) or contact [potential@releaseinternational.org](mailto:potential@releaseinternational.org).



## FEARLESSNESS AND FAITH IN SRI LANKA



**Change Maker Jessie has recently been on an amazing trip to Sri Lanka with Release Potential**

### **Why did you go?**

Because I really feel mission is something God's calling me to. I knew it would be an adventure.

### **What were you expecting?**

I knew from the briefing that we were going to meet lots of children in their homes and help at a Kids Camp run by a Release partner.

### **What impacted you the most?**

We met some absolutely incredible young people, who had dreams to become women and men who would one day make a huge difference. They demonstrated fearlessness, faith, eagerness and the mindset that every opportunity that is thrown your way should be grasped with both hands.

*To be continued...*

## **FOLLOW US**

 Twitter  Facebook

 YouTube

 [releasepotential.org](https://releasepotential.org)



Pastor Harry with his wife Marina and daughter Svetlana.

# A LIFE TRANSFORMED BY THE POWER OF GOD

Your generous support of our recent appeal raised more than £32,000 to help persecuted Iranian Christians — including courageous Pastor Harry who needs our prayers following a serious illness.

Thirty-five years ago God met in a miraculous way with a young Iranian man, Harry, to heal him of his addiction to heroin. This in turn helped him to escape from the streets where he had been sleeping, and to be restored to his family.

As Harry grew in faith, he was encouraged by Release's partner to serve with the publications ministry of a leading church, distributing literature throughout Iran.

Then, some 12 years ago, he was ordained an elder and assumed pastoral responsibilities. Harry and his family faced many skirmishes with

the authorities and he was detained several times.

## Heart attack

The stress he suffered made him ill, including one incident when he had a heart attack and was left for dead. Miraculously, though, God helped him to recover.

Two years ago the situation became unbearable: he was unable to support his family due to his ill health and the church had been pressured by government agents to stop his salary.

So the pastor fled to Turkey to seek asylum, along with his wife, Marina,

and daughter, Svetlana. One of their other two daughters, Anastasia, now living in Germany, was diagnosed with MS, attributed to the shock of her father's heart attack and vindictive treatment by the authorities.

## Powerful ministry

When they settled in Turkey the couple started a powerful ministry witnessing, discipling and pastoring. Pastor Harry remained steady in health — but needed to be careful.

Four months ago our partner proposed that the family moved to a new location to serve a growing church of about 20 people. It felt the young church had the potential for exponential increase.

Just recently, however, Pastor Harry fell seriously ill — and needs your urgent prayers.

After he was admitted to hospital, doctors said that his liver, gall bladder and kidneys were failing, and that there was little they could do.

Our partner arranged for him to be transferred to a private hospital where he is currently being cared for: but he remains very seriously ill.

## URGENT PRAYER

- Thank God for the mighty way that He has used Pastor Harry, Marina and their family in both Iran and Turkey.
- Pray that God will now once more act miraculously to restore Pastor Harry's life: to the glory of Jesus.



Hear more powerful testimonies of Iranian Christians in our 10-minute DVD *Scattered*. Call: 01689 823491 to request your free copy.



# release & your Church

Introducing **Kenneth**,  
Release's Development Manager  
for the South of England

## Share the stories of persecuted Christians in your church

### **What prompted you to become a Development Manager for Release?**

I'd been a supporter of Release for some time and the opportunity came at the right point in my life.

### **What do you enjoy most about your role?**

Preaching! God speaks by His Spirit, through His word. That for me is a basic evangelical conviction. It means that, like anything in Christian discipleship, we need to hear what God says about persecution and about how we should respond to it, if we are to be obedient to Him. I love exploring this with Christian congregations.

### **Please share one encouraging story from any recent visit overseas.**

I met one young man, in his early twenties, who had been beaten up for his gospel witness and had spent three

nights in a police cell. When I asked him what he would want Christians in the UK and Ireland to pray for he replied: 'Pray that I will win many more souls for Jesus.'

### **How can supporters pray for you and your ministry?**

Pray that when I speak on behalf of Release that God will go before me and prepare people's minds, hearts and wills to hear Him and to respond, prayerfully and practically.

### **Local churches said:**

'Kenneth's talks had a strong exposition of the Bible passage, with examples from Release to illustrate his points: an excellent blend of teaching and information.'

'Thank you so much for your clear exposition of the gospel – and challenge of what we are going to do about our persecuted Christian family.'

## Invite a Release speaker to your church

To request a speaker for your church or fellowship group, please contact your nearest Development Manager:

### **Richard**

North of England  
Tel 07969 361557

### **Anthony**

Central England & Wales  
Tel 01234 271855

### **Kenneth**

South of England  
Tel 07540 530153

### **Keith**

Ireland  
Tel 028 9334 0014

### **James**

Scotland  
Tel 07977 936554

## REFLECTION

# 'COME TO ME'

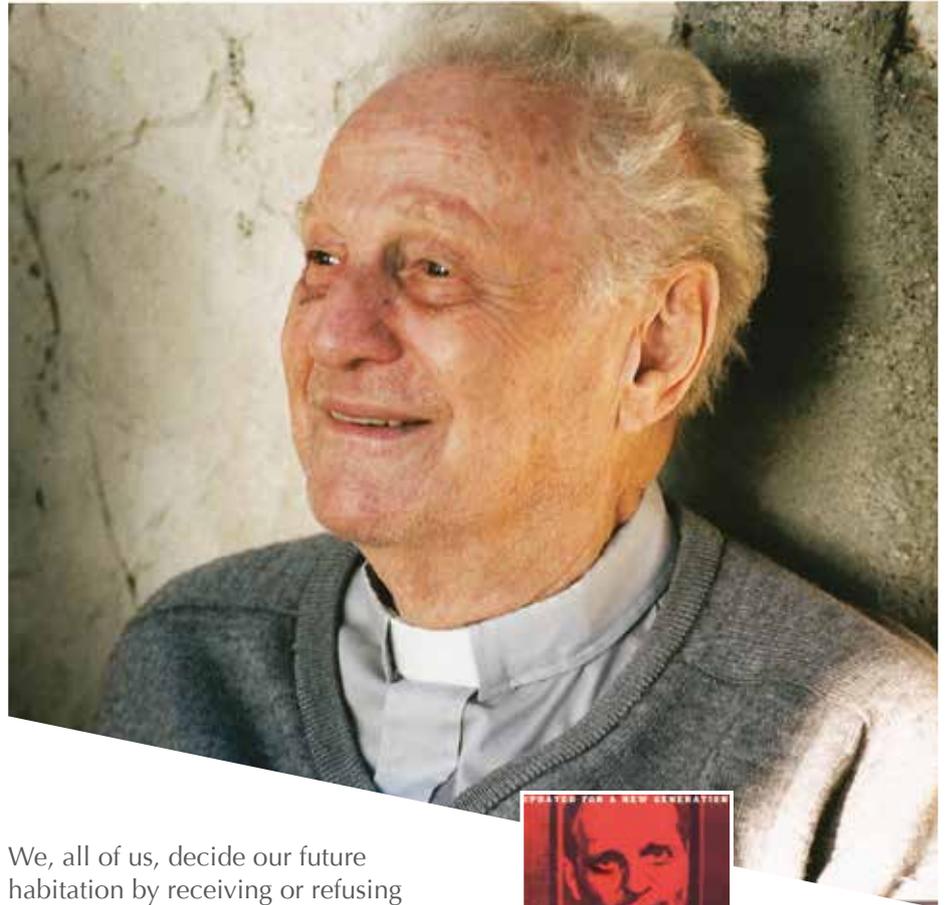
In the Romanian town Lugoj, the director of the prison received an order to arrest the subdirector, a lieutenant. The director called the subdirector and told him, 'Today we will have a new political prisoner. See to it that you prepare a cell for him!'

The lieutenant took a warden with him and chose the worst of cells. Now, all prison cells are bad, but some have a little more light, others less; some are damp, others are dry; in some you can take three steps to and fro, in others only two. He chose the worst of cells, the worst of straw mattresses. Then he came back to the director and told him, 'I have prepared the cell.'

***'We, all of us, decide our future habitation by receiving or refusing Christ'***

The director said, 'I would like to see it myself.' He went to the cell with the lieutenant and asked him, 'Do you not think that you should give the man better housing than that?' The lieutenant replied, 'You are too softhearted, captain! That is the right cell for a bandit.'

The director told him, 'Well, you are the bandit. Please enter!' And the door was locked behind him.



We, all of us, decide our future habitation by receiving or refusing Christ.

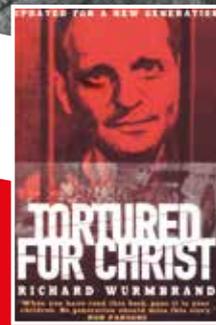
Those who refuse Him will have to suffer in hell. It is a bad place; I know it. In spirit I dwell there often, because hell is not surrounded by indifference but by the love of Christians.

In Luke 16, it is written that some who are in heaven love those in hell so much that they would be ready to pass from heaven to hell only to be able to help. But they cannot. Hell is a terrible thing. How awful to be there for all eternity with the devils!

Jesus says, 'Come to Me.' Accept the call! Do not be one of the ice-cold hearts that very often are as hard and as unfeeling as the stones of the prison floor on which Jesus might have slept, after being arrested in the garden of Gethsemane.

Extract from Richard Wurmbrand's *Victorious Faith*

**Pastor Richard Wurmbrand was imprisoned for 14 years in communist Romania in the 1950s and 1960s. He inspired the founding of Release International in 1968 to serve persecuted Christians and to make the church in the West aware of their suffering.**



Receive a free copy of *Tortured for Christ*

Richard Wurmbrand's best-selling autobiography *Tortured for Christ* describes both his suffering while imprisoned in Romania for his faith – and his overcoming faith in his Saviour.

Said Christian author and speaker Rob Parsons: 'When you have read this book, pass it to your children. No generation should miss this story.'

Get a FREE copy of 'Tortured for Christ' when you decide to give regularly to Release.

Request a standing order form by calling: 01689 823491. Or by using the response card. Thank you.

LOVE  
KILLS  
HATE

# SHARING GOD'S LOVE



**'I WANT TO HELP PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS BECAUSE I WAS ONCE PERSECUTED.**

**I JOYFULLY DO WHAT GOD HAS CALLED ME TO DO, AND TO SEE MANY REFUGEES COME TO CHRIST.**

**BUT, THEY STILL HAVE MANY NEEDS AND I HOPE YOU WILL JOIN ME IN HELPING THEM.'**

Release partner Majed

Release partner Majed cares for hundreds of persecuted Christian families in northern Iraq (see page 10).

He knows first-hand the cost of following Jesus today in a Muslim nation. When he converted from Islam his family rejected him and he lost his job. He was beaten and had to live on the street.

'That's why I have a heart for refugees and Muslim-background believers,' he said.

By sending a gift of £10 or more today you can help enable Majed to provide hundreds of vulnerable displaced families with food, clothing, blankets and heating supplies so they can survive the harsh winter.

**GIVE**  
using the attached card

**CALL:**  
01689 823491 to give  
over the phone

**VISIT**  
[releaseinternational.org/](http://releaseinternational.org/)  
donate

LOVE  
KILLS  
HATE



# SEND A GIFT OF LOVE TODAY!

Touch a persecuted Christian's life

Help **feed** the family of a Christian prisoner of faith whose children would otherwise go hungry. Support a worker who is **putting Bibles** into the hands of new believers. **Rescue** a Christian girl who was sexually abused and **needs a safe place** to live. Give a Christian mother **a chance to break free from poverty**.

Send a cheque | Give at: [lovekillshate.org](http://lovekillshate.org) | Call: 01689 823491



# PRAYERSHIELD

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2016



*Release associate ministries in Malaysia share the Gospel in both urban and rural areas.*

## NOVEMBER 2016

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that your light dispels all darkness and your perfect love drives out all fear. I praise you because your Spirit is everywhere: there is nowhere on this earth that I can flee from your presence.

So thank you, Father, that you are with my Christian brothers and sisters, even in the darkest cell and the most remote village. Your presence is with them always. Father, remind them of your unconditional, unfailing love, light up their darkness and drive out their fear.

Amen.

## MALAYSIA

**TUESDAY 1:** Christians in Malaysia are frequently targeted for arrest, often for no other reason than to intimidate them. Most are released after questioning. Pray they will learn to trust God more every day.

**WEDNESDAY 2:** The Malaysian Government will vote soon on enforcing an Islamic Hudud Law (a strict penal code of *Sharia*) introduced in Kelantan state in 1993. Islamic hardliners are pushing for the law to apply to non-Muslims too. This would make apostasy or leaving Islam a capital crime.

'WHERE CAN I GO FROM YOUR SPIRIT? WHERE CAN I FLEE FROM YOUR PRESENCE?' PSALM 139:7

**THURSDAY 3:** Pray that Malaysian churches will continue to shine the light of the Gospel into local communities and that God will add to their number.

**FRIDAY 4:** Pray for believers in Sabah and Sarawak states in east Malaysia: the majority

of Malay Christians live in this area but their numbers are slowly reducing as persecution increases.

**SATURDAY 5:** Pray for Christians being held in Malaysia's Purification Centres, where those who have left Islam are 're-educated' – sometimes with torture.

**SUNDAY 6:** Pray for 'Robert', a Christian with a Muslim background living in Selangor state. His decision to leave Islam meant he was thrown out of his home and his family have ostracised him.

**MONDAY 7:** 'Anita' is a university student who wants to defend the rights of persecuted Christians in her nation. Pray for wisdom as she considers how to respond to this calling.

**TUESDAY 8:** Pray for 'Paul' and 'Katlin' in Selangor state as they minister to believers with a Muslim background. They risk a great deal to serve this section of the church.

**WEDNESDAY 9:** 'Yolanda' teaches Muslim immigrants in Selangor state about Jesus. Praise God for her miraculous conversion and the passion He has placed in her heart.

**THURSDAY 10:** Pray for 'Susan' in Sabah state as she tries to make a stand for Jesus within her Muslim family. Pray for her spiritual growth, discernment over what she should say and her protection.

## IRAN

**FRIDAY 11:** The number of arrests of house church members in Iran has risen sharply since June. At least 37 Christians were detained in August. Pray that Iranian Christians will stand firm in their faith.

**SATURDAY 12:** Pray for the release of Maryam Naghash Zargaran from Tehran's Evin Prison. She has twice been given medical parole but has been returned to her cell before receiving adequate treatment.

**SUNDAY 13:** Ramiel (pictured), Amin, Hadi, Mohamad and Amir were arrested on a day out in Firuzkuh, east of Tehran. It's feared they may be pressured to give false confessions against Ramiel's father, Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz.

**MONDAY 14:** Pray for elderly pastor Victor Bet Tamraz (previous prayer). He was informally charged with evangelism, illegal church activities and printing and distributing Bibles in 2014, but has yet to be tried.

## UGANDA

**TUESDAY 15:** Pray for the family of Enoch Shaban, who was killed in Mbarara district, western Uganda. Enoch had recently become a Christian after leaving Islam – the apparent motive of his murderers.

**WEDNESDAY 16:** Christians are increasingly under pressure in mainly Muslim areas of eastern Uganda but Enoch's death (above) has raised fears about persecution spreading further afield.



*Ramiel has been arrested in Iran, apparently due to his father's Christian activities. Photo: MEC*



*'Joel' from Sri Lanka has seen his father suffer for his faith but is determined to follow his lead.*

**THURSDAY 17:** Pray for Aisha, 25, who narrowly escaped death after her food was poisoned with insecticide, apparently to punish her and her husband for becoming Christians. Relatives in Iki-iki County had threatened to kill them.

**FRIDAY 18:** Pastor Robert Bakulubanywa refused to stop telling people about Jesus in eastern Uganda – so they killed him. Please pray for his wife and four young children.

**SATURDAY 19:** Fatuma, 21, from a predominantly Muslim village in eastern Uganda, was beaten unconscious by her husband after she attended church. She is now in hiding.

## SRI LANKA

**SUNDAY 20:** On the International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for the persecuted church, let's ask God to make His presence and peace real to our brothers and sisters in Sri Lanka – and around the world.

**MONDAY 21:** Pray for Pastor 'Ron': his faith remains strong despite constant pressure from local Buddhists. Twice, he's been forced to move home and he has been imprisoned and tortured.

**TUESDAY 22:** Pastor Ron's son, 'Joel', is determined to follow his father's lead despite all they have suffered for their faith. Pray that this young man (pictured) will grow into a strong man of God.

**WEDNESDAY 23:** A mob has told a church in Kandegama, Polonnaruwa district, to close and its members to leave the village, accusing them of forced conversion. Thank God that the local police inspector is upholding the church's religious rights.

**THURSDAY 24:** Pray for members of a church in Pallekele in Kandy district. They have been told to stop all worship activities until the church is officially registered.

## SUDAN

**FRIDAY 25:** Pray God's peace and protection over all His people in Sudan as President Omar al-Bashir's Government continues to put pressure on all non-Muslims.

**SATURDAY 26:** Pray for three Sudanese believers and one Czech Christian on trial in Khartoum on charges that carry a possible death sentence. They're accused of supporting rebel movements – simply for helping a student injured in a demonstration in Darfur.

**SUNDAY 27:** Pray for staff and students at a church-run school in Madani: 13 teachers were arrested on suspicion of supporting rebels – and the school property seized.

**MONDAY 28:** Three churches in the Hajj Yousef area of Khartoum have been told their buildings will be bulldozed. The Baptist and Sudan Church of Christ churches have taken legal action to try to prevent this.

**TUESDAY 29:** Fourteen members of the heavily persecuted Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church were given heavy fines after protesting against the seizure of their church's training school.

**WEDNESDAY 30:** Pray that God's light will continue to shine in Sudan, despite officials' attempts to limit religious freedoms severely. Pray for wisdom for pastors – a particular target for persecution.

**WEDNESDAY 14:** As many as 11,500 Pakistani Christians are reportedly seeking asylum in Thailand, many as a result of persecution back home. Their applications are facing long delays.

**THURSDAY 15:** Pray for Christians in Chajwal village, Punjab, after a mob beat them with clubs and bricks and tore women's clothes. A local land dispute had inflamed religious tensions.

**FRIDAY 16:** Pray that all our brothers and sisters across Pakistan will know that they are not forgotten by their wider Christian family.

## LAOS

**SATURDAY 17:** Pray for Lao Christians, who pay a heavy price for following Christ under a Communist regime and in a mainly Buddhist nation. Christians have been killed, driven from their homes, and arrested and harassed by police.

**SUNDAY 18:** Pray for Lao believers who have been rejected by their families

**'I'M NOT AFRAID TO DIE. I'M NOT AFRAID TO GO TO JAIL. I WON'T STOP BELIEVING IN JESUS.'**

PASTOR 'MAC', LAOS

for turning to Christ. Pray that they will enjoy strong fellowship and support from their church family.

**MONDAY 19:** Pray for all Lao pastors who are benefiting from Release-funded training seminars in Thailand. Pray that God will give them wisdom and a deep understanding both of His word and of His great love for them.

**TUESDAY 20:** Lao police allegedly threatened to kill Pastor 'Mac' in a bid to make him renounce his Christian faith. Thank God for the pastor's grace: 'I was praying to God: "Please forgive them and work in their hearts."'

**WEDNESDAY 21:** 'Philip' was hounded out of his community by villagers who seized his land. Police ordered him to stop evangelising, but he refused. Now his children face discrimination at school.

## CHINA

**THURSDAY 22:** New religious restrictions, scheduled to come into force this autumn, aim to suppress all unofficial religious activities and appear to target house churches particularly.

**FRIDAY 23:** Thank God that Pastor Wen Xiaowu (pictured right) from Zhejiang was freed after four months' imprisonment: his arrest came after he contacted US consulate officials and foreign journalists.

*Christians in Laos have to be creative and discreet in baptising new believers.*



## DECEMBER 2016

### PHILIPPINES

**THURSDAY 1:** Pray for God's people in Mindanao, southern Philippines, which has become a flashpoint for Islamist extremist attacks, often targeted at Christians.

**FRIDAY 2:** Pray for Naomi and Joseph (pictured), who were orphaned when their father, Perfecto, was shot dead in Sultan Kudarat, Mindanao, apparently for his faith. Their mother left to work abroad years ago – and never returned.

**SATURDAY 3:** Believers in Perfecto's village (see above) are under pressure to sell church property to Muslims who have built a mosque close by. Some have fled the area because of related attacks on nearby Christian villages.

**SUNDAY 4:** Pray for wisdom for the Filipino Government as it attempts to curb the extremist threat. Pray that it will ensure that religious rights are upheld as it cracks down on extremism.

### PAKISTAN

**MONDAY 5:** Pray that the judiciary and law enforcement officers in Pakistan will uphold the rights of its Christian minority: so often they face discrimination.

**TUESDAY 6:** Gulzar was brutally assaulted by the gang he accuses of abducting, raping and forcibly converting his daughter. Punjab police refused to arrest their attackers.

**WEDNESDAY 7:** Praise God that security forces foiled a suicide bomb plot against a Christian community near Peshawar in north-west Pakistan.

*Naomi and Joseph were orphaned when their father was killed for his faith in the Philippines.*

**THURSDAY 8:** Pray for the family of security guard Samuel Masih, the only person to die when Taliban bombers tried to attack the colony he was guarding (above).

**FRIDAY 9:** Continue to pray for healing for survivors of the suicide bomb attack in a Lahore park on Easter Sunday. Many still require surgery as a result of their wounds.

**SATURDAY 10:** Sadique remains largely confined to his bed after being seriously hurt in the Lahore Easter bomb attack (above); his young son was also badly injured. Sadique has lost his job as a cleaner – and his income.

**SUNDAY 11:** Asia Bibi, the first woman on death row in Pakistan for blasphemy, was due to make her final appeal to the Supreme Court in October. Pray that God will protect her and her family.

**MONDAY 12:** Nabeel Masih, 16, has been accused of blasphemy by 'liking' a satirical post on social media about a sacred building in Mecca. Most Christians in his Punjab village have had to flee.

**TUESDAY 13:** Pray that the Pakistan Government will heed and act upon Release's petition calling on it to abolish the country's notorious blasphemy laws, frequently misused to persecute minorities.





*Pastor Wen Xiaowu, shown here with his mother, was held for four months after contacting foreigners. Photo: China Aid*

## Prayers for Christmas

**CHRISTMAS EVE:** As we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth tomorrow, let's ask Him to fill our Christian family with fresh awe and wonder at His unconditional love. Pray that our persecuted family in China and worldwide will be overwhelmed by His love today.

**CHRISTMAS DAY:** Pray today, as we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, that persecuted Christians worldwide will experience deep peace and joy and become peacemakers.

**MONDAY 26:** Praise God that five Christian detainees from Yazhong Church in Zhejiang were released unexpectedly after four

months in prison, apparently in preparation for the G20 summit meeting in Hangzhou. They were arrested after protesting against a planned church demolition.

**TUESDAY 27:** Officials in Guangdong province harassed a landlord into terminating his contract with Renyi Church. Pray that the Christians will be able to find a new home.

**WEDNESDAY 28:** Ask God to protect Beijing lawyer Zhang Kai. He has publicly renounced statements he was forced to make on TV in which he condoned the Government's recent crackdown on human rights lawyers.

**THURSDAY 29:** Pray for Zhang Xiuhong of Huoshi Church who was falsely charged with 'illegal business

operations'. She has been detained for more than a year awaiting trial.

**FRIDAY 30:** Wang Yao and Yu Lei, members of Huoshi Church, stand accused of 'divulging state secrets', along with their pastor, Yang Hua. Pastor Yang has been suffering ill health in custody.

**NEW YEAR'S EVE:** On the eve of a new year, ask God to make 2017 a year in which His name is glorified across all the earth and especially in the lives of our persecuted family worldwide.

**Lord Jesus,**

**Thank you for coming to live among us and teach us your Father's ways. Lord, as a Christian, I want to live a life that is worthy of your name. I want my life to bring honour to you.**

**Thank you for the amazingly powerful witness of my persecuted Christian family. Help me walk more closely with them in prayer, so I can learn from their overcoming faith and truly know what it is to be your disciple.**

**Amen.**

© Release International 2016

Sources: China Aid; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Malay Mail Online; Middle East Concern; Morning Star News; Release partners; VOM Australia; VOM USA; World Watch Monitor.

Names in inverted commas have been changed to protect identities.

**releaseinternational.org**

Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington BR5 4RT  
Tel: 01689 823491 Email: [info@releaseinternational.org](mailto:info@releaseinternational.org)  
Registered Charity 280577

**release**  
INTERNATIONAL  
voice of persecuted christians