



barnabasprayer

BARNABAS FUND - AID AGENCY FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH
BRINGING HOPE TO SUFFERING CHRISTIANS

To help you
pray for the
persecuted
Church

NOVEMBER/
DECEMBER 2020
barnabasfund.org/nz

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

November

SUNDAY 1 Bring hope, O Lord, to Thy suffering people. In their anguish and pain, be Thou their hope. Bring hope, O Lord, to Thy persecuted people. In their despair, be Thou their hope. Bring hope, O Lord, to Thy needy people. In their hunger and thirst, be Thou their hope. Bring hope, O Lord, to Thy dying people. In the hour of their death, be Thou their hope. In the Name of Jesus our hope, Amen.

MONDAY 2 Pakistani Christian Asif Pervaiz was sentenced on 8 September to a fine, three years jail and then hanging. His “crime” was sending “blasphemous” text messages about Muhammad. The former garment factory worker, who has been in custody since 2013, denied the charge and said that his supervisor at work had been trying to convert him to Islam and, when Asif quit his job, made the accusation of blasphemy against him. Asif’s lawyer, Saif-ul-Mulook, who successfully defended Aasia Bibi in a similar position, said that Asif would

appeal. Pray that the appeal will be heard soon and will be successful.

TUESDAY 3 At the time of writing, there are believed to be approximately 24 Pakistani Christians (including four minors) in prison accused of “blasphemy”; eight of them have been sentenced to death. Pakistan’s “blasphemy law” is framed in such a way that false accusations are easy to make, especially against non-Muslims. Although no one of any religion has yet been executed under the law, anyone accused will be in permanent danger of assassination by zealous Muslims, even if they are found to be not guilty by the courts. Pray for these innocent Christians that they will not give way to despair, but will continue to hope in the Lord and trust Him for their deliverance.

WEDNESDAY 4 In August, a Christian in Pakistan’s Punjab province was arrested for alleged “blasphemy” in a Facebook post. Sohail Masih was later charged under sections 295-A and 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, the latter section carrying a mandatory death sentence. Sohail’s accuser was a local Muslim leader. After Sohail’s arrest and before he was charged, an angry crowd gathered outside the police station where he was held, demanding that a case be registered against him. Pray that the Pakistani authorities will have courage to do what is right and not give in to mob rule when Christians are accused.

THURSDAY 5 Shafqat and Shagufta are still appealing against the death sentences issued to them six years ago in Pakistan for allegedly sending “blasphemous” text messages in English. The Christian couple are illiterate and cannot write Urdu, let

alone English. Their appeal hearing was postponed twice more in September. Pray that this innocent couple, held in separate jails hundreds of kilometres apart, will be freed. Pray also for their children – sons Zain (20), Danish (18), Joshua (16) and daughter Sara (14) – who now live with Shafqat’s sister.



Disabled Shafqat (left) and his wife Shagufta

FRIDAY 6 Authorities in China are closing the net on persecuted Christians by offering cash rewards to anyone who provides information on “illegal religious activity venues”. The Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau of Gushi county, in Henan province, urged citizens in August to submit photos, videos and recordings of unapproved meeting places in exchange for around 500 yuan (\$107). Chinese authorities are also stepping up a policy of withdrawing government welfare benefits from vulnerable Christians who refuse to renounce their faith. In Xinyu city, Jiangxi province, officials took away a disabled Christian’s monthly allowance of 100 yuan (\$21). “Officials told me that we would be treated as anti-party elements if my husband and I continued attending worship services,” said his wife. Pray that Chinese Christians will stand firm in their faith.

SATURDAY 7 A general election will take place tomorrow in Myanmar (Burma). The long-awaited election in 2015 brought Aung San Suu Kyi and her party to power, but was not followed by the establishing of real democracy and full human rights. Buddhism dominates the country, with ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Rohingya Muslims and Christians of many different non-Burman ethnic groups suffering greatly. Ask that the Lord’s hand will be over Myanmar tomorrow and in the coming days, so that righteousness and justice will be established.

SUNDAY 8 Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for Your people in Syria, as their country continues to suffer terribly, cut off by sanctions from all help. Encourage the congregations whose ministers have died from Covid-19. Bring hope to believers in Aleppo, the largest Syrian city, who are reported to be struggling with depression, many of them unable to pay for medical care for the sick or even buy food. Have mercy on this country, where You Yourself walked during Your life on earth, and especially on our brothers and sisters, that they may rejoice in You despite all that they are enduring.

MONDAY 9 A general election is due to be held tomorrow in Jordan. Pray that the newly elected legislators will preserve the measure of religious liberty that already exists in Jordan and will work towards full equality of all citizens. At present the law favours Muslims in many ways. An exception to this is the fact that nine of the 130 seats of the House of Representatives are reserved for the Christian minority, which is equivalent to 7%, a considerably higher percentage than their presence in the population.

Pray that Christians may be salt and light in their society, especially those who have the opportunity of public office.

TUESDAY 10 “Your prayers ... give us a lot of strength so we can absorb the shock and do our best to pass on this spirit to others around us,” wrote a Lebanese Christian leader soon after the massive explosion in Beirut in August. “People here are so sad and angry and it is difficult for them to just add on a big catastrophe of this size on top of all the previous ones accumulating over the years!!! Worst of all were the events in 2019 and 2020 starting with the revolution, the economic crisis and bank collapse, Covid-19 and now the explosion...” Pray that Christians in Lebanon may be a source of peace, joy and hope for those around them.

WEDNESDAY 11 “Ousmane” was born into a fanatical Muslim family in Senegal. His father’s four wives quarrelled constantly and so did all their children. At the age of four, he was sent to Quranic school, hundreds of miles away where the students were beaten, deprived of food, forced to beg and sometimes chained. He did not see his parents for years on end. Ousmane ran away when he was ten, and lived a life of crime on the streets. One day, a man told Ousmane about the love of Jesus and led the unloved boy to the Lord. With Barnabas’ support Ousmane has been discipled in his new faith and trained to mend shoes, so that he can earn his living. Pray that Ousmane’s business will thrive and he will grow in his faith.

THURSDAY 12 At least 18 Christians were murdered when Boko Haram militants, armed with rifles and



“Ousmane” and other former Quranic school students, now Christians, have received vocational training from Barnabas Fund

machetes, attacked a camp for internally displaced people in Nguetchewe village, Far North Cameroon, on the night of Sunday 2 August. Some of the bodies were found dismembered. Pray for the survivors, many of them injured in the attack, that the Lord Jesus will comfort, heal and provide for them. Ask Him to touch the hearts of the men of violence who attacked them, and lead them to a personal encounter with Himself.

FRIDAY 13 “Every day we witness looting, fires, kidnappings, killings and massive displacement of populations,” said a church leader from Cameroon. Then he spoke of the joy that was felt because

of the millet, soap, clothes, blankets and sleeping mats that Barnabas had provided for the homeless survivors of the persecution. "God is good, God is good, God is good forever," sang widowed Madeleine when she received her package of aid. Marie burst into tears when given her allocation and affirmed again and again, "The God of Jesus Christ has visited me." Ask the Lord to intervene to stop the violence against His people in Far North Cameroon.

SATURDAY 14 Pastor Alubara Audu heard voices outside his home at 2 a.m. on Sunday 6 September. Realising it was Fulani militants about to attack, he tried to warn the other residents of his mainly Christian village in Kaduna State, Nigeria. But the gunmen shot Alubara as he ran out shouting to warn the sleeping villagers. He stumbled on a little way and then fell to the ground but continued to yell his warning. Soon the gunmen were on him and shot him multiple times at close range until he was dead. Two other Christian men died in the attack and two Christians were abducted. Pray for the release of those kidnapped and for the Lord's consolation and provision for the widows and children of the martyred men.

SUNDAY 15 O God we pray for the 1,200 Christians of Kukawa town, in Borno State, Nigeria, who were ordered by the Nigerian authorities to return to their homes after two years displaced in a camp. Soon a convoy of 22 trucks carrying Islamist militants thundered into town, and hundreds of the newly returned Christians were taken hostage. O Lord, you understand how our brothers and sisters had hoped to restart their lives and cultivate their farms again, only to

find themselves under attack once more. In your mercy, set free those who have been abducted. Be a rock, a fortress, a shield and a stronghold for Your people in Nigeria.

MONDAY 16 "Poor Christians in Chad are presently worried about food, health, housing, education of children, the survival of their faith," wrote a pastor to Barnabas Fund in August. Chad was then staggering under multiple disasters, including floods in one part, drought in another, Covid-19, and malnutrition amongst children. Christians were particularly affected, and Islamic missionaries, with support from Turkey and other Muslim-majority nations, were taking advantage of the Covid-19 crisis to be more active in seeking to make converts. Christians also faced violent persecution from both Muslims and followers of traditional African religions. Ask the Lord to have mercy on Chad and that His followers there will cling faithfully to Him as they are buffeted by all these trials.

TUESDAY 17 Just a month after President Erdogan of Turkey decreed that Hagia Sophia in Istanbul should become a mosque again, he ordered that the same should be done for a nearby church. Like Hagia Sophia, St Saviour's Church was originally a Christian place of worship in ancient times, had become a mosque and then a museum. President Erdogan seems intent on bringing an end to Turkey's secularism, established almost a century ago by Kemal Atatürk. Even under the auspices of a secular state, Christians in Turkey have suffered much discrimination, harassment and persecution. Humanly speaking it looks as if things will only get worse for them,

as long as President Erdogan continues his policies. Pray that they will not give way to fear but will shine for Christ now and in whatever situation awaits them in the coming days.

WEDNESDAY 18 Moldova is an overwhelmingly Christian country, whose people were well used to persecution when it was part of the Soviet Union. After nearly 30 years of freedom, Christianity is under attack again, this time from Turkey. Turkish flags are appearing and Turkish private schools are opening, whose graduates can attend Turkish universities free of charge, where they are pressured to convert to Islam. Pupils at Turkish high schools report that they are being pressured to attend Muslim meetings and Islamic celebrations. Pray that Christians in Moldova, one of the poorest countries in Europe, will be faithful to the Lord.

THURSDAY 19 Belarus, the last dictatorship in Europe and the last former-Soviet country still to have collective farms, is also noteworthy for the large number of skilled IT workers. This is because its capital Minsk had been designated as a tech hub when Belarus was still part of the Soviet Union. At the time of writing, the country is in turmoil as protesters denounce the re-election of President Lukashenko, who has been president since the office was created in 1994. More than half the population identifies as Christian and the law guarantees freedom of religion. In practice, however, the government enforces a host of restrictive regulations against churches and other religious groups, and encourages intolerance of them. At this time of transition in a country that

has scarcely changed in decades, pray that the Lord will be in control and His Kingdom will be advanced.

FRIDAY 20 Some church leaders in Belarus have been actively involved in peaceful protests. Some have gathered at the main cathedral in Minsk to pray, read the Word of God and call for peace. They also pray for the police and for those who have suffered at the hands of the police. A number of these pastors were themselves arrested by the police. Pray that the Prince of Peace will draw many to Himself as people see the way in which His followers conduct themselves in a time of chaos and violence.

SATURDAY 21 A group of Belarussian evangelical leaders issued a statement in August called “Prayer and Hope” which called on Christians in Belarus to unite in prayer at 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. every day. The statement finished with the words: “Earthly hopes are not always fulfilled (Luke 24:21), but our hope is the Lord Jesus Christ; whoever believes in Him will not be ashamed (1 Peter 2:6). And if now there is no bright light in the clouds, then the wind will blow and clear them (Job 37:21).” Pray for and with our longsuffering brothers and sisters in Belarus that their hope in the Lord will remain strong and for an end to violence and bloodshed in their country.

SUNDAY 22 **O God of peace, we pray that You will guide the negotiations taking place between the Afghan government and the Taliban insurgents, that these talks may result in a lasting and just peace. We know that both sides in the negotiations are strongly committed to a death sentence for those who leave Islam so that Afghans who have believed**

in Your Son Jesus are in great danger in their homeland. Yet we ask that You will work in power, at this time of change and transition, to change this too. In Christ's Name we pray.

MONDAY 23 The Afghan government has announced that Afghan mothers will have their names added alongside the fathers' names on their children's identity cards. This small step towards recognising women's rights in this deeply conservative Islamic country was immediately denounced by some as a Western-backed attack on traditional family values. During the years of Taliban rule over most of Afghanistan (1996-2001), women were not allowed to work and girls were not allowed to be educated. Pray that the government's current peace negotiations with the Taliban will not cause a setback to women's slowly developing rights. Pray also that the rights of non-Muslims will begin to be recognised.

TUESDAY 24 An Indian Christian missionary called Munshi Dev Tado (aged 28) was shot dead on 10 July, by suspected Maoist Naxalite attackers, who had previously threatened him for sharing the Gospel in Maharashtra State. Munshi had formerly been a Naxalite himself, but then gave his life to Christ, and began ministry, opening a church on his own land. Pray for his widow, their children and his church members.

WEDNESDAY 25 Several Christian ministries in India have had their permits to receive funds from overseas removed. This appears to be part of a crackdown by the Indian authorities on Christian and Muslim organisations. For Christian ministries that are very

dependent on funding from outside the country, this will be a major blow. Ask that God will guide the ministry leaders with His wisdom to know how to sustain their work for Him in the coming days, months and years.

THURSDAY 26 "Jai Shri Ram" literally means "Victory to Lord Ram" (a Hindu deity) but has become a war-cry of Hindu extremist groups in India. Seven tribal Christian men from a village in Jharkhand State are reported to have been beaten by a mob of about 25 stick-wielding extremists and forced to chant "Jai Shri Ram". The mob accused the Christians of killing a cow (sacred in Hinduism) and showed what seemed to be a fake video as "evidence". The police took all the Christians to the police station and searched their homes for evidence of cow slaughter. Finding none, they released the Christians and began to arrest the Hindu extremists. Pray for the Christian men who were attacked — Raj, Deepak, Emmanuel, Sugad, Sulin, Soshan and Sem — and thank the Lord that the police are acting to protect the falsely accused Christians.

FRIDAY 27 Sri Lanka's Buddhist nationalist President Gotabaya Rajapaksa won a landslide victory in Sri Lanka's general election in August. If his party can make deals with some of the smaller political parties, they will reach the two-thirds majority needed to make changes to the constitution. This would enable President Rajapaksa to make religious conversion a crime, something his brother had earlier hinted at. Many Christians in Sri Lanka have converted from Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam. Pray that Sri Lankan Christians will be assured that their heavenly Father is in

control and that He will strengthen them to endure this new type of persecution if He allows it to happen.

SATURDAY 28 About 40 Hindu extremists burst into a Christian worship service in Chenkalady town, near Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, at 9.a.m. one Sunday morning. Pastor Arjin, his wife, his father and his mother-in-law were amongst those hurt in the attack. Arjin spent four days in hospital due to injury caused when someone smashed a motorbike helmet against his head. The police ordered the church to report to the police station for an enquiry, but no local lawyers were willing to represent them. Ask our Father that the Holy Spirit, who is our Advocate and the Spirit of truth, will be there to help this vulnerable little group of believers. (John 15:26)

SUNDAY 29 **O Lord, as we wait in a world of turmoil for an end to sickness and anxiety, facemasks and lockdowns, loneliness and job losses, enable us to keep our eyes fixed on You. Help us to be strong and take heart as we wait for You to deliver us. Give us grace to look beyond ourselves and remember others in far more difficult situations, especially our brothers and sisters in contexts of persecution or great poverty, where coronavirus has been yet one more hardship to add to what they already bear so patiently. Bless them and provide for them, we ask, in Jesus' Name. (Psalm 27:14)**

MONDAY 30 The Christian victims of Islamist violence in Burkina Faso tend to be the men of the community. But on 1 August it was mainly children who were killed when a cart they were

travelling in rolled over an improvised explosive device, killing six people. The children were on their way home from grazing their families' livestock. Ask the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort to be with the parents of these youngsters in their loss and their distress. (2 Corinthians 1:3)

December

TUESDAY 1 "Some families have lost loved ones during attacks, some members of these families miraculously escaped traps." In words reminiscent of Hebrews 11, a church leader from Burkina Faso gave this background information about 552 Fulani Christian families, persecuted converts from Islam, displaced and destitute, whom Barnabas Fund has assisted with maize, rice and cooking oil. Pray that they will remain strong in their faith, whether they are wonderfully delivered from persecution or whether they have had to endure terrible suffering for Christ. (Hebrews 11:32-38)

WEDNESDAY 2 "Thank you and all at Barnabas Fund for your earnest prayers during the captivity by jihadis/terrorists of Fulani church planter HT and his miraculous release. Thank you indeed for your prayer support during this ordeal that HT personally endured, which turned to be a test of faith for the Fulani Christian community as many committed to pray and fast regularly until HT's release." This message was written by a Fulani Christian leader in Burkina Faso. The Christians had been able to "smuggle" HT and his family out of the country, and rejoiced to compare this with the apostle Paul's escape from Damascus (Acts 9:25). Praise God for

the way in which the faith of the praying Fulani believers was built up by this experience. “Please pray for God to heal HT and his family from trauma, for God to renew their strength, for God to protect them and provide for their needs,” the leader also wrote, noting that HT’s life was still under threat.

THURSDAY 3 A new “civilian” president, Bah Ndaw (actually a retired colonel), was sworn in on 24 September in Mali, after a military coup five weeks earlier. The impoverished West African country is struggling against Islamist violence; thousands of French and UN troops are trying to control the jihadists roaming around the north of the country. The ousted government was unpopular with Malian people, who considered it corrupt, but the jihadists are fairly popular. People like their sharia courts, which deal out justice that is quick, cheap and understandable. They also like the low crime levels that resulted from sharia punishments like amputation when jihadists controlled Timbuktu (2012-13). But sharia is discriminatory to women and to Christians (2% of the Mali population). Colonel Ndaw is to rule for a transitional period of 18 months. Pray that he will be able to provide reliable basic services that treat all of the population equally.

FRIDAY 4 “I prayed to Jesus to have my own Bible. I always wanted my own, to keep with me. This is the best gift I ever received.” Such was the delighted comment of “Emil”, an eleven-year-old Egyptian Christian boy, when he received a children’s Bible from Barnabas Fund. Pray that the Word of God will strengthen Emil as he grows

up in a poor family in a country where Christians are despised by the majority of society and suffer discrimination at school and in the workplace. (Psalm 119: 9,31,42) Ask God’s blessings on all ministry amongst Christian children in Egypt that they will be strong in the Lord and know themselves loved by Him and precious to Him.

SATURDAY 5 Barnabas sent funds to Egypt to provide food and hygiene items for poor Christian families living in the desert area who lost their livelihoods because of Covid lockdown. Some received small sums of money. Many of the beneficiaries were widows. One of the widows had been diagnosed the day before with anaemia, and told at the clinic that she had to eat well. This seemed an impossibility, as she could not even feed her three children. Then the food aid from Barnabas arrived. Another sick widow had been prescribed antibiotics but had no money to buy them. Three hours after she got home



Egyptian Christians packing aid for needy families

from the doctor, a visitor from the church brought her a little money from Barnabas Fund and she was able to buy the medicine. Thank the Lord for His wonderful timing and also for the generosity of Barnabas supporters, which made it possible to help Christians suffering from the Covid crisis in Egypt and 34 other countries.

SUNDAY 6 Our Father in heaven, we lift to you the Christians of Saudi Arabia, asking that You will strengthen their faith in a country where it is illegal to show any public expression of Christianity. Please help them find ways to gather together safely to pray and worship You, and to build each other up in the faith. Many of them are migrant workers, far from home and family, living out their lives in terrible conditions. Others are secret Saudi converts, in danger of death if they admit to having left Islam. We praise You, Lord, that You know each one and we ask, in Jesus' Name, that You will minister to each according to their needs.

MONDAY 7 A mobile phone app called the Minangkabau Gospel Bible has caused a furore in Indonesia, especially in West Sumatra. The Minangkabau people are indigenous to Sumatra and strongly Islamic, as well as being very attached to their tribal traditions (*adat*), which they say are founded on sharia and the Quran. The governor of West Sumatra wrote to the Minister of Communication and Information Technology and soon the app disappeared from the Play Store. Praise God that His Word is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12) and pray that the Minangkabau people will find ways to read it, despite human attempts to keep it from them.

TUESDAY 8 Churches in China are facing growing persecution in the wake of the Covid lockdown. In Henan province authorities stated they would only allow churches to reopen after lockdown was lifted if they could prove their loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party. In Yucheng, officials ordered preachers to give sermons that extolled President Xi Jinping for leading people “in defeating the epidemic”. A pastor lamented, “I had to preach as the state required, otherwise the church would not have reopened.” Pray that Chinese church leaders will be given wisdom from above to know how to respond to these predicaments.

WEDNESDAY 9 North Korea has been struggling with torrential rains, floods and repeated typhoons in one of the wettest rainy seasons on record. The governing party ordered that local officials be punished for the number of casualties that occurred. Pray for the suffering people of North Korea, and especially for our Christian brothers and sisters, who are greatly persecuted yet remain faithful. Pray that these hardships will serve to advance the Gospel in this spiritually dry country, that water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert as more and more North Koreans turn to the Lord. (Isaiah 35:6)

THURSDAY 10 Sudan is to become a secular state and Islam will cease to be the state religion. Furthermore, “Freedom of belief and worship and religious practice shall be guaranteed in full to all Sudanese citizens. The state shall not establish an official religion. No citizen shall be discriminated against based on

their religion,” read a declaration that accompanied the signing of an agreement between the Sudanese Prime Minister and the leader of the rebel group, the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement – North on 3 September. This is wonderful news for the small Christian minority who have suffered terrible persecution for decades. A few days earlier, the Sudanese government had signed a peace accord with an alliance of other rebel groups, ending decades of conflict in Darfur and the border states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan, which had left hundreds of thousands dead and millions more displaced. Thank the Lord for these dramatic developments and pray that justice and equality, so long absent from Sudan, will be maintained.

FRIDAY 11 Praise God that the Eritrean government has been releasing Christian prisoners, apparently as part of their Covid-19 control measures. By 22 September, 69 had been released, most of whom had been held for over ten years without trial. The releases are made on condition that bail securities are lodged, usually in the form of property deeds, with guarantors held liable for the detainees’ future actions. “This is an answer to prayer. Thousands of Christians have been praying for this,” said an Eritrean Christian leader to Barnabas Fund.

SATURDAY 12 Please pray for the 69 recently freed Eritrean Christians (see above) as they adapt back to life with family or friends. Pray that they may be healed of the trauma of what they have endured in the harsh prison regimes. Pray especially for those who

have been jailed so long that they no longer have any home to return to. Pray also for the release of the remaining Eritrean Christians in detention. They are thought to number about 300 and include children as well as adults. None of the known imprisoned pastors or senior Christian leaders had been released at the time of writing.

SUNDAY 13 Heavenly Father, we lift to you the Christians of Somalia, rejoicing that You know each one by Name. You know the dangers they face, the abuse, rejection and contempt. Thank you for their courage in making a decision to follow Christ, in the full knowledge that this might lead to martyrdom. Although we may never meet our Somali brothers and sisters in this life, help us to learn from their example of faithful endurance. We pray especially for Somali Christian women, who are the most vulnerable of all, struggling to teach their children to trust and love your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose Name we pray.

MONDAY 14 “Please pray for me that I may meet persecution strongly,” wrote Amankan (aged 63), who became a Christian in Kyrgyzstan after her husband died. One of her brothers and the local imam raised a mob of around 200 people to confront Amankan and threaten her when she was trying to bury a beloved Christian friend in the village cemetery. The burial eventually took place elsewhere, but Amankan’s relatives have continued to hound her. Her oldest brother is a famous national poet and does not want his name tarnished by his sister’s Christian faith. Pray that Amankan will be given grace to stand firm.



A baptism in Kyrgyzstan

TUESDAY 15 The Church is growing in Issyk-kul, a strongly Islamic region of Kyrgyzstan – praise God. There are dozens of village fellowships with 5 to 15 adult converts from Islam in each one. The greatest persecution occurs when the first few Muslims come to Christ in a particular village. “Usually the whole village rises up against them,” wrote a church leader to Barnabas Fund. “They watch who goes to them and with whom they communicate.” Pastoral visits therefore have to take place secretly at night, or else in the nearest city. This means it is difficult for the new believers to get the care and teaching they need. Thank the Lord for recent training for leaders of these small rural church groups, which Barnabas funded, and pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to teach and guide all who participated.

WEDNESDAY 16 “All people in our village know that I am Christian and persecute me together,” said Zaraykan (aged 62) who leads a small home church in Kyrgyzstan. A Muslim neighbour who attended the group also decided to follow Christ, but her father-in-law then came round to Zaraykan’s home and

threatened her, saying she must stop her Christian activity. Zaraykan did not reply and the angry man stabbed her in the abdomen, piercing her liver. Zaraykan was taken to hospital, expecting to die because she had lost so much blood. “But God said to me that I will not die.” She recovered, and shared the Gospel while in hospital – everyone on her ward came to Christ. Pray that the Lord will continue to use Zaraykan for His purposes and glory.

THURSDAY 17 When the text of Uzbekistan’s draft new Religion Law was published on 19 August, Christians were disappointed that religious activities without state permission would still be illegal as would uncensored religious literature and sharing one’s faith. A positive change in the draft was that the number of members required for a church to seek registration would be reduced from 100 to 50. Another proposed change was that church leaders would be required to have theological qualifications, but the details of what qualifications would be acceptable was unclear. Christian leaders in Uzbekistan have called for

amendments to the draft law, but at the time of writing have not received a response from the government. Pray to the God of justice (Psalm 50:6 NIV) that He will establish righteous rule in Uzbekistan, which has begun to move in the direction of greater religious liberty in the last few years.

FRIDAY 18 Fifteen years ago the Uzbek authorities cancelled the registration of a church in the city of Nukus, evidently hoping that if there was no registration (meaning that the church was illegal) it would cease to exist. But the unregistered church, which is mostly converts from Islam, continued to function “underground”, despite hundreds of arrests and torture, bullying and fines; it even grew in numbers. Finally, on 13 August 2020, the authorities granted the church registration again. Praise God for the faithful endurance of His people and for the registration, which so many had been praying for.

SATURDAY 19 It was predicted in September that two-thirds of the population of Zimbabwe would need food aid by Christmas. After years of man-made food insecurity, a severe drought in 2019 and Covid-19 in 2020, with a long and brutally enforced lockdown, were already bringing the population to the brink of starvation. Pray that the nourishing ePap porridge, rich in micronutrients, which Barnabas Fund is providing for very vulnerable children and others will bring health and hope. Before lockdown, about 60% of Zimbabweans attended church regularly. Pray that their faith and joy in the Lord will not waver (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

SUNDAY 20 We pray today, dear Lord, for your persecuted people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, remembering especially the bereaved loved ones of 58 people killed by attacks on two mainly-Christian villages in September. We also lift to you the 17 Christians who disappeared in those attacks, probably kidnapped by the militants, and we ask that they will be released safe and well. O Lord, you know that this anti-Christian violence has continued for two long and weary decades and the more the army tries to stop the militants, the more violent they become. We remember that Your Word tells us that You make wars cease to the ends of the earth. We ask in the Name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace that You will bring an end to this violence. (Psalm 46:9)

MONDAY 21 A new amendment to the law on freedom of conscience and religious association has been drafted in Russia. If passed it would become illegal for pastors trained outside of the Russian Federation to preach in a church or even conduct home Bible study groups. Although apparently intended to combat violent extremism, the proposed new law would be a serious blow to all religious organisations. The bill would require those trained abroad to re-train in Russia, but at the same time the Russian government is making it increasingly difficult for Christian theological institutions to operate, as seen in a campaign over the past two years to revoke the licences of Christian educational institutions. Pray that the Russian government will find a way to prevent religious violence without restricting peaceful religious activities including Christian ministry.

TUESDAY 22 When 27 church leaders from Turkmenistan, all of them converts from Islam, met together for four days of leadership training in a nearby country it was the first time they had ever gathered in such numbers. Five others should have been there too, but could not get visas or had problems at the border. The participants were very appreciative of the training, which was funded by Barnabas, for such courses would be almost impossible to run in their highly restrictive homeland. “Thank you for this seminar,” said Pastor Pulat, “We didn’t expect that there are people who are interested in our lives. I was encouraged very much by this care.” Pray that these isolated and hard-pressed servants of the Lord will continue to be encouraged and equipped by what they learned in those four short days.

WEDNESDAY 23 Two pastors in Kazakhstan have appealed directly to the country’s president, asking him to stop local authorities seizing the land on which their church buildings stand. Pastor Igor wrote that his congregation had saved for 18 years to raise the money for their own building and were given permission to start construction in January 2020. Then suddenly the city authorities said the land was needed for a new kindergarten. The other congregation, led by Pastor Dmitry, have owned their property since 2001. Ask that God will touch the heart of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and move him to intervene to help the churches. The plot of land is in the Kazakh capital, now called Nur-Sultan after the previous president.

THURSDAY 24 Pray today for secret believers in Jesus, who will not be able to celebrate the wonder of His incarnation

except in their own hearts. Ask that they will not feel alone but will be conscious of the great company of the heavenly host giving glory to God for the birth of His Son (Luke 2:13-14). As they rejoice in their Saviour and the spiritual salvation that He brings, pray that they may also know salvation from their enemies and from the hand of all who hate them (Luke 1:71).

FRIDAY 25 As we rejoice in the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, pray for millions of His followers who live today and every day with discrimination, injustice, oppression and the possibility of violence. Pray that as they celebrate the coming of the Prince of Peace they may experience His peace in their lives. Ask for His special comfort for those who are celebrating Christmas for the first time since loved ones have been martyred. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

SATURDAY 26 Pray for pastors and church leaders in Iran that the Lord will guide each one with wisdom as they face pressure and persecution from the authorities. Pastor Victor Bet-Tamraz and his wife Shamiram, both in their sixties, fled the country after losing their final appeal against prison sentences of ten and five years respectively. Joseph Shahbazian (56) was released after less than two months in prison, when his family managed to raise about \$146,000 for his bail. Pray for Iranian Christians behind bars at this time, that the God of hope fill them with all joy and peace as they trust in Him, so that they may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

SUNDAY 27 Lord Jesus we ask for Your hand of protection to be over Christian women and girls in places where they

are doubly discriminated, first for being female and second for following You. We pray especially for 18-year-old Anika in Pakistan, who took a job as a live-in domestic servant. Within days her employers began asking her to forsake Christianity. She kept refusing and so her employers beat her severely and accused her of stealing money. We also lift to you the family of Indian Christian convert Suman, who was killed defending her young daughter from abuse by extremists. Please comfort and restore all Christian women and girls in similar situations, whom we do not know but You do.

MONDAY 28 Maria Shahbaz was only 13 when she was abducted at gunpoint on 28 April near Faisalabad, Pakistan. She was then forced to convert to Islam and marry a Muslim. Her parents showed her birth certificate in court to prove she had been too young to marry, but her abductor submitted a fake marriage certificate giving her age as 19. Eventually the court ruled in favour of her abductor and told Maria to be a “good wife” to him. Incidents like this happen to hundreds of Christian and Hindu girls and young women in Pakistan every year. But Maria’s story has an unusual ending – two weeks after the court ruling she managed to escape and re-join her own family. She and her whole extended family are now threatened by her “husband”. Pray that the angel of the Lord will encamp around them to protect and deliver them. (Psalm 34:7)

TUESDAY 29 On 10 September, the High Court in Lahore, Pakistan, called for medical reports on seriously ill Pakistani Christian Zafar Bhatti after his lawyers asked for bail on health grounds and

an early hearing for his appeal against his conviction for “blasphemy”. Zafar, a diabetic in his 50s, had suffered a heart attack in prison on 3 September. He has been in jail since 2012 and was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2017 for sending text messages insulting Muhammad – on a phone that was not even registered in Zafar’s name. Pray that Zafar may be set free and that he may be kept safe from zealous Muslims who would believe that killing him would be a righteous act, pleasing to Allah.

WEDNESDAY 30 Shafique, a Christian brick-kiln worker in Pakistan had hepatitis and TB, so his wife borrowed money from the brick-kiln owner to pay for his medical treatment. But the couple could not pay back the loan and became “bonded” to the kiln. Abbas inherited a similar debt from his parents and became bonded when they died. He could barely afford to feed his family, so there was no hope of paying off the debt. Both these families and many hundreds of other families have been set free by the generous gifts of Barnabas supporters who paid their debts, thus releasing them from bondage (almost like slavery) and from the terrible worry that never left them. Pray that they will all grow in faith as they rejoice in God’s provision.

THURSDAY 31 Many people in the non-Western world believe that the Western New Year is a Christian festival. Therefore it is often a time of increased violence against Christian minorities. Join our vulnerable brothers and sisters in their struggle by praying for them, that they may be rescued from the unbelievers, just as the apostle Paul urged the early Christians in Rome to pray for him. (Romans 15:30-31)

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