

A Christian initiative in Indonesia

Nine years ago a group of enthusiastic Christians in the Sundanese region of West Java rented a house to reach out to children from the rubbish dumps. As the numbers grew and children's lives changed, Muslim families who were at first hesitant began to attend Christian functions. As the gospel spread, people were converted, baptised and taught the Word of God.

The success of this work resulted in the acquisition of more safe places to carry out the work, and an increase in the number of children and families reached with the Christian message. More than a thousand local people were now involved. Although some radical Muslims tried to stop the building of a new kindergarten, the Muslim parents and a prominent Muslim leader supported the Christians' initiative, and now the school functions with official recognition and protection.

Voice of the Martyrs

Ugandan contrasts

In spite of the increasing activity of Muslim pressure groups in the nominally Christian country of Uganda, thirty former sheiks and imams have recently become Christians and are currently living in 'safe houses.' Muslim militants are trying to locate and eliminate them, so far without success. Several Christian ministries in Uganda run special programs to equip local believers for Muslim evangelism.

Christians in Tunisia

The small but growing Christian community in Tunisia faces many pressures, despite the fact that the law says people are free to choose and practise their own religion. Most national Christians are converts from Islam, which means they are often rejected by family and friends and suffer physical, verbal and mental abuse. They are also vulnerable to dismissal from their jobs. Pray that their mental and emotional wounds will be healed.

Barnabas Fund

'Big Brother' in China

The Chinese government continues to use Zhejiang Province, China's Christian heartland, as a test site for its repressive religious policies. In March, authorities in Wenzhou City, long known as 'China's Jerusalem' because of its thriving Christianity, ordered all churches to be fitted with surveillance cameras, inside and out. Church property has been damaged and church members arrested as cameras have been installed by force. Unable to resist the installations, some churches are trying to defeat the purpose of the cameras by disconnecting them or redirecting them away from the congregation.

The government claims the cameras are for security, but most people are not convinced. China's 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) includes a 'social credit system' based largely on data collected from a myriad of surveillance cameras armed with sophisticated facial recognition software. This enables the government to reward its 'friends' and punish its 'enemies', which means that Christians are highly vulnerable.

These 'security' measures strengthen the government's increasing opposition to Christianity and confirm the view that President Xi Jinping is the most powerful and untouchable leader in the world today.

Religious Liberty

Bringing hope to Ukraine

A new radio station has opened in Ukraine in a region that has largely been destroyed by war. The Ukrainian government approached FEBC saying it had a new transmitter and wanted to broadcast something that was positive and uplifting. The approach came through the recommendation of a local high-ranking military officer. As a result, the Good News is now being broadcast to people who badly need to hear a message that brings true hope.

FEBC

From a correspondent in Malawi:

"A local Christian adult literacy teacher did not know anything about the Bible stories and their meanings. But after a short training on how to use the Bridgeway books he started by teaching the stories from the beginning. This attracted many people in his church and even his overseer was so very much impressed that he now has appointed him a church elder."

Bridgeway

Syria's trauma

Before the current war began, about 10% of Syria's people were nominally Christian and enjoyed equality and respect. However, the rise of Islamist militant groups, and especially the emergence of Islamic State (ISIS), led to violent anti-Christian persecution. Half the population is displaced and nearly five million people have fled the country, including at least half a million Christians.

Yet most Western governments continue to discriminate against Syrian Christian refugees. This is despite a European Parliament resolution in 2016 that recognised the systematic killing of Christians and other minorities by Islamic State as genocide.

Persecuted Christians

South Africa and child literacy

Children from affluent homes in South Africa receive an average of 400 hours of literacy stimulation before they start school; children from poorer areas often receive none. With about half of South Africa's population classified as poor, too many children are falling behind before they even start school. It is estimated that 80% of disadvantaged learners will not reach the highest level of school.

For the country's future, it is crucial to narrow the gap in educational attainment. This year, the Bible Society and its partners plan to supply 360,000 Bible-based literacy booklets to pre-school children who attend day care centres and crèches, and up to Grade 2 of primary schools located in poorer areas. The long-term goal is to have the booklets published and available in all of the eleven main languages spoken in South Africa.

Sower

A glimpse of Guatemala

The apparent size of the church in Guatemala is not reflected in the moral state of society. Guatemala has the highest murder rate in Latin America, drug trafficking and organized crime are widespread, and death squads carry out what they call 'social cleansing.' Private armed guards outnumber police two to one.

Most children between ages 6 and 18 live in extreme poverty, large numbers of them being orphans or from broken homes. The 15,000 street children live in danger of being murdered by the death squads, who consider them nuisances. A number of local and international ministries are seeking solutions to these problems.

In the midst of this social chaos, churches run large evangelistic campaigns and operate two Christian television channels and more than 50 local Christian radio stations. There are numerous Christian magazines and newspapers, and personal witness by many Christians is fervent. There are about 150 Christian schools and other learning institutes.

Operation World

Philippines' Muslims

In the Philippine island of Mindanao, Muslim militants have long been fighting for independence. An ISIS-inspired group known as 'Maute' has attacked a Catholic Cathedral and a Protestant College, and torched numerous other properties. A truck transporting nine Christian labourers was ambushed and its occupants executed. The militants are using Christian captives as human shields while engaging in fierce battles with the Philippine military. The Philippine president has declared martial law across Mindanao, while the church pleads for the release of the Christian hostages.

Religious Liberty

Bible translations

It is difficult to assess the number of languages in the world, partly because of the blurred lines between languages and dialects and partly because some may be spoken by only a few hundred people. The number is probably between six and seven thousand, and about half of these (the less-spoken languages) still have no part of the Scriptures.

Of the languages that account for the majority of the world's population, 648 have the entire Bible, a further 1,432 have the New Testament and an additional 1,145 have Scripture portions and selections. Work on Bible translation around the world is progressing faster than ever.

Eternity

Appreciation from Côte d'Ivoire

"I and my brothers and sisters in Christ who have been receiving your study materials testify that it is helping us in all aspects of our Christian life, so I wish you to continue until God calls us into eternity. In fact, for someone to help his brother to acquire knowledge in Christ is a great thing which silver and gold cannot buy."

Bridgeway