

Christians in Pakistan

Pakistan's recent presidential elections have produced a populist and pragmatic leader whose direction is still unclear. But he has already declared that he will not change the blasphemy laws – often used maliciously against Christians. No party has promised sympathy for Christians in matters where they face discrimination, such as human rights, government administration, and the biased teaching in schools and universities that inculcates religious intolerance. Christians have no voice to represent them in government and are mostly viewed as an irrelevant irritant. *New Life*

Religion in New Zealand

Latest research has named New Zealand as the Commonwealth member country where people enjoy the most religious freedom. Published by the Council for Christians and Jews, the survey puts the island nation at the top of a list of 53 states, narrowly beating Lesotho and Botswana. The study analysed factors such as freedom to preach and convert publicly, and the risk of religious hostility from terrorism or armed conflict. The Commonwealth countries where religious freedoms were seen to be most under threat were Malaysia, India and Nigeria. *Premier News Service*

Widows

There are an estimated 258 million widows in the world, about half of them living in deep poverty. Most are in countries where there are few welfare services, if any, for the poor. For many their basic needs are food, clothing, bedding, weather-proof shelter, health services and income-producing activity through sewing, raising animals and other micro-enterprises. All over the world, Christians and their churches or aid agencies are reaching out to help such people.

A Filipino Bible college: it's different

"We have almost like a farm on this Bible college campus. The fish ponds will soon give our own fish supply, we grow food and have so much natural fresh water supply. The reason we have the students work on the farm is because we want to produce Christian workers not known just as Bible scholars mighty in the Word but also as ones who labour without being afraid or embarrassed by dirty hands.

"Just as their minds are moulded in the wisdom of the Word, their hearts and their strengths are exercised in true service and servanthood. We are preparing them so they don't become a burden to the people they will serve but become an example of hard work for the glory of God.

"These ideals are reflected in the way we give the final grade to our graduating students: 25% academic/theological proficiency; 25% disciple-servant character; 20% assignments/requirements; 20% Christian ministry involvement; 10% personal doctrinal testimony. Wives are required to attend all classes, even if domestic duties mean they don't sit exams. We want them to share the burden of working with their husbands in their work scholarship."

Sola Gratia

Venezuela's decline

With regard to the public services it once enjoyed, Venezuela seems to be in freefall. Electricity, water supply, health services and transport have all been reduced to the stage of being minimal or even non-existent. The nation's currency is almost worthless, as prices skyrocket and the necessities of life slip beyond-the reach of most people. With Venezuelans leaving the country in droves and many Christians unable to get to their churches, radio broadcasts are proving to be a spiritual lifeline that brings encouragement and hope. *TWR*

Islamist activity in Africa

A militant Islamist group from Uganda has increased its activity in northern **Congo**, killing about two thousand Christians and capturing much territory in a brazen attempt to establish a caliphate.

Christians continue to be killed and churches destroyed in the middle and northern states of **Nigeria**. A leading bishop publicly ridiculed the official explanation that the killers were herdsmen looking for land to graze their livestock. 'Do cattle-rearers look for grass with AK47s? Does a church look like grazing land?'

The security of **Central African Republic** is still fragile, with attacks from militant Islamists being met by attacks from a nominal Christian militia that is disowned by Christians in general. Yet Christian outreach and growth continue, both within CAR and across its borders.

In spite of welcome relief resulting from presidential initiatives in **Egypt** (over 200 churches previously branded as illegal have now been officially registered), Christians and churches are still targeted by anti-government militants. This is particularly so in regions distant from Cairo.

Barnabas Fund

Indian missionaries to India's unreached

An Indian mission recently commissioned 294 new missionaries from 61 language groups (picture below) to take the gospel to the unreached people groups of India and other regions of southern Asia. The mission, which has been serving God for more than fifty years, while acknowledging the benefits of radio, television and internet, believes that the most effective way to evangelise and establish churches is still through personal face-to-face interaction. Last year the mission reached more than half a million people in this way. In spite of India's increasingly hostile anti-Christian environment, people continue to come to Christ and new churches continue to be planted in all regions of the country.

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Syria, then and now

Before the war, about 10% of Syria's population were known as Christians. They were treated with respect and equality until the rise of Islamist groups, including Islamic State, fuelled violent anti-Christian persecution. While Western media largely focused on the Syrian army's war against the rebels, Christians were the targets of kidnappings and murders at the hands of Islamist rebel groups.

There are about half a million Christians among the five million refugees who have fled Syria since the violence began in 2011. Many of them have faced discrimination and even violence in the countries where they have fled, often being attacked in Muslim-dominated refugee shelters and denied the opportunity to claim asylum. Some 'Christian' nations of the West have been less favourable to Christian refugees than to Muslim.

Persecuted Church

Christianity in Ukraine

Earlier this year, when the President of Ukraine ordered a national event to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, over 200,000 Christians from all over the country gathered in Kiev to celebrate. In the place where Soviet rulers once forced people to acknowledge atheistic communism as their national creed, people now proclaimed Christ and the gospel. Ukrainian missionaries are spreading the gospel not only within their own country but as far afield as Mongolia. Summer camps are an effective way of reaching young people.

Mission Network News

Bridgeway: teaching the teachers

Feedback from Kenya . . .

"We need more books in our church library to update us when we teach or preach. We have so few books that we keep reading and rereading the same books for lack of change. Other sources are short of support and supply or we have no money to buy them. Adults and youths all need continual teachings through the Word of God, but we who teach must first be readers."

. . . and from Ghana

"Our ministry has moved to the higher level through the books you send us. If we only had five people from the West like you, our ministry would then move to the highest level. Nobody else does for us what you are doing."

Indonesia's Christians

Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population and, until a generation ago, Muslims and Christians lived together peaceably as equals. But in many parts of this vast archipelago nation, this is no longer true. Christians (who account for 15% of the population) face discrimination, harassment and violence. More than a thousand church buildings have been closed or demolished because of a law that requires places of worship to be supported by signatures from 60 local non-Christian households in order to be approved.

Persecuted Church