

## Reaching out in North India

An Indian ministry based in Delhi is committed to evangelising and building up churches in the dominant Hindu region across North India. In regional Bible conferences last year, 272 pastors received training aimed at improving the standard of Bible teaching in churches. Hundreds more potential preachers were impacted through residential and part-time Bible study courses. Thousands of people across 177 centres were taught basic discipleship.

The ministry is also concerned with the practical application of Christianity in society. This was demonstrated in the hundreds who were taught literacy, computer and other vocational skills. Many more were given hands-on experience in helping the poor, the sick, the homeless and other disadvantaged people. DBI

## New Zealand alarm

The number of New Zealanders who describe themselves as having 'no faith' (48.59%) is now greater than the number who identify as Christians (37.31%). When this data from the 2018 census was released in September 2019, a secular advocacy group named Humanist New Zealand called for changes to what it saw as Christianity's 'privileged position in public policy,' e.g. Christian prayers in parliament; facilitation of meetings of Christian groups in schools; government money for Christian chaplains in hospitals; tax exemptions for certain Christian groups. This trend in New Zealand is similar to that in many Western countries once known as 'Christian.'

*Barnabas Fund*

## Swaziland (now Eswatini)

In the small southern African nation of Swaziland (recently renamed Eswatini by its king), Scripture Union maintains a vigorous ministry in schools. In the last quarter of last year, over 10,000 students were reached with the gospel and Christian teaching. Published notes for Daily Bible Reading were distributed widely through schools, with the support of local churches and the backing of the government. Christian camps add to the effectiveness of the work. SU

## Kenyan care

A pastor in Kenya writes: "Here in our church we have started a home for the elderly men and women who have no one at all to help them. They are in a dire problem, suffering hunger, sickness and lack of medicines. We have total of 39 old people with us. Some cannot even wash themselves, so my wife helps them. We have very little food to give them to survive and it is only boiled maize and some have no teeth to chew but we have nothing else to give them."

[Then, a few months later] "We have some abused girls who have run away from home because of sexual abuse and they have come for rescue in our church, but we don't have even a room to keep them. I cannot send them away, even though we don't have enough blankets or food for all of us. They sleep on the floor but at least they are safe." Bridgeway



## Kyrgyzstan's shaky pragmatism

In general Kyrgyzstan is more tolerant of Christians than are the other Central Asian republics, but persecution of non-Muslim minorities is on the rise. The authorities want to curb, and conceal, the rise of radical Islam, partly because it deters tourists, a valued source of income. But incidents of violence against Christians are increasing and the authorities need to address this if they are to ensure peace and freedom for all. BF

## UK's special envoy

The British government has appointed Rehman Chishti to be its Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. He said, "As someone whose family came to the UK when I was six years old, and my father had taken up a role as an Imam, my family and I have always been able to openly and freely practise our faith. I want to ensure every citizen around the world is able to enjoy this basic right." Having helped Pakistani Christian Aasia Bibi to find freedom, he will need further fortitude and wisdom in promoting the right of individuals to choose or change their faith. BF

## Thailand's citizens and migrants

Citizens of Thailand who are Christians account for less than 1% of a population that is more than 90% Buddhist. They may be looked upon as social or religious misfits and suffer some discrimination and marginalisation, but there is no government-sanctioned persecution. Christians live freely in society along with other citizens.

There are also many Christians among the hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants who have fled to Thailand for safety. But if illegal immigrants get caught, they finish up in detention centres where conditions are harsh and they are treated as criminals. Thailand has become the chosen destination for Christians fleeing persecution in places such as Myanmar, Laos, Pakistan and Nepal. Christian ministries in Thailand are seeing much fruit among these refugees, both those in detention centres and those still at large in society.

### A plea from Syria

*A Middle Eastern church leader writes: "Let us continue our prayers for Syria, people and country, to have a peaceful end to this ongoing man-made catastrophe where hundreds of thousands of lives are lost, millions displaced, and more are suffering. Pray that God may enlighten the minds of the international community decision-makers to understand that human life is worth more than any economic profit and political influence." Only a decade ago, Christians lived peacefully alongside Muslims in Syria and were respected as equals.*

*Barnabas Fund*

## Brought to Christ through study books

*Uganda: "One person who finished Makerere University has been reading your book Making Sense and she told me she has been just religious person but after reading that book she has now become a true born again believer."* *Bridgeway*

## Energy in Argentina

Argentina continues to have one of the highest rates of church growth in South America. In addition to conducting vigorous outreach evangelism, churches interact with society in general though running schools and providing health services for vulnerable people such as neglected children, the elderly, prisoners and drug addicts. Literature, camps, radio, TV and the Internet are all used to reach the lost, build up believers and plant new churches. *OM/BCM*

## Unexpected outcomes

*When Amid, who grew up in a North African country, chose to become a believer in Jesus, he had little idea how God would use his life to serve his country. God gave Amid a strong desire to reach out to his Muslim neighbours through serving in Christian book ministry. When the government started arresting Christians, Amid fled as a refugee to a neighbouring country.*

*The desire Amid had to reach his own country was redirected to share the love of Jesus with refugees in another country, where many of the refugees were Muslims. Through visiting homes and caring for people, Amid and the other believers saw many Muslims come to Christ and form small house churches. They then set up a training school where Christian nationals from other countries train for six months and then return home to plant churches. So far he and his co-workers have trained 50 believers who are now serving God back in their home countries.*

*Operation Mobilisation*

## Spiritual battle in Ethiopia

Ethiopia's rapidly expanding Protestant church has grown from 5% to 20% in the past 40 years, and many of these Christians, like the recently elected Prime Minister, are converts from Islam. But communal ethno-religious violence skyrocketed after the PM introduced internationally acclaimed reforms aimed at ending decades of repression.

Although the Prime Minister is working hard to promote peace, facilitate reconciliation, improve living standards and draw people together, there are many who oppose him, mainly because of their loss of privilege through his reforms. These vengeful and ambitious ethno-religious nationalists are dragging the nation into conflict and towards disintegration. Churches in particular are being attacked.

At the same time, Islamic State in neighbouring Somalia is active in recruiting Ethiopian Muslims and so gain a foothold in Ethiopia. A spiritual battle is being fought for Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous nation.

*Religious Liberty*

## Ghana – brightening the mind

*A pastor writes: "In our area there is a theological college where some of us pastors attend courses to keep us improving our gifts and abilities to do the work. We thank you very much for the Bridgeway books you send us, also the good used books that people give you. We need more like this for brightening our minds. Especially we need more Dictionaries and Commentaries, for these are what pastors and evangelists always ask for."*

*Bridgeway*