

## What will happen in Afghanistan?

Twenty years of Western armed forces in Afghanistan achieved little enduring freedom, but they did open a window of opportunity that enabled some amazing Afghans to achieve remarkable things. Despite repression and persecution – from the government, the Taliban and Muslim society – a 2013 estimate put the number of Christians in Afghanistan at between two and three thousand, up from a couple of hundred a decade earlier.

As Western troops withdraw, that window will close. Afghans face the prospect of civil war – the Afghan government versus regional warlords versus the Taliban versus Islamic State. Outsiders, including Pakistan, Russia, Turkey and China, will almost certainly exploit opportunities and either defend or advance their interests. As we pray for the Afghan church, we should also pray for disillusioned Muslims to seek and find Jesus.

*Religious Liberty*

### **An evangelist in South Sudan:**

*“I want to inform you that we had groups of aged people, disability people, widows and orphans in the houses where we had evening prayer. The aged people numbered 100, the people with disabilities numbered 300, the orphan children numbered 150 and the widows numbered 100. One thing for sure, though we have no money, as prayer groups we helped these four groups of people with a small amount for buying sugar, soap and a little food. The money comes from our own pockets as prayer groups.”*

*Bridgeway*

## Northeast Congo

At least 58 people were killed and 17 kidnapped when Muslim militants attacked villages in the northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Large numbers in this Christian-majority region have since fled. A militant Islamist group that has been active in the region for more than two decades is thought to have carried out the atrocity. This group has been responsible for more than 700 deaths since 2017.

### **Improvements in Uzbekistan**

*More tolerant religious policies introduced in Uzbekistan continue to give hope to local churches. In the past two years more than 20 churches have been registered, something that for decades had been virtually impossible. More registrations are expected this year, bringing hope to Christians that they will be able to operate legally without fear of arrest.*

*Barnabas Fund*

## Australian aborigines

Australia has about 200 indigenous tribes and language groups who have lived on the continent and surrounding islands for thousands of years. Many indigenous Australian Christians have amazing life stories that show how their Christian faith has positively impacted their lives, families and communities.

In an age when many pressures promote beliefs of the time before white settlement, an indigenous Christian ministry has set up a website to demonstrate the relevance of Christianity to today's people. The website contains 40 short films of indigenous believers telling their life stories, in the belief that this will contribute to understanding, healing and reconciliation. The stories show how Christian faith makes lasting and positive change possible, even in difficult circumstances.

*New Life*

## Dealing with Covid-19 in Nepal

In recent months Nepal has struggled to cope with an explosion in Covid cases worse than in neighbouring India. In a strongly Hindu country, Christian patients are discriminated against. The pandemic has forced thousands of churches to close and tens of thousands of Christian wage-earners to be left penniless. To add to its anti-conversion laws, the government has refused to grant land for burial places. The church in Nepal has grown remarkably in recent decades, and continues to grow in spite of the obstacles and opposition. Churches and Bible training institutions need wisdom and courage in these difficult times.

### **Opportunities through Covid-19 in Mauritania**

The West African country of Mauritania, which is 90% Sahara Desert, is almost totally Muslim. Its penal code includes the death penalty for any who leave Islam for another religion – though there have been no known executions since 1987. Most times the country's few Christians are barely visible, but they came to the attention of others with their helpful and caring activity during the Covid pandemic. People were impressed and there are reports that some have committed their lives to Jesus Christ. As social media activity increased during lockdowns, many people became interested in the Christian message they read, mostly for the first time. Any new Christians will need special nurture and prayer, as persecution can be expected from family, community and government.

*Barnabas Fund*

## Russia and Ukraine

*Despite Russia and Ukraine continuing a war that is dragging into its eighth year, Christians in both countries are helping each other. Russian churches have taken offerings to assist 100,000 displaced people in Ukraine. Churches in the two countries are strategizing together to reach people in both regions. At a large church in Kiev, Ukrainians and Russians worship together. As one person commented, 'Christians are serving a Power higher than the governments of Russia or Ukraine.'*

*New Life*



### Chad's freedoms

Although Chad is a secular state, its politics are dominated by the Muslim majority, as are the armed forces, civil service and business. For thirty years the President of Chad fostered good relations between Muslims and Christians (most of whom live in the south). But the President was killed on a recent visit to front-line troops, leaving Christians apprehensive about the future. In spite of their apparent freedoms, Christians may suffer social discrimination from Muslims and hostility from followers of African traditional religions. Chad is surrounded by countries where militant Islamic groups could easily penetrate the country and create chaos.

*Christian Aid Mission*

## Extraordinary church growth in Brazil

The town of Tefé, in the heart of the Amazon, has no roads leading in, the only access being by water or air. Yet a church in Tefé has become a phenomenal church-planting hub, with over 420 churches being planted in the last two years. Many of these rural churches are even deeper in the jungle, but local pastors are caring for them and their communities. Evangelising indigenous groups has always carried unique challenges, but the outreach continues, as indigenous evangelists and pastors bring messages of hope, read the Bible, sing songs of worship, provide practical aid and proclaim the gospel.

*Harvest Ministries*

## From a Zambian:

*"At this year's regional youth conference the attendance was 1,890, but we failed to provide prizes and rewards to motivate young people in the Scriptures because we could not afford to buy anything. Even if we had 30 Bibles or some sets of Bridgeway books, that would be something. I have been assigned to oversee youth ministry among our churches in this district and in the province as a whole, but the churches themselves do nothing to help. They see with their eyes what we are doing and going through, but when I talk to them they give no response. They support their own programs but are not interested in the work in other places."*

*Bridgeway*

## Bangladesh

Although Muslim-majority Bangladesh is officially a secular democratic state with freedom of religion, Muslim militants keep agitating for the country to become a Muslim state. Christians and other non-Islamic minorities in Bangladesh found that Islamist extremist attacks against them increased while the pandemic was raging in the middle of last year. Prayers are sought for the protection of the tiny minority of Rohingya Christians among the three-quarters of a million Rohingya Muslim refugees from Myanmar who live in Bangladesh.

## Religion in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's multi-faith International Religious Freedom Roundtable has sent a letter to the Buddhist nationalist Prime Minister urging him to abandon the planned introduction of anti-conversion legislation. In countries where anti-conversion laws have been implemented, they have been notoriously ambiguous and given the religious-majority group a weapon to use against religious minorities for doing nothing other than worshipping together, sharing their faith, or performing charitable works. Christians in Sri Lanka appeal for Christians everywhere to pray against these proposed anti-conversion laws.

Likewise there are now proposed anti-terrorism laws, which will allow authorities to detain citizens for two years without trial for causing religious, racial or communal disharmony. These proposed regulations give officials such power to interpret 'disharmony' that Christians fear they could be arrested on just about any pretext.

*Religious Liberty./ Open Doors*