

release

ISSUE 63 SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2011

www.releaseinternational.org



MARYAM & MARZIEH

tell of their ordeal in Iran's notorious Evin prison

PAGE 8



IDOP 2011

Creative ideas for taking part in the International Day of Prayer

CENTRE



THE BAKEHOUSE

Release Potential meets comic book creator Andre

PAGE 9



These Sri Lankan Christians have been threatened and intimidated, have had to move house often and have seen their home firebombed – all because they proclaim the Gospel. Yet still they rejoice in the Lord.

Undaunted

release
international
voice of persecuted christians



A North Korean soldier stands guard on the border with South Korea.

ONE DAY

Sign the petition, take part in our Day of Prayer, watch the DVD and tell your friends. Because 'One Day' freedom will come to North Korea's persecuted Christians.

NORTH KOREA PETITION 20,000 names so far

Release CEO Andy Dipper made an interim presentation of 20,000 names on the One Day petition to the North Korean embassy in London in July. The petition calls for freedom of worship for Christians in North Korea. A presentation of all names will be made at the end of the campaign so if you haven't already signed, please add your name. Paper copies are available from the office or you can sign online at www.releaseinternational.org/petition.

DAY OF PRAYER SEPTEMBER 9



As part of Release's One Day campaign to bring about freedom of worship for Christians in North Korea, we are urging supporters in the UK and Ireland to stand together in prayer for them on September 9.

Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, please take time out on North Korea's national day to remember those who are persecuted for their faith in the

world's most repressive nation. You may find it helpful to use the 31-day prayer guide that came with the last edition of Release. If you need additional copies please contact the office (01689 823491).

Planned prayer vigil

A prayer vigil outside the North Korean embassy in London is being planned by the North Korean Residents Society in the UK – to which Release supporters are warmly invited. Please check our website www.releaseinternational.org for the latest details and confirmation of the event, or call Release on 01689 823491.



HOPE

Young artist supports One Day Campaign

A young London artist is supporting Release's One Day campaign to help persecuted Christians in North Korea by painting a 5 x 4 canvas to highlight their suffering.

The work in oil, called simply Hope, will be displayed at a number of churches and cathedrals around the UK during September and October before being auctioned through the Release website (www.releaseinternational.org). The money raised will go to Release's fund for helping North Korean Christians.

Emma Butler, who is 17, will have spent the summer working on the painting.

'When I found out about what Christians are going through in North Korea I was really moved,' she said.

'I'm really pleased that I can contribute something in this way to help them and hope the painting will inspire people to get involved in the campaign and to pray.'

Emma, who is studying art as part of the International Baccalaureate, is a former pupil at Thames Christian College in South London. David Adkins, the school's deputy head and an artist in his own right, described Emma's work at the school as 'absolutely outstanding'.

'I'm so thrilled that a young person with such a natural talent is able to engage with what is a serious and difficult subject and to be able to inspire others.'

Andy Dipper, Release's CEO, said: 'I would really like to encourage all our supporters to go and see the painting if at all possible. I'm so pleased that Emma has joined with us in this campaign.'

'The painting will be on display up and down the country for two months after which it will be auctioned to raise funds for Release's North Korean work.'

Further information with dates and times of display and how to bid for the painting will appear on the Release website (www.releaseinternational.org) in due course. •

Keep up to date

More than 1,000 people have signed up to Release's One Day cause on Facebook.



Followers of the cause receive the latest campaign information, news and prayer requests. It's also a great way to recruit others to the campaign and encourage prayer. You can also get the latest on the campaign by following

Release on Twitter (@ReleaseInt).



NORTH KOREA DVD



Find out more about the pressures facing North Korean defectors in our DVD No Other God. The 12-minute video

explains what life is like inside the Hermit Kingdom, including one of the notorious concentration camps, and the difficulties defectors have in trying to adjust to life outside North Korea.

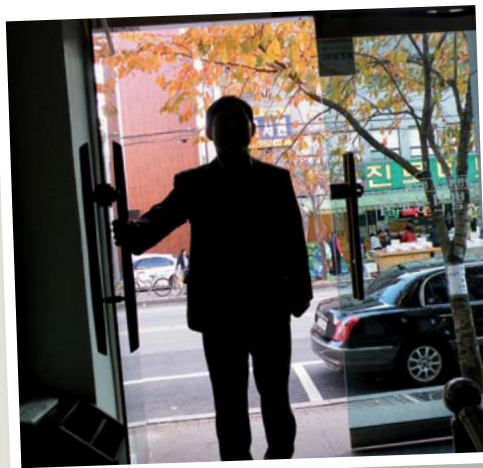
The DVD is ideal for encouraging prayer for North Korea and its people. You may order it for a suggested donation of £10 by calling our Supporter Relations Team on 01689 823491. It can also be purchased securely online for £10 from our eStore at www.releaseinternational.org/estore.

HELP FOR DEFECTORS

North Korean defectors can struggle to adjust to life in South Korea. As well as having to come to terms with a different culture and work ethic, they also miss family and friends back home and can experience intense loneliness. The suicide rate among defectors in South Korea is disproportionately high.

To help female Christian defectors to integrate into society and grow in their faith, a Release partner is providing a programme of education that focuses on five key areas: academic, life skills, character development, relationship development and spiritual growth.

'This training helps female defectors address both learning and cultural gaps



Many North Korean defectors have found it difficult to adjust to life in South Korea. Release partners have provided training to help them adapt.

as well as significant insecurity issues,' our partner said.

Such is the desire to learn that, among those on a recent course, which included biblical principles for financial planning, were four new students aged between 69 and 75.

RELEASE IN NORTH KOREA

Release's ministry to North Korean Christians includes:

- Supporting Christians who provide refuge and spiritual support to North Korean defectors, many of whom make their way along the dangerous 'underground railroad' to South Korea.
- Supporting the discipleship training of new North Korean Christians.
- Supporting discipleship training and comprehensive vocational training to help North Korean Christians successfully establish a new life in South Korea.

To support persecuted Christians in North Korea and around the world, please make a donation to Release using the back-page coupon.



UNDAUNTED

Churches continue to be attacked and destroyed in Sri Lanka, especially in rural areas, where local people and Buddhist leaders may oppose the gospel. Although Sri Lanka's civil war ended in 2009, Christians who seek to share the gospel of Christ continue to experience violence and opposition, reports Release Development Manager Andrew.

Threats, intimidation, legal restrictions – and violence: these are not uncommon experiences for Sri Lankan Christians today.

The long civil war that ravaged the country may be over, but it is Christians – and particularly evangelicals – who continue to face persecution today. And yet as they do so, the church is growing, and lives are being transformed.

Pastor Pradeep Kumara and his family typify what is happening in Sri Lanka in the present day.

He began his pioneering ministry in a southern village nine years ago. At the time, he says, there were no Christians in the area. A mixture of Buddhism, idolatry and folk religion dominated. As a result of his ministry two families began attending

a small prayer group ... and then the problems began.

'The area had been predominantly Buddhist,' he recalled. 'We met in believers' homes. Then some of the locals began throwing stones at the houses. We had to shift the meeting to other houses – but they kept on attacking our homes.'

Pastor Pradeep lived in rented accommodation, so his Buddhist opponents threatened his landlord.

'They said they would demolish the house if I didn't leave. They came in the night and started to stone my house. Then I left that place and I went to a new house – and the same things started to happen again. I had to move house six times in four years.'

The threats and intimidation

Pioneering pastor Pradeep Kumara with his wife Aruna, and son Sharon. Even though their home was firebombed by opponents, he is committed to sharing the gospel of Jesus.



Above: militants continue to attack churches in Sri Lanka.

continued – until one night a group of locals firebombed his home. Although the fire was put out, the incident had a devastating effect on his family. 'My two children were severely traumatised. Even now they don't want to sleep alone,' he said.

But Pastor Pradeep and his wife Aruna are undaunted, both in their faith and in their resolve to continue their gospel ministry.

'God has chosen me to serve that village and serve that people. No matter what threat comes, no matter what happens, I will continue to serve that village and I will continue to serve the believers,' the pastor said.

His wife spoke of an occasion when people came to attack and possibly kill her husband, but discovered he was not at home. 'I was alone with my two children. I shut the doors and told my children, "Let's pray", and so we prayed.

'I did not feel afraid because I was relying on God and I believed His promise that He has not given us a Spirit of fear, but a Spirit of encouragement and strength,' she said.



Release partner Godfrey Yogarajah.

She said: 'I continued to believe at every moment that God would bring something good out of this situation. Even our two children never said they wanted to leave. With the grace of God we will continue to minister and to preach the gospel of the good news.'

The evangelical church currently accounts for less than one per cent of Sri Lanka's 20.2 million population – but it has been growing in the past ten years at a tremendous pace.

Release partner Godfrey Yogarajah, General Secretary of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, said that against the backdrop of the drawn-out civil war, the Christian gospel had offered people hope.

'People have seen something much more than the suffering they were going through, and as such many were coming to the church, and many came to know the Lord. That has resulted in more violence against the church. In the last few years we've had more than 400 attacks on churches, Christian workers beaten up, churches demolished, churches closed by the police, court cases against pastors; and people framed on different charges.'

'The evangelical church in Sri Lanka is almost an underground church. This is a very scary situation.'



The new brick church being built by Pastor Gnanasundaram. His first wooden church was burned down – twice.

As well as physical violence evangelical Christians are facing increasing legal opposition and restrictions. 'There is a Ministry of Religious Affairs which has been formed, and this is very similar to what's going on in China and in some of the other restricted nations as well,' Mr Yogarajah explained. 'Unless the Ministry of Religious Affairs recognises you, you are almost illegitimate or an illegal church, and as such you cannot do anything legal, such as conducting marriages in churches, which was allowed at one time.'

'Today there are no registrations being given. The Religious Affairs ministry refuses to recognise any non-Roman Catholic or any non-traditional church. As such today the evangelical church in Sri Lanka is almost an underground church. This is a very scary situation.' •



Pastor Gnanasundaram.

BUILDING HIS CHURCH

The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: 'Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope...'¹

Pastor Gnanasundaram (pictured left) is a man whose life and ministry testify to the words of the Apostle.

This well-spoken, articulate man gave up a city job in the capital Colombo to found and pastor a church in Noraichcholai, a village on Sri Lanka's north-west peninsula.

With his own hands he built a small wooden church on land owned by his wife. Local people who opposed his ministry burned it down. Eventually he managed to rebuild it ... only for his opponents to burn it down – again. Now, unmoved in his resolve, he has commissioned the building of a permanent brick structure!

And he is quite clear as to why he has faced such opposition. 'When something good is happening, the enemy works on it: it's a spiritual battle,' he said. 'It is about the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, that's the most important thing, and the gospel is not preached anywhere in this area.'

The catalyst that began his troubles was a dispute about a burial ground for a Christian who had died. 'A group of people

Continued overleaf

¹ Romans 5:3-4



Pastor Allocious.

came in the evening and threatened me. They pushed me and said: "You have to close down the church and get out of this area." Later that night the first church he had built was attacked.

Pastors such as Gnanasundaram need our prayers to continue ministry in the face of such opposition and violent action.

'Really it was very discouraging and I wanted to move location,' he confessed. 'But my wife, who stood by my side, said: "No, the Lord has called you to this village, from the city. There is a reason for you to be here." So, anyway, every time something has happened, I have said: "No, Lord, I don't want this discouragement. I want to go ahead with the work you have entrusted to me."'

Pastor Gnanasundaram's story is typical of incidents that have occurred across Sri Lanka, where gospel ministries have begun, or are bearing fruit.

Release partner Godfrey Yogarajah said: 'Many of the incidents of violence that happen, especially out of the capital city, are not given any kind of media publicity. And so a lot of the culprits get away with it. Even though there has been so much violence against the church, very few people have been brought to book.'

Pastor Allocious is another man who faced opposition. When he moved to the isolated village of Bulathkohupitiya to pastor a small church he discovered there was no water supply. He set about establishing a water supply from a nearby lake for his church and home – but local Buddhists tried to block his every move.

'After the villagers got to know that I managed to get a pipeline, and had water, they came and broke all the pipes. Every time I repaired the pipes and got water they came and broke the pipes again.

'This went on for a long time. So I started going a long distance to get some

water. I even had to start travelling at night-time because the people would look out for me.'

When people began attending his Bible studies local Buddhist monks threatened them. 'They said: "We will attack you and strip you and make you run through the streets." So some of the believers stopped coming, out of fear.'

He added: 'If I was not preaching the Word of the Lord I could stay in the village without any problems. [My opponents] say that this is a Buddhist country, so because of that you can't proclaim the Word of the Lord and preach.'

The mixed reaction of his church members is understandable. 'Even though they are very committed Christians, they tend to get scared because they get a lot of threats,' said Pastor Allocious.

Clearly it is not just the pastors, but also the congregations – often made up of Christians who are new to faith – who need our prayers, that they might persevere by the grace of God.

The majority of these kinds of incidents of violence, threats and intimidation have happened in the south of Sri Lanka. In the north Christian pastors have had to count the cost of following and serving Christ in a different way.

The bloody end to the civil war with Tamil guerrillas in 2009 had devastating consequences, displacing up to half a million people, and drawing criticism from the international community over human rights issues. Many Christian pastors and their families chose to remain in dangerous areas – and often paid the price.

'Even though God has brought me through the valley of death, still He has not forsaken me.'

Pastor Andrew



Pastor Andrew lost his wife and four of his sons in a bomb blast.

Pastor Andrew saw four of his sons and his wife killed in a bomb blast. 'Because of my large family people told me to leave the war-torn area, but I told them that I have been brought by our Lord Jesus Christ and I will serve Him,' he said.

After the death of his wife and sons the pastor and the rest of his family spent some months living in a displaced persons' camp. He also suffered emotionally and mentally. But eventually he felt able to return to pastoral ministry.

'God is there with me,' said Andrew. 'He has brought me through this passage. Even though God has brought me through the valley of death, still He has not forsaken me. He is always with me.' •

RELEASE IN SRI LANKA

RELEASE has supported several projects in Sri Lanka:

HELPING HANDS supports rural churches that face the challenge of poverty as well as persecution. Many church buildings in the north were destroyed in the latter part of the civil war, but Christian congregations who have lost most of their possessions continue to witness in Buddhist or Hindu areas that are resistant to the gospel. This project provides temporary shelters where Christians can meet and worship.

EVANGEL CARE provides practical assistance for Christian families and their children.

Release has also helped to fund **SHALOM CAMPS** run by our partner. These two to three-day events provide groups of believers with fellowship, encouragement, biblical teaching and training in legal rights. The camps attract, on average, about 100 people each.

Over the years Release has contributed significantly towards a safe house where families who have been attacked or pastors who are working in particularly difficult areas can come for respite.

To support persecuted Christians in Sri Lanka and around the world, please make a donation to Release using the back-page coupon.



Buddhism is the national religion of Sri Lanka.

SRI LANKA
Colombo

SRI LANKA

Population: **20.2 million**
 Capital: **Colombo**
 Government: **Republic**
 Religion: **Buddhist 68.3%; Hindu 11.2%; Christian 9.5%; Muslim 9%; Other 2%**

After 450 years of colonial rule by first the Portuguese, then the Dutch and, finally, the British, Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) gained its independence in 1948.

Two people groups make up virtually all of the island's population. The dominant ethnic group is the Sinhalese, who are, in

the main, Buddhist. In the north of the island the Tamils are Hindu. Attempts to establish an independent Tamil state led to a protracted and bitter civil war which raged on and off from 1983 until a final campaign to destroy the Tamil guerrilla army was successful two years ago.

Release partner Godfrey Yogarajah said: 'It's only in the Christian faith that you find Sinhalese and Tamils coming together. Otherwise, ethnicity and religion seem to go almost hand-in-hand. Now that in itself is a witness: Christianity bringing two warring communities together.' The Christian community could be a real force for reconciliation in a future Sri Lanka, he said.

At the same time, believers can get caught in the crossfire, with Tamils suspicious that Christians support the Sinhalese, and the majority Sinhalese associating Christianity with the Tamil secessionists.

Buddhism is the national religion and, as such, is protected and promoted. The form of Buddhism practised in Sri Lanka is Theravada ('doctrine of the elders'), considered by some to be the most

traditional, orthodox form of Buddhism, and one which places great emphasis on the individual pursuit of 'nirvana' ('perfect peace').

Buddhism's scriptures, the Tripitaka ('three baskets'), were written in Sri Lanka and have been described as one of the landmark contributions of the Sinhalese to world literature. Monks and nuns play a prominent role in Theravada Buddhism, and continue to exert considerable political strength in Sri Lanka.

However, missions writer Paul Hattaway argues that in Sri Lanka the traditional form of Buddhism mixes with a 'folk' Buddhism: a world of spirits and gods, which can appear to address people's everyday needs better than the 'highbrow', monastic pursuit of 'nirvana'.² Release's partners in Sri Lanka broadly agree with this assessment.

'I think we need to pray for a lot of wisdom and discernment for the church in Sri Lanka,' said Mr Yogarajah.

'Pray that the church will fulfil its prophetic role in this land: speaking out against injustice, standing in the gap, and being true salt and light where there is so much darkness and misery.' •

Please pray

- that Christian pastors and the congregations they lead will remain faithful and persevere in the face of intimidation, threats and violence.

- Pray particularly for those who preach and teach God's Word in areas most hostile to the gospel.
- for wisdom for Christian leaders; and that the Christian church will be a powerful force for reconciliation in

the nation as it seeks to rebuild after the civil war.

- that the projects supported by Release will be used by God to strengthen and equip His church.

² Paul Hattaway, *Peoples of the Buddhist World*, Piquant, 2004, p 253.

OVERCOMING FAITH

'If we come out of prison we want to do so with honour,' said Iranian Christians Maryam Rustampoor and Marzieh Amirizadeh during their 259-day imprisonment in 2009, when they endured harsh conditions and debilitating sickness after being charged with 'anti-state activity'. Now living outside Iran, they gave their first interview to Release partner Sam from Elam Ministries, describing what life was like in prison and how they survived.

Sam: What was the worst thing that happened to you?

Marzieh: One of the worst was the execution of two of my fellow prisoners. I had never experienced such a thing. One of those killed was my roommate. We had spent a lot of time together. And one day they took her to be executed. For a week I was in shock that killing a human being was so easy. She lived among us, a fellow human being; I saw her every day, and we said 'Hello'. The next day she was not there. After these executions the spirit of sorrow and death hung over the prison. There was deadly silence everywhere. We all felt this.

Maryam: The worst thing for me was the execution of Shireen who became a close friend in prison.

Sam: Did you ever fear execution?

Marzieh: Before prison we talked about execution, but when we got to prison and experienced the fear of it - our way of talking changed. The very first night that we were arrested, when they threatened us, we were really frightened. We never imagined we would be so frightened; we had talked about these things before. But the atmosphere there and what happened to us frightened us beyond our expectations. We were confined to a dark and dirty room and paralysed with fear. We could see the fear in each other's faces. We prayed and what calmed us was the presence of God and the peace that He gave us. The power the Lord gave us helped us to overcome these fears, just as when we prayed in the police station, God banished our fear and renewed our strength.

Maryam: I thought we might be sentenced to life imprisonment because that is the punishment for women convicted of apostasy. I just thought this was something we would have to bear.

Sam: How did the guards treat you?

Maryam: When we were arrested most of the guards treated us badly, especially when they knew we had been involved in evangelism. They would curse us and would not let us drink water from the public tap or use the wash basin. But this changed and eventually they asked us to pray for them.

Sam: How did the other prisoners treat you?

Marzieh: Some called us 'dirty, unclean apostates,' but their opinion changed and they asked for forgiveness. We had become an example to them and they would take our side.

Maryam: At Evin Prison the well-educated political and business prisoners called us 'Mortad Kasif' (unclean apostates). In less than a month everything changed. As they got to know us, they were curious about our faith, they respected us and called upon us to sort out arguments they had between themselves.

Sam: Did any other prisoners come to faith?

Maryam: Yes. There were those who accepted Christ. When we were in Vozara [the first prison the women were taken to] we prayed the sinner's prayer with many of the prostitutes. They prayed themselves and we prayed for them. But there were others who were too frightened to confess their faith. There were many who were impacted.

Sam: What message do you have for the thousands who prayed for you when you were in prison?

Marzieh: I would like to thank them for their prayers and support, and the letters they sent us. During this time it wasn't just Maryam and Marzieh who were imprisoned, but all these prayer warriors. This was a great encouragement for us. We felt their presence alongside us.

Sam: What happened to the thousands of letters you were sent?



Maryam (left) and Marzieh. Photo: Elam Ministries.

Marzieh: We heard that people sent us letters in prison, but we didn't get any of them. Just hearing that people sent us letters, was a great encouragement to us. And what's interesting is that the guards who opened our letters, read the Bible verses and the prayers, and were impacted. We know this because they told us and mentioned some of the verses from the gospel. I can't thank them [those who sent letters] with all that is in my heart; I can say 'thank you,' but this is not enough.

Maryam: I thank them. It's true we didn't see the letters they sent, but we knew there was a large group supporting us. This was a huge encouragement to us and helped us to stand firm. We heard from our guards that forty to fifty letters were coming every day. They saw how Christians stood together to support their own. This was something that gave us hope.

Interview used with permission of Elam Ministries www.elam.com

FREE EMAIL ALERT

If you want to pray and take action for Christian prisoners of faith regularly, please sign up to receive our free monthly email alert at www.releaseinternational.org/signup, or by calling our Supporter Relations Team on 01689 823491.

release
PRISONERS

Praying for our family

TAKE PART IN IDOP

Every year hundreds of churches around the world join the International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for persecuted Christians.

Ask your church leaders now to consider taking part on Sunday, November 6 (or another day of your choice). Look at the creative ideas and resources here, and plan your prayer event.

Normal church meeting (up to 5 mins)

Read out one or more of the prayers on pages ii to iv, perhaps using different readers. Use the topical bullet points to guide informal prayers.

Produce photocopies of page ii, or project the PowerPoint version available from www.releaseinternational.org/idop. Use the prayer and bullet points to pray together as a church or in small groups.

Or play just a brief extract from one of our DVDs (see page iii), followed by prayer.

Meeting dedicated to IDOP (10-20 mins)

Choose one or more of our DVDs listed overleaf, which focus on a particular country where Christians are being persecuted today. Most of our DVDs are about ten minutes long, so are ideal for playing during a meeting.

Our four most recent DVDs focus on North Korea (No Other God), China (Forbidden City), India (Standing Firm) and Pakistan (Cry Justice). If you choose one of these, then you can use the prayers and bullet points on page ii, and in the North Korea Prayer Guide. DVDs focusing on other countries are also available (see page iii).

Before the meeting, watch the video(s) and plan which section(s) you wish to use. Most of our videos give specific prayer points on screen, which could also be incorporated into your meeting.

Using the information we have provided, try different ways of praying: allowing people to pray in silence, as small groups, or reading the written prayers together aloud. Feel free to experiment.

Consider setting up four prayer stations for North Korea (see opposite), or use the Liturgy by Release Patron Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali on pages iii and iv. Another prayer is available at www.releaseinternational.org/pray

Other ideas

- Young people in your church could set up their own 24-hour prayer room to pray for some of these topics. Check out the prayer information from Release Potential at www.releasepotential.org/category/prayer or the country profiles and news at www.releaseinternational.org
- Check out the songs which have been written specially for Release at www.releaseinternational.org/songs

Ideas to help you and your church take part in this year's International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for persecuted Christians on Sunday, November 6.

Prayer stations for North Korea



Please use our free 31-day North Korea Prayer Guide to set up four prayer stations in your church or meeting room. You can download the guide from www.releaseinternational.org/idop or request a printed copy by calling us on 01689 823491.

Set up a location for each of the four stations: you could use a table or display board, a corner of the room, or a separate room or space for each. Each station

focuses on a different aspect of life for Christians in North Korea and allows for both personal reflection and prayer. If you wish, you can also use visual prompts at the different stations (see below). Ask individuals to make the 'journey' between the four stations, stopping and praying at each in whichever order they choose. Or organise your intercessors into four groups that rotate between the stations.

You could print or photocopy the Prayer Guide prayers, enlarge them to poster size, or write them out on postcards for people to choose from.

1 Hermit kingdom

Prayer Guide prayers: 1-8

Visual prompt: a Bible. In North Korea, possessing a Bible, Christian literature or attending a Christian meeting is illegal.

2 Life behind bars

Prayer Guide prayers: 9-15

Visual prompt: bowl of (uncooked) rice. It is estimated that the North Korean authorities hold about 200,000 people in concentration and detention camps, many of whom are Christians. Prisoners endure brutal treatment in appalling conditions.

3 Far from home

Prayer Guide prayers: 16-24

Visual prompt: image of North Korean flag (downloadable from www.releaseinternational.org/idop). Untold numbers of North Koreans defect to China each year, many hoping to reach South Korea. The journey is long and dangerous.

4 Bringing Christ home

Prayer Guide prayers: 25-31

Visual prompt: inflated balloon (or balloons). Release partners drop gospel leaflets inside North Korea using large, slow-release balloons. Pray that these leaflets will plant seeds of faith in everyone who finds them.

North Korea petition

If you have not done so already, please download and print our petition for North Korea, which urges the authorities to allow greater religious freedom. Encourage members of your church to add their names to support persecuted Christians.

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHINA

Although the constitution provides for religious freedom, China's Government has consistently tried to control religious practice. All religious groups are required to register. Those who refuse are regarded as 'illegal' and sometimes forced underground. During 2011, a number of churches and Christians have continued to face intimidation, with some individuals being detained and tortured.

PRAY FOR

- Pastor Shi Enhao, vice-president of the Chinese House Church Alliance, who was sentenced in July to two years of 're-education through labour'.



- Prominent Beijing human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng who has not been seen since April 2010. Gao has made public statements about his brutal torture by security police in 2007 – despite being warned by officials not to do so.
- Members of Shouwang Church, Beijing, who repeatedly held their Sunday worship outdoors during 2011 after being barred entry to their normal venue. Police officers then arrested hundreds of church members and detained several leaders. It is believed that the church has attracted official attention because its members include many well-educated people, including human rights lawyers, former government officials and religious scholars.

INDIA

Hindu nationalists have been open and violent in opposing the church. Several pastors have been murdered, others beaten. Churches and their congregations have been attacked or threatened. Seven Indian states have now passed anti-conversion laws.

Lord, we pray for the vast majority of Christians in India who are from lower castes, scattered across India, and often uneducated.

Give wisdom and insight to all those engaged in evangelism. Specifically, we pray that the conferences which the **All India Christian Council** (AICC) gives on basic civil rights, sensitivity in witnessing and theology of persecution will help 10,000 attendees this year.

With more than 100 serious physical assaults each year, especially in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, we pray for courage for fellow Christians.

May the micro-grants administered by AICC help provide self-sustainable income for pastors. May rebuilt houses and churches serve as a symbol of the global church's support for victims of persecution.

May the Bibles that are distributed to people who have lost their belongings in arson or other attacks give them comfort and guidance in the days ahead.

From Release partner the All India Christian Council

PAKISTAN

The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion: proselytising among Muslims is banned. Pakistan's blasphemy laws – especially the notorious Section 295C of the Penal Code – are increasingly used against religious minorities to settle personal scores. So the number of Christians charged is disproportionately high. Christians, especially women, face discrimination at work, in education and in the legal system.

PRAY FOR

- Christians in prison under Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Although the death penalty for blasphemy has never been carried out, those accused often wait many years for their cases to be dismissed, putting severe emotional and financial pressure on them and their families.
- Release partner Sharing Life Ministry Pakistan, which gives pastoral care and practical support to Christian prisoners and their families. Pray for God's strength and guidance for all their staff.
- Release partner CLAAS (Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement) which champions the religious rights of Christians and other religious minorities. Pray for the protection of Director Joseph Francis (pictured) who has received death threats from militants.



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prayer shield

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September 2011 China

Father God

I thank you, Lord, that in this broken world, you did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and of love (2 Timothy 1:7).

Thank you, Lord, that I need not fear man because you are with me, and you will never leave me or abandon me. Father, thank you that the same is true for our persecuted brothers and sisters across the world.

Help us all to grasp what it means to fear you, our Lord and Saviour. And so make us bolder to spread the good news that you died to save this world.

Amen

Thursday 1: Christians in China continue to face persecution. In recent months, officials have targeted religious and human rights activists, and those who are prepared to challenge the abuse of power. Pray that their campaigning will bear real fruit and bring greater religious freedom.

Friday 2: Shouwang Church, one of Beijing's largest house churches, has been meeting outdoors since April (see photo) when officials barred them from meeting in their premises in Haidan district. Many church members have been detained or held under house arrest for short periods. Pray that officials will relent and allow the congregation back into their building.

Saturday 3: Officials have recruited members of the state-sanctioned Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) Church to try to persuade

Shouwang Church members in detention to join the TSPM Church. Pray that members of the TSPM Church, closely associated with the atheist Communist Party, will defend religious freedom for all faith groups.

Sunday 4: Pray for Pastor Shi Enhao, deputy chairman of the Chinese House Church Alliance, who had just been freed after 12 days' detention in Jiangsu when he was rearrested on his way home. He was sentenced to two years' 're-education through labour' in July for organising 'illegal meetings'.

Monday 5: Continue to pray for the release of blind activist Chen Guangcheng and his wife, Yuan Weijing, who have been under strict house arrest in Shandong for a year now. They were severely beaten when a video about their plight was posted on YouTube. They remain under very tight surveillance.

'Even though... we're feeling tired in body and soul, our desire to worship God is unchanged.'

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'Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow-prisoners, and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.' Nkxhk} y&9@

release
international
voice of persecuted christians



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North Korea

Tuesday 6: Continue to pray for persecuted Christians in North Korea, one of the most repressive nations on earth. Pray that even there, Christians will know God's goodness and be reassured that goodness and mercy will follow them all the days of their life (Psalm 23:6).

Wednesday 7: A key focus of Release's ministry to North Koreans is helping defectors adjust to life in South Korea. Pray for a project helping female Christian defectors integrate into society, through a programme focusing on academic and life skills, character and relationship development, and spiritual growth. One recent student was aged 75.

Thursday 8: Continue to pray for the success of a Release petition calling for greater religious freedom in North Korea (www.releaseinternational.org/current). Release CEO Andy Dipper presented an interim petition bearing 20,000 names to the North Korean embassy in London in July.

Friday 9: Today, North Korea's national day, join people across the UK and Ireland in praying for freedom of worship for Christians in North Korea – and miraculous change in the 'hermit kingdom'. Thank God that with Him all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).

Saturday 10: Pray for North Korean premier Kim Jong Il and his officials. Ask God to touch their hearts so that they come to respect human rights and allow religious freedom for all citizens.

'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'

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Egypt

Sunday 11: Egypt is due to go to the polls this month for parliamentary elections forced by the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in February. Presidential elections will follow before the end of the year. Pray that the country's new Government will work for peace and unity and uphold religious rights for all.

Monday 12: Pray for Christians in Egypt, particularly this month, as they await the outcome of the national ballot. Pray that they will be allowed to play a part in reshaping their nation.

Tuesday 13: Pray for Christians in Sohag, 240 miles south of Cairo, where a mob looted and destroyed seven homes in June after rumours that a Christian, Wahib Halim Atteyah, was building a church. Wahib's home was also bulldozed.

Wednesday 14: Thank God that moderate Muslims in the Sohag area intervened to ensure that most of the property looted in the June raids was recovered and returned to its owners. Pray that moderate Muslims will continue to resist the spread of more hard-line elements.

Thursday 15: Pray God's protection over Pastor Gorgy Thabet of St George's Church in Beni-Ahmed al-Gharbiya village near Minya, south of Cairo. The pastor has received death threats from hard-liners angered by his church extension plans and insisted that he should leave the village.

Friday 16: Salafi Muslims, a group who model themselves on early generations of Islam's followers, have been involved in several recent attacks on Egyptian Christians. Pray that the group will end its persecution of Christians.

Nepal

Nepal in focus

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Saturday 17: Nepal became a secular state when its Hindu monarchy was abolished and the country officially became a republic in 2008. Nepali citizens are currently 'free to express their faith', including through charity work. Pray that President Ram Baran Yadav and his Government will uphold religious rights for all.

Sunday 18: Thank God for the church in Nepal, which is said to be growing fast. In 1970, there were about 30,000 Christians in Nepal; today, there are up to 1 million.

Monday 19: Recent political turmoil and insecurity has left Christian pastors vulnerable to threats and violence, according to Christian leaders. Sources suggest church attendance has already fallen due to fears over lack of security. Pray that Nepali Christians will not be cowed by threats but will continue to meet together.

Tuesday 20: Thank God that Nepalese police foiled a series of attacks against Christian churches and public buildings by Hindu extremists from the so-called Nepal Defence Army earlier this year. The group, responsible for a series of terrorist attacks, wants to re-create a Hindu state.

Wednesday 21: Nepali Christians are concerned over legislation about religious conversion included in the draft constitution (scheduled to be approved imminently). The draft laws could make evangelism illegal and curb church activities. Pray that Parliament or the President will require significant changes to these draft laws, to ensure that churches can operate freely.

Thursday 22: Pray that Christians succeed in their bid to have an input into shaping the new constitution – and the future of their nation – after the turmoil of recent years. Christians were not involved in drafting the constitution.

Friday 23: Thank God that the Nepalese authorities recently agreed to Christians' appeals for a Christian cemetery in Kathmandu – in a predominantly Hindu culture where cremation is the norm. Pray that Christians across Nepal will now be granted the same right.

Nigeria

'Most churches no longer carry out worship services for fear of becoming targets.'

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Saturday 24: Islamist extremist group Boko Haram has been targeting Christians and their churches in Borno state, northern Nigeria, since before April's elections – in a bid to extend Sharia (Islamic law) across Nigeria. Pray particularly for churches in this Sharia state which have suffered religious persecution for years.

Sunday 25: Pray for Christians in the Borno state capital, Maiduguri, who have been a particular target for Boko Haram. A series of bomb attacks on churches there since June have claimed several lives and forced churches to close or limit their service times.

Nigeria in focus: Maiduguri

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Monday 26: Many Christians from Maiduguri fled their homes in July amid mounting threats of extremist attack. Pray that God will enable them to return home and feel safe.

Tuesday 27: Pray especially for the families of two Christians murdered by Boko Haram in Maiduguri in June – Pastor David Usman and his church secretary, Hamman Andrew. The group had killed several of his congregation and damaged his church in an attack in 2009.

Wednesday 28: Continue to pray for wisdom to tackle this extremist violence for Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan and Kashim Shettima, Governor of Borno state, who was himself the subject of a recent assassination attempt.

Thursday 29: Ibrahim Birkuti, a moderate Muslim cleric, who had criticised Boko Haram, was shot dead in Biu, south of Maiduguri, in June. Pray that more moderates like him will stand up against Islamist extremism which so often targets Christians.

Friday 30: Recent reports suggest that extremists who targeted Christians in Plateau state, central Nigeria, have recently moved north into southern parts of Bauchi state. Pray specifically for church pastors: ask the Holy Spirit to guide and sustain them.

October 2011

India

Saturday 1: The cost of following Christ is often high for Indian Christians. There are frequent reports of attacks by Hindu extremists, sometimes murders. Often anti-conversion legislation is misused to persecute Christians. Thank God for the steadfast faith of India's church.

Sunday 2: Christians in Odisha (formerly Orissa) state are still suffering the consequences of anti-Christian violence which swept across this and other states in 2008. Some are still living in refugee camps. Ask God to guide believers such as Gasurama

Prodhan (pictured) whose husband, a pastor, was killed in the violence.

Monday 3: Pray specifically for Christians in the Malkangiri district of Odisha state where the Christian community has been attacked 15 times since last November. At Christmas, 200 extremists raided a church in Kovi Konda and seriously injured several Christians.

Tuesday 4: Pray for the release of Pastor Isaac Samuel from Davangere district in Karnataka state who was attacked by a machete-wielding Hindu extremist – then detained by police. Pastor Isaac's attacker had accused him of promoting 'disharmony between religions' through his evangelism.

Wednesday 5: Pray for justice for Indian evangelist Peter Paul from Bangalore, charged with 'disturbing communal harmony' after giving out Christian books to youths. He was detained and reportedly shared the Gospel with fellow inmates before Release partners posted bail for him. The charges against him still stand.

Sudan

Sudan in focus: potential conflict areas

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Thursday 6: Thank God for the relatively peaceful transition this year to Sudan's becoming two independent nations on July 9. Pray that politicians in both Sudan (north) and South Sudan will work tirelessly to sustain this peace.

Friday 7: Pray for Christians living in Sudan (north), which is mainly Arab and Muslim. President Omar al-Bashir declared his intention earlier this year to introduce Sharia (Islamic law) across the north. Pray that the religious rights of all citizens of Sudan (north) will be respected.

Saturday 8: Pray specifically that God will protect Christians in border areas such as the Nuba Mountains. The Nuba people are mainly Christian and, though they have long resisted northern rule, they are now officially part of Sudan (north). Heavy fighting in the area has been reported recently.

Sunday 9: Pray for a swift resolution to the issue of the disputed oil-rich border area of Abyei. A referendum allowing the people of Abyei to vote on whether to become part of the north or south was postponed indefinitely over issues of voter eligibility.

Monday 10: Pray that politicians will have their citizens' best interests at heart and not be swayed by greed. Sudan's oil fields in the central border areas have been a major source of conflict between north and south. Before South Sudan became independent, southern states produced more than 80% of Sudan's oil – yet received only 50% of the revenue. The only pipelines currently run north to the Red Sea.

Iran

Tuesday 11: Pressure on Iranian house churches has increased since Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, branded home-based churches a threat to the regime last October. Pray that, despite the repression, God will draw many people to Christ.

Wednesday 12: Pray for a presidential pardon for Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani from Rasht, sentenced to death for 'apostasy' (leaving Islam). The Supreme Court upheld the sentence in June but his case was recently referred back to a lower court for review and to 'give him more time to recant his faith'.

Remembering the persecuted

LITURGY by Release Patron Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali

Open Blessed be your name (Matt Redman)

Invitation to Worship:

Leader: In You, Lord, do I take refuge

Response: Let me never be put to shame

L: In Your righteousness, deliver and save

R: Be as a refuge and a strong fortress (Psalm 71:2-3)

Prayer and Praise ending with the Doxology:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Reading: Matt 5:1-16 or Matt 10:34-42 or 2 Cor 4:1-10 or 2 Tim 4:1-8

Short message, or testimonies, from those who have experienced persecution or those who have visited such people.

Prayer:

Almighty God, who has taught us through your Son, Jesus Christ, that those who follow Him may be persecuted: strengthen, comfort and encourage all those who suffer harassment, violence, imprisonment and even death for being followers of Jesus. We pray for those who persecute your people; may their hearts be turned towards you through the faithful witness of those they persecute. Protect members of the families and church communities of those who are persecuted and bless the work and ministry of Release International and its partners as they support those who are suffering and seek to be a voice for persecuted Christians.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Continued overleaf

ORDER A RELEASE DVD FOR IDOP

Each DVD is available for a suggested donation of £10. They may also be purchased from our secure eStore www.releaseinternational.org/estore



No Other God (12 mins) includes the moving testimonies of North Koreans who have escaped from the brutal conditions and repression of the hermit kingdom.



Forbidden City (11 mins) features interviews with Chinese Christian lawyers who have been seized by the authorities for speaking out about human rights abuses.



Standing Firm (12 mins) reports on the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India and how church leaders and their congregations are being targeted by extremists.



Cry Justice (12 mins) reports on the plight of persecuted Christians in Pakistan, and includes testimonies from the village of Gojra, Punjab province, which was attacked by militants.

Turn over to order



We Forgive (10 mins) describes how Christians in Nigeria continue to face violent attacks in Plateau state, yet still find God's grace to forgive their attackers.



Staying Power (10 mins) Find out more about the secret and dangerous lives of Christians from a Muslim-background in Egypt.



Pray for Eritrea (13 minutes) tells how Christians are being detained without trial in Eritrea because of their active faith in Jesus.

FREE POSTER SET

These three punchy full-colour posters, in both A3 and A2 sizes, capture powerfully the needs of persecuted Christians, and are ideal for displaying in your church or on your church noticeboard. Free if ordered by phone or coupon here.



LITURGY (continued)

Hymn or Song:

Choose from: God moves in a mysterious way; For all the Saints who from their labours rest; How deep the Father's love; Faithful one, so unchanging.

Closing Prayer

Lord God, heavenly Father, give us the courage of the martyrs to bear witness, without flinching, to Your great love for us. Give us their confidence in the resurrection of Your Son, Jesus, and give us that same power and reassurance of the Holy Spirit as You give them, so that we too may fearlessly bring Your good news to a needy world. This we ask in the name of Him who was crucified for us and who called us to take up our crosses and to follow Him, even Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.
R: Amen and Amen

Song: All I once held dear

Benediction:

L: Christ crucified draw you to Himself, to find in Him a sure ground for faith, a firm support for hope, and the assurance of sins forgiven and the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you forever.

R: Amen

L: Let us bless the Lord

R: Thanks be to God

Order form

PLEASE SEND ME THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

ITEM (please tick)	QUANTITY	TOTAL
<input type="checkbox"/> Set of 3 A3 posters		FREE
<input type="checkbox"/> Set of 3 A2 posters		FREE
<input type="checkbox"/> No Other God DVD (N Korea) <i>Suggested donation £10</i>		£
<input type="checkbox"/> Forbidden City DVD (China) <i>Suggested donation £10</i>		£
<input type="checkbox"/> Standing Firm DVD (India) <i>Suggested donation £10</i>		£
<input type="checkbox"/> Cry Justice DVD (Pakistan) <i>Suggested donation £10</i>		£
<input type="checkbox"/> We Forgive DVD (Nigeria) <i>Suggested donation £10</i>		£
<input type="checkbox"/> Staying Power DVD (Egypt) <i>Suggested donation £10</i>		£
<input type="checkbox"/> Pray for Eritrea DVD <i>Suggested donation £10</i>		£
	Total	£
	Donation to Release	£
	Grand total	£

I enclose my cheque
(payable to Release International).

You may also order resources by telephoning 01689 823491.

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Name _____

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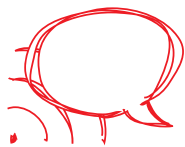
Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington BR5 9RT
email: info@releaseinternational.org

Registered Charity 280577

THE BAKEHOUSE

WE MEET ANDRE 'ZOOM' ANDERSON, 19, WHO WAS SO INSPIRED BY RELEASE POTENTIAL THAT HE CREATED AN AMAZING NEW COMIC BOOK ABOUT PRAYER CALLED THE BAKEHOUSE.

TAKE PART IN OUR COMPETITION BELOW – AND YOU COULD WIN A FREE COPY!



HEAR THE STORY

We met Andre when Release Potential spoke at a creative fashion show last year. He has recently created a book called THE BAKEHOUSE and has decided to dedicate it to Release Potential to highlight the issue of persecution. The story invites readers to journey with two young boys (one English, one Ugandan) as they both unpack the Lord's prayer and explore its relevance to their lives today.

As one prays: 'Help me to tell my friends about you ... even if they laugh at me', the other prays: 'Help me to proclaim your name ... even at gunpoint.'

WHEN DID YOU START EXPLORING YOUR ARTISTIC TALENTS?

I've been drawing since the age of six. I was drawing images of superheroes and cartoon characters, nothing more. It was only when I hit age fifteen that I began to take it seriously. This year, I completed a foundation degree in Art and Design which allowed me to further my skills.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO LINK THE BAKEHOUSE BOOK WITH RELEASE POTENTIAL?

People need to be aware. Even when I first spoke to friends about having Release Potential collaborate with THE BAKEHOUSE, they never knew that Christians suffered such persecution around the world. Release Potential is aimed at young people, and uses creative means to do so. I'm a young creative, so I felt it was the perfect opportunity to spread the news about what Release Potential does.

WHAT INSPIRES YOUR ARTWORK?

It's the cartoons and comics which I used to watch and read as a child which show their influence. I always try to have an underlying theme in my work: in nearly all of my pieces this is based on my relationship with Christ, but I suppose very few people would know that unless I show them. I suppose THE BAKEHOUSE shows

more blatantly my influences, getting back into a relationship with Christ through daily prayer.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE YOUR ART USED?

I would love my artwork to inspire other young people. I would love for everyone to be entertained, but more importantly I would love for everyone to be educated. It would be awesome if there was a rejuvenation in the art industry where artists would begin to emerge, educating the masses about salvation through creative means. The message would not change, but the medium will.

At 19, Andre has already written three books and is currently the Art Director of LIVE magazine.

Check out Andre's art at www.facebook.com/ZOOM4YOU. If you would like to get your hands on a copy of THE BAKEHOUSE for £8 email zoom@zoom4you.co.uk - or see how you can win a free copy below!

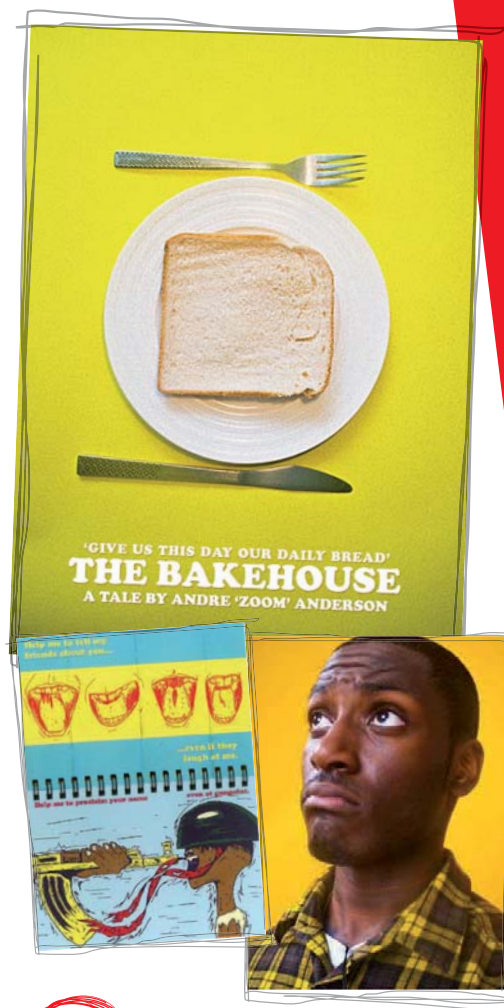


MAKE THE CONNECTION

Have you been inspired to be creative? Why not send us your artwork – and you may see it up on our website!

If you're stuck for inspiration, take a look at a particular theme such as prayer, or hope, or conflict. The great thing about art is that there are so many materials to choose from: from marker pens in comic strips, to chalk drawings on a pavement or even Biro sketches on a Post-it.

We challenge you to be as creative as you can with the resources you have to hand! Take a photo on your phone or send a file to: potential@releaseinternational.org with your details. Our favourite entry will get a copy of THE BAKEHOUSE book for free!



Andre 'Zoom' Anderson



BE THE CHANGE

- Please pray for our Christian family in Africa who are experiencing persecution. Pray that they would remain strong in faith and know God's peace amidst much fear and physical violence.
- In Nigeria, for example, Christian communities continue to be attacked by militant groups in Borno State. Pray especially for the children who witness violence and brutality. Many have lost family members and friends.



Take a look at the GET CREATIVE section on the Release Potential website (www.releasepotential.org) and try out some of the 'recipes' as a youth group or with your friends.

WOMEN IN OUR HEARTS



Prasansi was taunted at school because of her Christian faith

we know God's promise that He will be with us and we knew that even though we suffered for Him, it was a privilege to suffer because of His name. So, because of that, we were able to bear it, even though we suffered great pain.'

Despite all she has been through, Prasansi remains very positive about being at school, and one day hopes to become a doctor.

As Release Women, we often find ourselves engaging in the lives of families. Could you or a group at your church help families such as this one?

The Evangel Care project which is run by our partner in Sri Lanka aims to support the children of Christian pastors who have faced persecution or who are working in difficult areas where the threat of persecution is always real.

The sponsorship money helps pay for things such as school fees, books, uniforms and transport to and from school.

It costs about £140 a year to support a child, which is less than £12 per month. There are currently about 150 children being supported through this project.

Read more about Release's ministry in Sri Lanka on pages 4-7.

Ridiculed at school

Christian student Prasansi and her sister were taunted and beaten for not worshipping Buddha – yet remain faithful to Jesus.

Prasansi is a 16-year-old girl who lives in a remote area in the south of Sri Lanka. Her father is a local rural pastor. Her mother helps run their home which also serves as the meeting place for Christians.

Sri Lanka is a predominantly Buddhist country and many are hostile to Christians.

The two sisters were enrolled in a local state school through funding provided by one of Release International's projects. But it was in school that the two girls had to count the cost of following Jesus Christ.

'My sister and I were punished because we refused to worship Buddha statues and take part in Buddhist rituals,' Prasansi said. 'We were hit so hard that I was injured.

'My father and my mother went to the school and they spoke to the principal, but there was not much acceptance that what had happened to us was wrong. And we continued to face ridicule. We continued to face discrimination and we were not accepted as much as everyone else because we were Christians.'

'Our parents had taught us that God loves us and these things happen to us because of our love for God.'

16-year-old Prasansi, who was beaten at school because of her Christian faith.

Tears filled young Prasansi's eyes as she spoke about the way other children in the school taunted her because of her Christian faith.

'But our parents had taught us that God loves us and these things happen to us because of our love for God,' she said. 'And



Sri Lankan Christians face pressure from Buddhist militants, especially in rural areas, where Christians and churches have been attacked.

Women's conferences

Saturday, September 17
9.30am to 12.30pm

First Presbyterian Church (Edenderry),
Portadown, N Ireland



Contact Sharon (07746 713455) or Barbara (07511 164226) if you plan to come or want more information.

Saturday, September 24
10am to 3.30pm

Capel Y Groes, Bodhyfryd, Wrexham
LL12 7AG

For further information please call the Release office on 01689 823491 or email info@releaseinternational.org

For women only

release
women

BE A LINK in the Christmas Chain

Get inspired by these courageous words from an unknown Christian prisoner in Cuba, and this year celebrate Christmas with a difference.

CHAIN OF WITNESSES

A Christian prisoner in Cuba was asked to sign a statement containing charges against fellow Christians that would lead to their arrest. He said: 'The chain keeps me from signing this.'

The Communist officer protested, 'But you are not in chains!'

'I am,' said the Christian. 'I am bound by the chain of witnesses who throughout the centuries gave their lives for Jesus Christ. I am a link in this chain. I will not break it.'

From *Jesus Freaks Volume 1* (available from Release for £9.00 by calling 01689 823491 or from www.releaseinternational.org/eStore)

What will Christmas look like for you this year?

Christmas time in the UK and Ireland is one that is often portrayed by sentimental images of a perfect family sitting around a table overflowing with hot, rich food and the remnants of crackers and silly jokes. We know that is not entirely true!

What does Christmas look like for our brothers and sisters facing persecution around the world?

- In villages in communist Laos Christians will need to seek permission from elders to celebrate Christmas, and might be denied the right to do so.
- In countries such as China, Eritrea, Iran and Vietnam, the children of imprisoned pastors will feel the yawning absence

of their fathers who are still behind bars.

- Christian widows in northern Nigeria and central Plateau state will once again spend Christmas without their husbands following attacks on their communities by militants.

This Christmas, we are giving you the opportunity to become a vital link in the chain with Release Prisoners, Release Potential and Release Women.

As so powerfully described above by the unnamed Christian prisoner in Cuba, each one of us is part of the worldwide body of believers that we can neither deny nor be separated from.

This Christmas, why not celebrate Advent with a difference, and encourage your church to join you?

New Christmas pack for Advent

Download our free pack Be a Link in the Christmas Chain from www.releaseinternational.org/chain (available from October 1).

This contains everything you need, and includes creative ideas using coloured paper chains to help you and your church pray for and support the persecuted Christians with whom we are linked in the chain of witness.

At the beginning of Advent (Sunday, November 27) we encourage you to ask members of your church to acquire one or more links in the chain for a gift of £1 each. Every paper link contains the name of a person or Christian community to pray for.

Add your name to the chain

Everyone who buys a paper link adds their own name to the chain, alongside the names of other believers. In doing so you will make a chain that will grow and grow during Advent, representing the church of God, many of whom are in physical chains themselves.

If you wish, you could incorporate this chain of prayer and witness into your church Christmas decorations. It could be part of the Sunday School room, or even hung up in your home.

The pack also contains the brief stories of four individual Christians who today face persecution: one for each week of Advent. Use these to inform your church and to help them to pray and engage more deeply with our persecuted brothers and sisters.

All funds raised will go towards projects supporting Christians imprisoned for their faith (Release Prisoners); Christian youth and teens facing persecution (Release Potential) and our persecuted sisters (Release Women). Details are included in the pack.

Please consider being part of this new, creative Christmas initiative. Being a link in the Christmas chain will make a real difference to the lives of our persecuted family.

DOWNLOAD THE FREE PACK

From October 1, download the free pack from www.releaseinternational.org/chain.

You may also request a printed copy by calling our Supporter Relations Team on 01689 823491 or by emailing chain@releaseinternational.org. A donation towards our costs would be appreciated.



Pastor Shi Enhao

CHINA

Pastor Shi sentenced to labour camp

In a further sign of the intensifying crackdown on China's unregistered house churches, the deputy chairman of the Chinese House Church Alliance has been given a two-year labour camp sentence, reports Release partner China Aid.

Pastor Shi Enhao has been sentenced to two years of 're-education through labour', an extra-judicial punishment that requires no trial or conviction of a crime. It is often used for those who have committed minor criminal offences or for dissidents and adherents of religious groups, such as house church Christians and followers of the Falun Gong cult.

According to the sentencing papers, Pastor Shi was charged with holding 'illegal meetings and illegal organising of venues for religious meetings'. Pastor Shi's large house church of several thousand members meets in different sites around the capital Beijing.

Pastor Shi's arrest by police on May 31 in Suqian city comes against the backdrop of police pressure on the Shouwang Church in Beijing. In April, the Shouwang Church decided to meet outdoors after being evicted from its leased meeting site. Since then police officers have arrested hundreds of church members and several church leaders.

Read news about persecuted Christians on our website www.releaseinternational.org/news. Follow us on [@ReleaseInt](https://twitter.com/ReleaseInt) www.twitter.com/releaseint www.releaseinternational.org/facebook

Shi and his wife, Zhu Guangyun, are both 55 years old. His 86-year-old mother, Liu Guanglan, requires round-the-clock care. According to China Aid, police have threatened all three of his daughters and their husbands.

Read more at www.releaseinternational.org/shi

- Please pray that Pastor Shi and his family will know God's presence and protection.



Asia Bibi

PAKISTAN

Call for mercy for Asia Bibi

Release partner Voice of the Martyrs USA has launched a global petition to ask for mercy for Pakistani Christian Asia Bibi, the first woman to receive the death sentence for blasphemy against Mohammed, the prophet of Islam.

The online petition at www.callformercy.com urges President Asif Ali Zardari to immediately release Asia from prison, and to dismiss her conviction and death sentence.

As Release magazine went to press, over 190,000 had signed the petition, including 150,000 in Pakistan. Voice of the Martyrs is hoping that one million people will sign – with every signature acting as a 'call to mercy.'

- Pray that President Zardari acts mercifully and dismisses Asia's conviction.

IN BRIEF

INDIA: A Christian man from Karnataka has been accused of forcing a 14-year-old boy to convert to Christianity, reports the Global Council of Indian Christians. Militants went to the house of Praveen Lancy D'Souza, 29, to arrest him for allegedly forcing the conversion of Karthik, a boy who was seeking refuge.

INDONESIA: A church in Bogor that has been attacked six times since 2008 was recently ordered to stop all religious activities or risk inviting 'the community and others to react in a way that could spark a potential disturbance'. The Taman Yasmin Indonesian Christian Church (GKI) in West Java, near Jakarta, has had an ongoing dispute with Islamist groups.

LAOS: Two pastors have been imprisoned since January for holding a 'secret meeting' to celebrate Christmas without prior governmental approval. Eleven Christians, including pastors Wanna and Yohan, both from unregistered churches, were arrested in Khammouan province. The nine others were released shortly after their arrest.

PAKISTAN: Three Muslims convicted of killing a Christian in Pakistan's Punjab province for refusing to convert to Islam last year have been given life sentences. The Sessions Court in Mian Channu on July 7 convicted Ghulam Rasool, Amjad Iqbal and Kashir Saleem of torturing and killing Rasheed Masih in March 2010.

SOUTH SUDAN: On July 9 Sudan and South Sudan officially became separate nations, following the referendum held in January. However, there remain concerns that churches in Sudan may face further restrictions on their freedom of worship if the government implements a strict form of Sharia (Islamic law).

HEAR CHINA AID'S BOB FU IN BIRMINGHAM

Bob Fu, head of Release's partner China Aid, is visiting the UK in September to talk about the situation for Christians in China after the most recent clampdown. He is the key speaker at a Release evening conference in Birmingham on Saturday, September 24, at Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church, 300 Soho Road, Handsworth B21 9NA. The event begins at 7pm. See www.releaseinternational.org/events.

DO SOMETHING AMAZING!

Release supporters do some amazing things to raise funds for persecuted Christians. Get inspired - and try some of these sponsored activities yourself.



GILLIAN in South Wales has a real passion to care for persecuted Christians, having lived among people who have very few possessions in Africa. She undertook a fun run which raised **£300** for Release. Not prepared to rest on her laurels, three months later she then organised a group from her church to undertake a 'Peaks for the persecuted' challenge which raised just under **£800**. They walked the 25 miles route linking the Yorkshire three peaks in just over 11 hours.

Gillian said: 'We had a fantastic time of fellowship and we all really enjoyed the walk.'

RUTH in Belfast wanted to do something to honour the memory of her best friend Diane, who was also a keen supporter of Release, but who sadly died of breast cancer at a young age. So she organised a group of friends to take part in the Belfast marathon, and between

them, they raised over **£1,100** to support Bible distribution in India, and the education of persecuted pastors' children in Sri Lanka. **GARETH** also took part in this year's Belfast marathon and raised a magnificent **£628** to help North Korean Christians.



Our thanks go to all these supporters for their fantastic efforts!

SAM from Ballymena has taken part in the Lanzarote Ironman triathlon to raise funds for Release on three occasions. This is a gruelling 2.4 mile swim, immediately followed by a 112 mile bike ride, and finally, a 26 mile marathon. He has successfully completed the whole event twice, but last year had to pull out of the marathon due to injury. Not bad for someone in his mid-60s! Nevertheless, Sam's sponsors donated a fantastic **£600** in support of his effort.



PHILLIP from South Shields did a courageous sponsored bungee-jump from the Middlesbrough transporter bridge. He says: 'I did the 170 foot jump to raise money for Release to support the amazing work they do. Read Matthew 14:27-31 and step out in faith, and do something to support Release so that many, many more Christians who suffer persecution because they love Christ can get the support and help they need.'

KAREN in Hampshire heard about the work of the Tabitha Sewing Centre in Pakistan which trains poor Christian young women in sewing and tailoring, so they can earn a small income from the safety of their homes. Otherwise most poor women can only find work as domestic maids, with the serious risks of physical and sexual assault that this often involves.

Karen did a sponsored walk round Thorney Island, near her home, to raise funds to buy sewing machines for the project. Her 32-mile walk (four circuits of the island in a day) raised over **£1,000**, which provided 39 young women with sewing machines. She has repeated the walk again this year, this time in the company of friends, and they walked round the island twice.



ELLA in south west London decided at the age of 80 that she would not rust out, but develop what she calls 'age rage' and 'burn out for God'. So for her 85th birthday she invited over 100 of her friends and family to a celebration at All Saints, Tooting Bec. The afternoon ended with a feast which was enjoyed by all. Ella invited those attending not to bring gifts for her, but offerings which were divided between Release and a school in India that she has supported. This raised a fantastic **£500** for Release.

COULD YOU CONSIDER DOING SOMETHING SIMPLE OR AMAZING TO HELP PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS?

If these stories inspire you to consider your own fundraising event, please contact Paul on 01689 823491. He will be glad to send you sponsorship forms and other materials you will find helpful. Just think what you could achieve with a little imagination and support from your friends!

release
international
voice of persecuted christians

Our ministry involves:

Showing God's compassion

providing for the needs of the families of martyrs and prisoners

Serving God's church

enabling them to survive persecution and its effects

Sharing God's love

helping the persecuted church bring to Christ those who are opposed to the gospel

Spreading God's Word

supplying Bibles and literature to meet the need for growth and evangelism

Speaking as God's advocates

being the voice of the martyrs and the oppressed

RELEASE SPEAKERS

Why not invite one of Release's team of development managers to speak in your church or small group?

North and Central England, Wales
Tel 01234 271855

South of England Tel 01689 823491

Ireland Tel 028 9334 0014

Scotland Tel 01382 553879

Release Potential (teens/20s)
Tel 01689 823491

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Rt Rev Wallace Benn

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David Coey

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CALLED TO BE FRUITFUL

Join our team of volunteers, and 'bear fruit' by serving persecuted Christians, writes Release's national volunteer manager Anthony.

“I love travelling around the country to meet members of our volunteer team. It is inspiring to spend time with those who are so clearly called by Jesus to serve His church, His suffering bride.

This sense of call is key to us at Release. We see our role not as trying to get a job of work done by volunteers – but rather to find those that are called to the task, and then to serve them as best we can as they seek to fulfil that calling.

How do you know if you are called? Well, do you have a desire for your own local church to be praying regularly for your persecuted brothers and sisters? Then you may well have a call to be a church representative.

Do you have a desire to see the churches in your village, town or city increasingly aware of the persecuted church? Then you may have a call to be an area representative.

If you think you may be called then please pray and contact us; we would be thrilled to hear from you.

If you have a desire to do something but are not sure what that something is, we would love to chat with you about it. We can pray and explore together.

The good news from Jesus' own words, for instance in John 15:12-17, is that He calls us to fruitfulness. In other words, we are destined for success, not failure, as we follow His call.

I have found it much easier to listen to the voice that says that I am doomed to failure –



Release volunteer Crystal Baigent keeps her fellowship, Balham Community Church, South London, up to date with news of persecuted Christians.

usually for any number of reasons – than to understand the simple truth that Jesus calls me in order to glorify God.

Although I may stumble over Jesus's promise in verse 16, the truth is that in following His call the Father will give me whatever I ask for in His name. And yes, most times I need others around me to remind me of the call, to pray for me and cheer me on, to work with me and help me to see the resources God has provided.

But those are actually the characteristics of the volunteer team we are trying to build. If that description resonates with you, then why not join us? 📌

“Do you have a desire to see the churches in your village, town or city increasingly aware of the persecuted church?”



If you feel that God is calling you to serve persecuted Christians, our Volunteer Co-ordinator Gene would love to hear from you. Please call her on 01689 823491 or email volunteers@releaseinternational.org.

Pray, care and speak out.



This edition of Release magazine highlights the importance we place on prayer.

We hope you'll join us on September 9 to pray for North Korea (see page 2) and also be able to take part in the International Day of Prayer (IDOP) on Sunday, November 6 (see centre pages). We trust that both days will generate waves of intercession that will bless and encourage persecuted believers.

If we want to be true disciples of Jesus, we need to take time apart from our daily activities and busy-ness to pray; not just for ourselves and our needs, but for others too.

In Acts we see how the first Christians responded to the increasing levels of opposition against them.

We read that after the imprisonment of Peter by Herod, who is planning to execute him, that 'the church was earnestly praying to God for him' (12:5).

'Many were gathered together and were praying' at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (v 12). God works powerfully, sending an angel to miraculously release Peter.

With a touch of comedy, when Peter makes his way to that very same prayer meeting, he is leaning on the doorstep by the servant Rhoda, and the earnestly praying Christians cannot believe that it is really him (vv 15-16).

It's humbling to reflect that when God intervened to save Peter's life, it was way beyond their expectations.

The account of Chinese Christian Brother Yun in *The Heavenly Man*, who similarly experienced a miraculous escape

from jail, and the testimonies of many other Christians through the centuries, shows that God is still the one who works supernaturally, and whose ways are infinitely higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9).

Yet, it is also true that God may choose not to intervene. In Acts 12:2 we read that Herod 'killed James the brother of John with the sword'.

No reason is given as to why God allows James to be martyred, but miraculously saves Peter.

Today God still allows some of his precious sons and daughters to endure extreme hardship, torture and even death for His name.

That's why in addition to praying, we need to care practically for those imprisoned for their faith, and for their families, including the widows and orphans of martyrs (Matthew 25:32-46).

Then in Acts we also see a third way of responding to opposition: by using legal rights to advocate to those in authority.

In Acts 16, for example, Paul makes use of his Roman citizenship to challenge the magistrates of Philippi who had unjustly imprisoned himself and Silas (vv 35-39). Some commentators believe that Paul pointedly reminded the officials of his rights in order to protect the new believers in the city (v 40).

Signing petitions (see page 2) and writing letters to the authorities on behalf of our persecuted family is as important as our praying and practical caring.

Thank you so much for your continuing support.

Andy Dipper CEO

NORTH KOREA'S NATIONAL DAY

On September 9, in North Korea, a military parade will be held in the capital Pyongyang to mark the country's national day. Dutiful citizens will be taking part in rallies to celebrate their country's independence and lifting their voices to venerate their leader Kim Jong Il.

On that same Friday in the UK and Ireland, Christians will be lifting their voices in prayer to God for their persecuted brothers and sisters in North Korea as part of Release's One Day campaign. Whatever else you do on that day, please set aside even a short period of time to remember those of the Body of Christ who are suffering for their faith.

Release supporters are also warmly invited to join North Korean defectors and South Korean Christians at a prayer event outside the North Korean embassy in London on the day [please check our website www.releaseinternational.org/events for the latest details on this].

20,000 names

At the time of writing, Release's North Korea One Day cause on Facebook had just passed the 1,000-member mark and Release had just made an interim presentation of 20,000 signatures to the North Korean embassy in London (see page 2).

Thank you to everyone who is engaging with the issue of the persecution of Christians in North Korea and praying for their brothers and sisters. You are fulfilling the obligation of Hebrews 13:3, to remember those suffering for their faith. Please encourage others you know to do likewise.

FOUNDATIONS



'Persecution has always produced a better Christian – a witnessing Christian, a soul-winning Christian.'

Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand, founder of Release, who was imprisoned for 14 years in communist Romania, writing in *Tortured for Christ*. Pastor Wurmbbrand set up Release International in 1968 to serve persecuted Christians and to make the church in the West aware of their suffering.

